Mental wellbeing impact assessment: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental wellbeing of young people in Wales

Impacts on the protective factors for mental wellbeing

- A wide range of factors operating at individual, family, community and structural levels have affected young people’s mental wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Impacts are identified across the protective factors for mental wellbeing (control, resilience and participation).

**Individual level**

- New coping and thinking strategies
- More time for hobbies and interests
- Accurate knowledge about the pandemic, and what behaviours are needed to prevent infection.

**Family**

- More family time
- Closer relationships and time talking with parents

**Home**

- Quality of housing and access to facilities at home during lockdown impacted mental wellbeing including:
  - Having space to study
  - Access to outdoor space
  - Access to internet and digital tools
  - Secure housing

**Community**

- Volunteering
- Opportunities to express views
- Feeling listened to and having views valued
- Community cohesion

**School and learning**

- Independent learning and digital skills
- Learning losses and widening inequalities in attainment

**Mental health support**

- Drop in confidence in learning
- Worries about exams and future educational achievement
- Lack of access to informal emotional support in school
- Loss of valued roles in school

**Social determinants**

- Economic security
- Young people’s employment
- Increase in food insecurity
- Access to public transport

**Positive impact**

- Feelings of control
- Resilience
- Participation

**Negative impact**

- Feeling isolated and missing friends and family
- Worries about risks to their own and loved ones health and safety
- Not feeling in control
- Social skills and confidence affected
- More time on screens and social media

Less physical activity

What helped young people cope?

**Keeping in touch with family and friends**
- "Provides support around you and keeps you going"
- "Zoom as much as possible with friends"

**Maintaining a routine and structure to the day**
- "Write up a schedule ... and keep a routine."

**Seeking help and support when needed**
- "Don’t be afraid to say how you are feeling, don’t ‘bottle’ things up, and talk to others."

**Connecting with a pet**

**Creative and arts activities**

**Going outdoors and contact with nature**
- "Get out and appreciate green space every day, find something meaningful."

**Cooking healthy meals**

**Thinking strategies**
- "Believing in yourself is very important in this difficult time, and if you are self-isolating you need to have your back more than anybody else."
- "set a goal for the day."

**Leisure activities and hobbies**
- "Find time to spend with yourself and develop a hobby. Take time to yourself and turn that into a positive."
- "Have something to keep you busy to keep you happy."

**School work activities**
- "Don't stress about assignments, take a day off, go for a walk or spread your workload out over the week and maybe even on weekends to take the pressure off."

"Make yourself do something that you haven’t done before, this gives you a sense of control."
- "Do stuff you have not done before, use the time to do something to help your future, don’t waste all the time."

"Try to keep as active as possible within the rules."

**Following infection control guidelines**

**Quotes taken from young people who participated in the MWIA in Spring 2021**

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Summary of key findings

**Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment (MWIA):**
is a tool used to assess the impacts of policies, services and projects on the mental wellbeing of different groups of people and on factors that promote and protect mental wellbeing.

**The protective factors:**
- **Control:** how much choice and control individuals and communities have over their lives and decisions that affect them.
- **Resilience and community assets:** the resources, skills, environments, and relationships that enable individuals and communities to thrive, cope, and recover from adversity.
- **Participation and inclusion:** a sense of belonging, being able to access and take part in activities and services outside of the home.

**Key findings**

- **Negative impacts across the protective factors**, some impacted the whole population, such as disrupted social relationships, education, and group activities.
- **Insufficient evidence** to assess how many young people have been affected, to what degree, or for how long impacts may last.
- **Mental wellbeing outcomes fluctuated during the pandemic**, linked to the level of restrictions in place, including school closures.
- **Strong evidence of negative impacts on key social determinants of mental wellbeing**, including education, economic security, access to transport and good quality food.
- **Socioeconomic inequalities magnified due to the COVID-19 pandemic**, likely to impact on young people’s longer term mental wellbeing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every young person in Wales, some more negatively than others

**Population groups showing strong evidence of negative impacts on mental wellbeing outcomes**

- Young adults aged 16-24, particularly young women
- Young people living in low-income families
- Young people with Additional Learning Needs
- Young people advised to shield
- Young people with mental health problems

The MWIA identified 13 other population groups that have been adversely affected

**Areas for action**

- Listen to young people and ensure that they have the opportunity to inform policy and recovery measures
- Address long term impacts and inequalities in mental health and wellbeing
- Enhance the protective factors for mental wellbeing
- Strengthen action on mental health and wellbeing in education
- Support parents and family relationships
- Communications and information provision
- Use and access to digital tools and internet connectivity
- Improve access to mental health and wellbeing support
- Communities, housing, and the built and natural environment
- Build the evidence base on the impact of health protection measures on mental wellbeing