

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).



Positive impact



Negative impact



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.



Emotional wellbeing affected
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



Family



More family time
Closer relationships and time talking with parents



Parental stress
Violence and abuse
Family conflict



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



Closed leisure centres, youth, sports and community groups
Restrictions on access to parks and playgrounds
Less places to safely meet with friends
Disrupted access to trusted adults



School and learning



Independent learning and digital skills



Learning losses and widening inequalities in attainment



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



Mental health support



Investment in online self-help information



Drop in confidence in accessing mental health support online
Disrupted access and longer waiting times for mental health support

Social determinants



Economic security



Young people's employment



Increase in food insecurity



Access to public transport

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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”

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.”

Maintaining a routine and structure to the day

“Write up a schedule ... and keep a routine.”



Keeping physically active

“Try to keep as active as possible within the rules.”



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.”

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.”

Connecting with a pet



Creative and arts activities



Learning new skills

“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.”

Going outdoors and contact with nature

“Get out and appreciate green space every day, find something meaningful.”



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.”

Cooking healthy meals



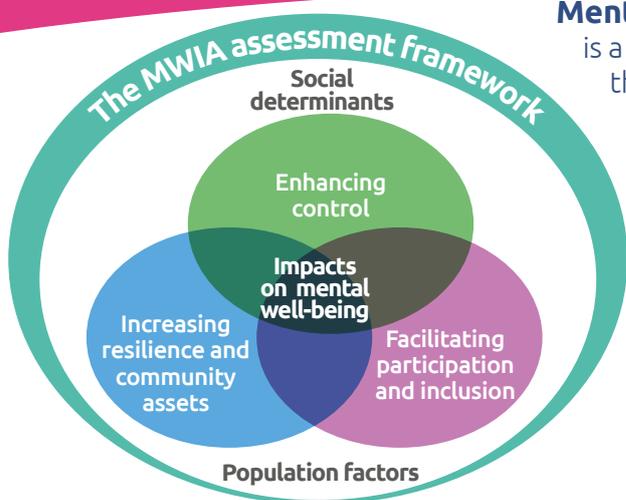
Following infection control guidelines



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.

Many factors have impacted the mental wellbeing of young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning from these impacts is important for future pandemic and emergency planning.

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