

Polling results report: 24 November 2020

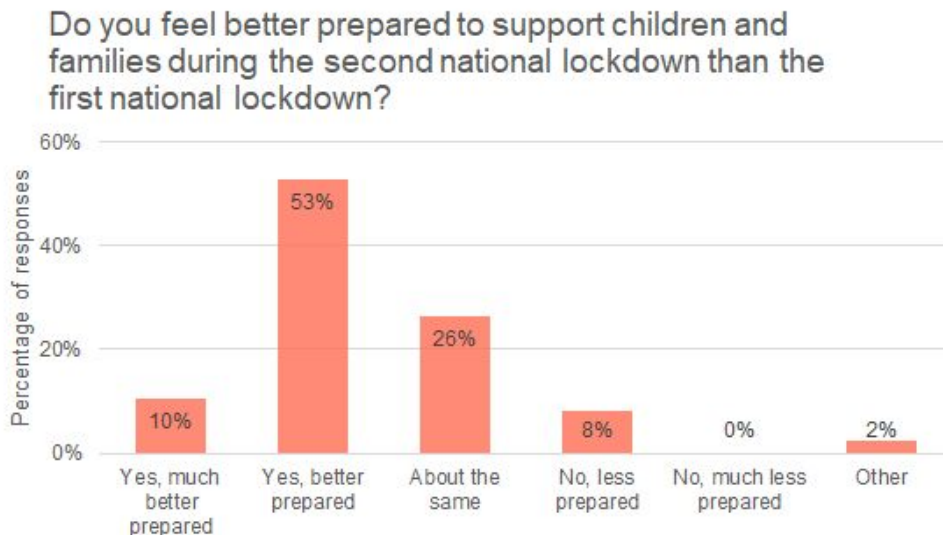
This report

This report covers the period between the 10 November and 23 November 2020. Participants were asked how well supported by their employers they felt and how well prepared they were for the second lockdown. Participants were also invited to give text responses to whether they had identified any gaps in services within their authorities.

Preparation for second lockdown

Participants were asked how well prepared they felt see below in Fig 1.

Fig 1



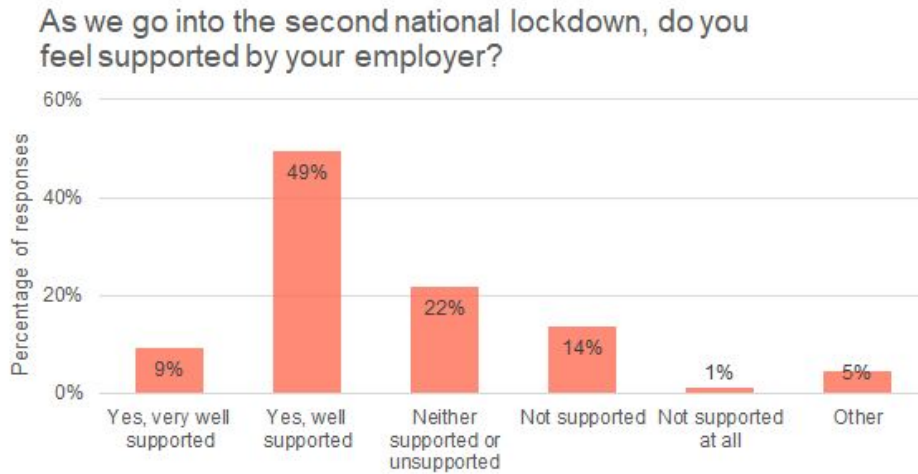
The above results show that the majority (63%) of social workers feel better prepared this time around. One can assume that the transitions that were made in the first lockdown such as remote working, virtual visits and virtual meetings have become the 'norm' in most organisations as employers and employees abide by government regulations. In general, feeling prepared helps to manage the uncertainty in situations where things are difficult and so it is positive that the majority of social workers feel this way. The 8% of respondents who feel less prepared raises questions about why this was the case which we have not been able to pursue in this survey.



How supported by your employers do you feel?

In the table below are the results for this question. (Fig 2)

Fig.2



Again, the majority of participants (58%) feel supported by their employers for the second lockdown. In April, we had asked whether participants felt employers had responded to the lockdown requirements appropriately and overwhelmingly social workers felt that they had at just under 80%. It is reassuring to hear that this is the experience of those in practice.

However, although both results were positive for the majority of social worker responses represented in the tables above, when asked about gaps in services there were concerns raised reflecting some of the very real difficulties of the current situation.

Is there a specific need for children, young people and families created or exacerbated by Covid-19 which services are currently not addressing?

‘we are seeing staff morale at an all-time low...staff are feeling isolated, demotivated and this time it feels much harder... the volume is unprecedented and I don’t know how much longer I will be able to cope...’.

Lack of in-person multi-agency support

Many social workers highlighted the lack of in-person multi-agency support, ‘as some services are still not visiting families’ and the ‘onus’ is on social care. For example, ‘basic services that support families as well as social care (e.g. health) are now not functioning in person’. Services which families need, e.g. OTs, physios etc., ‘are still only working remotely...’. Another person notes that ‘therapeutic work with children [is] no longer being done directly’.

In addition, ‘regular face to face sessions with family support workers’ are lacking, and ‘the hardest hit’, in one professional’s opinion, is group work services e.g. on parenting and domestic abuse. This worker describes: ‘parents are finding it hard to attend online provision



as the engagement is not the same and some groups are not running at all'. Further, a different practitioner highlights 'internet poverty' as a need exacerbated by Covid-19.

Needs of children and families

A couple of practitioners highlight 'mental health' as a need created or exacerbated by Covid-19 for children and families. In addition, one worker is interested to know when courts will reopen to enable 'better court hearing experiences' for parents. Another person wants to see 'more support for non-resident parents having contact, particularly for parents who have a long distance to travel and cannot get accommodation'.

Increasing workloads and pressure on CSC staff

One person describes how the lack of intervention support services has led to an increase in incoming referrals and workloads. Another person notes that there are current challenges in recruiting staff which leads to 'further instability for the team and young people'. Another implication is that newly qualified staff may not receive the support and guidance needed from more experienced staff due to the volume of work: 'I am jumping from job to job with no breaks. I can get interrupted constantly by IM in meetings and can come out of a 3 hour meeting to 40 odd emails with urgent tasks / advice'.

Health and safety of CSC staff

Some staff want communication around protection from their employer e.g. if they are clinically extremely vulnerable, how will their employer support and protect them? Others want clarity on the expectations in relation to home visiting and contact between children and parents. A couple of staff mentioned a lack of PPE. In terms of working from home, one staff member highlighted the need for 'resources offered such as table rests, chairs etc.' One person highlights the need for a 'contingency plan' and forward thinking around another potential lockdown in the future.

Implications

CSC professionals have highlighted a lack of in-person support from key multi-agency partners and also noted a lack of intervention support services during this time. Some support services are being delivered online however others are not and there is also the issue of internet poverty. Therefore, as one practitioner highlights: 'there is a need for some services to look at how they can work safely' in-person with children and families. For CSC staff, there is a need to clarify expectations around home visiting and contact. Similarly, local authorities must be prepared in the event a national lockdown happens again in the future.



About WWCSA Polling

What Works for Children's Social Care runs regular polls with social workers who have registered with us. Social workers are currently employed in a range of organisations and we canvas their opinions about our current and future research agenda as well as topics impacting on social work practice. There are 844 social workers currently registered to participate. 87 Social Workers responded to this poll with 24 social workers providing additional comments on their views on external agencies provisions and work pressures.