

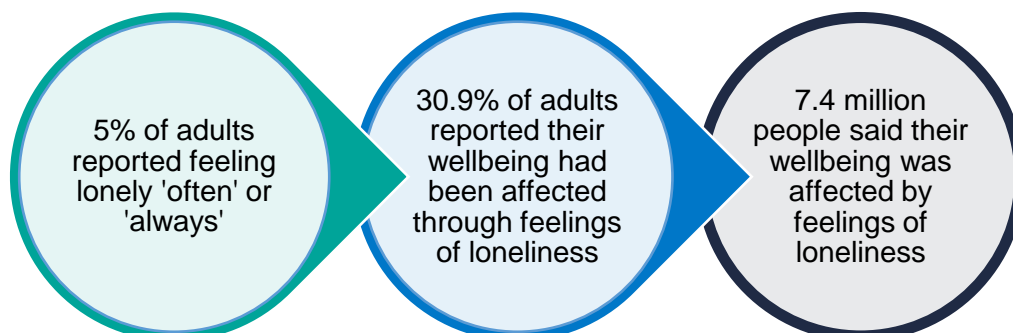
The Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on Social Isolation & Feelings of Loneliness in Vulnerable Groups

Billions of people were quarantined in their own homes from March 2020 as a way to contain the spread of infection of COVID-19. However, this social isolation can lead to feelings of intense loneliness which can have damaging effects on both physical and mental wellbeing. The below research looks into how COVID-19 lockdown impacted feelings of social isolation and loneliness in vulnerable groups, such as those with disabilities or existing health and mental health issues.

Please note: whilst reviewing the data gathered on loneliness over the lockdown period, the terms 'chronic loneliness' and 'lockdown loneliness' are used to differentiate between those that experience loneliness chronically/day-to-day, compared to those that experienced loneliness specifically during COVID-19 lockdown.

Key Findings

The below key findings were taken from four waves of the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) by the Office for National Statistics, which have been pooled together and reweighted to create a larger dataset. The pooled dataset from this survey contains 5,320 individual responses, representing an overall response rate of 66% from the waves of surveys conducted from 3 April to 3 May 2020, meaning the entire reference period took place during COVID-19 lockdown.

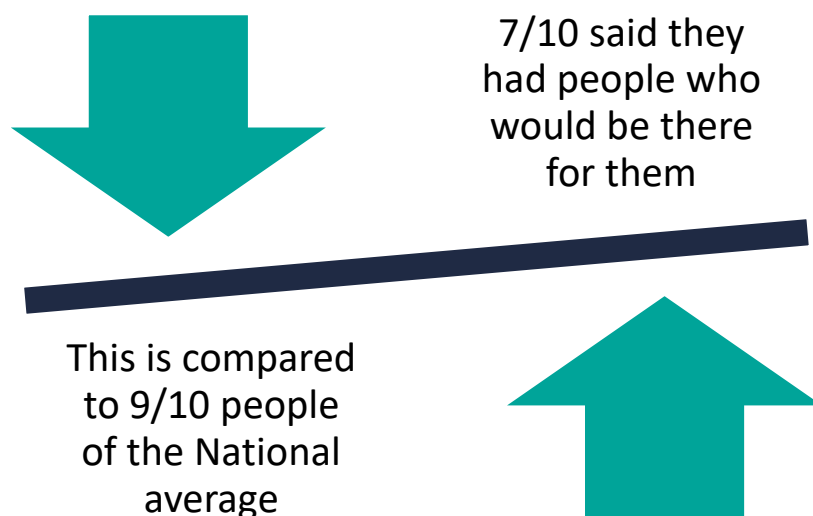


COVID-19 lockdown effected everyone differently, but, unsurprisingly, data suggests that during the first month of COVID-19 lockdown (March 2020), 7.4 million people said their wellbeing was affected by feelings of loneliness. From April to May 2020 lonely people were more likely to be struggling to find things to help them cope and were less likely to feel they had support networks to fall back on.

Of those asked, 5% of people in Great Britain (2.6 million adults) reported that they felt lonely 'often' or 'always' between 3 April and 3 May 2020 and a total of 30.9% (7.4 million adults) reported their wellbeing had been affected through feeling lonely in the past seven days. Notably 6.3% of respondents suffered from both chronic and lockdown loneliness, while 1.3% suffered from lockdown loneliness despite saying that they 'hardly ever' or 'never' feel lonely outside of lockdown.

Around 7 in 10 of those recorded as feeling lonely 'often' or 'always' agreed or strongly agreed that they had people who would be there for them, compared with 9 in 10 of the Great Britain average. Both those who noted feeling lonely 'often' or 'always' in the past seven days had lower personal wellbeing scores including higher anxiety scores than the Great Britain average.

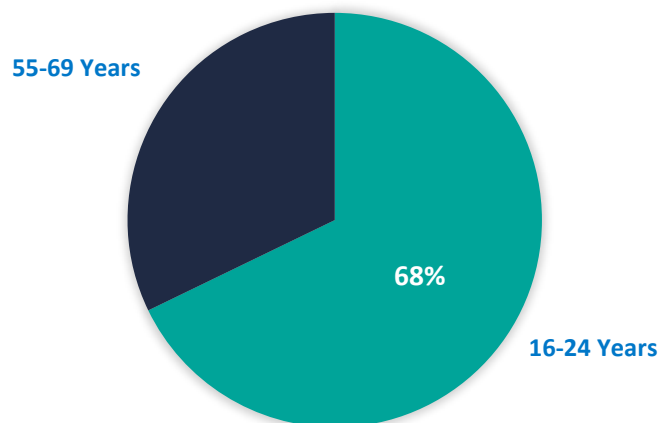
Moreover, both those feeling lonely 'often' or 'always' were more likely than the average to say they were struggling to find things that helped them cope during lockdown.



Further findings suggest working-age adults living alone were more likely to report loneliness both 'often' or 'always' and over the past seven days than the average adult; this was also the case for those in 'bad' or 'very bad' health, in rented accommodation, or who were either single, divorced, separated or a former or separated civil partner.

Interestingly, feelings of loneliness seemed to be more prevalent in those of a younger generation with respondents aged 16 to 24 years being more likely to have experienced lockdown loneliness (50.8%), while those aged 55 to 69 were less likely (24.1%) to have done so.

'LOCKDOWN LONELINESS' BY AGE GROUP



Mental Health

The below findings were taken from a Health Foundation org. article reviewing a series of social studies in adults across the lockdown period. Findings were also taken from a British Medical Association report reviewing the impact of COVID-19 on mental health.

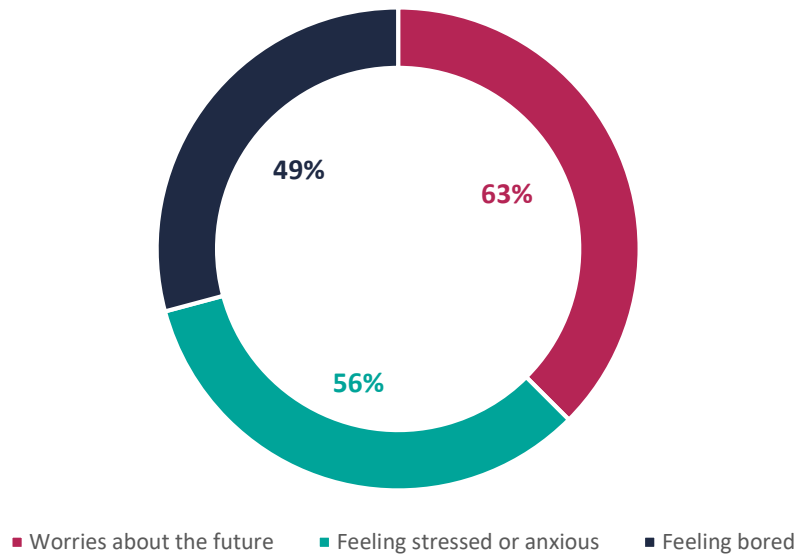
More than two-thirds of adults in the UK (69%) reported feeling 'very worried' about the effect COVID-19 is having on their life, showing that mental ill health is being experienced by a higher proportion of people, particularly those that are vulnerable, during COVID-19 lockdown. The most common issues affecting wellbeing are worries about the future (63%), feeling stressed or anxious (56%) and feeling bored (49%).

The UCL COVID-19 social study of 90,000 UK adults has monitored mental health symptoms throughout lockdown, finding levels of anxiety and depression fell in early June as lockdown measures began to lift. However, these remained highest among young people, those with lower household income, people with a diagnosed mental illness, people living with children and people living in urban areas.

Significantly, the COVID-19 outbreak has highlighted that the BAME community are at a higher risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19 than white people. There are also concerns about the mental health consequences on BAME populations due to the increased stress and concerns over ill health and COVID-19 related sickness.

Furthermore, the World Health Organization has warned that older adults, especially in isolation experiencing loneliness and those with cognitive decline or dementia, may also become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated and withdrawn during the outbreak or whilst self-isolating.

Issues Affecting Wellbeing

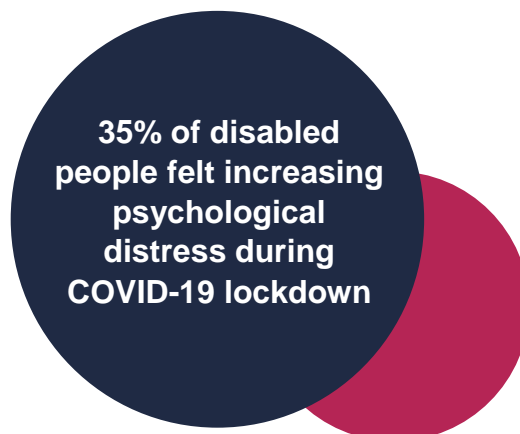


Disability

The below findings were taken from an interim report by Inclusion London by collecting over 300 responses from the Social Care survey from June 2020.

Over 35% respondents in a survey for those with disabilities talked about increasing levels of psychological distress following COVID-19 self-isolation. Respondents also noted increasing feelings that disabled people had been abandoned and neglected by the relevant services and the government.

A broad body of research confirms links between social isolation and loneliness to poor mental health, however a report from Inclusion London reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened and entrenched social isolation and loneliness among many disabled people.



The Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on Relapse Rates in Those with Substance Misuse Problems and Other Addictive Behaviours, e.g. Gambling

The effects of social isolation from COVID-19 lockdown are not limited to feelings of loneliness, and can also have damaging consequences for those who suffer from substance misuse problems and gambling problems. This is particularly significant as those with addictive disorders are thought to be especially vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19. The below research looks in more detail at the effects lockdown has had on rates of relapse in those who experience substance misuse related issues and whether this lockdown period has caused an increase in drug misuse.

Key Findings

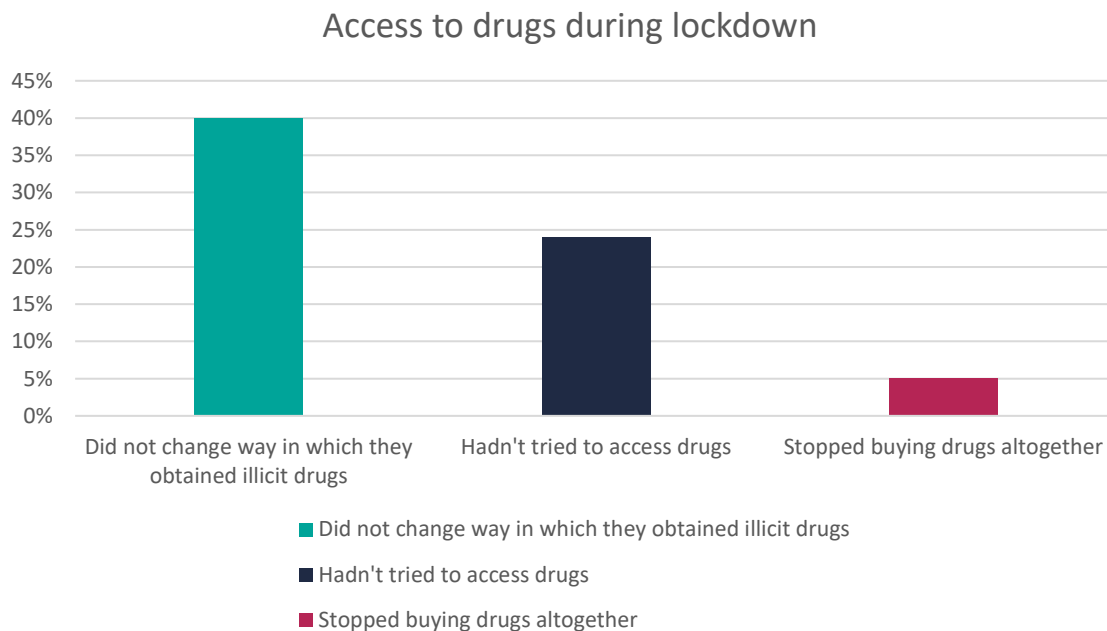
The below findings were taken from a speculative report from the Society for the Study of Addiction, based on preliminary findings from a number of ongoing studies. Further information was taken from a report from Health Europa based on details provided from The UK Addiction Treatment Group during the lockdown period.

Preliminary findings from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) from June 2020 suggest an overall decline in drug use, or some forms of drug use, in Europe during the first 3 months of the pandemic. This could have been due to a decline in the availability of some substances.

However, an increase in alcohol consumption has been reported, alongside an increase in the use of prescription medicines, especially benzodiazepines. This may be due to users wishing to combat the anxiety experienced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures and, again, due to lack of availability for illicit substances.

Survey results from the above listed resources show that, although people found it harder to obtain drugs, there were no major changes in the way they access drugs during their confinement period. 40% of respondents reported they had not changed

the way in which they obtained illicit drugs, 24% reported they hadn't tried to access drugs during lockdown and 5% reported they'd stopped buying altogether.



In support of this statement, Release, the national centre of expertise on drugs and drug law, received anecdotal reports from the UK that the wholesale prices of heroin and cocaine have increased substantially since lockdown, that some heroin is of 'low-quality' and that fentanyl is more available.

In light of an increase in low-quality drugs, The UK Addiction Treatment Group (UKAT) has revealed admissions into its seven residential rehabilitation facilities across the country reduced by almost 20% across May 2020 alone. Usually admitting 160 patients a month and treating upwards of 2,000 a year, UKAT had only admitted 146 clients across May 2020.

A survey by Crew, a Scottish drug treatment and education charity, found the reasons stated for increases in use were: boredom, more time, stress, and isolation. Such research and data suggests that the COVID-19 crisis is likely to increase the need to access drug treatment and services and that there will be extra demand for opioid substitution therapy and other medication.

Due to disruption of the drug market, alternative drugs or medications might be considered by users, including quetiapine, gabapentinoids, Z-drugs, some over-the-counter medications such as codeine, ephedrine and pseudoephedrine and the antidiarrhoeal loperamide (commonly known as poor man's methadone).

Currently there is little confirmed information into the effects of COVID-19 lockdown on the use of illegal drugs and subsequent relapses. However, there are ongoing studies across the UK and globally which will, in time, reveal some of the COVID-19 related consequences on drug use. Ongoing studies include:

- ALAMA, Electronic Music Scene Survey – University College London
- C-Cabana – University of Cambridge
- CannTeen – University College London
- Impact of coronavirus on drug purchases survey – Release
- Khat and Covid – University of Hertfordshire


Gambling

The below findings were taken from a report from the Gambling Commission based on research gathered from March 2020 to May 2020 from surveys such as YouGov's COVID-19 tracker, a weekly online survey of around 2,000 adults in Great Britain.

Findings from the Gambling Commission show the lockdown period does not appear to have attracted many new consumers to gambling. According to YouGov research from 16-17th April, only 0.2% of all adults surveyed stated that they had started gambling for the first time during the last four weeks. This compares with 2% of adults who had stopped gambling altogether during this period.

Further operator data on overall active player accounts indicates a 5% decrease between March and April 2020, driven substantially by real event betting (active players down 55%) and reflecting the lack of top-quality sport during April.

National Lottery sales have held up reasonably. Despite an initial fall, sales have recovered to a level slightly below normal.



**Gambling operator
data shows a 5%
decrease in activity
between March and
April 2020**

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