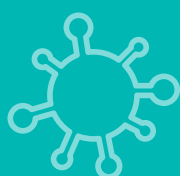


Society Watch 2022

They Think It's All Over: The Social Legacy of the COVID-19 Pandemic

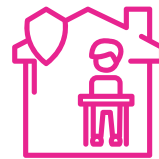


NatCen

Social Research that works for society

Introduction

- The annual Society Watch series provides a snapshot of what life is like for people in Britain today, from the cradle to the grave.
- Society Watch 2022 focuses on the impact of COVID-19 and the pandemic's possible legacy. The report builds on and complements earlier reports in this area.¹
- While much of the focus nationally has been on the 22,089,682 COVID-19 cases, 852,794 hospitalisations and 176,207 deaths reported by government as of 01 May 2022,² the coronavirus will have a wider, enduring and on-going impact on our lives.
- So what does the evidence tell policy makers and practitioners about people's experiences during the pandemic and what the legacy of COVID-19 may be on their lives in the future?
- Society Watch 2022 provides a snapshot of the public's experiences of the pandemic from some of the UK's national data sources, although it does not attempt to be a comprehensive record because of the scale of research that continues to be undertaken and the changing nature of the pandemic.
- The report also provides new, as yet unpublished, analysis by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) of how people were feeling about their lives at the beginning of 2022 after almost two years of living with COVID-19 and the associated restrictions.
- Society Watch 2022 is produced by NatCen. An associated event to launch the report is being sponsored by the British Academy.
- The devolved administrations use different sources and approaches to statistics and research for the individual countries of the United Kingdom and they are therefore not necessarily comparable. The tables and charts in this report reflect that. The geographical coverage is clearly marked and depends on the source used.



This report was compiled and edited by Josefiën Breedvelt, Guy Goodwin and Oliver Paynel. The lead editor was Josefiën Breedvelt.

Special thanks to all colleagues at NatCen and ScotCen who provided valuable input and support, including Gianfranco Addario, Robert Ashford, Beverley Bates, Kate Belcher, Paul Bradshaw, Jonah Bury, Sarah Butt, Soazig Clifton, Katie Crabb, Sylvie Craig, John Curtice, Rebekka Hammelsbeck, Ella Hudson, Nathan Hudson, Curtis Jessop, Joanne McLean, Sally McManus, Martin Mitchell, Gillian Prior, Lisa Rutherford, Katharine Sadler, Svetlana Speight, Bea Taylor and Isabel Taylor.

The case study analysis was authored by Isabel Taylor, Kate Belcher, Josefiën Breedvelt and Bea Taylor using data collected on the NatCen Panel.

1 See for example, The British Academy, "The COVID Decade: understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19", <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-decade-understanding-the-long-term-societal-impacts-of-covid-19/>;

The Health Foundation, "Unequal pandemic, fairer recovery: The COVID-19 impact inquiry report", <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/unequal-pandemic-fairer-recovery>, "Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Marmot Review", <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/unequal-pandemic-fairer-recovery>;

House of Lords COVID-19 Committee, "Living in a COVID World: A Long-term Approach to Resilience and Wellbeing", <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/9151/documents/159601/default/>.

2 <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/deaths?areaType=overview&areaName=United%20Kingdom>

Impact of COVID-19 through the Life Course

Executive Summary

- The statistics, research and themes in this report suggest that the pandemic has had a marked effect on our society with a range of areas affected, including education, work, our social connections and our mental and physical health.
- While this report only provides a snapshot and covers certain areas, it appears that the effects of the pandemic can be observed throughout society and throughout the course of our lives, posing challenges for the national recovery and for the government's agenda to 'level up' the United Kingdom.
- Young people experienced a disruption to education with a disproportionately negative effect on the learning environment and attainment of students from disadvantaged groups.
- Children and young people's mental health worsened over the pandemic, with more children experiencing a probable mental health problem. Similarly, adults reported a worsening of their mental health during the pandemic. Those struggling financially had worse mental health outcomes compared to those who did not.
- Women's wellbeing was more negatively affected than men's during the first year of the pandemic. Women were more likely to be furloughed, to spend significantly less time working from home, and more time on unpaid household work and childcare.
- New research from NatCen for this report highlights that, almost two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, women became more likely than men to report worries about their work-life balance, education and their parents' and children's wellbeing. Women also reported more inter-generational worries about both their children's and their parents' health and wellbeing.
- The pandemic had a negative impact on the mental health of LGBT+ people in the UK, in part due to the loss of safe and supportive spaces and peer groups, and disruption to LGBT+ services. There is a need for further research to explore the experiences of specific groups.
- Working from home during the pandemic had a marked negative effect on mental health, particularly for people living alone, with those working outside the home reporting better mental health than those working at home.
- Since the pandemic, more people reported they were struggling with paying their bills and there appears to be more overcrowding, particularly in the private rented sector. The cost of living crisis could amplify these issues further.
- Our general health may be negatively affected as well, with people reporting to exercise less and drink more alcohol.
- In later life, increasing loneliness and isolation was associated with a negative effect on wellbeing and mental health. Health conditions were identified later or not identified, and many reported a worse financial situation in later life.
- Society Watch 2022 offers an opportunity to take stock of the effects of the pandemic on our society. As we enter a 'new normal' we can observe that the effects of the pandemic are ongoing and likely to be felt for decades to come.



Baby Boom or Bust?

1. There were 625,008 live births in 2021, an increase of 1.5% from 2020, but still well below the 2019 number.³ This follows the trend of decreasing live births observed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in recent years and no direct association with the pandemic is drawn.
2. While the ONS concludes there has been “no baby boom” to date as a result of the pandemic, some commentators have suggested there may in fact be a “baby bust” in developed countries.⁴



Children, Young People and Education...

Early Years Settings

3. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges for the early years sector. NatCen, together with Frontier Economics, was commissioned by the Department for Education to track the impact of the pandemic on Early Years Providers as part of the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers.⁵
4. Childcare and early years providers reported that in July 2020 there were temporary closures, reduced opening hours and attendance.
5. However, by November-December 2020, 93% of providers reported to be open and most providers had not changed the choice or flexibility offered to parents as a result of the pandemic.
6. The overall number of childcare places in England also remained similar to 2019 though there had been a reduction in before and after school places, potentially driven by a reduction in parental demand for wraparound care.⁶

Social Disadvantage and Learning Provision

7. A follow up of the Department for Education’s Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) was conducted in 2020 by NatCen to look at children’s educational experiences during the early stages of the pandemic, with the report published in 2021.⁷ Children were aged 8-10 at the time of the follow up.
8. 89% of children did not attend school in person at all during the national lockdown (April-May 2020). However, the vast majority (96%) were given work by their school during this period.

3 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/articles/provisionalbirthsinenglandand-wales/2021>

4 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-56415248>

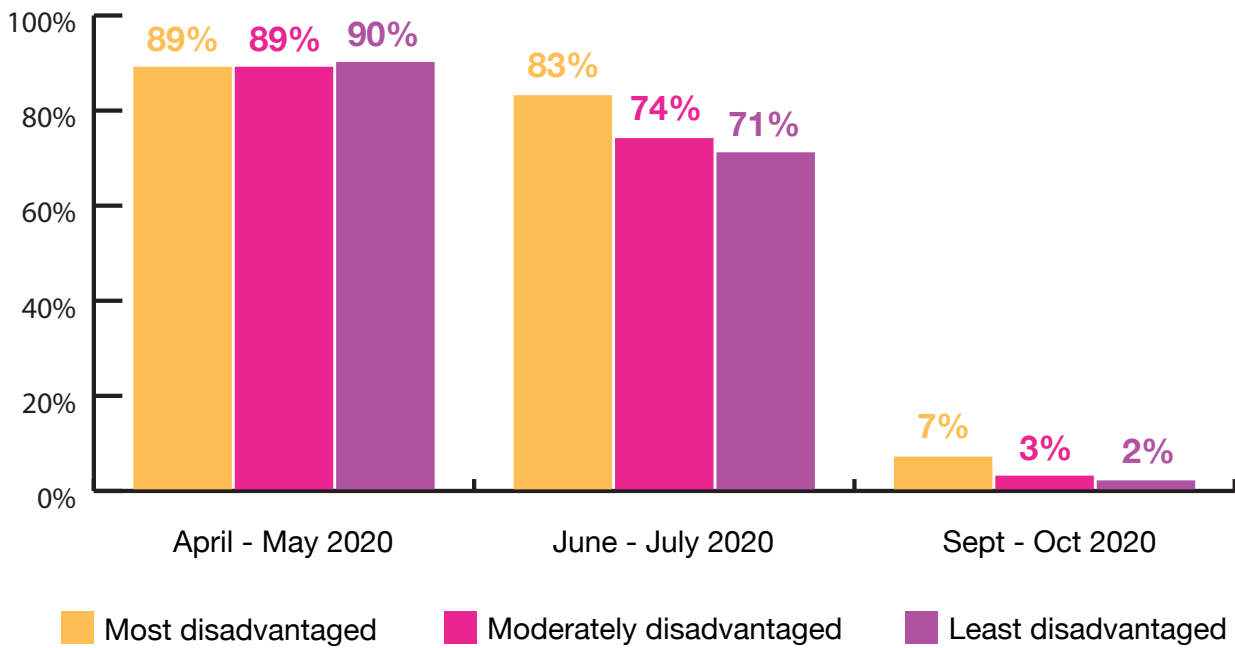
5 Waves 1-3 of the survey were conducted between July and December 2020. Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers COVID-19 study (DfE) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/survey-of-childcare-and-early-years-providers-and-COVID-19-coronavirus>, <https://www.frontier-economics.com/media/4320/childcare-and-COVID-19-impacts-on-opening-child-attendance-staffing-and-income-nov-2020.pdf>).

Wave 4 of the survey was conducted between November and December 2021 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/survey-of-childcare-and-early-years-providers-and-coronavirus-covid-19-wave-4>).

6 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-and-early-years-providers-survey-2021>

7 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-and-development-coronavirus-covid-19-study>

Fig 1. Percentage of children NOT attending school at all during the COVID-19 pandemic, by time period and disadvantage



Source: Department for Education, Study of Early Education and Development (SEED), 2021

Box A: Summary Findings: Early Education and Development COVID-19 Study

There were no differences by disadvantage in the proportion of children not attending school during the first national lockdown (April-May 2020). However, when schools partially re-opened after the May half-term in 2020, children from more disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to attend school. Similarly, in September-October 2020, children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs (SEN) were less likely to attend school.

Disadvantage had a clear impact on children’s digital learning environment, something that might be expected to contribute increasingly over time to the gap in attainment between the most disadvantaged and least disadvantaged pupils.

Among children who never or only sometimes attended school during lockdown, the most disadvantaged groups were significantly more likely to have no access to a computer. One in five children (22%) in the most disadvantaged group and 15% of children in the moderately disadvantaged group had no access to a computer, compared to only 5% of those in the least disadvantaged group.

Children with SEN also experienced marked inequalities in school provision and outcomes. When not attending school during the first national lockdown (April-May 2020), children with SEN were less likely to be given work and less likely to complete all of the work being set, compared with children without SEN.

Children with SEN aged 4 to 10 also showed significant increases in socio-emotional difficulties including acute rises in hyperactivity and emotional difficulties.

Disruption to Education

9. The ability to measure the attainment of pupils, and in particular to compare progress through both primary and secondary school years, has been greatly affected over the pandemic period with phonics screening checks, key stage assessments and standard assessment tests (SATs) in England cancelled in both 2019-2020 and 2020-21.⁸
10. The method of measuring pupil attainment at the end of Year 11 (GCSEs), without formal exams, has been a topic of public policy debate with different methods used in both 2019-20 and 2020-21 and a significant discontinuity upwards in outcomes reported by the Department for Education between these two years and those that preceded them, which makes comparability inappropriate.⁹
11. COVID-19-related disruption has negatively impacted the attainment of all pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is evidence that the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their classmates has grown. Most evidence shows that, despite some recovery by summer 2021, on average, pupils were not performing as well in both maths and reading as pre-pandemic cohorts.¹⁰
12. The National Online Tuition Pilot focused on school years 5 to 13 with 80% of those taking part in Years 10 and 11 (ages 14-16). An independent evaluation for the Education Endowment Foundation by NatGen found that delivering online tuition for pupils during school closures was feasible and the reach was high given the circumstances, even though online tuition lacked some of the benefits of in-person delivery. Access to equipment and reliable internet connections were key barriers to participation (see Box B below).¹¹

Box B: Summary Findings: Independent Evaluation of National Online Tuition Pilot

Delivering online tuition during the school 'closures' was feasible. Reach was high considering the circumstances and providers, schools, tutors and learners quickly adapted to what was a new learning model for most.

Learners enjoyed the tuition and there were perceived benefits for learning. Tutors, tutoring groups and school staff felt that learners benefited from the tailored support. They saw improvements in learners' confidence, engagement with education and preparedness for new school year.

Relationships were crucial in supporting take-up and engagement; investing time in building rapport helped tutors to motivate learners and tailor the support. Providers and school staff worked to identify the best ways to secure parents' and learners' buy-in but were unable to reach all families during the school closures.

Access to equipment and reliable internet connections were key barriers to participation, particularly for home-based learners; solutions included providing equipment and inviting learners to take part at school.

Online tuition lacked some of the benefits of in-person delivery; while the offer of online tuition was highly attractive during the COVID-19 pandemic, most learners would prefer in-person tutoring if given the choice. Tutors found it more challenging to build rapport with learners online, and technical challenges risked disrupting delivery.

8 <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/standards-and-testing-agency>

9 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-performance-revised>

10 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-performance-revised>; <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/guidance-for-teachers/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-impact-of-covid-19-on-pupil-attainment>

11 <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/independent-evaluation-of-the-national-online-tuition-pilot/>

Wellbeing of Children and Young People

13. As a result of the disruption to their education, along with pandemic-related bereavements and illness, changes to family lives and routines, as well as their reduced ability to socialise and make friends, attention has shifted to the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people and the possible, in particular negative, effects on the lives of this generation to come.^{12,13}
14. Two follow-up waves to NHS Digital's 2017 Mental Health of Children and Young People in England were conducted in 2020 and 2021 by NatCen, capturing experiences and circumstances during this time.¹⁴
15. Key findings from the 2021 study, published by NHS Digital, are shown in Box C below.

Box C: Summary Findings: Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021

Rates of probable mental disorder increased between 2017 and 2021; in 6 to 16 year olds from one in nine to one in six; and in 17 to 19 year olds from one in ten to one in six. Rates in both age groups remained similar between 2020 and 2021.

39.2% of 6 to 16 year olds had experienced deterioration in mental health between 2017 and 2021, and 21.8% experienced improvement. Among 17 to 23 year olds, 52.5% experienced deterioration, and 15.2% experienced improvement.

The proportion of children and young people with possible eating problems increased between 2017 and 2021; from 6.7% to 13.0% in 11 to 16 year olds, and from 44.6% to 58.2% in 17 to 19 year olds.

Problems with sleep on three or more nights of the previous seven affected over a quarter (28.7%) of 6 to 10 year olds, over a third (38.4%) of 11 to 16 year olds, and over half (57.1%) of 17 to 23 year olds. Across all age groups, figures were much higher in those with a probable mental disorder (59.5%, 74.2%, 86.7% respectively).

10.6% of 6 to 16 year olds missed more than 15 days of school during the 2020 Autumn term. Children with a probable mental disorder were twice as likely to have missed this much school (18.2%) as those unlikely to have a mental disorder (8.8%).

Children and young people with a probable mental disorder were more likely to have experienced not being able to afford enough food or using a food bank compared with those unlikely to have a mental disorder.

Children with a probable mental disorder were less likely to have access to learning resources and reliable internet access than children unlikely to have a mental disorder. In 2021, 87.8% of 6 to 16 year olds with a probable mental disorder had access to a laptop or tablet to work on, compared with 96.1% of children unlikely to have a mental disorder. 84.4% of children with a probable mental disorder had access to reliable internet, compared with 90.7% of those unlikely to have a mental disorder.

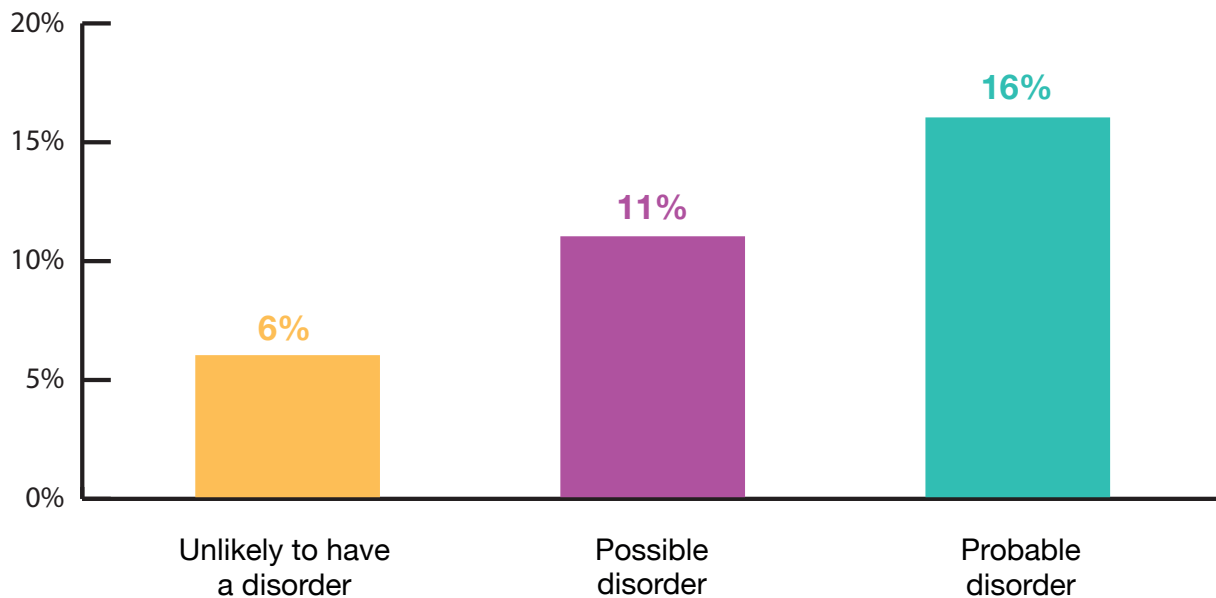
12 <https://www.youthforum.org/news/beyond-lockdown-the-pandemic-scar-on-young-people>

13 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/22/covid-has-formed-the-person-i-am-young-people-on-how-the-pandemic-changed-them>

14 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2020-wave-1-follow-up>;
<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey#chapter-index>

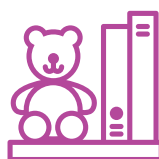
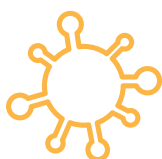
16. The results from the 2020 follow-up study had already raised questions around how responsive our social protection systems are to the socioeconomic challenges households have been and are facing during the pandemic. Children (those aged 5 to 16) with a probable mental disorder were more than twice as likely to live in households (16.3%) that fell behind with payments during the pandemic than those unlikely to have a mental disorder (6.4%). One in ten of those aged 17 to 22 with a probable mental disorder reported that during the pandemic their household did not have enough to eat or had increased reliance on foodbanks.¹⁵

Fig 2. Percentage of children aged 5 to 16 living in a household that fell behind with payments during the COVID-19 pandemic, by mental health of child, 2020



Source: NHS Digital, Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2020

17. The Youth COVID-19 Support Fund was set up to support organisations in the youth and voluntary sectors that were struggling financially due to the pandemic and the measures put in place by government to try to control the spread of the virus. Its key aim was to ensure that services providing vital support to young people can remain open after the pandemic. An independent evaluation for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) by NatGen found that the fund contributed to the number of organisations that said they remained fully open, or at least partially open, after payments from the fund. Most organisations that received support were able to continue service delivery despite the effects of the pandemic or resume services earlier. There were still concerns, however, about the future of the youth sector given that the pandemic and government restrictions measures were ongoing at the time of data collection.¹⁶



¹⁵ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2020-wave-1-follow-up>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-COVID-19-support-fund-evaluation>

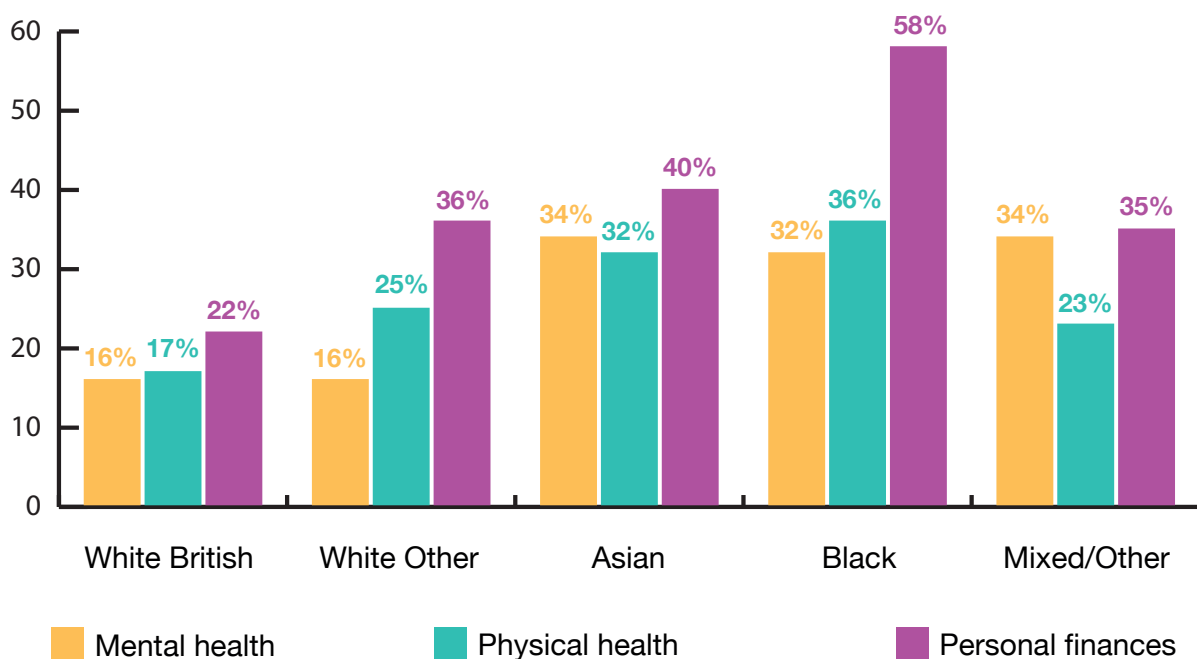


Our Lives as Adults...

How are we feeling?

18. In March and April 2020, the public had high levels of concern about the effects of the coronavirus outbreak.¹⁷ People were most concerned about the effects of the pandemic on others: National Health Service (NHS) capacity, the health of their friends and family, and the education of their children. Concern for personal health (physical and mental) and finances was lower overall but varied between demographic groups. People from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, and those finding it most difficult financially, reported higher levels of concern for their mental health, physical health and personal finances.

Fig 3. Proportion of adults very concerned about the effect of the COVID-19 outbreak on their mental health, physical health, and personal finances, by ethnic group



Source: Wellcome, Wellcome Monitor 2020: COVID-19 Study

19. The Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotGen), the Scottish arm of NatGen, found that around half (49%) of people in Scotland said the experience of self-isolation had impacted negatively upon their mental health, with younger people, international travellers in managed isolation and people with previous experience of self-isolation particularly affected.¹⁸
20. The Scottish Health Survey (telephone survey) 2020 found people in Scotland advised to shield were more likely to experience lower mental wellbeing and loneliness during the pandemic. People who reported keeping in contact with friends, relatives or neighbours less frequently reported lower mental wellbeing than those who said they kept in touch with others on 'most days'. The survey's findings suggest that men were less likely than women to keep in frequent contact with friends, neighbours or relatives since lockdown.¹⁹

¹⁷ <https://wellcome.org/reports/wellcome-monitor-2020-COVID-19-study>

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-19-support-study-experiences-compliance-self-isolation-main-report/>

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-health-survey-telephone-survey-august-september-2020-main-report/>

21. In July-August 2020, the Natsal-COVID study found that the first UK lockdown affected people's sex lives in a variety of different ways, with young people and those not living with a partner reporting the greatest changes. This is likely to be in part because young people are less likely to be living with partners and were unable to meet sexual partners when restrictions were in place.²⁰
22. The study also examined steady intimate relationships during the initial lockdown. Six in ten people in steady relationships felt there had been no change to their relationship quality, compared with only two in ten who felt there had been no change to their sex life quality. Perceived changes – both positive and negative – were more commonly reported by younger people. The pandemic appears to have widened inequalities in experiences of steady relationships among young people.²¹
23. Some of the possible longer-term impacts of the pandemic are explored in our case study (see page 13), based on new data collected via NatCen's mixed-mode random probability panel.

Mental Wellbeing and Social Disadvantage

24. In August 2020, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that almost one in five adults (19.2%) were likely to be experiencing some form of depression during the pandemic at June 2020; this had almost doubled from around 1 in 10 (9.7%) before the pandemic (July 2019 to March 2020).²²
25. A more recent analysis by ONS (March 2021) showed that while more men have died from COVID-19, women's wellbeing was more negatively affected than men's during the first year of the pandemic.²³ In general, men and women's experiences of life in lockdown tended to differ. Women were more likely to be furloughed, and to spend significantly less time working from home, and more time on unpaid household work and childcare.
26. During the pandemic, NatCen published four reports on socio-economic and mental health trajectories during the pandemic, focusing on furlough and mental health, finances and mental health, working at home and mental health and the financial experiences of people with previous experiences of mental distress during the pandemic.²⁴ Data from Understanding Society's COVID study was used, in combination with data collected from the same respondents before the pandemic, to investigate changes in people's mental and financial wellbeing during the pandemic.²⁵
27. As well as offering employees a continuing wage, even though they could not work for their employer, The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (or furlough scheme) appears to have had a protective effect on workers' mental health. Workers in insecure jobs were less likely to experience mental distress if they had been furloughed in May 2020, than if they had not. This was seen particularly amongst employees in long-term insecure jobs who reported, on average, a decrease in mental distress at the start of the pandemic.²⁶
28. Amongst people who continued to work during the lockdown, people who worked from home experienced a larger increase in mental distress than those who continued to work in their usual workplace. This was the case even when controlling for people's demographic characteristics, financial circumstances, levels of loneliness and living circumstances. Although people who continued to work outside their home were more likely to experience financial difficulties, people who worked from home were more likely to experience social isolation, especially if they lived alone.²⁷

20 <https://www.natsal.ac.uk/natsal-covid-study>; <https://sti.bmj.com/content/early/2021/12/14/sextrans-2021-055210.long#article-bottom>

21 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00224499.2022.2035663>

22 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/june2020>

23 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19latestinsights/work>

24 <https://natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/monitoring-socioeconomic-and-mental-health-trajectories-through-the-COVID-19-pandemic/>

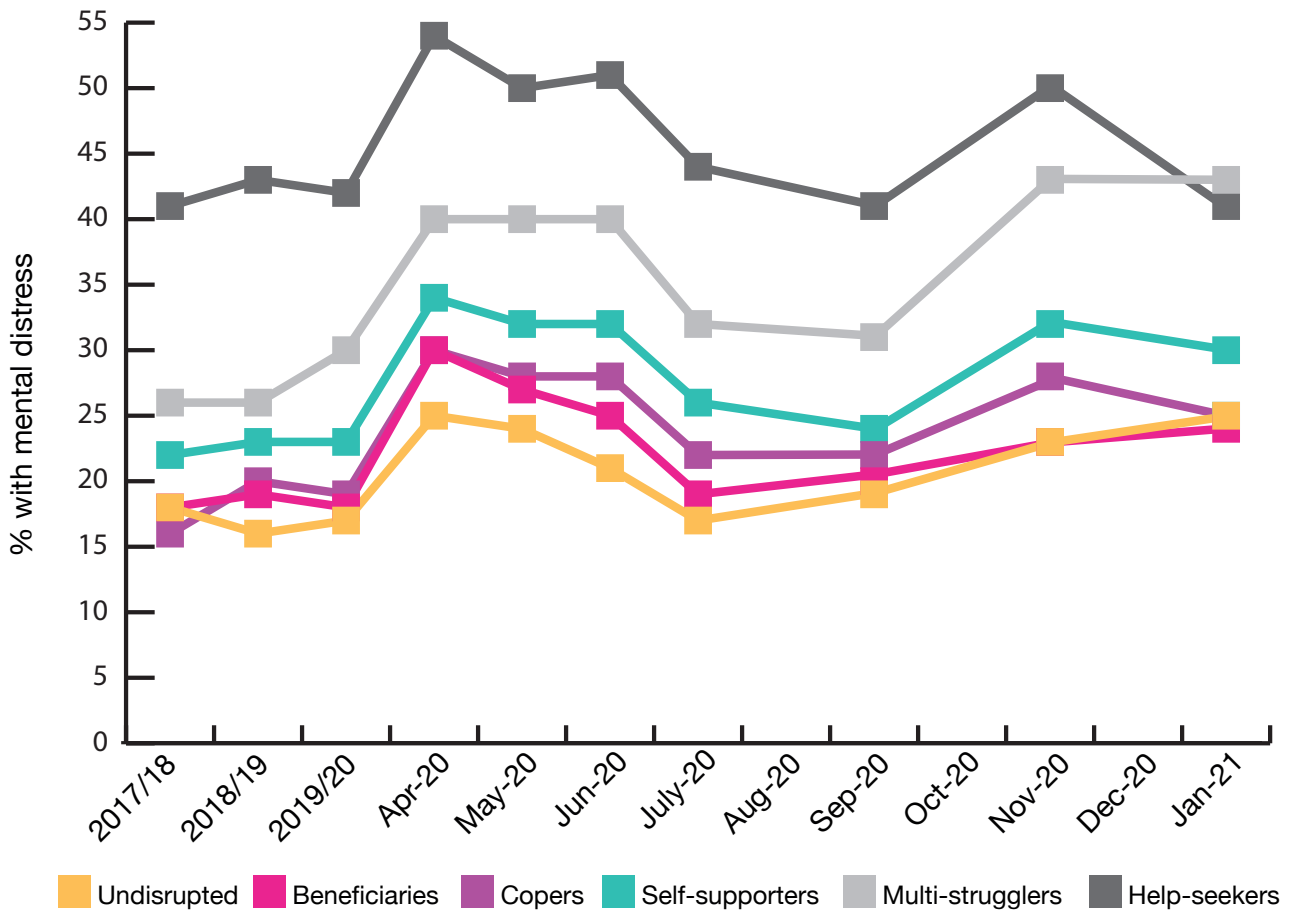
25 Data used: University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2020). Understanding Society: Waves 1-10, 2009-2019 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009. [data collection]. 13th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 6614, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UK-DA-SN-6614-14>; University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2021). Understanding Society: COVID-19 Study, 2020-2021. [data collection]. 8th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 8644, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8644-8>

26 <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/exploring-the-relationship-between-economic-security-furlough-and-mental-distress/>

27 <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/working-from-home-and-mental-health-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

29. Across the UK population, there were varied experiences of the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. NatCen’s analysis identified that people could have experienced six different types of financial circumstances during the pandemic.²⁸ Although the two largest groups suffered little financially during the pandemic, two groups were particularly badly hit; “Help-seekers” looked for external help, such as borrowing, benefits or new employment, to cover income losses during the pandemic and “Multi-strugglers” already faced multiple financial struggles but needed to take advantage of many different types of non-work based financial support. These two groups also experienced large increases in mental distress during the first year of the pandemic, particularly in the periods of the strictest lockdowns:

Fig 4. Proportion of UK adults reporting significant mental distress, by financial experience of the pandemic

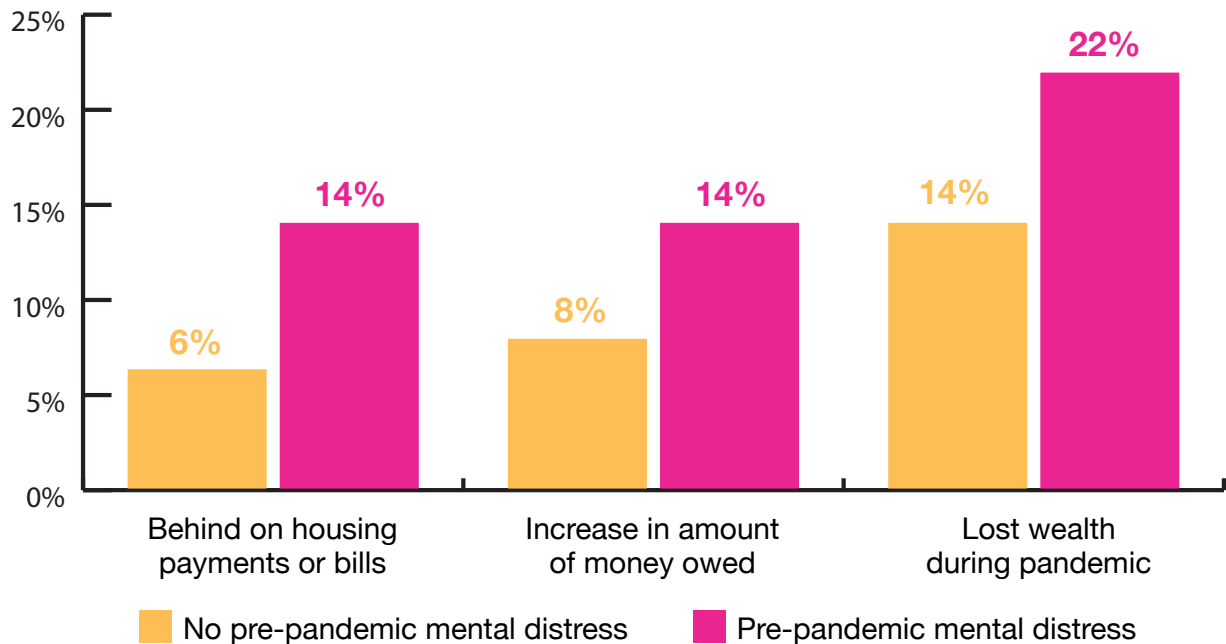


Source: NatCen analysis of Understanding Society

²⁸ <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/finances-and-mental-health-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

30. People experiencing mental distress before the COVID-19 pandemic appear to have experienced worse financial outcomes during the pandemic. As well as being more likely to say that they were financially struggling during the pandemic, they were also more likely to report falling behind on household bills or housing payments, an increase in debt or a fall in wealth during the first year of the pandemic. This does not appear to be driven only by their pre-pandemic financial situation, as even people who said that they were financially comfortable before the pandemic were more likely to experience each of these outcomes if they had experienced pre-pandemic mental distress.

Fig 5. Proportion of UK adults reporting negative financial outcomes in March 2021, by pre-pandemic mental distress



Source: NatCen analysis of Understanding Society

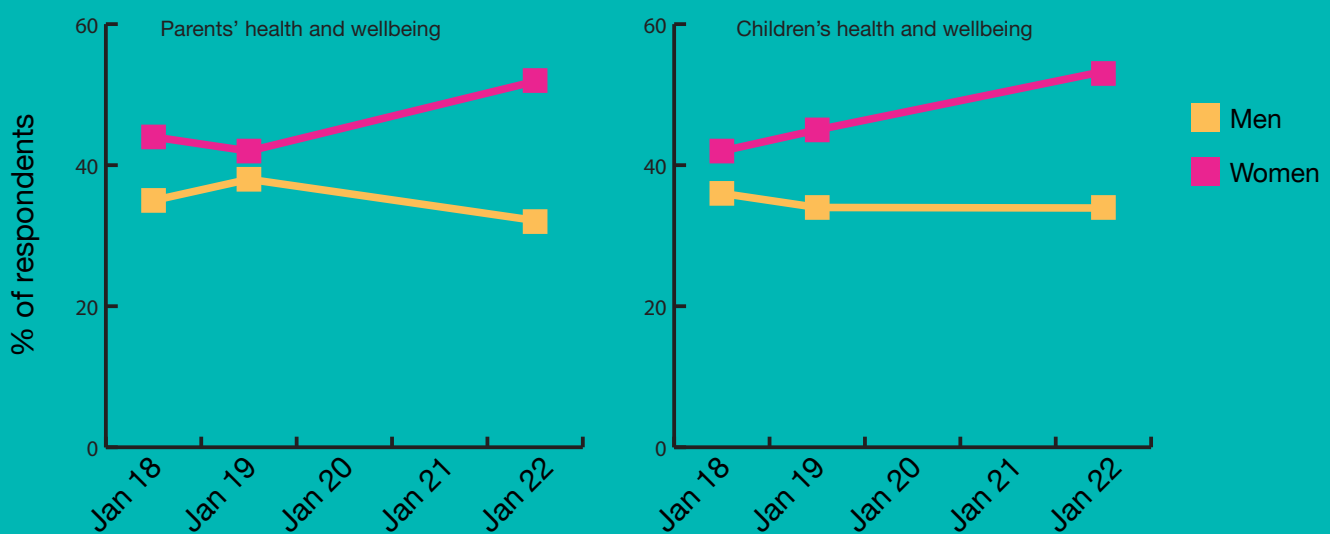


Case Study

Anxious Britain: How worried are we in 2022?

- This new analysis investigates levels of worry across adults in Britain before and after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. It uses data collected by the NatCen Panel, a representative sample of adults across Britain, in January 2018, January 2019 and January 2022.²⁹
- Overall levels of worry across Britain were relatively stable in January 2018, January 2019 and January 2022. Although there were no differences in the levels of general worries between men and women in January 2018 and January 2019, a gap had appeared in January 2022. In this most recently collected data, one in five women reported being extremely worried about most of areas they were asked about, compared to only one in 10 men.
- In January 2022, women were much more likely than men to be extremely worried about the health and wellbeing of both their children and their parents. Although men and women reported similar levels of worry about their parents' health and wellbeing in January 2018 and January 2019, a gap had opened up in January 2022 when half of women but only one third of men said that they were extremely worried about their parents. Similar differences were seen in people's worries about their children's health and wellbeing in January 2022, but a gap had already opened up in this area in January 2019.
- When asked about both their parents' and children's health and wellbeing in January 2022, women were also more likely than men to be caught between worrying about both generations. Four out of 10 women reported being extremely worried about both their parents' and their children's health and wellbeing. Half as many men (two out of 10) reported being extremely worried about both.
- The worry gap between men and women extended beyond areas related the health and wellbeing of people's families. In January 2022, women were also more likely than men to be extremely worried about their work-life balance and about their level of education, training and qualifications. These gaps were not seen in data collected in January 2018 or January 2019.

Proportion of men and women extremely worried about their parents' and about their children's health and wellbeing – January 2018 to January 2022



Marginalised Groups

31. The evidence base on UK LGBT+ communities' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic is methodologically limited, with a distinct lack of statistically representative, comparative research. NatCen has undertaken research to better understand what support can be provided to the UK LGBT+ voluntary and community sector to address the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.³⁰
32. Initial findings from this study suggested the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the mental health of LGBT+ people living in the UK. This included increased anxiety and depression, as well as feelings of isolation and loneliness through the loss of safe, supportive, and identity-affirming peer-groups, communities and spaces.
33. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant financial impact on LGBT+ services, with a loss of earned income/donations, and a loss of income via contract services/grant funding; all of which may jeopardise LGBT+ services' long-term survival.
34. There is a need for research to explore the experiences of LGBT+ people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and LGBT+ people of colour, as well as LGBT+ disabled people.

Our Working Lives

35. Research by NatCen using data from Understanding Society found that working at home was associated with larger increases in mental distress after the start of the pandemic. The greatest increases in mental distress were seen among the most isolated group – those both living alone and working from home experienced a bigger increase in distress than other workers at the start of the pandemic.³¹
36. In 2020, NatCen's British Social Attitudes survey showed that people were more positive about the health benefits of work and more likely to support flexibility from employers following the onset of the pandemic. 41% in 2020 said paid work is 'very good' for most people's mental health, an increase from 26% in 2019. 82% of people who shifted to home working in 2020 said they favour employers allowing home working, compared with 67% of those who have always worked from home and 51% of those who travel to work.³²
37. It appears that homeworking is gradually decreasing. The percentage of adults solely working from home declined from 30% in 10-14 March 2021 to 12% during 16-27 March 2022. 57% of adults reported they travelled to work only (did not work from home) in the March 2022 period, compared with 41% during the March 2021 period. The proportion of people working from home and travelling to work – often referred to as hybrid working – remained relatively stable between the two periods, at 12% in 10-14 March 2021 and 14% in 16-27 March 2022.³³

30 <https://natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2021/november/research-reveals-impact-of-pandemic-on-lgbtplus-communities-in-britain/>

31 <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/working-from-home-and-mental-health-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>. Data used: University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2020). Understanding Society: Waves 1-10, 2009-2019 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009. [data collection]. 13th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 6614, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-14>; University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2021). Understanding Society: COVID-19 Study, 2020-2021. [data collection]. 8th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 8644, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8644-8>.

32 <https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-38/work-and-health.aspx>

33 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/1april2022>

38. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) ended on 30 September 2021. In late October 2021, almost one in six (16%) businesses that had not permanently stopped trading reported having had employees on furlough at the end of the CJRS.
39. Employment fell by 466,000 (1.4%) in the year ending September 2021, largely driven by younger workers (the number of workers aged 16 to 24 years fell by 201,000) and elementary occupations; employment had previously been rising by 0.9% on average in the four years prior.³⁴
40. Economic inactivity of 16 to 24 year-olds has since fallen back to pre-coronavirus levels, however, economic inactivity for those aged 50 years and over increased another 160,000 from January to March 2021 to October to December 2021.³⁵
41. Longitudinal data from the ONS Labour Force Survey shows that those aged 50 years and over saw the largest increase of inactive people among all age groups since the start of the pandemic, following a historical downward trend since records began in 1971.³⁶ Among those adults aged 50 to 70 years in Great Britain who left or lost their job since the start of the pandemic and did not return to work, most (77% of adults aged 50 to 59 years and 57% of adults aged 60 years and over) said they left their previous job sooner than expected. Leaving work because of the coronavirus pandemic was the second most commonly reported reason (15%) after retirement (47%).³⁷

Housing and Affordability

42. Based on data collected prior to the pandemic, NatCen analysis of the English Housing Survey 2019-20 identified six distinct types of private renters living in England. The largest group were considered “comfortable renters” and were generally satisfied with their current accommodation, faced no issues with affordability and expected to buy in the next few years. However, other groups identified, including “struggling families” who made up 11%, were more likely to be struggling to pay their rent, living in overcrowded or damp accommodation and less likely to expect to buy their own home.
43. Findings from the Household Resilience Survey show that more households were in arrears in April-May 2021 than before the pandemic.³⁸ 2% of mortgagors were in arrears, compared with the pre-pandemic rate of 0.5%. 7% of private renters in England were in arrears, up from 3% in 2019-20. 13% of social renters were in arrears in April-May 2021, unchanged from before the pandemic.
44. One in ten (10%) households were behind with at least one household bill in April-May 2021, slightly lower than in November-December 2020 (12%). 22% of households had recently used their savings to pay their rent or mortgage. These figures precede more recent increases in the cost of living, including energy bills.

34 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/changingtrendsandrecent-shortagesinthelabourmarketuk/2016to2021>

35 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/movementsoutofworkfortho-seagedover50yearssincethestartofthecoronaviruspandemic/2022-03-14>

36 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/movementsoutofworkfortho-seagedover50yearssincethestartofthecoronaviruspandemic/2022-03-14>

37 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/reasonsforworkersagedover-50yearsleavingemploymentsincethestartofthecoronaviruspandemic/2022-03-14>

38 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1024762/Household_Resilience_Study_Wave_3_April-May_2021_Report.pdf

45. The proportion of renters who expect to buy their own home has declined during the pandemic. In April-May 2021, 45% of private renters and 20% of social renters said that they expect to buy their own home at some point in the future, compared with 59% of private renters and 28% of social renters in 2019-20.
46. Overcrowding increased during the pandemic, particularly in the private rented sector. In April-May 2021, 14% of private renters lived in overcrowded accommodation, compared with 7% in 2019-20. 9% of social renters lived in overcrowded accommodation, unchanged from before the pandemic. In total, there were 1.2 million overcrowded households in England in April-May 2021, up from 829,000 in 2019-20.

Diet and Physical Activity

47. The National Diet and Nutrition Survey assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the diet and physical activity of people in the UK in 2020.³⁹
48. In a self-report of everything eaten and drunk over a 24-hour period, fruit and vegetable intake was 0.7 portions per day lower in adults than it was before the pandemic. However, 36% of all participants reported in a web survey said they had eaten more fresh fruit and vegetables since the start of the pandemic while 7% reported they had eaten less.
49. Self-reported alcohol consumption over a 24-hour period was higher than it was pre-pandemic for 11-18 year olds and for adult men. In a web survey, a higher proportion of adults (22%) reported drinking alcohol more often since the start of the pandemic than reported drinking less often (13%).
50. 19% of participants reported that they, or someone in their household, had cut down or skipped meals since the start of the pandemic. The most common reason given was the food they wanted not being available in the shops (14%). 3% of participants reported not having enough money to buy food as a reason for cutting down or skipping meals.
51. 11% of people were worried about being able to afford food in the next month. More than half (52%) of those who were worried about not being able to afford food in the next month reported cutting down or skipping meals.
52. More than two-thirds of participants (68%) said that they or their household visited grocery shops less often since the start of the pandemic. 59% of households reported that they had cooked at home more since the start of the pandemic.
53. Energy expenditure from physical activity in adults 16 years and over, assessed by the Recent Physical Activity Questionnaire, was higher on average for women than in pre-pandemic assessments, but not for men. However, in a web survey, more people reported doing less physical activity since the start of the pandemic than reported they were doing more. 40% of adults aged 19 to 64 years reported a decrease in their physical activity since the start of the pandemic, while 26% reported an increase.

³⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ndns-diet-and-physical-activity-a-follow-up-study-during-COVID-19>

54. 34% of households reported that they had used food delivery services (such as Deliveroo or Just Eat) since the start of the pandemic and 10% used them at least weekly. Households doing alright or managing less well financially were more likely to have used food delivery services than those living comfortably financially. Participants from households reporting lower financial or food security since the pandemic began had poorer diets in some respects than participants from other households. For example, participants who reported managing less well financially or who were worried about being able to afford food in the next month consumed less fruit and vegetables, less fish, and more sugar sweetened soft drinks than participants who reported they were more financially or food secure.

Public Attitudes

55. NatCen's British Social Attitudes Survey is the primary vehicle in Britain for looking at public attitudes over time, based on a random probability survey design.⁴⁰
56. In the years leading up to the pandemic, public attitudes had become more favourable towards the provision of welfare for those of working age. This shift remained in place during the pandemic, and the new mood may have helped underpin support for the government's attempts to limit the loss of jobs and its decision to increase welfare payments.⁴¹
57. Already high at the outset, there were only limited signs of further increased concern about inequality and none of increased support for income redistribution. The debate about inequality that arose at various stages in the pandemic is likely to have been a reflection of existing concern rather than an indication of a new public mood.
58. Support for the expansion of public spending and taxation had increased in the years leading up to the pandemic. This may help explain why there has only been a modest reaction against the marked increase in public spending that occurred during the pandemic.
59. Despite public disquiet about the failure by some to adhere to the lockdown rules, a pre-pandemic trend towards more liberal attitudes towards the law and authority largely continued, reflected in an ongoing debate about how strict those rules should have been.
60. One area where the public health regulations that banned or limited social mixing aroused controversy was that they could make it illegal to gather to demonstrate against a government action. There was much discussion in particular of the ethics of holding 'Black Lives Matter' demonstrations in the wake of the murder of George Floyd by a policeman in the USA in May 2020. For others, the need to support the collective action being taken to reduce the transmission of disease during the pandemic was more important than the right to engage in political protest. In practice, the pandemic was accompanied by slightly lower levels of support for allowing those who wish to protest against a government action to organise marches or demonstrations.⁴²



40 <https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/>

41 <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/coronavirus-and-public-attitudes/>

42 <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/coronavirus-and-public-attitudes/>

61. In 2021, overall satisfaction with the NHS fell to 36%, a decline of 17 points from 2020 and the lowest level of satisfaction recorded since 1997. This shift in views was seen across all ages, income groups, sexes and supporters of different political parties. The main reason people gave for being dissatisfied with the NHS overall was waiting times for GP and hospital appointments, followed by staff shortages and a view that the government does not spend enough money on the NHS. Despite this, support for the principles of the NHS remains as strong as ever. The overwhelming majority of people expressed high levels of support for the founding principles of the NHS: that it is free of charge when you need it, primarily funded through taxation and available to everyone.⁴³



In Later Years...

62. The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) COVID-19 Substudy aimed to investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on people aged 50+ in England.⁴⁴

Loneliness and Isolation

63. Men and women in all age groups over 50 experienced an increasing prevalence of loneliness and subjective social isolation during the pandemic, with those aged 50-59 most affected.⁴⁵

64. Older men, those over 70 in particular, experienced larger increases in objective social isolation - a lack of contact due to situational factors, infrequent social interactions, or lack of participation in social activities. Older adults with poor self-reported health had a much higher risk of feeling socially isolated and lonely during the pandemic.

Access to services and new health conditions

65. Rates of newly diagnosed dementia dropped to below half the pre-pandemic rate. The increased isolation during lockdown may have meant that cognitive decline went unnoticed by friends and relatives, or barriers to accessing healthcare may have been experienced more by those with early dementia.⁴⁶

66. Other conditions were diagnosed more frequently than before the pandemic, including arthritis, chronic lung disease, diabetes and hypertension. Fewer opportunities for physical activity and social interaction may have played a part.

43 <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/public-satisfaction-nhs-social-care-2021>;
<https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/research/public-satisfaction-with-the-nhs-and-social-care-in-2021-results-from-the-british-social-attitudes-survey>.

44 <https://www.elsa-project.ac.uk/covid-19-reports>

45 Differences in subjective and objective social isolation and subjective loneliness before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, <https://www.elsa-project.ac.uk/COVID-19-reports>.

46 Multimorbidity, access to services and diagnosis of new health conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, <https://www.elsa-project.ac.uk/COVID-19-reports>.

67. Older people with multiple medical conditions were more likely to be unable to access healthcare, and 1 in 5 of them had a hospital operation or treatment cancelled. Mental health worsened during the pandemic, with higher reported rates of anxiety, depression and loneliness, and the rise was steeper for respondents with multimorbidity.
68. Older people experienced poor mental health and difficulty accessing basic health care during the pandemic, and those with multiple conditions and early dementia had the greatest difficulties. Particular attention should be paid to the health needs of these vulnerable groups as health care access improves and the backlog of cancelled and delayed care is addressed.

Finances in Retirement

69. One in seven (14%) older people had lower incomes in November/December 2020 than they had before the pandemic, and one in five (20%) thought they had lower financial wealth than if the pandemic had not happened.⁴⁷
70. Almost half (45%) of those over 50s in paid work before the pandemic thought that their total income in retirement would now be lower as a result of the crisis. This percentage was higher (by 11 percentage points) among those who were struggling financially before the crisis compared to those who were not, increasing concerns about widening financial inequalities.
71. This analysis highlights that the pandemic will have a long-lasting detrimental impact on many people's finances, and the importance of government policies to support older workers to remain in, or return to, employment.

Community and Connectedness

72. Research using the NatCen Panel for the Centre for Ageing Better examined feelings of community connectedness during the pandemic⁴⁸ and patterns of formal volunteering and informal assistance⁴⁹, with a focus on different age groups.
73. The data collected during the pandemic led to the identification of several groups of people, with varying levels of community connectedness. There was a near equal split, with 54% of people in England being part of highly connected groups, with high levels of community cohesion, as well as informal assistance. 46% of people in England were in less-connected groups, who felt mild or no belonging to their local communities, had low levels of knowledge and trust in their neighbours and rarely received or offered help to their neighbours.
74. Emotional and wellbeing outcomes during the pandemic were found to be less negative amongst people with high levels of connections with their local communities, especially as the age of the study participants increased.
75. People above the age of 50 largely belonged to highly connected groups. Isolated people had worse emotional health outcomes than others during the pandemic, and this gap increased with age.

47 The effect of the pandemic on expected retirement resources, <https://www.elsa-project.ac.uk/COVID-19-reports>.

48 <https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-03/community-connectedness-in-the-COVID-19-outbreak-report.pdf>

49 <https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-03/Volunteering-and-helping-out-in-the-COVID-19-outbreak.pdf>

76. Levels of informal assistance between members of the local community were found to be at the highest at the beginning of the pandemic. By the end of the second lockdown (November 2020), informal assistance was mostly directed only towards those who needed it the most (people above the age of 70, single-person households, people with long-term illnesses and limiting disabilities and those who faced financial hardships).
77. Separate research by NatCen found that groups at higher risk of loneliness during the pandemic also included younger people, women, those who are single or divorced/separated, the unemployed, those who live alone, those shielding, people living with dementia, carers, and those who are digitally excluded.⁵⁰

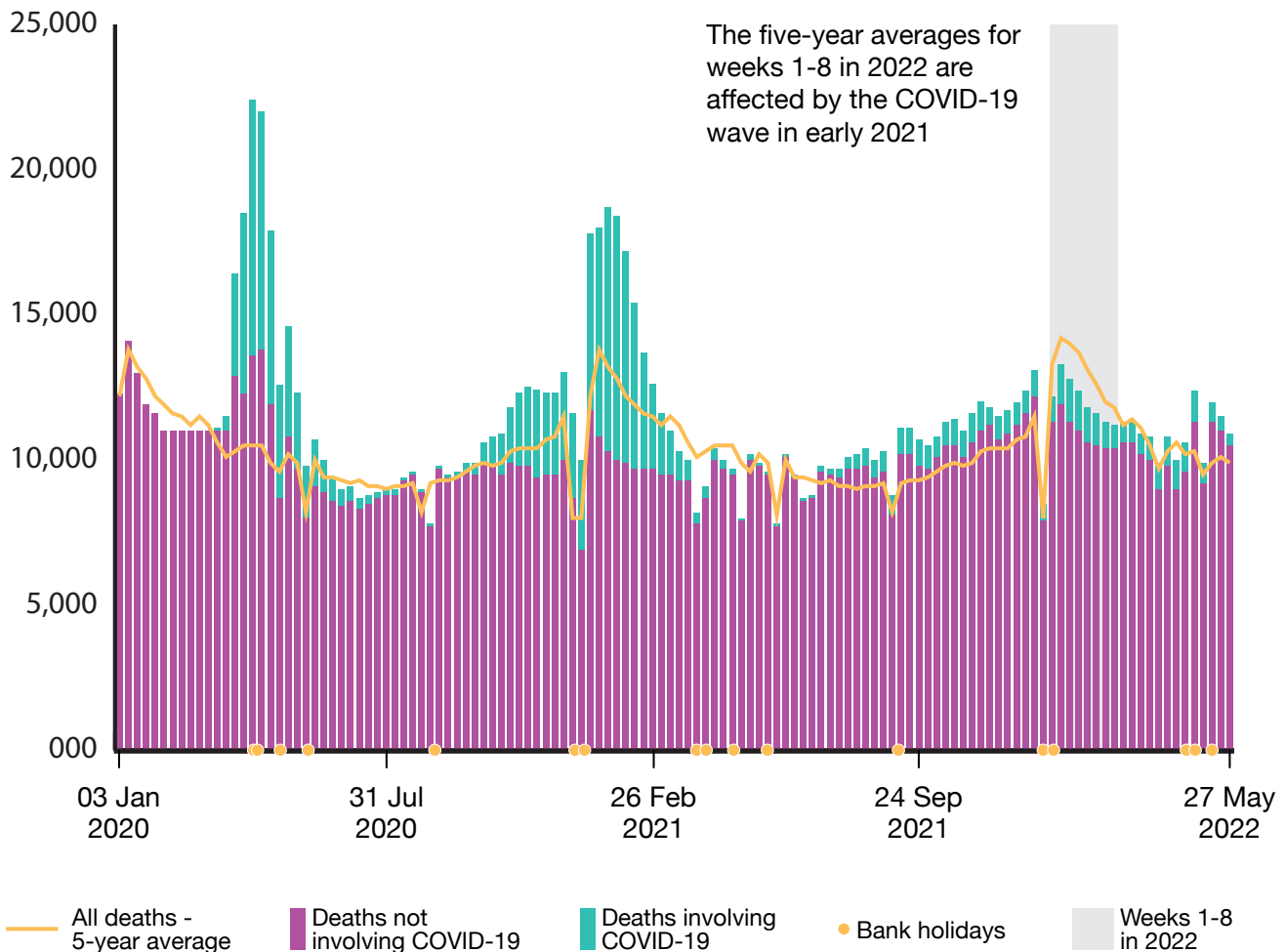


⁵⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/COVID-19-loneliness-fund-evaluation>

Saying Farewell to Loved Ones

78. As of 01 May 2022, there were 176,207 deaths in the United Kingdom where COVID-19 is mentioned as a cause on the death certificate.⁵¹
79. Total deaths involving COVID-19 and those not involving COVID-19 are displayed alongside the five-year average on this figure published by the Office for National Statistics.⁵²

Fig 6. Number of deaths registered by week, England and Wales, 28 December 2019 to 27 May 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics, Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales

80. Since the pandemic began, life expectancy has fallen for men for the first time since statistical records began. Life expectancy at birth in the UK in 2018 to 2020 was 79.0 years for men and 82.9 years for women; this represents a fall of 7 weeks for men and almost no change for women.⁵³

51 <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/deaths?areaType=overview&areaName=United%20Kingdom>

52 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsregisteredweeklyinenglandanddwalesprovisional/weekending18february2022>

53 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/lifeexpectancies/bulletins/nationallifetablesunitedkingdom/2018to2020>

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