



Lockdown Stories

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected our mental health and wellbeing in Jersey?



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



At the time of writing it is not yet known the real impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but from listening to peoples stories we know that in one way or another there will be a long tailback of change and loss for many people. For some people, lockdown was a time to find new interests and improve relationships but for others, change and uncertainty had a negative impact on their mental health.

To understand people's experiences during these uncertain times we conducted a piece of research exploring Islanders' experiences of mental health during lockdown. We wanted to hear stories from people at all ages and stages of life (our youngest respondent was eight and our eldest was 88) and from those with pre-existing mental health problems and those without. We hoped that we might learn from each other's stories as well as connect on a human level to other's experiences.

Stories have confirmed our belief at Mind Jersey that there is no health without mental health. But this crisis has also reminded us that health is dependent on emotional and financial safety nets. Prioritising mental health across all ages and stages of family life has always been important but going forward it must take centre stage in our Island wide recovery plan. Additionally, we all must do more to ensure Islanders are aware of what mental health services are available and how to access them.

Key themes from lockdown were about the importance of

Safety nets, Signposting and Swifts

With thanks to Emily Savva
Research Assistant at Mind Jersey



Dr Patricia Tumelty
Executive Director
Mind Jersey

INTRODUCTION

To understand people's experiences of mental health during lockdown we asked them to share their stories with us via letter, email, phone and an online survey. We asked about the challenges they faced, what helped and what advice they would give their pre-lockdown self and the islandwide mental health services. We were delighted that approximately 500 Islanders shared their stories with us at Mind Jersey.

500

PEOPLE SHARED THEIR LOCKDOWN STORIES

20% of respondents were men which indicates that we need to continue to try new and innovative ways to encourage men to share their stories and reach out to mental health services when needed.

We did not collect data on the ethnicity of respondents but the survey was available in Portuguese and Polish and we worked with the charity Caritas to increase links with black and minority ethnic communities in Jersey.

We hope these stories will help all service providers to put mental health at the heart of the islandwide recovery plan.

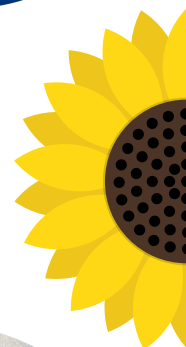
"Hope comes in many forms – for me, it's seeing my mental health nurse walk up the drive."

"One way or another we have all been confronted with our powerlessness but some have more power than others."

"I should've invested in Zoom in 2019."

"The miracle of nature saved the day for me – thanks to lockdown I now have a great big seven-foot sunflower in my tiny garden."

"Walking by the sea kept me sane but I so wished I had a friend or family member walking with me."



NEW BEGINNINGS


The pandemic and subsequent restrictions designed to prevent its spread affected different groups in different ways. Many Islanders enjoyed the slower pace of life that lockdown brought – the opportunity to spend more time with family and partners, to do some DIY or to explore Jersey's beautiful outdoor spaces through walking or cycling. Lockdown also gave some people time to work on their mental and physical health and to re-evaluate their life and what changes they want to make. Many storytellers also reported difficulties with their mental health at some point during lockdown often due to boredom, loneliness or concern for loved ones.

However, stories indicated that the negative impacts of the lockdown were distributed unevenly, with some groups more affected than others:

- People with **pre-existing poor mental health** who watched their services and coping mechanisms being cancelled or restricted.
- **Carers** who were expected to continue to provide care for their loved ones with limited assistance.
- Families in **financially unstable situations** and living in small spaces were met with financial and emotional hardship.
- **Parents** (especially women) struggled to find a balance between work and homeschooling, often resulting in feelings of failure and guilt.

Stories from lockdown were about the importance of

Safety nets, Signposting and Swifts



"In lockdown, I was reminded that the world is full of wonderful things, I got the chance to really bear witness to what is around me and for the first time was able to listen to a swift with feet so tiny that they can barely land."



LIVING WITH "THE UNWELCOME VISITOR"

The lockdown had significant effects for Islanders with pre-existing mental ill-health, especially as lockdown restricted their access to mental health services, coping mechanisms and support networks.

Limited Services

Many mental health services were stopped during lockdown which left some service users feeling abandoned and helpless. Several storytellers questioned how it was possible to see a GP for physical health problems, whilst their mental health services were cancelled, leading them to question the commitment to equality across physical and mental health.

Additionally, while some mental health services did move to phone calls, not everyone felt comfortable on the phone as it can be hard to interpret the conversation without seeing facial expressions.

"A key feature of my diagnosis is fear of abandonment and I was left feeling very angry that this was not taken account of when services were cut so abruptly."

Coping Mechanisms Restricted

Islanders' usual coping mechanisms such as going to the gym or visiting friends were restricted by the lockdown, especially for those classed as physically vulnerable and required to stay home for longer. A storyteller with an eating disorder explained that when her favourite cafe closed it made food choices even harder.

Support Networks

During lockdown Islanders' lives went on – partners struggled with addiction, friends got life-threatening illnesses and parents died – but people were not able to easily access their support network of friends and family. This often meant that small issues got out of hand causing huge setbacks in an individual's mental health journey.

"I have experienced mild to moderate depression most of my life – an unwelcome visitor but I have learned that it is part of me and whilst I don't welcome it with open arms, I now know it will pass and I am learning what sustains me. I did not grasp until nearly too late the enormity of COVID-19 and my visitor was able to exploit the strange time we found ourselves."

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We need your help to prevent a mental health crisis.
Contact us at admin@mindjersey.org.

THE CENTRALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

COVID-19 restrictions meant extra pressure on families to care for their loved ones in recovery. However carers themselves struggled without their Carers' Support Groups and usual coping mechanisms – many missed simple joys such as having a cup of tea with a friend.

“My husband – Overdose, alcohol withdrawal, depression, isolation and feeling trapped. Myself – lonely, as I had to face problems and concerns by myself.”

Others highlighted that carers should be exempt from the rule of only one person per household in the supermarket as they cannot leave their loved one at home by themselves. These experiences highlight that more needs to be done to help carers if there is another lockdown.

"The one-way system in shops led me to walk out and walk back in again."

“

"Carers need help too. They are often the unsung heroes as they are there for us long after the services have left."

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FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY



Many Islanders faced financial difficulty as their employer did not qualify for the government assistance scheme or they were between jobs. They reported increased stress, anxiety and sometimes shame when they had to rely on charities for food. Many highlighted how financial security is the bedrock of all health and that without it, people do not have the headspace to work on their mental health.

"The problem isn't the lack of mental health support available, but more the economic conditions that put people in the position where they feel trapped with no future."

"Every penny I spent was high risk - the unexpected could drown my family."

FAMILY LIFE STAGES

Young People

Young people (aged 16-25) stressed about work and university uncertainty and missed playing sports and seeing their friends. Some parents and young people highlighted that social media and video games helped them to stay connected with their friends, whilst others emphasised the need to limit screen time.

"It was difficult because all other adults in the households were working from home, including one sibling in my bedroom. I was the only one not working and so not contributing to society."

"I do not adapt well to change and COVID-19 changed everything."

Loneliness

Many Islanders who live alone found they became very dependant on friends and family reaching out to them through video calling and messaging apps. Weekends were an especially difficult time for them as instead of their usual busy social lives, they were left feeling bored and lonely.

"Suffering from depression with no help and on your own, losing contact with the two people who take the time to visit me was soul-destroying."

"Every day, I went for a walk alone, knowing that when I got back home, I would eat alone and watch TV alone. I don't think anyone who doesn't live alone can quite understand."

"If there is another lockdown please ensure that those living alone always have access to other people."



Advice and Support
We can help you make choices about treatment and understand your rights. Email us at admin@mindjersey.org.

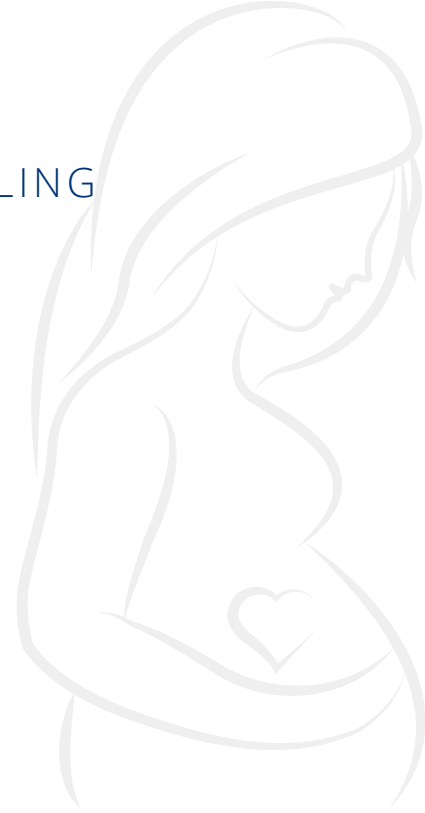
CHILDBIRTH WAS EASIER THAN HOMESCHOOLING

Many families enjoyed the extra time together, especially those who lived in large houses with gardens, where there was space for multiple people to work, study and play.

However many families with school-age children and working parents struggled significantly during lockdown. Unfortunately, women still seem to be taking the brunt of childcare and almost all mothers felt overwhelmed trying to juggle work, homeschooling and checking on elderly parents. Stories told by women were filled with feelings of guilt, failure and exhaustion.

"Work are adding pressure for not keeping up, I feel like I'm failing as a parent trying to keep work going."

The lockdown also restricted new mothers' access to their support networks and caused them significant anxiety about giving birth and access to post-natal medical care.



"I struggled to accept that I was spending my maternity leave stuck in my house; no baby classes, playgroups, lunch dates, walks...nothing. I was worried my baby was missing out on socialising, playtime, getting fresh air etc. and I was devastated that my parents weren't able to bond with their first grandchild."

We had very limited responses from fathers (and men in general), this may be due to the difficulty men have in sharing their experiences or because of the methods used in this research.

Mind Jersey is here to help all people, no matter their circumstances. For free and confidential advice visit our website www.mindjersey.org.

WORKING FROM HOME OR LIVING AT WORK?

Working from Home

Most respondents reported that they coped fine with working from home, but a significant proportion reported feeling stressed due to increased working hours, lack of team communication and frustrations with technology. This meant workers often felt the need to work harder to prove they were working.

"I felt I was the only one feeling the pressure, it wasn't the case but it's hard to gauge what others are feeling over email."

The responses we received indicate that the initial adjustment was hard but that once workers learnt how to better manage their time and wellbeing, some enjoyed working from home and found it hard to return to the office. The abrupt way in which lockdown rules were enforced meant that often people found it hard to adjust.

Working as normal

Those who continued to work during lockdown also suffered due to increased workload often resulting in stress and exhaustion. Many of these people also reported feeling lonely and isolated as they could not meet non-work friends.

"Work turned into a place where leaving on time was impossible and being exhausted was normal."

Making Positive Mental Health a Priority in the Workplace

Many workers raised concerns that although workplaces give the impression they are interested in employees mental health, this is often not the case in reality.

"Training for supervisors is key but also being aware that not everyone wants to open up to people they work with. I suggest someone independent comes in to speak to all staff, in complete confidence so people can talk freely about any issues."

Here at Mind Jersey, we hope that workplaces will continue to seek out training for their employees. For more information, visit www.mindjersey.org/training



RECOVERY RECOMMENDATIONS

As mental health service providers, we must not underestimate the threats that COVID-19 and the subsequent restrictions caused to Islanders' wellbeing. Going forward the Island-wide services that support mental health must respond collectively with early intervention and prevention strategies. We often talk about putting service users at the heart of what we do, but lockdown has allowed us to pause, listen and begin to implement the change Islanders are asking for.

Here are some recommendations from our storytellers:

Provide a Roadmap

Provide a road map of mental health services across all ages and stages of family life. This should include how to access support groups, volunteering opportunities, exercise classes and many other services.



Reduce Stigma

Stories told revealed that stigma is still preventing people from seeking help. We need to continue to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health by listening to and supporting others with mental-ill health.

Workplaces

Workplaces need to continue to take mental health seriously by training staff in mental health first aid (much like they do for physical first aid). They also need to be more understanding of carers, parents and individuals for taking time off in a crisis.



Another Lockdown

In the event of another lockdown, a mental health plan must be created to ensure mental health services continue via phone calls, online services and face-to-face meetings.



Weekend and Evening Services

Stories told of a real need to open some mental health services on weekends and evenings.



Safety Nets

Emotional and financial security is the foundation of mental wellbeing. Ensure that individuals and families are supported through times of hardship.

Physical Activity

Ensure sports classes are accessible to all by training instructors appropriately.

WHAT WORKED?

Salvation Army Food Bank

Video calling

Listening Lounge
Brighter Futures

Pets

Family

Gaming Caring Cooks

Friends

Mindfulness Mind Jersey
Crying

Hobbies

Exercise

Weather Garden



What advice would you give your pre-lockdown self?

"It's important to notice when your mood is dropping and try to get the right support earlier on."

"Enjoy every day to its fullest, go for that swim, do that run, meet your friend who wants a catch up rather than sitting at home and being lazy."



"Try to be mindful, maintain good habits and not worry about things I can't control."

"Ask for help and don't bottle it up as it will only overflow when you least expect."

"Don't set too many challenges or feel you must come out the other end speaking five languages and looking ten years younger - by just surviving you're a winner."



"Don't buy more than one bottle of wine at a time!"

Make a Donation
We need your help to continue to provide mental health services in Jersey. Visit our website at www.mindjersey.org.



WHERE WE ARE NOW

In the future, more research is needed to understand the factors influencing mental health on island including stories of inequality across all sections of our community.

Here at Mind Jersey, we will use these findings to help shape the future of our mental health services and share these results with our colleagues in the private, public and voluntary sectors.

Thank you to all those who told their stories and to those who meant to but didn't get round to it! Keep talking to us.

