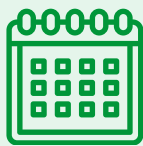


SUPPORTING YOUNG
BRADFORD:
RESEARCH AT A
GLANCE

Who
Part of Born in
Bradford cohort
study, funded by
The Health
Foundation



When
Data collection
took place
between 2023-
2024

What
Exploring barriers
and enablers to
family emotional
support for young
people



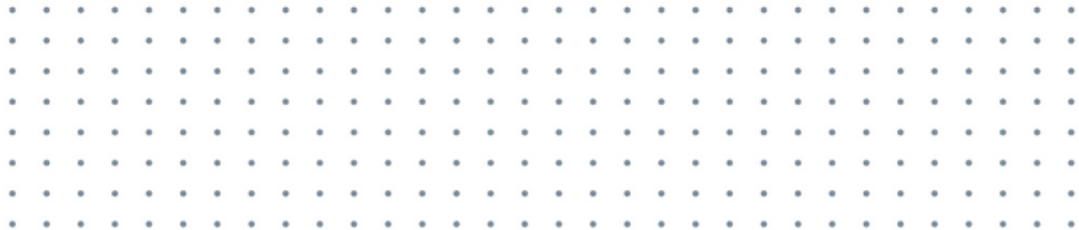
Why
Emotional support
from family
important in
protecting young
people's mental
health

How
9 appreciative
inquiry community
workshops across
Bradford with
young people and
parents/family



How
39 interviews with
young people and
their parents
exploring
emotional support
and working lives

How
Analysis of Age of
Wonder cohort
survey to
understand what
over 3000 young
people report about
how supported they
feel



EVIDENCE BRIEFING FOR EMPLOYERS

FAMILIES' WORKING LIVES AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S
MENTAL HEALTH
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



KEY CONTACT

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WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Growing up in the UK today is hard. Experiences in adolescence shape life-long health and it is a high-risk period for the onset of mental ill-health. We know that family support with emotions can mitigate many of the challenges teenagers face, but we know less about what helps families to provide this crucial support. Our research on the 'Supporting Young Bradford' project, funded by the Health Foundation, has sought to understand how families' working lives affects the support young people experience as they transition into adolescence, expanding knowledge about protective factors for young people's mental health. This evidence briefing outlines what we found and offers recommendations for employers who want to:

- Create supportive work environments for parents and guardians of adolescents
- Increase staff retention and productivity
- Lay the foundations for good mental health in the future workforce

WHAT HAVE WE FOUND?

PARENTAL AVAILABILITY IS KEY

'Being there for them when they need it' was the most significant way parents could support their older children. Although teenagers are more likely to want to spend time with their friends, they **still need their parents** and other family members to talk things through. Parents discussed how they tried to make sure they were around for when their children wanted to talk, many prioritising at least one parent being at **home after school** for this reason. Single parents felt their availability was even more important as there was not another parent around in the household. Young people also highlighted the importance of parental availability, often explaining they felt closer and more able to share their problem with the parent who was more present. **Family meal times** were particularly important for both parents and young people to check in with each other and talk about their days.

WOMEN STILL BALANCING WORK AND CARE

We found **mothers were doing more than fathers to make themselves available** to their teenage children, often working part-time or, where possible, flexible hours. As with childcare for younger children, women were more likely to try to fit work around their family needs and therefore continue providing the main bulk of emotional support to their older children. We found that **young people usually feel more comfortable opening up to their mums** than their dads because mums are working in ways that enable them to be more present. This has implications for long term relationships between teenagers and their fathers, as well as perpetuating inequalities for women at work.

PARENTAL WELLBEING MATTERS

Having teenage children is a worrying time for many parents. Parents who were able to work flexibly and had access to support with their mental health at work felt more able to provide support at home to their children. Parents who felt supported by their employers reported **overall higher levels of satisfaction with their work, and were better resourced to handle any challenges their family were facing**. Ensuring this provision is available and destigmatising its use, alongside managing workload could indirectly positively impact on young people's mental health.



FLEXIBILITY ENABLES SUPPORT AND SATISFACTION

Ensuring working parents know about flexible work policies within existing or future workplaces helps staff feel empowered and valued, which can **positively impact productivity**. Several participants in our study explained that they worked hard because they knew they had flexibility when they needed to be responsive to their older children. This knowledge can also ensure that parents, and particularly mothers, **feel able to progress at work**, without losing the flexibility they value so highly.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICE

SUPPORTING STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES

1. FLEXIBILITY FOR EVERYONE

When we think of family friendly working policies we often focus only on parents with young children. We found that **parents and guardians of adolescents also need workplace policies and cultures to help them provide greater support and protect young people's mental health.** Creating these supportive environments promotes staff retention, good employer - employee relations and decreases stress levels for staff and their families.

All workers now have a right to request flexible working from their first day in a job and employees can make two applications for flexible working in any 12-month period. Employers should make all staff aware of their rights and what is possible within your organisation and **create an atmosphere where they feel able and encouraged to request flexible working.** It is important that **men feel equally empowered to request flexible working** to ensure that they can play a more significant role in the emotional support of their children. This starts with shared parental leave, as if women and men share care from when a child is first born they are more likely, as that child grows up, to **share the responsibility of emotional support too.**

2. MANAGER RESPONSIBILITY AND SKILLS

The parents who felt particularly supported in the workplace explained that their managers were themselves parents. While sharing this experience might make managers more likely to be responsive to the family needs of staff, **all managers should be aware of how to support staff and what organisational policies are in place to enable this support.** Extra training for managers on the significance of parental support for young people's mental health and some of the issues parents and young people are facing could be helpful.

3. PROVIDE DEDICATED WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

With **two in five** working parents of children under 18 saying they would like mental health support in the workplace (Working Families, 2023), **ensuring staff feel they have somewhere to turn to** could make a big difference to staff performance and the support young people feel they receive from their families. Although some parents we interviewed had not used available support they explained that it made them feel better knowing it was there if needed. **Parents who had accessed support explained what a difference it had made to their levels of stress and anxiety about the challenges their children were experiencing.**

FINAL THOUGHTS

Creating work environments that support staff and their families is good for organisations. We hope our research can bring new awareness to employers that parents and guardians of young people are still playing a significant part in shaping their children's mental health and this may mean that extra support and understanding is required. Ultimately, investment in working parents is investment in the current and future mental health of our society.



MAY 2024, V1

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Flexible Working: An Overview](#) **UK Government**

[Are you happy to talk flexible working?](#) **Working Families**

[Toolkit for employers: managing pregnancy, maternity and parental leave in the workplace](#) **Maternity Action**

[Focus on Working Parents](#) **Chartered Institute of Personnel Development**

[Mental health growing concern for working parents](#) **Working Families**

[Paths to parenthood](#) **Fawcett Society**

[Young People's Future Health Inquiry](#) **The Health Foundation**

[Emotional Support for Young People](#) **The Health Foundation**

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