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.
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.
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).

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

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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>42.68%</td>
<td>32.98%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>57.32%</td>
<td>67.02%</td>
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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’**