

# COVID-19: CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND VULNERABILITIES

## JUNE EVIDENCE BRIEFING

### KEY MESSAGES

- Social isolation and loneliness continues to be a growing concern for children and young people in general. Wider literature suggests that it is the duration of loneliness, rather than its intensity, that is most strongly related to poor outcomes.
- Stress and anxiety appears to be higher in older children (teenagers), and girls in general. Some research indicates higher levels of anxiety and depression in young people from BME backgrounds.
- There is evidence that children in families with low incomes are spending less time on home learning, and have fewer resources both from their schools and in their own homes. Parents on lower incomes appear to be less confident and/or willing to return their children to school, and want the primary focus of schools when they reopen to be on emotional support and wellbeing.
- Surveys of parents with children impacted by disability or special education needs are consistently reporting a drop in formal and informal support, and increasing concerns about children's mental and emotional wellbeing and family income.
- A number of studies indicate the need to make messaging about COVID-19 more relevant for young people.
- Research is showing that some children and young people want to play an active role in supporting pandemic-related efforts, and that they want more information from government that is tailored for them.
- There is mixed evidence on the experiences of virtual service provision, with practice appearing to be very variable across the UK. Some children and families appear to be engaging well (e.g. contact with birth parents is working better for older looked after children but much less so for very young children) whilst others are experiencing problems with digital access, and safeguarding and privacy issues. Virtual services appear to be more successful where there are good pre-existing relationships.

## RESEARCH TOPICS

This document draws primarily on research on the social and emotional impact of COVID-19 on children and families.

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## CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES – COVID-19 SURVEY DATA

**Almost all of the COVID-19 surveys are drawn from self-selecting samples (a sample that a participant volunteers to be part of). This means that the findings are likely to be biased in some way and results of individual studies should be interpreted with some caution.**

There is now a considerable volume of surveys on the impact of COVID-19 on the wider public which include households with families, and an increasing volume of parent and child surveys. This section focuses primarily on parent/child surveys.

**The Scottish Youth Parliament, Youth Link, Young Scot** published the findings of their [Lockdown Lowdown](#) survey of young people (aged 11-25) last month which ran from 3-17 April. In May, they published [further analysis](#) of the results. The findings show that:

- Overall, there do not appear to be many significant differences in the views and concerns of young people about the impact of COVID-19 across different demographic groups including geography (urban/rural), SIMD, age, gender and ethnicity. However, 65% of respondents were female, and over 50% were from SIMD Quintiles 4 & 5 (least deprived). The results may not therefore be representative of the Scottish population.
- People in the most deprived areas were slightly more concerned about the mental health and wellbeing of others than those in less deprived areas; whilst people in less deprived areas were more concerned about educational outcomes and social relationships than those in the most deprived areas.
- Younger people (aged 11-15) were more concerned about social relationships than older young people, those aged 16 to 18 year olds were more concerned about educational outcomes and over 18s were more concerned about mental health and wellbeing of others than other age groups.
- There were no differences in concern between male and female respondents.
- Respondents who identified as non-binary and those in mixed/multiple ethnic groups were less confident in how to access information.

[The Children's Parliament](#) re-ran its survey in May, when 3,698 children aged 8 to 14 took part. The survey looks at wellbeing across a number of domains including learning and activities; access to information, expressing opinions and experiencing rights; health; and family and friends. Respondents are also asked about their worries and what makes them feel good. The survey is continuing to run monthly to track trends. Key findings from May were:

- Across all areas there is a **small but noticeable decline in the wellbeing of children.** This is **particularly true for girls, and especially for girls aged 12 to 14.**

- In terms of home learning, children are reporting less choice and a declining sense of fun or pride in work and increased levels of boredom. Meanwhile they are increasingly worried about doing school work and learning at home.
- Most children can access information, express opinions and experience their rights. However there are indications of a decline in these areas.
- Children are indicating a **decline in mental wellbeing**; fewer generally feel cheerful and in a good mood and they have less energy. Children are increasingly feeling lonely and less sure that in difficult times they will be okay.
- Most children are safe and happy at home but for those children who are not the experience of lockdown may exacerbate concerns or worries.
- Children are increasingly worried about a number of things. What they worry about is influenced by age and sex, but **as time passes they worry more**. Most children have someone at home or external to their family to speak to, but **a significant number indicate they do not have someone**.

**The Co-SPACE (Oxford University)** and its partner studies are a collection of parent surveys in the UK and four other countries, including Denmark, that ask questions about family life and relationships, health and wellbeing, parenting, psychological symptoms and how parents are coping during the Covid-19 pandemic. Initial findings are published on the [Emerging Minds website](#). To date they have received over 10,000 responses to their Co-SPACE survey for parents of children aged 4-16 and 1000 responses from young people. A selection of the most relevant findings is provided below:

From the first report which included data from 30 Mar – 4 April from 1500 parents:

- Nearly 2/3 of parents/carers reported that they were not sufficiently meeting the needs of both work and their child.
- Nearly 3/4 of children and young people are keeping in contact with friends via video chat and getting more than 30 minutes of exercise per day.
- The top 3 stressors for parents/carers were (i) work, (ii) **their children's wellbeing**, and (iii) their family and friends (outside their household).

From the second report which included data from 30 Mar – 29 April from 5000 parents:

- **Parents of children with special educational needs and neurodevelopmental disorders (SEN/ND) report higher levels of stress across all areas.**
- While child behaviour is rarely a stressor for parents of non-SEN/ND children, it was frequently a stressor for parents of children with SEN/ND.
- **80% of those who were previously receiving support from services have had this stopped or postponed during the pandemic.**
- Parents particularly want support around their child's emotional wellbeing, education and coming out of social isolation.

- Parents of children with SEN/ND would also like support around managing their child's behaviour.
- Parents/carers would value online written materials and videos, while parents with children with SEN/ND would also like online support from professionals.

From the third report which included data from 12 – 19 May (when new questions were added following the announcement in England about the phased reopening of schools) from approximately 611 parents:

- Around half of parents do not feel comfortable about their children going back to school.
- **Parents of children with SEN/ND are particularly uncomfortable about their children attending school, as are parents who do not work, and those with lower incomes.**
- Particular concerns for parents of children with SEN/ND are that their child will not get the emotional, behavioural and educational support that they need, or the support they need with transitions to different groups/classes.
- Parents on **lower incomes** appear to be particularly concerned about their child being upset by the need to social distance, or catching COVID-19, and being forced to do something that doesn't work for their family.
- Parents/carers of children with SEN/ND or a **pre-existing mental health difficulty**, in particular, report that their children are not comfortable about attending school (due to things being uncertain or different, changes to routine, the enjoyable parts of school not happening, and being away from home).

[The University of Sheffield](#) is running a two-part survey for young people age 13-24 to examine the impact of the pandemic on young people at different stages of development, and identify the factors influencing their mental resilience. The study will examine why some young people are not adhering to physical distancing rules, as well as measuring rates of anxiety and depression. The findings are based on a UK representative group of 2,000 13-24-year-olds. Early findings from the first survey are:

- Up to half of young people feel significantly more anxious than before the lockdown. **The youngest teenagers showed the highest rates of anxiety**, while older groups showed lower levels of overall wellbeing.
- Those whose parents are key workers demonstrated significantly higher levels of COVID-19-related anxiety and trauma and worse overall wellbeing.
- **Levels of anxiety and depression were up to 10 per cent higher for black and mixed race survey participants than white and Asian groups.**
- Over 50 per cent of men aged 19-24 have met with a group of friends during lockdown, and 20 per cent have been reprimanded by police (compared with one in 10 women of the same age)

- Majority of those aged 13-24 are not complying with basic hygiene recommendations such as washing hands more often.
- Government must explain reasons for ongoing physical distancing to persuade young men to follow rules as lockdown lifts, psychologists recommend.

[The University of Southampton](#) is undertaking a study to engage young people about their experiences and concerns under lockdown measures, and to develop solutions that support their wellbeing, mental and physical health. Current focus is on identifying ways to make messaging about the pandemic more relevant for young people. Discussions are being held with local providers about ways in which they might involve young people in volunteering activities during the pandemic and how they might be engaged in purposeful activities that would help them prepare for the future. Some of the early findings are:

- **Young people felt it was going to be difficult for them to stay at home** during lockdown without being engaged in purposeful activities.
- Year 11 and 13 study participants recorded feeling particularly lost and anxious because their education had been suspended abruptly with their national exams cancelled.
- When asked, participants came up with a number of ways they might keep themselves occupied, including: supporting their local community and its more vulnerable members; access to free mobile data or courses to enable them to learn new skills and work packages to prepare for upcoming A-level or university courses.

[The Nuffield Foundation](#) has recently published initial evidence on how children and families in England are spending their time during lockdown, with a focus on home learning. This is part of a larger study which seeks to explore the links between families' adjustments to the crisis in terms of time-use (e.g. juggling work and home-schooling) and children's well-being. The survey was completed online by over 4,000 parents of children aged 4–15 between 29 April and 12 May 2020. The data was adjusted to ensure that the results are representative of parents and children in England as a whole. The home learning report indicates “**that children from more disadvantaged families are spending less time on home learning**; they are making do with fewer resources both from their schools and in their own homes; and the activities they are doing are less likely to benefit their educational attainment”.

- Pupils from better-off families are spending longer on home learning; they have access to more individualised resources such as private tutoring or chats with teachers; they have a better home set-up for distance learning; and their parents report feeling more able to support them.
- Fewer than half of parents say they would send their child back to school if they had the choice. Higher-income parents report being more willing for their child to go back to school. This risks a situation where the children struggling the most to cope with

home learning remain at home while their better-off classmates are back in the classroom.

[Girl Guiding](#) published its findings of its survey of girls and young women aged 4-18 about their experiences of COVID-19 and lockdown. The survey was conducted between 1-5 May and received 6,678 responses (97% were girl guiding members). Some of the key findings are:

- A quarter of girls aged 11-14 (24%) and half of girls aged 15–18 (51%) report that coronavirus and lockdown have had negative impact on their mental health
- **There are signs of girls feeling sad from a very young age** with a third (33%) of girls aged 4 to 10 saying they feel sad most of the time. A third (34%) of girls aged 11 to 14 say they feel lonely most of the time.
- Of girls aged 15 -18, 45% said they felt stressed and **67% said they felt disconnected and lonely**. Nearly half of girls in this age group said social isolation is putting a strain on their relationships at home. Reasons for stress included uncertainty about school and education and a lack of freedom and independence.
- **Older girls are very worried about the future** with 70% saying that they are worried about falling behind at school or college. Most older girls are also very worried about the virus spreading and further lockdowns.
- **Nearly all girls aged 11-18 (90%) would like more information** about what to expect in the future, including the reopening of schools and 61% of girls aged 11-18 say they would like more information from the Government directly to children and young people.

## CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES – WIDER LITERATURE

[Sussex University](#) published a short document in early May by a panel of mental health experts about the **importance of play** for children aged 3-11 and why it should be prioritised as lockdown measures are eased. Some of the key points are:

- Loneliness and social isolation adversely affect children's short- and long-term mental health. **Importantly, the duration of loneliness, rather than its intensity, is most strongly related to poor outcomes.**
- Children across the UK currently have a **play deficit** because they are deprived of the chance to play with peers. Play with peers is critically important for children's social, cognitive and literacy development.
- Play has other benefits for children's holistic development and emotional wellbeing. Outdoor play, in particular, is linked to increased physical health as well as social and emotional health. Play is beneficial during times of anxiety, stress and adversity.
- In highly stressful situations (e.g. war zones, in hospital, in orphanages) research shows that **playing with other children is therapeutic.**

There is currently **very little historic evidence** on the impact of disease containment measures on the wellbeing of children and young people. Some research has shown that **pandemic disease-containment responses may be traumatic for some children and families.** One American study<sup>i</sup> of families who had experienced quarantine or isolation during the H1N1 pandemic found that the experience can be traumatizing to a significant proportion of children and parents. The 2009 study which involved 586 parents (mostly female) found that a third of children (30%) and a quarter (25%) of parents who had experienced isolation or quarantine met the criteria for PTSD (based on parent and self-reports). Key factors that influenced parental PTSD scores were social-distancing measures (being isolated or quarantined), gender (women reported significantly higher rates of PTSD) and age (younger parents had higher rates of posttraumatic stress). Key factors for child PTSD were parental PTSD (PTSD tended to co-occur in families) and social distancing measures. The study recommended a trauma-informed approach to understanding the impact of pandemics.

Some messages from disasters literature<sup>ii</sup> include:

- Children experience the atmosphere of panic and fear as acutely as adults.
- Children experience cumulative vulnerability.
- Poverty increases vulnerability before, during, and after a disaster.
- Children's recovery is influenced by economic, social, and structural factors.
- Displacement is very difficult for children.
- Schools should be prioritised in recovery, as they are important to both children and communities.



- **Children can play an active role in recovery and listening to children’s voices, and supporting their involvement in recovery activities should be a priority.**

A number of rapid evidence reviews are underway in various academic settings. Future briefings will cover the academic literature more fully.

## CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES WITH VULNERABILITIES - COVID-19 RESEARCH

### Children and young people with mental health problems

[Young Minds](#) published the results of its survey in April which ran from 20 - 25 March 2020 (very early phase of lockdown). Over 2000 young people (aged <25) with a history of mental health needs responded.

- Over 80% of respondents stated that the pandemic had made their mental health a bit (51%) or much worse (32%).
- Most respondents were still able to access some form of mental health response, but a quarter (26%) were not.
- **A lack of privacy at home** was highlighted as a barrier to providing remote services (some services were encouraging young people to have therapy while doing their daily exercise outside).
- Young people’s top three concerns about coping over the next few months were **isolation and loneliness**, not having enough food / supplies [this may be due to widely reported panic buying at the start of lockdown] and managing mental health / mental health deteriorating.
- Young people raised concerns were raised about loss of routine and coping measures and loss of social connection, but also reported that helpful methods included face-to-face calls with friends, watching TV and exercise.
- In terms of support, respondents asked for the resumption of face-to-face sessions as soon as possible, more online and digital support, advice on self-help techniques and coping strategies, and more accessible information and guidance about COVID-19 generally.

### Children and families affected by disability

[Inclusion Scotland](#) published early results of their survey in April which had 822 respondents. Initial findings report mental distress in adults and children with disabilities, and a reduction in services. Parents of very young or adult children with ASN report stressful experiences,

particularly lone parents. Other issues reported include problems with accessing food and essential items including medicine.

[Carers UK](#) conducted a survey of adult unpaid carers which had 5047 respondents. The findings highlights financial and mental pressures placed on unpaid carers due to COVID-19 and removal/reduction of formal and informal care support. The report includes some issues related specifically to people who care for disabled children:

- The reduction or removal of formal support, particularly specialist provisions for those with high levels of support needs. Some carers report that school hubs were unable to provide support previously available at school due to low staffing levels.
- Lack of routine leading to worsening conditions for learning disabled young people and young people with mental health problems;
- Financial pressure of having to buy equipment and toys to use at home that would usually be accessed outside the home, as well as increase utilities costs;
- Difficulties in accessing essential items if unable to leave the house due to caring responsibilities;
- Some carers report having to give up employment due to caring responsibilities.

#### Children in contact with or impacted by the Justice System

[The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#) undertook a rapid consultation from 14 to 28 April 2020 on the use of remote hearings in the family court. The report highlighted the view of some that the current lockdown justifies the use of virtual hearings, but also the concerns about the fairness of such hearings. The report may lead to further guidance being issued about the hearings in care proceedings in England and Wales which may also have relevance in Scotland.

#### Looked after children

[The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#) has published a rapid evidence review to examine the evidence on post-separation digital contact between children and their birth families in order to inform decisions about how to reconcile social distancing requirements and court-ordered contact with birth families and on how best to use technology to maintain contact arrangements. The review included 16 studies. The evidence indicates that whilst it is not possible to simply state that digital contact with birth families is either positive or negative for children and young people's well-being some key themes emerged:

- **Digital contact is more immediate, less formal, and can help facilitate relationships.** It can give families more freedom and control over contact arrangements. However, it can be difficult for carers and professionals to set boundaries and supervise digital contact.

- Digital contact should be used to enhance rather than replace face-to-face contact. Private law studies highlight that children, parents and professionals alike feel that there are benefits of face-to-face contact that are lost through digital contact alone
- **Appropriate forms of digital contact depend on the child's age and experience** e.g. conversations via video calls may not be appropriate for very young children.

[The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#) has published findings from a survey and interviews with social care professionals and foster and kinship carers on contact between children and their birth families. Key research findings include:

- **Almost all face-to-face contact with birth relatives has been suspended** for all groups of children. Those taking part in the study reported widespread use of video calls with children in residential, foster and kinship care.
- **Digital contact is working better for older children** who are more familiar with the medium; it is less successful with young children (under 5s) and some older children with disabilities. The quality of the child's relationship with birth family members was an important factor. For some families, digital contact can be less difficult and emotionally intense than face-to-face meetings.
- Concerns were raised by parents about the lack of physical contact, particularly by parents of infants. Parents were keen that video calls do not substitute physical contact in the longer term.
- **Practice appeared very variable around the country.** Professionals asked for more guidance on choice of digital platforms and how to use them safely, and ideas on how to make video calls work well, particularly in terms of making it an enjoyable and safe experience for children.
- Recommendations focus on improving the quality of digital contact, particularly for babies and young children (e.g. singing and reading).

See also the [Who Cares? Report](#) in a later section.

### Children living in poverty

[Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland](#) (University of Glasgow) is undertaking research in partnership with Policy Scotland, and local authorities to understand the impact of COVID-19 on families with children, and how third sector services and organisations are responding to it. Key to this will be exploring supports and services that are working well, as well as the challenges that families are facing due to the pandemic. The research focuses on service responses to and experiences of **children and young people living in high poverty settings** to COVID-19. [Early insights](#) (published 8 May) include:

- There are very significant concerns around the impact of the lockdown on households including **overcrowding, job losses and access to financial support**, the strain placed

on relationships and the stress of dealing with additional support needs and caring responsibilities.

- The **demand for support** (including food parcels) in high poverty areas is increasing day on day.
- Families who were managing at the beginning of the lockdown period are now seeking support. Many of the families that were 'just coping' have now become 'chaotic' families.
- There is a **demand for intensive and regular emotional support** from families. This is being provided via the phone and video calls.
- **Digital access**, both to devices and to the internet, is an issue for many, including children and young people expected to access online learning.
- Some families are preferring to engage with the third sector rather than formal education.
- There is concern that volunteer groups established at the start of the lockdown may not have either the capacity or structures to continue in the longer term.

[The Child Poverty Action Group](#) has run two surveys for parents and children aged 4-17 from 1-25 May to find out about what is working well, and what could be improved, especially for **families on low incomes**. This is a UK survey but Scottish results will be available. As of 19 May, the survey had received responses from over 2,500 parents and carers and over 1,200 children and young people. Early findings indicate the following emerging themes:

- Resources for learning: one of the common barriers mentioned by parents and carers is the **lack of resources for learning at home**, including digital devices, printers and stationery. In addition, parents and carers report struggling to support home learning due other responsibilities, particularly having to work or having to care for other children or family members.
- Pupil and family wellbeing: beyond learning, **families are struggling with isolation and wellbeing**, and would like more pastoral support and reassurances about expectations for home learning from schools.
- Financial support: families are facing increasing financial pressures and often struggle to find information about financial support options. Some families are struggling with increased financial pressures but are not entitled to any support.
- Support with food costs: families on low incomes have found free school meal provision extremely important during school closures to help with additional costs. Cash payments were by far the preferred option, with many parents describing difficulties with vouchers.
- When schools reopen: children and young people are most looking forward to seeing their friends and teachers, and parents want the primary focus of schools to be on emotional support and wellbeing.

## Other studies

[The Department for Education](#) (DfE) has published results of a poll of 1000 parents of young children (aged 0-4) on the use, availability and experiences of childcare in April 2020, including key workers and parents of vulnerable children. The survey will be re-run in May. Key findings include:

- The survey found that around a third (36%) of children aged 0-4 with parents that are key workers, or who are vulnerable, used formal childcare in April during COVID-19.
- Among the children of critical workers or vulnerable children not using childcare, this was primarily due to parent choices. The most common reason for not using childcare was having somebody at home that could care for the child (43%). One in five parents (21%) gave being too concerned about their child's health during COVID-19 as a reason.

The data also revealed some distinctive findings for key worker and **vulnerable child households**:

- **Vulnerable child households are less likely to have all forms of technology.** Only 40% of vulnerable child households reported having a computer or laptop and 65% reported having access to broadband, compared 87% of all households.
- 44% of key worker households reported that children spent more than 1 hour on digital devices, compared to 34% of vulnerable children households.
- **Families in the most deprived areas were less likely to read** to or look at books with their children at least once a day (61%), compared to those living in the least deprived areas (77%)
- 51% of vulnerable child households feel that the amount of learning and play activities they are doing is 'about right' but 24% would like to do less (compared to 7% all child households).
- Of those vulnerable child households that wanted to do more learning and play activities, the most common things they felt would help were having more toys and materials (38%), more free time (36%), working less hours (33%) and more resources online (33%).
- **Vulnerable child households report less child physical activity** than non-vulnerable households. Almost half do less than 1 hour per day (47% compared to 31% of all children).

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND THIRD SECTOR EVIDENCE AND INTELLIGENCE

[The Parent Infant Foundation](#) (4 May) has undertaken a consultation with specialist parent-infant relationship teams (NHS and third sector) in the UK on their experiences, challenges and learning in the first 6 weeks of lockdown. Some of the key themes and insights are summarised below:

- Families experiencing poverty, chaotic homes or more significant difficulties have been at a cumulative disadvantage
- A small minority of families have chosen to reject all contact by online media, even where they have the tools to do so.
- **Some families do not have the devices, wi-fi or phone credit** to engage with services. There is rarely wi-fi in refuges.
- Previously fragile therapeutic alliances frequently haven't survived the transfer online.
- **Some families have thrived in the virtual space**, where there are fewer barriers than with face to face attendance. Young parents, in particular, find the increased use of Whatsapp and other text or video-based services familiar and welcome. Group sessions area also working well.
- The main issues with delivering virtual services are building rapport with new families, **lack of child voice**, assessing safeguarding risk, lack of tech support and lack of privacy.
- There has been a drop in referrals, and a surge in demand is expected post-lockdown.

[The British Association for Social Workers](#) launched its survey on 16 March and updated it with COVID-19 questions. This survey is ongoing but early findings from 1200 social workers report the following in relation to children's services:

- Social workers in children and families teams said they were worried self-isolation increased the risks in many situations.
- Several said they were worried over how to safeguard children, particularly given **some families were refusing social worker visits** because they were self-isolating and schools were closed so teachers wouldn't see children day-to-day.
- They shared concerns **domestic abuse** victims could end up trapped in abusive situations. They worried the economic fallout of the pandemic could exacerbate pressure within families who were already struggling, with some reporting local foodbanks were closing.
- Several said they were worried about a lack of emergency placements for children being cared for by **carers who are in the high-risk group for the virus** and may need to move urgently

[UK Youth](#) has published findings of its survey about the likely impact of COVID-19 on young people and youth organisations. The survey was conducted between 20-27 March and was

completed by 252 respondents, representing 235 youth organisations. The report highlights some key areas concern including mental health and wellbeing, **increased loneliness and isolation, lack of safe spaces** (outside and within the home), challenging family relationships, **increased risk of online pressure and sexual exploitation** and employment uncertainty. Most services are engaging with young people virtually, although concerns were raised about the lack of digital infrastructure and availability of a private space for young people, as well as likely reduction in services due to a drop in funding.

[Who Cares? Scotland](#) has a published report on the impact of COVID-19 on care experienced people in April and May based on intelligence from its ongoing work which includes advocacy support, helpline, and participation activities. The following key themes have emerged:

- **Poverty** - Many care experienced people (inc. care experienced parents and kinship carers) are struggling financially, including not having enough money for food. This is partly due to the increased costs of food and utility and digital access bills during lockdown, and partly that some care leavers living independently for the first time have not been adequately supported during this transition and are struggling to manage their finances. This includes a reduction in previously available support with accessing financial support. Delays in the social security systems due to increased demand were also highlighted.
- **Health and wellbeing** - The report highlights increased existing and new mental health concerns, social isolation, emotional impact of bereavement and increased tensions within personal relationships due to lack of/reduced professional support, particularly for young people living in temporary accommodation away from their usual support networks.
- **Information and participation** - Concerns are raised about a lack of digital access which is leaving some young people feeling isolated and without a voice, and preventing them from accessing services and education.

[The Food Foundation](#) has conducted a UK wide survey of 4,343 adults. The number of adults who are food insecure in the Britain is estimated to have quadrupled under the COVID-19 lockdown. The survey found that adults with children, including those eligible for free school meals, are at particular risk of food insecurity.

[Aberlour](#) has published a report on how its services have responded to COVID-19. The challenges in delivering services in the current climate are described, alongside some **positive changes such as increased continuity of staff in residential homes** on a week-to-week basis which has been welcomed by children in the houses. The report describes how the organisation is seeing a rise in child protection concerns, domestic abuse reporting, mental health concerns and financial hardship, which is leading to a **demand for additional supports** for vulnerable families. It is anticipated that the level of need will continue to rise as a result of current circumstances.

## NEW AND FORTHCOMING STUDIES

### New early years COVID-19 surveys

**Home-Start**, The Parent Infant Foundation, Best Beginnings, and the Maternal Mental Health Alliance launched a survey for parents with infants and pregnant women on 6 May. They intend to release top line findings in Infant Mental Health Awareness Week in June.

### New young people COVID-19 surveys

**The University of Edinburgh** launched its **TeenCovidLife Survey** (age 12-17) in May. This survey aims to find out how COVID-19 measures are affecting young people's wellbeing, schooling and family life. It will identify where children are living someone in the C-19 shield group, children with a disability of long term physical or mental health condition, children of key workers, as well as other socio-demographics such as ethnicity and gender. Further surveys will be run over the summer. The response rate to the adult CovidLife survey for adults is over 14,000 and it is anticipated that this survey will be a key source of data on the experiences of older children and young people in Scotland.

**The Nuffield Foundation's Growing up under COVID-19** will run over 18 months. Researchers will document the lived experiences of young people aged 14-18 in seven countries: the four nations of the UK, Italy, Singapore and Lebanon, at different stages of the pandemic to explore how differing social, political and economic contexts affect young people's experiences. Seventy young people will take part in interviews and focus groups, combined with analysis of their social media and blog data. It is intended that this evidence-base will ensure policy responses consider impacts on children and young people.

### New research on the impact of COVID-19 on children and families with vulnerabilities

The **Chief Scientist Office** are funding Scottish-led rapid COVID-19 studies that will report within the next 3-6 months. Of the 17 studies funded there are several which explicitly focus on the vulnerable children and families and the health and social care workforce. A selection of those directly including children and families is listed below; other studies may also include some insight on the wider experiences of households with children. These studies are listed in Annex A.

- **Protecting the safety and wellbeing of Vulnerable Children and Young People in Scotland during the Covid-19 Pandemic** (University of Stirling) – this study, now named the FACE19 study (Families and Children Experiencing Covid-19), aims to understand how vulnerable children, young people and families have experienced social distancing and economic constraints during the pandemic. The study will target looked after children, children experiencing poverty, young people



experiencing learning disabilities and children experiencing domestic abuse and family violence. The study will also consider how social care organisations, particularly in the voluntary sector, have adapted their services to meet the needs of children, young people and parents/carers through the pandemic, and evaluate what has worked well. It will include online surveys (a keyworker and parent survey went live 21 May) and interviews with professionals, parents and children and young people. The partner organisations in the project include Aberlour Child Care Trust, Scottish Women's Aid, Adoption and Fostering Alliance, and Parenting Across Scotland.

- **In isolation, instead of school (INISS)** (University of Edinburgh/ Data for Children Collaborative with UNICEF) – this study aims to explore the impact of C-19 restrictions on the mental health of young people and any additional impacts on the mental health of vulnerable young people. It will contextualise children's experience of C-19 within data on C-19 prevalence, health patterns and trends and educational achievement outcomes data to inform interventions and policymaking, with potential to track long-term trends. It will include an online survey for young people over the summer with follow-up interviews and focus groups.
- **Impact of pandemic response upon public mental health and disparities** (University of Strathclyde) – the study will examine how the pandemic response is affecting the mental health and wellbeing of the Scottish population and includes three vulnerable groups: adults with physical and/or mental health conditions, low income single parent families and those with particularly disruptive changes in circumstances.

**The Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice (CYCJ)** is undertaking various activities to inform practice for children and young people in contact with the Justice system e.g. CYCJ's report on the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act, Youth Justice Voices' participation project for care and justice-experienced young people, and CYCJ and CELCIS' rapid consultation on parents' and children's experience of remote children's hearings. CYCJ is also running a research project on how COVID-19 is affecting young people (18+) who are in contact with youth justice services or have previous experience of the youth justice system. This will involve video or telephone interviews and seeks to explore young people's views and experiences of COVID-19 and lockdown, what has helped and how support could be improved.

**ACEs Clinical & Research Centre** (University of Glasgow) - 'How are families coping with self-isolation?' – This qualitative study is interviewing a range of families with vulnerabilities and professionals about their experiences of C-19. Target groups include parents or children with developmental disabilities, parents or children with mental or physical illness, families with experience of care or long-term social work involvement, families with little space at home, little access to green space or living in a high rise flat, and families with financial or

employment worries or digital poverty. Follow up interviews are underway and will also include BME families.

Other relevant surveys underway –

- **Association for Change (ARC)** is running a parent survey until 29 May to find out how COVID-19 is impacting transition planning for young people aged 14 and over with additional support needs in Scotland. Findings are expected to be available on 9 June.
- **The Disabled Children's Partnership** has recently run a UK-wide survey from 30 April – 18 May which has received over 4000 responses. The findings are due to be published soon.
- **Intercultural Youth Scotland** is currently facilitating a youth-led report to hear the voices of BME young people in Scotland with a particular focus on education and positive destinations during COVID-19. The project is ongoing and findings are expected in this summer.
- **Time for Inclusive Education (TIE)** is running a survey to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and consequential closures of education establishments, on young people (12-24) in Scotland. This project is specifically concerned with emotional wellbeing, the availability of online services, and instances of online bullying behaviours and **rates of prejudice** (harmful opinions or attitudes against groups of people). The survey went live on 15 April and will run for 6 weeks.

#### Other new COVID-19 research and surveys

[Inspiring Children's Futures](#) (University of Strathclyde) is undertaking a series of international projects to inform policy and practice that promote children's wellbeing during and after the pandemic. This includes a rapid review of evidence of learning from past pandemics (publication pending) and developing an App to gather, collate and analyse real-time information of policy makers' and professionals' experiences in the current pandemic. They have also published a report on how to combat the impact of COVID-19 on children.

**Parenting Across Scotland** is running a short survey for parents to understand the nature of the challenges that children, young people and families are facing in their homes and communities at this time.

## NOTES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

This briefing document is intended for information and awareness on current and emerging evidence on the impacts of COVID-19 on children and young with vulnerabilities. It is not an exhaustive overview or a critical appraisal or endorsement of the quality of research included.

**For queries or suggestions please contact Tamsyn Wilson, Children & Families Analytical Unit** (Tamsyn.Wilson@gov.scot)

The following reports may be of interest:

[Children in Lockdown](#) (UNICEF) – This report highlight the impacts of lockdown on children’s rights and their health, education and mental wellbeing.

[The Impact of COVID-19 on children](#) (United Nations, April 2020) – This report focuses on effects of COVID-19 on children and recommendations for governments and policymakers.

[Combatting COVID-19’s effect on children](#) (Inspiring Children’s Futures, OECD Briefing, May 2020) - This brief aims to capture some key issues and propose early steps that governments can take to mitigate negative consequences for children, especially the most vulnerable.

## ANNEX A – CSO RARC-19 PROJECTS

Chief Scientist Office funded projects:

1. **Protecting population physical and mental health during the Coronavirus pandemic: a representative national weekly survey to understand changes** (University of Aberdeen, Professor Diana Dixon)
2. Understanding and reducing the psychosocial impact of Coronavirus social distancing and behavioural changes on families in care home residents in Scotland (University of Edinburgh, Dr George Palattiyil)
3. How has COVID-19 social distancing amplified the mental health vulnerabilities of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (Glasgow Caledonian University, Dr Jamie Frankis)
4. Understanding longer term impact of social distancing and behavioural interventions introduced to prevent the spread of infection in the population (University of Glasgow, Dr Kate Robb)
5. **Impact of pandemic response upon public mental health and disparities** (University of Strathclyde, Prof Alex Morton)
6. COVID-19 social distancing effects on social engagement, loneliness, well-being and physical activity in Scottish Older Adults and an exploration of potential ameliorating strategies (Prof Anna Whittaker)
7. **The ABC (Anxiety, health behaviour and cognition) of social distancing and isolation: evaluating the role of technology in remote support** (Prof Nick Sculthorpe, University of West of Scotland)
8. Develop evidence based interventions to support doctors' well-being and promote resilience during COVID-19 related transitions and beyond (University of Aberdeen, Dr Kim Walker)
9. Effective interventions to support the resilience and mental health of front line health and social care staff during a global health crisis and following de-escalation (GCU, Dr Alex Pollock)
10. Online de-briefings with care home staff after a resident's death: improving coping mechanisms, team cohesion and communication with relatives (Edinburgh Napier, Lucy Johnstone)
11. Avoiding burnout of the care home workforce: sharing national learning and local initiatives that support resilience and retention during the COVID-19 pandemic (Edinburgh Napier, Lucy Johnstone)
12. Qualitative investigation of health and social care early entrant experiences and coping strategies during rapid transition into professional practice (Robert Gordon University, Dr Flora Douglas)

13. Sustaining the well-being and resilience of frontline community based care and support workers to vulnerable older people during a time of crisis (University of Stirling, Dr Grant Gibson)
14. **Using participatory digital platforms to enhance resilience and mental health of Scotland's frontline health and care staff during COVID-19** (Uni of Highlands and Islands, Dr Joannes de Kock)
15. **In Isolation instead of School (INISS): Vulnerable children's experiences of COVID-19 and effects on mental health and education** (University of Edinburgh, Professor Gillean McClusky )
16. **Protecting the safety and well-being of vulnerable children and young people in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic** (University of Stirling Prof Jane Callaghan)

## REFERENCES

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- <sup>i</sup> Sprang, G. & Silman, M. (2013) Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Parents and Youth After Health-Related Disasters, Society for Disaster Medicine and Public Health, Inc. DOI: 10.1017/dmp.2013.22
- <sup>ii</sup> Fothergill, A. (2017) Children, Youth, and Disaster. Subject: Vulnerability, Exposed Populations Online Publication Date: Jul 2017 DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199389407.013.23