

Written evidence submitted by Girlguiding

Girlguiding response to the Education Committee Inquiry into the impact of Covid-19

Overview

As the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, our submission is focused on our evidence of girls and young women's experiences of education - both during this crisis as, well as research we've collected as part of the wider context of girls lives online over the past decade.

The impact of Covid-19 on girls and young women's education and their future is a source of anxiety and worry. The closure of schools means they miss seeing their friends, teachers and teaching assistant, learning at school and, for the youngest girls, playtime with their friends. Half say it's hard it hard to focus on schoolwork at the moment. And the cancellation of exams has fuelled anxieties of young women, a third of whom are concerned about their teachers predicting my grades.

Relevant evidence

The [Girls' Attitudes Survey](#) is Girlguiding's annual research project into the lives of girls and young women, aiming to build a comprehensive picture of the emerging needs, issues and priorities of girls and young women today. The survey provides a snapshot of the views of over 2,000 girls and young women from across the UK aged 7 to 21, within and outside Girlguiding. Each year the findings build upon those of previous surveys and cover a range of issues affecting girls from education, health and wellbeing, aspirations and safety on and offline.

Our latest research, ['Early findings on the impact of Covid-19 on girls and young women'](#), published on 20 May 2020, surveyed almost 7,000 girls and young women aged 4 to 18 across the UK, and gives a platform to their voices about the impact of the coronavirus and lockdown. This research took place in early May 2020.

Covid-19 and girls' education

It's clear from our research with girls in May 2020, that the closure of schools and the radical changes to girls lives, has had a major impact on girls and young women. For some, this different way of learning, alongside the uncertainties that remain, is causing them to feel overwhelmed and stressed. Older girls face further uncertainties around career prospects with many having had their planned work experience, internship or apprenticeship postponed or cancelled.

The closure of schools

Girls and young women feel a range of emotions in response to their schools being closed including:

- Aged 4 to 10: sad (64%); lonely (24%); happy (22%)
- Aged 11 to 14: sad (48%); lonely (33%); worried (24%)
- Aged 15 to 18: worried and anxious (58%); sad (40%); relieved (36%)

The closure of schools means girls are missing friends and their wider school community. For the youngest girls aged 4 to 10 this includes:

- Missing their friends (95%)

- Missing their teachers and teaching assistants (79%)
- Missing playtime (59%)

‘Sometimes I feel sad because I miss my friends and school, but I understand we have to stay at home to save lives and protect ourselves.’ Girl, aged 4 to 10

‘I’m in year 6 so I didn’t get to say goodbye to my friends and I’m sad I won’t see them again.’ Girl, aged 4 to 10

For girls aged 11 to 18, some say they are missing learning at school, whilst others will miss out on plans they had made or events they had expected, especially for those who are transitioning to secondary school or leaving school or college. They report:

- Missing school trips, events or celebrations (70%)
- Missing learning (50%)
- Missing school sports (29%)

‘The place I miss most is school because of the social aspect with friends and some of the teachers.’ Young woman, aged 15 to 18

‘I’m really struggling without my clubs. They were moments in the week I could look forward to, especially as I struggled with making friends at school.’ Young woman, aged 15 to 18

Learning from home

Girls and young women have adjusted to a radically different way of learning. For some, this has been positive, with 42% of those aged 4 to 14 saying they like it. For others, it has been more challenging, with 29% saying they don’t like it.

‘My mum and dad work so they don’t have enough time to teach me.’ Girl, aged 4 to 10

For the 11 to 18 age group, a third (33%), say learning at home has resulted in less pressure. However, half (48%) report finding it hard to concentrate on schoolwork at the moment and a third (34%) say they’re finding it hard to balance schoolwork and time to relax.

‘I have to share a laptop with my mum as we only have one.’ Girl, aged 11 to 14

‘I’m worried about getting behind in my work.’ Girl, aged 11 to 14

For the oldest group aged 15 to 18, over a third (38%) say they feel overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork they have to do. Over a third (37%) report that their school is giving them the support and help they need to learn at home. A fifth (21%) say they’re worried about not getting the support they would usually get at school such as careers advice.

‘I’ve been finding the balance between relaxing and schoolwork really difficult.’ Young woman, aged 15 to 18

The cancellation of exams

The cancellation of exams has fuelled anxieties of older girls aged 15 to 18, who feel worried / anxious (41%) and disappointed (39%) about it. Whilst a third (35%) say they feel okay about their teachers predicting their grades, a third (32%) also say they feel concerned about this.

'I will have a lot more pressure next year.' Young woman, aged 15 to 18

'I'm worried about the possibility that some teachers won't predict their students' grades correctly and mine may suffer as a result.' Young woman, aged 15 to 18

'I am gutted that exams were cancelled as my results have now been taken out of my control.' Young woman, aged 15 to 18

Education and gender

We know that girls and boys have different opportunities and experiences of their education and of different subjects. It's essential this is considered where grades are being predicted that will affect future opportunities, especially in relation to STEM subjects and the conscious and unconscious bias that these subjects are more for boys than for girls.

Our wider research (Girls Attitudes Survey) shows that, even before the coronavirus, girls and young women were worried and stressed about doing well at school and what it means for their future opportunities in life.

- 59% of girls and young women aged 11-21 are worried that if they don't do well in exams it will ruin their future opportunities in life (2019)
- 72% of girls and young women aged 11-21 say they often feel stressed about school college or work (2016)
- 40% of girls aged 7-10, 65% aged 11-16 and 44% aged 17-21 say their biggest fear is not doing well in school (2016)

And that that there are gendered inequalities across subjects:

- 87% of girls and young women aged 11-21 believe schools should be assessed to make sure girls and boys get the same information and encouragement when making subject choices and receiving careers advice (2019)
- 52% of girls and young women aged 11-21 say STEM subjects have the image of being more for boys (2016)
- 20% of girls and young women aged 11-21 think physics is more for boys (2018)
- 30% of girls aged 11-16 think computing is more for boys (2018)

And finally, that social media can impact education

- 44% of young women aged 17-21 are worried about being distracted from schoolwork online (2017)

This is significant given our Covid-19 research with girls and young women shows 85% aged 15-18 are spending more time on social media during this time.

[Girlguiding activity during coronavirus](#)

We believe that having an adventure is trying something new for the first time, it's embracing play and making the everyday extraordinary - and we need to make sure children and young people can still experience this even during current crisis. That's why Girlguiding has launched it's online offer - [Adventures At Home](#) - a range of activities to help children, parents and carers find simple ways to create fun, adventure and boost wellbeing. Adventures At Home provides weekly activities for children and young people to build their wellbeing in fun and playful ways at home.

[About us](#)

Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with over 500,000 members. Thanks to the dedication and support of 100,000 amazing volunteers, we are active in every part of the UK, giving girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build brilliant friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their lives and their communities. We build girls' confidence and raise their aspirations. We give them the chance to discover their full potential and encourage them to be a powerful force for good. We give them a space to have fun. We run Rainbows (4-7 years), Brownies (7-10 years), Guides (10-14 years) and Rangers (14-18 years). Registered Charity No. 306016.

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