

Young People and Coronavirus

Covid-19 has affected almost every aspect of life, and young people, especially those who are vulnerable, face considerable challenges in education, employment, and mental health. Evidence suggests that young people are less at risk in terms of developing severe physical health symptoms linked to Covid but the disruption to their education and employment opportunities is likely to put them on a much more volatile trajectory in finding and maintaining quality jobs and income.

The period of adolescence (from the onset of puberty until independent adulthood) covers a unique period of change during which young people can be particularly vulnerable to experiencing the kinds of social welfare problems that give rise to a need for advice¹. Research by Youth Access has shown that young people aged under 25 are considerably less likely than the general population to access legal advice when they experience social welfare problems². As well as being a key predictor of mental health problems in young people³ the experience of problems can also lead to a loss of confidence, loss of income, physical illness and unemployment⁴. Advice and early intervention can have a huge positive impact on outcomes for young people by preventing the escalation of problems and saving resources and funds in the long term. A study of clients of youth advice services found that 64% of those who received advice reported an improvement in their stress levels⁵.

Post Covid, demand from under 25 year olds accessing our service increased three-fold, showing the increased need for support within this age group. This report summarises external research publications on how young people have been affected by coronavirus in areas such as employment, education, and access to youth organisations.

Employment and Coronavirus

Employment for people of all ages has been drastically affected by Covid. However, youths are more likely to be in informal employment or forms of zero-hour contracts, making them more vulnerable to an economic downturn. Pre-Covid, British youths aged 15-24 were already three times more likely to be unemployed compared to adults, whilst 126 million young workers were in extreme and moderate poverty worldwide⁶. The effects of Covid on employment levels can already be seen - in August 2020, 526,000 people aged 16-24 claimed unemployment related benefits. This was an increase of 291,000 (124%) claimants from March 2020, when the UK lockdown began. Some of this increase will be due to employed people who have become eligible for

¹ Engaging Young People – Citizens Advice Tunbridge Wells & District 2019

² Kenrick, J. Young People's Access to Advice - the evidence, October 2009

³ Youth Access, The Social Determinants of Young People's Mental Health, June 2015

⁴ Balmer, N.J., Pleasence, P. *Young People & Legal Problems: Findings from the Legal Problem Resolution Survey 2014-2015*, February 2018

⁵ Balmer, N.J., Pleasence, P. *Young People & Legal Problems: Findings from the Legal Problem Resolution Survey 2014-2015*, February 2018

⁶ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/news/2020/05/covid-19/>

Universal Credit as part of the government response⁷. Employment has been the top issue on which people have been seeking our support since lockdown.

We can learn from the impact of the 2007-2008 financial crisis which saw the number of youths not in employment, education or training rise to 18% and the number of unemployed young people increase by 20%, leaving one in eight young people (aged 18-25) in poverty⁸. This can have significant impacts as young people with a history of unemployment face fewer career development opportunities, lower wage levels, poorer prospects for better jobs and ultimately lower pensions⁹.

Education and Coronavirus

The global pandemic is also having an unprecedented impact on schools and universities all over the globe, with far-reaching social consequences that have affected more than 1.5 billion children and youth worldwide. According to UNESCO (2020), so far 191 countries have implemented nationwide or localized school closures¹⁰. This has significantly changed how youth and children live and learn during the pandemic. Although schools have shown flexibility and commitment to continuing education through lockdown, not all students have been able to consistently access education, with surveys showing that across OECD countries, more than one in ten 15-year-olds from socio-economically disadvantaged schools do not have a quiet place to study at home or an internet connection, and one in five do not have access to a computer¹¹. Education can be key in accessing opportunities, such as a better career prospects, and with the limited access available and problems some children have in gaining access, they may lose these possibilities.

We do not have data on educational impact in East Herts but are working more closely with partners who support young people and their families. We can play a key role in working with schools and colleges to raise awareness that we are here to help with free and confidential advice on a range of issues.

Youth Organisations and Coronavirus

Youth organisations play a crucial role in the daily lives and development of children throughout the world, and Covid represents an unprecedented challenge to keep these services and systems functioning. During the pandemic, youth organisations have been providing access to education, peer to peer mental health advice and other programmes to support young adults in lockdown.

⁷ East Herts Council

⁸ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/>

⁹ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/>

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/04/YOUTH-FLASH-Special-issue-on-COVID-19-1.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/#section-d1e458>

Between 20th -27th March 2020, UK Youth surveyed the needs of the youth sector and young people in the wake of Covid and its potential long-term impact. 252 respondents, representing 235 organisations completed the survey, and most respondents (88%) indicated they are likely or very likely to reduce service provision to young people. 31% said that staff redundancies were likely while 17% said permanent closure was likely. 64% of respondents said that they were likely to lose sources of funding. Moreover, 72% of respondents said that their organisation needs access to emergency funds to support organisational needs to aid young people during and after the pandemic. There have, however, been attempts to engage with young people virtually, with 86% indicating that they were doing so or were planning to do so, where possible¹². This however is not available to children without computers or internet access, who may desperately need the support.

Multiple countries have created online campaigns to keep young people informed of the measures to protect themselves and others, such as the international campaign #youthagainstcovid19 to map and share myth-busting, fact-checking websites and resources. This is useful in keeping young people knowledgeable but may also help with keeping them involved with recovery plans.

Recovery and Young People

Young people born between 1990 and 2005 have already experienced two major global shocks within the first 15-30 years of their life – the financial crisis of 2007/08 and the Covid pandemic. Many organisations have been trying to explain the importance of having a recovery plan that is inclusive to all ages, especially the young people that will be dealing with a multitude of aftershocks from this pandemic as they go into further education or employment. One recovery plan suggestion by The Children’s Society includes how grades will be viewed by further education organisations such as universities, as well as additional mental health support for the age group¹³. Youth led organisations have been active in building recovery plans in partnership with the government to ensure their inclusion. For example, the British Youth Council is urging the government to create a Minister for Young People to bring the voice of youth into policymaking¹⁴. Moreover, half of mental ill health starts by age 15, and 75% develops by age 18¹⁵, which highlights the vulnerability of this age group during a period when mental illness is high. Before lockdown, suicide was the third leading cause of death in 15-19-year olds¹⁶, and with increased uncertainty, anxiety and fear, there may be worrying increases in this number. Focus needs to be placed on youths as part of the recovery plan for the Covid pandemic to ensure that they are not left behind, that they continue to

¹² <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UK-Youth-Covid-19-Impact-Report-External-Final-08.04.20.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/covid-19-recovery-briefing-children-and-young-peoples-mental>

¹⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/#section-d1e1472>

¹⁵ MHFA England: <https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/research-and-evaluation/mental-health-statistics/>

¹⁶ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

receive opportunities to improve their futures, and to make sure that they are supported, especially surrounding mental health.

Support organisations

- Healthy Young Minds:
<https://www.healthyyoungmindsinherts.org.uk/professionals/message-professionals-working-children-and-young-people-during-covid-19-outbreak>
- YC Hertfordshire: <https://www.ychertfordshire.org/about-yc-hertfordshire/news/>
Email: yh.eastherts@hertfordshire.gov.uk; Call: 01992 588220
- The Mix: <https://www.themix.org.uk/>
Visit site to email or chat 1-2-1; Call: 08088084994