Together Through Tough Times

The power of community to support mental wellbeing across the UK

Research Highlights October 2021

in partnership with

CO-OP
It's what we do

mind

SAMH
for Scotland's mental health

inspire
wellbeing, ability, recovery

Key Research Findings

The Co-op is partnering with Mind, SAMH (Scottish Association for Mental Health) and Inspire to bring communities together to improve mental wellbeing and build resilience. The **Together Through Tough Times** research was commissioned by the Partnership to develop our understanding of what makes mentally resilient communities.

The research sheds new light on the vital role of communities in supporting mental wellbeing. More people having an active role in their community means that more support networks become available to those who need them most. Whether it is small acts of kindness towards other people, or volunteering in your community, helping others can go a long way in improving your own and others' mental wellbeing.

The research identified four crucial factors that build individual and community resilience:

1. **Community hubs and voluntary sector networks.** These allow people to build connections, be active locally and provide access to mental health support. A strong local network of voluntary sector organisations helps communities respond to challenges and ensure people get the support they need.

2. **Open and supportive environments to talk about mental health and wellbeing.** An 'open door culture' for people to talk about mental wellbeing and share personal experiences helps reduce stigma and frame mental health as something that affects everyone.

3. **Actively participating and making connections within communities.** Public space provides opportunities for people to build social connections, take pride in their area, relax and reflect. Through neighbourliness, community organising and volunteering, people are able to support their own and others' resilience.

4. **Identities and belonging.** Community identities and shared narratives establish a sense of belonging and help people feel secure and connected to their community, and able to overcome challenges together.

The research also found that **some groups had more limited access to the factors identified** within these four themes and so were **at risk of being left behind**. This includes **children and young people, newcomers, ethnic minorities and people living in poverty**.

This insightful research helps us all consider how individual and community resilience can be developed and maintained, and extended to others in the community who may be at risk of being left behind.

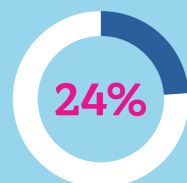We carried out a survey to explore some of the findings of the Together Through Tough Times research in more detail[2].
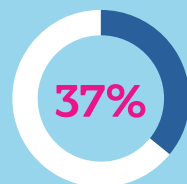
We found that:

1 in 3 people

don't have the support or tools to deal with the 'ups and downs of life'
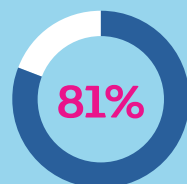
10.6 million

people in the UK (19% of the population) describe their current mental wellbeing as poor, rising to almost three in ten (28%) amongst 16- to 24-year-olds

24% Almost a quarter of people became isolated from their community due to the pandemic, and for 61% this affected their mental wellbeing

37% agree they don't have the support or tools to cope with stress, pressure or difficult circumstances, rising to almost half (47%) of 16- to 24-year-olds

81% of these said support in the community such as having spaces to talk, activities and services would help them.

NORTHERN IRELAND

26% describe their current mental wellbeing as poor, rising to 26% among 16- to 24-year-olds

28% More than a quarter of people became isolated from their community due to the pandemic

41% of people don't have the support or tools to cope with stress, pressure or difficult circumstances

SCOTLAND

22% describe their current mental wellbeing as poor, rising to 29% among 16- to 24-year-olds

25% A quarter of people became isolated from their community due to the pandemic

36% of people don't have the support or tools to cope with stress, pressure or difficult circumstances

WALES

23% describe their current mental wellbeing as poor, rising to 46% among 16- to 24-year-olds

27% More than a quarter of people became isolated from their community due to the pandemic

43% of people don't have the support or tools to cope with stress, pressure or difficult circumstances

ENGLAND

20% A fifth of the population describe their current mental wellbeing as poor

20% A fifth of people became isolated from their community due to the pandemic

34% of people don't have the support or tools to cope with stress, pressure or difficult circumstances

Our partnership support for mentally resilient communities

Co-op, Mind, SAMH and Inspire are committed to supporting mentally resilient communities and will use the findings of the **Together Through Tough Times** research to inform the ongoing development of our collective and individual plans.

- We are **calling on governments across the UK to recognise the importance of community resilience in post-pandemic recovery policy making, and beyond.** Full recommendations, including those specific for the English, Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish governments are on p.36 & p.37 of the main research report.

- We are **partnering on Time to Talk Day in 2022** to encourage people to have open conversations about mental wellbeing in their communities. The research shows how important this is for maintaining resilience.

- We are **delivering partnership services** in more than 50 communities across the UK*. These services are supporting people to build resilience and harness the role of the community to support mental wellbeing. Many of the services are for young people, who the research shows are at risk of being left behind.

- We used [Co-op's Community Wellbeing Index](#) (CWI) to help inform the partnership services and ensure the services are in locations where there are high levels of mental health need. The CWI gives an insight into strengths and challenges for communities, enabling better decision making at a local level which is tailored to community need. Many other organisations use the CWI tool to support their plans too.

- We are **joining our partnership services with Co-op community contacts** to support opportunities for collaboration and partnership working at a local level. This includes Co-op's network of [Member Pioneers](#) who help make good things happen in communities and [Co-operate](#), an online community hub that helps people in communities come together. The research has demonstrated the value of local community organisations working together, so we are empowering our partnership services to work with a diverse range of community organisations and hubs.

- We will **use the insights from this research to inform our wider programmes of work at Co-op, Mind, SAMH and Inspire**, to help strengthen our approach to supporting the development and maintenance of community resilience.

* In England and Wales, partnership services will be delivered by local Minds, a federated network of independent mental health charities. In Scotland partnership services will be delivered through service providers directly commissioned by SAMH. In Northern Ireland, partnership services will be delivered through service providers directly commissioned by Inspire.

Comments from Partners

"Findings of our research confirm that communities have a key role to play in providing good mental wellbeing, with networks of people and hubs creating strong community resilience, which in turn creates the conditions where both individuals and communities can prosper.

The pandemic has shown us how important it is for us all to stay connected. More people having an active role in their community, means that more support networks become available to those who need them most. Whether it be small acts of kindness towards other people, or volunteering in your community, helping others can go a long way in improving your own mental wellbeing.

In response to the findings and as part of our vision of Co-operating for Fairer World, we're really pleased to be working with our partners Mind, SAMH and Inspire, to introduce new community-based services in over 50 local communities to support over 10,000 people across the UK."

Rebecca Birkbeck
Director of Community and Shared Value at the Co-op

"The coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact on all of us, especially those of us living with a mental health problem. This research highlights the role of community in supporting people and their mental health at this critical time. From being able to spend time in parks and green spaces to being in touch with a community mutual aid group, or simply checking in on neighbours from a safe distance, we know that connections between people and places matter when looking after our mental health.

We're thrilled that our partnership with Co-op will deliver new mental health services to respond to the growing need for mental health support in communities, but we can't do this alone. As we learn to live with the pandemic and its aftermath, the value of our communities in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the whole country, needs to be recognised."

Paul Farmer
Chief Executive, Mind

"We are currently living through some of the most difficult times any of us have ever faced, and as this research shows, the important role our local communities play has never been more crucial in protecting our mental health and helping our mental wellbeing flourish.

At SAMH, we're proud to be working in partnership with Co-op to deliver services into the heart of Scottish communities. Together, alongside our friends at Mind and Inspire, we'll be using this research to help shape the support we provide across the country."

Billy Watson, Chief Executive of SAMH

"Inspire is delighted to launch this new research alongside Mind, SAMH and Co-op. This is an important part of our partnership's approach to improving wellbeing and empowering the communities in which we work.

We've always believed that community networks and supports are key to the society we're building and to keeping ourselves, and others, mentally well. It is encouraging to see so much evidence of this in the report."

Kerry Anthony MBE, Inspire CEO

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[1] The qualitative research was conducted by Traverse and Leeds Beckett University, in four locations across the UK, one in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland respectively. In each nation, 10-12 interviews were conducted with community organisations and local authority representatives, up to 10 interviews were conducted with the general public, and small groups of residents also participated in workshops. The fieldwork took place between summer 2020 - winter 2020/21.

[2] Additional quantitative research was conducted by Censuswide, with 2,000 general population (natrep 16+) with an additional 1,000 respondents in Scotland and 500 in each of Northern Ireland and Wales. The fieldwork took place between 21.09.2021 - 27.09.2021. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles.