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**Two Years On:  
LGBTQ\* UK Pandemic  
Experiences  
Online Survey  
Preliminary results of  
the third survey**

**July 2023**

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# LGBTQ\* UK Pandemic Experiences

## Preliminary results of the third survey

We have summarized the preliminary results of our third LGBTQ\* UK COVID-19 Experiences survey. A total of 594 LGBTQ\* people who live across the UK helped us by completing this survey – thank you to everyone who helped to publicize it and took a look. Data collection took place between 24<sup>th</sup> of March and 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2022, with most of the responses submitted in April and May.

The results show the continuing impact of the pandemic and resulting restrictions on the LGBTQ+ community in the UK. Mental health issues, sleep problems and financial struggles were a large concern for many. However, our findings generally show that fewer LGBTQ+ people were emotionally affected by the pandemic when compared to then findings from our previous pandemic surveys and a return to “normal” for many, with lower levels of health concern related to COVID-19 specifically.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a chasm within the LGBTQ+ community regarding feelings of isolation. For the majority the easing of restrictions has brought more freedom. But others experienced further exclusion and were negatively impacted by the decrease in online services availability brought about by the easing of social restrictions. The number of people who considered themselves disabled has risen in comparison to numbers in our previous surveys, and for a lot of disabled participants navigating the easing of social restrictions has been made even more difficult by feeling as if other members of the community had no regard for their safety and health.



In general, the pandemic seemed to give many people in the LGBTQ+ communities in the UK an opportunity to focus on personal development, their hobbies and interests, and/or spend extra time with partners or family. Various respondents had realizations about their gender identity and/or sexuality during

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the first lockdown and many subsequently decided to come out. This was often aided by the shift to socializing online, making it easier and safer to communicate and come out to others.

This survey is the third part of a series of interview studies within an overarching international research project on LGBTQ\* adults' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the first two surveys, as well as further details about our international research project are available on our website:

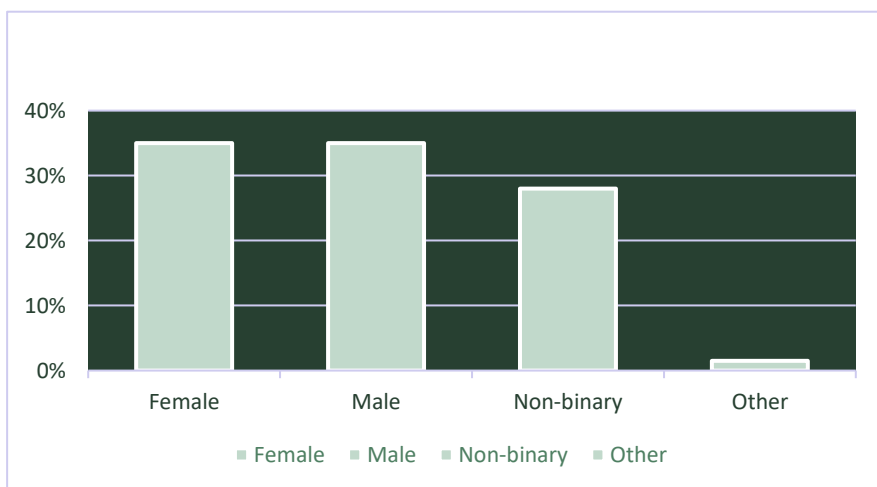
[lgbtq1835c19lockdown.wordpress.com](https://lgbtq1835c19lockdown.wordpress.com)

If you have any questions, would like to know more about the results, or would like to quote any of the material here, please do get in touch with Fiona Tasker ([f.tasker@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:f.tasker@bbk.ac.uk)).

## Who took part in the survey?

**Gender.** 35% of participants were female, 35% were male, and 28% were non-binary. 1.5% either identified as 'other' (including intersex people) or choosing not to answer.

**Transgender.** 30% of participants were transgender.

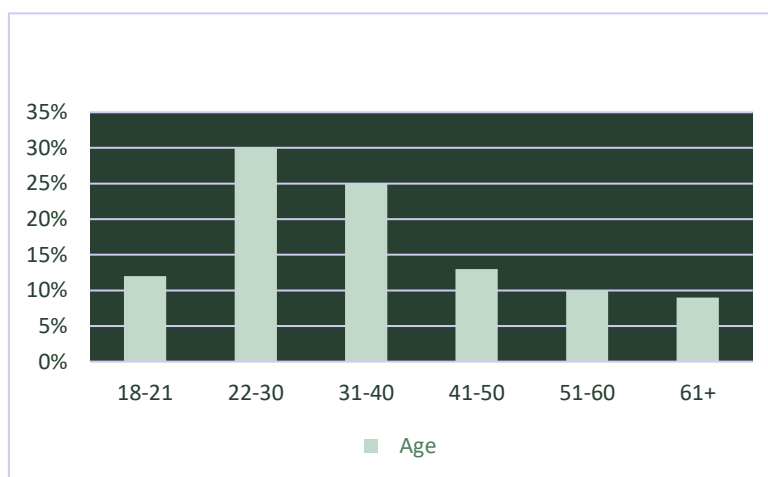


**Sexual orientation.** 46% of participants were gay or lesbian, 26% bisexual, with 10% preferring the term pansexual, 10% were asexual, 2% heterosexual and 4% of participants selected 'Other', which included orientations such as demisexual, omnisexual and polysexual. Additionally, about 23% chose queer as an answer, often in combination with one of the other options.

**Ethnicity.** In response to our survey question 93% of respondents were white (English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish, Gypsy or Irish traveller, Roma, and any other white background).

**Nationality.** 91% of participants said they were British (or possessed dual-nationality, including British nationality).

**Age.** Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 80, with an average age of 37 years. Overall, 12% of participants were aged 18-21 years, 30% were 22-30 years, 25% were 31-40 years, 13% were 41-50 years, 10% were aged 51-60 years and 9% were over the age of 61 years.



**Educational qualifications.** 59% of participants had completed (or were completing) an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. 25% had achieved a further education qualification (such as an NVQ, apprenticeship, or A-levels) and 5% had achieved GCSEs or equivalent school leaving certificate.

**Employment.** Almost half of participants reported that they were in full-time paid employment (49%), while 17% were in part-time employment, 3% were on long-term leave, 6% were retired and 11% unemployed. Additionally, 22% were either full-time or part-time students. 50% said that their personal economic future is looking a little or much worse than before the pandemic.

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**Disability or ongoing health problem.** 49% of survey respondents said that their health was a little or much worse now compared to before the pandemic started. 61% of participants considered themselves to be disabled or to have an ongoing mental or physical health problem. Of those participants who were disabled or had an ongoing health problem, 62% reported that this affected their ability to carry out their regular activities at least to some extent, with 22% stating that their condition affected their life a lot.

### **Responses from across the UK.**

We were very pleased to receive completed surveys from LGBTQ+ people living in all parts of the UK. There were respondents to the survey from country and part of the UK. Nevertheless, most participants lived in England (83%).

The most represented regions were Greater London (24%), followed by the South East (12%), the North West (11%), the South West (9%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (8%). Only 1% of respondents lived in Northern Ireland at the time they completed the survey.



**Relationship status.** 39% of survey respondents said that they were not in an intimate relationship at the time they completed the survey. 20% of participants were in a relationship but not cohabiting, 35% of participants were cohabiting, married, or in a civil partnership.

**Living situation.** 25% of survey participants reported living on their own, 37% lived with a partner and/or children, 13% lived in a shared house, and 17% were living with their family at the time they took part in the survey. 32% of participants said they had changed where they live during the pandemic (since March 2020).

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## Personal experience of COVID-19

Nearly half of our survey respondents (47%) reported that they had received a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 or at some point experienced symptoms. This contrasted with our last survey, where this figure was much lower (4%).

Additionally, 79% of participants reported having a family member or friend who had been infected with COVID-19 (compared to 35% recorded in our previous survey).

When asked about how afraid they were about becoming infected with COVID-19 in the future, only 4% answered they were totally afraid. 85% of all participants had either all or some of the COVID vaccinations they had been offered.

## Impact of the pandemic

The outcome of our third LGBTQ\* pandemic experiences survey seems to suggest that a slow return to “normal” is underway.

Looking back over the three weeks prior to completing the survey, only 6% said that the pandemic had very much or severely affected their life, whereas 29% of participants reported that the pandemic had not affected their life or had very little impact. This is almost a reversal from our second survey when 20% said they had been severely affected and only 2% reported no or next to no effects of the pandemic on their life. Both our 2022 and our 2021 surveys show a substantial change from the first survey in June to August 2020 where 72% said that the pandemic had severely affected their life over the three weeks prior to survey completion.

Respondents who said that they had felt totally or extremely limited in the last three weeks when carrying out usual activities totalled only 6% (compared to 28% in the second and 69% in the first study). The percentage of participants who reported not feeling limited by the pandemic at all increased from only 2% to 26%.

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*“The pandemic has taken a back seat lately in what causes my anxiety and emotional difficulties. It is still there for sure. But lately the situation in Ukraine and some news about trans people has been extremely triggering and horrendously upsetting...Overall I am hopeful and optimistic and positive about things.”*

(Survey participant)

The number of participants who felt they were emotionally affected by the pandemic has decreased. 21% reported that the pandemic had not affected them emotionally at all during the last three weeks (in contrast to only 3% in the last survey). Only 5% of all participants still felt very emotionally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in our third survey.

Some participants said that had experienced covid only just before they completed the survey:

*“I have had Covid-19 in the last three weeks. Prior to that, my social life and mood was significantly improving.”*

(Survey participant)

Asked about if they were following or thinking about news of the pandemic, 25% of all respondents answered not at all, while only 3% did so all, or almost all, the time.



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## Feelings of isolation

In general terms, the number of LGBTQ+ survey respondents who felt affected by feelings of isolation decreased in our third survey compared to the figures we noted in either of our two previous pandemic surveys. Nevertheless, some participants, especially vulnerable and disabled people, still felt very isolated, even within LGBTQ+ spaces. Two main reasons were given for feeling isolated and both were associated with the general easing of social



restrictions: many online services had been withdrawn or had become harder to access by the time of our third survey and the level of mask wearing had decreased reducing the opportunities for social activity for some survey respondents.

About 8% of participants said to be feeling very or extremely isolated from both their LGBTQ+ as well as their cisgender or heterosexual friends over the last three weeks, whereas only 2% felt very or extremely isolated from their partner(s).

*“I felt less isolated when everyone treated online interaction as the norm, but now access to online LGBT events has mostly ended, and I am clinically vulnerable and unable to travel to live events.”*

(Survey participant)

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## Pandemic Problems

Our second survey introduced a section asking participants about any problems and positives experienced during the pandemic, which was repeated for the current study.

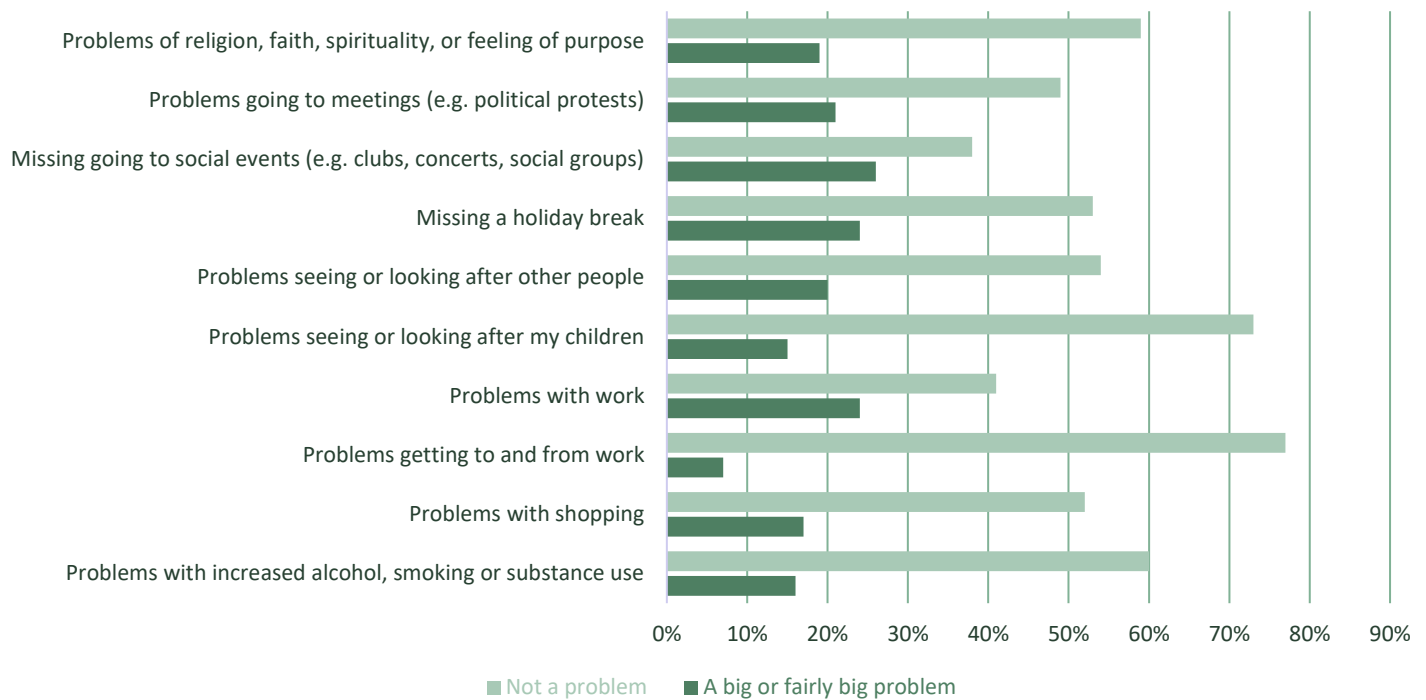
The most common issues that participants in our third survey had were problems with sleeping, with 39% identifying this as a big or fairly big problem they are dealing with. Problems with mental health or well-being was a big or fairly big problem to 35% of all respondents, as well as keeping fit, weight gain or less which was identified as a big or fairly big problem by 34%. Looking at additional responses regarding problems throughout the whole pandemic period, it seems that the isolation experienced during the lockdowns and the anxiety resulting from dealing with a worldwide pandemic, exacerbated a lot of participant's mental and physical health issues long-term.

*“I have become disillusioned with humanity. People's lack of consideration for others during the pandemic and the fact nothing has changed after such a crisis has made the world seem hopeless and really hurt my motivation for life...”*

(Survey participant)

Furthermore, 31% of those participants who said the question was applicable to them, reported problems accessing appointments, or medication to support their gender identity. 22% had problems accessing sexual health screening and/or medication. 39% of respondents said that they had general problems accessing health appointments and/or medication.

## Other problems experienced over the last few weeks



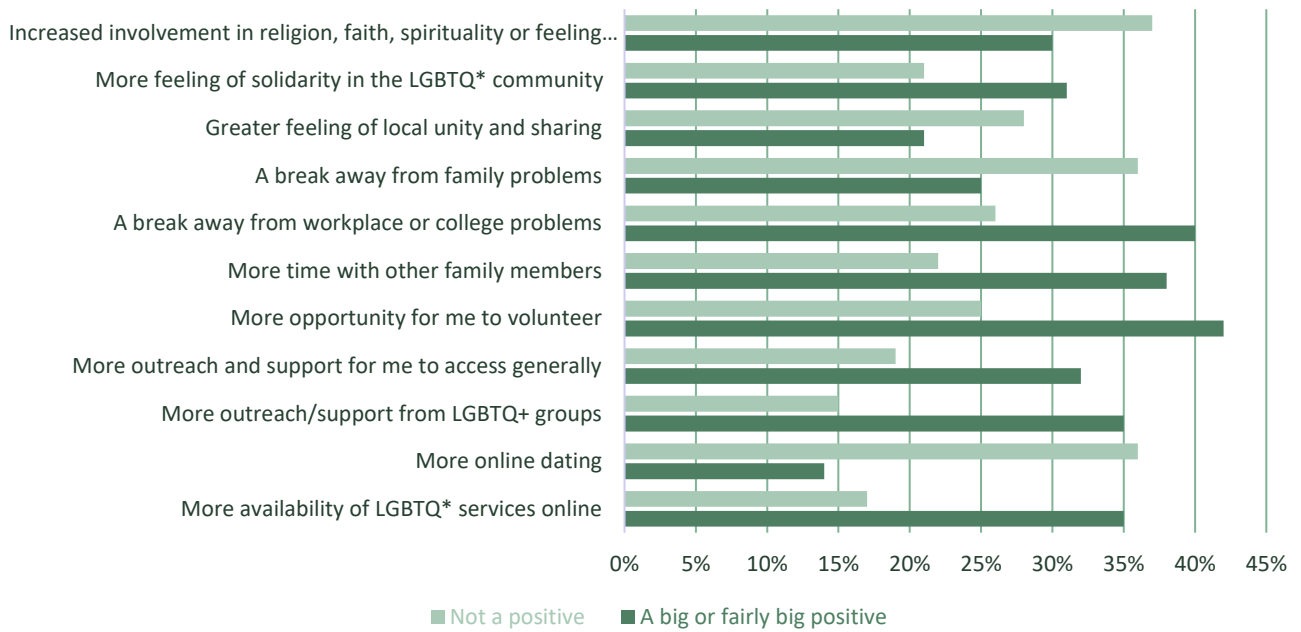
NB Percentages calculated only for respondents who indicated that the issue was applicable to them.

## Positives from the pandemic

A lot of participants found that a positive of the pandemic and its lockdowns was to have more time to spend with a partner or children (59% saw this as a big or fairly big positive), as well as time at home to do DIY or garden (44%) and time to start a new interest or project and increased feeling of creativity (35%). Additionally, not having to commute was a big or fairly big positive for 63% of all those who responded to the question.

Availability of online services was valued highly, with 50% of participants saying that access to general online services was a big or fairly big positive to them. Forming of online friendships and more online entertainment were also seen as upsides of pandemic by 42% and 63% of respondents respectively.

## Other positives experienced over the last few weeks



NB Percentages calculated only for respondents who indicated that the issue was applicable to them.

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## Thanks and future research

Thank you so much to everyone who took part in this survey and donated their time and effort. We appreciate it! Gratitude also to Birkbeck, University of London and the British Academy for funding this project.

Hopefully, you have found this brief summary of the preliminary findings useful. The UK LGBTQ+ community contains a diverse group of people and experiences vary for each member, evidenced by this survey.

While some of the findings, especially around mental health, disability, and isolation are concerning, others which show the pandemic itself has been causing less anxiety and offered a time to self-reflect and find oneself, offer a more positive outlook into the future.

*“The pandemic allowed me to reflect on my purpose and my gender identity ... allowed me to come out safely as non-binary - choosing my social occasions and interactions to express this”*

(Survey participant)



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Please get in touch with Fiona Tasker ([f.tasker@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:f.tasker@bbk.ac.uk)) if you have any questions, would like to know more about the results, or would like to quote any of the material here.

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