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Building back better: speech and language therapy during and beyond COVID-19

Dr Judy Clegg

[#BuildBackBetterSLT](#)



What, why, who

- **What** – survey on people’s access to speech and language therapy (SLT)
- **Why** – concerns about the impact of March-June 2020 lockdown on access to services
- **Who** – 500+ responses:
 - 100 from people aged 18 & over
 - 400+ from or on behalf of people aged 0-18



Good things people of all ages told US

- SLT makes **people's lives better**
- It makes their **families and carers' lives better**
- Some people **continued to have SLT** in person during lockdown
- Some people **liked** therapy **over the phone** or **online/video**



Bad things people of all ages told US

- Many had **no SLT** at all during lockdown – 44%
18+/62% 0-18
- Of those who had SLT, most had **less than before** lockdown – 52% 18+/81% 0-18
- This was **bad** for them in various ways inc. **mental health, education** and **home and social life**
- People are **worried about future access** to SLT
- People in **most deprived areas** fared worst



Children and young people's (CYP) general experiences

- 62% had **no SLT** at all during lockdown
- Of those who had **SLT during lockdown**:
 - 10% had the **same amount**
 - 81% had **less** than before lockdown
- **Reasons** cited included: SLT services cancelling appointments, closure of schools & colleges, redeployment of therapists



CYP in the most deprived areas

- In the **most deprived** areas:
 - Higher % in most deprived areas had **no SLT** (71% cf 58%)
 - Higher % in most deprived areas had **less SLT** than in the least deprived areas (82% cf 80%)
 - Lower % in most deprived areas had **in-person SLT** (7% cf 13%)
 - Lower % in most deprived areas have had **in-person SLT since lockdown ended** (22% cf 37%)
- Interestingly though, if children and young people had **more SLT** during lockdown, a higher % were in most deprived areas (4% cf 1%)



Different forms of delivery...

Of those who had **SLT over the phone (28%)**:

- 13% liked it
- 45% found it ok
- 20% did not like it
- 18% could not do it

Of those who had **SLT online/video (54%)**:

- 29% liked it
- 40% found it ok
- 19% did not like it
- 12% could not do it



...the phone...

Parents highlighted the following issues:

- Assessment over the phone did not give full picture
- Some thought virtual assessment of swallowing was unsafe
- Some felt unsupported by lack of in-person access
- Ability of children to engage & focus
- Child not being able to engage with SLT on the phone



...online/video...

Parents highlighted the following issues:

- Bad connection & technology lags
- Difficulties in capturing non-verbal communication
- Distorted sound, poor sound and image quality
- Difficulties keeping CYP engaged & concentrated on the screen
- Reliance on parents to support & interpret



...implications for telehealth

- Personal preference
- Digital poverty & exclusion
- Ability of SLT services to provide online therapy
- Considerations of age
- Accessibility issues for certain people



Impact of lockdown on communication & swallowing

Majority of CYP saw **no improvement** or a
worsening during lockdown

- **47%** said their communication & swallowing stayed **the same** during lockdown
- **24%** said it got **worse**
- **18%** said it got **better**



Impact on CYP...

Children and young people told having less SLT was bad for their:

- Education – 67%
- Social life and friendships – 59%
- Mental health – 45%
- Home and domestic life – 44%
- Hobbies and leisure – 23%
- Employment – 2%



...and on their families and carers

Families and carers told us having less SLT was bad for them too:

- Home and domestic life – 64%
- Mental health – 58%
- Education – 43%
- Social life and friendships – 42%
- Hobbies and leisure – 21%
- Physical health – 14%
- Employment – 14%



Thoughts on the future

- 79% concerned about receiving SLT in the future
- Most concerned about the impact on their:
 - Education (82%)
 - Social life and friendships (74%)
 - Mental health (60%)



Other issues highlighted

- Value of SLT & importance to communication
- Gratitude for some support during lockdown
- Lack of resources making access to SLT difficult inc. pre-lockdown
- Shortage of SLTs
- Struggles not having in-person SLT & preference for it
- Particular concerns around SLT when delivered in schools



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Where we are

We all face:

- Challenge
- Opportunity



Building Back Better

The *Building Back Better* report calls for:

- **improvement in support** for people with communication and swallowing needs
- **better access** to speech and language therapy
- **levelling-up of provision** so the most deprived areas have the same provision as the least deprived areas
- **removing inequalities** of access to services



Building Back Better – cont'd

National and local recovery policies

- **Need** - Identification of need & appropriate support
- **Education recovery plans** – communication and language development must be central to them
- **Rehabilitation services** – communication and swallowing must be integral to them
- **Mental health services recovery plans** – SLT must be recognised as integral to them



Building Back Better – cont'd

Adequate resourcing for SLT services

- **Increase in demand** because of pandemic – inc. supporting people with Long Covid, a new clinical area
- **Higher level of need** due to backlog in identification and support
- Return of SLTs to **substantive posts** ASAP
- Promotion & protection of people's general **mental health and wellbeing**



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We are not alone





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Thank you!

