



# Perinatal Mental Health

Warwickshire Findings via Healthwatch England

# Healthwatch England National Survey

- 2, 693 responses were received nationally between October and December 2022. These reflect experiences between April 2020 and December 2022.
- Healthwatch England concluded that: 'The findings send out a clear message that six-week checks - required of GPs - are not reaching all new mothers, and where they take place, they don't offer the opportunity for a meaningful conversation.'
- 56 Warwickshire residents responded to the survey.
- We have continued to collect feedback throughout 2023 to see whether the picture is changing.

# National Findings

- Over one in 10 (16%) of new mothers and birthing parents who shared their experiences said they hadn't received the six to eight-week check.
- Of those who said they had been offered the postnatal check, only one in five, 22%, were satisfied with the time their GP spent talking to them about their mental health.
- Nearly half, 44%, of respondents felt that the GP did not spend enough time talking to them about their mental health, while a third, 30%, said that their GP didn't mention this during the check.
- One in seven, 15%, said they had had their six-week check over the phone, with many new parents finding it hard to verbalise their mental health struggles and discuss physical issues. In the worst cases, respondents felt the way their mental health issues were discussed was inappropriate and potentially harmful.

# Warwickshire Findings

- 6 of the 56 respondents (11%) from **Warwickshire** who shared their experiences said they hadn't received the six to eight-week check.
- Of those who said they had been offered the postnatal check, 27% were satisfied with the time their GP in **Warwickshire** spent talking to them about their mental health.
- 36% of respondents felt that the GP did not spend enough time talking to them about their mental health, while 24%, said that their GP didn't mention this during the check. (13% of **Warwickshire** respondents did not answer this question)
- 7%, 4 out of the 56 **Warwickshire** respondents, said they had their six-week check over the phone. Two of these rated the overall quality of mental health support given by their GP as Poor and one rated it as Very poor. (The fourth did not give a rating)
- 44% said they would rate the quality of mental health support provided by Midwives in **Warwickshire** as Good or Very good



## Respondents who received their GP 6-8 week check over the phone in Warwickshire said:

“Prior to pregnancy I had generalised anxiety. Now am dealing with ocd and trauma symptoms as a result of how I was treated during labour and in the early postnatal period.”

“I was under consultant led care - this was not useful for me, having to explain myself to the doctor each time, impersonal, I was challenged on all my decisions and didn't have my husband with me due to covid restrictions.”

“Absolutely no breastfeeding support and partner was unable to stay to support me after the birth and support from staff was minimal. This has left me with a lot of grief around my immediate post natal and breast-feeding journey that is now impacting my mental health in my current pregnancy.”

“The pandemic affected things but there is an obvious culture within maternity to ignore or admonish the mother which needs to be dealt with. Midwives at Worcester were amazing but everyone else brushed me off, ignored me, or belittled me.”



# Responses from Warwickshire residents

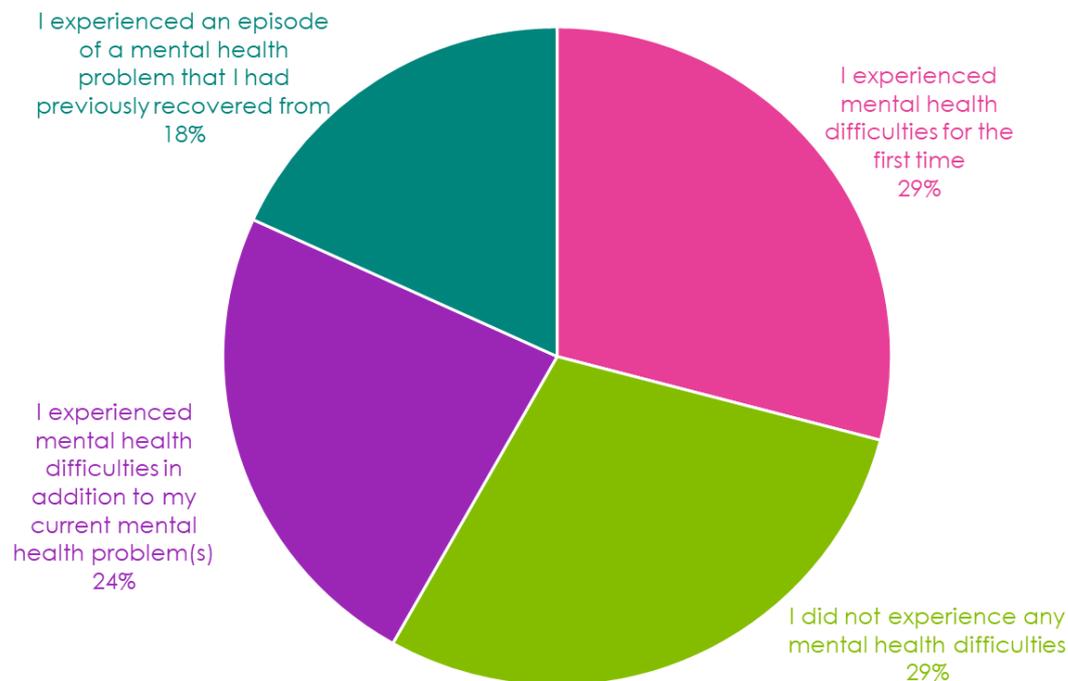
- 56 women from Warwickshire, all between the ages of 25 and 49 years, completed the national Maternal Mental Health Survey.
- 51 of these women identified as White: British/ English/ Northern Irish/ Scottish/ Welsh.
- 2 identified as Asian/ Asian British: Pakistani, 1 identified as White: Irish, 1 as Mixed/ multiple ethnic: Asian and White and 1 preferred not to say.
- 3 of the women told us they are carers, 2 have a disability, 8 have long term conditions and 2 are neurodivergent. 41 of the women did not identify with either of these and 1 preferred not to say.

# Responses from Warwickshire residents

- 34 of the women were talking to us about their first experiences of giving birth. 19 of the women gave birth between April 2020-March 2021, 22 between April 2021-March 2022, (one of whom had a still birth) and 15 between April 2022 and present.
- Prior to becoming pregnant: 32 of the women did not have a mental health condition, 23 did and 7 of those had undiagnosed mental health conditions.
- Whilst pregnant and after birth: 16 women did not experience any mental health difficulties, 16 experienced mental health difficulties for the first time, 13 experienced mental health difficulties in addition to their current mental health problem(s) and 11 experienced an episode of a mental health problem they had previously recovered from.

# Responses from Warwickshire residents

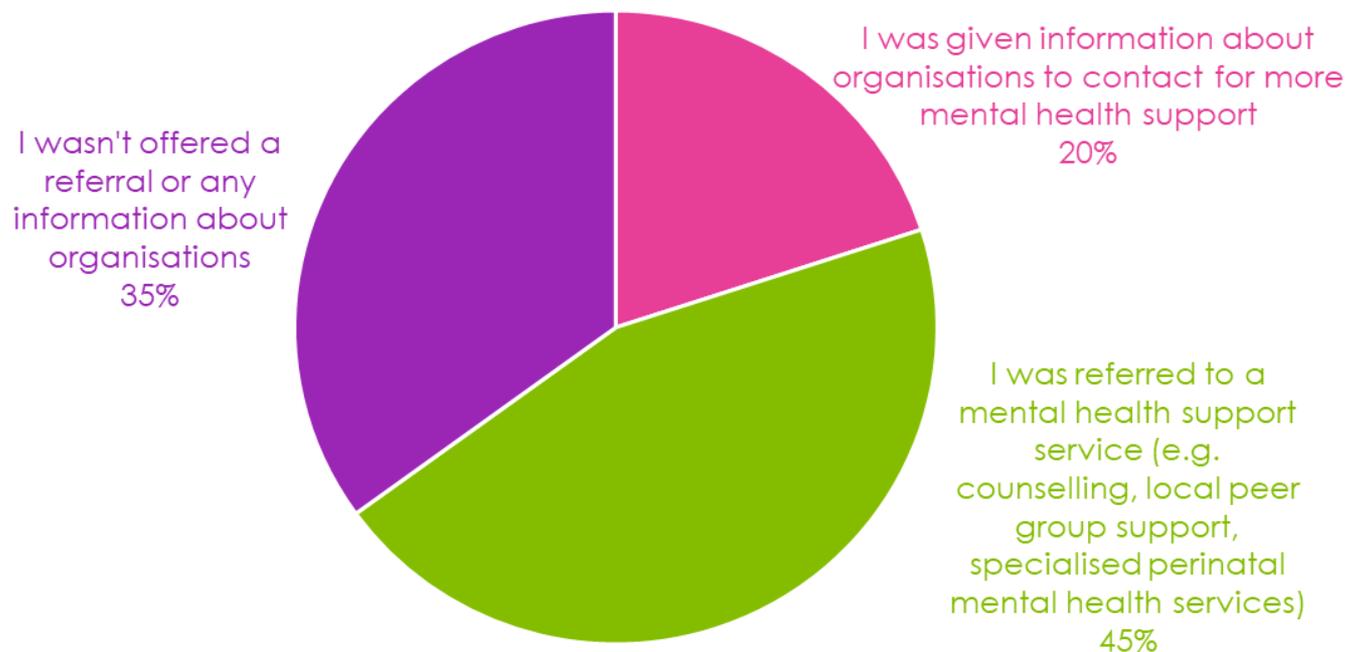
Which of the following best describes your experience whilst you were pregnant and after birth?



Only 29% of the respondents in Warwickshire said they did not experience any mental health difficulties whilst pregnant or after giving birth.

# Responses from Warwickshire residents

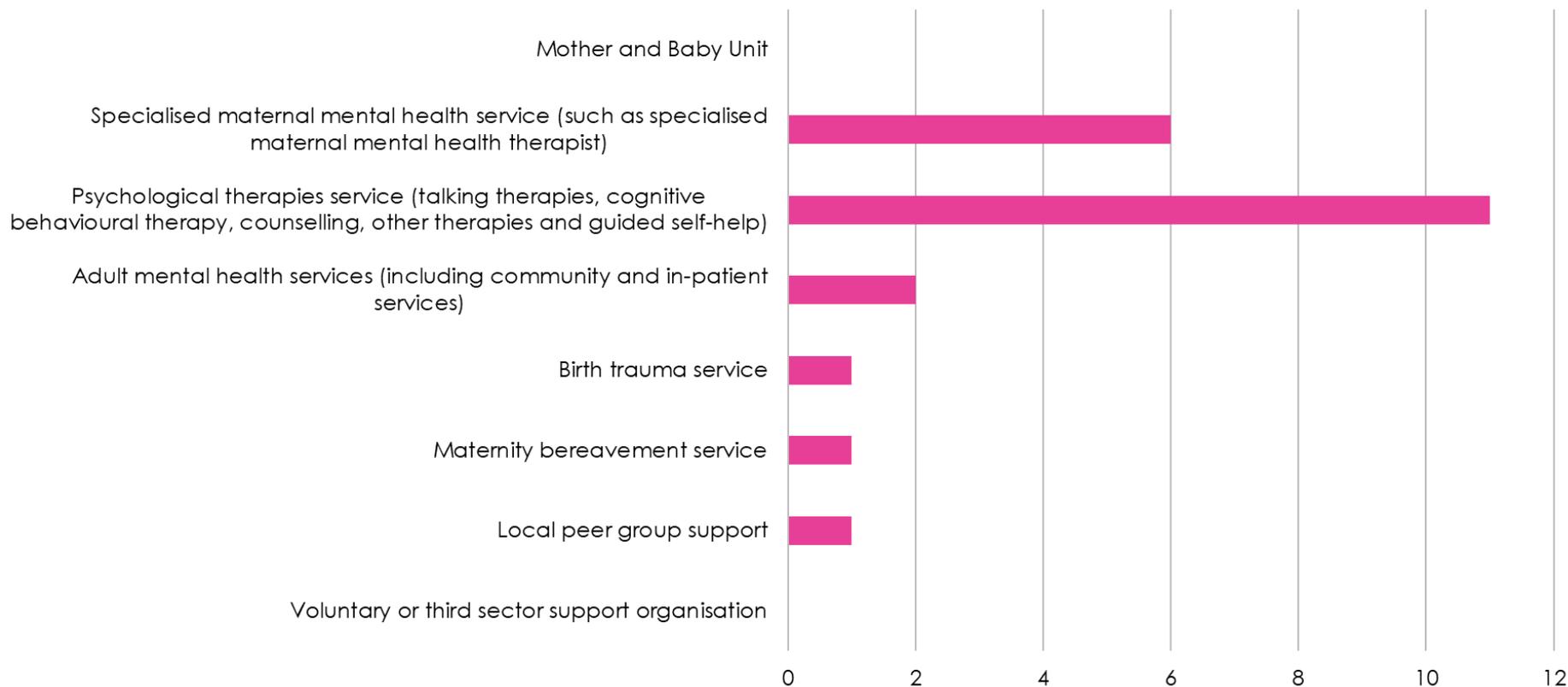
Which of the following best describes your experience of support with your mental health difficulties?



65% of Warwickshire respondents were given information about who to contact or were referred for further mental health support.

# Responses from Warwickshire residents

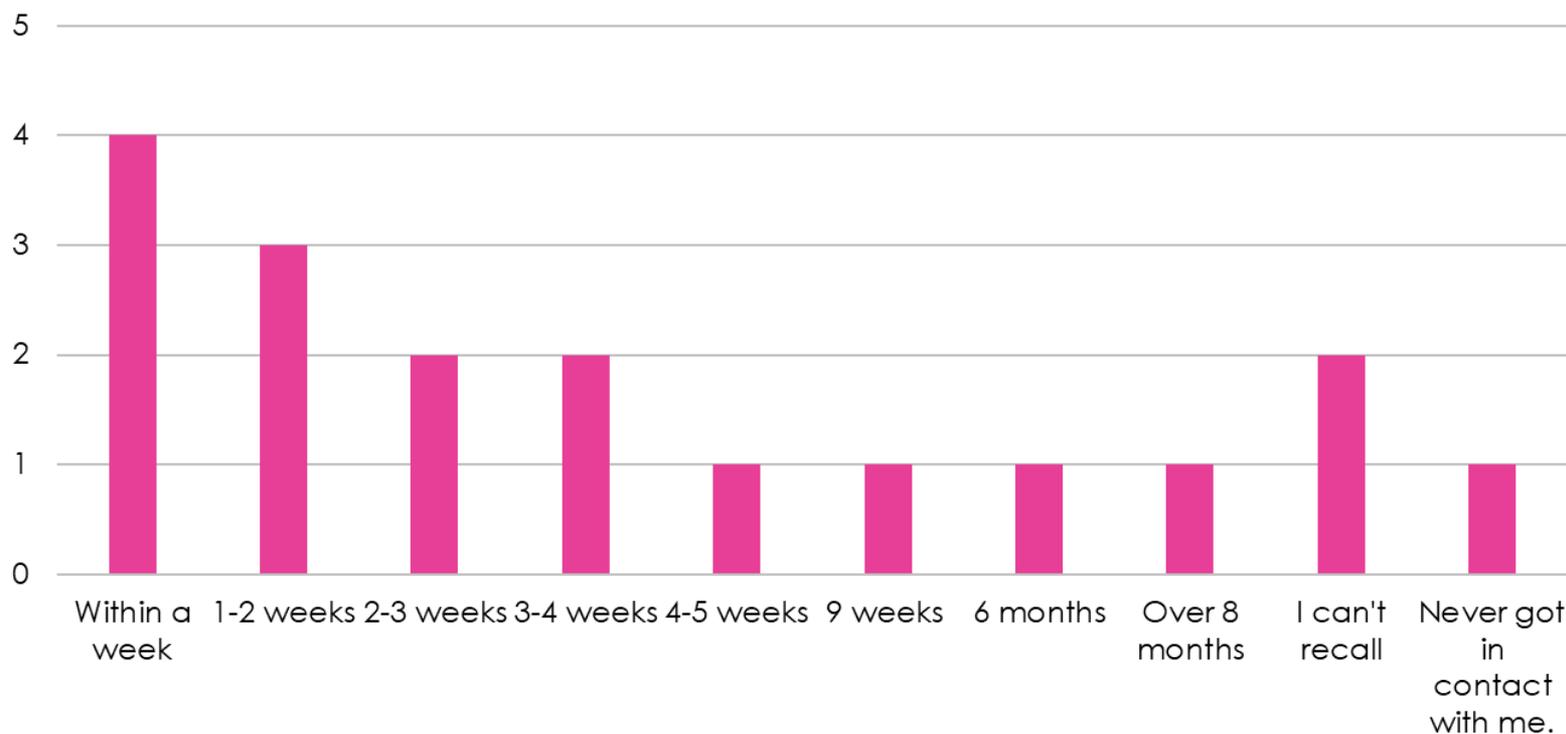
Which service were you referred to for support with your mental health?



People could choose any that applied to them. One person said: "Doctor referred me but like everything else I never heard anything." One person said they were referred to IAPT.

# Responses from Warwickshire residents

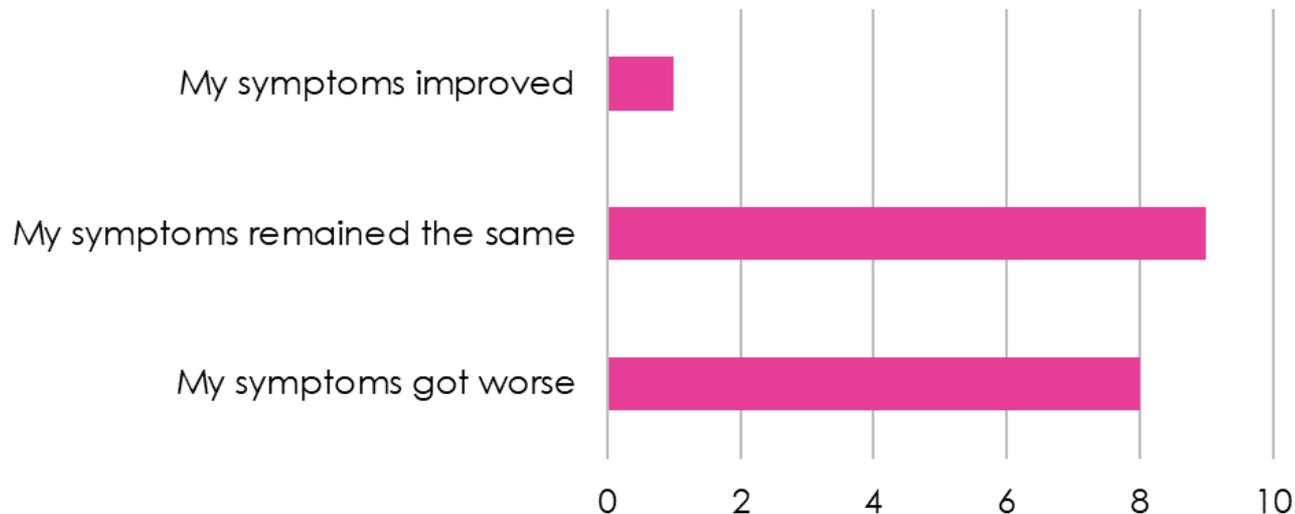
How long did you wait to get an appointment with a mental health support service after being referred?



5 Warwickshire residents waited for 4 weeks or more to get an appointment with a mental health support service, after being referred. 11 got an appointment in less than 4 weeks.

# Responses from Warwickshire residents

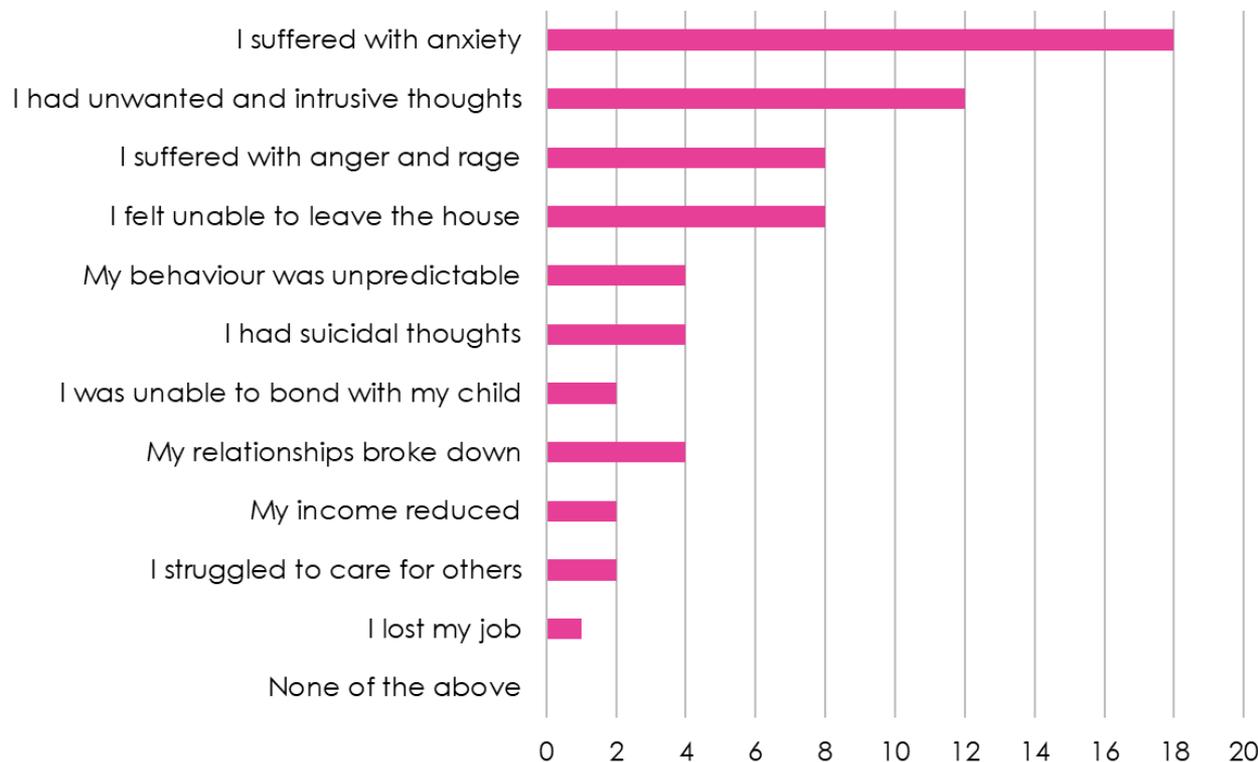
Which of the following statements best describes your experience while waiting for treatment for your mental health?



Only 1 person said that their symptoms improved while waiting for treatment, and 8 felt that their symptoms had gotten worse.

# Responses from Warwickshire residents

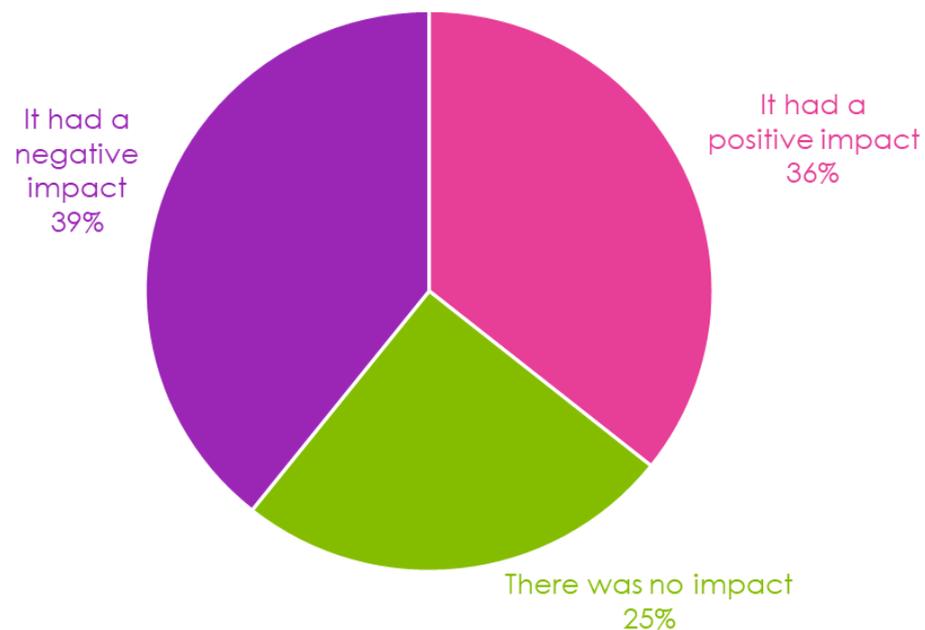
Which of the following symptoms or consequences did you experience while waiting for treatment for your mental health?



People were asked to share any that applied to them. Extra comments were: 'I kept rethinking over my birth trauma events' and 'I had severe flashbacks'.

# Responses from Warwickshire residents

Thinking about the care and support you received during labour and childbirth, what impact did it have on your mental health?



The most common response from people in Warwickshire was that the care and support they received during labour and childbirth had a negative impact on their mental health, however this was closely followed by people saying it had a positive impact.



## Is there anything else about your maternity experience that you want to tell us about?

“The 6-week check with the GP was fine as I had no concerns about my own mental health at the time but the question from the GP was literally just that, it would be very easy to lie at this point and the GP didn't push it or ask any follow up questions.”

“I was asked once, 14 days post birth how I was feeling and not since. I have not seen a health visitor and nor has my baby (now 13 months) for a 6-8-week or a 9–12-month check because there were no appointments. Midwives all very supportive, but once discharged into HV care there has been no support.”

“Felt very ignored in hospital, time was spent with breastfeeding mums, I was the only one on my ward bottle feeding and had no one just pop their head in during the day or in between regular checks just to check up or anything was a lonely experience especially with having to keep curtains closed yet others didn't have to.”





## Is there anything else about your maternity experience that you want to tell us about?

“My baby was on special care and the nurses and doctors were lovely, kept us informed the whole time and even checked up on him when he was back on the ward with me.”

“The perinatal mental health team have been fantastic. I was seen quickly, and the support has been incredible. I have felt listened to, supported and it has made a huge difference- taking me from a place where I didn't want my baby to absolutely loving having him.”

“The midwives were fantastic, supportive and listened. The GP did ask about mental health but only briefly, it was easy to say, 'yes I'm fine'. I don't recall the health visitor even asking. However, all seem to assume you know what is normal for your mental health post partum but with all the hormones etc. that's hard and more questions or checks would have been welcome.”



# Healthwatch England Recommendations

**We have made five recommendations to help ensure every new mother and birthing parent receive the six-week check, and that it is of the highest quality:**

- Integrated Care Systems should monitor the delivery of six-week postnatal consultations as part of their primary care commissioning responsibilities.
- NHS England should update [the GP contract](#) to make clear that mental health reviews at the six-week postnatal check should be part of an open-ended discussion.
- NHS England should update [the GP contract](#) to include mention of signposting to specialist and community mental health support services at the six-week week check.
- As part of its Maternity Transformation Programme, NHS England should consider what additional support and guidance it can provide for GPs to have quality conversations about mental health at the six-week postnatal check.
- Deliver the Long-Term Plan commitments on improving access to perinatal mental health services, including through more perinatal mental health outreach clinics around the country.

# What we have heard in Warwickshire in 2023

Between January and March 2023, 63 people told us about their experience of maternity and postnatal care. This included feedback from new parents, grandparents and from the services supporting them.

27 people highlighted their concerns about postnatal care and support.

34 people spoke to us about hospitals and 8 about GPs.

## Feedback from a Nursery & Playgroup Leader:

“There are lots of cultural challenges for our families as 60–80% have English as a second language and they are unlikely to have extended family nearby, or know how to navigate the health system. People are not being supported. There are waiting lists for health visitors and speech and language therapists – these ordinary services are not there.

We refer our parents to the pharmacy and we call health visitors on their behalf. The baby groups and clinics, run by health visitors and children’s centres before COVID, provided so much support and opportunity to socialise that is missing now for these families.”



## Feedback from 2023:

“I’m classed as a vulnerable parent and have suffered postnatal depression since he was born. I used to have a health visitor come every two weeks and talk to me. Now I have been told that they don’t have the resources to offer this service and that I have to travel every month to see someone. I don’t drive”

“The 6-week check with the GP was face to face but it was nothing to do with me and was just focused on the baby. It wasn’t my normal GP and they were asking questions like ‘Have I thought about contraception’. They should be asking about how you mentally and physically are, and how are you coping.”

“My health visitor is the only reason I am still breastfeeding – they were incredible. I saw the health visitor when I went to get my baby weighed and she said she was leaving the service as she didn’t have enough time to do her job properly. The service needs people like that – she was incredible.”



# For more information

Healthwatch Warwickshire

4-6 Clemens Street

Leamington Spa, CV31 2DL

[www.healthwatchwarwickshire.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchwarwickshire.co.uk)

t: 01926 422823

e: [info@healthwatchwarwickshire.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchwarwickshire.co.uk)

 @HealthwatchWarw

 @HealthwatchWarw

@healthwatch\_warwickshire

**healthwatch**