



**The Mix's Quarterly  
Helpline Trends:  
Autumn 2020**



**THE MIX**

# Introduction

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

**15,082**

Requests for support

**95%**

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

Between 1 January and 31 December 2020, The Mix helpline\* responded to 15,082 requests for support; 95% of these were made by young people up to 25 years old.

**This paper focuses mainly on the period of 1 October to 31 December (Q4), 2020.**



During this period, there were **2,232** 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 Q4 of 2020 (2,232 cases) was compared to Q4 of 2019 (1,990 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

**With local and national lockdowns in place due to COVID-19, young people experienced a lot of uncertainty between September and December 2020. Student life continued to be disrupted and the festive season was impacted by the increased risk of infection and changing of rules, meaning lots of young people couldn't spend time with their families and some were coping with bereavement. This made autumn 2020 a very challenging time for under 25s, and we can see this reflected in The Mix helpline data.**

Two areas of young people's lives show the greatest impact; they are **mental health** and **education**. The number of requests for support discussing anxiety or depression have risen even higher than in the previous two quarters, with over a quarter of cases mentioning each. Year on year, the cases have risen dramatically by **10 percentage points\*\*\*** (pp) for depression and **7.7 pp** for anxiety.

The number of conversations around school and education have almost tripled year on year with around **one in 10 conversations** mentioning this topic. For some students, the pandemic, with its restrictions, triggered or exacerbated existing mental health issues, which negatively impacted their studies. A loss of support network connected with a move to university, the inability to build a new one due to restrictions, alongside loneliness and lack of motivation to study were some of the important themes discussed on the helpline. Cases mentioning family have also risen sharply year on year.



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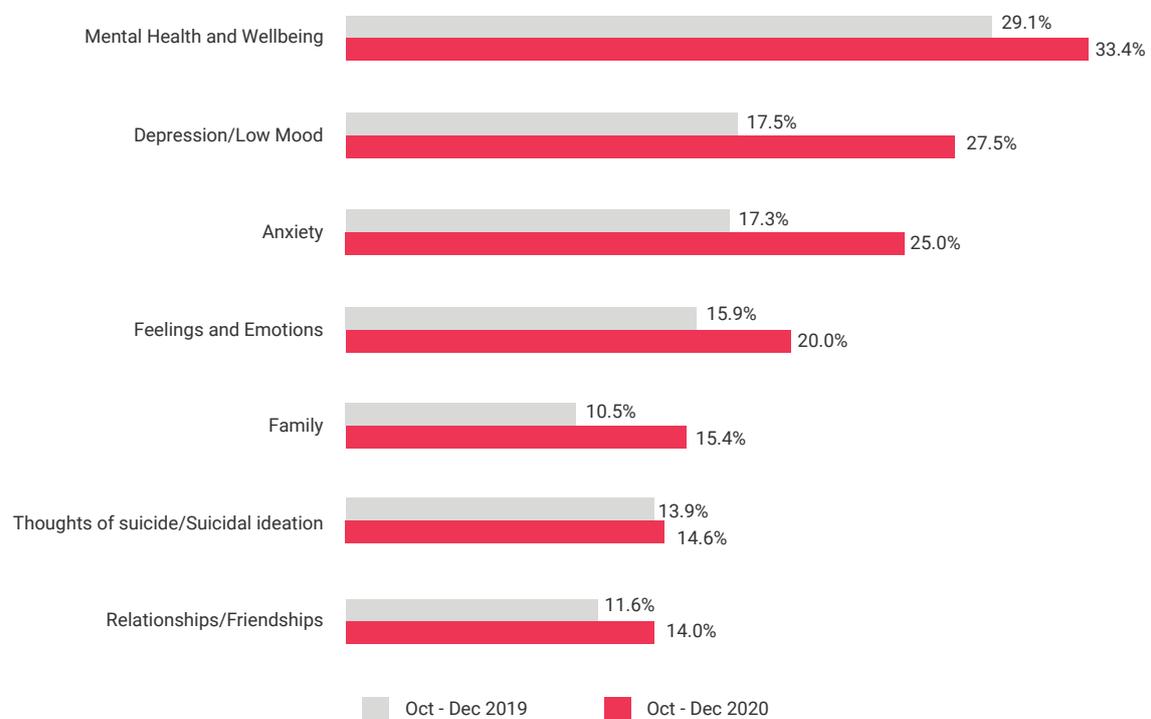
The number of cases mentioning relationships or friendships, loneliness and housing issues have also risen significantly, while there was a fall in requests for support around homelessness. As the death toll from the pandemic climbed up sharply, helpline contacts discussing bereavement have also increased year on year. And yet, the positive trend showing a sharp fall in suicidal thoughts with intent to act highlighted in the two previous reports endured, with such cases falling from **7.2%** in Q4 of 2019 to **4.5%** 12 months later.

# 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 last quarter (Q4) of 2020, with each being mentioned by at least a quarter of young people contacting the helpline. Feelings and emotions; family; thoughts of suicide and relationships were the next most commonly-discussed topics.

### Top issues mentioned Q4



While the list of the top issues tends to be stable, there has been a large number of unseasonal trends during the last quarter of 2020. Although the coronavirus pandemic was mentioned in only **5.4%** of conversations, with the pandemic still strongly affecting people's lives during this period, it's highly likely that its effects have contributed to many of the changes highlighted in the next pages.

## Mental health

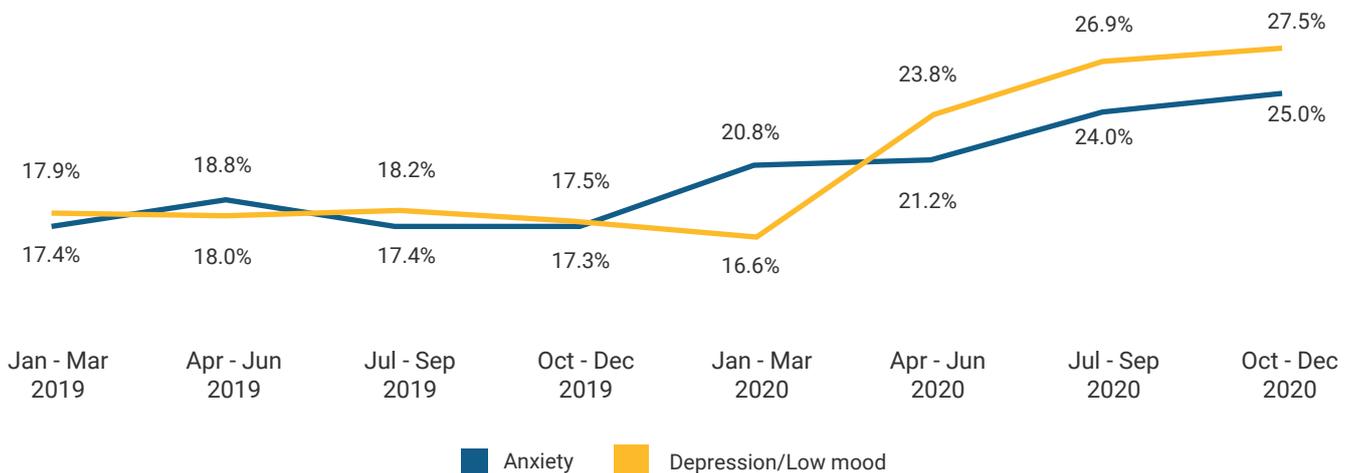
The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on mental health has been much talked about; The Mix data illustrates the extent to which this has impacted lives of young people.



The two previous reports highlighted dramatic rises in the cases mentioning depression or low mood and the cases where anxiety was discussed, and in the last quarter of 2020 this accelerated further.

During Q4 of 2020, some **27.5%** (613 cases) of the helpline requests for support mentioned depression or low mood; this compares to **17.5%** (349 cases) in the same period of 2019. This represents an increase of 10 pp year on year; the most dramatic rise in the helpline data recorded so far. The cases mentioning anxiety have risen by 7.7 pp year on year, accounting for **25%** (559 cases) in Q4 of 2020 and **17.3%** (345 cases) a year earlier. The chart below shows that the cases have been rising steeply ever since the beginning of the pandemic.

### Depression & Anxiety



## Education and family

The number of conversations around school and education have almost tripled year on year, with almost one in 10 conversations (218 cases) focusing on this topic during Q4 of 2020. In comparison, such conversations accounted for only 3.5% in Q4 of 2019 (69 cases). The Mix partnership with Student Minds around Student Space, whereby students are signposted to The Mix for support might account for some of this increase, nonetheless, the pandemic has clearly affected many students profoundly.



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There has been a sharp increase year on year in young people mentioning family during their conversations on the helpline.

An analysis of the helpline conversations shows that for some students, the restrictions of COVID-19, triggered or exacerbated their existing mental health issues which is having a negative impact on their studies. In some cases, it led students to withdraw from the university. Some students experienced anxiety about the move to university because of COVID-19 and/or existing mental health problems, with some pointing out that because of their move, they lost their established support networks.

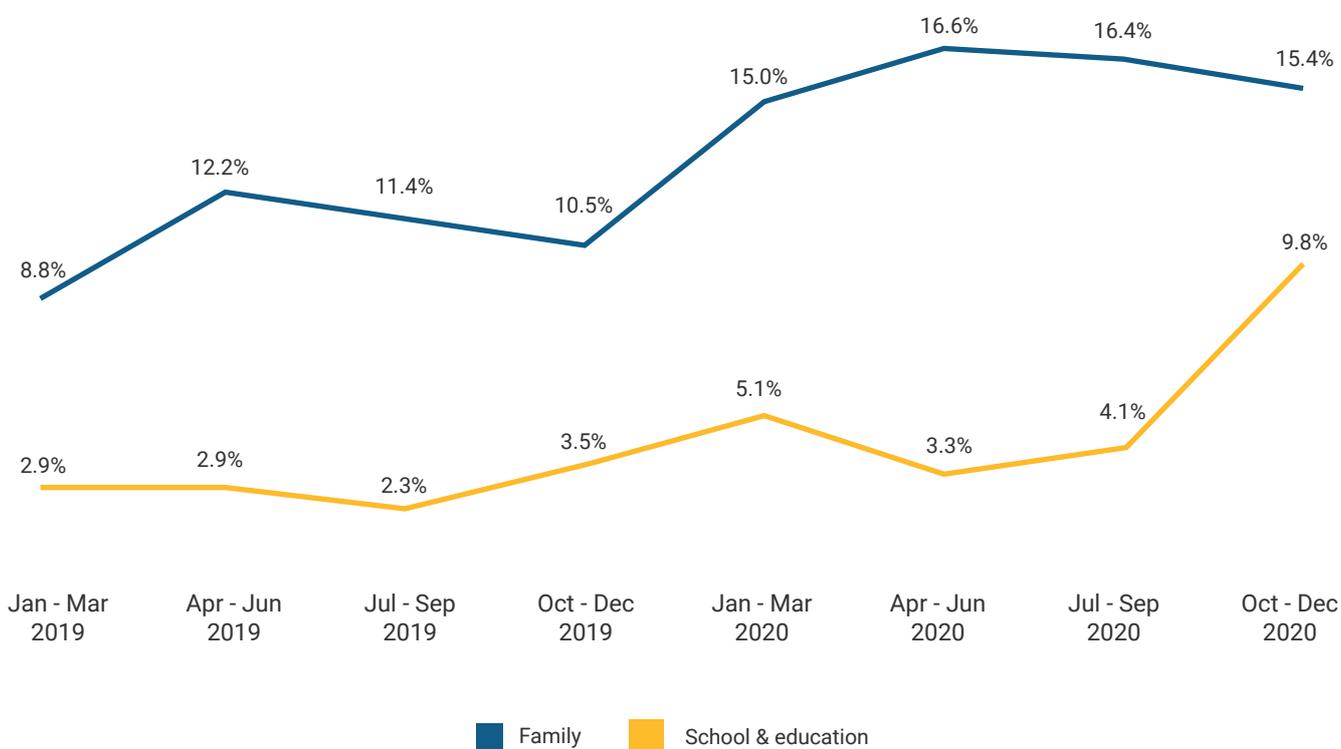
**Inability to freely socialise with students made building these support networks harder. Also, the move to online teaching meant a loss of a support network for some students, who found it calming talking to their peers before the lessons on campus - previously a way of reducing anxiety. In some cases, loss of this support network resulted at students missing their lessons.**

**Additionally, local lockdowns have prevented some students from traveling home for a break from university, where some struggled with settling in or being lonely, thus depriving them of their established support networks and calming familiarity. The quarantine made many feel isolated, while others got bored or lonely with a university life under COVID-19 restrictions.**

Some young people struggled with finding a motivation or energy to do any homework or revise for tests, while others were missing the routine while home schooling, resulting in late nights and little studying. Some young people worried about whether they were doing enough to gain the grades they needed.

In addition, in line with the trend from the previous report, there has been a sharp increase year on year in young people mentioning family during their conversations on the helpline, this has risen from **10.5%** (208 cases) in Q4 of 2019 to **15.4%** (343 cases) a year later.

### Family and School & education



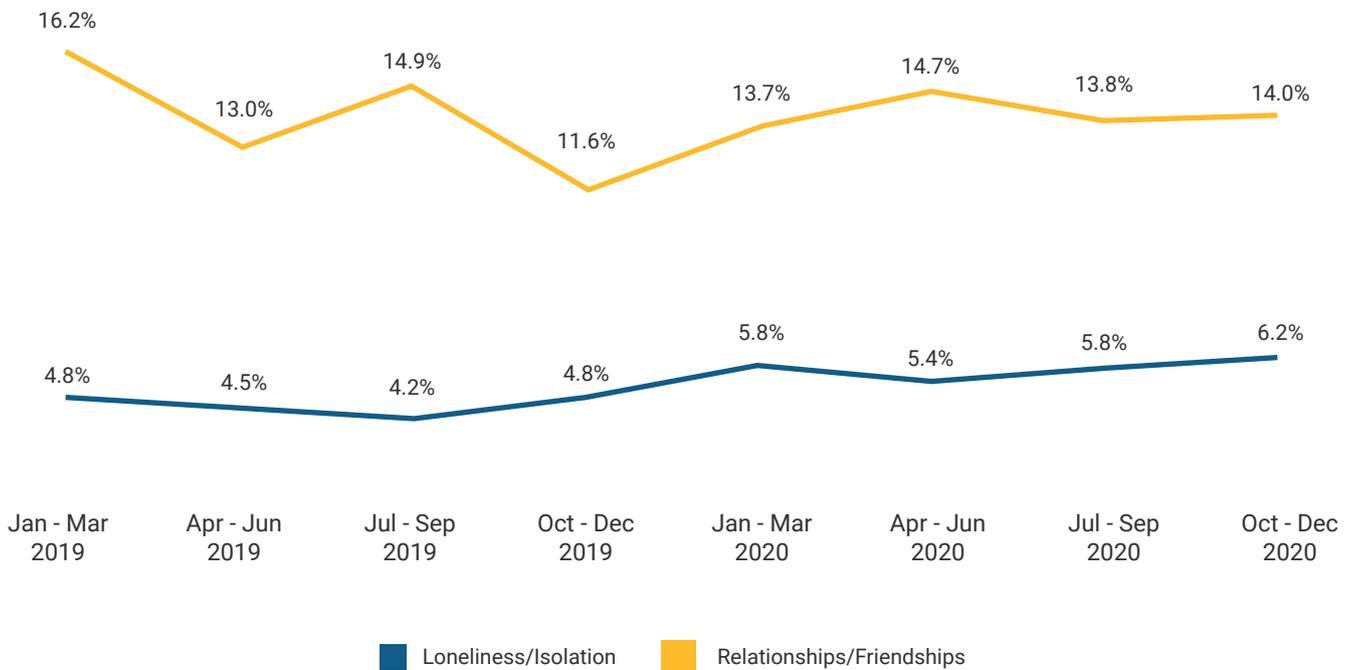
### Relationships



The effect of the continued restrictions might also be reflected in the increase in conversations around relationships or friendships, which have grown from **11.6%** (230 cases) in Q4 of 2019 to **14.0%** (312 cases) one year later.

At the same time, loneliness became a slightly more prominent topic on the helpline, with cases raising from **4.8%** (95 cases) to **6.2%** (138 cases).

## Loneliness/Isolation & Relationships/Friendships



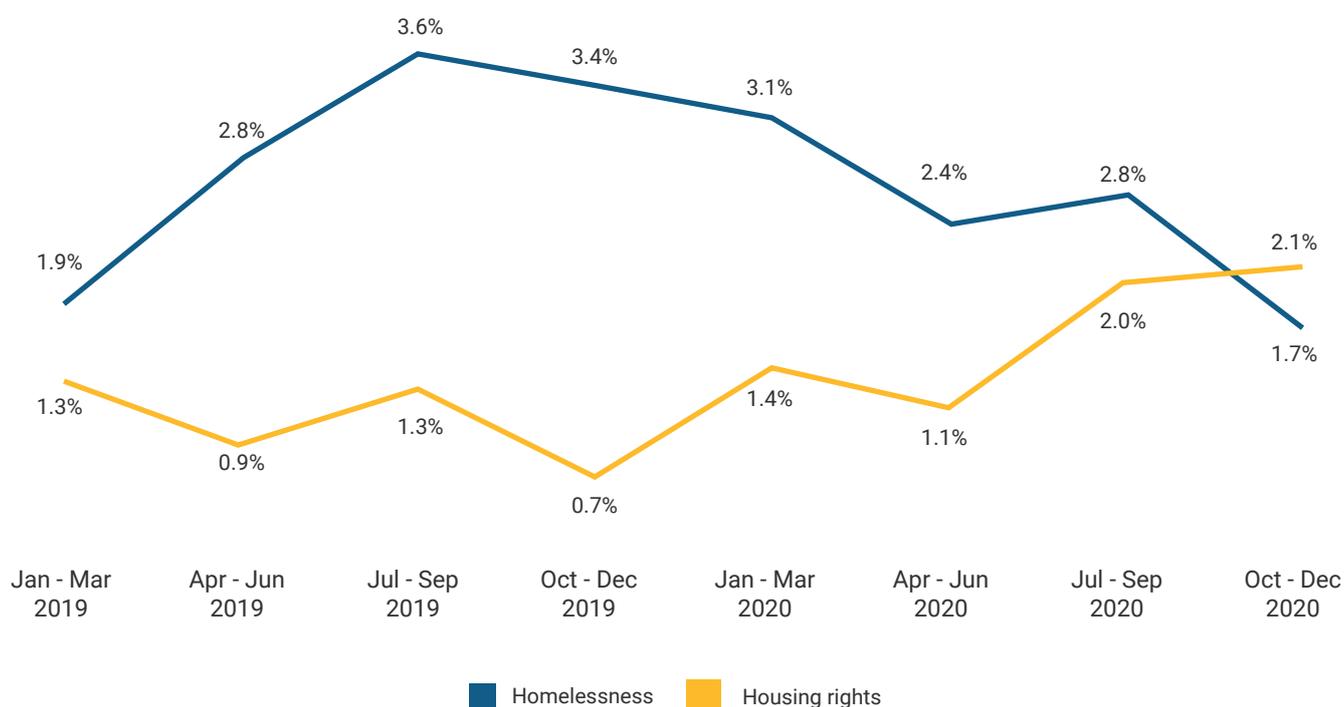
## Housing and homelessness



**While requests for support around housing rights (including issues connected to housing, as well as help with finding a new accommodation) increased from 0.7% (13 cases) to 2.1% (46 cases) in Q4 of 2020, cases mentioning homelessness have fallen from 3.4% (67 cases) to 1.7% (38 cases).**

The requests for support around homelessness have been largely falling since the beginning of the pandemic. Additional funding made available to local councils and charities to provide COVID-safe accommodation and a temporary eviction ban have likely had a positive impact on homelessness among young people.

## Homelessness & Housing rights



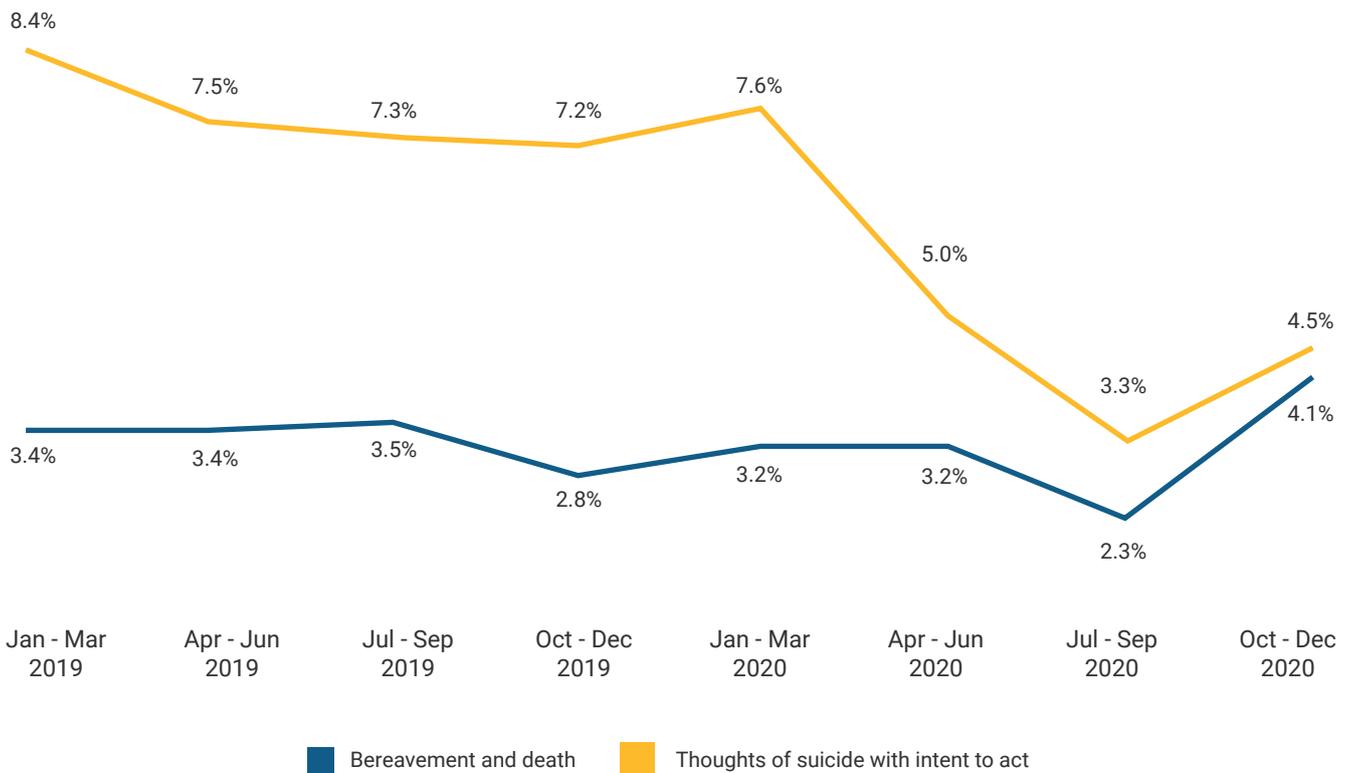
## Bereavement and thoughts of suicide with intent to act

As the death toll from the pandemic continued climbing up sharply during the last quarter of 2020, helpline contacts discussing this topic have also risen year on year from 2.8% (56 cases) to 4.1% (91 cases).



And yet, among the negative trends highlighted above, the positive trend showing a sharp fall in suicidal thoughts with intent to act continued, with such cases being down from 7.2% (143 cases) in Q4 of 2019 to 4.5% (101 cases) a year later. While this represents a significant decrease year on year, the proportion is somewhat higher than the 3.3% in July to September (Q3) 2020.

## Bereavement and death & Thoughts of suicide with intent to act



## Young people using the helpline: demographic information

During Q4 of 2019, three quarters (75%) of young people seeking help on The Mix helpline were female, with 24% being male and 1% falling into the 'other' category. In comparison, in Q4 of 2020, females accounted for 79% and males for 20% with the 'other' category unchanged at 1%.



In terms of age, almost half (47%) of requests for support were made by 17–21-year-olds in Q4 of 2019 and just over a quarter (28%) were from 22–25-year-olds. In Q4 of 2020, the proportion of 17–21-year-olds increased to 50%, while the proportion for 22–25-year-olds decreased to 25%.

In terms of ethnicity, 75% of requests for support were made by young people from White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British backgrounds in Q4 2020, somewhat lower than the 79% in Q4 of 2019. This suggests that The Mix 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.
- Although the vast majority of cases have issues mentioned recorded on the database, there is a small proportion of cases where this is missing; these are mainly email contacts.

## Glossary

\*The Mix helpline offer a non-judgemental service for young people up to 25 years old who need help. 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 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.