

Advice on questions / survey tools relevant to suicide prevention research in relation to COVID-19

The aim of this document is to provide interested researchers with a selection of measures which could be used in suicide prevention research studies. A huge thanks to Dr Duleeka Knipe with input from Dr Olivia Kirtley for pulling this together

The document is structured in two parts:

- 1) Outcome (i.e. suicidal behaviour) assessment
- 2) Exposure assessment

1. Outcome assessment

There are several measures available for assessing suicidal behaviour in population-based research. Note in all questionnaires, we recommend you include signposting to local sources of help / crisis helplines

These have been reviewed and evaluated, and the findings are available here:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270514172_A_Systematic_Review_and_Evaluation_of_Measures_for_Suicidal_Ideation_and_Behaviors_in_Population-Based_Research

The main recommended questionnaires were:

- Depressive Symptom Index Suicidality Subscale (DSI-SS) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0005796701000171>
- Suicidal Behaviors Questionnaire—Revised (SBQ-R) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/107319110100800409>
- Suicidal Ideation Attributes Scale (SIDAS) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24612048/>

In addition to those reviewed above, additional measures include:

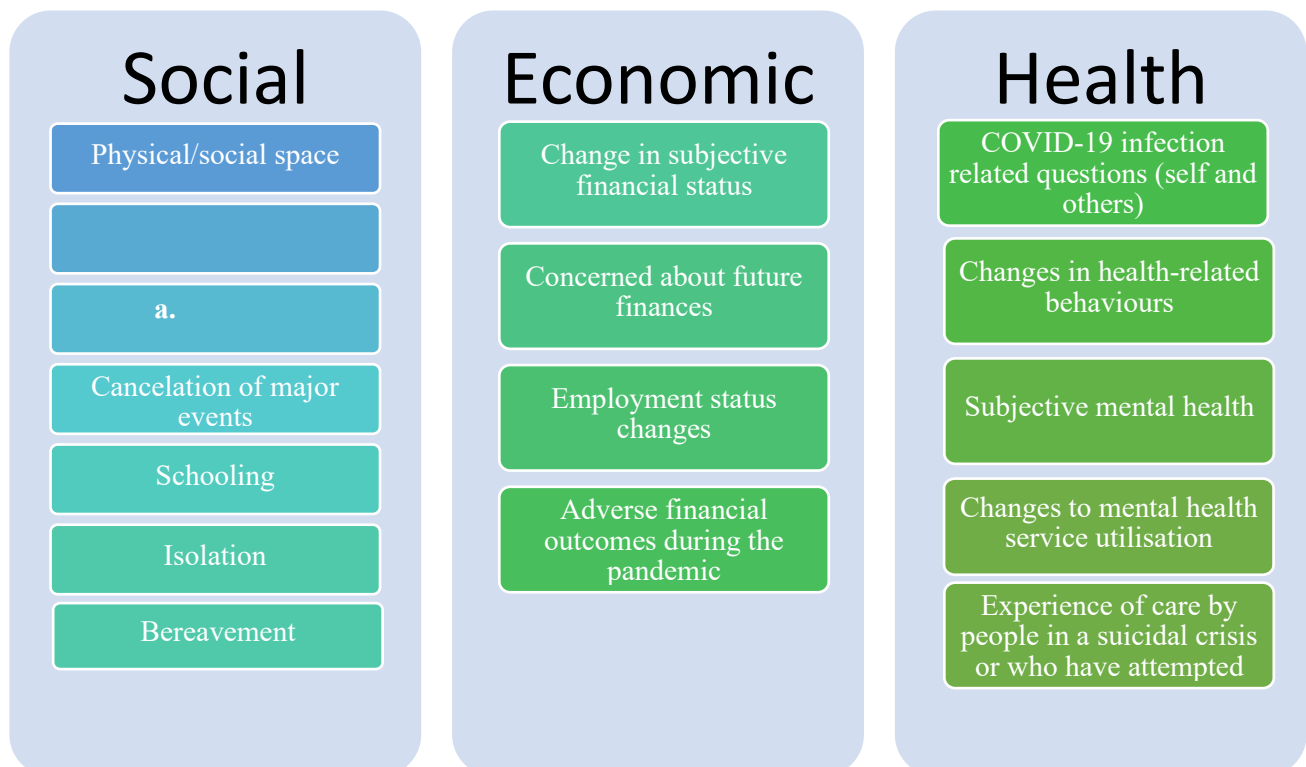
- Question 9 of the Patient Health Questionnaire (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10568646/>)
- The suicide attempts and self-harm questions from the UK Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (pages 44 to 46 and 101 - https://files.digital.nhs.uk/pdf/4/j/appendix_d_phase_one_questionnaire.pdf)
- The Columbia severity scale (<https://depts.washington.edu/ebpa/sites/default/files/C-SSRS-LifetimeRecent-Clinical.pdf>)

2. Exposure assessment

A selection of COVID-19 relevant exposures for suicide research are presented below. The questions have been selected from longitudinal surveys and are suggested here to allow for datasets to be comparable. Only questions related to exposures are presented here, however, questions related to possible mitigating factors are also available from the surveys listed below. We recommend, where possible, that research studies use measures being used in other existing longitudinal studies. If using any of the questions from the questionnaires outlined below, it may be appropriate to alter the term “lockdown” when used, to a term that has meaning in the context in which it is to be operationalised (e.g. “stay-at-home orders” in the US) and note that as time goes by lockdown restrictions have eased in many countries, but may be re-introduced at a later stage, so it might be important to specify a discrete time period / range of dates. The questions presented in this document have been selected from the following sources:

- Wellcome longitudinal population studies (LPS) (website pending)
- COVID-Mental Health tracker (COVID-MH) (<http://www.suicideresearch.info/tracking-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-mental-wellbeing-study-covid-mh>)
- UCL COVID-19 Social Study (UCLSS) (<https://www.covidsocialstudy.org/>)
- The Coronavirus Health Impact Survey (CRISIS) (<http://www.crisissurvey.org/>)

The diagram below are broad groupings of possible questions with links to the relevant section in this document (hover over the relevant text in the document and ctrl+ click to follow the link).



a. Physical/social space

Question	Source
<p>Who do you currently live with? Please select ALL that apply</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> live alone <input type="radio"/> with spouse / partner <input type="radio"/> with own / step children <input type="radio"/> with parents <input type="radio"/> with siblings <input type="radio"/> with extended family <input type="radio"/> with roommate/companion <input type="radio"/> other (please specify: _____) 	COVID-MH
<p>Has your living arrangement changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic¹? Please tick all that apply</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> I moved to my current address temporarily because of the COVID-19 pandemic <input type="radio"/> Another adult (e.g. sibling, adult, child, parent) has moved into my address because of the COVID-19 pandemic <input type="radio"/> Adults I live with have moved elsewhere because of the COVID-19 pandemic <input type="radio"/> My living arrangement has not changed 	LPS
<p>What type of place do you live in? Please select</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> House <input type="radio"/> Room(s) in shared house (e.g., lodger) <input type="radio"/> An apartment or flat in a block <input type="radio"/> Student Halls <input type="radio"/> Residential Home <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify: _____) 	COVID-MH
<p>How many rooms are in your home? (not including any bathrooms or toilets. If you live in a shared house only count the rooms that are open to you to use. If you live in a block of flats, only count rooms in your flat.)</p>	COVID-MH
<p>Does your home have a safe outdoor space (e.g., a garden or yard) where you can exercise or play?</p>	LPS

¹ These questions are taken from existing cohort studies habitual household composition is already recorded. Other studies might want to collect this specifically.

b. Violence

Question	Source
<p>Since [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE]², how often have been physically harmed or hurt by somebody else</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Not at all <input type="radio"/> One or two days <input type="radio"/> More than half the days <input type="radio"/> Nearly every day 	UCLSS
<p>Since [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE]², how often have been bullied, controlled, intimidated or psychologically hurt by someone else</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Not at all <input type="radio"/> One or two days <input type="radio"/> More than half the days <input type="radio"/> Nearly every day 	UCLSS

c.

d.

e. Family relationships

Question	Source
<p>Since [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE], has the quality of the relationships between you and members of your family changed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> A lot worse <input type="radio"/> A little worse <input type="radio"/> About the same <input type="radio"/> A little better <input type="radio"/> A lot better 	CRISIS

f. Cancellation of major events

Question	Source																																																	
<p>How much has cancellation of important/major events in your life been difficult for you³?</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Not at all</th> <th>Slightly</th> <th>Moderately</th> <th>Very</th> <th>Extremely</th> <th>N/A</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Weddings</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Funerals</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Graduation</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Proms</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Holidays</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other (please specify:)</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely	N/A	Weddings							Funerals							Graduation							Proms							Holidays							Other (please specify:)							CRISIS
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² This has been altered from the original survey which was designed to be asked on a weekly basis.

³ Altered question/format to allow the assessment of the impact of cancellation on specific events. Modified from original questions which asked “how often have you been bothered by: being physically harmed or hurt by somebody else” / “how often have you been bothered by: being bullied, controlled, intimidated or psychologically hurt by someone else”

g. Schooling

Question – adults with children				Source
Do you have one or more children in full time education? Include school, college or university courses and includes children who are schooled at home (Yes/No)				LPS
Before the official lockdown was announced, how was each child being educated? (pick the best answer)				LPS
	Was going to a school/college/university in person	Was enrolled on a distance learning course	Was schooled at home	
My youngest child				
My second youngest child				
My third youngest child				
My fourth youngest child				
Any other children [opens free text box]				
Free text:				
Since the official lockdown was announced on [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE] ⁴ , how has each child been educated? (pick the best answer)				LPS
	Was going to a school/college/university in person	Was enrolled on a distance learning course	Was schooled at home	
My youngest child				
My second youngest child				
My third youngest child				
My fourth youngest child				
Any other children [opens free text box]				
Free text:				

⁴ This has been altered from the original survey to allow for international use

Question – adults with children	Source
<p>Since the official lockdown was announced has your child or children had any of these problems accessing education? <i>(tick any that apply)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Difficulty adapting to online learning <input type="radio"/> Limited quality or quantity of online lessons <input type="radio"/> Lack of device or internet connection for accessing online lessons <input type="radio"/> No suitable place in the home to learn 	LPS

h. Isolation

Question	Source																				
<p>How often do you feel like this since the start of lockdown on [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE]⁵?</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Hardly ever</th> <th>Some of the time</th> <th>Often</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>How often do you feel you lack companionship?</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>How often do you feel left out?</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>How often do you feel isolated from others?</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>How often do you feel alone?</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Hardly ever	Some of the time	Often	How often do you feel you lack companionship?				How often do you feel left out?				How often do you feel isolated from others?				How often do you feel alone?				LPS
	Hardly ever	Some of the time	Often																		
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How often do you feel isolated from others?																					
How often do you feel alone?																					

i. Bereavement

Question	Source
<p>Have you experienced any of the following since the official lockdown was announced on the [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE]⁶? (tick all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> You lost somebody⁷ close to you due to COVID-19 <input type="radio"/> You lost somebody close to you due to another reason 	UCLSS

⁵ This has been altered from the original survey to allow for international use. The original survey also asks this question twice, once to assess current isolation/loneliness and then was repeated asking how often they felt like this before lockdown

⁶ This has been altered from the original survey to allow for international use and separates out COVID-19 deaths

⁷ Users may want to alter this phrase to be culturally/context specific or use more direct terminology e.g. “Somebody close to you died due to COVID-19”

j. Change in subjective financial status

Question	Source
<p>Before the official lockdown was announced on the [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE], how well would you say you personally were managing financially?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Living comfortably ○ Doing all right ○ Just about getting by ○ Finding it quite difficult ○ Finding it very difficult 	LPS
<p>Overall, since the official lockdown was announced on the [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE] how would you say you personally are managing financially?⁸</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Living comfortably ○ Doing all right ○ Just about getting by ○ Finding it quite difficult ○ Finding it very difficult 	LPS

k. Concerned about future finances

Question	Source
<p>I'm worried about my future financial situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree 	LPS

⁸ Original questionnaire asked: “Overall, how do you feel your current financial situation compares to before the official lockdown was announced on the [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE]?”

I. Employment status changes

Question	Source
<p>Which of these best describes what you were doing just before the lockdown on the [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE] ? If you were doing more than one activity, please choose the activity that you spent most time doing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Employed <input type="radio"/> Self-employed <input type="radio"/> In unpaid/ voluntary work <input type="radio"/> Apprenticeship <input type="radio"/> Unemployed <input type="radio"/> Permanently sick or disabled <input type="radio"/> Looking after home or family <input type="radio"/> In education at school/college/university <input type="radio"/> Retired 	LPS
<p>Which of these would you say best describes YOUR current situation now?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Employed and working the same number of hours (pre-lockdown) <input type="radio"/> Employed and working reduced number of hours <input type="radio"/> Employed but on paid leave (including furlough) <input type="radio"/> Employed and on unpaid leave <input type="radio"/> Apprenticeship <input type="radio"/> In unpaid/voluntary work. <input type="radio"/> Self-employed and currently working <input type="radio"/> Self-employed but not currently working <input type="radio"/> Unemployed <input type="radio"/> Permanently sick or disabled <input type="radio"/> Looking after home or family <input type="radio"/> In education at school/college/university <input type="radio"/> Retired 	LPS

m. Adverse financial outcomes during the pandemic

Question	Source
<p>Have you experienced any of the following since the official lockdown was announced on the [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE] ⁹? (tick all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Lost your job / been unable to do paid work <input type="radio"/> Your spouse/partner lost their job or was unable to do paid work <input type="radio"/> Major cut in household income (e.g. due to you or your partner being furloughed / put on leave / not receiving sufficient work) <input type="radio"/> Unable to pay bills / rent / mortgage <input type="radio"/> Evicted / lost accommodation <input type="radio"/> Unable to access sufficient food <input type="radio"/> Unable to access required medication <input type="radio"/> Somebody close to you is ill in hospital (due to Covid-19 or another illness) <input type="radio"/> You lost somebody close to you (due to Covid-19 or another cause) <input type="radio"/> None of the above 	<p>UCLSS</p>

⁹ This has been altered from the original survey to allow for international use

n. COVID-19 infection related questions (self and others)

Question	Source
<p>Have you been in close contact with anyone with COVID-like symptoms in the last [XX]¹⁰ weeks?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes, I was in contact with a confirmed/tested COVID-19 case <input type="radio"/> Yes, I was in contact with a person with COVID-19 symptoms <input type="radio"/> No, not to my knowledge 	LPS
<p>Do you think that you have or have had COVID-19?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes, confirmed by a positive test <input type="radio"/> Yes, suspected by a doctor but not tested <input type="radio"/> Yes, my own suspicions <p>If yes, when were you told/when did you think you first had COVID-19? DD/MM/YYYY</p>	LPS
<p>Have you been hospitalised as a result of COVID-19?</p> <p>Please select</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No 	COVID-MH
<p>Have any of your family or close friends had COVID-19?</p> <p>Please select</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes diagnosed and recovered <input type="radio"/> Yes diagnosed and still ill <input type="radio"/> Yes diagnosed and died <input type="radio"/> Not formally diagnosed but suspected <input type="radio"/> Don't know <input type="radio"/> No 	Modified from COVID-MH
<p>Are you regarded as a high risk group (e.g., aged 70+, underlying health condition)?</p> <p>Please select</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No 	COVID-MH
<p>How often do you actively seek out information on COVID-19?</p> <p>Please select</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Less than once a day <input type="radio"/> 1-5 times a day <input type="radio"/> 6-10 times a day <input type="radio"/> 11-20 times a day <input type="radio"/> 21-50 times a day <input type="radio"/> More than 50 times a day 	COVID-MH
<p>Are you working in any of the current roles? (select all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Health, social care or relevant related support worker (e.g. doctor, nurse, NHS volunteer) <input type="radio"/> Teaching or childcare worker <input type="radio"/> Key public services (justice, religious staff, journalist or mortuary) <input type="radio"/> Local and national government <input type="radio"/> Food and other necessary goods (production, sales, delivery) <input type="radio"/> Public safety or national security worker (police, armed forces) <input type="radio"/> Transport worker <input type="radio"/> Utility worker (energy, sewerage, postal service) <input type="radio"/> Utilities, communication and financial services 	LPS

¹⁰ The original survey asked about the last two week (reflecting the incubation period of the virus)

o. Changes in health-related behaviours

Question					Source
<p>Since the official lockdown was announced on [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE]¹¹, have any of the following aspects of your life changed?</p>					LPS
	Decreased	Stayed the same	Increased	N/A	
Amount you sleep					
Amount of physical activity/exercise you do					
Time spent in green spaces such as parks or gardens					
Amount you smoke/vape					
Amount of alcohol you drink					
Number of hours you work in usual workplace					
Number of hours you work at home					
Time spent talking to family/friends inside my home					
Time spent talking to family/friends outside my home					
Time spent talking to work colleagues					
Practising relaxation/mindfulness/meditation					
Time spent listening to the news					
Time spent using devices with a screen					
Time spent doing hobbies/things I enjoy					
Amount of money you've spent					

¹¹ Altered from the original survey to be consistent with other questions in this document. The original question also asks about diet related changes too

p. Subjective mental health

Question	Source
<p>How was your mental health before the official lockdown was announced on the [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE]¹²? Please select</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Very good <input type="radio"/> Good <input type="radio"/> Fair <input type="radio"/> Poor <input type="radio"/> Very poor <input type="radio"/> Don't know 	<p>COVID-MH</p>
<p>How is your mental health since the official lockdown was announced on the [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE]⁹? Please select</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Very good <input type="radio"/> Good <input type="radio"/> Fair <input type="radio"/> Poor <input type="radio"/> Very poor <input type="radio"/> Don't know 	<p>COVID-MH</p>

¹² This has been altered from the original survey to allow for international use

q. Changes to mental health service utilisation

Note to researcher: we recommend that these questions are asked in conjunction with questions in the following section (r)

Question	Source
<p>O.1 Before the official lockdown was announced [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE], did you have any mental health difficulties?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No (please go to Q O.2 below) <input type="radio"/> Don't know (please go to Q O.2 below) <p>If yes, before the official lockdown was announced [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE], did you receive support for your mental health difficulties?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No (please go to Q O.2 below) <p>If yes, who did you receive support for your mental health difficulties from? (tick all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Health care professional <input type="radio"/> Online helpline/service <input type="radio"/> Crisis hotline <input type="radio"/> Family/friends <input type="radio"/> Other: please specify _____ <input type="radio"/> None of the above 	ICSPRC
<p>O.2 Since the official lockdown was announced [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE], have you had any mental health difficulties?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Don't know (please go to the next section - Experience of care by people in a suicidal crisis or who have attempted suicide) <p>If yes, since the official lockdown was announced [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE], have you tried to access services to support your mental health difficulties?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <p>If yes did you seek support from any of the following sources? (tick all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Health care professional <input type="radio"/> Online helpline/service <input type="radio"/> Crisis hotline <input type="radio"/> Family/friends <input type="radio"/> Other: please specify _____ <input type="radio"/> None of the above <p>Did you have any difficulty accessing support?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never <input type="radio"/> N/A - Did not access care 	ICSPRC

Question	Source
<p>If you accessed support from a health care professional in what setting did this occur? Tick all that apply</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Face-to-face in primary care / general practice <input type="radio"/> Face-to-face in general hospital <input type="radio"/> Face-to-face in acute/psychiatric hospital <input type="radio"/> Face-to-face elsewhere – please specify: _____ <input type="radio"/> By phone <input type="radio"/> By video-link <input type="radio"/> Other, please specify: _____ <p>How would you rate the ongoing support you are receiving for your mental health difficulty during lockdown? Please select</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Very good <input type="radio"/> Good <input type="radio"/> Fair <input type="radio"/> Poor <input type="radio"/> Very poor <p>How does it compare to the support you received before the official lockdown was announced [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE]? Please select</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Much better <input type="radio"/> Somewhat better <input type="radio"/> Stayed the same <input type="radio"/> Somewhat worse <input type="radio"/> Much worse 	

r. Experience of care by people in a suicidal crisis or who have attempted suicide

These questions are designed to assess an individual's service utilisation during the lockdown period. In order to assess suicidal behaviour, we recommend that the tools outlined above (page 1) are used (Outcome (i.e. suicidal behaviour) assessment)

Question -	Source
<p>Since the official lockdown was announced [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE], have you had thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way but have not actually done so¹³?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No 	ICSPRC
<p>Since the official lockdown was announced [INSERT START OF LOCKDOWN DATE HERE], have attempted suicide or hurt yourself in some way on purpose?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No 	ICSPRC

¹³ Amended from question 9 of the PHQ-9 questionnaire

Note to researcher: if using either of the two questions above, those answering “yes” should be signposted to the following set of questions.

ICSPRC

If yes did you seek support from any of the following sources?

(tick all that apply)

- Health care professional
- Online helpline/service
- Crisis hotline
- Family/friends
- Other: please specify _____
- None of the above

Did you have any difficulty accessing support?

- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never
- N/A - Did not access care

If you accessed support from a health care professional in what setting did this occur for your initial assessment/interaction?

- Face-to-face in primary care / general practice
- Face-to-face in general hospital
- Face-to-face in acute/psychiatric hospital
- Face-to-face elsewhere – please specify: _____
- By phone
- By video-link
- Other, please specify: _____

How would you rate the initial assessment/interaction you had with the healthcare professional?

Please select

- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor

If you received follow-up support from a health care professional in what setting did this occur?

Tick all that apply

- Face-to-face in general hospital
- Face-to-face in acute/psychiatric hospital
- Face-to-face elsewhere – please specify: _____
- By phone
- By video-link
- Other, please specify: _____

How would you rate your follow-up support with the healthcare professional?

Please select

- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor

