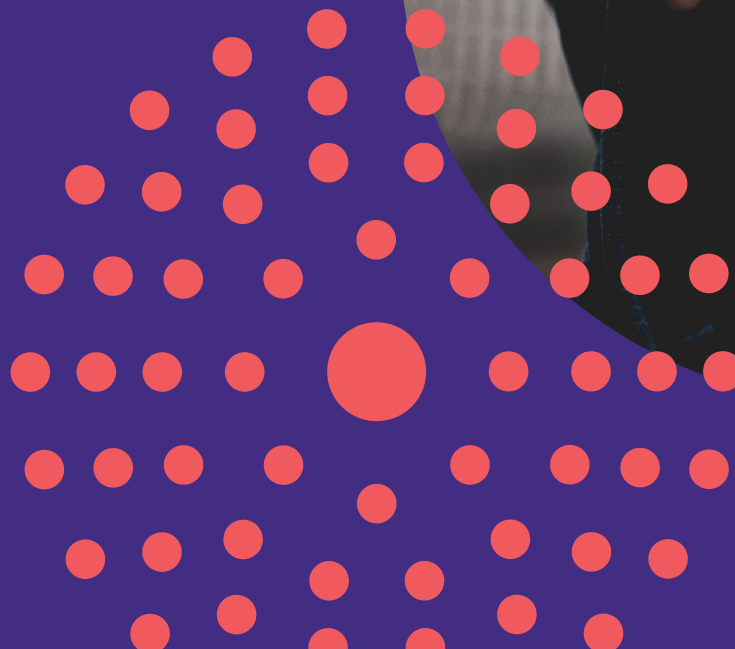
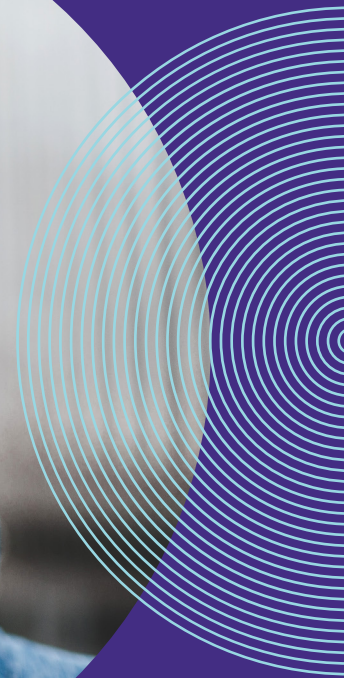
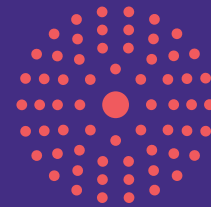
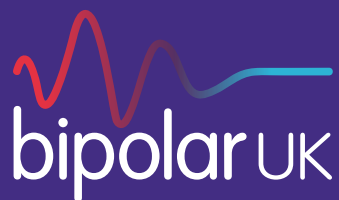
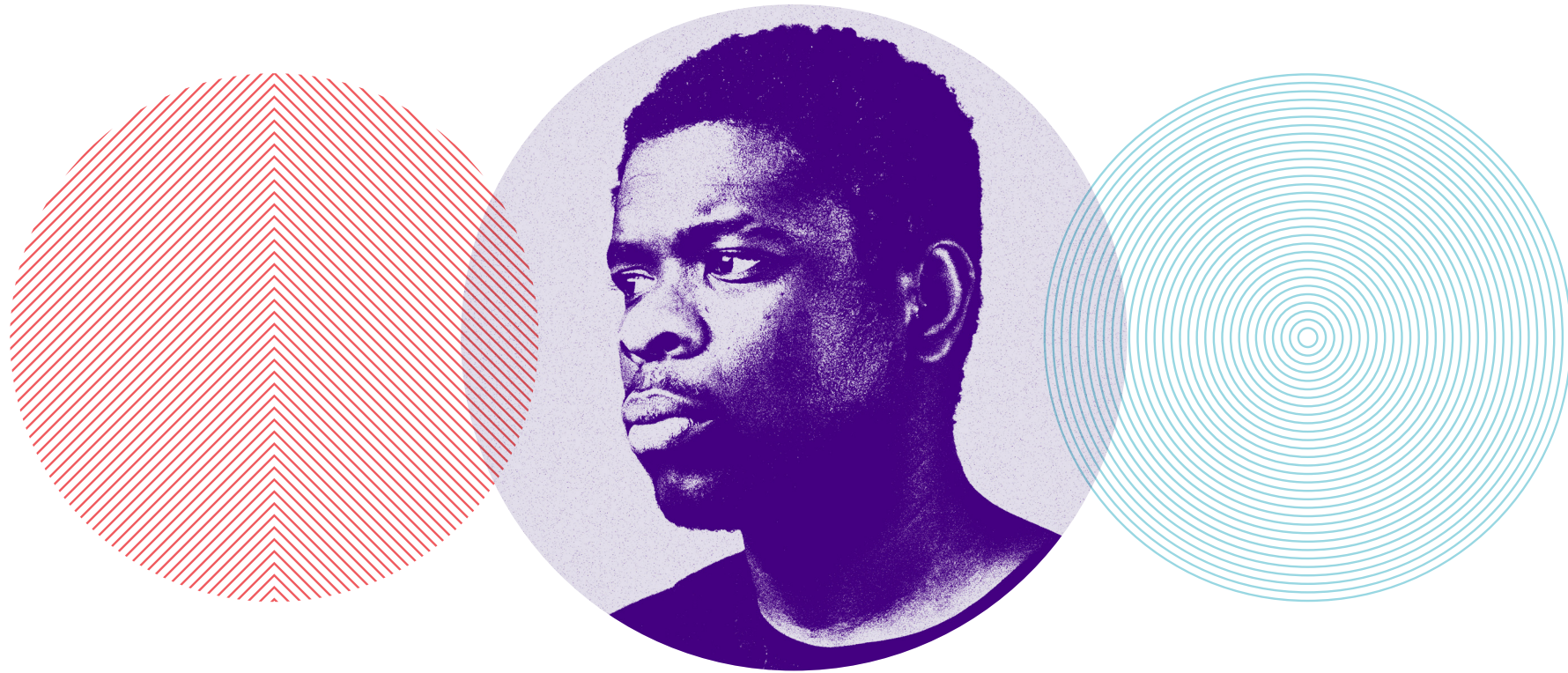


Executive Summary

The impact of Covid-19
on the bipolar community.

December 2020





Bipolar is a severe, long-term mental illness. To assess the impact of Covid-19 on the bipolar community, Bipolar UK originally conducted an online survey between 30 April and 13 May. We received 1,751 responses from our community. A follow-up survey from 7 November to 26 November received an additional 1,096 responses. The surveys asked questions ranging from access to services, to the specific ways in which people's mental health has been affected.

A summary of our findings.

From spring to autumn 2020.

Mental health is deteriorating. Suicidal thinking is increasing.

Respondents reported significant increases in depression and anxiety. Almost half said they had relapsed since March 2020.

30.97% reported an increase in suicidal thoughts, 4.03% had attempted suicide during the pandemic and 2.6% had been hospitalisation for suicide attempts. 9.16% have self-harmed.

Hospitalisation low but exposure high

Less than 1% of respondents required hospitalisation for Covid-19.

Wider exposure was higher with 22% of respondents believing a close family member or friend had contracted the virus. Of these, 5% said the acquaintance had died as a result.

The mental health crisis is driven by three factors:

1. A fear of the virus

Almost half of respondents (47%) said their biggest worry was catching the virus.

2. The challenge of self-managing

69% said it was harder, if not impossible, to avoid triggers.

3. Reduced access to mental health services

15% said it was still impossible to access their psychiatrist.

When those without support pre-Covid-19 are factored in, almost a third of respondents were without any clinical mental health support.

Christmas fear

Within our survey, five times as many people affected by bipolar are dreading Christmas compared to those that are excited for it.

While a staggering 36% aren't bothered or are indifferent, suggesting Christmas cheer won't provide a pick me up.

Conclusion

The pandemic has had a severe impact on mental health.

More than five times as many people affected by bipolar have been hospitalised for suicide attempts as for Covid-19 itself over the last eight months.

The sustained dips in mood, high levels of relapse and continued increases in suicide attempts and completions suggests that the mental health impact of Covid-19 poses a risk comparable to the virus itself.

As such, it demands a similar level of response.

Recommendations.

A proportionate response.

The response to the mental health crisis caused by the pandemic needs be proportionate to the scale of the pandemic itself.

Immediate priorities

- Everyone with a bipolar diagnosis is written to by their GP about the risks of relapsing during Covid-19, providing advice on staying well and signposting to Bipolar UK. All aligned with existing communications to save time and money.
- Increased access to specialist mental health services so everyone who needs support can find it. This needs to include those who are struggling to stay well but aren't yet in crisis.
- To conduct further research into access to services and treatment for people living with bipolar to investigate whether these findings are representative of everyone living with bipolar.

Longer term priorities

- Improve diagnosis rates to empower people seeking out knowledge and support. Separating bipolar from other serious mental illnesses in the Quality Outcome Framework could help facilitate this.
- Ensure that specialist bipolar services are included within the new integrated primary and community model.
- Integrated Primary and Community Mental Health Teams to invest in psycho-education courses for everyone with a diagnosis, helping everyone with bipolar to develop tools for effective self-management.
- Expand the use of personal health budgets for mental health so people with bipolar can access the support they need, when they need it.

Contact Bipolar UK

If you have been affected by anything included in this report please get in touch:

Bipolar UK

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www.bipolaruk.org

www.bipolaruk.org/faqs/mood-scale

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