

More than half of Year 12 students report poor mental wellbeing since lockdown

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A school-based survey of students in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire examined over 200 key factors in the lives and expectations of young people, aged 8-18 years, helping to shed light on mental health during lockdown.

The Oxford University-led study included 19,000 students from 237 schools across Berkshire East, Berkshire West, Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, South Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire. Students in Years 4 to 13 (aged eight to 18 years) completed the OxWell School Survey 2020, either while at [school](#) or at home. The survey assessed mental [wellbeing](#), anxiety, indicators of vulnerability, sleep patterns, online safety, and protective factors, such as exercise, social interaction, and attitudes to accessing [mental health](#) support.

The analysis of results from the survey findings is on-going, however early reports suggest that older students were more likely to perceive their mental wellbeing as being lower during lockdown compared with before lockdown, with those in Years 10, 12, and 13 reporting the worst outcomes.

When asked about their general happiness (mental wellbeing) – whether it was better or worse during lockdown—Year 12 students reported:

- 54 percent felt their wellbeing was worse
- 24 percent felt their wellbeing was better
- 22 percent felt their wellbeing was unchanged

Associate Professor Mina Fazel, Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, said, "We are very curious about those [young people](#) who say they are happier since lockdown—is this because they are bullied at school, or feel anxious away from their homes and were no longer exposed to these stressors? Or is it because they can study and concentrate better away from the hustle and bustle of the classroom? A lot more than academic learning takes place at school and unpicking the different and complex components that can help a young person thrive is our priority through this important research, so as to help inform schools and young people's services."

The study leads prioritized getting summaries of the results of the survey to the schools and local authorities that were involved in recruiting students to complete the survey, as well as an overall summary report from all data collected in the entire survey. Two school leavers were employed to lead on getting the information sent out to students who took part in the study, the resources developed include a poster to be put up in schools, to help raise awareness of mental health, a short video for students to watch (primary and secondary versions available), and an email for schools to send out to students.

Students and Youth Advisors, Cameron and Kirsten Bell, (Year 13 school leavers), said, "It's very important that students understand the problems with mental health and how lockdown has had an impact. They need to understand it so that they can be sympathetic to those who have it and for those who have it to have an understanding that they are not alone. This information can be used for schools so they can prepare better and improve the mental health of their students in case we have to go through another lockdown."

Dr. Karen Mansfield, Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, said, "We are now pulling out the most relevant results to make them available for schools and policy makers to use in supporting students and managing the current situation with COVID-19 and its impact. Part of our on-going work is to try and find the reasons behind these figures, to identify which students are more likely to have lower wellbeing since lockdown and which factors are associated with these outcomes. We are grateful to the [local authorities](#) across the region who wanted to join us and conduct this important survey, a reflection of their concern for the wellbeing of the people in their constituencies."

Donna Husband, head of Public Health Programs—Health Improvement, at Oxfordshire County Council, said, "This survey is an important collaboration between researchers, schools, public health and

education teams, and providers of mental health services. The results can be used to promote [mental wellbeing](#) and help tailor mental health support within and between schools, as well as to guide scientific research and inform policy."

Janette Fullwood, head of Children, Young People and Families at NHS East Berkshire CCG, said, "NHS East Berkshire CCG has benefitted from the results of the OxWell School Survey locally and would like to continue with it in future. Hearing the needs of young people has enabled us to put youth voice at the heart of our local strategic planning and partnership working."

Gareth Williams, cabinet member for public health and community engagement at Buckinghamshire Council, said, "It is really important for us to understand the way children have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, and this survey plays a key part in helping us to do that. The findings will be invaluable as we continue our work to support the mental health and wellbeing of children across Buckinghamshire and to make sure their needs are being met by our health and care services. I am very pleased the council was able to work with our schools and other colleagues to be involved in this research."

Dr. Jane O'Grady, director of public health Buckinghamshire Council, said, "Buckinghamshire Council, working in partnership with our local schools, was delighted to have taken part in this survey. Understanding the COVID experience from the perspective of children and young people is a critical part of our local Health and Wellbeing COVID Recovery Plan. The data will inform both our ongoing support and future developments for children and young people's mental [health](#) and emotional wellbeing needs in our plan."

Provided by University of Oxford

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