

Youth Mental Health First Aid

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Introduction

Record levels of young people are struggling with their mental health. Academic pressures, social media, bullying, poverty, inequality, and the lack of timely professional mental health support available are all contributing factors. The Youth MHFA course is for anyone who works with lives with or supports young people aged 8-18.

Many surveys and studies that examine youth mental health often include a wider age range of participants, typically from 6 -25 years old. This broader age range reflects adolescence and early adulthood, highlighting their roles in mental health development. For this reason, the statistics within this document have been split into three categories.

It's important to note in the glossary section of the course manual, you will find that our working definition of "youth" is distinct from those used in some external research and studies. For this course, "youth" refers to individuals aged 8 to 18.

Full references for statistics featured in the Youth MHFA course

Session 1

Slide 9: Activity: True or false?

- Half of all reported poor mental health is established by the age of 14 years old ¹
- 20.3% of children aged 8 –16 years had a probable mental health condition ²
- In the last year, nearly 40,000 children experienced a wait of over two years for mental health support ³

Session 4

Slide 4: How is gaming linked to gambling?

- Just over one-quarter of 11–17-year-olds reported having spent their own money on a gambling activity in the past twelve months ⁴

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Supplementary statistics related to youth mental health

Children aged 5-11

Autism and learning disabilities

- The percentage of pupils with special educational needs support increases during primary school age. SEN is most prevalent at age 9 and continues to be more prevalent in boys than girls ¹
- For further relevant statistics, see youth aged 12-18

Coping during the pandemic and the impact of COVID-19

- Mental health difficulties increased for children aged 5 to 10 years between 2017 and 2020. Specific sub-scores such as emotional problems, hyperactivity problems, and the impact score also showed a notable increase during this period, indicating a potential worsening of mental health outcomes for this age group by 2020 ²
- For further relevant statistics, see youth aged 12-18

Maltreatment of children and young people

- For relevant statistics, see youth aged 12-18

Mental health prevalence

- In 2023, 15.7% of children aged 8-10 years had a probable* mental health condition ^{3*}

* probable - the statistic does not directly measure diagnoses of mental disorders but indirectly estimates the true rate of mental disorders. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire was used to identify children who may have had problems with aspects of their mental health to such an extent that it impacted their daily lives. Responses were used to estimate the likelihood that a child or young person might have a mental disorder, this was classified as either 'unlikely', 'possible', or 'probable'.

- In children aged 8- 10 years boys are more likely to have a probable mental health condition compared to girls. The rate for boys (17.7%) is higher than for girls (13.6%)³
- In previous years (2020-2022), this difference has been somewhat consistent, with boys always showing higher rates of probable mental health conditions than girls, though the exact percentage has fluctuated³
- The median age of onset for anxiety and impulse-control disorders is 11 years, compared to substance use disorders, which begin around age 20, and mood disorders, which often develop around age 30⁴
- Children and young people with a learning disability are three times more likely than average to have a mental health diagnosis⁵

Poor mental health and wellbeing

- There is a clear relationship between the number of missed school days and the likelihood of having a probable mental health condition. Children who miss more school days are likelier to fall into the probable condition category. This trend is seen in all years but is particularly noticeable in 2021 and 2022³

Note: For 2023, some data points within the data set are marked as "u" making the full analysis difficult for that year, especially in the probable and possible condition categories. Some figures in 2023 are not displayed because the number of people in that specific category was too small to provide a statistically reliable result.

- Over three years, there has been a notable increase in the proportion of children and young people aged 8-16 with probable mental health conditions who experience sleep problems on 3 or more nights per week. In 2021, 56.2% of children with probable mental health conditions had sleep problems on 3 or more nights, increasing to 73.0% in 2022 and 76.5% in 2023³
- In 2023, both boys and girls show similar levels of sleep problems, with around 76-78% experiencing issues on 3 or more nights³

Suicide and self-harm

- There is not sufficient suicide data for children aged 5-11 in the UK. This is because suicides are rare however there are some tragic instances in which they do occur.
- Children under 13 who self-harmed were more often boys, particularly in the age group 5-10 years ⁶
- Although self-harm was less frequent among primary school children compared to high school students, early intervention remains crucial. Schools expressed the need for more comprehensive training for staff and parents to recognise and respond to self-harm behaviours ⁷

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Youth aged 12-18

Autism and learning disabilities

- Autism affects approximately 1 in 100 children and young people ¹ and boys are three times more likely to be diagnosed based on studies ²
- In autistic children, 70% have a mental health problem (such as anxiety or depression), and 40% have more than one ³
- Guidance on suicide prevention recognises that individuals with autism are a group at high risk ⁴
- Children and young people with a learning disability aged 5-16 years are more than four times more likely than average to have a mental health problem ⁵

Coping during the pandemic and the impact of COVID-19

- Evidence from across the pandemic suggests that most children had broadly coped well with the pandemic ⁶
- A survey of over half a million children and young people between 6- 17 years found 80% of children and young people were happy or okay with their mental wellbeing ⁷
- However, over the pandemic, young girls (16- 24), disadvantaged children and young people, and those with special educational needs and disabilities were more likely to report difficulties with mental health and wellbeing ⁶⁻²⁰.
However, the literature methodology cannot determine if these are continuations of pre-pandemic trends or if they reflect differential experiences between groups of children through the pandemic.
- Research shows that 26.9 % of 11-16- year-olds with a probable mental health condition were more likely to say that the lockdown had made their life much worse. This is compared to those unlikely to have a mental health condition - 9.7 % ²¹
- A UK survey of over 2000 young people aged 13 - 25, who have looked for mental health support at some point in their lives, found that around 80% believed the pandemic had made their mental health worse ²²

- A 2021 survey found that 67% believed that the pandemic would have a long-term negative effect on their mental health, and 75% agreed they were finding the current lockdown harder to cope with than previous ones ²³
- There has been an increase in demand for support for mental health conditions, including eating disorders:
 - Referrals to children and young people’s mental health services in England for 0- 18-year-olds increased by 85% from September 2019 to September 2021 ²⁴
 - YoungMinds reported a 48% increase in demand for its helpline supporting parents and carers with concerns about their child’s mental health between 2019 and 2021 ²⁵
 - Childline counselling sessions about mental or emotional health increased from 31% (71,628) in 2019/20 to 37% (73,088) in 2020/21 ²⁶
 - In England, new referrals for eating disorders in children aged 0-18 rose by 115% from July to September 2021, compared to the same period in 2019, reaching 6,657 cases ²⁴
 - Calls to Beat’s eating disorder helpline rose 173% between February 2020 and January 2021 ²⁷
- The mental health and wellbeing of some groups of children have been disproportionately affected:
 - Demand for online mental health support in England rose by 11% for Black, Asian, and minority ethnic young people seeking help for anxiety or stress between March-May 2019 and March-May 2020, compared to a 3% increase for White young people under-18s ²⁸
 - 29% of children whose parents were unemployed (June 2020) reported feeling stressed most days or every day, compared to 22% of children in the general population ²⁹

Maltreatment of children and young people

- In the UK in 2019/20 there were over 23,000 child cruelty offences recorded by police ³⁰
- However, some of these offences would be counted as child physical abuse rather than neglect and it is not possible to separate these offences ³⁰
- It is unknown how many children in the UK experience sexual abuse. However, research with 2,275 young people aged 11-17 about their experiences of sexual abuse suggests around 1 in 20 children in the UK have been sexually abused ³⁰
- Girls and older children are more likely to experience sexual abuse. Many children who experience sexual abuse were abused by someone they knew ³⁰
- Rates of police-recorded physical, sexual and online abuse offences against adolescents are higher than rates against younger children ³¹
- Rates of adolescents in care are higher than rates for younger children, with the exception in some nations of infants under the age of one ³¹
- Rates of adolescents subject to a child protection plan or on a child protection register are lower than rates for younger children ³¹
- The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated many of the risk factors associated with abuse and neglect. At the same time, the support services that would traditionally identify and respond to these concerns have been unable to see many of the children and families they work with face-to-face ³¹

Mental health prevalence

- In 2023 20.3% of young people aged 8-16 years had a probable mental disorder ³²
- In young people aged 8- 16 years, probable mental disorders steadily increased over the years, from 12.5% in 2017 to 20.3% in 2023 ³²
- The largest jump appears between 2017 and 2020, which coincides with the global pandemic, which exacerbated poor mental health among the youth ³²

- While the rates of probable mental disorders are quite close, boys experience a sharper increase from 2022 to 2023 ³²
- 20% of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year ³³
- 50% of mental health problems are established by age 14 and 75% by age 24 ³⁴
- 10% of children and young people (5-16 years) have a clinically diagnosable mental health condition ³⁵, yet 70% of children and adolescents who experience mental health conditions have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age ³⁶

Mortality and risk

- Adolescence (10-19 years of age) is the life stage with the second highest risk of death among children and young people – second only to infancy ³⁷
- Evidence from multiple sources shows that risk-taking behaviour among young people is declining at a population level. However, in the UK levels of alcohol consumption in youth are higher than the European average and there are groups of young people who are taking risks and experiencing harm ³⁸

Physical and mental health

- Adolescents (17-year-olds) who suffer abdominal bloating, pain and constipation are more likely to suffer from anxiety or depression. They found common abdominal pains were linked back to increased rates of anxiety, depression and bullying ³⁹

Poor mental health and wellbeing

- 6% of young people aged 10 - 15 are unhappy with their lives, and nearly 12%, around 562,000, are unhappy with school ⁴⁰
- 96% of young people surveyed across England reported that their mental health had affected their schoolwork at some point ⁴⁰

- Sleep problems affected 38.4% of 11 to 16-year-olds, and 57.1% of 17 to 23-year-olds. These rates were significantly higher in those with probable mental health conditions, 74.2%, and 86.7% respectively ⁴¹
- 10.6% of 6- to 16-year-olds missed more than 15 days of school during the 2020 Autumn term. Young people with a probable mental health condition were twice as likely to have missed this much school (18.2%) as those unlikely to have a mental health condition (8.8%) ⁴¹
- The proportion of children and young people with possible eating problems increased since 2017; from 6.7% to 13% in 11 -16 year olds, and from 44.6% to 58.2% in 17 - 19 year olds ⁴¹
- After the 2021 lockdown, staff and parents of pupils in special schools/colleges reported poorer wellbeing, increased anxiety, and mental health declines, which they attributed to the pandemic. Students were seen to be 5 to 8 months behind in emotional health and development, with deterioration in behavioural, social, and independent skills ⁴²
- Children and young people (6-18 years) with special educational needs and disabilities also had poorer wellbeing, higher anxiety, and lower learning engagement in the 2021 autumn term compared to peers without special educational needs and disabilities ⁴³

Racism

- 59% of school staff were aware of young people experiencing racism at school and 47% said it had affected the mental health of those who experienced it ⁴⁴
- 70% of young people who experienced racism in school told us their experience had impacted their wellbeing ⁴⁵
- For the first time, stop and search data for 10 -17-year-olds is available. It showed Black children were more likely to be stopped than other ethnicities. It also showed that 80% of stop and searches across all ethnicities, resulted in no further action ⁴⁶

Social media and bullying

- 11- 16 year olds with a probable mental disorder were less likely to feel safe at school (61.2%) they were also less likely to report enjoyment of learning or having a friend they could turn to for support ⁴⁷
- 12.6% of 11- 16-year-old social media users reported that they had been bullied online. This was more than 29.4% among those with a probable mental disorder ⁴⁷
- 11-16 year old social media users with a probable mental disorder were less likely to report feeling safe online (48.4%) than those unlikely to have a disorder (66.5%) ⁴⁷

Suicide and self-harm

- Suicide is the main cause of death in young people under the age of 35 in the UK ⁴⁸
- In 2018, 1,866 young people under the age of 35 took their own lives. Over three-quarters of them were boys or young men ⁴⁸
- On average, over five young people take their lives each day ⁴⁸
- Over 200 school children are lost to suicide every year ⁴⁸
- Research shows that with appropriate early intervention and support suicide by young people can be prevented ⁴⁸
- In 2018 in England and Wales, the three most common causes of death in the 10-19 age group were accidental injury, cancer and intentional self-harm (including suicide) ⁴⁹
- 56% of school staff identified that young people who didn't receive support self-harmed ⁵⁰

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Young people aged 18-25

Coping during the pandemic and the impact of COVID-19

- See young people aged 12-18 for some relevant stats

Mental health prevalence

- In 2023, 22.3% of young people aged 17- 25 years had a probable* mental disorder ¹
Note: the dataset has two categories for 17-19 and 20–25-year-olds. The figure above is a weighted average of both categories combined.
- In the UK, anxiety and depression have been rising among young women aged 16 - 24. Between 2017 - 2018, nearly 31% reported experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety, up from 26% in the previous year and the same period five years earlier ²
- In 2021, 28% of young people aged 16 - 29 years were most likely to have some form of anxiety ³

Social media and bullying

- 15.3% of young people aged 17 to 24 years who used social media agreed with the statement “I have been bullied online”. Young women were almost twice as likely to report having been bullied online than young men (19.5% compared with 11.3%) ⁴

Socioeconomic and Environmental factors

- Among 17 -22-year-olds with a probable mental disorder, 14.8% reported living in a household that had experienced not being able to buy enough food or using a food bank in the past year. In comparison, only 2.1% of those unlikely to have a mental disorder faced the same situation ⁵
- This highlights the social economic and environmental factors likely impacting young people and mental health

Substance use

- 13% of LGBT people aged 18-24 took drugs at least once a month ⁶
- For the year ending March 2023, the estimated proportion of people reporting any drug use in the last year was higher among younger age groups (17.6% of those aged 16 - 24 years) compared with older age groups (7.7% of those aged 25 - 59 years) ⁷

Suicide

- In England in 2021, 372 people aged 20-24 died by suicide (263 male, 109 female) ⁸
- 13% of LGBT people aged 18-24 said they've attempted to take their own life in the last year ⁶

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