

Recovery Planning: Using Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment (MWIA) to identify the impact of Covid-19 on mental wellbeing

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The Covid-19 pandemic has had – and continues to have - a profound impact on individuals' and communities' lives, and potentially on their mental wellbeing. While some may have experienced traumatic events, everyone's mental wellbeing may have been affected to some degree because of necessary restrictions placed on our daily lives, and due to the temporary loss of familiar activities and ability to spend time with friends and family.

Indeed, the Local Government Association and UK Association of Directors of Public Health have commented that 'the behaviours and environments needed to curtail the spread of COVID-19 are known risk factors for mental health difficulties'¹.

Some population groups – particularly Black and Minority Ethnic groups and older people - are being affected disproportionately. The recent Public Health England (PHE) Disparities Review confirms that the impact of Covid-19 has 'replicated existing health inequalities, and in some case, increased them'²

The United Nations³ stated in May 2020:

'Although the COVID-19 crisis is, in the first instance, a physical health crisis, it has the seeds of a major mental health crisis as well, if action is not taken. Good mental health ... must be front and centre of every country's response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic'.³

In the UK as elsewhere, recovery planning is now underway in all sectors ranging from national, regional and local governments, health and social care, community and voluntary organisations as well as business and commerce. It will be vital that it considers the mainly adverse impacts on mental wellbeing of the pandemic on individuals and communities, and as PHE has pointed out², that policies are adopted that 'recognise and wherever possible, mitigate or reduce the impact of Covid-19 on population groups shown to be more affected by the infection and its adverse outcomes'.

¹ Local Government Association and Association of Directors of Public Health (2020) Public mental health and wellbeing and Covid-19 <https://local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Public%20mental%20health%20and%20wellbeing%20and%20COVID-19-1.pdf>

² Public Health England (June 2020) Disparities in the risks and outcomes from Covid-19. PHE Publications, Gateway number GW-1311

³ United Nations (2020) Policy brief: Covid 19 and the need for action on mental health <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/JN-Policy-Brief-COVID-19-and-mental-health.pdf> stated:

A toolkit that can help with assessing and informing recovery planning is Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment (MWIA). This briefing presents MWIA and explains how it can be applied. We hope it will be of interest and relevance to those involved in recovery planning across sectors.

MWIA: what is it?

The MWIA Toolkit was developed and published in 2011 by a national mental wellbeing collaborative including National Mental Health Development Unit (a DH arms-length body), Liverpool University, South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, the New Economics Foundation, and the NHS Confederation together with public mental health and impact assessment experts. It is an evidence-based framework for making both a rapid and/or comprehensive assessment of likely impacts on mental wellbeing; and leads to identifying possible ways to support, plan and commission for positive responses to the findings. For details of the toolkit see⁴.

MWIA has an emphasis both on using an evidence-based framework; and also on significant participation of affected communities in the identification of impacts. This enables a greater depth of understanding of impacts as well as ownership of findings and potential responses. Evaluation has shown ‘strong qualitative evidence that MWIA makes a difference to the way initiatives are implemented’⁵.

The MWIA toolkit aims to identify the specific influence of an event, programme or policy on mental wellbeing. To do this, it explores the positive and negative effects of the event or programme on three protective factors:

- Enhancing Control
- Increasing Resilience and Community Assets
- Facilitating Participation and promoting Social inclusion.

These protective factors have a significant influence on the mental wellbeing of individuals and communities, including those with specific population characteristics. These are pathways through which wider social determinants – for example financial security, housing, education, employment – influence outcomes.

Organisations that have applied MWIA have found that the participative nature of MWIA helps to raise awareness and understanding of mental wellbeing and ownership of the findings. This leads to recommendations which are based on identified needs, which inform future planning, commissioning and service delivery to minimise adverse and maximise positive impacts of the event or programme.

⁴ MWIA <https://q.health.org.uk/document/mental-wellbeing-impact-assessment-a-toolkit-for-wellbeing/>

⁵ King,S. (2014) How effective is Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment?: A briefing paper by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. Publ. The Tavistock Institute

Using MWIA in Covid-19 Recovery Planning

There are two main MWIA processes that could be used to make assessments of mental wellbeing impacts of the pandemic:

1. Screening: this involves a rapid initial assessment of potential impacts on protective factors, population groups, and wider determinants/health inequalities, and is often used as a 'stand-alone' process. Using the MWIA Screening Toolkit as a guide, facilitators:
 - Identify up to 10 people who can reflect or represent views, and experience of Covid-19 – depending on the group of interest e.g. people working in a hospital setting or in a community that has lived experience
 - Convene and facilitate a 2-3 hour MWIA Screening 'meeting' in which participants identify mental wellbeing impacts from the event, and potential solutions – probably on-line
 - Analyse and write-up the findings, identifying potential recommendations in response to adverse impacts.

Should the screening process identify significant negative impacts or issues that require further investigation, an 'In-depth' MWIA assessment can be undertaken.

2. In-depth assessment: this is a comprehensive exploration of actual and/or likely potential impacts on mental wellbeing, which follows on from Screening involving:
 - In-depth population profiling
 - Drawing on existing literature summaries on the impacts of Covid-19 and / or of other key emerging issues e.g. Bereavement, Volunteering
 - Gathering stakeholder views and lived experiences through workshops
 - Appraising the impacts
 - Identify indicators to measure impacts
 - Formulating recommendations
 - Producing an in-depth report.

Note: the MWIA is not suitable or intended for making individual health status assessments.

How can MWIA help with Recovery Planning?

Carrying out MWIA Screening will provide insights about actual and/or likely impacts on population mental wellbeing which will help shape recovery planning.

It could enable a more tailored response to those mental wellbeing impacts through:

- ✓ Involvement of affected communities or staff in the MWIA process - hence a tool to gain local participation, understanding and ownership of responses
- ✓ Increasing understanding of the likely impacts on mental wellbeing for communities or staff – both negative or possible positives
- ✓ Helping to understand what action can be taken to help support and minimize negative impacts

- ✓ Helping to understand how positive impacts can be built upon and sustained
- ✓ Helping with planning how to assess impact from action taken in recovery planning.

For example, the screening process may reveal negative impacts in various population groups:

- Older people who have greater isolation than previously, meaning a loss of participation and contact with family and friends
- People who already misuse alcohol or other drugs experiencing a sense of a loss of control and reduced ability to make healthy choices, resulting in greater substance misuse and greater vulnerability to mental illness
- Health and social care professionals experiencing overwhelming demands and work pressures, together with anxiety about exposure to and risk of spreading the virus, experiencing an erosion of resilience.

MWIA screening may also reveal positive impacts which arise from new ways of living, working, receiving services or new opportunities, such as enhanced participation in volunteering, that could be built on during recovery.

In the context of Covid-19, we think MWIA could be applied in the following ways:

- (a) With and for higher risk communities – as per the PHE Disparities Review
- (b) With and for staff delivering frontline services
- (c) With and for staff newly working from home
- (d) With and for people who have Covid-19 lived experience, including bereavement.

Next steps in MWIA to assist with Covid-19 Recovery planning

Organisations and communities may wish to undertake MWIA Screening themselves. The toolkit is downloadable and can be self-administering <https://q.health.org.uk/document/mental-wellbeing-impact-assessment-a-toolkit-for-wellbeing/>

This briefing is the first component of a package of free support being developed.

Look out for:

- ✓ A PHE-hosted webinar on MWIA and Covid-19
- ✓ Case studies on using the MWIA Toolkit in Covid-19 recovery planning

If you would like expert help in using MWIA in your own recovery planning, get in touch with Anthea Cooke (a lead MWIA author, trainer and specialist MWIA provider):

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