



The Mix's Quarterly Helpline Trends: **Summer** during the pandemic



THE MIX

Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of The Mix's Quarterly Helpline Trends Report, in which we share insights from our helpline data about the issues impacting young people.

15,166

Requests for support

96%

Of these were made by young people aged up to 25 years old

Between 1 October 2019 and 30 September 2020, The Mix helpline* responded to 15,166 requests for support; 96% of these were made by young people up to 25 years old.

Issues discussed during helpline conversations reflect wider trends in society. The Mix would like to share our insights on these trends with young people, the wider public, third sector organisations or anyone else who may be interested. Please note that our usership tends to be young people who seek help.

This paper focuses mainly on the period of 1 July to 30 September (Q3), 2020.

Between July and September 2020 (Q3), there were **1,999 cases** where a young person got in touch with The Mix helpline and where one or more issue discussed during their conversation was recorded on the Mix database. Data from Q3 of 2020 (1,999 cases) was compared to Q3 of 2019 (2,042 cases) to identify changes in topics discussed. Following the overview of the most common issues discussed, the remainder of the report highlights the most dramatic changes in the data, year on year.

Method

All the trends discussed in this paper are statistically significant unless otherwise noted; significance level of 0.05** was used. For the purposes of this paper, we define a young person as 25 years old or younger. As this paper focuses on trends for young people only, data where the known user age was 26 years or above was excluded, alongside records where the issue mentioned was not specified. Each percentage is the proportion of all conversations where the given issue was discussed.

Summary

Summer 2020 was far from a typical summer. With coronavirus still rife, large events were cancelled, social distancing was in place and lots of aspects of life were uncertain and subject to change. This was a very challenging time for lots of young people and had a huge impact not only their home and social lives, but also on their mental health. Our data reflects this and offers insights into the many issues young people faced during this time.

8.7 pp

Cases mentioning depression rose by 8.7 percentage points (pp)

6.6 pp

Cases mentioning anxiety rose by 6.6 percentage points (pp)

2.7pp

Cases where counselling was discussed rose by 2.7 pp year on year.

On the helpline, there has been a sharp rise in requests for support mentioning anxiety and depression year on year. This is in line with the trend seen in the previous quarterly report, however, this time the increase was even higher, with the cases mentioning depression raising by 8.7 percentage points (pp)^{***} and anxiety by 6.6 pp. It is likely that these increases have also contributed to the rise in cases where counselling was discussed as these have risen by 2.7 pp year on year.

Young people were more likely to discuss family issues on the helpline, with cases rising steeply (by 5 pp) year on year.

Restrictions on movement and socialising in bigger groups and many venues staying closed meant that young people spent more time at home with their families, leading to an increase in family conflict, while other young people worried about their family members.

Requests for support mentioning school or education have risen slightly (by 1.8pp); a number of young people discussed the negative impact of their struggle with mental health issues on their school or university work, while others were worried about their future because of the negative impact of lockdown on their education.

The helpline also experienced small increases in cases mentioning loneliness or isolation and eating disorders.

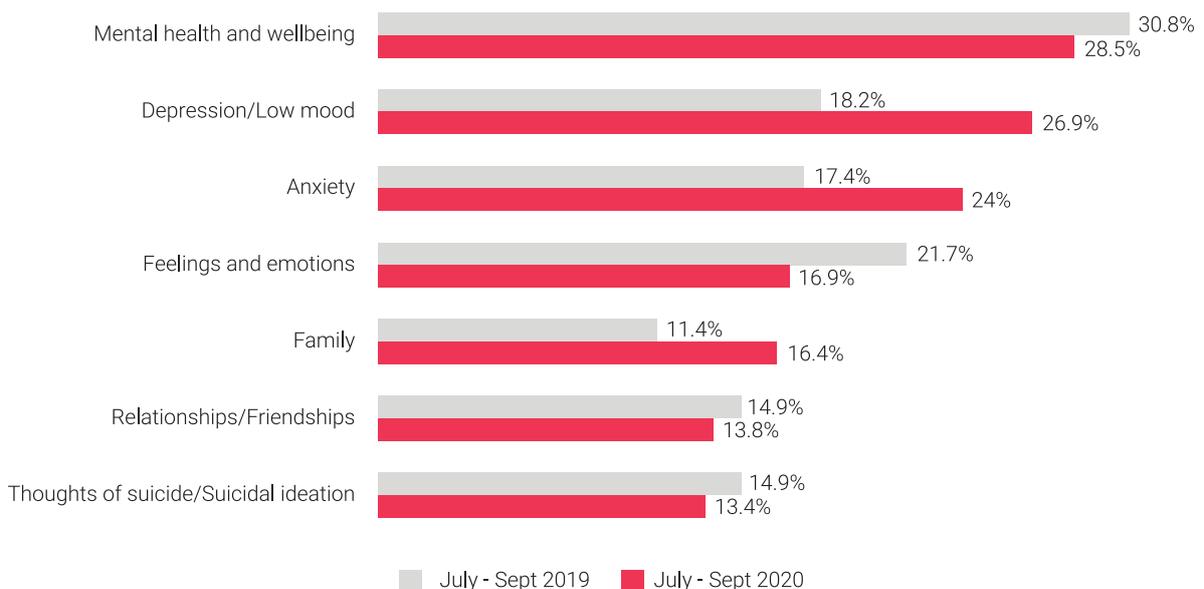
Importantly, a positive change showing a decline in cases mentioning thoughts of suicide with intent to act further accelerated with the proportion of cases falling by more than half year on year (4pp). Also, cases mentioning suicidal ideation decreased slightly. Finally, with fewer social interactions, the cases mentioning sex and sexual health have also decreased.

Trends overview in detail

Top issues discussed

Mental health and wellbeing, depression or low mood and anxiety were by far the most common topics young people discussed on the helpline during the third quarter (Q3) of 2020, with each being mentioned by around a quarter of young people. Feelings and emotions; family; relationships and thoughts of suicide, respectively, were the next most commonly discussed topics.

Top issues mentioned Q3



Steep increase in cases mentioning depression and anxiety

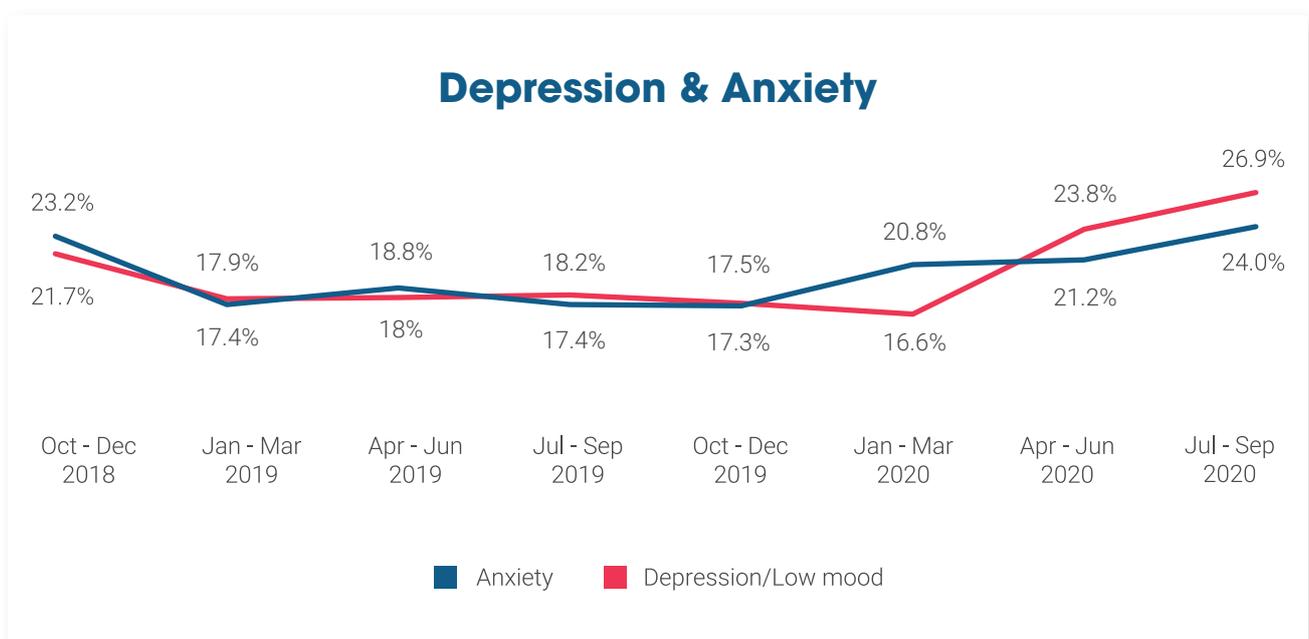
While the most common issues discussed tend to include the same themes every quarter, there has been a number of unseasonal trends during Q3 of 2020. Although the coronavirus pandemic was mentioned in only 4% of conversations, it's highly likely that the effects of the pandemic have contributed to most of the changes highlighted below.

There has been a dramatic increase of 8.7 pp in cases mentioning depression or low mood...

...such a large increase is rarely seen in our quarterly data comparisons. Some 26.9% (537 cases) of the helpline requests for support from young people mentioned depression or low mood in Q3; this compares to 18.2% (371 cases) in the same period last year. A similar trend, albeit with a somewhat less sharp increase, was highlighted in the last quarterly report, when the cases rose by 5.8 pp.

↑ 6.6 pp increase

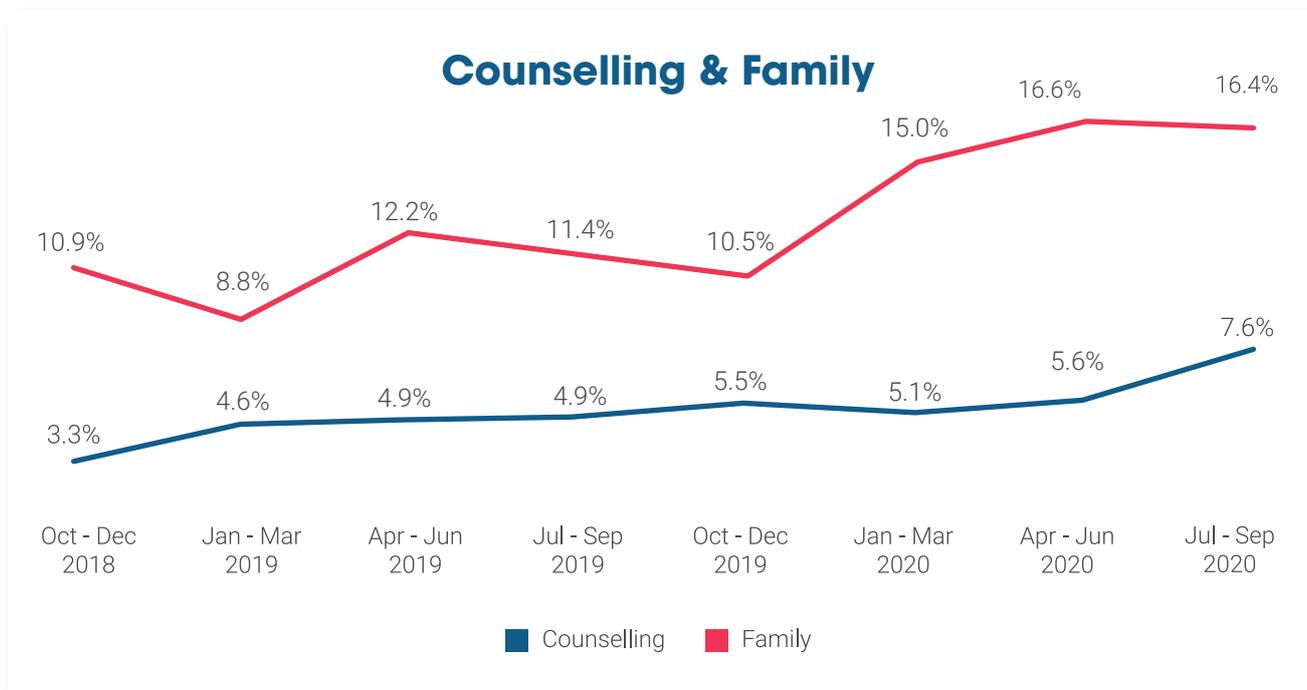
Anxiety was mentioned in 356 cases (17.4%) in Q3 of 2019. In Q3 of 2020, there were 479 cases (24%) mentioning anxiety. This represents another dramatic increase of 6.6 pp year on year. This is a far steeper increase compared to one seen in the last report, where a rise of 2.4 pp was observed.



More conflict within families and more mentions of counselling

Similarly to the last quarter, there has been a sharp rise of 5pp in cases where family was mentioned; from 11.4% (233 cases) in Q3 of 2019 to 16.4% (327 cases) in Q3 2020. Restrictions designed to contain the spread of the virus meant that young people spent more time at home with their family, resulting in some cases in family conflict, with other young people being worried about their family members.

There has also been an increase in young people talking about counselling on the helpline (2.7 pp). Some 4.9% of cases mentioned counselling (101 cases) between July – September 2019, while in July – September 2020 it was mentioned in 7.6% of cases (152).

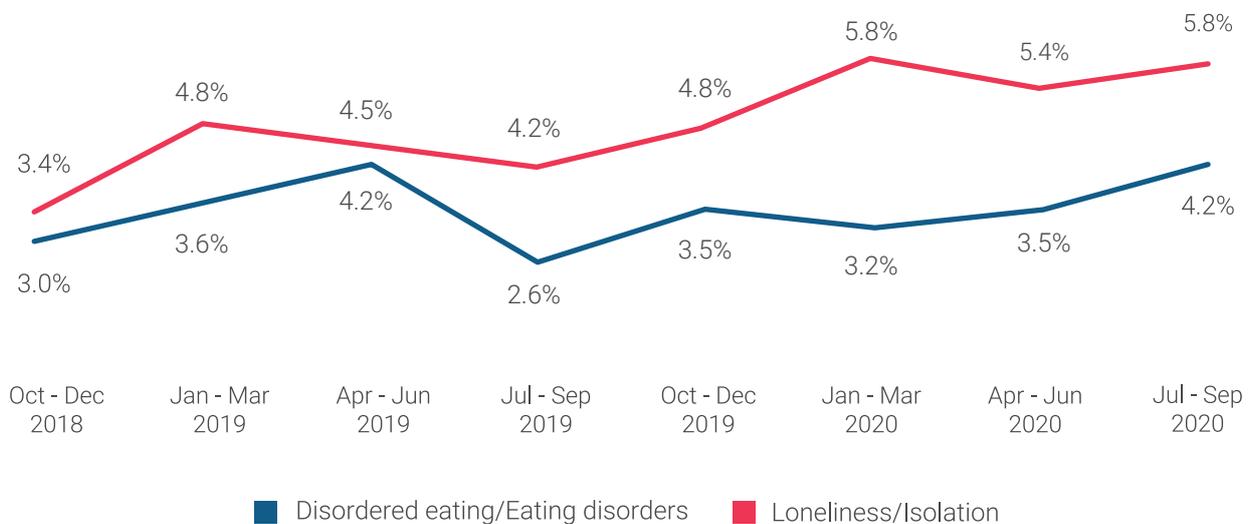


Increase in loneliness, disordered eating and mentions of school/education

The number of cases mentioning loneliness or isolation have increased by 1.6 pp year on year. In Q3 of 2019, these accounted for 4.2% (85 cases) and in 2020 for 5.8% (115 cases). Though a small increase, it's still statistically significant. Cases mentioning disordered eating or eating disorders have also slightly increased from 2.6% in Q3 of 2019 (54 cases) to 4.2% in Q3 of 2020 (83 cases).

Requests for support mentioning school or education have also risen. They accounted for 2.3% in Q3 of 2019 (46 cases) and 4.1% in 2020 (82 cases). Some young people discussed the negative impact of their mental health issues on their school or university work, while others were worried about their future due to the negative impact of the lockdown on their education.

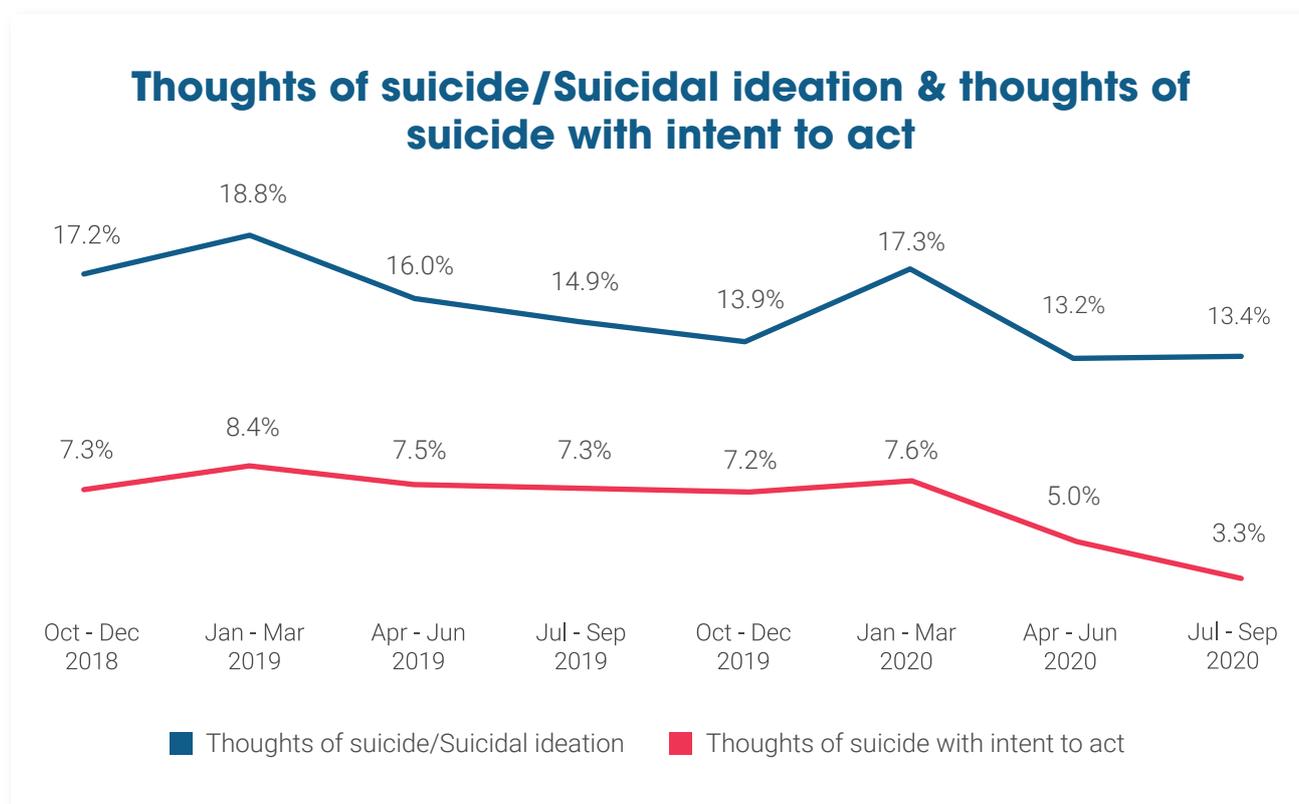
Disordered eating/Eating disorders & Loneliness/Isolation



A significant drop in cases mentioning thoughts of suicide with intent to act

Alongside the rises in the issues discussed above, we have seen some significant drops. The trend observed in the last quarterly report continues, showing a drop in cases mentioning suicidal ideation and also in cases where thoughts of suicide with intent to act were articulated. There has been a sharp decline of 4.0 pp in the number of cases mentioning thoughts of suicide with intent to act; it was mentioned in 7.3% of cases in Q3 of 2019 (149 cases) falling to 3.3% in Q3 of 2020 (66 cases).

Cases mentioning thoughts of suicide have dropped slightly from 14.9% (304 cases) in Q3 of 2019 to 13.4% (268 cases) in Q3 of 2020.



In 2020, the proportion of cases mentioning feelings and emotions have dropped by 4.8 pp, from 21.6% (442) in Q3 of 2019, to 16.9% (337) in Q3 of 2020.

Cases that mentioned sex and sexual health have also decreased. In Q3 of 2019 it was mentioned in 4.1% of cases (84 cases) and in Q3 of 2020 it was mentioned in 2.5% of cases (49 cases).

Demographic information

Just under three quarters (74%) of young people seeking help on The Mix helpline during Q3 of 2020 were females, with one quarter (25%) being males. This is similar to the same period in 2019.

In terms of age, almost half (46%) of requests for support were made by 17-21 year olds, with under a third (29%) coming from young people aged 21-25 years; similar to Q3 in 2019.

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In terms of ethnicity, 73% of requests for support were made by young people from White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British backgrounds, which is far lower than 78% in Q3 of 2019, meaning that we received more requests for support from young people from ethnic minority groups.

Limitations

- Young people seeking support are overrepresented in this data as it is only young people who seek support who access The Mix helpline.
- Data is looking at contacts rather than users, meaning that people who contacted The Mix more than once would appear in the data repeatedly. However, typically, the repeat users tend to contact the helpline about a wide range of issues.
- Data on mental health conditions reflect how young people describe their feelings. While some users might have a diagnosed mental health disorder, others might be describing their feelings.

Glossary

*The Mix helpline offer a non-judgemental service for young people up to 25 years old who need support. It can be accessed via a telephone, webchat, email or a webform. Young people can speak to us about any issue. We'll explore their situation with them and find organisations that may be able to help them further. Information on issues mentioned is typically recorded by volunteers dealing with young people seeking support during or after conversations on The Mix database.

** Significance levels show how likely a pattern in your data is due to chance. The most common level, used to mean something is good enough to be believed, is 0.95. This means that the finding has a 95% chance of being true and a five percent (0.05) chance of not being true.

***A percentage point or percent point (pp) is the unit used for the arithmetic difference of two percentages. For example, moving up from 40% to 44% is a 4 percentage point increase, but is a 10 percent increase in what is being measured.