

# THE MIX

## The Mix's Quarterly Helpline Trends: July-December 2021

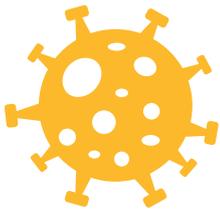


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## Introduction

**Our fifth edition of The Mix’s Helpline Trends report shares insights on issues affecting young people in the UK, using data from our helpline service.\* This report specifically focuses on Quarter 3 of 2021 (1 July 2021 to 30 September 2021) and Quarter 4 of 2021 (1 October to 31 December 2021), while highlighting some important trends that occurred throughout the pandemic.**



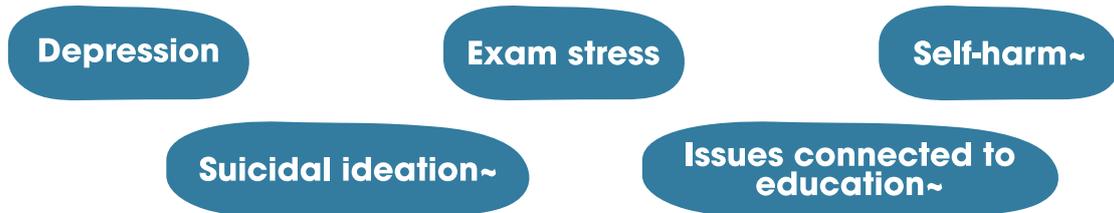
Q3 of 2021 was generally filled with optimism across the UK as the government introduced a roadmap to reopening society, following a decrease in Covid-19 cases. However, the easing of the restrictions was short-lived with the unveiling of England’s Covid-19 winter ‘Plan B’ in September 2021 and subsequently the outbreak of the Omicron variant, leading to tightening of restrictions in early December 2021. The data in this report shows how these factors affected young people’s lives during Q3 and Q4 of 2021.

**Trigger warning: This report includes references to self-harm, abuse, suicide, substance abuse and bereavement. If you are looking for support for any of the issues mentioned, you can find information at the end of the report.**

## Summary

### Q3 of 2021

Across the UK, Q3 of 2021 was filled with optimism, as most of the Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed and due to arrival of the summer months. During this quarter, there was a decrease in many issues affecting young people compared to the previous quarter, including:



Nonetheless, a number of issues kept increasing:



### Q4 of 2021

Across the UK, the spread of the Omicron variant and the arrival of winter saw the re-introduction of restrictions to curb the spread of Covid-19. The resurgence of Covid-19 cases and subsequent restrictions have had a significant impact on the mental health of young people. During this period, compared to the previous quarter, there was a sharp, statistically significant increase in a wide range of issues affecting young people, particularly:



~ While there was a decrease in these issues quarter on quarter, it was not statistically significant at 0.05 level

## Trends in detail

In Q3 of 2021, there were 1,967 cases and in Q4 of 2021, there were 1,714 cases where a young person requested support from The Mix helpline team and at least one issue mentioned during their conversation was recorded in The Mix Helpline Database. Below we explore some of the most significant trends observed during this period and throughout the pandemic.

### Self-harm

Since the outbreak of the pandemic in the UK to Q3 of 2021, cases mentioning thoughts of self-harm had been far below the peak of 14.5% recorded in Q1 of 2020, however, in Q4 of 2021 they suddenly rose sharply, accounting for 13.2% of all cases (227 cases). This represents a statistically significant 3.5 percentage point (pp)\*\* increase compared to the same period a year ago. Additionally, the sharp increase from 8.5% in Q3 of 2021 to 13.2% in Q4 of 2021 represented the highest increase between quarters since the beginning of the pandemic.



13.2%

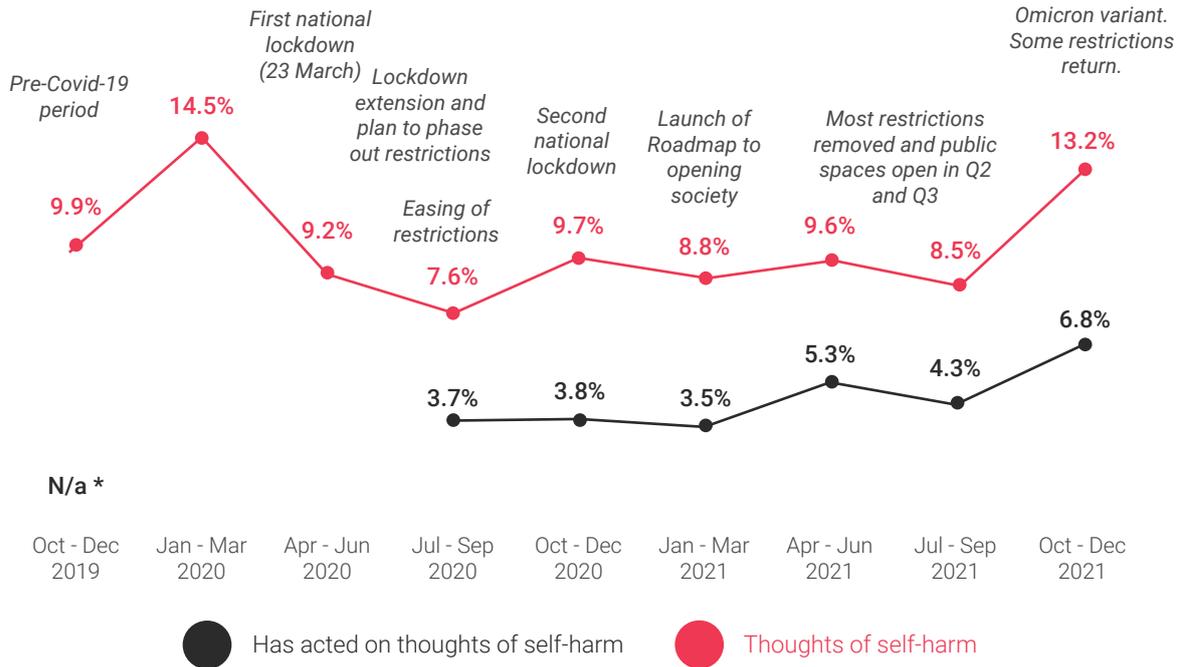
In Q4 of 2021 cases mentioning thoughts of self-harm rose, accounting for 13.2% of all cases.

The dramatic increase in young people discussing thoughts of self-harm in Q4 of 2021 corresponded with a sharp increase in cases mentioning acting upon thoughts of self-harm. These increased from 4.3% (85 cases) in Q3 of 2021 to 6.8% (116 cases) in Q4 of 2021 representing the highest increase between quarters since the beginning of the pandemic. The cases have also risen sharply by 3.0pp between Q4 of 2020 and Q4 of 2021.

6.8%

Of cases mentioned acting upon thoughts of self-harm in Q4 of 2021.

## The pandemic and self-harming



Conversations with young people revealed that many young people attributed thoughts of self-harm to family problems or challenges; with cases mentioning family issues also on the increase in Q4 of 2021. Other reasons contributing to young people self-harming included work-related stress, issues around further education or school, feeling low or depressed, concerns relating to the pandemic and fear of becoming ill, being a victim of abuse, money problems, worries about future, and bullying, among others. Additionally, many of the young people contacting the helpline about self-harming mentioned disability.

## Suicidal ideation

While the cases with young people experiencing thoughts of suicide had fallen sharply during the early phases of the pandemic and stayed well below the peak of 17.3% recorded in Q1 of 2020, they reached a new peak in Q4 of 2021 (21.9%). Compared to Q4 of 2020, this represented a dramatic 7.3pp increase over a year. Similarly, cases of young people mentioning thoughts of suicide with intent to act increased in Q4 of 2021 to 6.8%, following a sharp fall at the beginning of the pandemic.



**21.9%**

Cases of young people experiencing thoughts of suicide peaked in Q4 of 2021.

\* The category 'Has acted on thoughts of self-harm' has been introduced in April 2020, therefore data for this prior to that date are not available

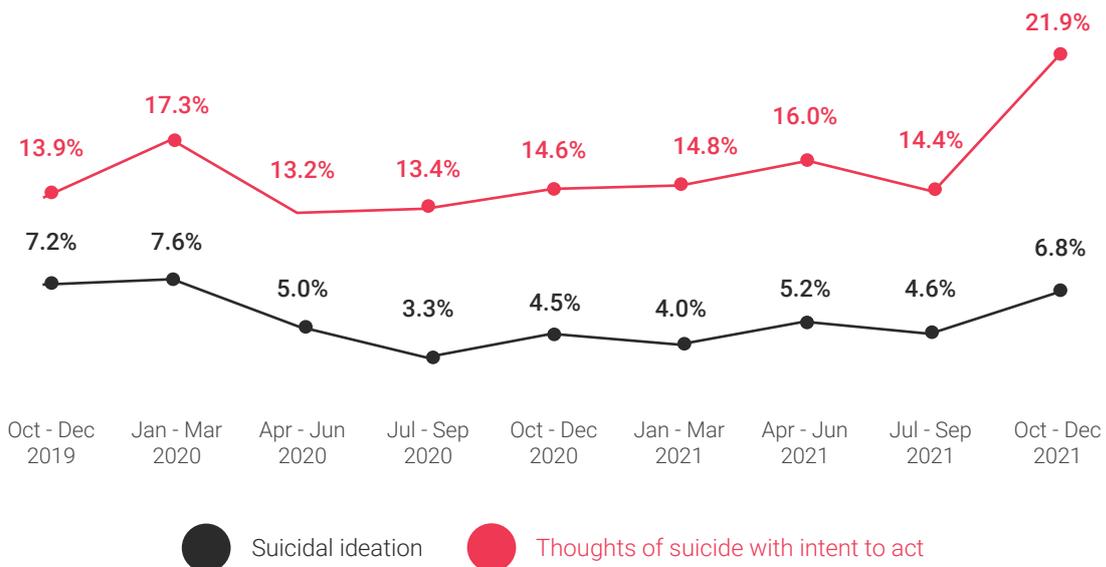
It is possible that the pandemic, which brought many changes to daily lives of young people such as home learning or home working, led to some young people temporarily experiencing fewer pressures and stresses to cope with. Additionally, with many parents or other family members also home working, support networks were more easily available. These aspects might have contributed to the falls observed during the early stages of the pandemic.



Indeed, the increases in thoughts of self-harm and suicidal ideation were accompanied with an increase in cases mentioning stress. The number of cases mentioning stress have grown significantly from Q3 when they accounted for 4.1% (80 cases) to 6.3% in Q4 (108 cases).

Conversations mentioning self-harm are often intertwined with suicidal thinking. Analysis of the conversations show that for many young people suicidal thoughts are present in their lives over a longer time period. Some young people mentioned that they previously experienced suicidal thoughts and those who had an intention to act on thoughts of suicide in the past mentioned a likelihood of acting again on those thoughts.

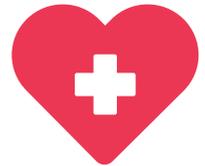
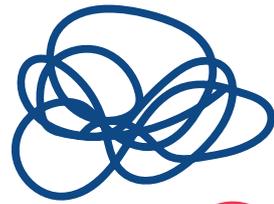
### Suicidal ideation and thoughts of suicide with intent to act



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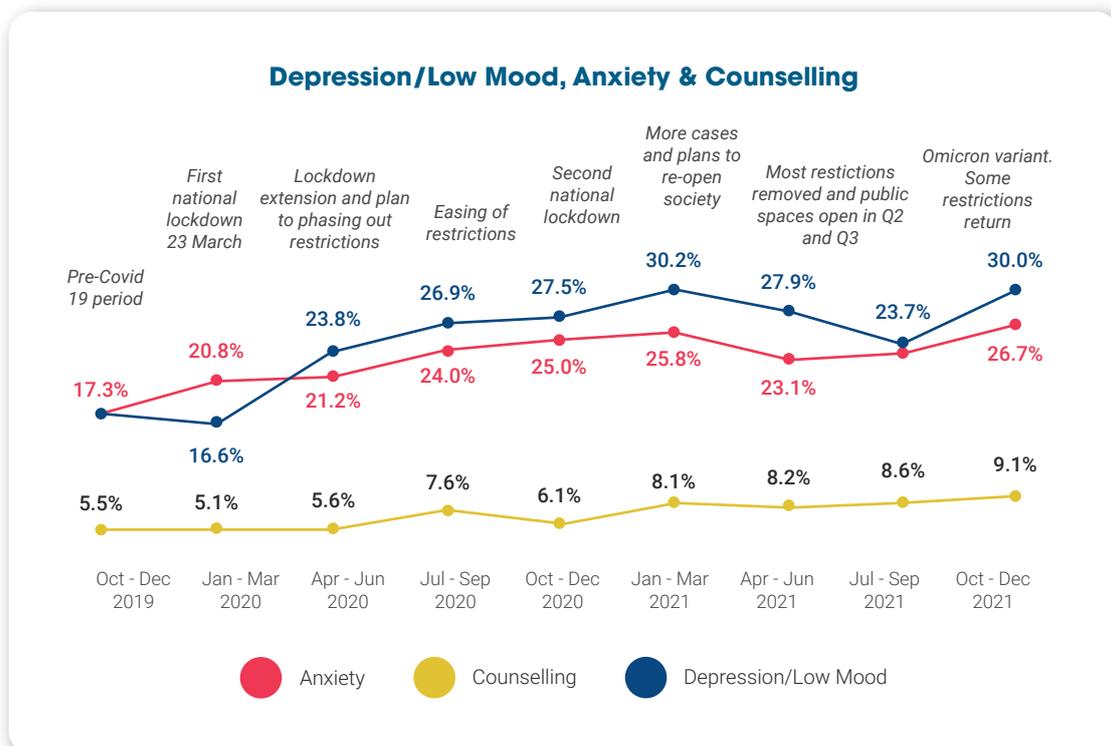
## Depression & anxiety

Cases mentioning depression or anxiety show very different trends from those where self-harm or suicide were mentioned. Since the beginning of the pandemic, depression or low mood has been on the rise, reaching a peak in Q1 and Q4 of 2021. In Q1 of 2021, depression was mentioned in 30.2% (734 cases) and a similar proportion (30.0%) mentioned it in Q4 of 2021 (514 cases). Following a fall in such cases in Q2 and Q3 of 2021, when most pandemic-related restrictions have been removed, arrival of the winter months and a new Omicron variant coincided with a dramatic rise in cases discussing depression in Q4 of 2021, with a 5.1pp increase compared to Q3 of 2021 (24.9%).



### Mentions of anxiety reached its peak of 26.7% in Q4 of 2021

The periods during which mentions of depression and anxiety reached their peak corresponded to significant changes in society across the UK. For instance, in Q1 of 2021, the UK was battling the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, while in Q4 of 2021, the UK was experiencing the fourth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. During Q2 and Q3 of 2021, when mentions of depression and anxiety dipped, the UK had introduced plans to re-open society and many restrictions were phased out.



Indeed, conversations with young people revealed that the pandemic contributed to a spike in cases mentioning anxiety or depression. Feelings of loneliness, the death of a family member or relative, and worries about friends self-harming linked to the pandemic were among reasons contributing to depression and anxiety.

Approaching adulthood, with its responsibilities, was also a major concern for young people, leading to depression and anxiety. Experiences of depression and anxiety were further interlinked with family and relationship issues, work stress, school and education, trauma, and experiences of bullying. Due to depression and anxiety, many young people discussed self-harming, suicidal ideation, lack of energy and motivation and withdrawal from peer relationships. The requests for support discussing depression or anxiety often came from young people with a learning disability, personality disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

9.1%

Of young people discussing counselling in Q4 of 2021.

The high prevalence of mental health issues was also reflected in the proportion of young people discussing counselling, which has been rising significantly since the beginning of the pandemic. The proportion of cases discussing counselling steadily rose from 5.1% before the start of the pandemic, reaching its record high in Q4 of 2021, with 9.1% (156 cases) of cases discussing counselling.

Between Q4 of 2020 and Q4 of 2021, cases mentioning counselling have increased significantly by 3pp.

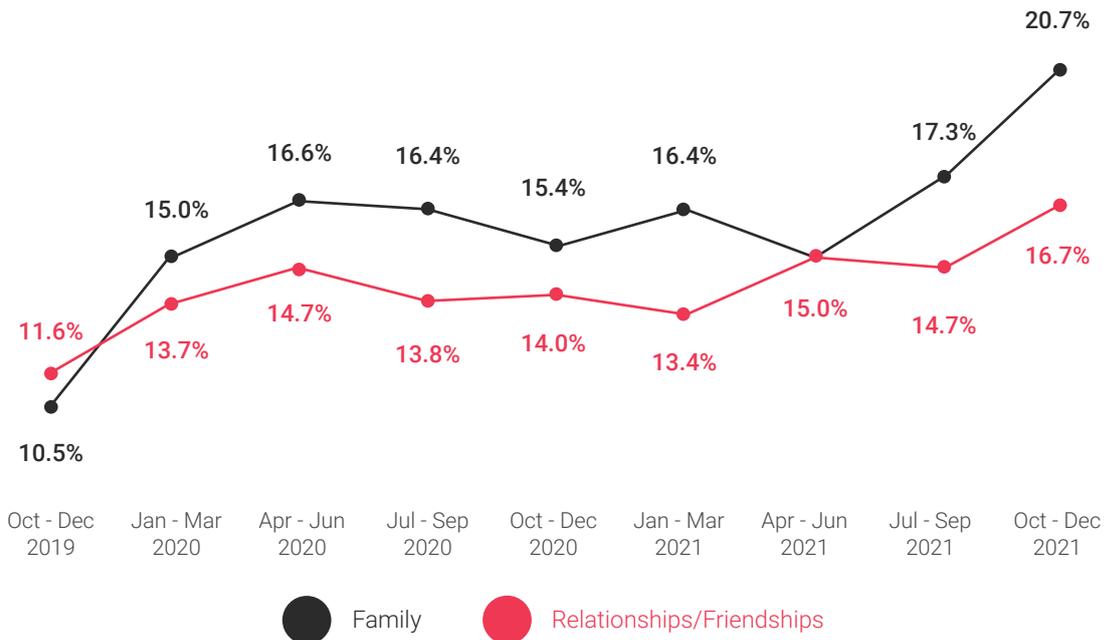
## Family & relationship issues

Family issues remained a key concern among young people, alongside relationships and friendships. There has been a sharp increase in cases mentioning family issues since Q2 of 2021, rising from 15.0% (324 cases) to 20.7% (354 cases) in Q4 of 2021. Year on year (comparing Q4 of 2021 to Q4 of 2020), the proportion of conversations mentioning family issues has increased by 5.3pp.



A similar trend emerged for relationships or friendships. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the cases mentioning relationships or friendships were broadly increasing. Between Q4 of 2020 and Q4 of 2021, a significant increase of 2.7pp was observed.

## Family, Relationships & Friendships issues



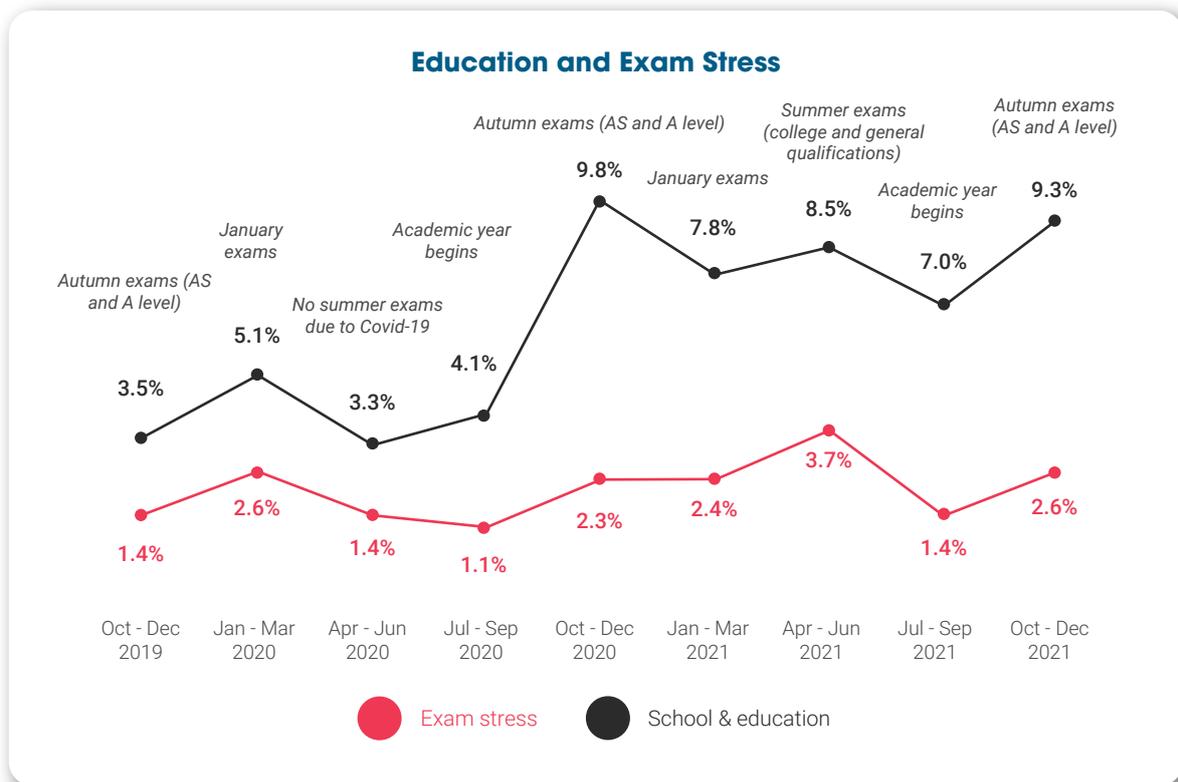
Analysis of conversations around family issues show that some young people believe that their parents do not understand their mental health. Some young people felt their interactions with parents affected their mental health and that parents were not listening to their mental health needs, causing conflict in the family. Other issues included parental or marital problems, abuse in the family, drug and substance abuse in the family, parental expectations of young people's career aspirations, and parents expecting young people to take up more responsibilities at home, among other topics.

Young people mentioned several issues affecting their relationships and friendships. Some mentioned their experiences of stalking, trauma from abusive relationships with partners, arguments with partners around sexual activity in a relationship, coming out around gender identity, and acceptance by family and friends. In terms of friendships, some young people felt lonely as they had very few friends, some experienced social anxiety, and difficulties with making new friends. Some young people experienced verbal and emotional abuse from their friends as they did not fit in with their lifestyles and behavioural practices, leading to feelings of rejection.

## School, education & exam stress

Education remains one of the key issues affecting young people. Since Q4 of 2020, cases mentioning education remained significantly higher throughout 2021, compared to the full year of 2020. While in the first three quarters of 2020 these cases fluctuated between 3.3% (75 cases) and 5.1% (111 cases), in 2021, cases mentioning education fluctuated between 7.0% (137 cases) and 9.3% (159 cases).

Following a fall during the early stages of the pandemic, the cases mentioning exam stress started to rise again from Q4 of 2020, reaching their peak at 3.7% in Q2 of 2021 (79 cases). Following a decrease over the summer holidays in Q3 of 2021, the cases have almost doubled in Q4, with 2.6% of cases (44 cases) mentioning exam stress. The periods during which cases discussing exam stress are highest correspond to periods when young people are taking their exams, especially the autumn exams for A level and AS level students and summer exams for college students.



Conversations with young people showed that young people who experienced exam pressure were concerned with their performance at school and in exams. Many young people mentioned that they were constantly comparing their performance with other students and finding college work difficult. Feelings of not being good enough, being concerned with grades dropping and finding it difficult to balance college and work were also mentioned. For some young people, this was worsened with the need to meet their parent’s expectations on their college performances.

Additionally, some students struggled with lack of motivation to study, being too tired to study and with depression and anxiety affecting their education. Importantly, for some young people, the school provided a major source of support and the Christmas break meant young people could not have their usual support associated with school. This resulted in feelings of loneliness and affected young people’s mental health. A few international students experienced anxiety over their visa expiry, worries about payment of tuition fees and accommodation.

## ADHD, Autism & trauma/flashbacks/PTSD

The Mix's data show that cases mentioning Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism and Asperger's/ASD, and trauma/flashbacks/Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) have been slowly increasing throughout 2021, with a sharper increase between Q3 of 2021 and Q4 of 2021 particularly in cases mentioning Autism or Asperger's/ASD.

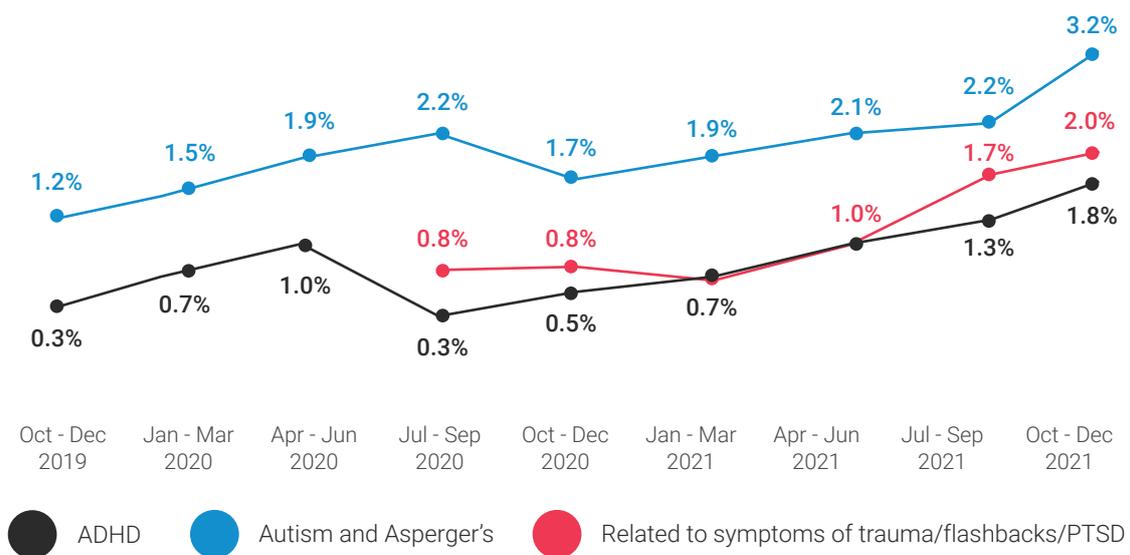


**In a number of conversations childhood trauma was mentioned, including abuse within the family environment (emotional and verbal abuse and neglect), experiences of being bullied, and sexual abuse. Most recent experiences of trauma for young people emanated from relationships including online sexual abuse, emotional abuse in relationships, and sexual assault.**



The conversations show that trauma severely impacted young people, affecting their socio-emotional wellbeing. Many young people struggled with current relationships due to trauma, with anger management and sexual identity challenges and failing to build positive peer relationships being the most common effects of trauma. Low self-esteem, low self-worth, anxiety, and self-harming also emerged as effects of trauma in young people.

**ADHD, Trauma/flashbacks/PTSD, Autism and Asperger's/ASD**



The category 'Trauma/flashbacks/PTSD' has been introduced in April 2020, therefore data for this prior to that date are not available

Similarly, young people with Autism or Asperger's/ASD experienced difficulties related to adjustments to work environments, subsequently leading to low performance at work. Some young people mentioning Autism, experienced depression or low mood and low motivation and energy to study, work or get tasks accomplished. In a few cases where young people's Autism diagnosis was concealed by the family, for fear of stigmatisation, young people discussed feelings of resentment when they discovered they had Autism.

## Alcohol

While cases mentioning alcohol were relatively stable during the early stages of the pandemic, they suddenly shot up in Q3 of 2021, with the proportion doubling to 2.8%, compared to the same period a year earlier (1.4%). However, in Q4 of 2021, the cases dropped to 1.8%. The conversations with young people show that alcohol or drinking issues mainly emanated from the family.

**1.8%**

Of young people mentioned alcohol in Q4 of 2021.

Most young people discussing alcohol mentioned worry over family members' current alcoholic tendencies while some young people mentioned traumatic childhood experiences linked to parents' alcohol problems. Having alcohol problems in the family resulted in parents being abusive to children and some young people feeling unsupported by their parents.

In some instances, young people used alcohol as an escape from stress and mental health difficulties. Some young people drank alcohol to cope with sexual abuse, work stress, and difficult family problems.

### Alcohol

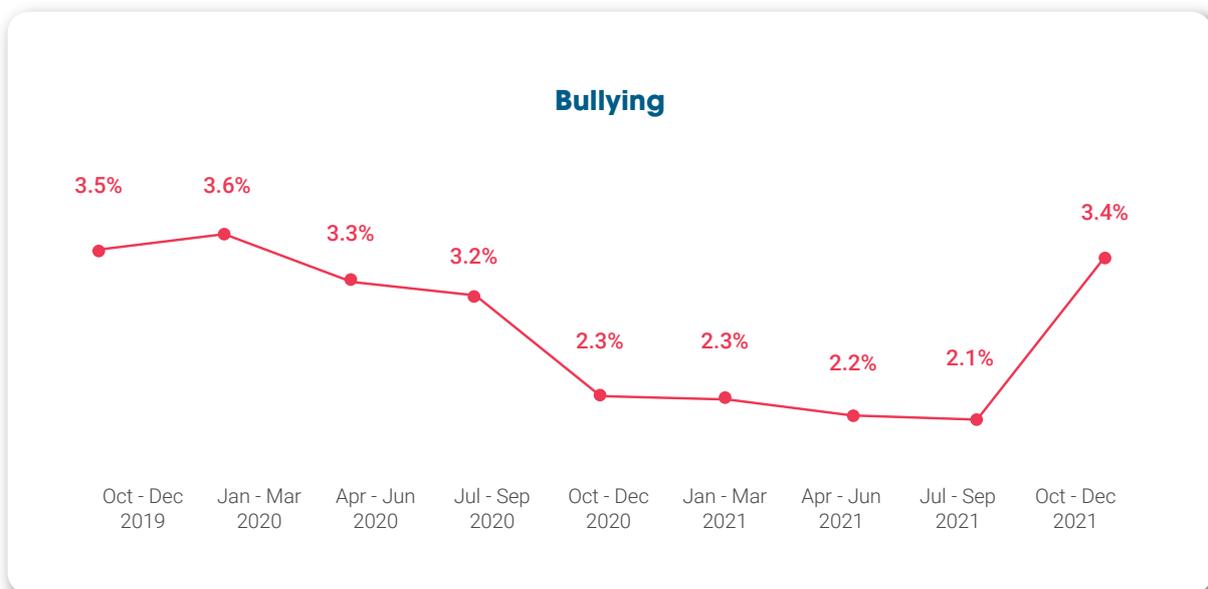


## Bullying

Following a steady decline in the cases discussing bullying throughout the pandemic, likely associated with limited face-to-face contact due to restrictions, in Q4 of 2021 the cases have risen sharply reaching 3.4%. Between Q4 of 2020 and Q4 of 2021, the cases have risen significantly by 1.2pp. Interestingly, the conversations show that young people believe their parents are not aware of the impact of verbal abuse on their mental health.



Some young people mentioned experiencing verbal bullying from their parents and family members resulting in depression, low mood, and tension in family relationships. Some young people also experienced bullying from their peers for not fitting in with them, and some young people referenced bullying experienced in childhood impacting their current mental health. Some of the impacts bullying had on young people included: withdrawal from education, social anxiety challenges while making new friends, and having a negative self-perception.



## Method

Most of the trends discussed in this paper are statistically significant unless otherwise noted; a 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, were excluded, alongside records where the issue mentioned was not specified.

Each percentage is the proportion of all conversations where the given issue was discussed.

## 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 most 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 will 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.

\*\*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.

\*\*\* 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.

## Support for issues mentioned

**If you or someone you know is looking for support on any of the issues mentioned in this report, you can get in touch with the organisations below, who are there to offer free advice and information.**

### The Mix

For essential support for under 25s on any issue, call 0808 808 4994 (7 days a week from 4pm to 11pm). Access counselling, a moderated community and online resources via [themix.org.uk](http://themix.org.uk).

### Crisis messenger

For crisis support, text "SHOUT" to 85258 to contact the Shout Crisis Text Line, or text "YM" if you're under 19.

### Switchboard LGBTQ+ Helpline

For specialist support for LGBTQ+ communities, call 0300 330 0630 (open 10am-10pm every day).

### Black Minds Matter

A service for Black communities, offering signposting to support and advice for mental health, via [blackmindsmatteruk.com](http://blackmindsmatteruk.com).

### Childline

If you're under 19, you can call 0800 1111 to talk to Childline (the number will not appear on your phone bill).

### Samaritans

Call 116 123 to talk to Samaritans, or email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) for a reply within 24 hours. Samaritans offer a listening ear on any issue.

## Amy Winehouse Foundation

Access information and support for drug and alcohol related issues via [amywinehousefoundation.org](http://amywinehousefoundation.org).

## Drinkline

Get in touch for support on alcohol-related issues. The number for England is 0300 123 1110 and for Wales is 0808 808 2234. Access via [alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://alcoholconcern.org.uk).

## Relate

For support with relationships, call 0300 100 1234 (Monday-Thursday from 8am-10pm, Fridays from 8am-6pm and Saturdays from 9am-5pm). You can also email them at [relate.enquiries@relate.org.uk](mailto:relate.enquiries@relate.org.uk).

## Young Minds Parents Helpline

If you're supporting a young person, call 0808 802 5544 (9.30am to 4pm on weekdays).

## Papyrus UK

A charity for the prevention of young suicide (under 35) in the UK. Call the Papyrus Hopeline on 0800 068 4141.

## Winston's Wish

Call the free helpline on 08088 020 021 for expert advice and guidance on bereavement support for a grieving child or young person after the death of a loved one.