

COVID-19 and its Impacts on the Environment – The Voices of Young People in the United Kingdom (UK)

Saiba A and Ebony J (Youth Advisory Panel, TEC Cymru), Gemma Johns (TEC Cymru), Prof A Ahuja (TEC Cymru)

Background

To understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, scientific evidence alone isn't the only reliable source to inform public and policy. In the United Kingdom (UK), a country where the pandemic has hard hit, the experience has been a time unlike no other for our younger population and an opportunity for them to voice their opinions on a subject that concerns them greatly – the environment.

Aims

At the start of the pandemic, Technology Enabled Care team (TEC Cymru) identified environmental impacts as a significant benefit to remote healthcare – a service that dominated much of NHS Wales patient care during the pandemic.

Method

TEC Cymru were keen to learn more about environmental impacts beyond that of remote healthcare, especially from younger people, by generically asking 'how has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the environment'. Video clips were used to gather the data. Full ethical permissions and consent were granted.

Results and Quotes:

The views of young people, ranging between 2 to 23 years old across Wales UK, shared comparable observations of environmental impacts to that of world-wide experts. The emerging themes were

a) Travel, Emissions and Air Pollution,

"Well, there's less cars, buses, trains boats and all vehicles around..." (Female, 9 years old, Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB).

"...so it reduces the gases in the air" (Male, 8 years old, Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB)

b) Water Pollution and Beaches,

"It's good, because now there's less plastic in the sea because nobody's allowed out" (Female, 10 years old, Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB)

c) Protection of Animals and Wildlife,

"Wildlife are probably roaming in new areas... and less being knocked over on main roads" (Male, 10 years old, Swansea Bay UHB)

d) Recycling and Plastic Waste,

"We all need to really focus on making sure we're disposing this plastic waste correctly otherwise it's going to end up in our eco-systems" (Female, 21 years old, Aneurin Bevan UHB)

e) Food and Energy Waste.

"As people are home, they're wasting less food and also in light of the recent free school meals campaign I think people are more aware and conscious of their food waste" (Female, 17 years old, Cardiff & Vale UHB)



<https://vimeo.com/489439721/b1cb6f702c>

The video above summarises the perspectives of young people in Wales with regards to the impact of COVID-19 on the environment.

Conclusions

The young people present a well-balanced debate, reflecting on both positive and negative environmental impacts, with common-sense recommendations. The combined themes were translated into a short video that was developed along with the TEC Cymru Young Peoples advisory panel.