



**WOMEN  
FRIENDLY  
LEEDS**

**BETTER FOR WOMEN,  
BETTER FOR EVERYONE**

**WOMEN'S  
LIVESLEEDS**

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# COVID-19 Women's Survey Report

## Executive Summary

COVID19 Survey 01/06/20 – 14/06/2020

**June 2020**

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# Foreword

As we continue to respond to the unprecedented and tragic circumstances thrown at us by COVID-19, as a Council we remain steadfast in our commitment to be the Best Council and for Leeds to be the Best City.

I am therefore pleased to support Women's Lives Leeds's ambition to make Leeds the UK's first Women Friendly City, and to become an Ambassador for them.

We recognise how important it is to draw on all the experiences and views of the people of Leeds to help guide us through this crisis.

Women Lives Leeds has reached out to women across our city to ask for their views about how COVID-19 has or is currently affecting them.

There has been an overwhelming response with so many women taking part and contributing, making sure their voices are heard.

We endorse the contents of this report, which will help shape our thinking around the support needed for all our communities and which will help us achieve our ambition to make Leeds the Best City.

Cllr Judith Blake – Leader of Leeds City Council



# Introduction

In light of the COVID-19 Pandemic that has swept across the nation, Women's Lives Leeds were keen to make sure that the effects of this pandemic on women were known, so created an online survey that would provide a quick snapshot of this, with a view that the findings would contribute to the reshaping of services across Leeds.

The Women Friendly Leeds COVID-19 survey was launched on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> of June and closed on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June. A total of 979 responses to the survey were received, telling us that Leeds women wanted their say about their views and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, within a local context. The purpose of the survey was to gather data to capture the experiences and views of women to gain a wide, diverse perspective, represent the views of as many women as possible and feed this into key decision conversations across the city. This included the "Communities of Interest" work, which is Leeds's partnership approach to COVID-19. The data will also be shared with other strategic partners, such as Public Health, Safer Leeds, Healthwatch Leeds and the Equalities Assembly.

The questions were focused to provide an understanding of women's concerns in the current pandemic and its future effects. Questions focused on women's opinions and their experiences. The survey was launched 10 weeks after lockdown begun, with the aim that women would be able to reflect and respond thoughtfully on their experiences so far.

The survey was advertised through established partnerships, contacts and networks within the local authority, social media and in newsletters to the Women Friendly Leeds and Women's Hub memberships.

# Responses

The purpose of this section is to highlight the diverse range of issues and key emerging themes that have been captured in the detail of the report.

## Question one

5 statements were presented and women were asked to reflect on whether they agreed or disagreed:

- 85% (829 respondents) agreed that women bear the brunt of childcare and other caring responsibilities more than men.
- 57% (558 respondents) agreed that there are more women than men in frontline jobs, therefore having a greater risk of exposure to the virus.
- 90% (877 respondents) agreed that women's experience of domestic violence is likely to increase during lockdown.
- 72% (702 respondents) agreed that BAME women are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 compared with white British women.
- Only 43% (424 respondents) agreed that women are more likely to be affected by mental health issues as a direct result of COVID-19, with 39% (382 respondents) neither agreeing or disagreeing, demonstrating that most women did not think this was a gendered issue. However, this is still a significant theme, as it was evident in later responses from the survey.

Three key themes emerged from this question are as follows:

1. Women's opinions and concerns around bearing the brunt of childcare
2. Other caring responsibilities
3. Domestic abuse.

## Question two

Women were asked if they thought there were other ways that women were disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

The top five themes are:

- Employment – mentioned by 60 respondents, was particularly about job security and stability and was hindered by other responsibilities such as childcare and homeschooling.
- Childcare or homeschooling – mentioned by 58 respondents, women spoke about bearing the brunt of these responsibilities, or doing all of it, whilst often working from home at the same time.
- Carrying the emotional burden and juggling a variety of roles – mentioned by 58 respondents, this was about 'holding it all together' and looking out for the practical and emotional needs of others.

- Household chores – mentioned by 41 respondents, these tasks had increased due to more people being at home and for longer periods of time.
- Other caring responsibilities – mentioned by 39 respondents, this included current caring roles that had become more complex and time consuming, or new caring roles due to the virus, again fitting alongside other responsibilities.

Other themes that were raised were ‘financial concerns’, ‘access to women’s health and maternity services’, ‘mental health’, ‘the lack of representation of women at government level’ and ‘intimidation by men.’

### Question three

Women were asked to reflect on their own experiences, by asking them to agree or disagree with seven statements, prompting them to leave out any that weren’t relevant to them:

- 19% agreed that they have experienced difficulty accessing women’s health services during lockdown.
- 27% agreed that COVID-19 had negatively affected their financial situation.
- 25% were concerned about their children going back to school or nursery too soon.
- 56% agreed that they had experienced mental health issues more than normal directly due to the pandemic.
- 29% agreed that they were concerned about going back to work sooner than they felt comfortable with.
- 18 % experienced difficulties due to inadequate technology, however it was important to note that this was an online survey, so likely that respondents had a reasonable level of access to the internet, and a device.
- 31% of respondents agreed that they had been affected by shielding for themselves of others.
- 56% who expressed that they had experienced mental health issues more than normal as a direct result of COVID-19, clearly demonstrating that is the most significant issue that women are experiencing.

### Questions four and five

These questions focused on what was their main concern regarding the pandemic now and in the future respectively.

The themes that came up in these questions were very similar but prevalence was different depending on whether women were thinking about their view now, or going forward.

The top five themes about current concerns were:

- Childcare, home schooling and other household chores – mentioned by 93 respondents.
- Health – mentioned by 89 respondents
- Lockdown being lifted too soon – mentioned by 68 respondents
- Mental health – mentioned by 64 respondents
- Safety – mentioned by 60 respondents

Other themes were; 'people not sticking to lockdown rules', 'government failures', 'isolation', 'work', 'access to services', 'a second spike', and 'gender inequality.'

The top five themes about future concerns were:

- Work, unemployment and jobs – mentioned by 109 respondents
- Returning to normal – mentioned by 87 respondents
- A second spike – mentioned by 79 respondents
- Education – mentioned by 70 respondents
- A recession and the economy – mentioned by 68 respondents

Other themes were; 'mental health', 'COVID-19 illness and recovery', 'gender inequality', 'government failures', 'relationships and families', and 'the future for younger generations.'

It is apparent that concerns for the future move to employment and education, and are linked to returning to normal, an expected second spike, and an unstable economy.

## Question six

This question asked; 'Have you easily been able to access local advice, guidance and support regarding COVID-19?'

This was mostly positive, with many women reporting that they had been able to with:

- 64% being able to access it within their locality
- 7% commenting that this was through work specifically
- 16% hadn't tried or needed to access information or services
- 8% had not been able to access any at all

The same key themes emerged throughout the whole survey, and they linked with each other. Women strongly expressed that they are struggling to manage working from home, childcare, home schooling, having increased household chores, and holding the emotional burden. This has had an impact on their mental and physical health, and they predict that the ongoing situation, which could lead to a second spike and further lockdown, would continue to have a disproportionate effect on them as women.

They are concerned that the pandemic will inadvertently create a backwards movement in terms of gender inequality. There is the view that the government are not considering their experiences, in part due to a lack of representation in those conversations.

They felt that the disproportionate effects of economic instability, which also link to employability and getting 'back to normal' was more complex and difficult for women.

Respondents generally felt that there was a lack of recognition of these issues and a sense of how the individual issues within an already unequal society, had been exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



# Conclusion

The Women Friendly Leeds team was delighted to have received such a positive and vast response from women in Leeds to the COVID-19 women's survey. We want to thank every respondent who took the time to contribute their opinions and experiences which has given us an extensive local view of how the pandemic has affected women. We took the time to read, understand and categorise every single comment that was made and we valued every response given.

These responses have enabled us to gain a rich and useful range of local data highlighting the views, opinions and experiences of 979 women in Leeds in regards to COVID-19. It is apparent that there are key themes that have emerged from the survey, some are already known across the city, so the findings reaffirm those as priorities and concerns that should be addressed.

These themes include: women's employability; juggling numerous tasks expected of them, such as taking the majority of the burden of childcare, other caring responsibilities, carrying the emotional burden; and greater general household tasks. Some respondents told us that these negatively affected their financial stability, and their mental health and well-being.

There was a sense that gender inequality had been negatively affected by these issues and, women talked about their concerns for family of all ages, and friends, often as a concern over themselves.

Whilst completing this survey there have been some lessons learned by the team from women who responded in terms of the following which will be considered in the future:

1. Developing online surveys
2. How to capture some of the many positives stories to have come out of the pandemic that haven't been captured within this survey
3. How capturing the demographics of the respondents may have given more insight into who was responding and if those respondents were fully reflecting the diversity of Leeds
4. How questions could be posed without being deemed as being biased

Women's Lives Leeds are delighted that the Women Friendly Leeds team could do this first survey and capture so many responses which can be seen in the direct quotes throughout the report. These will be used to help shape and contribute to conversations in Leeds.

The intention is that these findings will be used to inform the city's COVID-19 recovery response, and be taken into consideration in the future, so that women's voices will be present in every decision, plan and change that our city makes.

We make no apology for the ambitious nature of our recommendations and strive to ensure that gender is at the heart of the future city-wide approach in line with our intention for Leeds to become the first UK Women Friendly City.



# Recommendations

The following recommendations have been drawn from this report and will be shared across all strategic partnerships:

1. The report will be disseminated and inform future planning in the city, where city leaders will take a proactive approach to gender and have an inclusive leadership stance in the COVID-19 recovery stage.
2. Women's Lives Leeds will adopt a strategy to share the report as widely as possible to all regional and national partners.
3. City leaders continue to recognise gender equality and that the voices, experiences and views of a diverse range of women are included and represented in conversations going forward in the future.
4. City leaders are to consider and include employability and equality in conversations at every stage in the COVID-19 recovery process, as these were identified as particular concerns, both currently and in the future.
5. All Partners including Leeds City Council, Public Health and Clinical Commissioning Groups who have a responsibility for designing, reviewing and commissioning services consider the specifics that are relevant to them to help shape more targeted approaches; to help make changes to services and to adapt to meet identified need that has arisen directly due to the pandemic, in particular maternity and mental health.
6. The Women's and Girl's Hubs consider this alongside the City Listening Project's outcomes; form task and finish groups to agree and take forward collective priorities based on the broader scope of both projects.

