



# **Impact of Covid-19 crisis on wellbeing: Survey findings**

## Contents

- Introduction
- Survey details
- Responses to questions
- Conclusion

## Introduction

The Covid-19 crisis has had a global impact on physical health, freedom of movement and the economy. For the first time we have also seen the impact of an event on mental health acknowledged at a global level<sup>1</sup>.

The UK Government announced closure of all non-essential businesses and services on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, and Network Counselling and Training closed its building and moved all counselling to remote work on March 24<sup>th</sup> 2020.

In the weeks immediately following the strict new stay-at-home measure Network, and other counselling charities, businesses and private practitioners, saw a complete drop off in enquiries.

The evidence collected at a national level, even in these early days, pointed clearly to a new level of strain being placed on our mental health.

Network's objectives are to provide professional counselling services on an affordable basis, as well as other avenues for personal and psychological development. As such it is important that we understand events in the community which are likely to affect how people's needs for support are expressed. The Covid-19 virus and some level of social distancing measures are likely to be with us for some time, and Network recognises its responsibility to make the best contribution possible to the range of support available in Bristol, South Glos and Bath over the coming months and years.

As a result Network invited people of all backgrounds to complete a short survey to give us a better indication of what their needs are at this time. This report provides the results of that survey, alongside our understanding of what that might mean for our service. It will feed into our planning for the next financial year (Aug 2020 – July 2021), and enable us to make best use of our strengths.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/covid-19>

## Responses to questions

The survey was sent to all Network supporters, publicised on Network social media, the Bristol Networks website, sent to local media, and shared through the personal channels of Network supporters.

The survey opened on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2020 and closed on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

The survey asked four questions on wellbeing and support needs, with multiple choice options given for answers. They were:

- 1 At the moment, what feels like the biggest area of emotional difficulty?
  - a. Particular issues such as (but not only) coping with lockdown, isolation, family relationships, health fears, work, finances and debt, bereavement.
  - b. Deeper, longer standing issues coming to the surface which are causing problems,
  - c. My feelings and/or behaviour.
  - d. Something else
  
- 2 What kind of emotional help might be most useful for you at the moment?
  - a. Someone to talk to about dealing with immediate challenges.
  - b. The space to explore longstanding life challenges, relationships, or patterns you feel stuck in.
  - c. The opportunity to share with and hear from others about life in lockdown and beyond.
  - d. Something else
  
- 3 How able are you to deal with emotional issues as the moment?
  - a. Not at all – I am busy coping with practical day to day challenges.
  - b. Somewhat – I would like to talk about how the current crisis is affecting my feelings.
  - c. Very – This feels like a good time to explore issues I otherwise don't have time for.
  
- 4 How acceptable would you find it to talk about your problems over the phone, and/or to receive counselling by phone or video link?
  - a. I would feel comfortable doing this.
  - b. I would if I had to, but would prefer to talk face to face.
  - c. I would not want to do this at all.
  - d. I don't have the privacy or technology to be able to do this.

We also asked respondents their gender and their age, in brackets of under 21, 21 – 65 and over 65.

## Survey results

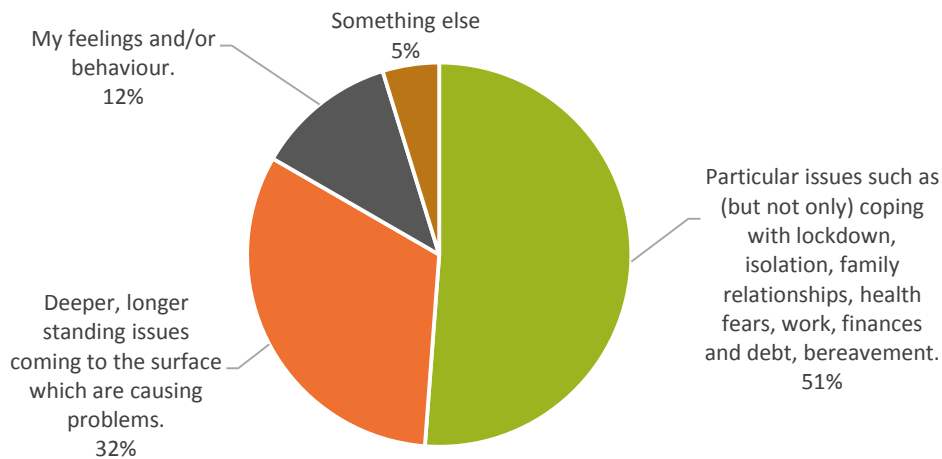
### Respondents

Eighty four people completed the survey. 80% of respondents were female, 18% male, with 2% preferring not to say.

In terms of age, 85% of respondents were 21-65, 12% were over 65 and 1% under 21. One respondent preferred not to say.

It is important to acknowledge the size of the responding group, as well as the fact that we do not have socio-economic demographic information. Our affordable counselling service is open to all, regardless of ability to pay, and around 75% of our clients are on low incomes. Whilst efforts were made to publicise the survey through varied channels, including to residents local to Elm Park, the demographic of the survey respondents may not reflect the demographic of our client group.

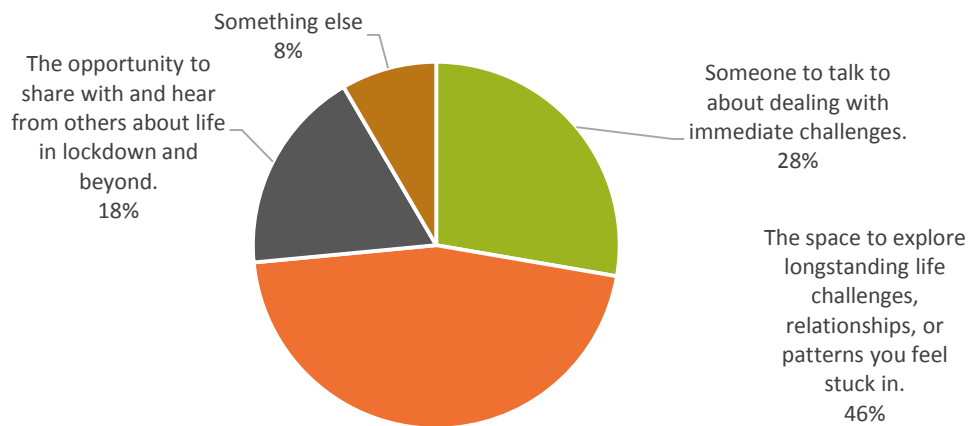
### Question 1: At the moment, what feels like the biggest area of emotional difficulty?



During the period of this survey it is clear that for over half of respondents the specific challenges around coping with lockdown felt like the biggest emotional challenge.

Respondents who completed the field "something else" referenced other events in life that would have happened anyway and other areas of concern.

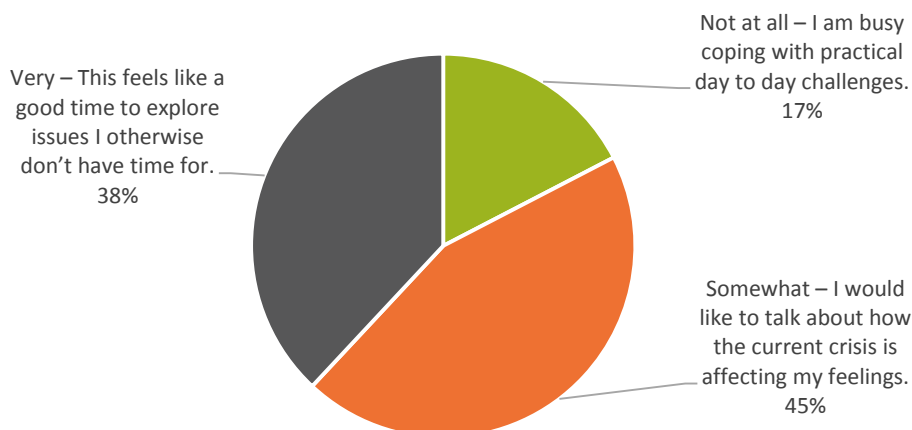
*Question 2: What kind of emotional help might be most useful for you at the moment?*



This question invited people to give an indication of what approach might be best suited to their needs. Nearly half of respondents felt that space to explore longstanding issues would be most helpful for them at this time, whilst 28% felt that talking about immediate challenges would be best suited. A small but significant group of respondents felt that a space for exchanging experiences with others would be most helpful.

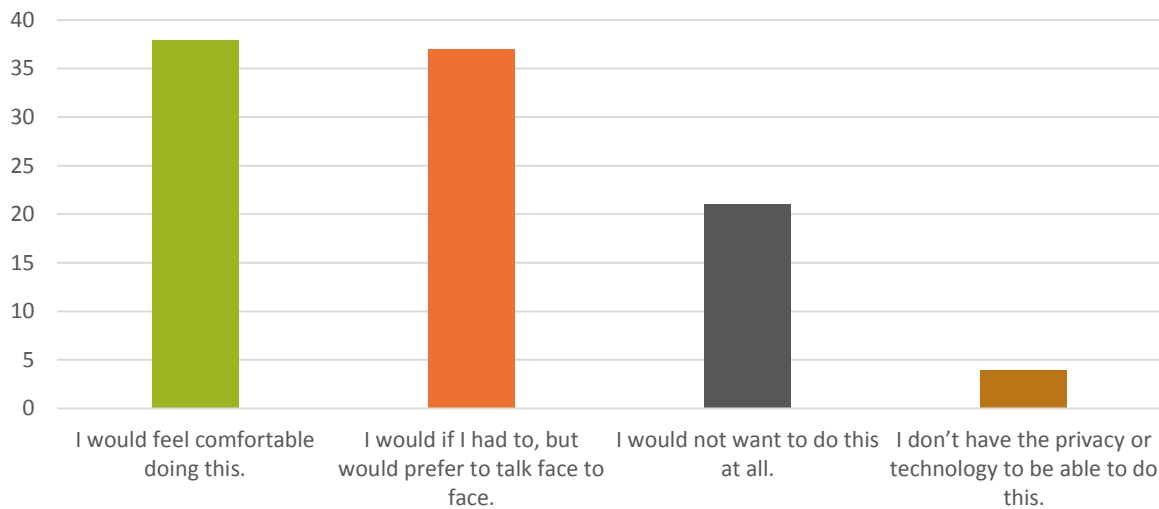
Respondents who replied “something else” talked about being able to meet or stay in touch with people, to have someone to call if needs be, or that they did not feel they needed help right now.

*Question 3: How able are you to deal with emotional issues as the moment?*



The majority of respondents felt that they were able to deal with emotional issues at some level. Interestingly, a large group of people felt that lockdown created a space for thinking about issues that wasn't usually there. For nearly a fifth of respondents, the practical day to day challenges meant that they did not have space for addressing emotional issues.

*Question 4: How acceptable would you find it to talk about your problems over the phone, and/or to receive counselling by phone or video link?*



In total, 75% of respondents found the idea of receiving counselling or talking about their problems using the phone or online acceptable. However, 62% felt that this would be either second best, unacceptable or inaccessible. It is important to note that for a small but significant group, practical barriers mean that accessing support from home is simply not a possibility.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the first three questions there is a message that the Covid-19 crisis has had a significant impact on people's mental health and wellbeing. Related issues are occupying a prominent space in terms of what is causing difficulties and what kind of support people need.

The unusual aspect of the many and varied wellbeing challenges that lockdown has created for people is that they are being experienced by a lot of people at the same time. This is perhaps reflected in the responses that say that the chance to share experiences with others would be of greatest value to them at this time.

Interestingly, the variety and even extremes of people's experiences of lockdown show. For around one fifth of respondents practical challenges are leaving them with little space to deal with emotional challenges. For more people, the stay-at-home measures are creating a space to address issues that might not have been available before.

Counselling has traditionally been a face-to-face practice, and although there are many private practitioners who successfully work with clients over the phone or online, this has not been something Network has chosen to do previously. The Covid-19 crisis has compelled our service to operate in this way. It is interesting and reassuring to hear that although possibly not ideal for all, that 75% of people feel that this would not prevent them from accessing our services. Importantly, we must also recognise that the face-to-face element of counselling is essential to many, and that we must ensure that our service is available in this way as soon as and whenever reasonably possible around restrictions.