

News links from October 2020

Child Mental Health

The mental health of children and young people has quite rightly been receiving almost as much attention as child food poverty. This [BBC News report](#) has links to evidence about the impact of isolation on the young, and reports that a group of academics who work with children and adolescents have set up an [online noticeboard](#) collecting scientific evidence that these age groups are being forgotten by policy-makers.

*In the first weeks of the new term the [Young Minds](#) charity surveyed over 2000 11-18 year olds with a history of mental health needs, and found that 61% felt their mental health had initially got worse since returning to school. Only 15% agreed that there was enough information and support available for their mental health at their school. The charity is calling for a ring-fenced **Resilience Fund**, which would ensure schools could commission the mental health and wellbeing support that young people need. [Read more](#)*

*[The Mental Health of Children and Young People in England Survey](#) published by NHS Digital on 22nd October has found that the proportion of children with mental health problems is now 50% higher than before the pandemic, prompting the Children's Commissioner, **Anne Longfield** to warn that this increase should shock the Government into action. [Read more.](#)*

Child Mental Health - cont'd

Polly Waite, co-author of a [University of Oxford study](#) into the health of children and adolescents during the pandemic, said the number of children who would meet the threshold for clinical diagnosis had increased by 35% during the pandemic, and that children from lower-income families are 2½ times more likely to suffer poor mental health. [Read more](#)

In an [open letter](#) to “Policy Makers and the Public” psychology professionals have been sharing their concerns about the psychological impact of the measures taken to combat the pandemic, including the information that “. . . 80% of surveyed young people have reported a deterioration in their mental health. One in six children in England are now likely to meet criteria for a mental health problem, with reported increases in self-harm and abuse, reductions in learning and academic opportunities, delayed presentation to services, and a concerning suggestion of increased child suicide. Contributing factors to these issues are likely to be multi-faceted and multi-level.”

The signatories assert that it is crucial for policymakers to consider, and constantly re-consider, the balance between managing threats to life and core human needs for short and long-term wellbeing. They hope that the professional concerns outlined in their letter will help to redress the balance.

[Read more](#)

Free School Meals Holiday Provision Saga

We know that you will have seen the high profile coverage of the campaign to extend free school meal provision to cover school holidays in England as has already been done in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The excellent Marcus Rashford is now an MBE. The Prime Minister has promised no child will go hungry over the winter but seems keen to find an alternative method to avoid being accused of another U-turn.

The Ecorys report assessing the impact of the 2019 HAF schemes has still not been published, leading to speculation that Government are reluctant to roll out a national scheme. Some Conservative MPs oppose on the grounds that it's the responsibility of parents while others such as Robert Halfon MP support, most publicly Baroness Warsi on 'Have I Got News for You' who suggested some of her colleagues need compassion training.

WATCH THIS SPACE!

Online Harm

A six-part podcast has been produced by the Internet Watch Foundation. **Pixels from a Crime Scene** shines a spotlight on the clandestine world of child abuse, investigating why images and videos showing the sexual abuse of children are still spreading across the internet, and the battle to keep children safe.

You can subscribe through your usual podcast player or [see here](#) for more information.

The Local Government Association calls for a child-centred recovery

A recent LGA report describes how children and young people have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 crisis, with normal life completely transformed, services taken away and a increased range of hidden harms, poverty and mental health issues.

Councils have been at the forefront of local responses since day one and their report is part of a campaign ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review. It calls on the Government to:

- restore the £1.7 billion early intervention funding ahead of a surge in children's services demand
- introduce a cross-Whitehall strategy that puts children and young people at the heart of recovery
- take action to prevent the attainment gap from widening, including immediate work to stabilise the early years sector and support children and young people to attend school or to continue learning from home where required.

[Read the report](#)

Child Poverty

The British Association for Child and Adolescent Public Health (BACAPH) has [resources](#) showing the extent of child poverty in the UK and offering actions to tackle it. Initiatives include: Universal basic income; Living wages/benefits; Expansion of the free school meals programme; Free, high-speed internet to all households with children eligible for free school meals; Increased support of local services; and post-Covid mental health support.

Even before the pandemic child poverty had increased, according to [research](#) by the **Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University**, for the **End Child Poverty** coalition. In 2018-19, 30% of UK children were in poverty (in households with incomes after housing costs of less than 60% of the median). In England, 31% of children were below the breadline, compared with 28% in Wales, 25% in Northern Ireland and 24% in Scotland. Since 2014, child poverty has shot up across the north and midlands of England, fuelled by stagnating family incomes and the spiralling cost of housing. The increase was highest in Middlesbrough, (28% in 2014 to 41% in 2018/19).

Tower Hamlets (London) has the highest percentage of children in poverty (55.4%) and Birmingham (41.6%) had the highest outside London. According to the research, there were increases in 50% of countries and regions of the UK over the five year period.

[Read more](#)

Early Years

A study by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), has highlighted the importance of Early Years settings for babies and toddlers from lower socio-economic backgrounds. While 90% of families reported enjoying increased activities with their young children during lockdown, parents from disadvantaged backgrounds reported spending less time with their children, in particular activities requiring outdoor space and access to books.

[Read more](#)

Obesity

NHS Digital published data from the National Child Measurement Programme for 2019/2020 at the end of October. It covers children in Reception (4/5) and Year 6 (10/11) in mainstream state-maintained schools in England.

Obesity prevalence has increased in both groups - from 9.7% to 9.9% in Reception, and from 20.2% to 21% in Year 6. Boys have a higher obesity prevalence than girls, and children living in the most deprived areas were more than twice as likely to be obese than their better-off classmates.

[Read the full report](#)