

Covid stress 'driving hundreds of childcare workers to quit profession'^[1]

With nurseries remaining open in the pandemic, survey finds staff struggling to cope with pressures and lack of state support

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EXCERPTS

A fifth of all nursery and early years staff are considering leaving the sector amid warnings that many childcare workers are struggling to deal with the stresses placed on them by the pandemic.

In addition more than a third of workers say they do not feel able to cope with additional pressures, while around 10% said they had taken time off because of stress linked to the Covid crisis.

A comprehensive online survey carried out between December 2020 and January 2021 by the Early Years Alliance had nearly 3,800 responses from childminders and those working in nurseries and pre-schools in England.

Unlike schools, nurseries have remained open under the current lockdown. Nursery owners and staff said the sector, already affected by low pay and financial peril before the pandemic hit, had been largely forgotten in the country's Covid response.

One respondent said: "I feel workers have been put at increased risk during the pandemic with little support and acknowledgment of [our] feelings and welfare. My intention is to look for another form of employment and leave the sector."

Another said: "I have always loved my job, but I'm about to resign this week as I don't feel safe at work. It's causing terrible stress and anxiety, and arguments at home." While 72% of those replying to the survey said they had experienced fatigue and tiredness related to the impact of the pandemic on their early years role over the past six months, 70% had experienced anxiety and 59% had experienced insomnia. Workers have complained of having to travel long distances on public transport to keep working, while some childcare settings say they have set up their own regular testing regime in-house to reassure staff and parents.

The Early Years Alliance said stress had been caused by the need to keep up with the latest government guidance on Covid, ensuring the safety of children and staff and ongoing concerns about financial viability.

"This is a sector at breaking point," said Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-School Learning Alliance. "Those working in nurseries, pre-schools and childminding settings have been asked to put their own safety – and that of their loved ones – at risk with little support and even less recognition, so it is no surprise that this has taken such a toll on their mental health and wellbeing.

"Those in government should take a moment to reflect on how it feels to listen to ministers tell everyone how vital it is to stay at home, and to watch as hospitalisation and death rates continue to rise, and then to be asked to keep working in a close-contact environment with no PPE support, no testing and no vaccinations. Is it any wonder that such a significant proportion of the early years workforce are considering simply walking away?"

Many children have left early years care since March and not returned. There are already signs that closures have had an impact on child development. Research has suggested that the number of children starting school without basic skills such as going to the toilet unaided, putting on a coat or responding to questions is at record levels. Meanwhile, Ofsted research has highlighted lapses in children's personal, social and emotional development. The lower attendance has heaped further financial pressure on a sector that was already under stress.

A spokesperson for the Department for Education said early years workers were being prioritised for asymptomatic testing. "We know early years professionals are working hard to deliver crucial care and education to our youngest children, which cannot be done remotely, and we are working closely with the sector to ensure timely guidance and support. Current evidence suggests that children under the age of 5 are less susceptible to infection and are unlikely to be playing a driving role in transmission.

"We are funding nurseries as usual and where nurseries do see a drop in income from either parent-paid fees or income from DfE, they are able to use the furlough scheme."

Region: Europe^[3]

Tags: workforce^[4]

Source URL (modified on 1 Feb 2021): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/02/covid-stress-%E2%80%98driving-hundreds-childcare-workers-quit-profession>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/02/covid-stress-%E2%80%98driving-hundreds-childcare-workers-quit-profession> [2]

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jan/31/covid-stress-driving-hundreds-of-childcare-workers-to-quit-profession> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/workforce> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/health-and-safety> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9040>