

DEPAUL

Homelessness has no place



'Everything Stopped!'

The Impacts of Covid-19 on Young People Experiencing Housing Instability

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Introduction

At Depaul UK we are committed to ending youth homelessness. Our services not only strive to prevent young people from falling into homelessness to begin with but also aim to ensure that safe and supportive accommodation is available to those who have nowhere else to turn. Over the past nine months Covid-19 has presented great challenges to our services and the young people who are supported by them. Throughout this period we have remained committed to promoting the voices and perspectives of the young people who we work with. By engaging with, and learning from, those with firsthand experience of housing instability, we hope to respond to Covid-19 in a way that keeps young people safe from the virus itself and empowers them to take steps out of homelessness and towards suitable accommodation.

There is growing evidence to suggest that while many of us are experiencing challenges due to Covid-19, vulnerable young people, such as those in our services, are feeling the negative consequences of the pandemic particularly acutely ^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}. In response to the first lockdown, the Government took positive action by providing all people experiencing rough sleeping with emergency accommodation

through the “Everyone In” initiative. However, as the pandemic continues, growing evidence suggests that youth homelessness is rising ^{1, 6}. In London alone, 368 young people aged from 16 to 25 were found to be experiencing street homelessness between July and September this year – a 47 percent increase compared to the same quarter of 2019 ⁶. This statistic suggests that many young people, who are already in precarious housing situations, may well be being pushed into homelessness as a result of Covid-19.

This report presents the findings of a research study that explored how the pandemic is impacting young people in our services. The research not only sought to uncover prominent issues experienced by young people that have been caused or exacerbated by the pandemic, but also aimed to understand how these issues may result in an increased likelihood of homelessness. We hope that the insights in this report will support the sector to respond to the pandemic in a way that minimises the ongoing threat of the virus itself and protects young people from homelessness and the dangers associated with it.

Methodology

A mixed method approach was used to explore how Covid-19 has been affecting the young people in Depaul UK’s services. A questionnaire was issued across all services between August and October 2020. This helped us to understand the scale of the issues caused or exacerbated by the pandemic. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were arranged with four young people, all with differing journeys through homelessness, in early November 2020. From these interviews, we developed case studies that provide more nuanced insights into the effect of the pandemic on housing instability and homelessness.

The research sought to address the following questions:

- › How is Covid-19 impacting young people experiencing housing instability?
- › How is Covid-19 affecting the known drivers of youth homelessness?

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was drafted by Depaul UK’s Head of Data, Evaluation & Research in close consultation with the wider Data, Evaluation & Research team. To ensure that the questionnaire generated insights into the pandemic’s impact on the drivers of youth homelessness, the following areas were covered:

1. Relationships.
2. Education, employment and financial stability.
3. Mental health and emotional wellbeing.
4. Housing and homelessness.

The survey was distributed to all services in physical form. This included both prevention and floating support services as well as a variety of youth-specific accommodation projects offering differing levels of support. Additional documentation was provided to inform service staff of the aims of the

research. Staff were asked to circulate the questionnaire to the young people they were working with, providing support where necessary.

To maximise the response, an online version of the questionnaire was also made available. This was used by services that had limited or no face-to-face contact with their clients due to Covid-19. To maintain control over who was completing the survey, services and young people were asked not to forward the link to anyone or publish it online. It was made clear to all services that paper completions were preferred.

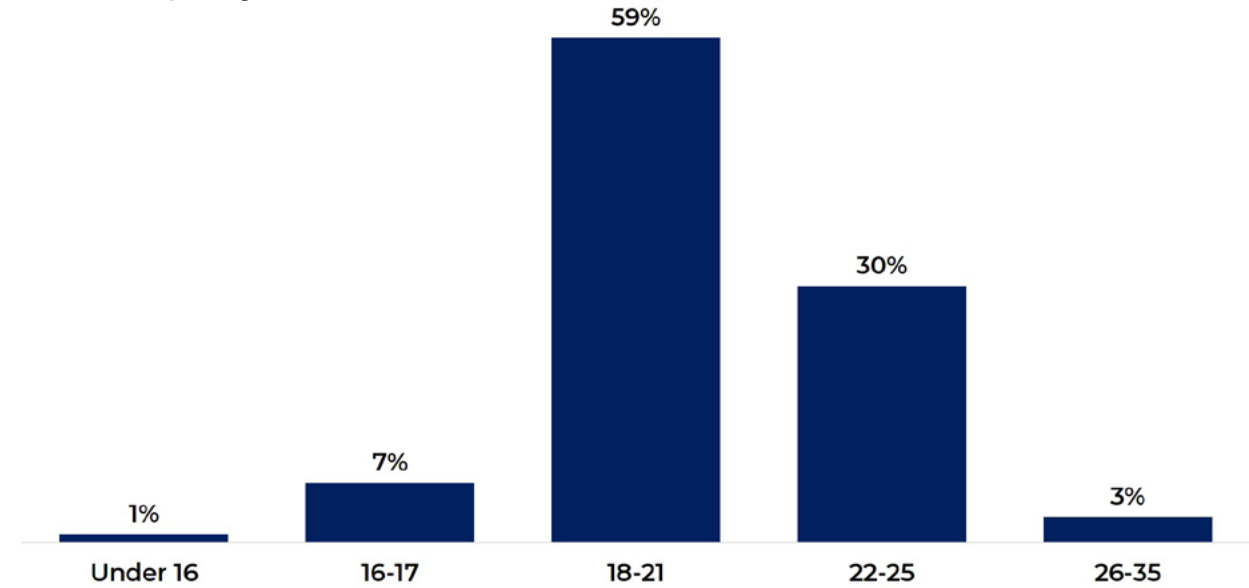
The questionnaire was anonymous and asked for no identifying information. However, young people who participated were invited to enter a prize draw to win one of six vouchers. To do so, they were required to leave their name and contact details.

The Questionnaire Sample

The questionnaire was completed by 116 young people. One respondent was under 16, eight were aged between 16 and 17; 68 were between 18 and 21; 35 were between 22 and 25; three were between 26 and 35, and one young person chose not to disclose their age. Of those who chose to disclose their gender identity, there was a relatively balanced split with just under half (46 percent) identifying as female, and just over half (53 percent) as male. One young person identified as non-binary.

While a large proportion of the sample (88 percent) identified as heterosexual, a notable 12 percent were members of the LGBTQ+ community, including four percent who identified as gay or lesbian and eight percent as bisexual. In terms of ethnicity, the young people who completed the questionnaire reflected the ever present diversity across our services. Of those who disclosed their ethnicity, 27 percent identified as either Black, African, Caribbean or Black British; 61 percent identified as

Chart 1: Sample Age Breakdown



Base: All respondents (115)

White British or White European; six percent identified as Asian or Asian British; seven percent identified as having a mixed ethnicity. The make-up of the sample in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity generally reflects that of our overall client cohort, indicating appropriate representation of all groups.

The Case Studies

Due to the restrictions of Covid-19, the case study interviews were all carried out with clients residing in London to minimise unnecessary travel. The young people were encouraged to reflect on their journeys through homelessness and were specifically asked to think about how Covid-19 may have impacted on their experiences. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and summarised to present within this report.

Table 1: Case study client breakdown

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Location	Housing Status
Justin	Male	20	Greater London	Peer-led accommodation*
Louis	Male	24	Greater London	Supported accommodation
Charlie	Female	21	Greater London	Local Authority temporary accommodation
Jackie	Female	25	Greater London	Council accommodation

* In peer-led accommodation, one tenant in each property takes on a leadership role, coordinating with Depaul UK staff on issues like property maintenance. In return for these increased responsibilities, the lead tenant receives a contribution for a deposit on another property when they move on.

Relationships

Covid-19 will have had an impact on many of our personal relationships. Although each individual's situation is different, the pandemic appears to have typically affected our relationships in two distinctive ways:

- 1. The ongoing economic challenges of the pandemic, alongside the high pressures of confinement, may have placed strain on the relationships we have within our immediate living environments.
- 2. The enforced social restrictions implemented to limit the spread of the virus may have resulted in a disconnect from family and friends leading to feelings of isolation.

For young people who are often already exposed to volatile social situations, the effect of the pandemic on their relationships may be considerable. As shown in Charts 2 and 3, the pandemic has placed strain on many young people's relationships within our services.

Six out of 10 (60 percent) survey respondents stated that the pandemic has had a strong negative effect (25 percent) or slight negative effect (35 percent) on their personal relationships. Specifically, nearly three quarters (74 percent) of respondents agreed that the pandemic had resulted in them feeling isolated from family and friends, with 40 percent strongly agreeing.

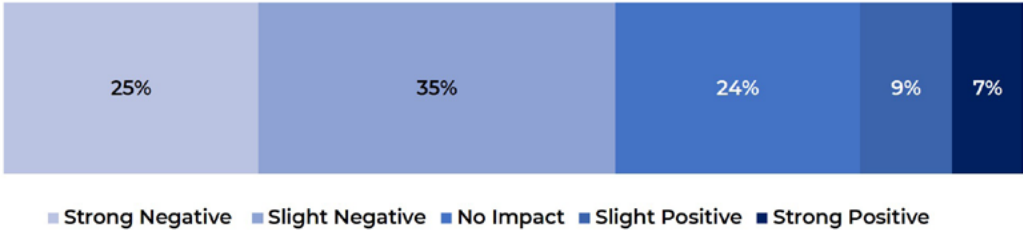
This is particularly concerning given new research suggesting that the social deprivation experienced by young people (aged 12-24) as a result of the pandemic is stalling key emotional and social development due to the absence of face-to-face interactions ⁷.

Linked to the isolation experienced by many, more than a third (35 percent) of respondents agreed that the pandemic had resulted in weakened support from their social networks. This is likely to make day-to-day living more difficult, especially for those who rely on support for specific functions such as childcare. Our previous research has shown how critical relationships can be to young people experiencing housing instability⁸. Not only do supportive relationships reduce the levels of risk young people are exposed to while they are out of stable accommodation, they also play a key role in enabling young people to take steps out of homelessness and towards more suitable accommodation⁸.

"I was getting a lot of support from my baby's grandparents but due to Covid-19 they couldn't come and this made things hard for me living on my own with a baby and no family support."

Kirsty, 20

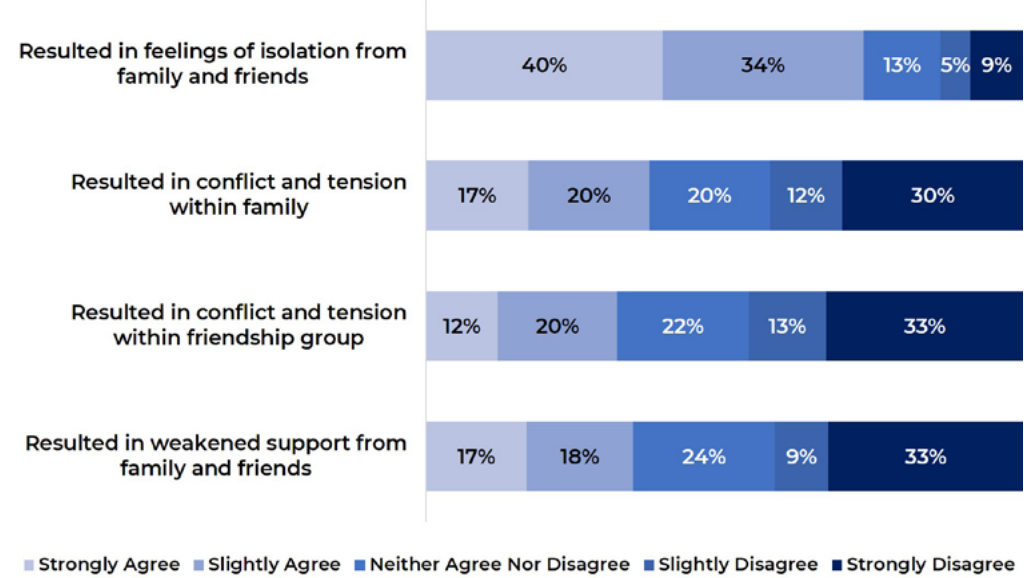
Chart 2: Impact of Covid-19 on personal relationships (family and friends)



Base: All respondents (115)

In contrast to the absence of support from positive social connections, there was also evidence to suggest that the pandemic has exacerbated the negative elements of young people’s relationships. More than a third (37 percent) of respondents felt the pandemic has resulted in conflict and/or tension within their families, and a similar proportion (32 percent) felt that the pandemic had resulted in conflict and/or tension within their friendship groups. For many young people across our services, personal relationships were already volatile before the pandemic and they are often one of the main factors contributing to their housing instability. These findings are particularly concerning given that our previous research has found that negative relationships within living environments, as well as across wider social networks, have the potential to expose young people to an increased risk of harm⁸.

Chart 3: Impact of Covid-19 on aspects of personal relationships



Base: All respondents (115)

Evidence from elsewhere suggests that the experience of Depaul’s clients is reflective of a wider trend among young people experiencing housing instability. For example, recent research from Centrepont suggests that the pandemic is increasing the likelihood of youth homelessness due to the stresses it places on relationships¹.

Justin’s story

Living at home was all right. I was living with my brother and my mother. I was working. I was doing what I needed to do in the house. Couldn’t really complain.

I was working in construction. The thing I enjoyed most was working inside of the penthouses. I went into a couple, top floor, nice with nice views. When we got the news about Covid spreading, my manager told me: “I can’t allow you to work in flats.” He said there was no work available for me at that time. The last day of work was actually on my birthday.

After two months of not working, I started to feel really down. I didn’t feel motivated to do anything. It affected my relationship with my family quite dramatically. It used to be that after work I’d come in, I’d cook, socialise, play some card games. But I didn’t feel like talking to anyone because I didn’t feel like anyone would understand what I was going through.

I had a fight with my brother and went to my friend’s place. I got a call from my mum, at about eight o’clock, saying that she doesn’t want me to come back. The next morning I went home and the locks were changed. So I just picked up a couple of my things and went straight down to the council. They said they couldn’t help me because, due to Covid, there was no one in the building. That’s when I knew that I was on my own.

I was a week or two sleeping on a park bench. I had no money. I went to my friend’s place and he said I could stay there once in a while. In the flat it was him and his girlfriend, and his sister was living there too, with her new baby. So I had to be sleeping on the floor, and most nights I would be wandering the streets.

I was doing that for about three months. One night I went to sleep on a bench for maybe an hour. When I woke up there was someone next to me. They ran off with one of my bags. I could never really forget that experience. I was scared for my life. He could have done anything to me. It’s kind of rough out there.

Eventually, the council put me in touch with Depaul UK. I got a viewing and on the same day I said: “Yeah, this is the home for me.” The day before I moved in, I was excited and relieved, especially when I saw the bed. When I first moved in, I didn’t even pack away my clothes. I just went straight to bed. Probably the best sleep I’d had in months, to be fair.

Depaul UK has helped me to find work. They helped me get my uniform for my new job. They helped me sort out my CV. If it wasn’t for them doing that, I wouldn’t have got this job that I have now. It’s warehouse work, which I’m already used to. I’m enjoying it. I’m enjoying the work and I’m enjoying where I’m staying, too.

I see that as my lowest that I’ve ever been in my life so far. But I can’t give up. I have to keep on trying. Keep on moving forward. My hopes and goals for next year are being able to get back into construction work. To start being happy. To start living life again.

Education, Employment and Financial Stability

Education plays a critical role in both preventing young people from falling into homelessness and supporting them on their journeys towards economic independence and stable accommodation⁹. Research carried out by The Centre for Education & Youth identifies three ways in which professionals across educational settings can prevent homelessness among young adults⁹:

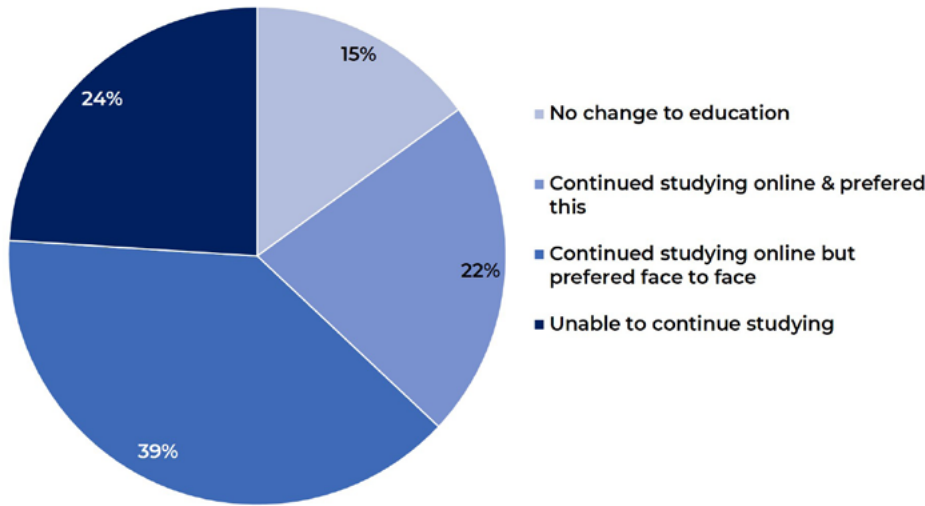
1. Primary prevention – Working with young people and their families to prevent new cases of homelessness before the point of crisis.
2. Secondary prevention – Early identification and treatment of current cases of homelessness (supporting young people at the point of family breakdown).
3. Tertiary prevention – Working with young people who are already homeless to prevent long term, entrenched and repeated rough sleeping.

As well as these direct forms of homelessness prevention, the long-term benefits of education cannot be underestimated. Specifically, young people’s engagement with education arms them with the academic qualifications to progress and supports them to develop the necessary confidence and social skills to find sustainable work. The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted upon young people’s ability to access education and, therefore, benefit from these advantages.

Of the 116 young people who participated in our survey, 54 were in some form of education prior to Covid-19. As shown in Chart 4, the vast majority (85 percent) of this group experienced changes to their education.

Nearly a quarter (24 percent) of those who were in education prior to Covid-19 stated that they were unable to continue with their studies due to the pandemic. The potential effect of this is significant. Not only could it damage these young people’s prospects

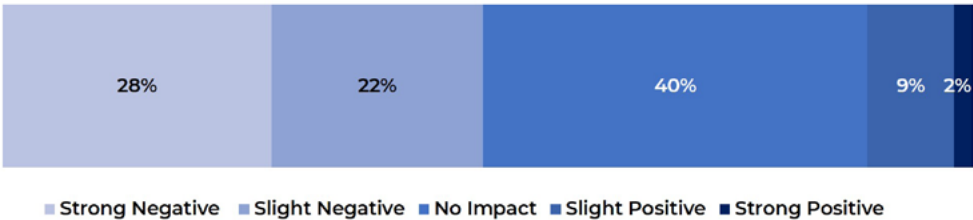
Chart 4: Impact of Covid-19 on education status



Base: All in education at start of the pandemic (54)*

*Low base size – treat percentages with caution.

Chart 5: Impact of Covid-19 on personal finances



Base: All respondents (115)

of taking steps towards employment and financial stability, it may also result in an increased risk of homelessness due to the loss of contact with professionals who have safeguarding responsibilities. A further 61 percent of those in education were able to continue to study but only in an online capacity. Of this group, 64 percent preferred face to face which implies that many of the benefits of education, particularly those associated with social interaction, may not be realised through online methods.

Employment & Financial Stability

The pandemic has had an unparalleled impact on the economy. Recent data from the Office of National Statistics shows that from April to June 2020 the UK experienced a 20.4 percent economic downturn, marking the largest decline since quarterly records began¹⁰. While the weight of this decline

has been felt by many across society, there is considerable evidence to suggest that young people have felt the effects of the economic downturn most sharply^{5, 3}. Our data supports this, with half (50 percent) of the young people who responded to our survey saying the pandemic had negatively affected their finances.

Existing evidence suggests that young people have been disproportionately excluded from the labour market as a result of the pandemic. For example, the Resolution Foundation found that one-third of 18-to-24-year-old employees (excluding students) have lost jobs or been furloughed, compared to one in six prime-age adults (35-to-49-year-olds)⁵. This is likely to be related to wider economic patterns that place young people at greater risk of unemployment due to the unstable nature

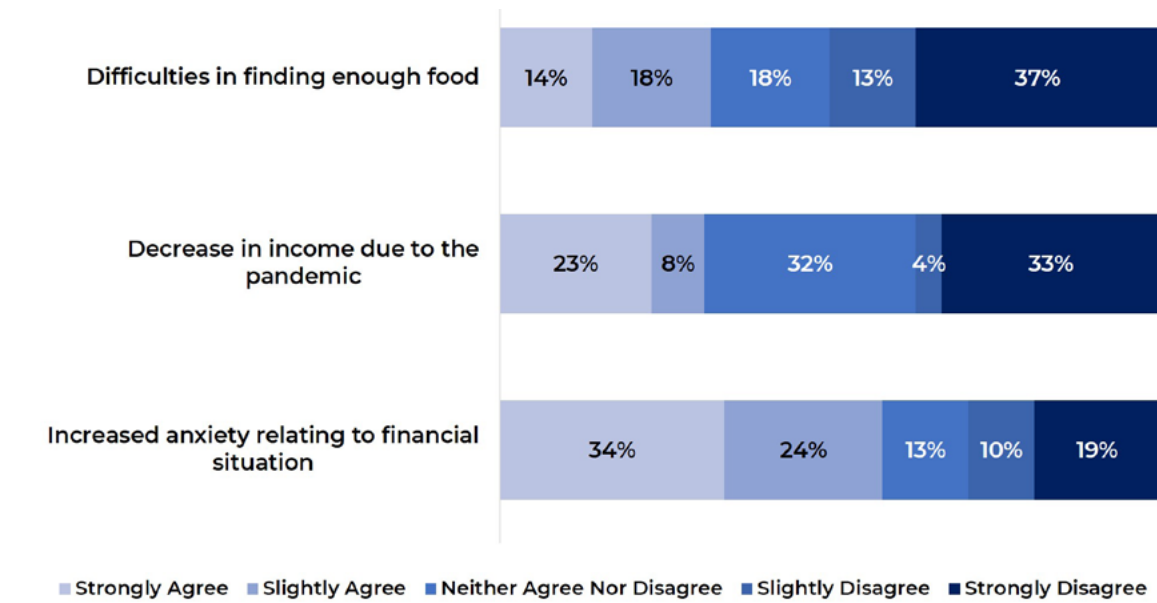


of their work. Specifically, within the UK, around 350,000 young people aged 16 to 24 are dependent on unstable “zero hours contracts”. It is estimated that around 22 percent of these roles are accounted for within the hospitality sector, which has been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19¹¹.

Among our sample we also found high levels of employment disruption due to Covid-19. Of the 116 young people who responded to our survey, 27 were in employment prior to Covid-19. Of this number, 15 lost their jobs as a direct consequence of the pandemic, four had their hours reduced and six were furloughed. Only two of the 27 managed to maintain their employment at the level it was before the pandemic.

While those who had employment prior to Covid-19 may have experienced changes to their financial situation most acutely, our research found that the pandemic had wider effects on respondents’ finances. As Chart 6 shows, almost a third (31 percent) experienced a decrease in income because of the pandemic and almost six in ten (58 percent) felt more anxious about their personal finances. Shockingly, 36 of the young people who completed our survey said that they had struggled to find enough food as a result of Covid-19.

Chart 6: Impact of Covid-19 on aspects of personal finances



Base: All respondents (115)

Louis's story

At 20, I became homeless because of my dad. My dad has always put me down. I'd held it in over the years but I'd just had enough one day. I've got Autism Spectrum disorder, and anger issues. I got bullied a lot at school. My dad and I had a massive fight and it turned into a punch-up. My mum separated us and then she kicked me out of the house. My mum didn't want me to leave, but you know.

I was living on friends' and families' couches for a year and a half. It was quite rough really. I was going back and forward from work experience and college. After a while, I'd do a week at my nan's, then home for a weekend, then go to my uncle's. It could get exhausting, with all the travelling. I just didn't have somewhere to call my home.

I moved to Depaul UK for a year and a half. I've had a bedroom with a built-in kitchen but I share a bathroom. I'd never slept in my own room. It was quite nice to have a door. The staff at the project were really helpful. They helped me with paperwork and stuff, and anything I needed. And they'd point me in the right direction.

I had studied animal care at college. Before lockdown, I was volunteering at an animal centre. I was going to Prince's Trust twice a week, going to Mencap, had work on the side. I run my own business. I'm a pirate performer and entertainer. I do all the stuff, gun-shooting, flaming torch, performing at festivals, birthday parties, summer fairs, that kind of thing. May onwards is my busy months, with festivals and that. When Covid came along, all my bookings were cancelled. The last gig I did was in March.

Everything stopped! Work and volunteering stopped. I've seen a drop in my income. It's been hard. I tried to get back to my old job, delivering leaflets. Try and get money in, do odd jobs. I get Personal Independence Payment, but I almost lost it before lockdown. Since I moved into a new place, I have to find a new way to make money now.

So I've been doing my flat up, cleaning and decorating. I've got Christmas gigs in the diary but I don't think they'll go ahead now. They keep changing the rules every day. If Covid wasn't happening, I'd be normally working, coming into Halloween bookings, and then Christmas and New Year are the busiest time for me, all the parties. But not this year.

I'm just going to see what happens. There's not much I can say or do, really. I hope I can do the bookings that I've got next year. A friend of mine is getting married next year. He moved to America, but I was supposed to be going over for his wedding.

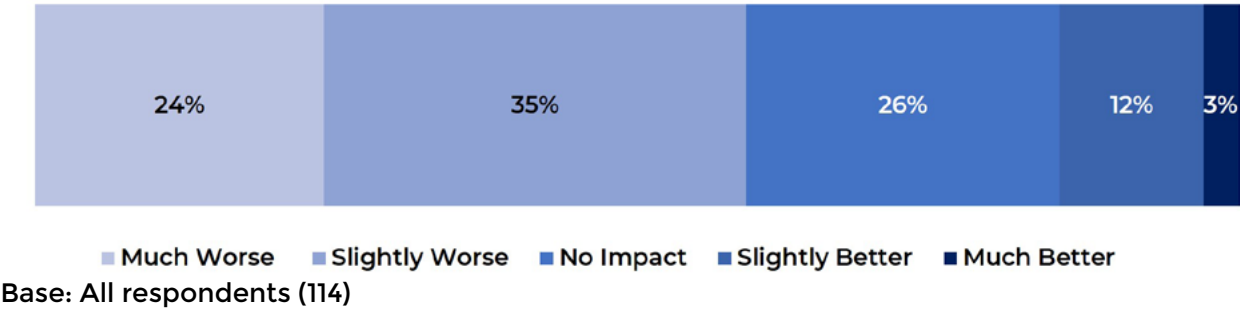
What gives me hope for the future? I don't know really. Apart from hoping that next year will be better than this year. I'm hoping we leave this year and leave “the Corona” behind. That would be nice.

Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing

Mental health issues among young people have been shown to be a significant contributing factor to both the scale and severity of youth homelessness^{12, 13}. Our previous research has suggested that weakened mental health may be linked to engagement with high-risk behaviours and create barriers to moving out of homelessness⁸. In contrast, young people who experience mental stability and high levels of emotional wellbeing make healthier decisions in relation to risk and are typically more capable of continuing on their journey out of homelessness.

While the threat of the Covid-19 virus itself is significantly lower to young people in comparison to their older counterparts, there is evidence to suggest that the combination of risk to family members, enforced quarantines paired with wider social isolation, economic exclusion, and an uncertain future, has had a significantly damaging impact on many young people's mental health^{7, 11, 14}. As shown in Charts 7 and 8, our data supports this.

Chart 7: Impact of Covid-19 on mental health

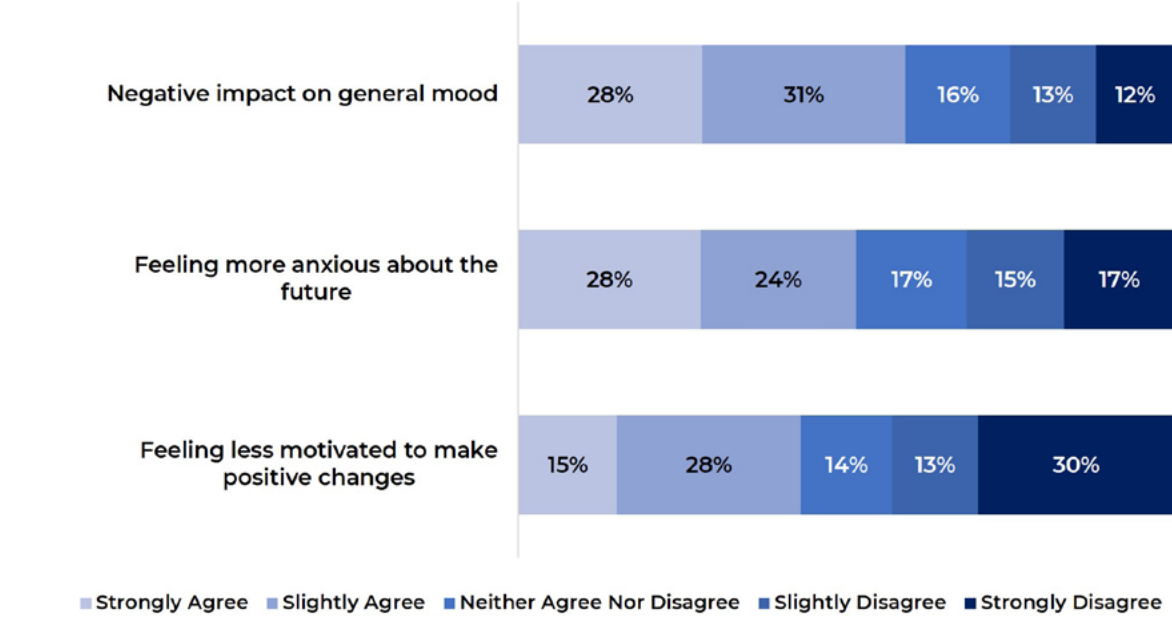


Of the young people who completed our survey, around six in ten (59 percent) stated that their mental health had been negatively impacted by the pandemic. More specifically, the same proportion (59 percent) felt that their general mood had been negatively impacted due to the pandemic, and more than half (52 percent) felt more anxious about the future. Notably, 43 percent felt less motivated to make positive changes to their lives because of the pandemic. This is a particularly concerning finding considering how critical it is for young people to invest actively in their own futures in order to progress.

'It has had a negative effect on my mental health because I am at home with my mum more and haven't been able to see my friends as much. Also I don't have the escape of college and work as much'

Nicole, 21

Chart 8: Impact of Covid-19 on aspects of mental health



Charlie’s story

I got pregnant at 17. Completely unplanned. Contraception doesn't work for everyone. I was studying business at university. I'm not with my son's father. He's involved here and there. Right now, he's in prison, so it's hard for him to be involved. I deal with anxiety a lot, feel anxious. It feels weird to say I have anxiety because I'm a very confident person. But I still get anxiety attacks. Sometimes it takes me ages to leave my house and go outside.

I turned 18 four weeks after I had my son. It was insane. I was at home, studying and stuff. I knew there wouldn't be enough room at my dad's for me and my son. I did get moved, initially, to a place in Peckham. It was all right. I was there for two years, but then the council moved me to a new property, downgraded me to a tiny studio. The place was uninhabitable. The cooker was less than a metre from the bed, with the wires from the cooker running along the back of the bed. Trip wires everywhere. There were pests there. I didn't stay in the property even one night. The council agreed it wasn't habitable and moved me again, all the way to Leyton.

It was so far from my support network and my son's nursery was in Elephant and Castle. I wasn't changing the nursery because it was the cheapest I could find. Every morning I'd go from Leyton, all the way to Elephant and Castle to drop my son off at nursery, then go back to Liverpool Street, and I'd get to my work at 11 in the morning. I had to leave my job. Then the council moved me to Elephant & Castle. My son and I moved four times in six months.

I had support from Depaul UK the whole time I was getting moved around, they were always there for me. I was always on the phone to them. I had homelessness support, help with housing applications and processes, emotional support. They were amazing. I'm still using those services. During Covid and the last few months, my new support worker has checked in on how I'm doing.

The new property was completely unfurnished, nothing there but a cooker and a fridge. When Covid came, I just had my bed. I was still trying to get a sofa, a table, washing machine and stuff. I was really stressed because the shops would always be empty. I was scared because my little boy hadn't had his vaccinations yet and his nursery closed down.

My Universal Credit did increase, by like £70 or £80. I mean, I don't want to stay at home, but I will if I don't have a job that pays double the nursery fees. In reality, I'd be left with less than what Universal Credit would have given me for staying at home, it doesn't make sense. Plus, it's hard to get jobs and lots of people are redundant as well.

What gives me hope other than my little boy? I'd have to say my game plan. I know exactly where I want to be. I want to have my own business. What gets me through it and helps me not lose my mind is that I know what's going to happen in my future and it's not going to be like this. Everything is going to be for something.



Housing and Homelessness

In addition to the socio-economic challenges highlighted within this research, the pandemic has also exacerbated the ongoing difficulties young people face when looking to secure more stable accommodation. Recent research from Crisis, as well as Depaul’s own experience of delivering the programme, suggests that while “Everyone In” ensured that people experiencing homelessness had somewhere to stay during the first lockdown, attempts by local authorities and homelessness charities to support people into more stable accommodation have remained difficult due to structural barriers which pre-date Covid-19 ¹⁵.

As shown in Chart 10, our research suggests that the pandemic is having a notable impact on many young people’s ability to move onto more suitable accommodation, with a third (34 percent) of respondents stating that the circumstances have made it more difficult to make positive housing changes.

Around a quarter (24 percent) felt that their housing situation was less stable due to the pandemic. This is likely to be related to financial struggles as more than two in ten (22 percent) felt that it had become more difficult to meet their housing costs due to Covid-19.

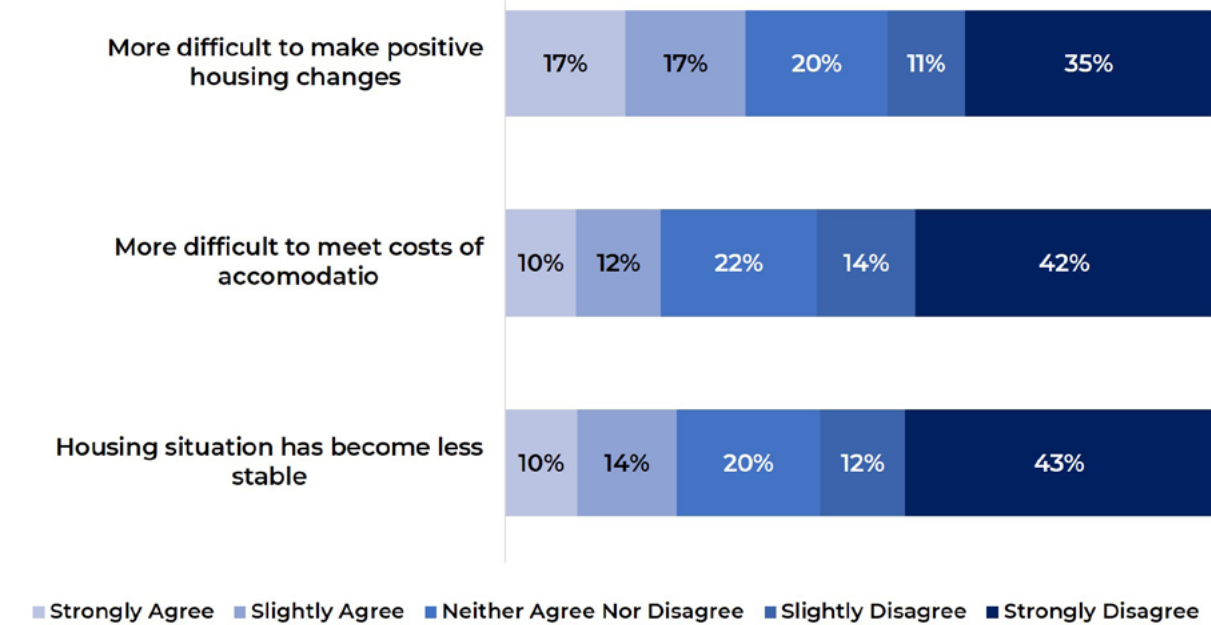
Nearly a quarter (22 percent) of the respondents had experienced changes to their housing situations as a direct consequence of the pandemic. As shown in Table 2, there was a shift away from informal temporary environments, such as staying with family and friends, and an increased demand on service-provided temporary accommodation. This shift may be symptomatic of the conflicts experienced across personal relationships, and supports wider evidence which suggests that the current restrictions on household mixing is resulting in young people being unable to reside with family and friends when falling out of stable accommodation ^{15, 16}.

Our findings suggest that the pandemic has led to more young people sleeping rough. Around one in eight (12 percent) respondents said they had experienced rough sleeping on one or more occasion due to Covid-19. Of the 14 young people who had experienced homelessness, eight had faced conflict/tension within their families, and 12 had experienced mental health issues as a direct consequence of the pandemic.

Table 2: Accommodation shifts due to Covid-19

Accommodation type	Before Covid-19	During Covid-19/time of questionnaire
Informal temporary living arrangements (family and friends’ accommodation)	17%	7%
Formal temporary living arrangements (Depaul and non-Depaul supported, foster care)	53%	66%
Settled accommodation (local authority/housing association accommodation, private rented accommodation, with partner)	23%	26%
Base	115	116

Chart 9: Impact of Covid-19 on aspects of housing



Base: All respondents (115)

Jackie’s story

I became homeless when I was 16. I'd fall out with my mum, my five brothers and sisters, hit things. It was chaotic. My dad took me to a homeless shelter where I stayed until I was 16. I moved to Margate with my boyfriend, but he ended up running away. At the time, I didn't know I was pregnant yet. Then I got arrested and sent to prison. I was arrested because a dog got into someone's property and injured a person. It wasn't mine, it was a dog I was looking after. I was in prison for six months.

After getting out of prison, I lived in a mother-and-baby foster care centre for about two months. The authorities took my daughter from me, before my mum went to court and got special guardianship of her, so now she lives full-time with my mum.

I bid on a flat with the council, where I've been for five years now. I live here with my two cats, Milo and Maisie. I see my daughter quite a lot now, sometimes three or four times a week. She's stayed over at my house twice, now that lockdown is easing.

I got a job. I was giving money to provide for my daughter and to help my mum. A couple of years ago, I was put in touch with Depaul UK and the iAspire project. They asked if I wanted help with food vouchers and helped me with my DBS checks for my job applications. It helped.

For six months last year, I was a support worker with adults with disabilities in supported accommodation. I loved my job. I woke up every day so happy to know that I was going there. Having the job helped me feel more independent.

I was doing 70-something hours a week, sometimes 14 hours a day. I wanted to do a couple of part-time jobs instead, so I had more flexibility. But because I didn't tell them I was going to apply for another job, they let me go, no notice. I went back on to Universal Credit. I definitely noticed the difference, financially.

I got another support worker role, which coincided with Covid. I would have been making £800 a month. I started there a week before lockdown began. They would normally contact me on a Friday and tell me my shifts, then all of a sudden they just cancelled all my shifts. I had only done one. They said they only wanted one or two staff members to come in. I wasn't offered furlough or anything.

I've been claiming Universal Credit again. I've got some advances that I need to pay off. For a while during lockdown I didn't have to pay them, which helped, but they've kicked back in again now. I've been applying for more jobs, but I feel like my life right now is on a pause. I've been getting food parcels, because I haven't got enough money, because I have to pay off my debts.

I hope to get back into work, find a stable job again. I think that will help, with my personal life too, with my relationships and my family life. I think I'll get a stable job and earn a stable wage. I'm a person to help people. So when the support worker role popped up, to help people, I thought, "I'll give it a try", and you know what, it was my best job. I wish I could go back there.

Depaul UK Support

Due to the issues evidenced within this report, Depaul UK's support has become increasingly vital to young people during the pandemic. Our services have had to adapt quickly to protect young people's mental, social and economic wellbeing. To learn from the challenges we have faced we have encouraged young people across our services to provide feedback. The majority of the young people who completed the questionnaire gave positive feedback when reflecting on the way in which our services have supported them through this challenging time. Specifically, of the respondents to our survey:

- 85 percent felt that Depaul UK has done a good job **at keeping them safe** during the pandemic,
- 92 percent felt **continually supported** by Depaul during the pandemic,
- 87 percent felt that they had been **sufficiently consulted** regarding Depaul's response to the pandemic, and
- 79 percent felt that they had been **given sufficient opportunities to feedback** to Depaul's service about our response to the pandemic.



Conclusion and Recommendations

Covid-19 has undoubtedly placed a momentous strain on our society. While we have all faced challenges, the findings from this research supports wider evidence that the pandemic has had a disproportionately damaging effect on vulnerable young people^{1, 2, 3, 4}. The combination of a sharp economic downturn, as well as enforced social distancing measures, has not only increased the financial pressures faced by young people but also placed strain on their personal relationships and mental health. For those in precarious housing situations, these issues represent a significant threat due to the causal relationship they hold with youth homelessness.

While we must take collective responsibility for ensuring that the spread of the virus is limited, to protect vulnerable young people from homelessness and socio-economic exclusion those in positions of power must act with urgency and conviction. To truly support young people experiencing housing instability during the pandemic, we need sustainable solutions rather than “sticking

plaster” initiatives. Resources and efforts must be focused on tackling the root causes of youth homelessness. This action will not only protect the most vulnerable young people at a time of great need, but could also mark a renewed commitment to end youth homelessness for good.

We hope that the evidence generated from this research brings to light the challenges faced by young people who all too often struggle to get their voices heard. We urge the youth homelessness sector to use the insights in our report to continue to respond to the pandemic in a way that keeps young people safe from Covid-19, homelessness and the harms associated with periods of housing instability.



Recommendations

To ensure we are able to provide vulnerable young people with the best support possible during the pandemic and stall the worrying rise in youth homelessness, we ask the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to:

- Ring-fence a proportionate amount of any new funding for homelessness and rough sleeping for young person-only services to provide emergency accommodation for rough sleepers aged under 25,
- Ring-fence a proportionate allocation for young people of any future funding for long-term move-on accommodation, and
- Create a new national youth homelessness prevention strategy, working closely with charities working in youth homelessness such as Depaul UK.

The Department for Work and Pensions should:

- Make permanent the £20 uplift in Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit, and extend it to people on other income replacement benefits, and
- Bring forward from 2023 the introduction of exemptions announced in the 2020 Budget to the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) of support with housing costs for care leavers, young people who have slept rough and survivors of domestic abuse and human trafficking.

Limitations & Suggestions for further research

While this research has given an indicative insight into the experiences of many young people across our services, the small sample size makes it difficult to suggest that our findings are representative of all young people experiencing housing instability. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the impact that Covid-19 has had on young people experiencing housing instability, a larger sample would be required consisting of young people across a wider range of youth specialist support services.

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