



Healthwatch
Together

Blackburn with Darwen,
Blackpool, Cumbria and
Lancashire working
in partnership



How are you coping with the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic?

March - April 2020

About Healthwatch and Healthwatch Together

Healthwatch was established in April 2013 as part of the implementation of the Health and Care Act 2012.

Healthwatch England acts as the national consumer champion for all local Healthwatch organisations, enabling and supporting individual Healthwatch to bring important issues to the attention of decisions makers nationally.

A key role of each individual Healthwatch is to champion the views of people who use health and care services in their area, seeking to

ensure that people's experiences inform the improvement of services. Healthwatch are constantly listening, recording and reporting on the views of local people on a wide range of health and care issues, ensuring that people are able to express their views and have a voice in improving their local health and care services.

Healthwatch Together consists of Healthwatch Cumbria, Healthwatch Lancashire, Healthwatch Blackpool and Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen, working in collaboration together.



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Rationale for research

This research project took place as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) and the subsequent lockdown that took effect in England in March 2020.

Healthwatch Together (HWT) quickly created a survey in response to the pandemic, with the aim of finding out how the people of Cumbria and Lancashire were coping during this difficult time.

The survey was developed as a ‘temperature check’ designed to find out how people were feeling and coping during the initial first weeks of this unprecedented pandemic.

Methodology

The survey was launched on Survey Monkey on 23 March 2020 and ran until 26 April 2020 (when it was replaced by a second version of the survey, which is currently still live.)

Anyone living in Cumbria or Lancashire was eligible to complete the survey online. A link to the survey was shared via Healthwatch websites, through social media and word of mouth and via a network of local contacts.

The questions were limited to 20, to keep the survey relatively short and quick to complete. Most of the questions asked were deliberately constructed to be ‘open questions’ in order to gather as much information as possible and also because we were not sure at this point what the emerging themes would be.

No personal data was collected (except for the first half of respondent’s postcodes). Respondents were assured of their anonymity, but were informed that we may use their (anonymous) quotes in our reports.

Questions

1. Where do you live?
2. What is the first half of your postcode?
3. How old are you?
4. Are you male/female/other?
5. What was your employment status before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?
6. Including yourself, how many adults (18+) live in your household?
7. How many children (0-17) live in your household?
8. What is your ethnicity?
9. How have you been affected by the outbreak of Coronavirus?
10. What are your three biggest concerns?
11. What impact has social distancing had on your daily life?
12. How are you taking care of your physical health?
13. How are you taking care of your emotional and mental health?
14. What actions have you taken for yourself and others?
15. Where do you look to find information about Coronavirus?
16. What changes would help you cope?
17. What information would help to support you?
18. Are you currently receiving any medical care or treatment (not related to Coronavirus)?
19. If you are receiving any medical care or treatment, how has this care/treatment been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic?
20. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?



Demographics

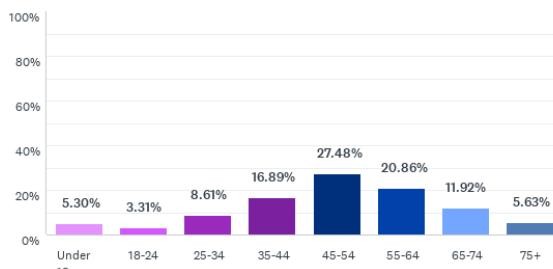
305 people responded to the HWT survey over five weeks, covering the first full week of lockdown in England.

39% of respondents were from Cumbria

56% were from Lancashire

5% were 'other' (including four people from Blackpool and one from Blackburn with Darwen)

Q3 How old are you?

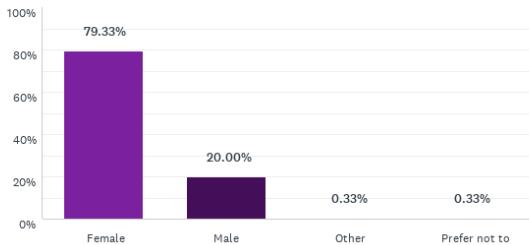


65% of respondents were aged between 35 and 64 years old.

18% were aged 65 years +.

Only 9% were under 25 years old.

Q4 Are you

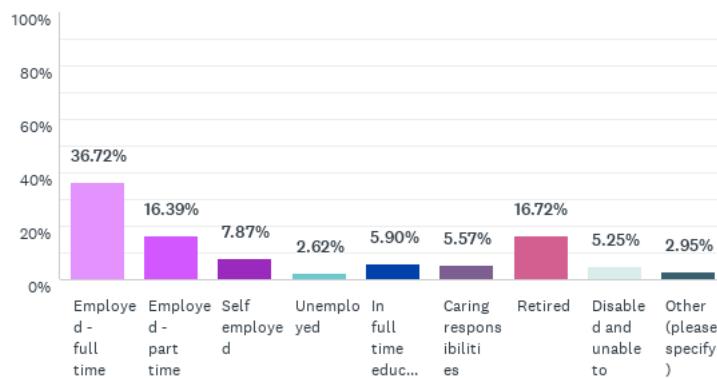


79% of respondents were female.

20% were male.

1 respondent identified as other and 1 person preferred not to say.

Q5 What was your employment status before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?



61% of people who responded to our survey were in some form of employment.

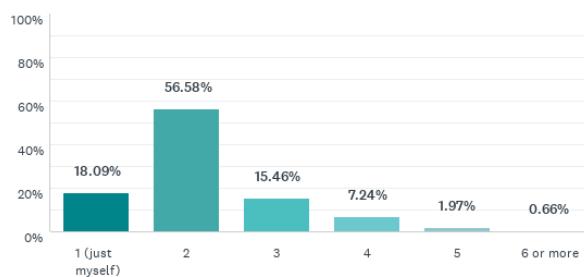
17% were retired.

6% were in full time education.



Demographics

Q6 Including yourself, how many adults (over 18) live in your household?

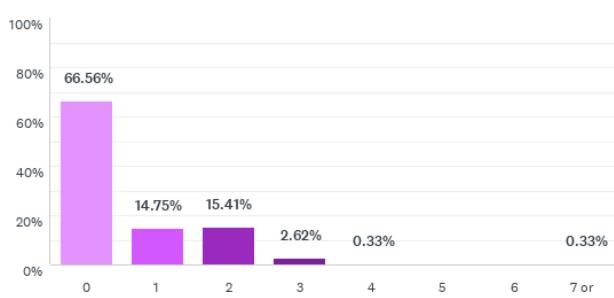


Over half of the respondents to our survey live with one other adult. Although 18% are the only adult in the household.

This 18% is equivalent to 55 people.

Of these, 8 people are looking after children. 47 are living entirely on their own.
 31% are retired.
 4% have caring responsibilities,
 and 13% identify as having a disability.

Q7 How many children (0-17 years) live in your household?

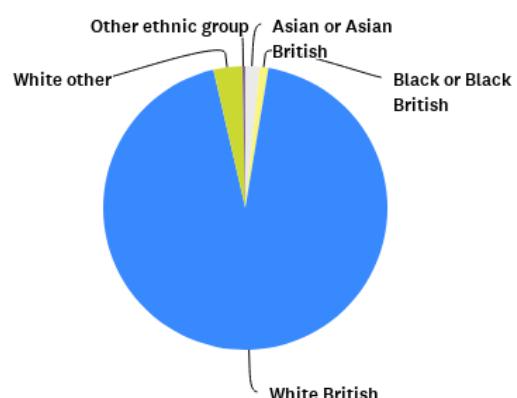


67% of respondents to this survey did not have any children living in the house.

1 person had 4 children and 1 person had 7 or more children living in the house at the time.

Q8 What is your ethnicity?

94% of respondents identified as white British, with a further 3% white other.
 Only 1% were black or black British and 2% Asian or Asian British





Q9. How have you been affected by the outbreak of C-19?

This question was designed to get an idea of the general feeling and mood of during the initial weeks of the pandemic and the resulting lockdown.

The answers that respondents gave were categorised into three types:

1. Social impact
2. Emotional impact
3. Practical impact

The social impact

This remained the biggest issue for most people across the five weeks. It included a lack of physical contact with friends and family, feeling isolated and lonely and being isolated.

People missed social activities and the freedom to go out and visit loved ones.

Respondents shared their personal stories with us, which included parents with a new baby and single parents isolated with children with learning difficulties.

“As I live alone it’s lonely.”

The emotional impact

Many people commented that they were experiencing more stress and anxiety, feeling useless, trapped or scared. There were worries over the future, about school and university and fears for family members who are key workers.

However, respondents were more concerned for other people’s wellbeing and mental health than for their own and this is a theme that ran throughout the responses.

Overall there was a general feeling of uncertainty about the future and the subsequent stress that this produces.

“Anxiety is getting bad having to work from home with three children, trying to school two of them at the same time is a disaster.”

The practical impact

When the UK went into lockdown it presented all sorts of challenges. Initially, responses to our survey focused on the impact on jobs and the self-employed and the practicalities of working from home. It was during this period that the UK government announced the furlough scheme and, later on, the help that would be provided to the self-employed.

For the first few weeks there was panic-buying within the shops and many respondents found it difficult to get a delivery slot for online food buying. There was also concern around collecting prescriptions.

As the weeks (and lockdown) continued, people became more concerned for the vulnerable, particularly those who were either caring for vulnerable people or were unable to care for elderly relatives.

“Can’t get food because disabled and vulnerable, and able-bodied people are booking up the supermarket delivery slot, so loads of food stress.”



Q10. What are your three biggest concerns?

- 1. My family and friends will contract the virus.**
- 2. That I will contract the virus.**
- 3. Financial concerns and a shortage of food.**

These three concerns stayed consistent across the whole time period of this survey.

Other concerns included:

- The future impact on the UK economy.
- The effect on mental health.
- The safety of key workers.

As time moved on people also became concerned about:

- How the UK will come out of lockdown.
- Access to PPE.
- When testing will be widely available.

Towards the end of week four respondents were becoming concerned over what they felt to be a lack of reliable and consistent information from the government and a fear that not everyone was abiding by the social distancing rules.

“Will they find a cure? Fear of the unknown?”

“Getting ill and being on my own and not allowed any family to visit if I become seriously ill or I am dying.”

“When is this going to end? Am I going to have enough money? Is someone close to me going to die?”

“Disappearing in an ambulance, or seeing my partner disappear in an ambulance.”



Q11. What impact has social distancing had on your life?

During the initial first week of this survey, ‘social distancing’ was a relatively new term, the UK government hadn’t introduced a total lockdown, so people were still trying to understand what the term meant and what impact it was going to have on them.

Social distancing, also called “physical distancing,” means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. To practice social or physical distancing:
Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms’ length) from other people
Do not gather in groups
Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings

CDC.gov.uk

The biggest impact by far was being unable to visit and spend time with family and friends. This continued to have an impact across all weeks.

“Not being able to have close contact with family.”

The second biggest ‘impact’ was that social distancing was not having much of an impact, or that people were feeling ok about it. Respondents started saying this after the first two weeks.

“I’m quite enjoying social distancing. The only aspect of this that stresses me out is shopping chaos.”

It seemed evident from the responses that some people are better able to cope with the effects of lockdown and social distancing than others. Some of this could be as a result of different personalities and lifestyles, but it also suggests that some people are in a position (either through ill health, caring responsibilities, mental health problems or loneliness and isolation) that makes the impact of social distancing more dramatic and more devastating.

“It has had a great impact as I am a very social person, always out and busy.”

Other impacts:

- The impact on social activities; socialising, hobbies, sports, voluntary work.
- Individual freedom is limited.
- Having to work from home.
- Being stuck inside the house.
- Feeling increasingly anxious and sad.

“Essentially not being able to do what makes life worth living.”

“Not huge...I actually like the quietness without the tourists.”



Q12. How are you taking care of your physical health?

Most people told us that they managed to get some form of physical exercise most days. The most popular form of exercise was walking, followed by gardening and YouTube exercise classes.

Many people managed to adapt to new ways of exercise, although they continued to miss their previous activities.

There were a minority of people for whom physical exercise was difficult, either because of physical disabilities or because they were unable to go outside for a walk.

“Due to my disability I struggle anyway.”



Q12. How are you taking care of your emotional and mental health?

During this period people used a combination of different approaches in order to take care of their emotional and mental health, rather than relying on one thing:

- Staying in touch with friends and family - through various means including video chats and phone calls.
- Using exercise, meditation, gardening, housework and prayer.
- ‘Keeping busy’.
- Taking up new hobbies, restarting old ones or continuing with existing hobbies.
- Listening to music, reading, drawing and painting or crafting.
- Completing puzzles and jigsaws.
- Sticking to a routine.
- Using social media.
- Watching TV or films and listening to the radio.

Many respondents also told us that they deliberately cultivated an acceptance of the current situation and tried to remain positive about it, seeking the good in their situation.

“Just trying to accept it for probably the next six months.”

“Trying to remember that it’s the same for everyone.”

However, as with physical health, it is a challenge for some to look after their emotional and mental health and the lockdown has affected them disproportionately.

“I am struggling and have no support with this. My partner is not very understanding.”

“I’m not coping well, I’ve always had bouts of depression and I’m already feeling low.”



Q14. What actions have you taken for yourself and others?

- 1. Looking after myself and others:** social distancing, extra hygiene measures, following government guidance.
- 2. Looking after others:** particularly the vulnerable and family members.
- 3. Supporting the wider community:** volunteering, offering support, getting shopping, donating to the foodbank.

“I go shopping for the family and elderly mother-in-law.”

“Helping the community by donating to the local foodbank.”



Q14. Where do you look to find information about Coronavirus?

Where people looked for information remained consistent throughout the weeks. The tendency was to use reliable and trustworthy news sources, with most people not getting their information from social media channels.

Listed in order of popularity:

1. TV news: mainly the BBC, but also Sky news.
2. Gov.uk
3. NHS.uk
4. Internet websites.
5. Social media.
6. Trusted and reliable websites: BBC, WHO.
7. Radio and newspapers.



Q16. What changes would help you cope?

The changes that people felt would help them cope changed across the weeks.

Initially respondents suggested better provision for online shopping, but as the shopping situation began to ease this became less important.

They also said that being able to see family and friends would help them cope, though most people did note that they understood why they couldn't.

Almost half of respondents said (every week) that there was either nothing that would help, or they weren't sure what would help.

As the weeks progressed, people suggested:

- **Consistent and correct information.**
- **Widespread and reliable testing.**
- **Life 'getting back to normal'.**
- **People adhering to government guidelines.**
- **A vaccine.**

Overall the people who responded to our survey seemed resigned to the current situation and felt that there weren't really many practical options for 'changes' that would help them cope.

"To know when this will end."



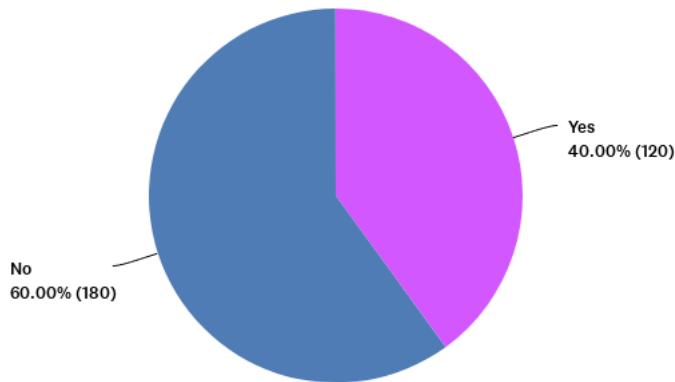
Q17. What information would help to support you?

Over half of respondents said (every week) they felt that they either had already enough information or else they weren't sure what more information would help.

One issue that was identified from this question was the number of people asking for information that was already available through mainstream media sources. This prompted HWT to design a Q&A style social media campaign that addressed the main signposting issues raised via the survey responses.

Other information that people felt would support them:

- "A clear exit strategy."
- "Specific local information."
- "The truth about what is actually happening."
- "An idea of what could be next."

**Q18. Are you currently receiving any medical treatment or care (not related to Coronavirus)?****Q19. If you are receiving any medical care or treatment, how has this been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic?**

The main impact that has affected people has been the cancellation or rearranging of pre-existing appointments and uncertainty around future appointments and treatment.

In the early weeks there were quite a few respondents who were struggling to get and collect prescriptions, but this seemed resolved to a large extent by the last couple of weeks.

There were concerns over cancer tests and treatment not taking place and mental health services were not all available.

“Not at all, but probably would have been to the GP regarding worsening depression if I could see one.”

A third of respondents said that they had not yet been affected.



Q20. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

The majority of respondents said that there was nothing else they would like to tell us.

In the first week there were some specific complaints about neighbours and about supermarkets. But some of the concerns raised:

- Such as panic buying have since been addressed by the supermarkets.
- People not obeying social distancing guidelines has also been addressed.
- People ignoring government guidelines is continuing to be addressed and the situation continues to change.

“I’m worried about my family being ill while I’m still ill.”

“I cannot think of anything but I think it took everyone by surprise. Its like something out of Science fiction book/film.”

“You have forgotten the carers and the parents of children with additional needs who struggle and isolated in the normal world but who are now ultra isolated.”

“It can be very, very lonely, makes you cry sometimes.”

“Being furloughed has made me feel un valued by my employers and that my contribution to my workplace was/is irrelevant especially as other colleagues are still working. This has affected my mental health quite badly.”

“Mental health has been ignored.”

“I look after my 100 year Mum who lives with us and my 76 year old husband as well as being a part time carer for my disabled daughter who lives close by.”

“How beautiful is the natural world around us, in this time of spring awakening. I hope we will learn to appreciate the precious things in life more, and maybe take better care of each other and the natural world.”



Conclusion

HWT would like to say thank you to all those people who took the time to contribute to our survey and to share their stories with us.

It was possible, during the 4-5 weeks that this survey was live, to track the 'mood' of our respondents across Cumbria and Lancashire and to see the shift of priorities and changes that they made as the pandemic and lockdown progressed. It should be noted however, that over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents were female and over half were between 35-64 years old and nearly all identified as white, which will skew the data towards the concerns of this demographic.

Initially, the reality of lockdown was unknown, but gradually as the weeks progressed it started to take its toll with some people feeling severely anxious, stressed or depressed. Throughout the weeks there have been concerns about the future and the financial impact of job losses, being furloughed or losing a business or state benefits. As time rolled on and families continued to follow instructions to stay at home many struggled to maintain harmony within the household while others became reliant on other people and lost their independence.

There was a rise in the number of people reporting that they had been ill, beginning in week 2, and in those who were finding it difficult to look after the vulnerable.

Most people were concerned about their own and other people's health and about what the future will bring, wishing that the pandemic was over and life could get back to normal. Respondents continued to maintain social distancing and most felt that they were managing this ok but missed family and friends.

People looked after their physical health through exercise and healthy eating and tried to maintain their emotional and mental health through a combination of approaches including acceptance of the situation. Unfortunately, around 1/10 of respondents continued to struggle with their mental health.

Most respondents to this survey are managing to cope but finding it a challenge to be in lockdown. Specifically, this survey has highlighted the minority who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic and lockdown. These were mainly those who were already struggling with mental health issues or pre-existing medical conditions, as well as those who were (and still are) caring for elderly relatives or their own children who have learning difficulties or autism.

As a result of this survey we now have an insight into what the first 4-5 weeks of the pandemic were like for some of the people living in Cumbria and Lancashire. The themes that have been highlighted, such as mental health conditions, caring responsibilities and financial worries have enabled us to design a new version of the survey to help us understand and investigate these issues in more depth.

A further series of reports based on the findings of version 2 of the survey will be produced and published by HWT.



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