

Royal College of Psychiatrists' briefing

Analysis of fifth COVID-19 RCPsych member survey – wellbeing, addictions, ecological distress



September 2020

The Royal College of Psychiatrists issued a survey to its members working in the National Health Service across the United Kingdom. It was in the field from Tuesday 1 September until Wednesday 9 September.

689 completed responses were received from across the UK out of a total available sample of 12,900, which equates to a response rate of 5.3%.

This summary will focus on the results regarding the wellbeing of psychiatrists, ecological distress and addiction services. Further summaries will consider other issues covered in the survey such as: the changes in demand for a range of appointments and interventions compared to last year; increased utilisation of digital consultations, the extent of digital exclusion and challenges associated with technology; and experience of racism.

Wellbeing of psychiatrists

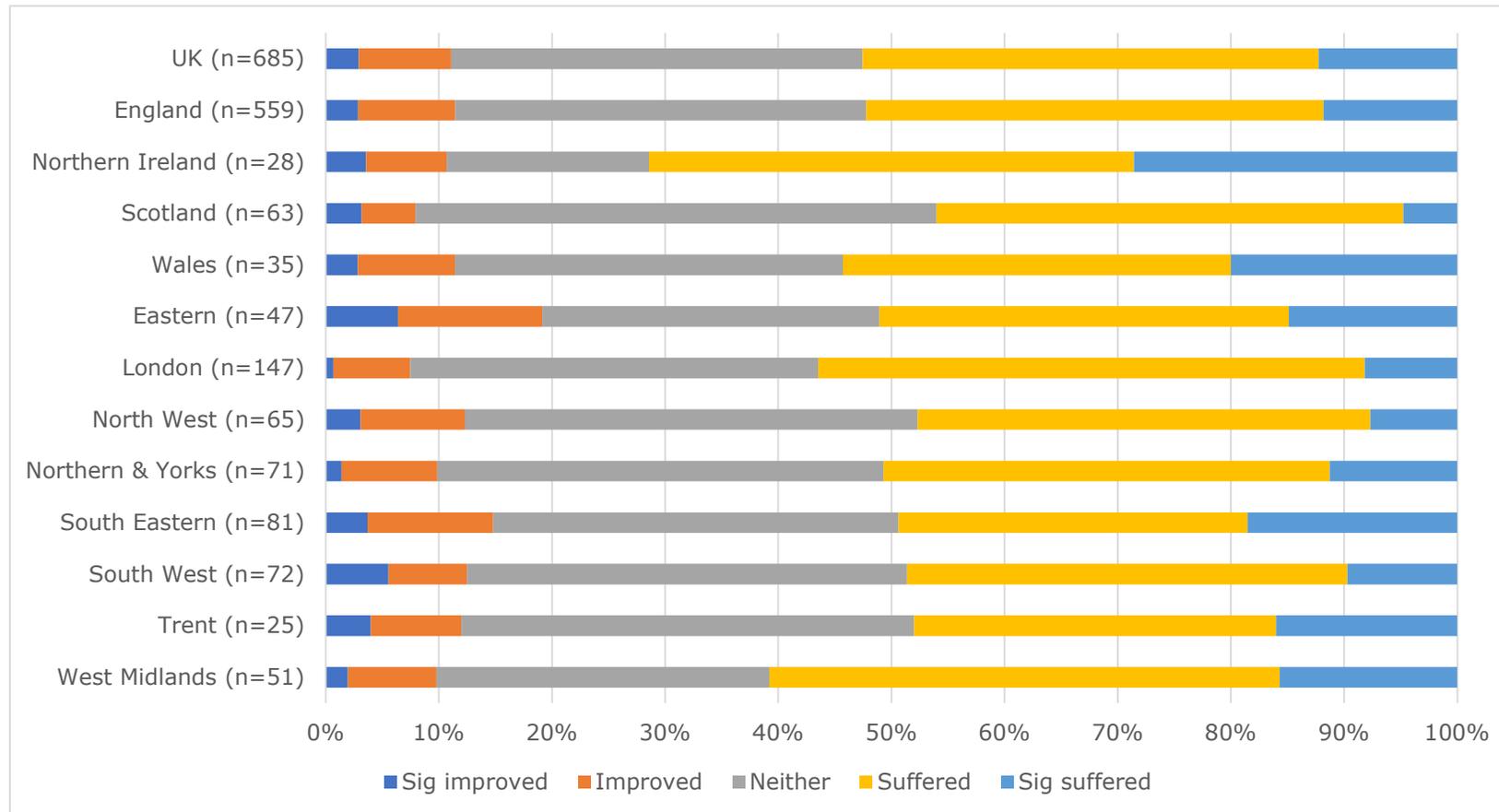
Across the UK, 52.6% of members confirmed their wellbeing had 'significantly suffered' (12.3%) or 'suffered' (40.3%) as a result of COVID-19 and the lockdown, while a mere 11.1% confirmed that it had 'significantly improved' (2.9%) or 'improved' (8.2%). These headline percentages compare to 48.6% and 13.1% respectively in our second survey (in the field from 1-6 May) and 54.4% and 10.2% respectively in our third survey (in the field from 18-26 May).

Over the nations and RCPsych regions in England, the percentages of respondents that answered 'significantly suffered' or 'suffered' ranged from 46.0% in Scotland (29 of 63) to 71.4% in Northern Ireland (20 of 28). Meanwhile the percentages of respondents that answered 'significantly improved' or 'improved' ranged from 7.5% in London (11 of 147) to 19.1% in Eastern England (9 of 47).

Members were also asked about whether their organisation had introduced wellbeing policies. 86.5% of all UK respondents to this question (575 of 665) answered 'yes', with the affirmative percentages ranging from 76.0% in Trent (19 of 25) to 94.0% in Northern & Yorkshire (63 of 67).

The full responses to the initial wellbeing question are illustrated in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1 – How has your wellbeing been impacted by COVID-19 and the lockdown? All responses from across the UK and each of the RCPsych regions



Ecological or environmental distress

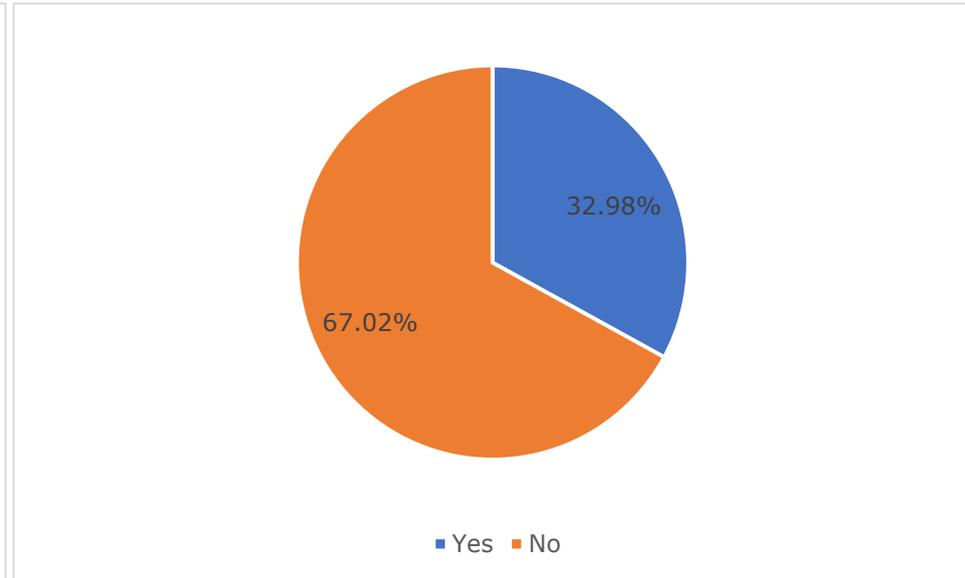
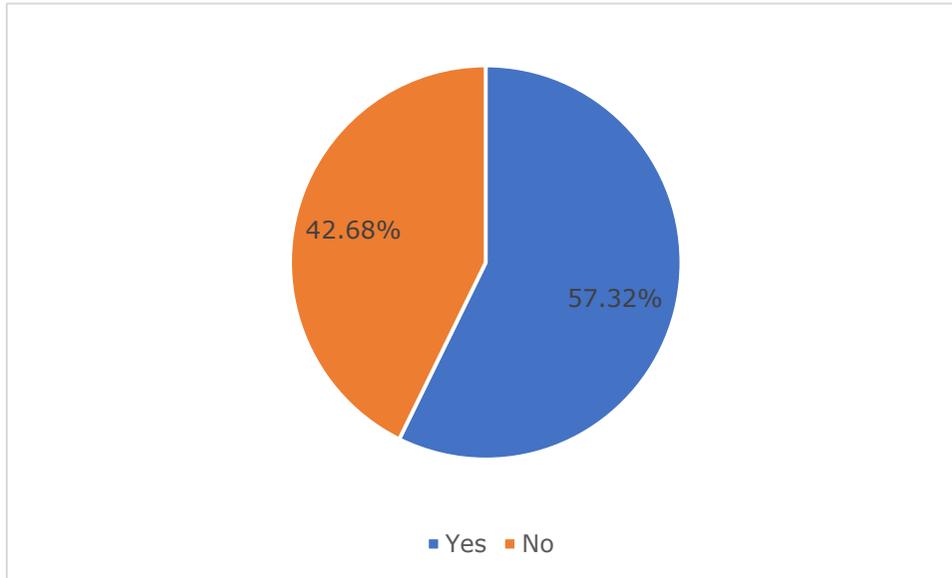
Almost half of respondents from across the UK (46.7% or 316 of 677) confirmed that they had seen patients over the past year who were 'distressed about environmental and ecological issues.' This percentage varied from 27.5% in the West Midlands (14 of 51) to 59.2% in the South West (42 of 71).

Chart 3 below contrasts the answers to this question for child & adolescent and old age psychiatrists in England.

Chart 3 – In the last year have you seen patients who are distressed about environmental and ecological issues?

Child and adolescent psychiatrists, England, n=82

Old age psychiatrists, England, n=94



All of the members who answered 'yes' to the previous question were then asked to identify how this distress had manifested itself among those patients. The following options were available: 'low mood'; 'anger'; 'panic'; 'helplessness'; 'guilt'; 'losing sleep'; and 'other.'

'Low mood' was most frequently identified, by 61.4% of members from across the UK (194 of 316) and by as much as 72.7% of respondents in Scotland (16 of 22) and 72.0% in Eastern England (18 of 25). 'Helplessness' was the second most chosen manifestation, which was selected by 47.8% across the UK (151 of 316) and by as much as 61.5% in Trent (8 of 13) and 60.6% in South Eastern England (20 of 33). 'Anger' and 'losing sleep' were both identified by 41.1% of UK members answering this question (130 of 316), with the former most commonly selected in Trent (53.8% or 7 of 13) and South Eastern (51.5% or 17 of 33) and the latter most frequently chosen in Trent again (53.8% or 7 of 13) and Eastern England (48.0% or 12 of 25).

Prevalence of substance misuse during the pandemic

Members were asked about whether or not they had 'seen a rise in the number of patients whose alcohol use/substance use has contributed to the deterioration of their mental health' during the COVID-19 pandemic. Once 'not applicable' answers are excluded from the analysis, 44.5% of respondents (245 of 550) across the UK confirmed that they had. The percentages of 'yes' responses were found to have ranged from 28.6% in Wales (8 of 28) to 73.9% in Northern Ireland (17 of 23).

Chart 4 below shows the range of responses after 'not applicable' is excluded.

Chart 4 – Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you seen a rise in the numbers of patients whose alcohol use/substance use has contributed to the deterioration of their mental health? All responses from across the UK and each of the RCPsych regions, with exception of 'not applicable'

