

IIMHL & IIDL Leadership Briefing XXXVII

COVID-19: Mental health and wellbeing surveillance report for England

Janet Peters

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Introduction

This Leadership Briefing presents close to real time intelligence [on the mental health and wellbeing of the population in England during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

This report is a product of Public Health England (a public health organisation under the Department of Health and Social Care of the UK Government).

It compiles routinely updated indicators from multiple sources and summarises important recent findings from a pre-defined set of studies. It aims to inform policy, planning and commissioning in health and social care and is designed to assist stakeholders at both national and local level.

The aim of this Briefing is to share this information quickly across countries.

Summary of the report

Date: 8th September 2020

Delivering real time surveillance (such as in this report) is logistically challenging and the approach should be viewed as experimental. However, the approach is expected to provide value in situations where:

- the ability to respond to a changing environment is needed and decisions may need to be made quickly
- the certainty in existing evidence is limited, posing a barrier to decision-making
- there is likely to be new research evidence emerging that would inform decisions.

The report will be updated monthly¹.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-surveillance-report/1-about-this-report>

Important findings:

¹ Ian Walker, Consultant in Global Public Health, PHE Email 23 September 2020

Changes in population health and wellbeing

There is evidence that self-reported mental health and wellbeing worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. The decline was largest in April. There is evidence of some recovery since then, but not yet to pre-pandemic levels.

Data from longitudinal cohort studies provide useful information about change over time. Longitudinal cohort studies return to the same sample of people at regular intervals – often to see how responses to the same questions change over time. Data from the UK Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS) suggests that, among adults:

- mental distress (measured using GHQ-12) was 8.1% higher in April 2020 than it was between 2017 and 2019¹
- mental distress in April 2020 was 0.5 points higher than expected (on the GHQ-12 scale), after taking into account increases in mental distress since 2013²
- in April 2020 over 30% of adults reported levels of mental distress indicative that treatment may be needed, compared to around 20% between 2017 and 2019^{3 4 5}
- estimated prevalence of common mental disorders was lower in May 2020 than in April 2020, but still higher than between 2017 and 2019⁵

The seven chapters in this report:

- chapter 1 introduces the overall report and also describes a glossary of terms
- [chapter 2](#) summarises important findings so far
- [chapter 3](#) triangulates different sources of intelligence to provide robust findings for anxiety, depression, loneliness and life satisfaction
- [chapter 4](#) presents weekly data on a range of mental health and wellbeing measures from the COVID-19 Social Study, ONS and YouGov
- [chapter 5](#) presents plain English abstracts of recent analysis from relevant research
- [chapter 6](#) presents service use data and commentary from a range of remote mental health and wellbeing service providers
- [chapter 7](#) is dedicated to the experiences of children and young people

Chapters 2 to 7 will be updated regularly and will draw upon new intelligence that has become available.

Two useful sources of information on the use of NHS funded mental health services are the [Mental Health Services Monthly Statistics](#) and [Psychological Therapies, Report on the use of IAPT Services](#).

This report draws upon close to real time data and evidence. This is important in the context of a rapidly evolving pandemic, but comes with strengths and weaknesses. It is important to explain the basis for the inclusion of evidence and analysis in this report. A [methodology document](#) outlines how sources of intelligence have been identified for inclusion and the process undertaken for intelligence synthesis and presentation of findings.

If you have any enquiries please forward to mhdnin@phe.gov.uk.