

## Q&A

How many young people took part in your research?

Phase 1 (2015-2020, pre-covid):

Around 4000 young people in Years 7-9 (age 11-14) completed computerised questionnaires at initial recruitment (Time 1, 2016-17) and one and two years later (Time 2, 2017-18; Time 3, 2018-19). The questionnaire collected detailed information about mental health and about social circumstances and experiences that might increase or decrease risk of mental health problems (e.g., bullying, racism, poverty, peer relationships, etc.). Among those who completed the questionnaires, around 800 also completed face-to-face interviews and cognitive tasks at two time points, and around 400 took part in a virtual reality task and provided hair samples for analysis of cortisol levels.

Phase 2 (2020-2025):

In May 2020, we started inviting existing REACH participants – who had completed questionnaires pre-covid – to complete a 30-min online questionnaire about their mental health, experiences, and circumstances during the pandemic and school closures (Time 4). By August 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, over 1000 young people, now age 14-18 years, had taken part. The findings presented at the ESRC Festival of Social Sciences are based on preliminary analyses of these data. Around 40 young people who completed the online questionnaire are also taking part in a video diary sub-study, providing in-depth information about their experiences of lockdown and the return to school via interviews and weekly diary entries.

What percentage of young people in each cohort agreed to participate in the research?

At Time 1, 88% of the invited young people took part. At Time 2 and Time 3, approximately 85-90% of those who took part the previous stayed involved. At Phase 2, it is a moving picture because we are still collecting data – we have presented the data collected between May and August in this event, but currently, we have around 1,300 responses.

How representative is the REACH cohorts?

Our data at Phase 1 is highly representative of young people in Lambeth and Southwark in terms of gender, ethnic group, and free school meals status. At our Phase 2 COVID-19 survey, we have – at the moment – a slight underrepresentation of young people on free school meals and an overrepresentation of girls. We hope this will balance out as we continue data collection in the coming months.

How do you evaluate your research?

This is something that we are keen to do more of. We are working with an organisation called [McPin](#) to try to evaluate the impact of our research, our community engagement programme, and the ways in which we, as researchers, work with and involve schools and young people. McPin are talking to people who have been involved in REACH over the years, including teachers, young people, and our Young Person's Advisory Group, to find out what's worked well and what we could do better. We hope this will inform future ways of working.

How do we make sure our participants are okay (i.e. if they need help)?

Young people's safety and wellbeing is always our first priority. When we first started REACH, we worked closely with school safeguarding leads and pastoral teams to develop robust protocols and procedures that (a) protect and support young people who disclose information that might indicate risk of harm, (b) provide participating young people with [information](#) on relevant support services and organisations, and (c) provide young people with opportunities to (discretely) request further support, if they wish to do so.

Are there any similar studies related to primary school pupils?

Co-SPACE at Oxford University uses very similar measures on children aged 4-16, so includes a large data set on primary school aged children. However, this includes information reported about primary school children by their parents as opposed to being completed by the children themselves. You can find more information about Co-Space and Co-SPYCE (a sub-section of Co-SPACE which focuses on behavioural difficulties of pre-school children) on this [website](#).

Did you measure help seeking behaviours or coping strategies and potential protective factors?

Yes, we measured help seeking behaviours at all four timepoints, so, we will be able to explore changes in help-seeking behaviours over time. Regarding coping strategies and potential protective factors, yes, we have collected information on numerous things that might

be protective for adolescent mental health, such as coping methods, social support from peers and family, physical activity, and so on. We will be conducting interaction analyses to look at whether these putative protective factors modify/mitigate the effects of known risk factors for mental distress in the context of the pandemic.