



LIVING THROUGH A LOCKDOWN

Reflections and
recommendations
from young people at
risk of serious violence

About the charities:



STREETDOCTORS

At StreetDoctors we believe that knowledge is power, so we equip young people at risk of youth violence with the skills to become lifesavers in their communities and with the knowledge to make informed decisions about how to keep themselves and others safe.

✉ info@streetdoctors.org

🌐 streetdoctors.org

☎ 07763 457712

📷🐦📘 @StreetDoctors

Redthread

Redthread empower young people to thrive as they navigate the challenging transition to adulthood by integrating trauma-informed youth work into the health sector.

✉ info@redthread.org.uk

🌐 redthread.org.uk

☎ 020 3744 6888

📷🐦📘 @Redthreadyouth



We want to create social equality by radically transforming excluded young people's access to mental health services. Excluded young people are not the problem - in fact they hold the solutions to the problems they face.

✉ info@mac-uk.org

🌐 mac-uk.org

📷🐦📘 @macukcharity

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Introduction

Although there is a certain universality to adolescence, we know that the process of coming of age is ever-changing, and by no means a homogeneous experience. The very definition of what constitutes an adult isn't even fixed – while an 18-year-old is entitled to live independently should they wish to, many studies cite that brain development doesn't end until a person's mid-twenties.

In normal times, countless reports are dedicated to understanding young people's lives – but the coronavirus lockdown was unique in its ability to unite one portion of experience across the nation. While it is arguable that everyone experienced the same restrictions, this is not to say that lockdown was a great leveller. People were impacted differently, to varying degrees and across a range of factors. Concerns were also raised that young people were likely to be one of the most severely impacted groups in the longer term.

Our research – devised and conducted jointly between MAC-UK, Redthread and StreetDoctors – focuses on one group's specific experiences of lockdown. We surveyed young people who were already in touch with our organisations, those victims of, or at risk of, experiencing youth violence. We looked not only at the safeguarding implications of lockdown, but at their fears for the future, and the positive elements of this strange time in society. Yet even within this focused demographic, experiences and responses varied greatly.

Despite these differences, what is quickly apparent when looking at the responses is the key priority areas for young people. It is important to acknowledge and understand individual experiences, but we also hope these can inform some wider themes to learn from and take action on. They can be grouped into the four following areas: communication and community, support, safety and mental health.

In this report we will look in detail at these themes, examining youth perspectives on them through the prism of these extraordinary circumstances. We will draw out what problems have emerged during lockdown and the change that young people would like to see in the future. What emerges is insightful and urgent, with much to be concerned about and to act upon. But most strikingly throughout the results is a clear thread of hope – of a renewed focus on community, of a cohort who care and want the best for society.

This report is a snapshot. It looks at a specific moment in time under incredibly unusual circumstances. As such, it is difficult to make specific or longer term policy recommendations based on the responses from young people.



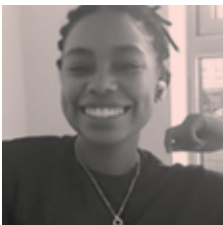
This report lays bare the feelings and experiences of young people at risk of or involved in violence during lockdown. It powerfully demonstrates their pain, confusion and loneliness, their lack of support, their fears for their safety and their feelings of loss. But it also highlights their amazing active citizenship during the crisis, and their hopes for a more positive future, one that they desperately want to make a positive contribution to. StreetDoctors is thrilled to have been a part of empowering these young people to amplify their voices. Alongside our partners Redthread and MAC-UK we will be doing all we can to ensure their thoughts and opinions are heard by both regional and national decision makers, and acted on as a priority.

Lucie Russell CEO, StreetDoctors



While the national lockdown might be over, many communities know restrictions could imminently be imposed at a local level. It's vital we are ready. This time, it won't be unprecedented, and all agencies must have plans in place to protect the younger generation. This report gives an invaluable insight into the lives of those at risk of youth violence during a time of nation-wide crisis. We can all learn from it to keep the young people in our own communities safe in the next phase of tackling the pandemic, and in years to come.

John Poyton OBE CEO, Redthread



At MAC-UK, Redthread and StreetDoctors, we work with some of the most marginalised and excluded young people in the country, who are experiencing violence, or the threat of violence, in their daily lives. These young people are often presented as one-dimensional, as a monolithic group who are a danger to each other and wider society. What this report shows us is something people who work with them already know: that these young people are among the kindest and most compassionate in society, who are willing and eager to help out their communities as much as they can. It also shows us where we failed them as a society during the first lockdown, leaving young people feeling isolated and confused; provides us with a warning about the imminent and ongoing local lockdowns. If we are going to support these young people as they deserve to be supported, we need to truly co-design services with them, provide their communities with adequate resources and enable them to participate in acts of mutual aid by facilitating community engagement.

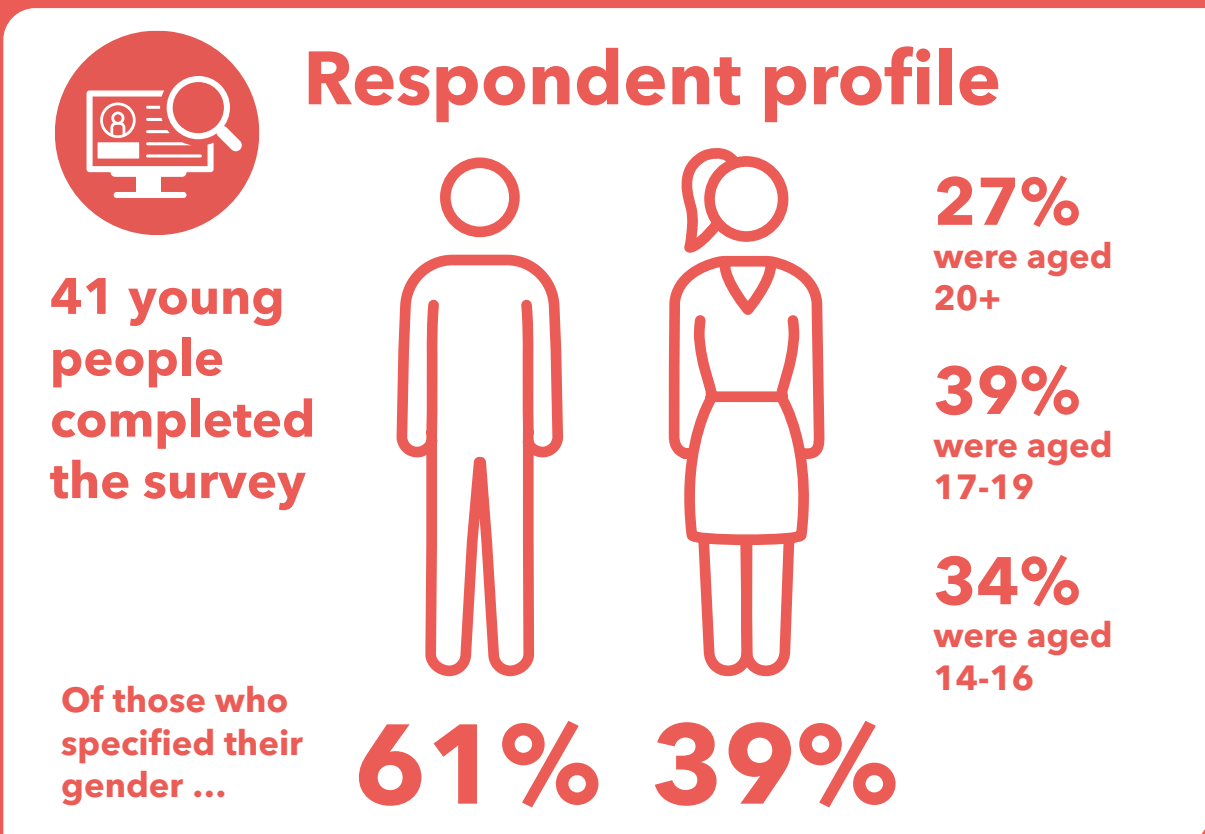
Jake Lake Policy, Public Health and Prevention Lead and
Dr Samantha Rennalls Trainee Clinical Psychologist, MAC-UK

Method

We asked young people at risk of youth violence who have received support from one or more of our organisations to share their experiences of lockdown. We received 44 responses, including two duplicate responses and one who did not consent or complete the survey. Therefore, **this report is based on analysis of 41 responses from people aged between 14 and 25**. For privacy purposes, demographic information was limited to age range, gender identity and place of residence.

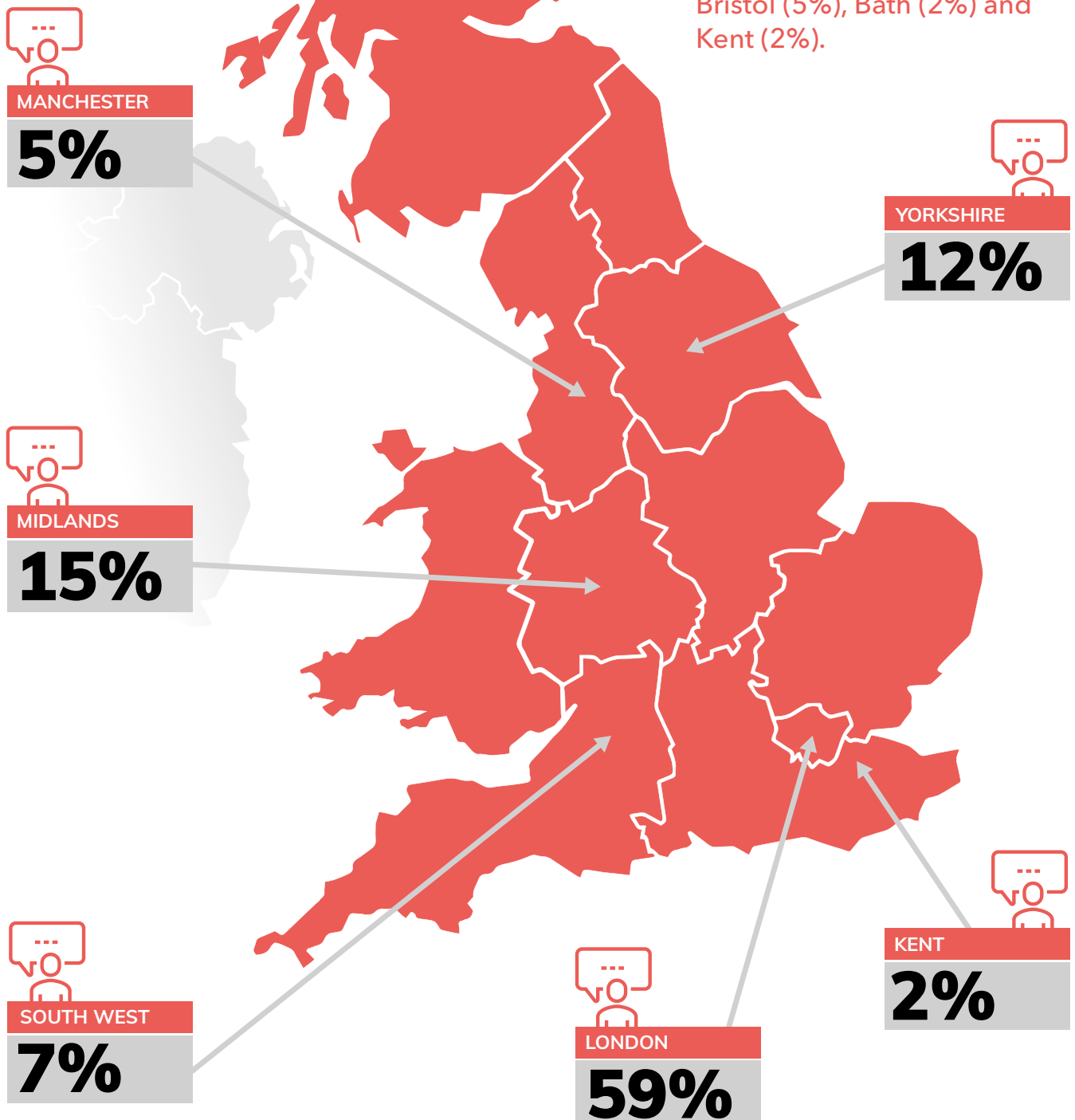
Young people, some with the support of youth workers, completed a 20-question online survey, detailing their experiences during lockdown. The majority of questions were open-ended, to prevent our preconceptions of lockdown from influencing young people's responses. In addition to three quantitative questions (asking young people to rate their general feelings around coronavirus and how much it has impacted their physical and mental health), the remaining 17 questions asked respondents to provide more in-depth reflections about how coronavirus and the resulting lockdown has affected their lives and life in their communities.

Responses were collected between 6/5/2020 and 15/6/2020, and were coded and analysed using Microsoft Excel.



Map of Respondents

59% of respondents were from London, 12% from Yorkshire and 15% from the Midlands (10% from Birmingham, 5% from Nottingham). The remainder were from Manchester (5%), Bristol (5%), Bath (2%) and Kent (2%).



Theme 1: Communication and Community

Young people share community-values

For many young people, lockdown will have been the first time that they have been surrounded by messages encouraging people to come together, help each other and celebrate the strength of community during a crisis.

In our survey, young people expressed great enthusiasm for community-based support and action. Young people valued the opportunity to build stronger relationships with their neighbours and local communities by working together to support each other.

"Everyone has become closer in my neighbourhood helping each other out if they need essential items and clapping every Thursday night for the carers."

Many were an active part of this community response; **39% of survey respondents identified ways they were getting involved**. These included:

Joining in with the
NHS clap for carers



Becoming an NHS
First Responder

Coming together
during Ramadan



Shopping for others

Meeting neighbours



"I have helped my local community by shopping for others."

Young people's enthusiasm for and engagement in community activity challenges the longstanding narrative that young people are individualistic, being ascribed labels such as 'Generation Me'. It also challenges the widely held view that young people who are affected by youth violence are not active and positive members of their local communities. The young people we all work with are at risk of violence, but despite this they show high levels of community spirit and compassion, something that is often missing when we discuss events in their communities.

Young people identified the need for more support for those most vulnerable in society and highlighted this as a priority for action moving forwards. A question in the survey asked young people what they would like to see from their MP:

"Give more support to vulnerable people to make sure they had medication and places to stay. Make sure that the elderly were being taken food and supplies. Give the vulnerable free soap, masks and hand sanitiser."

"Provide more funds for asylum seekers."

"Make sure vulnerable people have all the support they need during this time, People who have mental health issues [should] get the support they need easily."

The responses also suggest that young people would be receptive to more community-oriented messages that focus on young people's strengths and what they have to offer their neighbours and the local community. Continuing to provide meaningful ways for young people to maintain engagement could also reduce their risk of criminalisation, particularly during a lockdown.

"[I would like to see] more opportunities for young people to work or volunteer it would put less stress on jobs and try to keep the community together and make sure they feel safe in their environment."

Young people value clear communication

During the crisis, young people have found communications about the virus, its associated risks, and strategies to manage it to be unclear and unhelpful.

"There is not a clear plan to what is going to happen."

Young people found that the messaging from the government was too indirect and they felt that attempts were made to 'mask' the severity of the impact of the coronavirus e.g. not being transparent about the length of lockdown or the

number of deaths. This might have implications for the relationship between young people and government entities, including statutory services.

"I trust people and their common sense to contain the virus but I don't trust the government."

"I would [like the government to] give it to [us] straight rather than masking up the length of lockdown or the amount of deaths."

Clearer communication that is more targeted at young people could empower them to take responsible steps to keep themselves and others safe.

Summary

Informed: Young people want to be informed.

Inspired: Young people were inspired by community action and are keen to take on meaningful roles.

Transparency: Openness from the government and people in positions of power is important and valued by young people.

Co-production: Involving young people in the design and dissemination of information would be key for reaching them effectively.

Theme 2: Support

During lockdown, support for young people has been lacking overall

Over half identified specific deficits in support they were receiving, and mentioned three key areas: school, friends and family, and key services (health and social care, youth work, counselling).

Of the 14-16 year olds we asked:

- **64%** mentioned support they received at school in their answers
- **23%** felt the support they received from school had been reduced
- **63%** of all young people said friends and family are an important source of support

In terms of key services, **39% of young people stated continued support through counselling or youth work was important to them during lockdown.**

Of those who said their support needs were not being met, **15% mentioned health or social care, while 9% mentioned not being able to work.**

Those who are 20 years old or older were more likely to identify unmet needs than younger groups.

Those living in the Midlands or the North were more likely to mention gaps in their support (**69% versus 43% of southern respondents**).

Support that has been helpful

Closing schools has had an overwhelmingly negative effect on young people, although some schools have been able to continue providing support to their students. One young person shows how even small acts can be a great help to young people during this difficult time:



"Head of year emails me each day about an assembly or with a motivational quote... it helps us all to keep going even though things can feel unpredictable when it feels like we have nothing to work towards."

Young people have been able to find support from friends and family which has been really positive for many:

"[Contacting friends and family] makes me feel less lonely. Gives me a sense of belonging. Makes me feel safe."

Many cited using the internet or phones as a way to keep in touch:

"It helps me to stay positive whilst in lockdown, as I still can talk to my friends and family even if it isn't face-to-face."

Counselling and youth work has been very important to young people during this crisis, with a significant percentage (**39%**) of respondents mentioning this as a source of support for them. Their answers show just how crucial access to key services has been:

"It helps me to know that I have people there for me."

"It's made me realise I'm not alone, I have people that care and be in my corner."

One young person said they found they were getting more support than ever before, and another talked about specific digital support from Redthread:

"Otherwise I would get really bored and it means I can talk to you [Redthread youth worker] about my problems."

Support that has been lacking

It is clear from the survey that for those young people who are at risk of youth violence, support has been lacking. A quarter of young people who felt their needs were not met say support they received from school has reduced.

"Being on lockdown has affected my school work in a negative way I was so used to being at school having people supporting me. When I was down some would tell me I can do it ... at home I did not have that."

Social distancing and lockdown meant over half of those who have unmet needs missed support offered by friends and family.

Access to key services has also been problematic for young people, especially those that have been cancelled or postponed such as:

- housing services
- asylum seeking processes
- police investigations
- follow up appointments for mental or physical health



Theme 2: Support

The lack of social care is also mentioned, with one young person stating:

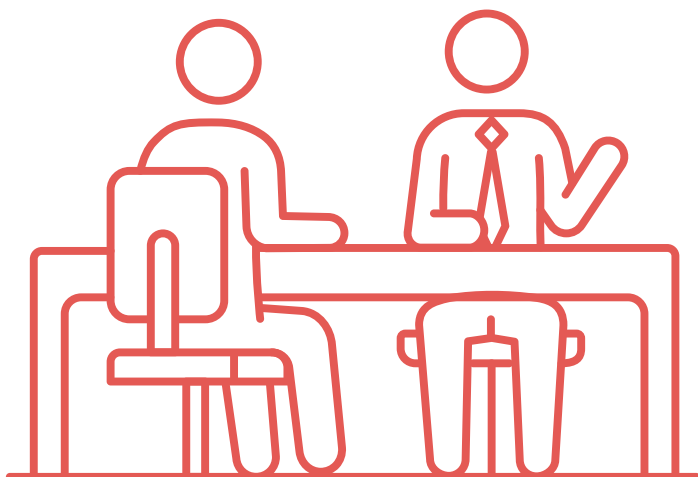
"I had a support worker at college. I had a counsellor every week ... [not having access is] making me feel very low."

Finding employment is a key concern for many young people. The Resolution Foundation has found that **24% of 18-24 year olds in employment have been furloughed and 9% have lost their jobs** – the highest of any age group. **9% of the young people we surveyed expressed a lack of support related to finding work:**

"I was working before now I am looking for employment."

"[It has had a] big impact on me trying to find a job."

job centre



Summary

The young people surveyed show many statutory services have been delayed or cancelled, leaving them worried and alone.

Counselling and youth work is an extremely important source of support for young people; those who have been able to access this have talked of the benefits. But it is also clear that many young people are falling through the gap. The upending of support structures and networks has had a negative impact on young people's lives, and will continue to do so.

There needs to be a concerted effort to ensure that young people are provided with the resources and support they deserve and need, in order to ensure both their safety if there is another local lockdown in their area, and that they are able to maintain their wellbeing after the impact of the first.

Theme 3: Safety

For the young people we engaged in this research, safety is a key concern, and a lack of safety is an important risk factor we consider when supporting young people.

Safety on the streets

- **17%** of young people said they felt less safe during lockdown
- **34%** of young people said they felt more safe
- **49%** of young people said their feelings of safety had not changed

It is striking that **66% said their feelings of safety had not changed or they felt less safe**, even with the extreme lockdown restrictions imposed. While we view youth violence as something that only happens on the streets, these responses show that young people's sense of personal safety is more complex.

For those who felt safer during lockdown, one of the most pertinent reasons was due to them being at home and unable to be outdoors. **25% of young people said that this was one of the primary reasons they felt safer from potential crime and violence.**

One young person said:

"Because I am at home there's not a lot that could actually hurt/happen to me."

Another young person noted:

"The fact that I'm in my house and no one can bust open the door without my Mum doing something about it is a reason for feeling safer."

Some young people felt safer during lockdown because they were not alone and had people they trusted around them, which helped them feel safe and protected from harm.

However, young people still had concerns about offending or having contact with the police, impacting their safety.

"It seems easier not to offend, but also easy to offend by not complying to social distancing."

"[I am] worried about police brutality when there's no witnesses due to lockdown."

Statistics for the period of lockdown show that crime and violence rates were reduced significantly in nearly all areas, with domestic abuse a notable exception.

This reduction is reflected in the number of young people that accessed services at the start of lockdown, with Redthread, for example, seeing a decrease in eligible hospital presentations and resulting referrals. This decrease has reversed rapidly as lockdown has started to ease.

Theme 3: Safety

Safety in a pandemic

For those young people who felt less safe, all but one respondent stated their primary concern was the threat of the virus, contracting the virus and this impact on them, their family and friends.

Young people were really worried about loved ones contracting the virus and passing away as a result of this. Many young people referred to family who were in vulnerable groups or in circumstances that put them at greater risk, with one young person making particular mention of their father being in jail:

"My mum is in the vulnerable group of people so I am more worried about her."

"My dad is in jail and people in there have it."

10% of young people surveyed had lost loved ones or friends to coronavirus.

Experiences like this made the fear of the virus and its impact very real and tangible for young people, increasing their feeling of being unsafe. This also speaks to the mental health impact on young people who are coping with bereavement and loss during this time.

Safety in the home

Although none of our respondents mentioned specifically feeling unsafe at home during coronavirus, there were of course safety risks posed due to domestic violence. This has left many young people unable to remove themselves from unsafe spaces within the home and the relationships that perpetuate this:

- On average 2 women a week are murdered by a current or ex-partner in the UK, but **during lockdown the number had increased to 4 on average**
- As of 29th April 2020 in London, the MET had made over **4,000 arrests in relation to domestic abuse**

**Source, London Met Police.*





Case Study: Difficulties at home

The Redthread Young Women's service have been supporting Katy* who is 13 years old. She presented at hospital following a missing episode. Before going missing she was living at home in a significantly overcrowded house, where she shared a room with her mum. Home is a safe space for Katy, but the impact of having to spend increased amounts of time indoors with her mum and others in the house led to her and her mum having a large conflict one day, exacerbated by lockdown. This led to Katy going missing.

Redthread have supported Katy around relationships and helped her to think through healthy and unhealthy qualities in relationships in her life. They are now also linked in with her social worker to advocate for Katy's wishes around support.

**name changed*

Summary

Safety on the streets:

Despite being at home and physically away from peers and risk, lockdown did not increase feelings of safety for the majority of young people

Safety in a pandemic: The threat of the virus made day-to-day life feel unsafe for young people, and caused increased anxiety.

Safety in the home: Family trouble caused increased pressure at this time for young people, and this is supported by national domestic violence statistics.

Theme 4: Mental health

Many recent reports, such as that done by Young Minds, UK Youth and Children and Young People Now, have already evidenced the negative impact lockdown has had on young people's mental health. Our findings from young people at risk of youth violence very much support this.

"Anxiety, everyone is a prisoner in their home."

There has been a clear impact on respondents' mental wellbeing:

76% scored 3 or above out of 5 for the question, 'On a scale of 1-5, how much has coronavirus impacted on your mental wellbeing?'

The key reason for this were feelings of depression or negative impacts on mood and anxiety, which feature in **41%** of responses, along with loneliness, which has impacted on **17%** of respondents' mental health.

From the respondents, **86% noted having faced particular difficulties during lockdown** which included boredom, missing their daily routines and fears of uncertainty.

51% of respondents mentioned feeling very isolated as a result of lockdown. Young people missed:

- their freedom
- being active
- being able to see friends and family

They also missed being able to do everyday activities such as:

- going to the shops
- going to school/college
- having a normal daily routine

"I was a lot more anxious, at the start of lockdown my sleeping patterns were bad and I was having a lot of bad nightmares... they got a lot of worries."

For some young people, being able to do these daily activities was a way of managing their anxiety before lockdown, so without this they felt it harder to cope.

"Not going to college as much, not seeing my family or girlfriend as much because there the things that only made me leave the house."

"I haven't been as active as I would and it has impacted a lot on my self-confidence and my mental well being. Usually I'm happy and raring for each day and of course I have my down days but during this pandemic I have had lots more down days."



For **32% of young people, boredom and having nothing to do** was having a negative impact on their well being. Young people felt they had nothing to do, no motivation on some days and felt some days had no purpose.

"Being stuck inside and trapped in my mind."

"There's too much time in the day to think to myself so anxiety can be an issue but I keep myself occupied."

One young person spoke of sleeping throughout the day as a way to manage their anxiety and to ensure time went quickly:

"I go sleep throughout most of the day - to kill time as I don't have a lot to do."

In contrast to this, it was positive to see that some young people, **37%, felt that that lockdown had had a positive impact on their mental health.**

Many spoke of being self-reflective and identifying what they needed to do around self-care to support themselves.

"I feel more productive, more time for me to do things that I did not normally have time or head space to do."

88% of respondents said missing family and friends and not being able to see them had been a particular difficulty for them during this time.

"Staying at home is mentally exhausting when being told to stay inside, and not seeing friends has made me a lot lonelier than I thought it would."

As touched on in the theme of safety, young people's fears of the virus, contracting it and people they loved falling sick had really affected their mental health as many were very worried.

For those who were going out and seeing friends when guidelines allowed, they really valued the opportunity to do this.

"I'm now able to go out even with one of my friends at a distance and the cases are going down. It doesn't feel as scary as it did in the beginning."

Theme 4: Mental Health

Redthread has seen a significant increase in both the number of referrals of young people needing support for their mental health and their complexity. In the Midlands, in particular, Redthread saw an increase in young people seeking support from their Mental Health crisis teams. One hospital which had become a COVID-19 'red' site saw an unprecedented rise in young male (aged 18-21) self-harm, with many of them self-presenting to hospital which is unusual.



Summary

Loneliness: Young people felt isolated by lockdown and the lack of physical and social connection it brought.

Boredom: Out of education and out of employment, young people struggled to keep themselves meaningfully occupied.

Lack of support: With services stretched or shut, young people felt they had to deal with these issues on their own.

Fear of loss and the future: With both the virus and societal change looming, young people felt anxious about what post-pandemic life would look like for them.

Conclusion

Anxieties about the future

This report shows that young people who are vulnerable and at risk of youth violence have been even further disadvantaged by lockdown. Although claimed as a 'great leveller', it is clear this is not the case for young people who were already struggling with education, accessing support, finding work, feeling safe at home and on the streets, and mental health.

Although young people did find positives from this time, in particular being able to spend time with family and feeling like part of a community, the overwhelming impression is of a generation of young people being left behind.

A lack of access to support over the past five to six months, particularly mental health services or mentoring, will continue to impact the most vulnerable young people well into their future as support needs go unchecked and young people fall through education and employment gaps. There needs to be significant emphasis placed on the areas highlighted in the report as we move into a 'new normal', especially with the risk of a second wave and local lockdowns threatening areas of the UK.

The young people surveyed have given us a vital insight into what they find important:

- spending time with friends and family
- being given opportunities to contribute to their local community through work or volunteering
- support from social workers and youth workers, including for mental health problems
- increased support for vulnerable people
- good and clear communication from policy makers
- feeling safe on the streets

This report has proven that more than anything we must listen to and prioritise young people's needs as we head into a 'new normal'. Without this, they will be left with significant anxiety about what might happen to their futures.

"It's anxiety provoking and stressful not knowing what's going to happen next."

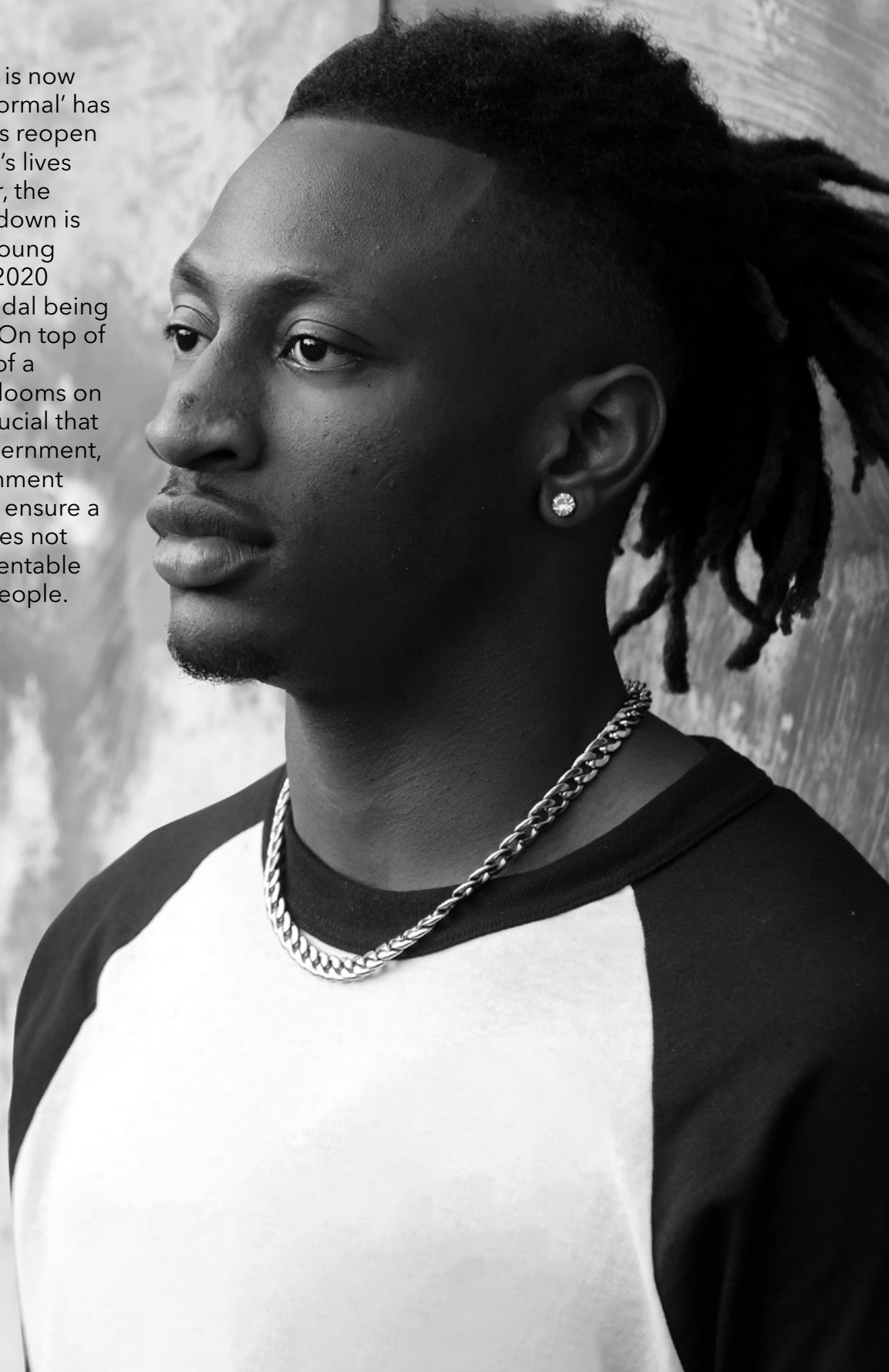
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- **National Police Chiefs' Council, Data Pack - Crime Snapshot to 10 May 2020:**
<https://news.npcc.police.uk/resources/data-pack-crime-snapshot-to-10-may-2020> accessed 14/07/2020
- **Resolution Foundation 'Young workers in the Coronavirus crisis':**
<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/young-workers-in-the-coronavirus-crisis/>

Recommendations

Planning for a local lockdown

The first lockdown is now over, and a 'new normal' has seen many services reopen and young people's lives continue. However, the impact of the lockdown is still being felt by young people - with the 2020 A-Level result scandal being just one example. On top of this, the prospect of a second lockdown looms on the horizon. It is crucial that charities, local government, and central government take action now to ensure a local lockdown does not cause further preventable issues for young people.



Based on the research we recommend that:

- 

Authorities should consult with young people to produce targeted messages around any upcoming local lockdown restrictions. Plans for changes in delivery should be shared with young people currently being supported by services.
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Pathways to ongoing opportunities for community engagement and active citizenship should be created, publicised and managed in conjunction with local grassroots organisations.
- 

Schools, colleges and youth services must receive ongoing support to act as anchor institutions during local lockdowns, particularly for those known to be at risk of youth violence.
- 

Service delivery organisations must prepare clear digital engagement strategies to ensure consistency through any lockdowns, and practitioners should receive additional training on this where possible.
- 

Funders should distribute small grants to local organisations who can help ensure consistent lower level support during local lockdowns – to support local authorities, schools and health services.
- 

Referral criteria for support services should be temporarily relaxed during lockdown to self-referrals from young people or parents during lockdown, particularly those struggling with mental health.
- 

The government must co-create and publish a long-term plan for young people to ensure they do not suffer disproportionately as a result of the lockdown. These plans should prioritise access to work and training opportunities for young people.



Street Doctors, Registered charity: England & Wales 1150925
Scotland SC046981 Registered company number: 08330240



Redthread Youth Limited, Registered charity: 1051260



MAC-UK, Registered charity: 1126144 and company limited by guarantee
Registered in England: 06693712

Design by jo@us2design.co.uk