

PACEY RESEARCH: Mental health and wellbeing in the early years and childcare sector (summary of findings)

1. Background

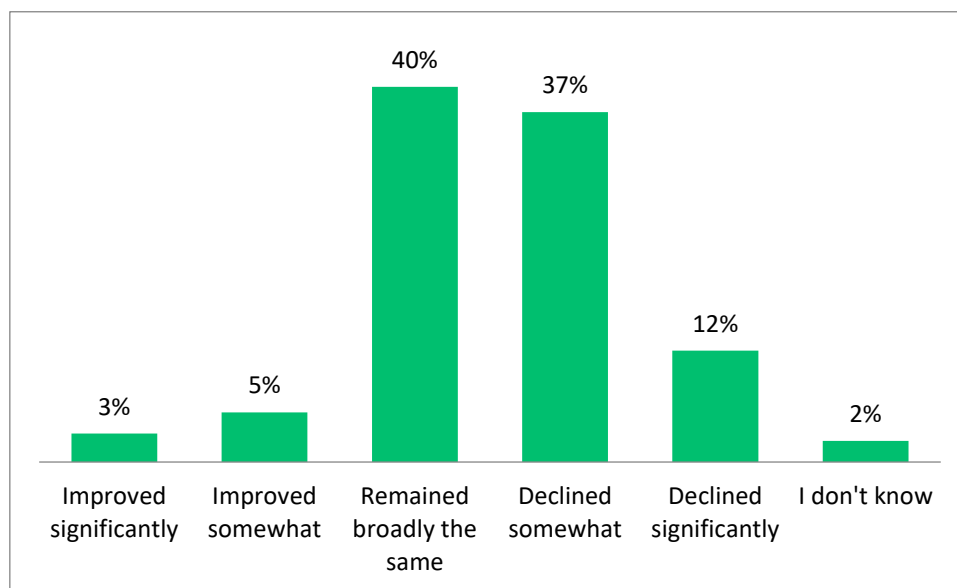
Thank you to more than 1500 respondents who took part in our survey on mental health and wellbeing in the early years sector. The survey was open for two weeks during June 2022.

85% of respondents were PACEY members. The majority (81%) were childminders, 14% work in nursery or preschool, 2.3% nanny and 3% selected 'other'.

2. Practitioner mental health

When asked about their own mental health and wellbeing, most commonly practitioners said it has declined since the pandemic (49% 'somewhat' or 'significantly' declined) and 40% said it remained broadly the same. Only 8% noticed an improvement.

“Since the pandemic (March 2020) my own mental health and wellbeing has...”



When asked if they had noticed any changes to their mental health and wellbeing, the most chosen options were:

Tiredness /lack of energy	59%
Worrying more	56%
Feeling overwhelmed	41%
Feeling less interested in activities	34%
Sleeping more or less	34%
Low mood	32%

Poor concentration/ distracted easily	32%
Finding it hard to make decisions	24%
None of the above	20%
Difficulty controlling emotions	18%

When asked about what is impacting their mental health and wellbeing, **cost of living** ranked significantly highest.

“Which of the options below have a significant impact on your mental health and wellbeing?”

Cost of living increases	68%
Regulatory inspections (e.g. Ofsted, Care Inspectorate Wales or other agency)	39%
Workload	35%
Other financial worries	29%
Employment and job security	25%
Social and family relationships	21%
Health-related issues (general)	17%
COVID-19- related health issues	15%
None of these options	8%
Lack of career progression	8%
Existing mental health condition(s)	7%
Connection to your community	6%
Housing	4%
Provision of social care	1%

Relating specifically to cost of living, we asked respondents to rank 6 options in terms of how concerned they were.

- **Heating and electricity** came out top with 50% ranking this #1 (54% when taking primary earners only)
- **Fuel costs** and **cost of food** was split with around a quarter ranking these either second or third.
- **Cost of bills and mortgage** was next
- **Cost of activities/resources for the children**, and **other business expenses** were ranked least concerning.

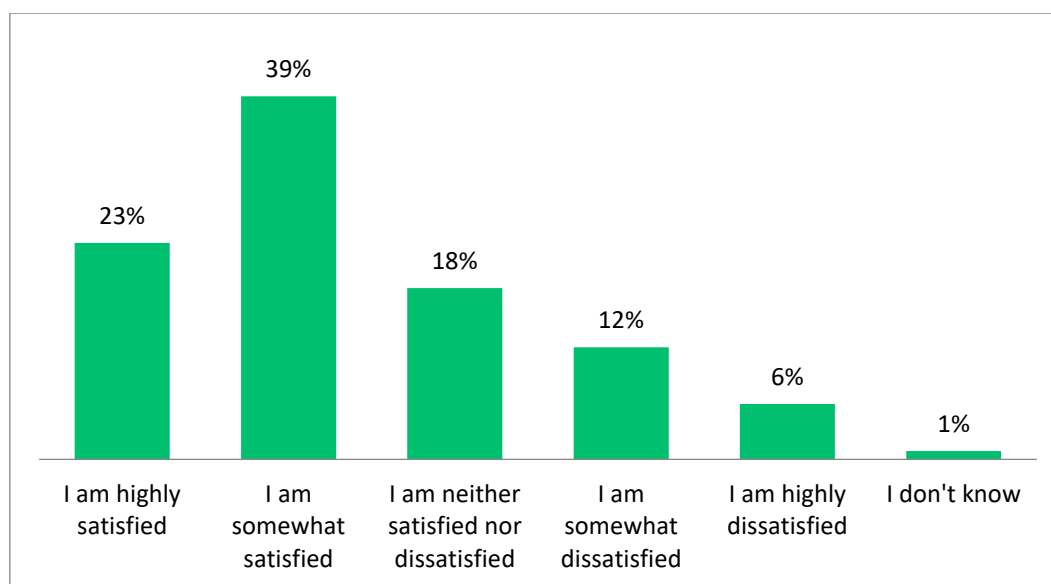
Most respondents agree with the statement: "My mental health and wellbeing affects my work as a practitioner"

Somewhat agree	31%
Strongly agree	29%
Neither agree nor disagree	18%
Strongly disagree	12%

Somewhat disagree	9%
I don't know	1%

Despite this, respondents reported a high level of job satisfaction with just under 63% saying they are either highly satisfied or satisfied in their job.

'How would you rate your job satisfaction?'



Most commonly practitioners prefer to reach out to family or friends, or a GP for support with their mental health.

“Where would you prefer to seek help and support for your mental health?”

Family /friends	58%
GP	44%
Don't mind - as long as the support is high-quality	26%
Paid-for service such as counselling	11%
I would not seek help for changes in my mental health	11%
Online/digital services	8%
PACEY community outreach staff	5%
Charity / community organisation	4%
Local authority	3%
Services offered through workplace	3%
Membership organisation	2%

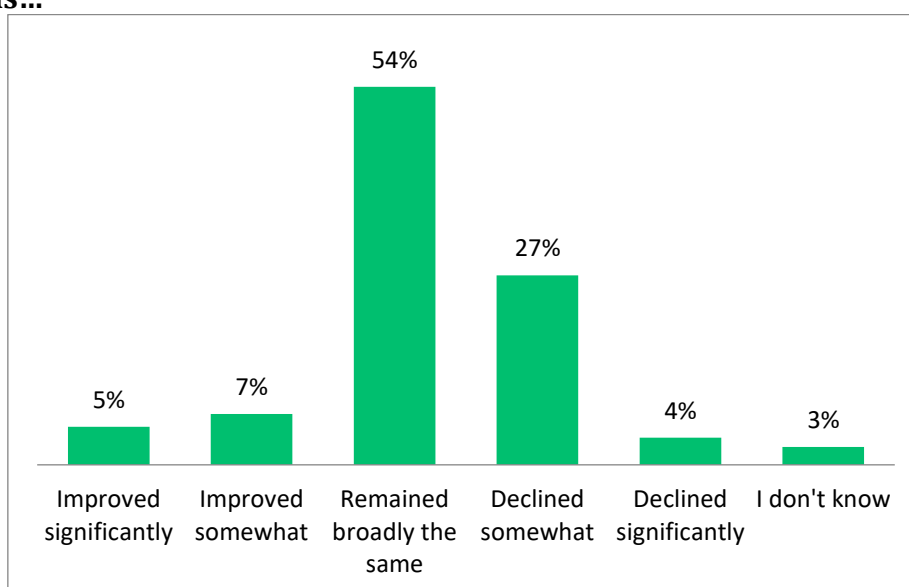
“Which of the following changes would improve your own mental health and wellbeing as a practitioner?”

Greater recognition for what I do as a career	61%
Increased pay	54%
Government listening to the sector more	49%
Changing the regulatory inspection experience	44%
Increased funding levels	42%
Reducing my workload or hours	36%
More equity with rest of education sector	35%
Less change dictated by Government/regulatory agencies	31%
More information/guidance on what to expect from inspections	25%
A greater sense of collaboration across the sector	25%
Greater promotion of the job	15%
Employing assistants/more staff in my setting	11%
I don't feel any changes are needed	5%

3. Supporting children's mental health

When asked about mental health and wellbeing of children in the setting, most commonly practitioners said it has remained broadly the same since the pandemic (54%). 31% noticed a decline and 12% noticed an improvement in child mental health and wellbeing.

“Since the pandemic (March 2020) the children in my setting’s mental health and wellbeing has...”



“What changes have you noticed?”

Just under 30% said they have **not** noticed any of our listed options on children’s mental health and wellbeing. But for those that did, this most commonly manifested as:

Separation anxiety	47%
Changes in behaviour	40%
Lack of confidence	30%
Anxiety	23%
Toilet training delays	23%
Mood changes	20%
Developmental regression	19%
Decline in eating habits	18%
Tiredness	18%
Decline in physical activity	14%
Aggression	13%
Low self-esteem	9%
Struggling with tasks they could previously do	9%
Other (please specify)	5%
Decline in physical health	5%
Self-harm behaviour	1%

“Since the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020) has your relationship with children in your setting changed?”

Our relationship is closer	32%
Our relationship has remained the same	62%
Our relationship is more distant	3%
I don't know	3%

The majority of respondents (58%) said they feel they are doing enough to support children’s mental health in their setting, although a smaller cohort (37%) said they would like to do more.

“How would you describe your ability (in terms of time/resource) to support children’s wellbeing and mental health?”

I feel I am doing enough to support children's mental health	58%
I am supporting children's mental health, but would like to do more	37%
I feel like I am not supporting children's mental health	2%
I don't know	3%

“Do you experience any barriers to supporting children’s mental health and wellbeing?”

Time	38%
None of these options	33%
Budget or funding	32%
Resources and information	28%
Knowledge	26%
Confidence	16%

“If you need advice or information on how to support mental health of children in your setting, where would you look?”

Training opportunities	55%
Local authority	55%
Member organisation e.g. PACEY	49%
Online search engine	45%
Others working in the sector (e.g. social media groups or childminder networks)	39%
Colleagues	38%
Mental health charity	21%
None of these options	1%

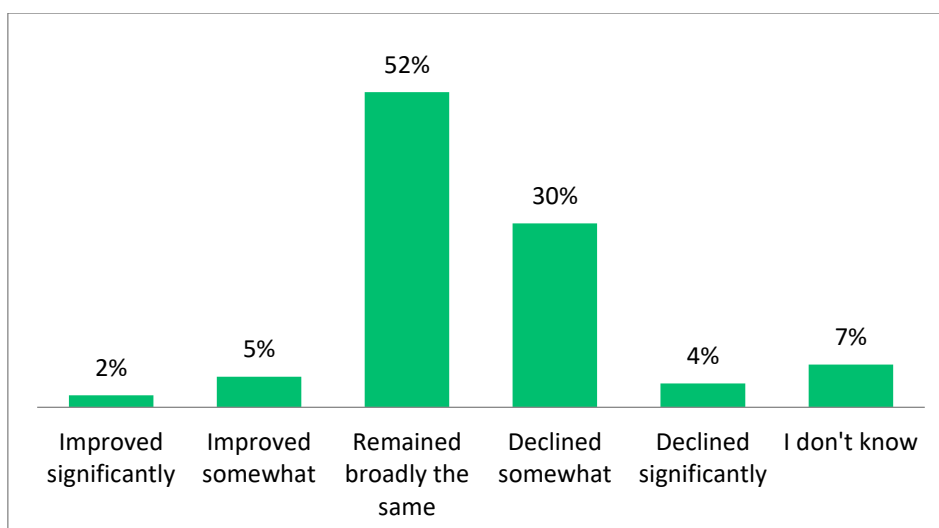
“Which of the options below would help you to support children’s wellbeing and mental health?”

More training opportunities	56%
Increased funding	41%
Access to health professionals	40%
Online network for information and support	36%
Local ‘knowledge hubs’ or centres for in-person support	36%
Greater professional respect	32%
Access to mentors	22%
None of these options	6%

4. Supporting the wider family

Relating to the wider family (parents and carers of children in the setting), practitioners most commonly noticed their mental health and wellbeing has remained broadly the same (52%), with 34% noticing a decline and 7% noticing an improvement.

“Overall, since the pandemic (March 2020) the mental health and wellbeing of the families of the children in my setting has...”



“Has your relationship with the families changed since the pandemic (March 2020)?”

Our relationship is closer	31%
Our relationship has remained broadly the same	58%
Our relationship is more distant	9%
I don't know	3%

“Do you feel you have a role in supporting the mental health of families (parents/carers) of children in your setting?”

Yes, and I feel I provide enough support	54%
Yes, but I would like to do more to support them	36%
No, and I do not wish to support them	3%
I don't know	7%

It is clear through our research that practitioners play a key role in supporting the wider family, outside their remit as a childcare and early education practitioner.

“What kind of support have you offered to families (parents/carers) of the children in your setting?”

A listening ear	94%
Advice and reassurance around supporting their child	80%
Parenting advice	74%
Signposting to other services	55%
Financial advice	16%
Advice and/or practical help to find work	10%
None of the above	2%