

In Isolation, Instead of School

The Problem:

Coronavirus has had an unprecedented impact on children and their families across the globe. The extended school closures, disruption of routine and lack of clarity around examination and assessment has been a significant change in the lives of young people. Not only have they missed out on quality education, but also the broader positive impacts of their school environment. There is a concern that this could have worrying impacts on children and young people's mental health in both the short and long-term. It is well known that schools provide structure and safety, particularly to vulnerable children and young people. School closures during the pandemic impact all young people, but are likely to place vulnerable young people at further risk of mental ill-health.

The Project:

In Isolation, Instead of School: Vulnerable Children's Experiences of COVID-19 and Effects on Mental Health and Education

When Covid-19 forced the closure of schools in Scotland to most pupils in March 2020, there was widespread concern about the impact this might have on the mental health and wellbeing of young people and, in particular, on those preparing for national level exams such as Nationals, Highers and Advanced Highers.

As part of the rapid research for COVID-19 programme, this project set out to investigate:

- How isolation, school closure and exam cancellation caused by Covid-19 affected the mental health of the generality of young people in Scotland
- Whether there were additional impacts on the mental health of groups of young people typically identified as vulnerable
- What young people, as pupils, think would help address their concerns about mental health in the context of the pandemic

A total of 759 young people completed the INISS online survey. A further 45 young people participated in four online, in-depth focus groups.

Impacts:

Supporting Other Initiatives:

The Collaborative was delighted to be able to support this initiative by providing advice, guidance and expertise to the team along the way via our Responsible Innovation framework.

Engaging with Young People:

This project showcased a variety of successful methods to engage with young people on topics that matter to them, including online surveys and focus groups.

Informing COVID-19 Recovery:

This study was small scale and largely exploratory. It is hoped that these initial findings will help to inform policy and practice in response to any future school closures and social restrictions; support the development of educational interventions to address the impact of Covid-19 on young people's mental health and wellbeing; and contribute to UNICEF's broader, longer term planning to support young people's recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Further Research:

The project team is hoping to continue developing this research to understand the medium to longer-term impacts of COVID-19.