

‘Her whole little life has changed dramatically’ Findings of a qualitative study into children’s mental wellbeing in Bradford during Covid-19

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This report presents findings of children’s experiences during the Covid-19 lockdown within the Born in Bradford cohort. This report is to aid policy and decision makers in their planning and responses to Covid-19.

Further Information

www.bradfordresearch.nhs.uk/csag

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Executive Summary

Background

Children's mental wellbeing during Covid-19 was one of three topic areas identified as a priority for qualitative research in order to help decision makers in Bradford understand the social impacts of Covid-19 and assist their response. As a result, we conducted phone and video interviews with 21 Born in Bradford families, children aged between 10-13 and their parents, between August and September 2020. Below is a brief summary of the key findings which are discussed in further detail in the main report.

Key Findings

Covid-19 Anxiety

- Children and parents reported a moderate, sometimes high, level of health anxiety about Covid-19
- Engagement with news cycle and social media worsened children's anxieties
- Children needed a lot of reassurance from parents, but parents felt confused and worried themselves

Boredom and Lethargy

- Children complained of days being boring, repetitive, lacking purpose and feeling stuck indoors, unable to do extracurricular activities
- Lack of school routine, late bedtimes, long lie-ins and more time spent on devices meant some children fell into lethargy

Disengagement from school

- Home-schooling was very variable and often a catalyst for arguments
- Parents and children felt that not attending school had decreased children's ability to concentrate and learn
- There was a destabilising effect on children who had just transitioned or were just about to transition to secondary school

Reduced social contact

- Due to their age, social abilities and financial means, children were often cut off from contacting their friends
- Virtual contact was more difficult and strange compared to face to face interaction
- There was distress and unhappiness about being cut off from family that lived outside the household

Positive aspects of lockdown

- Children enjoyed the opportunity to spend more time with their families
- For some children with additional needs, lockdown offered a welcome respite

Conclusions

The children interviewed were on the cusp of their teenage years, independent to a degree but still needing a lot of parental support and reassurance in order to maintain good wellbeing and healthy behaviours. Many parents will be unable or find it difficult to offer this, without additional support. They were also at an age where they were very aware of Covid-19 and its impact, which had caused many of them anxiety, insecurity and concern for their loved ones. The absence of the routine that going to school offered and a drastic reduction in social contact had led to boredom and sluggishness, and many had been cut off from their friends and wider family. Although circumstances have changed since these interviews took place, with further lockdowns and social distancing still in place, we can expect some of the issues identified in the interviews to remain.

Recommendations

To mitigate anxiety

- Access to trusted and credible information sources for parents and teachers
- Easily shareable resources aimed directly at young people to help them understand the virus and the rules
- Mental health advice and support for parents so that feel more ready and able to reassure their children

To mitigate boredom and lethargy

- Advice and ideas on age-appropriate activities for children to do at home or outside in a socially distanced way could be collated and shared. This advice would ideally be locally focused, based on what there is to do in Bradford and take into account different cultural backgrounds and financial means.

To mitigate routine changes

- Children are experiencing periods of being unable to attend school because there are Covid-19 cases in their bubble. It is important for teachers to maintain contact with students and provide guidance on their work, especially during the transition years of years 6 and 7.

To mitigate social isolation

- Whilst children are still experiencing a degree of social isolation, encouraging parents to take a more active role in facilitating their children's social interaction (e.g. swapping phone numbers with other parents and planning virtual or outside meet-ups), especially for younger children, will be important.

Introduction

Bradford's Covid-19 Scientific Advisory was formed in March 2020 to support policy and decision makers in Bradford and the UK to deliver an effective Covid-19 urgent response and in the longer term to better understand the wider societal impacts of Covid-19. As part of these longer term aims, it was decided that priority topics would be explored through qualitative research, using the Born in Bradford infrastructure as a starting point. These areas of concern were identified through rapid consultation work carried out in April 2020 and involved three different sources of information 1) Speaking to nine members of Bradford's District Gold Command. These were brief 15-20 minute phone calls to assess what their priorities were for qualitative research in Bradford in response to Covid 19. 2) Analysis of the first 350 free text responses to the BiB Covid 19 adult questionnaire conducted in April 2020 during the initial weeks of lockdown to assess what the main concerns were for parents within the BiB/BIBBS/BiB4all cohorts. 3) Community researchers collected soft intelligence from 12 people considered influential within community settings in Bradford.

From the above consultation exercise, three priority topic areas were identified with child mental wellbeing of highest importance. The members of District Gold Command were particularly concerned about school aged children; the effect of not attending school would have on them not just in terms of their education but their social and mental wellbeing. The parents in our survey were concerned about this too, with some reporting that their children were particularly bored, anxious or experiencing low moods during lockdown. The child survey conducted in May-July 2020 echoed some of these concerns as we found children were still experiencing anxiety about Covid-19 and the harm it could do to them, their families and friends. They were also worried about how the time out from school would impact them and were troubled about being unable to see their friends and wider family. From these sources of information we were able to identify child mental wellbeing as priority area for qualitative work with Born in Bradford families.

Methods

Due to the age of the Born in Bradford cohort, we chose to focus on families with children aged 10-13, choosing interviews with both parents and children as a way to explore child mental wellbeing during lockdown in further depth. Due to social distancing measures, the interviews were conducted over the phone or via video call, whichever was the family's preference. For the interview with children, the parent and child were given the option of having the parent present or not, or having a sibling present. Whilst the focus of the interviews was on the Born in Bradford child, parents often mentioned how their other children had been coping with lockdown or a sibling was present and contributing, so we were able to get some insight into children's mental wellbeing during this time outside of the specified age group.

Our sample started with 100 families (parents and children) who had participated in the Born in Bradford adult and child surveys, split into two groups. The first group (randomly selected from a total of 490) was a sample of 50 children (and their corresponding parent) who reported moderate to low mental wellbeing on the Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS) in their survey and the second group (randomly selected from a total of 306) was a sample of 50 children (and their corresponding parent) who reported medium to high mental wellbeing on this scale. We decided to exclude children who reported low to very low wellbeing on the RCADS because we felt it would not be ethical to contact these families when we could only offer limited support and signposting due to social distancing. In

addition, this group was only 22 children out of a total of 818. This group of 100 were then purposefully sampled by ethnicity, age of child, sex and deprivation (using the index of multiple deprivation) to make the small sample as diverse as possible. We also took into account the parent responses and whether they were concerned about their children's mental wellbeing, and ensured we included those who did indicate it was a concern and those who did not. Recruitment took place via a letter with information about the study and a follow up phone call to ask if they wished to participate. Consent was given verbally by both the parent and child prior to each interview. Overall, we conducted 43 interviews (with 21 families: 21 parents and 22 children) between August and September 2020, just before the majority of the children returned to school. Bradford was at the time in local lockdown and had a high number of cases relative to the rest of the UK, but it was before the second wave of cases had begun.

The sample consisted of 9 boys and 13 girls aged 10-13, with the majority being 11 or 12 years old. In terms of ethnic group, they were White British (9), Pakistani heritage (7) and other (4) (the label of 'other' included children of African and Eastern European heritage). In terms of deprivation, the index of multiple deprivation associated with where they lived ranged the full spectrum from 1-8, but most families were clustered in the lower numbers (higher deprivation).

For the analysis, a subset of interviews (9) was analysed independently by three experienced qualitative researchers, who came together to identify commonalities in the responses and discuss how these could be ordered into loose themes. These were then used and refined by the lead researcher to analyse the remaining interviews. Although the RCADS scores from the survey were used to create the sample, they were not analysed through this lens as there were no discernible differences between the two groups.

Anxiety about Covid-19

The responses in both the parent and child interviews indicated that many children were experiencing relatively high levels of anxiety and worry around the impact of Covid-19. Some parents reported that their child was so anxious that they did not leave their house for the first part of lockdown, even for the permitted exercise:

She wouldn't even take the dog out, it seemed to really affect her, she was quite scared. And obviously she's at that age now where she's got a TV upstairs and she can read, so you know, she's reading about the coronavirus every day and seeing things, so it did scare her at the beginning and she didn't, I don't think she left the house for about eight weeks. (Family 11, Parent)

Other parents also believed that the news cycle and what their children saw on social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, was increasing their anxiety:

He's kind of, you know, nervous because he keeps hearing this many or how many people died, these people, you know, how many people are positive for this virus and this and this. So first, you know, for few weeks he was keep looking at those news, everybody every day, you know, telling me, telling me. Then I told him "no, stop looking at this news, yeah, because it's too much for you". Yeah, because he was taking in that, you know, then he was worried, he was saying "I'm not going outside" first. (Family 14, Parent)

Parents often felt ill-equipped to reassure their children because they themselves were unable to make sense of the news as so much was unknown. Whilst they could not completely control what their children saw or heard, they attempted to stop watching the news as a family and encourage their children to stay away from Covid-19 related stories.

The children reported feeling worried about getting Covid-19 themselves but often they were more concerned about their families, particularly if they felt their parents and grandparents were more vulnerable:

I was a bit worried about my mum because they had cancer, I think, three years ago, or something. And I was worried that it was easier for them to get coronavirus, so I was really worried for my mum, I was really worried for my grandparents because they live with my auntie and they have kids and they all go sometimes on drives, or go out somewhere to eat, or like when they went back to school I was a bit nervous about that. (Family 17, Child)

I just didn't really know what would happen, because when you just started hearing about Covid-19, I was always worried, will it come to Bradford, will I get it and pass it to my dad, because I'd heard that kids don't get it as bad as older people. Because I was like, oh, can I pass it to my parents or my nana and will they, summat happen? So I was always scared of that. And then when it did come to Bradford I got really worried. But my parents helped me get through that. (Family 20, Child)

Both parents and children discussed how they talked together about these anxieties, and children were often reassured by their parents. They also described becoming less worried as lockdown measures lifted and cases/deaths lowered, although they were often nervous about being in public places at first. Parents described how their children were usually very vigilant about mask-wearing, social distancing and hand-washing although this was sometimes taken to the extreme:

I think that were the major thing, the hygiene thing, they got to the point where they were making, they were washing their hands raw. And I think they were frightened, I know they were frightened for their dad because he's a bus driver and obviously he's in his late 50s now and he, I think they were frightened for their dad. (Family 20, Parent)

Whilst some children were much more relaxed about the impact of the virus and neither they nor their parents reported much anxiety around it, other parents of children with histories of anxiety reported that they were particularly suffering. For example, the parent from Family 15 reported that their nine year old child's nervous tics and bed wetting had resurfaced during lockdown. Even children who their parents described as generally 'laidback' and 'always happy' were becoming quite anxious or upset during this time:

My mum became poorly a couple of weeks ago, and he was really affected by it. Whereas she's been poorly in the past and he's just taken in the information and he's been fine, whereas he got really quite upset about it 2 weeks ago. And I think that's just the added, the build-up of the worry that she might have to go into hospital and that's not necessarily a safe place at the minute, so it was all, it's that but not excessive, just a change. (Family 8, Parent)

This response and others like it suggested that in these unprecedented times children were experiencing new feelings of concern and apprehension.

Key Findings

- **Children and parents reported a moderate level of health anxiety about Covid-19 resulting in some children not wanting to leave their homes and/or practicing excessive hygiene/social distancing**
- **Engagement with news cycle and social media worsened children's anxieties**
- **Children needed a lot of reassurance from parents, but parents felt confused and worried themselves**
- **Anxiety affected most children to a degree, not just children who had experienced it before**

Boredom and Lethargy

Whilst experiencing anxiety, children were also facing boredom. Many of the children described lockdown as boring, especially as time had gone on. Some of them had very active lives before lockdown doing multiple extra-curricular activities such as sports clubs, scouts/guides and activities related to their church or mosque. The majority of these had stopped completely, with some carrying on virtually. Whilst most had appreciated a bit of a rest at first they started to feel 'cooped up inside' (Family 10, Child) and that their days were repetitive:

[Being at home felt] amazing but now I get bored a bit and now I've not really to do... if I do go back to school it might give me something to do but I don't know what's really happening. (Family 12, Child)

Parents reported their children complaining of boredom often:

He did, you know, because it was a bit of, you know, he was saying "it's boring, boring", every day he used to wake up, "oh it's boring, we can't go anywhere, so we can't do anything". (Family 14, Parent)

The idea that every day was the same seemed particularly exaggerated over the summer holidays when home-schooling had stopped and there was no longer any kind of structure:

Since the home schooling finished, obviously its summer holidays and they're just bored now. So she's a bit, you know, the last sort of five weeks or so, she's just been really fed up because the home schooling kept her going and so now, she's a little bit fed up. So she's not really into her routine now, she'll sort of wake up watch quite a bit of TV or she has her games that she'll play a little bit but it was more sort of really disciplined when it was home schooling. (Family 11, Parent)

When she'd got school work and she's had good quality school work, she's had a reason to get up in the morning, geared to doing the work and then she was fine. As the work sort of tailed off, the intolerance to anything came in, in May. Just lack of concentration really, I think because she's not stimulated, the concentration's not there. (Family 9, Parent)

This was echoed by the children as well, when asked why they were sleeping in later than usual:

Because I used to work up with, like, a plan for the day and what I was going to do. And now, there isn't really a big point in getting up so early, might as well have another hour in bed. (Family 9, Child)

Having no 'reason to get up in the morning' was causing some of the children to sleep in and/or get up quite late. Their bedtimes had become more relaxed since not going to school and so they were often getting up a lot later than they usually would, sometimes after midday and in the most extreme example, 2pm. One child explained why he was getting up a lot later:

On a school day I'm still, when I get woken up I'm still very asleep, so I kind of still want to go to bed, I'm still very, you know, tired. And so, but I'm, like a day like this, a lockdown day, I don't need to get up so like I just kind of lie asleep through the entire thing. (Family 18, Child)

As discussed by many of the parents, the majority of the children interviewed were reaching adolescence and were starting to need or want more sleep and the relative freedom of lockdown had given them more opportunity for this. However, some parents were troubled by their children's lack of routine and structure in their day which meant they were spending a lot of time alone watching videos or playing computer games on a TV or tablet. Even when they were able to go out and do a few more things, some children had fallen into lethargy:

No he hasn't been [out in public] but when I've asked him to go with me somewhere you know, just to get him out the house, no, I'll stay here, I don't think that's because he's worried about the virus, actually I think that's because he just wants to stay indoors, you know, so.... it's just the iPad the whole day. (Family 5, Parent)

Now I'm that lazy, I do less. I'm less eager to be more active, like go outside. I'm like, "Oh, I have to go outside now", I'm like, I don't want to, I just want to, you know, lie down on my bed and just watch my phone all day. But I'm going to have to get outside and get some sunlight because it's healthy for me, it's good for me. And I used to be much more active before lockdown and now I can't do it. (Family 18, Child)

Children were often left to their own devices because parents were very busy working from home or working as key workers outside of the home. Some parents were worried about how they could get their children back into a routine when school started and whether they would struggle with concentration. This boredom combined with anxiety often meant children were more irritable than usual, less tolerant of their siblings, experiencing mood swings or low moods.

She did cheerleading like four times a week so for that to stop suddenly as well has had a major as well because everything we've known has just stopped, do you know, everything from like going to school and going straight out after school, to being at home, it has, it stopped for her, her whole little life has changed dramatically. So the mood being down from being sociable to being at home all the time. (Family 4, Parent)

Key Findings

- **Children complained of days being boring, repetitive, lacking purpose and feeling stuck indoors**

- **Lack of school routine, late bedtimes, long lie-ins and more time spent on devices meant some children fell into lethargy**
- **Many children had been very busy with extracurricular activities before lockdown and were really missing them**
- **Parents felt their children's boredom led to low mood, irritability and more severe mood swings**

Disengagement from school

Whilst a lot of children lamented that they were not able to go out and enjoy their hobbies and activities or go on day trips and holidays, a major cause of their boredom was not being at school. They had often described school as quite stressful, particularly if they were in secondary school, and time off from getting up early, stern teachers, difficult social situations and doing homework was welcome at first. After a while however they became fed up with the monotony and most were quite eager to return to school. The few children we spoke to who had returned to school in May/June (because they were the children of key workers or were in Year 6) had enjoyed this experience and the routine it offered them.

Home-schooling was also often a point of tension within families. Some parents had adopted a strict home-school regime and others were more relaxed. This was often dependent on whether their schools were offering contact hours, guidance and feedback, whether the parents were working or not and whether there were younger children in the house who needed more help. Parents would describe how arguments and tension were often triggered by home-schooling, as both parents and children had to adapt into different roles, of teacher and student, within a home environment:

They lose their routine like you know, the school sit down with other friends having a proper teacher with them and I think for them it was just you know, staying at home, what's the point of education at the time. I've tried, I've tried because he had weekly work, we tried to do it together but because it was a change of routine it was like sitting down at home, you know, in his comfortable space normally he just does his own work and you know a bit of extra work but having to do more than that, it was quite difficult for him. (Family 19, Parent)

Children would often become frustrated when they felt unable to do the work that had been set:

He has been quite anxious and stressed, I'd say we did have a lot of tears, a lot of kind of storming off saying he couldn't do his work and that kind of thing. And obviously then he'd got a lot, very, he'd have a lot of well, I call them strops, tantrums, kind of thing, he'd just, yeah, he'd just storm off and kind of answer back and stuff. However, since kind of they did finish school and again, as a few things have started, since his football started again the change has been quite dramatic actually. He's just so much happier. And he does, he has settled down, he's stopped wetting the bed again. He's gone back to school today actually, first day back. (Family 15, Parent)

Parents were worried that their teaching was not adequate enough, especially if they could not dedicate a lot of time to it if they were working or caring for other children. As a result, they were concerned their children would fall behind and struggle to get back to their previous level of ability and concentration:

She'd lost her... She'd lost her focus, her enthusiasm and she didn't then want to do even a simple book review, so doing a project on a country was quite good but again, once it was done, that was it, interest was lost once again. So she's definitely suffered. (Family 16, Parent)

A few of the children were also concerned about the impact of lockdown on their intellectual abilities:

It feels weird because it's been such a long time that I haven't been to school, is that sometimes I can't even like speak properly without messing up or, you know, doing something. I realise that I've thought a bit slower and I'm not as like, you know, sharp as I was, as I was in school... I was a really good student before. I feel like quarantine made me a little less smart, in a sense that I've not been as sharp as I used to be, used to. And I've just kind of been lacking in just intelligence, really. (Family 18, Child)

Many of the children interviewed had just started secondary or were just about to, so were in a time of transition. For those who had just started, they were still getting used to a larger school and some had experienced issues adapting to this new environment. These children were usually happy to not be attending school but their parents were worried that the lockdown would have a further destabilising effect. Those who were just about to start secondary school were sad they did not get the end of year 6 experience or get to say goodbye properly to their teachers and friends going to other schools. They had also not been able to visit their new school and have any transition sessions and this was causing anxiety for some children and their parents. On top of these concerns, both parents and children expressed some apprehensiveness about the return to school, what school would be like with social distancing measures in place, whether it would be safe and how it feel to be in limited social groups.

Key Findings

- **Most children were keen to return school, but there was apprehensiveness about the new measures and how safe it would be**
- **Parents took different home-schooling approaches depending on their capacity and home-schooling was often a catalyst for arguments**
- **Parents and children felt that not attending school had decreased children's ability to concentrate and learn**
- **This period had a destabilising effect on children who had just transitioned or were just about to transition to secondary school**

Reduced social contact

For the children interviewed, school was usually at the centre of their social life and face to face interaction with their friends was their primary mode of social contact. Due to their age, some were unable to maintain friendships without in person contact and many of the younger children did not yet have their own phones and/or social media accounts which vastly reduced their means of independently contacting their friends during lockdown:

Because normally, even before the lockdown, he'll only meet his friends in school, their relationship was in school than outside the school so since the lockdown there hasn't been any contact with friends because he doesn't contact them, (Family 6, Parent)

I just missed hugging [my friends], even when I got to school I couldn't hug them. I was only able to keep in touch with my best friend because I don't think Mummy had any other, like any other of my friends emails or anybody, so... (Family 16, Child)

She didn't really, she didn't speak to anybody on, you know, on her phone, she didn't talk. So it sort of got cut off, really, pandemic, and then, you know, when we were allowed to meet up, me and her dad were, sort of pushed for her to meet her friend again. But it were sort of only, they only met up twice. (Family 20, Parent)

For those that were in contact via phone or video calling, social media or texting, often described it as 'weird' compared seeing them in person:

I mean, it's different [than seeing them face-to-face] because you're not really having a laugh and a joke about things you've just seen or what's just happened. It's kind of, trying to make up a random conversation about something. You're not, like, having a laugh with them. It feels more formal. It don't feel sort of laughy and jokey. [Family 9, Child]

This child went on to describe the first time she met one of her close friends after lockdown 'Yeah, well, I couldn't even figure out what to talk about, how to string a sentence together, we was just both sat there, drinking, not knowing what to say'. Some children felt their virtual communications had been misunderstood or misread:

That you can't really see them in person. And like sometimes when you text them, they don't really understand them. (Family 4, Child)

Lack of regular contact meant they felt detached from what was going on their friends' lives and sometimes they were worried about them:

I don't know what they were doing, if my mate's doing other stuff and it were my mate's birthday the day after mine so I hadn't heard owt from him for a while, my mate, he had an accident so he wasn't able to call me for about a week or so. (Family 10, Child)

Some children did have contact with their friends via gaming but this was reliant on having access to a games console and good Wi-Fi which was a barrier for some households. Children would often describe trying and failing to video call their friends because their friends had poor Wi-Fi reception.

For the few children who had been completely cut off from their friends during lockdown, their parents were very worried about whether they could get back on track socially:

I noticed that he'd stopped talking on Snapchat to those kids and his brother told me that "oh he's left that group of friends now, he doesn't talk to them anymore", so I am actually worried as to what's going to happen when he goes back because those people are his, they're children in his class so what's he going to do, is he not going to have any friends, I'm not worried about... well, that's not true, I am worried that you know, is he going to be left without his friends now, so there's all those concerns as well. (Family 5, Parent)

As well as their friends, children would describe how much they missed seeing relatives outside of their household, in particular their cousins and their grandparents. Some children had also been unable to see one of their parents during lockdown:

Child 1: [It was] really hard, really, really hard.

Child 2: And sad. Sad because like when we found out that we couldn't go for weekends with our dad, I started crying, we both started crying and we started doing this pub quiz with him. (Family 8, 2 Children)

Although school was just about to start and lockdown had eased, these children would still be in an isolated school bubble, not necessarily with their friends and were still unable to socialise with their friends and wider families inside.

Key Findings

- **Due to their age, social abilities and financial means, children were often cut off from contacting their friends during lockdown**
- **School was usually the centre of their social life**
- **Virtual contact with their friends and family felt stilted and not the same as face to face interaction**
- **Some children were distressed and unhappy about being cut off from family that lived outside their household**

Positive aspects of lockdown

Many parents and children shared positive aspects of lockdown. One common benefit for many families was that had been able to spend more time together. This was partly because they were unable to do most of their after-school or weekend activities outside of house and because parents were often home more often (although this was not the case for key worker families):

That we go on more walks together because like in, before lockdown we never used to go on walks because we never had time but because of lockdown we came together, we was more of a, we saw each other more and went on more walks. (Family 4, Child)

In particular, children had often spent more time with their dads over lockdown as they were either not working or working from home. They seemed to have really valued this experience:

*Child: It's just nice having him home all the time, we didn't used to see him a lot.
Parent: Yeah... Dad was always about in the mornings before they went to school but not particularly on an evening. So, yeah, it's meant that we've been able to sit down to eat a meal as a family a lot more than we ever have done. (Family 9, Child and Parent)*

Parents often described how their children had become more independent and responsible over lockdown, often out of necessity due to parents having to work:

They actually can now both make their own sandwiches, [child's name] can warm up half a tin of tomato soup, you know, they've got it down to a fine art now of being self-sufficient because we did not have the time to even do anything with them during that time and whilst we're both key workers (Family 16, Parent)

For the few children interviewed with health issues, special educational needs or problems socialising at school, lockdown was something they had really enjoyed. For example a parent described their daughter, who had epilepsy and was on the autism spectrum, as being much calmer during lockdown and seizure free:

Her anxiety levels went through the roof before lockdown, but since lockdown she's calmer. Her safe place is at home so she's been happy... She feels safe, that's how she describes it. She's said a couple of times "I feel safer at home." I think it's her comfort zone. (Family 3, Parent).

Key Findings

- **The vast majority of parents and children mentioned that it was nice to spend more time with their families, especially family members that they did not normally see as often**
- **Some parents felt that their children, out of necessity, had been able to become more independent and responsible over lockdown**
- **For a few children with additional needs or who had been severely struggling at school, lockdown offered a welcome respite**

Conclusion

The children we interviewed were on the cusp of their teenage years and as a result found themselves in a bit of no man's land during lockdown. They were independent enough to be left to get on with their own thing and manage their own routine to some extent but still required a lot of parental support, input and reassurance in order to maintain good wellbeing and healthy behaviours. The parents we spoke to were largely able to offer this to them, although the responsibilities of work (in and out of the home) and caring for other children often made this difficult. However, many parents, for many reasons, will have struggled in this regard. These children were also in a position to hear about and try to understand Covid-19 and consider what its potential impacts might be, which had caused many of them anxiety, insecurity and concern for their loved ones. The absence of the routine that going to school offered and a drastic reduction in social contact had led to boredom and sluggishness, which the children themselves were unhappy about. When the interviews were conducted, there was a general sense of positivity and normality due to the imminent start of the new school year. As the pandemic goes on, with degree of lockdowns and social distancing still in place, we can expect some of the issues identified in the interviews to remain.

Recommendations

- Anxiety about Covid-19 is still likely to be a factor for many children, particularly as they come into contact with it more, know friends and family members that are affected and be constantly in anticipation of becoming unwell or having to isolate. Parents in this study described how they felt at a loss sometimes to reassure them and felt confused themselves, and so it seems important for them (and those working with children) to be able to access trusted and credible information sources about Covid-19. Easily shareable resources directed specifically at young people to help them understand the virus and the rules will also be of value.
- Mental health advice and support for parents which acknowledges the challenges of Covid-19 and offers reassurance is also important in helping to reduce anxiety in their children.
- To help combat boredom and lethargy, advice and ideas on age-appropriate activities for children to do at home or outside in a socially distanced way could be collated and shared. This advice would ideally be locally focused, based on what there is to do in Bradford and take into account different cultural backgrounds and financial means.

- Although schools remain open at the moment, many children are experiencing periods of being unable to attend school because there are Covid-19 cases in their bubble. Whilst we understand schools are stretched, it is important to mitigate the effects of this changeable routine and for teachers to maintain contact with students and provide guidance on their work, especially during the transition years of years 6 and 7.
- There is likely to be a continuation of social isolation for children, as they are unable to see their wider family and friends outside of school. Even within school, they may not be in a bubble with their close friends, and this will be a particular issue for those that struggle socially. Encouraging parents to take a more active role in facilitating their children's social interaction (e.g. swapping phone numbers with other parents and planning virtual or outside meet-ups), especially for younger children, will be important.

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