

Impact of Covid-19 on older people's mental health



Methodology

- Online survey promoted through Age UK networks (August 2020)
 - 569 responses (incl. 369 older people & 200 family/ informal carers)
 - 78% of respondents aged 65+ and 56% aged over 70
- Representative online poll 1,200 older people (Kantar. Aug – Sept 2020)
 - All respondents aged 60+ with nearly half over the age of 70
 - 40% reported at least one long term condition
 - 14% had been advised by the NHS they were 'extremely clinically vulnerable'

Emerging themes from live survey (over 13,000 respondents)



Anxiety

- One in three of the people we polled agreed that they have felt more anxious since the start of the pandemic
- Latest ONS data shows that one in three older people are now experiencing high levels of anxiety
- People living with long-term health conditions or who had been shielding were more likely to be feeling anxious
- Anxiety is impacting on older people's sleep and appetite

"it's no use going anywhere because it's too risky . Last time I went out to the bank a young woman coughed in my face! I worried for 14 days after in case she had the virus and I felt quite ill and panicky." (Female, 75-79)

"Covid has made me into a hermit afraid to go out and when I do I just want to get things done and get back home again to the safety of my home" (Male, 65-69)

"Being scared of contact with people and the isolation at same time" (Female, 70-74)



Older people have lost confidence

We asked older people how their confidence in doing common activities had changed since the start of lockdown

- Two in five people feel less confident going to the shops
- Two in three are less confident using public transport
- One in five feel less confident going for short walks outside and one in five are less confident leaving the house by themselves
- Nearly half feel less confident going to a hospital appointment
- Two-fifths feel less confident going to a GP surgery



Health related anxiety

- Delays to treatment and surgery and reduced access to healthcare not only have a physical impact but are taking a toll on older people's mental health
- Older people are worried that their health will have got worse and that the decline will be irreversible
- They are also worried about accessing health services in case they catch Covid when doing so

*"Constant worry over delay in accessing MRI which is needed for my sanity"
(Female, 60-64)*

*" Because my cancer and diabetes check-ups have been cancelled, and I have been unable to see a GP in person, I am worried that my conditions have worsened"
(Female, 60-64)*

"They have anxiety about their health, believing every little ache and pain is serious. They are depressed that they will never get out safely again."



Lack of motivation and self-neglect

- Over a third of older people also agreed that they are feeling less motivated to do the things which they used to enjoy
- Older people have lost pleasure in life and don't have the motivation or energy to do the things they used to enjoy. They can't see the point.
- Some are struggling to get out of bed and dressed. They have also stopped taking care of themselves, for example by not washing or eating.

"feelings of "is this life worth living" and no joy in even the simple things in life which previously would make a day worth living" (Female, 60-64)

"I just sit i know i should get up every now and again due to other health reasons, i go days without showering lost all energy to self-care" (Female, 65-69)

"Feel really down a lot and can't always be bothered to get dressed and go out." (Female, 70-74)



Cognitive decline

- One in five of the older people we polled told us they were finding it harder to remember things
- Some are finding it harder to concentrate, do day-to-day activities and make decisions
- Friends and family of older people report that their loved ones are becoming more forgetful and confused.

‘Lack of stimulation means my wits have slowed and my memory has got worse.’

‘She’s more forgetful, rambling speech, bringing up memories no one has heard before’

‘I’m more confused and finding it more difficult to deal with situations, harder to make decisions’



**How are older people
coping now?**



People who were coping before are now struggling

- The longer the pandemic goes on, the harder older people are finding it
- Coping strategies used during the summer are no longer possible in cold and dark weather
- People are starting to give up hope and don't believe that the pandemic will ever end.
- They are worried they are wasting the last years of their lives

'Probably because the first lockdown occurred during the Summer I was more relaxed and still able to go for walks. Now, many of my social contacts have withdrawn into their depressed states and we are all isolated.'

"The first lockdown wasn't so hard but this time round I struggle to get out of bed each day."

'I feel I have done very well over the year but I am now feeling overwhelmed and can wake up with a sense of foreboding. I am sure many will be feeling the same the longer this pandemic goes on.'



Older people feel less resilient

- Older people are struggling to cope with things which would have previously not impacted them. Report feeling devastated by trivial things.
- Finding it harder to do every-day tasks which used to be easy
- Lost skills, such as ability to make decisions
- Everything is becoming too much

'Things are bothering me more. Feel I can-not cope if things go wrong.'

'Can't stop thinking. Difficult to concentrate. Worry all the time about every little thing. Can't make decisions.'

"I become irritated/angry at petty things. I cry at the slightest provocation which is not like me at all. Even doing this survey I have tears in my eyes".



Older people are becoming withdrawn

- After months of reduced contact with people, older people are finding it hard to have conversations and feel nervous about interacting
- They have lost social skills and worry what will happen when we return to 'normal'
- Many do not want to leave the house and will not want to after the pandemic

“I can't cope with people or situations involving people, it's very stressful.”

“I'm getting used to being on my own/ withdrawn and dread the thought of company”

“It seems that I no longer have the ability to talk to people . I even find it hard to talk on the telephone.



Older carers are at breaking point

- Carers have taken on more responsibility while at the same time have less support
- They are feeling exhausted, depressed, isolated, and anxious

'Worsening of husband' s condition and his increased dependency has caused me loneliness, sleeplessness and fear. Depression and isolation is getting worse as not able to sit with family/friends and just chat. It is awful to try and keep up a brave face while talking on facetime etc.'

'I am a full time carer and have had bouts of depression. I feel tired all the time. My husband has been housebound for 7 years and uses a wheelchair. Outside of him the only person I see week to week is the Asda delivery man.. Some mornings I get up and burst into tears. I can't say anything to my husband as the worry could flare up his MS. This is existing it is not living.'



Bereavement and grief

- Older people are struggling to cope with loss of loved ones, either before or during the pandemic.
- Support which they would have depended upon in normal circumstances is not available.
- Many feel they have not been able to grieve properly or process the death.
- Bereavement support has not been available

“My husband died- not of Covid- so am grieving but have no distractions such as going for car rides or seeing friends or going out for lunch out going to Bingo., or Church. Nothing except T.V.”

“I was adjusting to losing my husband after 5 years decline and other health issues. Lockdown has made the confidence I was gaining to do things for myself almost disappear.”

I lost my identical twin sister to Covid, this impacted me terribly. I had a couple of Drs calls, then nothing! My OT from Hospital had zoom meeting with me, and was writing to my GP, asking that they contact me, as she could see the state I was in! The call never happened!



Can't access services or practice coping strategies

- Coping strategies, such as meeting with friends and staying busy, are not available
- Mental health support has been disrupted or can't be accessed
- Large numbers of older people report being put on or increasing their dosage of anti-depressants during this time

'Nowhere to go for support. Even the telephone numbers previously given to me by GP surgery prior to covid19 do not cater for older women but only younger generations and men of all ages'

'I'm very depressed and apparently mental health services for older people are rationed.'

"Not being able to meet up with friends or mental health team has made my mental health and depression a lot worse."



Any questions?

