

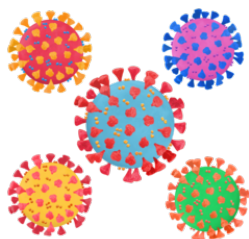
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Loneliness, mental health and coronavirus: research findings

Easy Read, March 2022

Loneliness, mental health and coronavirus: research findings

Introduction



Coronavirus or COVID-19 is an illness caused by a new type of virus. This can make some people feel very unwell.



Loneliness is a feeling of sadness you have when you do not feel connected to anything.

This could be to people, places or activities that you do.



Mental health is about our emotions, feelings and thoughts.



Sometimes people feel sad or worried, and this is normal.

But when people feel like this often, it may be a sign of a mental health issues.



Although loneliness and mental health are different things, many people suggest that they are related to each other.

For example, if you are feeling lonely, you may also suffer with poor mental health.



Even before the pandemic, lots of people with a learning disability felt lonely.

People spent a lot of time indoors during the pandemic. Research suggests that many people with a learning disability felt even more lonely during the pandemic.



About the research project

This research project aimed to understand the experiences of people with learning disability during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was particularly interested in mental health and feelings of loneliness.



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport

Mencap were given money by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to carry out this research.

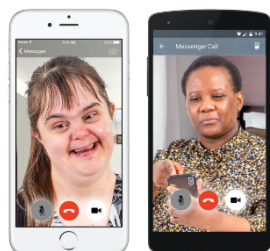


6 focus groups were carried out across England. This is when a small group speak about a topic and share ideas. 1 interview was also completed.

Findings from the research project



Many people with a learning disability spoke about how they kept in touch with their loved ones. There were some positive experiences of keeping in touch during the pandemic.



Some people used technology such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to talk to other people. A few people said it helped them to learn new skills such as making video calls.

Other people said video calls were helpful but did not feel the same as speaking to people in real life.



Not everyone was able to use the internet to keep in contact. This was upsetting and made some people feel lonely.



Some people with a learning disability did not have many loved ones. Staying indoors more meant they did not speak to as many people as they normally would.



People felt that they would not have got through the pandemic without the support of their family and friends.



Lockdown was a difficult time for many people.



Many people with a learning disability found it hard not seeing their family and friends. Some looked for different ways to meet up, such as talking to their family through a window.



People felt lost and confused because their daily routine was suddenly changed. Routines are very important to many people with a learning disability or autistic people. These people found a change in routine especially difficult.



Some people with a learning disability had some positive experiences during the pandemic, such as gaining more confidence to go out alone.



Life has begun to return to normal for many people, but not everyone. Some people with a learning disability are unsure if their life will ever return to how it was before the pandemic.



People found spending most of their time indoors isolating and boring. Some people were living in supported accommodation and found that support workers were working less during the lockdown. They missed talking to them as much as usual.



People said they struggled with their mental health during the pandemic. Some did not want to talk to their loved ones about this in case it worried them.



People who suffered from mental health problems said they found staying indoors during the pandemic made this worse.



Many felt their mental health got worse during the pandemic because they felt lonely.



Some people with a learning disability talked about discrimination during the pandemic. Discrimination is when someone is treated unfairly due to who they are (such as factors like their race, gender and disability).



People felt that most people do not understand what a learning disability is. This often leads to people with a learning disability being treated differently and discriminated against.

There were many examples of when this happened during the pandemic.



For example, during the pandemic the government asked people to wear a face mask in public places. There were many reasons why people with a learning disability did not have to wear a face mask.



Some people did not understand that people with a learning disability did not have to wear a face mask if they didn't feel comfortable doing so. Sometimes this led to them being abused or refused entry to places.



Being discriminated against and judged can impact people's confidence.

Some people with a learning disability felt that they were often judged by others because of how they look or act.



Some people with a learning disability felt others make judgements about how capable or intelligent people with a learning disability are which is offensive and hurtful.



The pandemic had not reduced fear of bullying for people with a learning disability. Many tried to avoid unnecessary attention in public which may lead to bullying.



For example, some wore a sunflower lanyard to show people that they had a disability in the hopes that they would not be picked on.



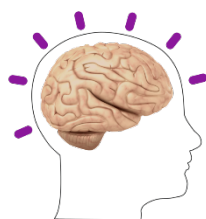
People felt that it was hard to stop people from bullying people with a learning disability.



Some felt bullying and discrimination might stop if people understood what it means to have a learning disability.



They said people often think disabilities are only physical and this makes it harder for them to understand what it is like for people with a learning disability.



Some people said education might help people to understand what a learning disability is.



Some felt that education might not work as some people would not listen.



People who were involved in raising awareness about learning disabilities felt this was a very important part of their life.