

State of the Nation 2020: children and young people's wellbeing

Introduction and background

In October 2018 the Prime Minister Theresa May committed to publishing a 'State of the Nation' report annually on World Mental Health Day to integrate available evidence on the state of children and young people's wellbeing, and to provide an accessible data to guide discourse and action. This is the second State of the Nation report. In the light of the current pandemic, a simple update of official data sources (mostly collated before the pandemic took hold) was not deemed sufficient. This report therefore focuses on collating publicly available data on children and young people's wellbeing and experiences associated with the pandemic. It draws and expands on the data included in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) indicator sets. Other sources include the Children's Society's annual survey of children and young people and the Centre for Longitudinal Studies Millennium Cohort study. The report considers the wellbeing of children and young people aged 5 to 24 years old. The term 'children' is used to refer to any age group within the 5 to 13 years range and 'young people' are defined as those within the 14 to 24 years range. The term 'older young people' refers to individuals within the 16 to 24 years range. The key indicators used to measure personal wellbeing were health, education and skills, relationships, personal finance, what we do and where we live. These are the ONS 7 domains of wellbeing for children and young people.

Key findings

Personal wellbeing

- Overall and on average, and in the context of pre-pandemic reducing trends, children and young people have had quite stable personal wellbeing during the coronavirus (COVID19) pandemic.
- Levels of happiness are similar to previous years. The Children's Society found that children and young people's self-assessed happiness¹⁶ (at 7.2 out of 10), was only very slightly lower during this time than at the same time in recent years. They also found that 9.2 per cent of children and young people scored below the midpoint of the 0 to 10 scale. There was no notable difference compared to previous years. While other indicators of personal wellbeing have decreased slightly, the overall averages for these measures are still generally in line with previous years where data is available.
- There are indications that some groups of children and young people have had lower personal wellbeing than others. Children with special educational needs or a disability, disabled young people, children and young people with disabilities and some children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds reported (or were reported by their parents as) being more anxious than children and young people without these characteristics.
- Secondary aged children who say they get free school meals, surveyed by the Department for Education, reported higher levels of anxiousness on the previous day, an average of 4.1, compared to 2.7 amongst secondary aged children who say they do not get free school meals.
- The reported level of anxiety was relatively high for disabled young people and it continued to increase over the course of April to early September.
- These indicators suggest that children and young people felt life was worthwhile during the early months of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The Children's Society found that, on average, children and young people rated the extent to which things they do in their life as worthwhile as 7.4 (out of 10). However, 8.5 per cent of children and young people scored this indicator below the midpoint of the 0-10 scale.

Mental and physical health

- Although children are not at high physical risk from coronavirus, the pandemic is still an important issue in children and young people's lives.



- Evidence from the Co-SPACE study suggests that in March to May 2020, children were most worried about the possibility that their friends or family would catch coronavirus (COVID-19) followed by worries about missing school. Over half of the surveyed parents of secondary school aged children (54%), and almost half of the surveyed parents of primary school aged children (45%), reported that their children were worried about friends/family catching COVID-19 'a lot' or 'extremely'.
- Adolescents, aged 11 to 17, surveyed were lower on the pandemic anxiety scale (PAS) compared to adults.
- The Children's Society found that children and young people's self-assessed happiness with their health (at 8.1 out of 10), was within the same range as at the same time in recent years in Great Britain.

Education and skills

- In June to July, most parents reported that schools were providing online or non-digital resources to support children and young people learning while at home. However, the majority of children and young people struggled to learn while at home. Parents reported a mixture of reasons for this, most commonly a lack of motivation in children and young people, but also a lack of their own time to support home learning and a lack of guidance or support from elsewhere.
- The Children's Society found that children and young people's (aged 10 to 17) self-assessed happiness with their school (at 7 out of 10), was very similar to recent years in Great Britain
- Although children and young people are generally as happy as usual with their view of the future, there is evidence that the majority of older young people are worried about the future.
- The Office for National Statistics found that a large proportion of young people feel worried about the future. In April to May 2020, 73 per cent of 16 to 19 year olds and 74 per cent of 20 to 24 year olds reported that they felt worried about the future.
- In the months since the initial restrictions due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, feelings of worry about the future appear to have reduced since May for the 16 to 19 year old group, although about half still feel worried. Feelings of worry about the future have not reduced among young people aged 20 to 24. Around 61 per cent of this age group felt worried about the future in the period from late July to September.

Relationships

- Most children and young people up to 17 years of age remain happy with their relationships with friends, although average levels of happiness appear to have reduced slightly compared to previous years.
- Around a half to two thirds of primary age children had little to no contact with friends over the period from late March to August. By contrast, most secondary age children and young people had regular contact with their friends over this time. These worries have eased slightly from April to September in young people aged 16 to 19 years.
- Children's happiness with their family has also remained high, on average, over this period, and the majority of

parents reported that their relationship with their children had remained the same, with over a quarter saying it had improved.

- Between a quarter and just under a half of those aged 16 and over reported the pandemic affecting their relationships during the pandemic, with a peak in May. This figure appeared to be driven more by the experiences of females and the older (20 to 24 years) age group. Data also indicates that for this age group loneliness may be a greater concern than for older adults.

Personal finance

- Estimates of the proportion of children's households in Great Britain which have had a reduced household income during the pandemic have varied between 20% and 35%. Over 400,000 additional households with dependent children claimed Universal Credit in April and May 2020. There are indications that more parents have been cutting meal sizes or skipping meals due to not having enough money.
- April and May 2020 also saw a large increase in new Universal Credit claims in the 16 to 24 age group. There is also evidence to suggest that those young people who were already struggling financially have been more likely to see worse financial impacts of the pandemic.

What we do and where we live

- Although the majority of children and young people have been fairly physically active during April to July 2020, data from different sources points to an overall reduction in activity levels.
- There is some evidence of increased use of social media by young people, particularly girls. A study in the South West of England among Year 9 pupils reported that girls spent of 3 or more hours a day during lockdown (55%) than pre-pandemic (42%), whereas there was little change for boys (30% in lockdown compared to 29% before). In the study, pupils' main reported reason for using social media more during the pandemic was for schoolwork. The second most reported reason for the increase was 'nothing better to do'.
- The Children's Society found that in April to June 2020 in the UK, children and young people's self-assessed happiness with their home (at 8 out of 10), was very similar to recent years in Great Britain.
- The English Housing Survey found that, in 2018, 85% of homes with a resident dependent child were decent, meaning they met health and safety guidance, were in good repair and had sufficiently modern facilities and heating. However, the remaining 15 per cent of homes in which dependent children lived (an estimated 1,023,000 homes) did not meet this standard. They will have spent more time in their 'non-decent' home during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
- In a Natural England survey, 56 per cent of parents reported that their child had spent free time outside in green and natural spaces twice week or more. Eight per cent spent free time outside in green and natural spaces fewer than 4 times a year or not at all.
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The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2020-children-and-young-peoples-wellbeing>