YOUNGMiNDS

Deconstructing the System

Young people's voices on mental health, society and inequality

April 2023

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Foreword

By Chris and Flav, YoungMinds Youth Panellists

Young people have spoken, and this report is their microphone.

It is difficult to remain optimistic about the state of young people's mental health considering its downwards trajectory during, and after, the pandemic. Many of us think of lockdown as a time of the past, something we overcame together. However, the sad reality is that young people are still feeling its repercussions and will continue to do so for many years to come.

As the statistics in this report will show, young people are feeling more isolated and hopeless than ever due to an amalgamation of key areas: institutional barriers like education; services and the Government; social inequality and discrimination; anxiety caused by uncertainty of the future. YoungMinds has carried out this research to better understand where these anxieties stem from – because we cannot provide adequate support without a comprehensive understanding of the state of the nation.

The quantitative statistics throughout the report show us the diversity of problems young people face. Quantitative statistics are often thought of as people with the tears wiped off. At YoungMinds, we appreciate that behind every one of these percentages there lies a deeply individual journey of mental health that will differ slightly (or wildly) from the next person's. We also dedicate space in this report to qualitative data so personal experiences can be expressed in young people's own voices. We are not interested in wiping away the tears; the first step in stopping the crying is in fact acknowledging that the tears are there, and that something needs to be done about it.

Many of the findings from across the three surveys are disappointing. For example, a particular inequality arose for Non-binary people and young Muslims, as only 14% and 17%, respectively, felt comfortable talking to a parent or carer about their mental health. Understanding these limitations is a useful tool in identifying where we are failing to support young people and ensure significant focus is given to these areas. YoungMinds could do more to include communities that feel isolated and unsupported: we are striving for more diversity in our future work, not as something tokenistic, but as an authentic commitment to amplifying the needs of underrepresented young people.

Chris

Flav

Tackling the mental health crisis needs to be a communal effort: intergenerational, interfaith, and interhuman. Despite the tough times young people are facing in society today, we have hope for the future and a strong appetite to change society for the better. As members of the Youth Panel, we are excited to see YoungMinds' collaborative approach to supporting young people through the societal change we want to see. We are all responsible for making the world a safer place where young people can be their true selves, and we hope that the severity of this report alerts institutions and charities to the immediate need for intervention.

This research is our first step of many in showing a dedicated and thorough approach to understanding mental health needs. This is the foundation of knowledge we need to build a house of effective and sustainable support that future generations can also benefit from. At YoungMinds, we already attempt to combat many of the issues raised by young people. For example, over 70% of 16–24-year-olds called for early intervention to be prioritised in the Government's promised, but now dropped, 10-year mental health plan. Through our work with the Fund the Hubs campaign, YoungMinds is already emphasising the urgency of this work. We will use this data to continue lobbying politicians, to inform our future projects, and to guide the growth of our charity in response to the emerging themes and patterns mapped out by this research.

For those who may question YoungMinds' mission, this report clearly lays out the issues we face. It paints a dark picture of the current state of the nation from young people's perspective. But it also illuminates potential solutions to these issues that will lead to a better tomorrow for young people.

> **Tackling the mental health crisis needs to be a communal effort: intergenerational, interfaith, and interhuman.**

Introduction

We've gone way past the point where we can continue to look at the record numbers of young people needing mental health support and carry on as we've always been doing.

The past three years have been tumultuous. An unprecedented global pandemic, political instability, cultural shifts and global turmoil have come together making life feel unpredictable and difficult. However, for young people all this has done is pour fuel on a fire that has been burning for some time. It continues to get harder and harder for them to navigate their lives, engage in education and they now face a future which feels even more uncertain and less hopeful.

"Isolated, stressed, overwhelmed, inadequate, insecure."

– Male, 14

This research aims to shine a light on the young people's mental health crisis in the UK, to pinpoint the areas where action is urgently needed. It aims to look beyond the areas YoungMinds normally engages in and ask what's really driving this crisis, why do so many people reach out for help?

It brings together the voices of tens of thousands of young people who shared their experiences and ideas in multiple research projects undertaken by us and our partners during 2021-22.

"Isolated, stressed, overwhelmed, inadequate, insecure."

While their backgrounds, identities and experiences differed, what they told us was tellingly similar. Their perspectives have helped us to identify five broad areas where change is needed in order to turn the tide of the young people's mental health crisis. These areas will underpin our policy development work with young people.

The first area of concern are the social structures and systems that young people interact with most: education, the economic system, health and social care, law enforcement, and critically, the political system and media, which have failed to support young people's mental health.

Our second area of focus are the overstretched and underfunded mental health services, which according to our research is having a profound mental health impact on young people, despite having been built to protect and improve young people's mental health.

Our third and largest area is social inequality and discrimination, which underpin the failures of the social structures and systems outlined in the first two areas of focus. We found that social inequality and discrimination permeate every area of young people's experience and have the greatest impact on their wellbeing, making them feel unsafe to be themselves. This is particularly true for minoritised young people.

The fourth area we'll focus on are global issues and how they affect young people. Young people are not only aware of what's going on across the world, they are being deeply affected by the warfare, instability and social, health and climatic breakdowns that have characterised the last few years and will no doubt characterise the coming decades.

Our fifth and final focus area is society and its impact on young people on an individual level. This chapter captures what young people told us about how their day-to-day relationships, their communities and wider society are impacting their mental health. Despite the social pressure placed on young people, there is hope: young people can also benefit from their social circles and communities, so if we get this right, we can tap into a well of support for them.

Our five areas of focus paint a bleak picture of young people's mental health in the UK today. But we have a clear map for change, which is reason to think positively. Young people have had their say, and they've made it clear that they want the Government and public institutions to take accountability for their part in shaping the systems that perpetuate poor mental health. It's now up to us to ensure that these bodies take responsibility and lead the way when it comes to tackling structural inequalities, discrimination and lack of empathy – and we hope that as they do, young people will feel heard, empowered and stop blaming themselves for the difficulties they face in their lives. At YoungMinds, we pledge for young people to be partners in our plans for action every step of the way, to keep their experiences at the heart of this work.

Our five areas of focus paint a bleak picture of young people's mental health in the UK today. But we have a clear map for change, which is reason to think positively.

Methodology

We used four datasets to inform our research:

The Big Young People's Mental Health survey (BYPMHS), 2021

We partnered with YouthSight, now a Savanta agency, to develop and run The Big Young People's Mental Health survey in two stages over 2021. Qualitative research was conducted with 76 young people aged 14-25 in late spring 2021, via online community discussions and focus groups. This stage helped us to better understand how and what to ask young people in the survey.

The online survey ran from 22nd November to 17th December 2021, with a total of 9 questions, the majority of which were quantitative and two which were qualitative. In total 14,215 young people aged 13-25 took part. We then stratified the sample to make it nationally representative, lowering the number of responses to 4721.

YoungMinds insight groups with minoritised young people, 2021

We held insight groups with different communities of young people aged 14-25 to find out how they feel about certain issues relating to their lives and their mental health. They identified as Black, Muslim, refugee or asylum seeking, Trans or Non-binary, and physically disabled.

The Government's ten-year plan for mental health consultation survey, 2022

This was a survey of 13,887 young people conducted in June-July 2022, as part of our submission to the Government's 10 Year Plan for mental health consultation. We worked with mental health charity, Mind, to produce a survey to help young people aged 14-25 submit their concerns, experiences and ideas directly to the Government's consultation.

Beano Brain — Waves 5, 6 and 7, 2021-2022

In March 2021, YoungMinds commissioned Beano Brain to conduct a representative longitudinal study to monitor and track the responses of 11–25-year-olds and their experiences with mental health over a 2-year period. The study is conducted in a series of 'waves', with Wave 6 occurring in summer 2022 and Wave 7 occurring in autumn 2022, coinciding with the beginning of term. This report uses the results of Waves 5, 6 and 7.

14,215

young people took part in The Big Young People's Mental Health survey

13,887

young people took part in Government's ten-year plan for mental health consultation survey

Limitations

Respondents to our surveys were self-selecting – that is, they came across the survey and chose to take part, rather than being approached directly in order to ensure a representative sample. Responses for certain groups were lower than others, including full-time parents and those not studying or in work.

The BYPMHS and ten-year plan survey follow the ethnic grouping of the UK Census 2011, meaning we've not been able to look into the experiences of different communities belonging to a wider ethnic group.

The ten-year plan survey was unrepresentative of Black and racialised respondents in comparison to Census data. 28% of respondents did not disclose their ethnicity.
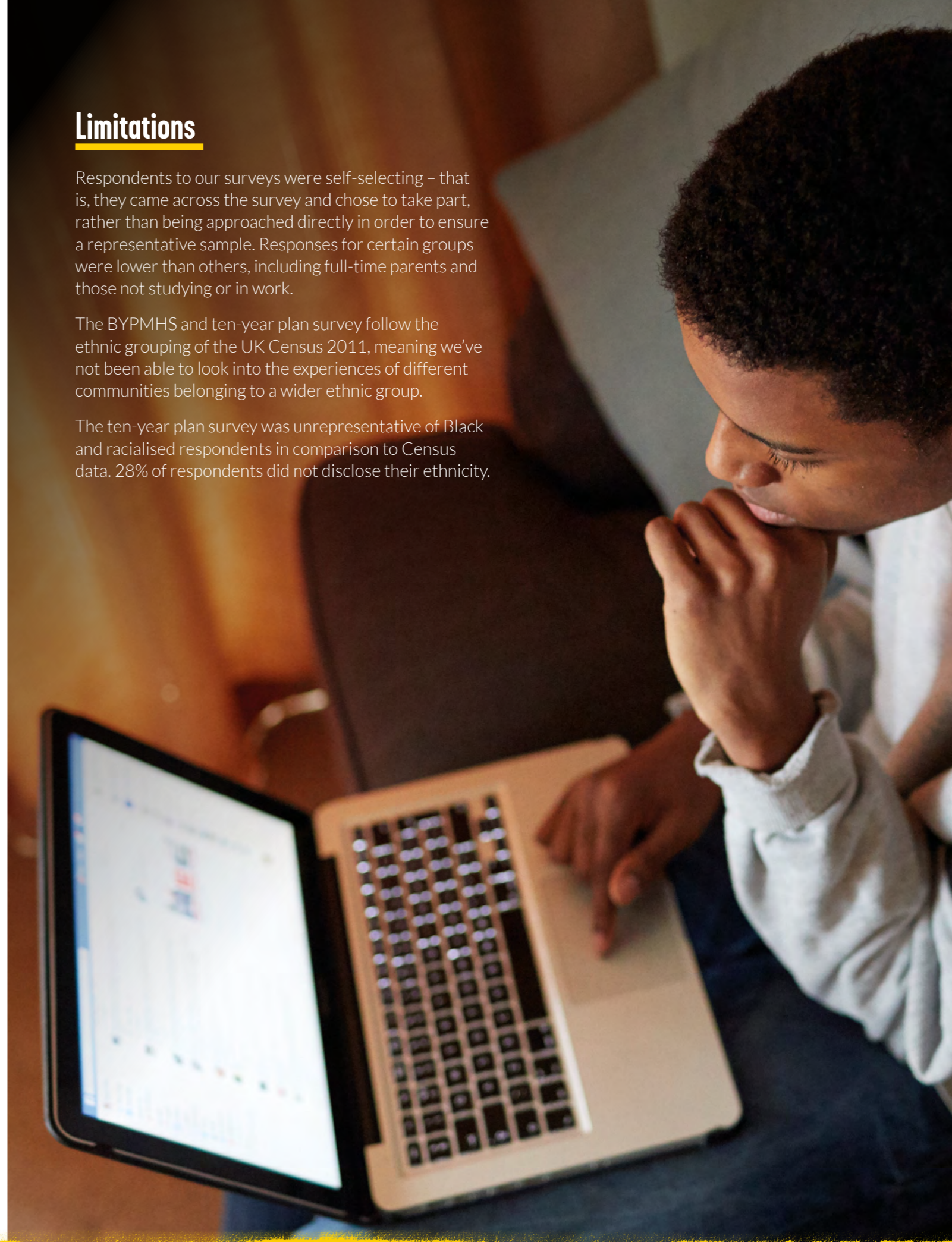
Social systems and structures

There are a number of key building blocks to life which lead to positive mental health outcomes, all of which have come up time and again in our work. These include factors such as income, education, housing, employment, public services and support networks.

An inequitable society can create barriers to wellbeing which can go on to cause poor health outcomes in adulthood.[1] This point is emphasised by data from NHS Digital which shows that children and young people living in households undergoing financial hardship are more likely to suffer from poor mental health than those who are not.[2] Addressing the structural causes that can affect mental health, while also improving mental health provision, is essential to cultivating good mental health in young people throughout their childhood and as they transition into adulthood.

In this chapter, we explore how different structures in society, including education, the economic and political systems, can impact young people's mental wellbeing.

Addressing the structural causes that can affect mental health…is essential to cultivating good mental health in young people throughout their childhood and as they transition into adulthood

Education

For young people who are still in education, their schools, colleges and universities are the main institutions they interact with on a daily basis. An education system that works well for young people is therefore key for cultivating good mental health and wellbeing, but as it stands, more than half of young people feel that their place of education affects their mental health negatively. When we asked young people who or what they'd choose to influence if they had the opportunity, education came in second behind the Government, with 93% saying they want to change how school works to make sure it fits modern life.[3]

For those aged 13-19 who are still attending, their place of education is the main source of their pressures. This could be for many different reasons; a few of which were mentioned in our survey included academic pressure, bullying and behaviour management. Many young people feel that the education system focuses too heavily on academic achievement, to an extent that can be detrimental for their mental health – 69% told us they always or often feel worried about getting good enough grades at school, and many discussed the need for less pressure around academic achievement and exams. When asked where the pressure came from, most young people felt they themselves were to blame, but 72% also admitted that they felt pressured by their educational setting.[4]

Our research also found that the autumn term of 2022 coincided with an increase in negative emotions, and that autumn in general sees more young people struggling with their mental health and wellbeing, leading to an impact on young people's education, friendships and feelings towards themselves. Our research indicates that worries about school are continuing to rise, with 32% claiming it to be a negative influence in their lives.[5]

82% of young people felt that it was extremely important to ensure that young people have the skills and knowledge needed for adult life. The education system should be helping young people prepare for the future, but currently it isn't fulfilling that need.[6]

Educational learning spaces that are supportive of mental wellbeing, and offer routes to extra mental health support, were seen as the most important aspect to consider should the Government introduce a national plan for mental health. [7] We also found that those attending school, college or university were more likely to seek support from their place of education than anywhere else, making it essential that school provides quality mental health provision for young people.

Only 27% of young people felt their teachers could be trusted to champion young people's mental health. This shows a lack of mutual understanding between students and their teachers, and a lack of trust in the education system to deliver a safe space for pupils' wellbeing. [8]
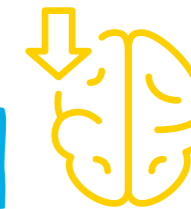
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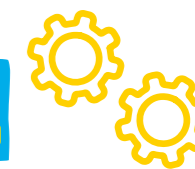
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"[A national mental health plan should] focus mainly on education. Many staff members are unaware of the damage of the education system and I really feel like this is a key place to start."

This disconnection has led to a desire for the education system to be remodeled, improved, and funded properly. In turn, young people hope to be provided with more relevant, up-to-date education and real-world experiences which also reflect the diversity of today's population. Suggestions to make schools more inclusive included decolonising the curriculum and including LGBTQ+ content in sex and relationship education.[9]

"Everyone's education should matter and we should have a system that embraces differences."

Young people's experiences of education can differ depending on their identity. For those who are awaiting refugee status, there are several barriers to accessing education, including being unable to attend school while waiting for documentation and having a language barrier, which makes it difficult to communicate.

Young Black women, on the other hand, described experiencing microaggressions at school with other students grabbing their hair. They told us they felt the need to act differently with Black and white friends, as those who are white may not be aware of their culture. Young Black men felt that teachers often treated them unfairly because of their race. They'd experienced teachers who had made judgements prior to meeting students, and held grudges against Black students for longer than non-Black pupils. The racial stereotyping they'd experienced from teachers negatively impacted the young men we spoke to and their views on the education system. They felt their wellbeing would be positively impacted if teachers were supportive, asked the right questions, and listened to Black students.[10]

These findings present multiple issues, including lack of access to education for certain groups, how safe pupils feel from discrimination by their peers and teachers at school, and the lack of education and training around different cultures which further evidences how the education system can be harmful towards minoritised communities.

Without acting on the presenting issues, the education system will remain inaccessible and out of touch for many young people for the foreseeable future.[11] The system needs to be rethought and updated in consultation with young people in order to enable them to flourish both in their studies and throughout their lives. Schools, colleges and universities should be inclusive institutions, which prioritise and uphold young people's wellbeing and provide them with a safe space to go to when they're struggling with their mental health.

Only
27%
of young people felt their teachers could be trusted to champion young people's mental health

"Everyone's education should matter and we should have a system that embraces differences."

Money and work

Young people feel a tremendous amount of pressure to be successful. Aside from feeling pressured to get good grades at school, 92% also told us they worried about finding a job and moving forward in their career.[12] Furthermore, more young people were worried about their job and work in 2022 than in 2021.[13]

Money was a common source of pressure and worry. 90% of young people worried about earning enough money, and a further 44% always or often worried about buying their own house. This isn't exclusive to older age groups either; 40% of under 16s always or often feel pressure to earn enough money, and 58% are already worrying about buying their own house. As for those aged 20-25, nearly three-quarters find themselves worrying about finding or keeping a stable place to live.[14] The rising cost of living is affecting both younger and older age groups alike.

"Mine and all of my family's mental health would improve immensely if we didn't have to choose between affording to heat our home or eating."

"Being a young citizen I find the cost of living an extreme pressure on my mental health, I am able to pay for the bare essentials at a struggle which puts a lot of pressure on my social life, I would love to be able to save and buy something nice or go out for the day doing something I enjoy with my friends, but with the price of living going up so dearly all I am able to do is work and go home."

Money plays a big factor in poor mental health; in 2022, our research found that worries about money were the biggest negative influence on young people's mental health by far.[15] More than half of 18-24 year olds found experiences of poverty or debt to have affected their mental health negatively. Young, full-time parents were most likely to find that experiences of poverty and debt, as well as housing and the benefits system, impacted their mental health negatively, while young carers were also more likely to suffer as a result of financial issues than those who do not look after or support family members or friends. They were also more likely to be affected negatively by issues regarding employment.

"It needs to be easier to live. It is not possible to maintain a healthy lifestyle, connect with friends and family, engage in fulfilling activities and run a household while working enough hours to survive. I work two jobs and may need to pick up a third just to keep on top of household costs, and that leaves very little time for anything else."

Those who were unemployed found the benefits system to be detrimental to their mental health, while young people actively searching for a job were more likely to feel that their mental health was negatively impacted by issues regarding employment.

90%
of young people worry about earning enough money

58%
of under 16s are always or often worried about buying their own house

"Mine and all of my family's mental health would improve immensely if we didn't have to choose between affording to heat our home or eating."

Experiences can vary depending on where you live and who you are – those in the North were more likely to have their mental health negatively affected by experiences of poverty and debt than anywhere else in the country, and young people with certain protected characteristics were more likely to struggle financially than others.[16]

Other social systems impacting young people

We found that a number of other social systems also worried young people, in particular the health and social care systems and police and law enforcement.

Of all the young people we surveyed, 9% disclosed some form of worry about being in care, while 24% worried about being a young carer. For the former, pressure and worry stemmed from themselves, their family and carers, and the social care system itself. Young carers feel most pressured by their family and carers, followed by themselves and the healthcare system. These young people face heavy external pressure to exercise a huge amount of responsibility on factors out of their control.

We also found that some institutions disproportionately affected certain minoritised groups, including the police and law enforcement and health care systems; half of young Black people were impacted negatively by the police and law enforcement, as were 58% of Non-binary people, while half of those who have both a physical and a mental health condition felt that the healthcare system impacts their mental health negatively.[17]

What's driving the pressure on young people?

Young people identified the Government and the media as the two most harmful institutions to their mental health. Both are key actors in upholding systemic inequality and driving the pressure on young people; the Government through education, the economic system, and public services, while the media shapes social attitudes and the news agenda which then creates pressure and worry for young people.

50% of young Black people told us that police and law enforcement impact their mental health negatively

58% of non-binary young people told us that police and law enforcement impact their mental health negatively

The political system

The Government hold the power to improve young people's mental health by listening to them and implementing positive change to the education system, the economic system and other public services like healthcare, social care and law enforcement.

However, it's clear that the Government is failing young people. Appearing as one of the top 10 issues young people brought up in our research, 69% of young people told us they feel negatively impacted by them.

Not only does this show that young people are switched on to the way politics shapes our lives, but they're also deeply dissatisfied with Government- just 6% name it amongst the top three institutions they trust the most to advocate for or champion young peoples' mental health. Not only that, but only 7% of young people believe that the Government will make the right decisions for their future, and only 12% think that they take young people's mental health seriously. Despite this, 35% of young people chose the Government as the institution they'd most like to influence. Young people recognise that the Government holds the power to improve lives, but it's clear that young people don't think they're doing so.

Non-binary, LGBTQ+ young people, full-time parents and those with a health condition or illness were more likely than other groups to say the Government has impacted their mental health negatively, though figures were high across the board. Young people living in large towns or cities also felt the impact of the Government negatively on their mental health more so than their countryside peers (72% vs 64%).

The political system also has a negative impact on young refugees and asylum-seekers. Those we spoke to told us they wouldn't choose to be in the UK unless they had to and felt that the UK Government didn't care about them. Young people only received £5 a day to live off, which they felt wasn't enough when compared to how much things cost. They also spoke of negative experiences with the Home Office; they'd be told to wait with no further information, they were unable to visit the doctors due to not having the right documents, and rather than protecting them, the Government encouraged them to move to other countries despite having been through traumatic and gruelling journeys to the UK.

"The government must start to serve the people, rather than capital. Meaningfully tackle poverty in all forms, and work to make society better for all (work-life balance, redistribution of wealth, elimination of discrimination, wholly democratic processes and institutions) – here in the UK, and abroad, where reasonable. The knowledge that all people are being cared for, and the elimination of all kinds of injustice, would immediately improve my mental health tenfold, regardless of any personal circumstances in my life."

"I want the government to start giving us young people importance and genuinely wanting to hear us out."

Only **7%** of young people believe the Government will make the right decisions for their future

Only **12%** of young people think the Government take young people's mental health seriously

Young people want politicians who truly understand their experiences so they can better act in their interests. Within our surveys, there were calls for government to be more representative of society and more accountable. Young people need to be heard by those who wield power at the top and actively involved in the creation of policies which will affect them; in fact, 64% of respondents to our survey wanted to see involvement of more young people in government decision making. This was particularly true for LGBTQ+ young people, who feel neglected by those in power.

"I would make our government more accountable. I feel they bend rules and generally don't seem to care about what the average person thinks of them."

Young people feel let down and forgotten by those in power. The Government holds the key to improving young people's mental health by improving the institutions and structures that young people interact with on a day-to-day basis. But that's not happening – a lack of care and funding in young people's services are making things worse. It's crucial that the Government rebuilds trust with young people by ensuring their voices are heard and that they are an active part of the political decision-making process.

"I want the government to start giving us young people importance and genuinely wanting to hear us out."

The power of the media

Young people report overwhelmingly negative experiences with the media. The media came out in our research as the institution most responsible for having a negative impact on young people's mental health, with 70% of respondents saying it had a negative impact on them. The media influences how young people feel about the world around them, and how others in society view them; young people report feeling less safe due to the media, and more worried and anxious about what's going on in the world.
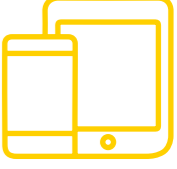
On holding insight groups with young Muslims, refugees and physically disabled young people, we found that all three groups felt the media had portrayed them badly enough to influence public perceptions around their communities. Physically disabled young people thought representations of them in the media were inauthentic, leading to people viewing them differently and acting differently towards them. Young Muslim people, on the other hand, felt significantly impacted by negative portrayals of Islam, with some even saying it prevents them from being proud of their identity as a Muslim. Young refugees have similar concerns about the media, believing their portrayals to be inaccurate and unrepresentative of who they are.

While the media can be a powerful tool for influencing and accountability, it's vital to recognise that now, with the world at our fingertips, it has a huge impact on young people's mental health.

When we consider social media in particular, young people do not feel in control of what happens to them online, but they do feel responsible for what happens to them. Despite many young people reporting that social media brings numerous mental health benefits and with 79% going online when they are feeling emotionally vulnerable (13), 56% of young people still feel that social media impacted them very or somewhat negatively. Encountering harm online – be it through harmful content or the impact of platforms' design – is now accepted as normal. Less than 10% of young people had never seen online content that made them feel upset, distressed or uncomfortable, while 92% of young people worry about feeling they have to look or act a certain way as a result of social media's influence.[18] Given the importance of social media to young people's lives, that it comes with so much risk to mental health should be a cause for concern.[19]

In summary, it is clear that not only are young people not being supported by key public institutions, they are often being actively harmed by them.

70%
of young people are impacted negatively by the media

92%
of young people worry about feeling they have to look or act a certain way as a result of social media's influence

The mental health impact of mental health services

The NHS is also a part of the social institutions we mentioned earlier. However, it's crucial to recognise that young people are being failed by mental health services – the key institution built to support and improve their mental health.

Just like the education system, young people think Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) needs an overhaul. They told us they'd like to see a more accessible, stable and high-quality health system. Specific recommendations included shorter waiting times, more funding to increase staff pay and efficiency, preventing privatisation of the NHS and providing more wide-ranging treatment options and longer appointments. Young people also spoke of wanting better support for mental health for everyone who needs it.[20]

"I'd like to make a difference by putting mental health at the top of the list!"

59%
of young people said their mental health got worse during the wait for support

Quality of services

Many young people expressed that they'd like to see more treatment options beyond CBT, which is too often thought of as a catch all treatment plan. They also wanted to see early intervention with no specific thresholds.

Young people also want the healthcare system to be more understanding and caring, and to ensure it understands and does not discriminate against minoritised groups. There were specific mentions of transphobia and ensuring Trans young people get appropriate healthcare, particularly from young people who identified as LGBTQ+. They also expressed a need for better mental health education, and for older generations to better understand mental health issues.[21]

"I would ask the healthcare system to start taking patients with chronic illnesses and disabilities seriously. I have experienced so much medical trauma and ableism within the medical community, so I would like to see this change as I don't know a single disabled person or someone with a chronic illness who hasn't experienced medical trauma."

"The people who work in the NHS mental health sector are not well trained and often do not understand mental illness. The stigma of certain diagnosis within healthcare professionals needs to be eliminated as it affects quality of care. Also doctors / nurses / HCAs that work in hospitals need to have a better understanding of mental health. People need to listen and help before it's too late. So many people are let down by the NHS services and so many times they have left me mentally worse than to begin with."

Improving mental health support, which includes funding, access, education and recognition was seen as vital by many young people. It was mentioned more often by girls, and was also the most frequently mentioned change from Asian young people. [22]

Over 70% of 16 to 24 year olds were hopeful that prevention and early intervention would be prioritised in a national mental health plan, with 70% of respondents aged 18-24 also expressing the need for more support and care for people experiencing a mental health crisis. [23]

It's clear young people feel that they're being let down by mental health services, and despite services existing to help them feel better, chronic under-resourcing means they often seem to do the opposite.

15%
of young people attempted to end their own lives during the wait for support

Over
70%
of 16 to 24 year olds were hopeful that prevention and early intervention would be prioritised in a national mental health plan

Getting help and support

Our research found that younger age groups felt less comfortable reaching out for mental health support than older age groups – 52% of under 16s and 53% of 16-18 year olds felt uncomfortable seeking help from their GP, school or youth worker, compared to 38% of 20-25 year olds. It's plausible that older age groups feel more comfortable due to having more independence and experience away from their families and peers.

Factors which determined whether a young person was likely to seek support for their mental health include gender, ethnicity and religion, health status and age.

81% of Trans young people had looked for support in the past two years, compared to 67% of those not identifying as Trans, while 80% of Non-binary young people had also done so, making them more likely than other genders to have sought out support for their mental health.[24]

We spoke to young Black women about their experiences seeking support, and found that they don't feel listened to when they seek support for their mental health. They reported feeling overlooked, and felt that diagnosis took too long, all of which prevented them from looking for help. There was also a feeling of distrust for health professionals, with some young people in our insight groups attributing this to historic experiences of discrimination where the Black community was experimented on without their consent. [25]

Asian young people were the least likely ethnic group to have sought mental health support over the past two years, along with those who didn't wish to disclose their ethnicity, while Jewish young people were the most likely religious group to have sought help.

Muslims were the least likely religious group to have sought support.[26] This could be due to multiple factors; young Muslim people told us they feel less inclined to reach out due to a lack of understanding from parents, poor media portrayals of Islam and mental health being seen as taboo amongst the Muslim community. Young men and boys feel even less inclined to seek support as they feel the need to suppress their views to maintain a perception of 'being strong and looking good' for the family.[27]

People with health conditions or learning differences were more likely than those without to have sought mental health support in the last two years – 84% had looked for help, compared to 52% without health conditions.

When asked where they'd prefer to go for support, friends and family were the most popular choice, with 56% choosing this option. This was followed by mental health services at 52%.[28]
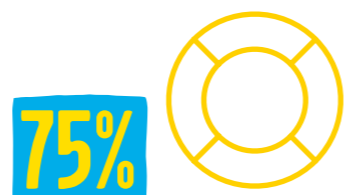
75% of 18-24 year olds had looked for mental health support in the last two years, along with over half of under 16s and 71% of 16-18 year olds

Nearly all young people feel there should be a clear point of contact for those struggling with their mental health. While over half of young people know where to go to get help when they're struggling, more than a quarter aren't sure. Although they're more likely to seek support, those who identify as Trans or Non-binary were less inclined to know where to go to receive help for their mental health, as were Black and Buddhist young people. Those who identified as full-time parents were the least likely to know where to go for support.

Many respondents did have people they could turn to in case they were struggling; 65% felt they were able to talk to their friends about their mental health, but less than half felt the same about their families. Muslim young people were the least likely to talk to their families, with less than a quarter feeling able to open up, while Black and racialised young people in general were much less likely than white young people to feel able to do so.[29]

Inequality in accessing services

Inequalities were clear when assessing the wait times for young people to be seen. Waiting times for treatment varied depending on multiple factors, including the characteristics and region of the young person seeking treatment:

- Trans young people were more likely to wait longer for mental health support – 13% said they were still waiting after a year, compared to 8% of non-trans young people.

- Young Black people and those who preferred not to state their ethnicity were the most likely ethnic groups to be waiting more than a year for support.

- Those in the North West were slightly more likely to be waiting more than a year for support at 12%. Londoners were likely to receive support quicker than other areas – 8% were still waiting for support after a year.

- Those with health conditions or learning differences were more likely to wait longer for support than their peers without any conditions.

Young people with health conditions or learning differences face multiple barriers to getting support. 15% were left waiting between 6 months to a year, compared to 10% of those without health conditions. A further 54% also said they lacked treatment and support options, compared to 25% of those without. 61% also experienced long waiting times, compared to 29% who didn't have any health condition or learning difference.
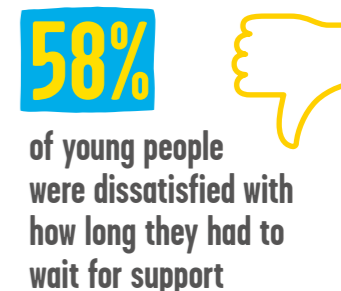
58% of young people were dissatisfied with how long they had to wait for support

Crisis during the wait for support

Long waiting times for support have negative consequences for those young people who have taken the step of reaching out for support; 59% said their mental health got worse while waiting to be seen, with figures rising even higher for those with health conditions or learning differences – 69% experienced worsening of their mental health.

The wait for support also has a knock-on effect in other areas of a young person's life. 42% said they experienced problems with family and friends, with just under half of 18-24 year olds saying they also experienced problems with their physical health. 12% of young people had contact with a crisis team during their wait for support, while 18% of under 16s and 21% of 16-18 year olds attempted to take their own lives.

For gay and Trans young people, there are bigger gaps in facing crisis and then seeing a crisis team, compared to their straight or non-trans peers. 29% of men who identified as gay attempted to take their own lives during the wait for support, compared to 11% of people identifying as straight. Most of those identifying as straight had managed to be seen by a crisis team, whereas only 18% of those identifying as gay had been seen. The picture is equally concerning for those identifying as Trans; 32% attempted to take their life while waiting for support, compared to 14% who don't identify as Trans, yet only 20% had contact with a crisis team. 13% of those who did not identify as Trans had contact with a crisis team.

Amongst different ethnic groups, mixed-race young people and those identifying as other ethnicities, had the highest percentage attempting to take their own life, at 22% and 23%. A further 17% and 19% managed to see a crisis team.

For Asian young people, things are even worse. While 18% said they attempted to take their own lives during the wait for support, only half had any contact with a crisis team.

42%

of young people waiting for mental health support experienced problems with family and friends

A new vision for services

When asked what they'd like to see in a national Government plan for mental health, young people had plenty of ideas. Many expressed that they'd like educational learning spaces to be supportive of mental wellbeing, offering routes for extra mental health support if needed. Over 70% of 16 to 24 year olds were also hopeful that prevention and early intervention would be prioritised, with 70% of respondents aged 18-24 also expressing the need for more support and care for people experiencing a mental health crisis. More support for those experiencing a mental health crisis also particularly resonated with young carers.

People also prioritised different issues they'd like to see addressed depending on their individual circumstances. Non-binary people, those identifying as LGBTQ+, Trans people and respondents who preferred to self-describe their gender were more likely to want services that are sensitive to their culture and identity than other genders and sexualities. They were also more concerned about addressing the quality and safety of mental health treatment and other kinds of stigma than those identifying as male, female and non-trans.

Throughout all regions and across all ethnic groups, there was strong support for prevention and access to early support in the community for people struggling with their mental health, and better access to services and support more generally, with 71% support overall.

People who experience a number of health conditions had different experiences to those without. 73% found it important for prevention and access to early support in the community to be prioritised for people struggling with their mental health. They were also more likely to want a clear set of standards on expected waiting times for NHS services, which isn't surprising considering they were the most likely group to wait a long time for support. [30]

To summarise, in order for children and young people's mental health services to truly improve the mental health of the young people they serve, it's crucial that the changes outlined in this chapter are acted upon. This would mean prioritising prevention, early intervention and staff training to ensure services are culturally competent. For those who are at risk of a mental health crisis, crisis support needs to be drastically improved to meet young people's needs.

Inequality and discrimination

The majority of young people who took part in our research all had something in common – they'd been subject to some form discrimination, while minoritised communities had also experienced high levels of social inequality. While inequality underpins every chapter of this report, this chapter takes a specific look at young people's experiences of social inequality and discrimination.

Social inequality

Social stability, including access to education, stable housing, careers and finances, are essential to cultivating good mental health. Many young people are under undue pressure to be successful while grappling with the rising cost of living, but some groups face barriers to a stable life every step of the way due to their characteristics, including their race, class, and gender identity.

Our research shows that social inequality and discrimination are rife in society, and all young people are affected by it. But those from marginalised groups especially at risk – young people with disabilities, special educational needs, LGBTQ+ young people and Black and racialised young people are significantly more likely to struggle to cope than their peers.[31]

It's crucial to recognise that inequality and discrimination have a significant impact on young people's mental health, and any negative feelings they have are made worse by social systems like school, money, the media and government, which actively harm young people by perpetuating inequality.

"We need rounded support that addresses the causes, not just the mental illness itself. A lot of mental illness is caused by financial and housing issues which is something that the government has also failed to act on. Prevention is better than cure."

Below, we've set out some figures which map out how unjust society can be for young people, which will help us to understand exactly why some groups struggle more than others.

Social inequality: facts and figures

Race

Black young people were more likely to be affected by poverty, debt and housing issues than young people from other ethnic backgrounds.[32]

- Young Black people were the most likely ethnic group to report experiencing class inequality (33%). In total, 19% of young people overall reported experiencing class inequality.

- Young Black people were the ethnic group most likely to say they had experienced poverty (21% vs 11% of young people overall).

- 23% of Black, Asian and racialised young people, including 30% of young Black people, reported not having the same work opportunities as other people, compared to 16% of white young people.

- 26% of racialised young people, including 37% of young Black young people, report experiencing institutional discrimination. Only 11% of white people feel the same way.[33]

- 49% of Black and racialised young people reported struggling to cope, compared to 41% of white young people.[34]

"We need rounded support that addresses the causes, not just the mental illness itself...Prevention is better than cure."

33%

of young Black people reported experiencing class inequality

Gender & Sexuality

Non-binary young people were more likely than other genders to have been negatively impacted by poverty or debt, homophobic stigma and discrimination, and transphobic stigma/discrimination.[35]

- Female and Non-binary young people were more likely to report not having the same work opportunities as others, when compared to males. (20-24% vs 14%).

- 29% of Non-binary and 27% of Trans young people have experienced institutional discrimination, compared to 14% of young people overall.[36]

- 65% of LGBTQ+ young people reported struggling to cope, compared to 39% of straight young people.[37]

Health

Young people with health conditions were more likely to have their mental health suffer as a result of poor-quality housing, experiences of poverty and debt, and homophobic and transphobic stigma or discrimination.

- 30% of young people with a heavily reduced ability to carry out day-to-day activities due to a health condition had experienced poverty and class inequality.

- Those with both a mental and physical conditions are more likely to experience class inequality and poverty.

- 31% of those with both a physical and mental health condition reported not having the same work opportunities as their peers.[38]

- 72% of young people with a disability reported struggling to cope, compared to 34% without a disability.[39]

"Class has had a huge impact on almost every aspect of my life. Even though now I have a fairly stable job, I still worry about money. I think I have carried a lot of experiences I had as a child through to my adult life (for example, being the kid that couldn't afford nice clothes for non-uniform day I still get nervous about what I wear now, and feel like I have to put extra effort into my appearance). Someone once told me I wouldn't be able to get a job with my West Midlands accent. After that incident, I actually trained myself to have a less strong Black Country accent because I was so embarrassed."

"Class has had a huge impact on almost every aspect of my life. Even though now I have a fairly stable job, I still worry about money. I think I have carried a lot of experiences I had as a child through to my adult life."

Discrimination

Inequality in society can result in communities feeling excluded and encourage discrimination, while discrimination and exclusion can reinforce social inequality.

We know from wider research that being on the receiving end of discriminatory abuse has been linked to various adverse physical, emotional and social outcomes, including poor educational attainment and low self-esteem.[40] It can also lead to internalisation of stigma, resulting in shame, fear, stress and poor health.[41]

Our research shows that stigma and discrimination in society have an unquestionable impact on many young people's lives. Many discussed how it has negatively affected their lives, for example by increasing their anxiety levels. A range of issues were spoken about, including racism, homophobia, ableism and mental health stigma, all occurring in various different settings, including work, school, within the family and while out in public. There were also troubling instances of self-blame, further evidence that discrimination has a negative impact on young people's self-esteem and self-worth.[42]

"I feel so alone sometimes and doubt people like me at all due to the racism and sexism I face."

As a result of the stigma and discrimination in society, young people from different ethnic, gender and religious backgrounds may have different experiences from their peers when accessing the same services. Being free to be themselves and having equal opportunity and access to services is paramount in order for them to maintain good wellbeing and mental health.

The following pages map out statistics and quotes from young peopled about how discrimination has impacted them.

Discrimination: facts and figures
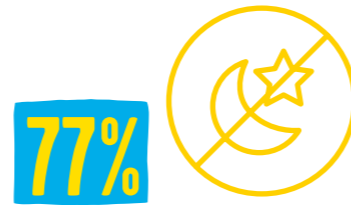
Race and Religion

Black and racialised young people were most concerned about racism and directly experienced discrimination or abuse when compared to their mixed ethnicity and white peers.[43] This sadly doesn't come as a surprise, considering that Black young people were the most likely ethnic group to have been negatively impacted by racism, followed by Asian young people. Region also plays a factor; young people living in London were most likely to say their mental health was affected by racism than in any other region.

"I feel so alone sometimes and doubt people like me at all due to the racism and sexism I face."

Different religious groups also face discrimination and stigma, which has a knock-on impact on their mental health. Those identifying as Hindu, Muslim or Sikh were more likely to say their mental health had been impacted negatively by experiences of racism than any other religious group.[44]

Key stats:

- 77% of young Muslims reported having experienced Islamophobia

- 71% of BAME young people report having experienced racism; this includes 83% of Black people, 71% of Asian people and 67% of those from mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds.

- 74% of Hindus, 62% of Muslims, 66% of Sikhs and 28% of Jewish people also reported having experienced racism.

- 23% of BAME young people have experienced xenophobia, compared to 4% of white young people.

- 33% of Jewish young people reported experiencing discrimination.[45]

'Growing up, I was usually the only one or one of very few Asians in a school. In primary school, I had been told that my nose was too flat, that my eyes are strange, had "ching chong china" shouted at me multiple times and have been told by other children that they would have preferred me if I had blonde hair and blue eyes.'

"Islamophobia and racism were the biggest part of my transition from a bigger city in the south to the north west. Whereas I was outgoing and quite extroverted when I was in London, now I feel much more closed off and less willing to socialise than before, even with my own family... It doesn't help that I get slandered on the bus, with high schoolers telling me to go back to my country. It makes me so sad that just because I wear a hijab and I'm Black, people think that I'm a terrorist or something."

Gender and Sexuality

Non-binary and Trans young people were most negatively impacted by homophobic and transphobic stigma and discrimination than other factors.

Trans young people were also more likely to say that school and college had a negative impact on them, more so than non-Trans young people. Gay people were more likely to find homophobic discrimination and stigma more detrimental to their mental health than other factors, although gay men were more likely to be negatively impacted by transphobia than gay women, who were impacted more heavily by sexism.[46]

Key stats:

- 78% of Non-binary young people and 60% of young Trans people report having experienced homophobia. Only 1% of those identifying as LGBTQ+ report not having experienced homophobia.

77%
of young Muslims reported having experienced Islamaphobia

78%
of Non-binary young people report having experienced homophobia, along with 60% of young Trans people

- 30% of males reported experiencing none of the discrimination experiences listed, compared to only 9% of females and 1% of Non-binary people.

- 72% of females and 79% of Non-binary young people report having experienced sexism.

- 62% of Trans and 59% of Non-binary young people have experienced transphobia.[47]

- 74% of Jewish young people were negatively impacted by sexism.[48]

"Transphobia has majorly impacted me (I'm FTM) because I have had no support around me. And since I've dealt with depression and anxiety, it's been worse for me since I feel like nobody cares. I've been out for 11 months and all I want is someone to try to get my pronouns and correct name right. I figured it can take time but it still hurts badly when you can tell they don't try."

Age and Health

Young people with health conditions or learning differences were more likely to have experienced mental health discrimination or stigma than those without.[49]

Key stats:

- 34% of young people with a health condition or illness, either physical or mental, have experienced ableism.

- Under 16s were the least likely to report having experienced ageism (22%) while 20-25 year olds were most likely to have experienced it (28%).

- 29% of young people report having experienced weight discrimination.

- Females were more likely than males to experience discrimination based on weight (34% vs 23%)

- 37% of those with a health condition (either physical or mental) reported experiencing weight discrimination, compared to 18% of those who do not have a health condition.

- Asian young people were more likely to experience weight discrimination compared to other ethnicities.[50]

If young people continue to experience these shocking levels of discrimination and inequality in society, it will continue to have a knock-on impact to their mental health. In order to promote healthier, happier lives, it's crucial to build a fairer society for young people, inclusive of differences and identities.
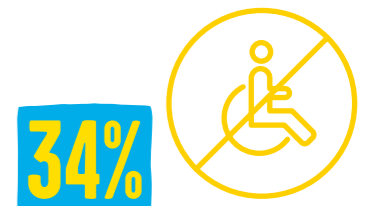
34%
of young people with a health condition or illness, either physical or mental, have experienced ableism

The impact of global crises

Thanks to globalisation and the rise of social media, young people today are more engaged than ever with issues going on around the world, but this has had a knock-on impact to their mental health. Young people are now extremely concerned about the state of the world they're growing up in and lack hope for the future. Not only that, but our research shows that Government responses to global crises are fuelling this anxiety.

Climate Crisis & Conflict

Levels of eco-anxiety are growing amongst the youth population across the world, with almost half of all young people always or often worried about climate change. When factoring in those who stated that they sometimes feel worried about it, this number further rises to 87%. Another 45% always or often worry about big political issues such as war and conflict, rising to 82% when factoring in those who sometimes worry.[51]

87%
of young people report always, often or sometimes worrying about climate change

Researchers at the University of Bath found that climate change and inadequate governmental responses are associated with climate anxiety and distress in many children and young people globally.[52] The level of distress young people feel over climate change is a threat to their health and wellbeing, and further dissipates their trust in the Government due to a perceived lack of action on environmental issues.

> *"Climate change is the one major factor in young people's mental health. If the government took action to attain carbon neutrality by 2050, the common psyche would see a vast improvement."*

When we asked young people what changes they'd like to see in society, tackling climate change and environmental concerns was the 5th most frequently mentioned issue, and was mentioned more often by 16–19-year-olds, highlighting how younger age groups are aware of global issues and worried about how the climate crisis will impact them for significant proportion of their lives.[53]

> *"I feel like once I'm old enough and can afford to travel there won't be much left to see (coral, marine life, wildlife etc.). The government doesn't care about the people, or the future."*
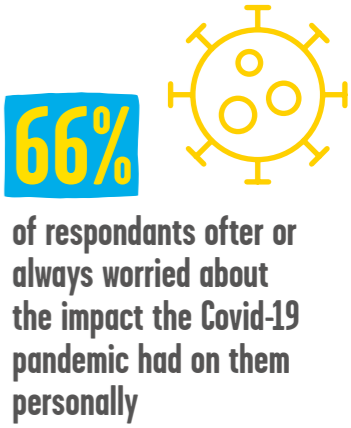
From the responses, it's clear that young people don't think the Government is doing enough to protect our planet.

Covid-19

In late 2021, the impact of Covid-19 was also weighing on young people's minds, with 66% of respondents always or often worrying about the impact of the pandemic on them personally. Covid was also the 10th most mentioned issue in our survey, highlighting that young people were still struggling with the aftermath and continued disruption to their education and social activities, as well as bereavement and trauma.[54] Research by NHS Digital published in November 2022 confirms this is still the case – they reported that 43.5% of young people aged 11-16 are worried about the effect of Covid-19 on their future exam results, while 38.6% are worried about the effect it has had on their schoolwork.[55]

During insight groups with physically disabled young people in 2021, many told us that the pandemic had a significant impact on them, and that they felt anxious about catching the virus. Given that our findings show low levels of government support from those with a health condition, Covid-19 policies such as the total lifting of lockdown in 2021, may have affected young disabled people's relationship with the Government and further deepened the belief that society has an 'anti-disability' rhetoric.[56]

> "I feel like once I'm old enough and can afford to travel there won't be much left to see... The government doesn't care about the people, or the future."

66%
of respondants ofter or always worried about the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on them personally

Despite how much young people went through during the peak of the pandemic, as time goes by, the impact the pandemic has on young people reduces. We found that there was a noticeable drop in the pandemic's negative impact when comparing responses in summer 2021 to summer 2022. 53% of respondents reported it having an impact in summer 2021, while only 32% of young people raised it as a factor in 2022, a drop of 21%. This is likely due to the pandemic being fresh in their minds in 2021, compared to 2022, when life had largely been getting back to normal for a while.[57]

Despite the reduction, it's important to recognise that many young people are still affected by what they experienced during the peak of the pandemic, and some will likely be affected for years to come. The pandemic itself has had many lingering aftereffects, including unprecedented levels of demand for mental health services, which cannot be ignored.

It's crucial that the impact of issues like climate change, war and global health on young people are taken into account. Young people are the ones who will live with the consequences of our inaction in the decades to come, and they've told us they feel unsafe and afraid. It's time we support them to have the future they deserve.

Young people on society, their relationships and the future

Young people are increasingly feeling the pressure of societal expectations but desire to be independent from the generations before them. Our research explores their insights into the challenges facing society, and how this can impact their mental health.

81% of young people believe that wider society has an impact on mental health

93% of young people worry about loneliness and isolation

71% of young people are negatively impacted by public attitudes

Self-blame and pressure

In Chapter 1, we touched on how young people blame themselves for feeling pressured in education, and how those who have experienced discrimination can suffer from low self-esteem.

Our research found that young people often blame themselves for the problems they face. They place undue pressure on themselves to think, act or be a certain way, from questioning whether they're even allowed to be worried, through to 'constantly pressuring [themselves] to be on 'top form'.[58] Our findings show that girls put more pressure on themselves than boys, while self-blame also becomes worse with age. Young people aged 20–25 indicated greater concern about insecurities than their younger peers, possibly because they're at a time of transition in their lives – to adulthood, where many are navigating higher education, work and financial independence for the first time.[59]

Connection to others was also mentioned; young people feel pressured to maintain relationships and have good social lives. Worries about feeling lonely or isolated are almost universal, with 93% of young people identifying it as one of their concerns. It's not surprising, then, that 93% also told us they feel pressured to maintain healthy relationships with friends or family. Many young people also feel the need to maintain the status quo – 88% felt they had to look or act a certain way to fit in, while 86% felt they needed to do what society expected of them. Much of this pressure is applied on the young person by the young person themselves, as well as by social media, friends or peers.[60]

Society and mental health

According to young people, society has changed for the better when it comes to talking about mental health, but they're also aware that much more work needs to be done.

While 78% of young people believe that society is much more accepting of mental health issues than it has been in the past, less than a third believe that mental health support is actually available for people who need it.[61]

They're also aware of how society and public attitudes can impact mental health. According to our research, young people want society to be more open-minded and less discriminatory. They want increased empathy for others and the acceptance of difference coupled with a better understanding of the intersectionality of experiences, including those of marginalised individuals in society. Since this doesn't reflect the experiences they've had in their daily lives, they want to change society for the better.

78% of young people believe that society is more accepting of mental health issues than it has been in the past

'Help people to become more open minded and encourage them to educate themselves on things they aren't familiar with and listen to the experience of others who deal with things they themselves can't relate to.'

81% of young people believe that wider society has an impact on an individual's mental health, with 71% saying that public attitudes affect their mental health negatively. People with health conditions and those identifying as Non-binary, LGBTQ+ and Trans were particularly likely to report that their mental health was negatively impacted by people's attitudes.[62] On speaking to Trans and Non-binary young people in more depth, they felt that that wider society treated them differently depending on how far they were with transitioning, and when asked to use the correct pronouns, they are often told that they are 'asking too much.'[63]

Young refugees and asylum seekers also felt that public perceptions of them are overwhelmingly negative. They spoke of how people in society don't react well upon hearing the word 'refugee' and one young person we spoke to felt that people look at asylum seekers and refugees as though they are criminals.

These perceptions, they believe, are often perpetuated by the media, who inaccurately and negatively influence public attitudes towards refugees.[64]

Cultural differences

Racialised young people experience different concerns within their communities to their white counterparts.

- 80% of Asian young people feel pressured to do what their culture expects of them. 82% of young Black people feel the same way.

- 75% of Black and racialised young people overall feel pressure to do what their culture expects of them, in comparison to 28% of white young people.

When asked who or what made them feel this way, respondents overwhelmingly felt pressured by their families and carers, with 70% singling them out.

Personal safety

Bullying was also an issue that cropped up in our research, with 85% of young people telling us they have some level of worry or pressure around it. Worryingly, a further 44% disclosed that they always or often worry about bullying.

On the subject of personal safety more broadly, female and Non-binary young people were far more likely than males to worry about their own personal safety. As for who or what drives their concerns, young people believe they themselves are to blame, followed by the media, public attitudes, and police and law enforcement.

Personal relationships and generational differences

Over half of Non-binary young people and 42% of Trans young people felt that their family or carers had a negative impact on their mental health, as did 41% of Asian young people and 48% of those belonging to other ethnic groups.

"As a South Asian Muslim in the UK, my community cares too much about how other people will view you. So family, specifically parents, put a lot of pressure on their children to act according to the norms... One of my biggest worries is having my own family and a huge factor is worrying that nobody will marry me due to my mental illness. People closer to my age are more accepting, but their parents will likely be similar to mine and believe all the stigma there is around mental illness. Mental illness being seen as very taboo also is another factor."

When asked whether their feelings were accepted by the older adults in their lives, 41% of young people agreed, and 47% felt that they also took their mental health and wellbeing seriously. However, this figure changed depending on individual circumstances; for white young people, 46% agreed with the first statement, whereas only 32% of Black and racialised young people did. Muslim and Non-binary young people were the least likely to think that their feelings are accepted by their elders, with only 19% agreeing with the statement.[65]

For young Muslims, the low numbers could be because they feel their parents don't understand mental health; during insight groups held by YoungMinds, they disclosed that if their parents knew they were struggling with their mental health, their parents would be concerned about their reputation.[66] As for Non-binary young people, they felt that the older generation could often be less accepting of young people's identities, and young people find having to explain their gender exhausting, which could explain why they're less likely to feel that older adults accept their feelings.[67]

44%

of young people disclosed they were always or often worrying about bullying

> "As a South Asian Muslim in the UK, my community cares too much about how other people will view you... Mental illness being seen as very taboo also is another factor."

Over half of our respondents said they do not trust the older adults in their lives to fight for change on the issues that matter to them, and only a quarter of them said they did. Furthermore, only 29% of young people feel that they can trust their parents or carers to champion mental health. This figure was especially low for certain groups; only 14% of Non-binary people feel able to trust their parents or carers, and only 17% of Muslims feel the same, highlighting a generational gap for these young people in particular.[68]

Young Black people we spoke to also highlighted the generational differences they face within their own families. Some felt that mental health was a taboo within their community, while others had tried to talk to their parents about mental health only to be dismissed due to their parent feeling a sense of blame or guilt. While their family members may work in mental health jobs, they're not able to recognise when mental health issues arise in their own families, signaling a disconnection between mental health professionals and their line of work.[69]

The findings from our research show that minoritised young people are less likely to feel their elders take their wellbeing and mental health seriously, and are less likely to trust their parents or carers with their struggles.

A lack of understanding between different generations is seen not only within families, but also in wider society. When asked what they'd like those in charge to change, respondents mentioned 'listening to young people' third most frequently, highlighting the intergenerational tensions that came out throughout the survey – young people don't think older generations understand them or are properly listening to their experiences. Being heard was the change most frequently chosen by young Black people, indicating that they feel particularly disconnected to and ignored by those in power.

Whilst intergenerational difference is nothing new, the good news is that there is an appetite from this generation of young people to change things, with 92% feeling that it's important to help different generations to understand each other.[70]

Things that impact mental health positively

While young people struggle much of the time to feel safe and accepted by wider society, it's not all doom and gloom – young people acknowledge that the systems they interact with and their social circles have the power to turn their mental health around. Our data shows that friends and family play an important role in maintaining mental health and wellbeing; 68% of respondents believed that friends affect their mental health positively, and another 52% said the same about their family or carers.[71]

68%

of respondents believed that friends affect their mental health positively

Young people suggested that having supportive relationships, having enough money to enjoy their lives that they haven't had to borrow, and having good housing were likely to be better for their mental health than mental health and community support services.

The factors that impact a young person's mental health positively depends largely on their unique situation. For instance, young, full-time parents felt happier if they had good housing, since warmth and safety are seen as necessities for bringing up a family.

Those who were working were more likely than others to say that having a good job in a supportive workplace with job security has a positive impact (63% and 65%), while Non-binary, Trans, and young people from racialised backgrounds are more likely to place importance on feeling comfortable in spaces where they can be themselves in relation to their gender, sexuality, or ethnicity. Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were also more likely to say that feeling comfortable to be themselves in regards to their ethnicity has a positive impact.[72]

Furthermore, when asked for the top three people or institutions they trust to champion young people's mental health, friends and peers came out on top. Overall, 59% of respondents told us they trust their friends to champion mental health, and this number was higher for some of the most marginalised groups in society; 65% of Non-binary young people trust their friends to champion mental health, as do 64% of Trans young people.[73] Considering that some of these communities are less likely to confide in older adults, friends may act as their primary support network.

It's not only their closest friends and family that young people trust. Activists and campaigners were the second most trusted people to champion mental health, with 53% of young people rating them as trustworthy. Black and LGBTQ+ young people were more likely to say they trust activists in comparison to other groups. This is understandable considering the impact activism has had on matters relating to racial justice, sexuality and gender.[74]

Despite the challenges wider society poses to their mental health, young people haven't lost all hope; they've shown that they're determined to challenge the existing social order to create a more inclusive, equitable and harmonious society for all.

Conclusion and next steps

This report is a clear call to action from young people. It is the start of a manifesto for change that could revolutionise mental health in this country.

What's clearest, though, is that young people can't wait any longer for this change to happen: rising prevalence rates, the normalisation of long waiting times, rocketing experiences of discrimination and a prevailing sense of hopelessness shows us just how deep the crisis goes. And our five focus areas – inadequate systems and structures, crumbling mental health services, ubiquitous inequality and discrimination, global crises and a divided society – map out the path we need to take to achieve this change.

This report is just the start for YoungMinds. We plan on taking our five areas of focus and turning them into real, tangible work plans. Collaborating with young people, experts and other stakeholders, we hope to develop each area into radical and ambitious plans to tackle the issues so clearly set out in this report. We will be putting the emphasis on co-creation, to champion young people's voices and do our part to tackle the disenfranchisement and helplessness so many expressed.

Collaborating with young people, experts and other stakeholders, we hope to develop each area into radical and ambitious plans to tackle the issues so clearly set out in this report.

We will particularly be focusing on the voices of marginalised and minoritised groups, and those we didn't reach in great enough numbers in the surveys and focus groups that informed this report. We know from this research that we have a lot of work to do as an organisation and a sector to build trust amongst Black and minoritised young people, who were less likely to identify charities as institutions they trust.

We also know that young people are under extreme external pressure from a myriad of angles, but also that they are consistently blaming only themselves for their worries, their experiences, and their mental health. While doing this work, we will endeavour to remind young people that the institutions and systems around them have responsibility for building a world in which they are not thriving. We want to empower young people to work with us and campaign with us to make the changes they want to see, without feeling like the responsibility is again falling completely on their shoulders.

We're aware that action needs to happen now, but that to truly tackle embedded issues like systemic inequality and education systems that worsen rather than support young people's mental health will take some time. While this work continues, we will keep campaigning for immediate change, taking opportunities when they appear, and expediting our work to match external agendas. Right now, for instance, our End The Wait campaign is calling for better support in schools, a roadmap to meet waiting times targets for CAMHS, and an early support hub in every community.

As Chris and Flav explained so eloquently in their Foreword, this report paints a dark picture of the state of young people's mental health – but it illuminates the solutions that can lead to meaningful change. Every generation has the innate drive to build for themselves a better future and this one, though it feels the weight of the world on its shoulders, is no different.

We want to empower young people to work with us and campaign with us to make the changes they want to see, without feeling like the responsibility is again falling completely on their shoulders.

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YOUNGMiNDS

India House, Curlew Street, London, England, SE1 2ND

T 020 7089 5050 | **E** ymenquiries@youngminds.org.uk

youngminds.org.uk