

Background

The **Young Person's Health and Wellbeing Survey** (YPHWS) has been developed for secondary school aged young people. The survey was developed and delivered in partnership – Public Health, YCH Services for young people, and HCT Public Health Nursing Service. The survey replaces the bi-annual Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ) and the Lancaster Model survey for secondary schools.

There were **12,923 responses** to the survey (just under three times more responses than the 2018 HRBQ), with pupils from **42 schools** participating. Schools with sufficient numbers of pupils participating will have received a report summarising how their pupil responses compare with the Hertfordshire average.

- 45.5% (5875) of respondents identified as male, and 51.7% (6670) female, with 160 young people selecting 'other' when responding to the gender question.
- 26 young people were not attending a school, and 1030 (8.2% of all respondents) young people completing the survey stated that they had caring responsibilities.
- 1040 young people completing the survey were gay, lesbian or bisexual (8.2% of the overall respondents), with a further 770 identifying as undecided or questioning (6%).

1. Mental Health and wellbeing:

Covid-19 impact:

We asked young people how they would rate their wellbeing now compared with before Covid-19.

Overall, 33% of young people felt that their wellbeing was worse than before Covid-19, with girls being more affected than boys, and those selecting 'other' as their gender* being particularly negatively affected (56.2% rated their wellbeing as worse), as well as those identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual (52% rated their wellbeing as worse).

We also asked, "Have your plans changed since Covid-19?". Almost a third of girls answered yes to this. Interestingly, year 7 and year 8 had the highest proportion of young people responding yes to this question, compared to other year groups.

General wellbeing

52.5% of young people at the time of the 2020 survey rated their happiness as high or very high, compared with 61% in 2018.

27% rated their happiness as 'low' compared with 20% in 2018. Gay, lesbian or bisexual young people were more likely to rate their happiness as low (51.6%).

This implies there may have been a decline in wellbeing, and this decline may be more pronounced in LGBTQ+ young people.

Boys were more likely to rate their happiness as high or very high compared with girls.

Self-harm

72% said they had never self-harmed (65% female and 81% male – 33% other*)

14% prefer not to say (17% female and 9.5% male – 20% other*)

14% said yes. (17% female and 9% male – 47% other). 41% of young people identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual reported that they had self-harmed.

*It's worth noting that a larger proportion of those selecting 'other' for their gender, reported that they self-harmed, when compared with those selecting 'male' or 'female'. This is based on small numbers (160) however so no firm conclusions can be drawn.

Given the slightly different age range of the participants and that self-harm tends to increase with age, there is not a big difference between the 2020 self-reported self-harm rates, and 2018.

- In 2018 – 75% said they had never self-harmed, 14% said they had, and 11% preferred not to say.

Worries

Young people were asked to select which things they worry about from a long list of options. The top 5 worries for young people in Hertfordshire are:

1. **School work (56.4%)** – Appears to have increased since 2018, particularly for males
2. **Their appearance (46%)** – Significant increase since 2018 of approximately 5%. This worry was more prominent for females (61%) than males (29%)
3. **Mental health (39.5%)** – Similar numbers to 2018, with a possible slight increase in females
4. **Covid-19 (35%)** – New issue not included in previous survey
5. **Feeling lonely (35%)** – New item included in the 2020 survey

Listed below is some further detail regarding the worries highlighted by young people in the 2020 survey:

Bullying – 16.7% 2020 - Higher in females than males, and higher in those identifying as 'other'

Covid-19 – 35% 2020 - Higher in females than males

Crime – 14% 2020

Drugs/alcohol – 7.6% 2020

Family problems – 24.6% Nb. Higher in females than males (almost double). But for both boys and girls, this is lower than in 2018. This was higher for children with a caring responsibility.

Feeling lonely – 35% - Significantly higher in females than males

Nb. 100% of those not attending school said they worried about feeling lonely, but this is only based on 26 responses.

Gambling – 2.9%

Issues with friends – 30.8% 2020 - Significantly higher in girls and other than in boys

Mental health – 39.5% 2020 (twice as likely in girls than in boys, and more than twice as likely in 'other'). There may be a slight increase in females worrying about their mental health, but this may be accounted for in the different age group surveyed as mental health concerns increase with age. There is no evidence of an increase in boys worrying about their mental health.

Money problems - 17.9% - More likely in girls and other

Physical health – 28% - more likely in girls and other

Relationships and sexual health – 17% - more likely in girls and other

Social media - 18.3% - more likely in girls and other

Street safety and violence - 18.5% - more likely in girls and other

The environment – 23.6% - more likely in girls and other

School work - 56.4% (66.6% females, 44.7% males). This appears to have increased slightly for females since 2018 and significantly for males.

Coping strategies

Young people were asked what they would do if they were struggling to cope.

20.6% said they'd do nothing if they were struggling to cope (23.2% of girls and 17.3% of boys), with a further 28.4% saying they'd try to solve the problem alone.

The most popular coping strategies for boys were playing computer games (53.4%), doing/listening to music (47.7%), talking to a friend (44.5%) talking to a family member (41.2%), followed by exercising (39.7%).

It's worth noting that between 2017 and 2020 there appears to have been an increase from 35.6% to 44.5% of boys saying they'd talk to a friend if they were struggling, although the 2017 survey was a substantially smaller sample size.

The most popular coping strategies for girls were doing/listening to music (61.7%), talking to a friend (55.3%), talking to a family member (42.1%) followed by thinking of a solution on their own (31.4%) and creative activities (31.3%).

Compared with previous surveys, there seems to have been an increase in young people who would 'do nothing' if they were struggling to cope, this being particularly pronounced in girls (increased from 14.6% in 2017 to 23.2% in in 2020).

Knowledge of mental health information and support

16.5% felt they do not know where to find mental health information or services (boys were slightly more likely to feel this way than girls)

21% were unsure

63% felt they did know where to find mental health services for support or more information

Knowledge appears to slightly increase with age ranging from 56.4% in year 7 to 68% in years 10,11 and 12, and 71% in year 13.

Attitudes towards mental health

Young people were asked whether they agreed with the statement, "It's ok to talk about my mental health"

70.4% of young people agreed that it was OK to talk about their mental health - 74% of Males agreed, and only 68% of females (45% of those selecting 'other').

In 2017 (Nb. Smaller sample size), 72% females agreed with the statement, and 70% of males so there appears to have been a potential shift. It will be important to ensure that campaigns designed to normalise conversations about mental health and help seeking behaviours (such as Hertfordshire's Just Talk campaign) effectively reach all genders.

Bullying

10% of young people said they are currently being bullied

45.9% of young people have been bullied at school at some point – this is a slight increase from 43% in 2018, and was higher for gay, lesbian or bisexual young people (67%).

18.1% of young people have been bullied online

School support and information provision

Young people were asked whether their school is supportive of their emotional wellbeing.

Yes - 37%

Somewhat - 35.4%

Unsure - 6.7%

No - 20.9% (this was significantly higher for those selecting 'other' as gender – 51.7%, but again this information needs to be treated with caution as 'other' is based on only 160 young people)

2. Healthy weight, eating and physical activity

Healthy eating

Young people were asked how many portions of fruit or vegetables they ate yesterday.

15.6% reported that they ate 5 portions of fruit or veg yesterday. This is a significant reduction from 28% in 2018.

7.1% reported eating none. An increase from 6% in 2018.

The most common response was 3 (27.1%).

How would you describe your current weight?

58.6% described their weight as just right

11% described themselves as overweight (females significantly more likely to identify as overweight than males)

9% described themselves as underweight (males significantly more likely to identify as underweight than females)

21.1% don't know/prefer not to say.

Physical activity

24.7% young people reported that they do 60 minutes of physical activity for at least 5 out of 7 days in a week (in line with guidance). Boys significantly more likely to do 60 minutes than girls.

Of those that did not achieve this level of physical activity, only 8.1% did 30 minutes of physical activity per day indicating that a number of young people were leading a relatively sedentary lifestyle at the time the survey was undertaken.

Most common response was that young people did 60 minutes of activity 1 – 3 times per week, but boys were just as likely to do 60 minutes of activity 4-5 times per week.

3. Oral Health

82.2% of young people brushed their teeth at least twice the day before the survey (85% girls, and 80% boys). 16% brushed their teeth once. 1.8% had not brushed their teeth at all.

Young people were also asked, "Within the last year have you had a check up at the dentist?" 21% said No, 79% said Yes, with no significant differences between male and female responses. Those selecting 'other' were more likely to say no (39%), but this is not statistically significant.

4. Smoking, vaping and drugs

Smoking

90.3% of respondents said they have never smoked

6.1% have tried smoking once or twice

1.4% smoke regularly.

For those that smoke regularly, 16.4% would like to stop, 34.3% would like to cut down, and 49.3% want to continue – this is based on very low numbers though as the majority of young people do not smoke.

Vaping – new questions

86.5% have never vaped

9.3% have vaped once or twice

2.7% vape regularly

1.5% used to vape but no longer do.

The majority of those who had vaped did not use it as a way to reduce smoking (80%). Only 20% reported vaping for this reason.

Drugs

91.6% young people reported that they had never taken drugs

5.3% said they had taken drugs once or twice

2.6% reported they take drugs regularly

0.4% used to take drugs but no longer do.

The most commonly used drug was cannabis (54.4% of those who said they'd taken drugs has used cannabis), followed by nitrous oxide and ketamine (both 13%) and ecstasy and cocaine (both 10.9% of those who said they'd taken drugs). This appears to be a slight increase in ketamine, cocaine and ecstasy use since 2018 but it is difficult to draw conclusions as older children are included in this year's survey.

5. Sexual Health

53% in year 10 know where to get free contraception, compared with 44% in 2018. This is an encouraging increase.

29.2% felt they know how to access sexual health services (36.2% felt they did not know how to access sexual health services, the rest were unsure).

Across all year groups, 28.4% said they knew where to get free contraception and 53% said they did not know. Knowledge increases with age as we might expect.

This year 75.7% of Year 8 pupils agreed that it is OK to wait to have sex, this is a decrease from 82% in year 8 in 2018.

Conversely, in year 10 pupils there is a slight increase in those that feel it is OK to wait to have sex from 87% in 2018 to 90% in 2020.

40.7% of young people feel there is a pressure on young people to have sex. 24.6% felt there is not pressure.

This perception of pressure increases with age, and is more pronounced for girls than boys.

There has been an increase in year 10 pupils who feel that there is pressure on them to have sex - 36.5% in 2018 and 42.3% in 2020

If you have any questions about the Young People's Health and Wellbeing Survey, please email us at YPHWS@hertfordshire.gov.uk

More detailed analysis will be made available in due course (~April 2021).