

MY HEALTH, OUR FUTURE (PHASE SIX)

Young people's mental health
and emotional wellbeing in
Suffolk - part one

Published December 2022

healthwatch
Suffolk



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of the 'My Health, Our Future' (MHoF) research programme would not be possible without the continued support of the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System, and partners working with young people across Suffolk (e.g., youth-led networks, Public Health Suffolk, and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations across Suffolk).

Above all, we thank school and college leaders, and students, at the following schools and colleges for supporting MHoF in 2022:

- ▶ Abbeygate Sixth Form College
- ▶ Castle Manor Academy
- ▶ Chantry Academy
- ▶ Claydon High School
- ▶ Copleston High School
- ▶ East Point Academy
- ▶ Mildenhall College Academy
- ▶ Newmarket Academy
- ▶ Northgate High School
- ▶ Samuel Ward Academy
- ▶ Sir John Lemman High School
- ▶ Suffolk One
- ▶ West Suffolk College

We also opened the survey to the public this year, gaining over 150 responses. A huge thank you to everyone who took the time to respond, and share their experiences.

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For more information about 'My Health, Our Future' (MHoF), or to download previous reports and insights, please visit: www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/mhof

INTRODUCTION – PART ONE

My Health, Our Future (MHoF) is a unique research programme exploring the wellbeing of children and young people in Suffolk.

Since 2017, more than 43,000 responses have been received to MHoF surveys about important topics like wellbeing, self-harm, resilience, bullying, and many other topic areas.

MHoF uses a consistent survey methodology (co-produced with young people, schools, colleges, and local partners) in schools and colleges.

This report presents the findings from 'phase six' of the MHoF survey for young people in secondary schools and colleges. Young people completed the survey between April and July 2022.

This report is part of a series – access part two and part three from:
www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/mhof/phasesix

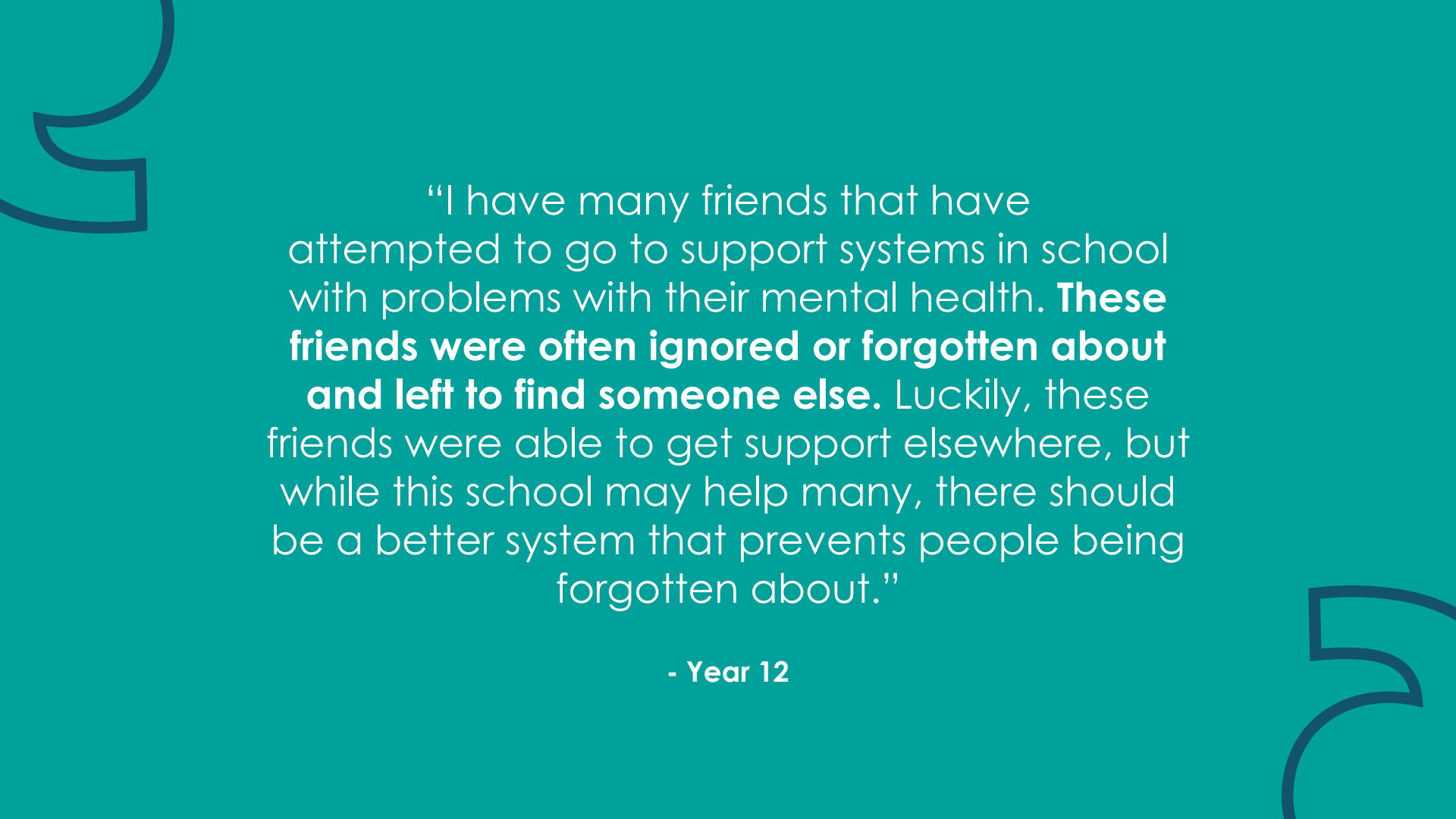
Learn more about MHoF on the Healthwatch Suffolk website:
www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/mhof

[DOWNLOAD PART TWO](#)

Click to explore data on **self-rated mental health, self-harm and bullying.**

[DOWNLOAD PART THREE](#)

Click to explore data on **community and mental health support and mental health education.**



“I have many friends that have attempted to go to support systems in school with problems with their mental health. **These friends were often ignored or forgotten about and left to find someone else.** Luckily, these friends were able to get support elsewhere, but while this school may help many, there should be a better system that prevents people being forgotten about.”

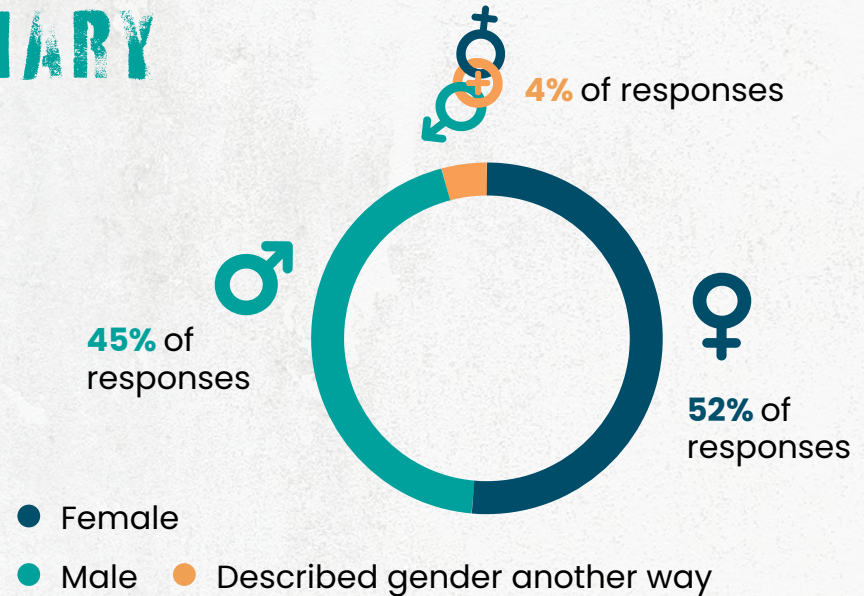
- Year 12

A close-up shot of a person's hand raised in a crowd, set against a warm, golden bokeh background. The scene is filled with soft, out-of-focus lights and a shower of golden confetti or glitter, creating a festive and celebratory atmosphere. The background shows the silhouettes of other people in a crowd, suggesting a social gathering or event.

WHO TOOK PART?

DEMOGRAPHICS SUMMARY

- ▶ **4,889** responses were recorded.
- ▶ Most young people were in Year 7 to Year 13, including high school and college students.
- ▶ There were also a small number of responses from university students and young people not in mainstream education.
- ▶ **77% (3,759)** were white - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British.
- ▶ **33% (1,618)** identified one or more 'vulnerabilities', in the survey, including having a diagnosed mental health difficulty (**13.5% / 660**).



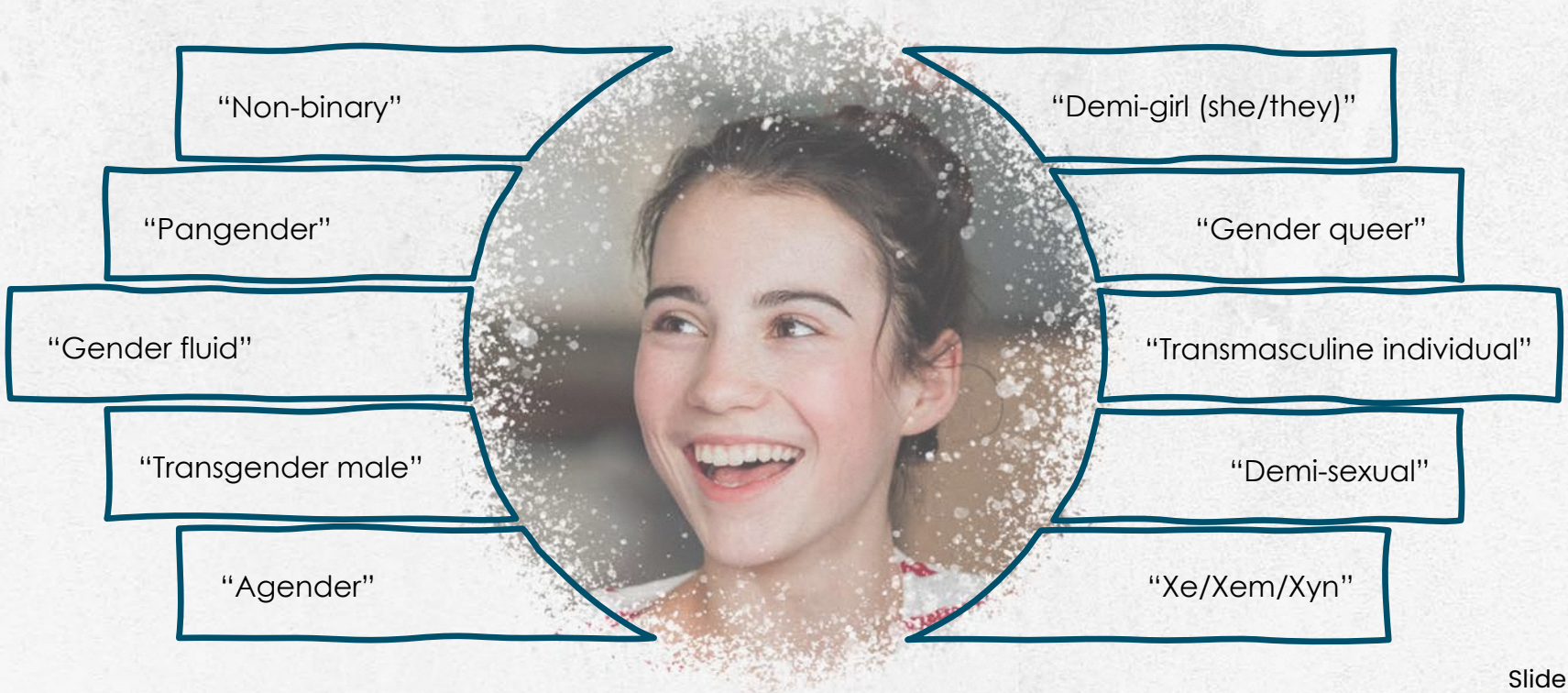
Got a question about our MHoF data?

Contact

research@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk

Four per cent of students preferred to describe their gender in another way.

Here are some of their responses.




1,058 RESPONSES WERE FROM LGBT*Q+ YOUNG PEOPLE.

These students tended to experience poorer wellbeing than their peers. They were also more likely to report lower wellbeing and resilience, as well as higher rates of anxiety, self-harm and bullying.

You can read more about our findings from LGBT*Q+ young people, and students throughout this report. The findings for LGBT*Q+ young people are presented as a group, including both sexuality and gender identity unless otherwise stated.



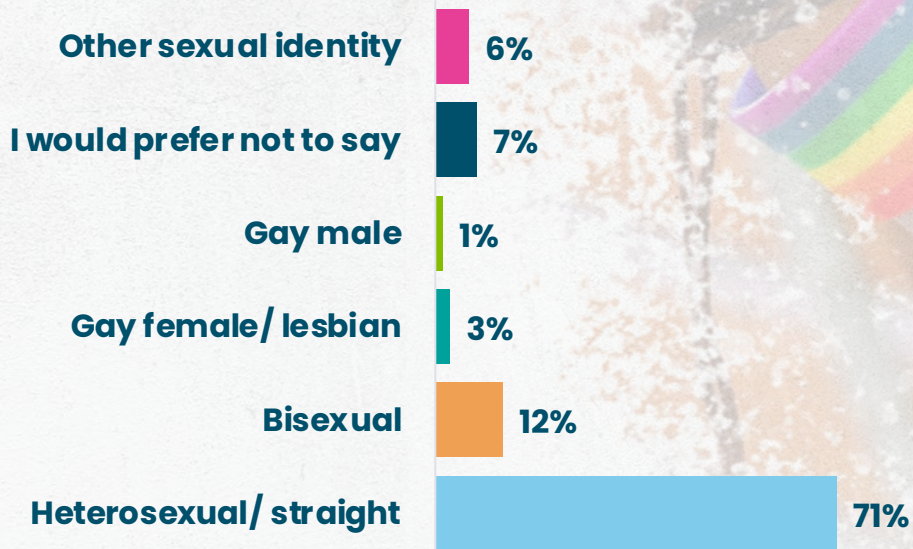


“I just wish my school could **help those who have parents that dislike their children for their chosen gender and sexuality**, and if my school notices people who are struggling with others who bully them for their life choices.”

- Year 7



22% OF RESPONSES WERE FROM YOUNG PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFIED AS LGBT*Q+.



“I prefer to describe my sexuality in another way” – Student responses

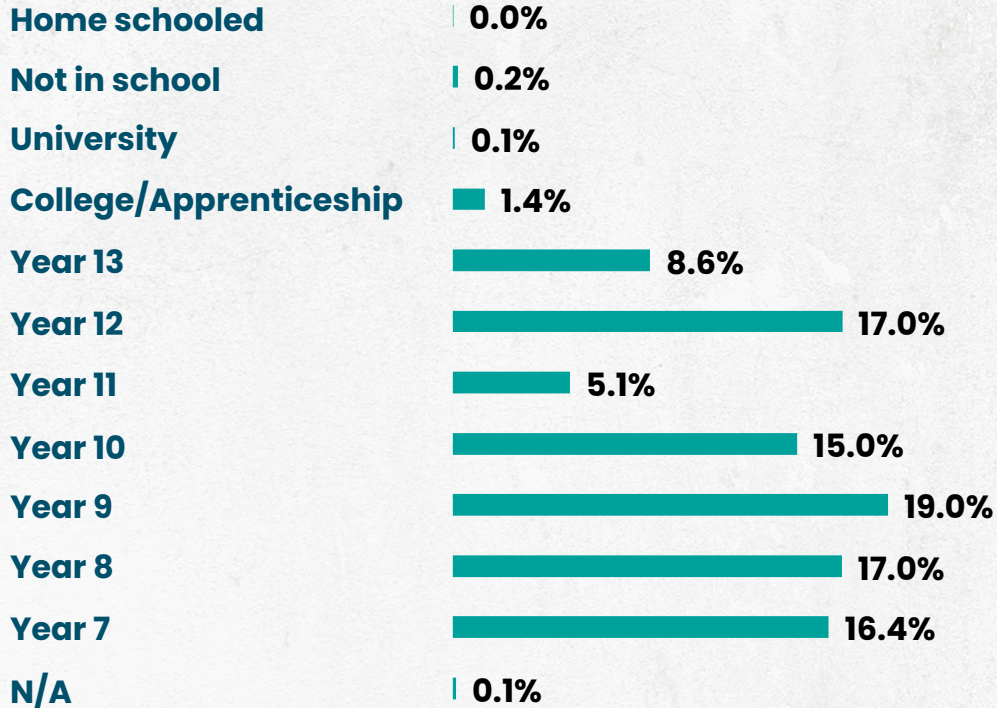
- “Questioning”
- “Don't know”
- “Asexual”
- “Sexually fluid”
- “Aroace”
- “Aromantic”
- “Demi sexual”
- “Abstinent”
- “Toric”
- “Unlabelled”
- “Pansexual”

- ▶ Most students identified as 'white English/ Welsh/ Scottish/Northern Irish/British' (76.9%) or 'Any other white background' (3.7%). See below for a full breakdown of respondents.

Ethnicity	%
Polish	1.9%
Other	3.5%
Romanian	1.2%
White and Black Caribbean	2%
White and Black African	0.8%
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	1.3%
Portuguese	0.9%
Asian/Asian British - Indian	1.2%
Any other Asian background	0.9%
White and Asian	0.9%
Black British - African	0.7%

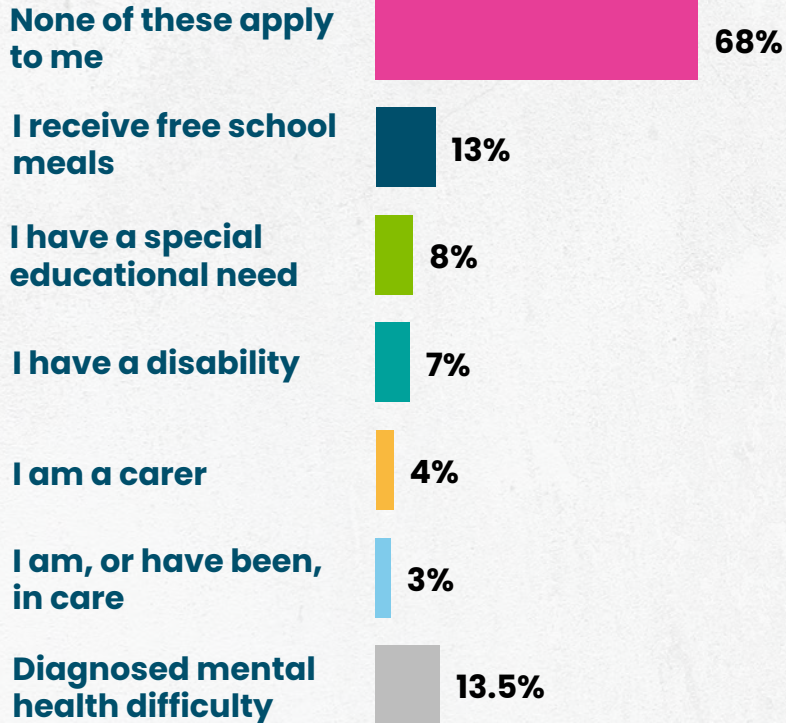
Ethnicity	%
Asian/Asian British - Pakistani	0.7%
Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi	1.1%
Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller	0.5%
Asian/Asian British - Chinese	0.3%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - Any other Black/African/Caribbean background	0.3%
Arab	0.3%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - Caribbean	0.3%
White - Irish	0.7%

Students recorded their year group:

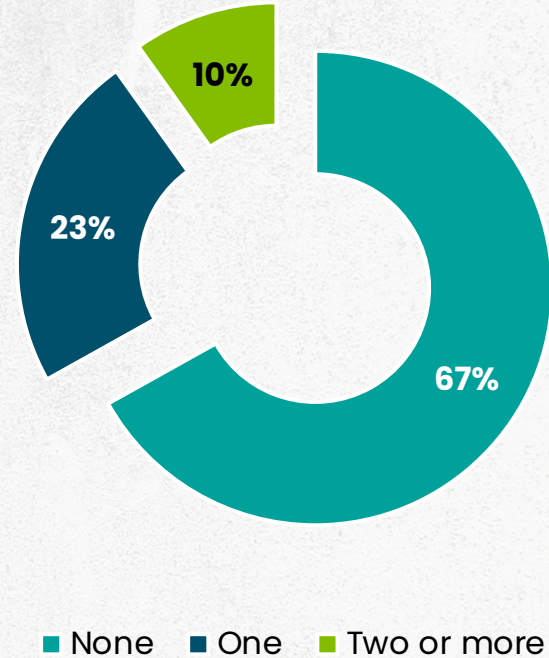


Year group / Group	Students
Home schooled	1
Not in school	11
University	4
College/Apprenticeship	68
Year 13	421
Year 12	831
Year 11	250
Year 10	735
Year 9	929
Year 8	830
Year 7	802
N/A	7

The survey asked young people which of the statements below applied to them. They could agree with more than one statement.



Twenty-three percent of young people identified at least one additional support need:



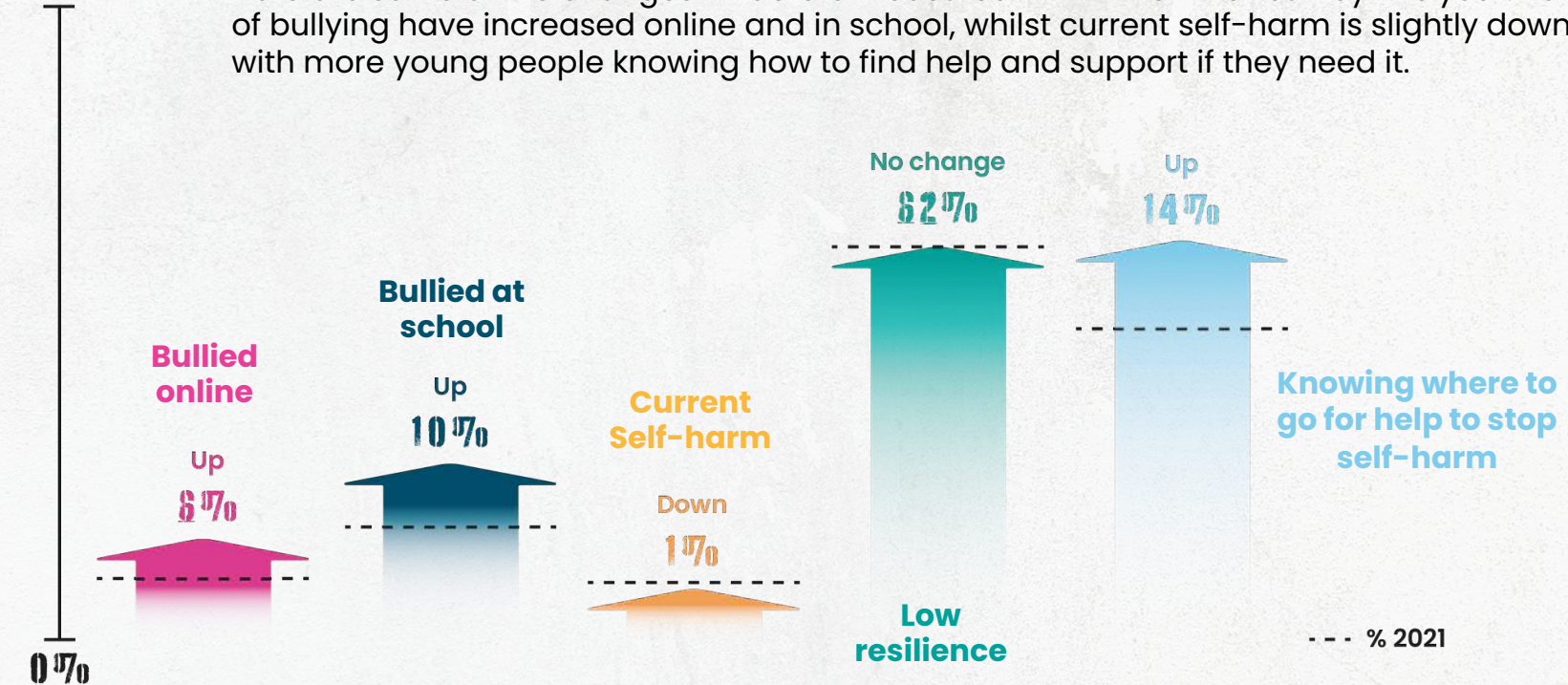
OUR RESULTS

PART 1

2021 – 2022 DATA COMPARISON

100%

- ▶ Here are some of the changes in factors measured within the MHoF survey this year. Rates of bullying have increased online and in school, whilst current self-harm is slightly down with more young people knowing how to find help and support if they need it.



--- % 2021

WELLBEING (SWEMWBS DATA)

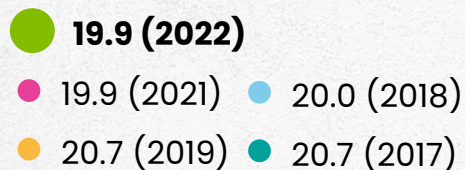
- ▶ Wellbeing was measured using the 'Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale' (SWEMWBS). Students responded to seven statements about their wellbeing and received a score ranging between seven and 35. A higher score indicates better wellbeing.
- ▶ **4,889** students responded to the WEMWBS questions this year.
- ▶ The average score for 2022 **remains the same as 2021**, and lowest of all 'MHoF' years.

National SWEMWBS data

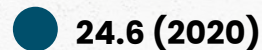
NHS research in 2020 reported the average SWEMWBS score for young people in England (aged 11 to 16) as **24.6**.



Suffolk



National



Young people in Suffolk have reported lower wellbeing scores than the national average for multiple years of MHoF.

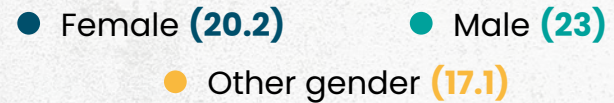


NEARLY 1 IN 3

felt cheerful 'rarely' or 'none of the time' (29%).

GENDER AND WELLBEING

- ▶ **Male** students reported higher average wellbeing scores than **female** students. **Those who preferred to describe their gender in another way** reported the lowest wellbeing scores on average. These findings are consistent with previous years MHoF.
- ▶ **7%** of **male** students fell within the low wellbeing category. **Female** students were more likely to have low wellbeing (**13%**).



Young people who preferred to describe their gender in another way were the most likely to have low wellbeing. Almost a third (30%) had low wellbeing.

WELLBEING & EDUCATION SETTING

- ▶ There are differences in wellbeing between students attending different education settings, and those young people who said they are not in school.
- ▶ **Caution is needed regarding the extent to which these results can be generalised to a wider population due to sample size.** However, the results are of note, and provide indicators worthy of further research. It is our intention to explore these differences further in future MHoF surveys.



- Secondary school students (19.9)
- Not in school (14.9)

Year group / Group	Students	Average wellbeing
Home schooled	1	16.9
Not in school	11	14.9
University	4	19.9
Sixth Form / College / Apprenticeship	68	20.3
High school	4,798	19.9

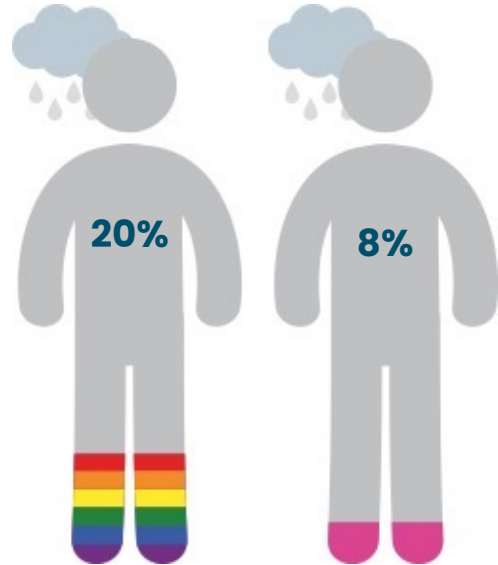
SEXUALITY AND WELLBEING

- ▶ Young people who identified as heterosexual (**22**) had a considerably higher wellbeing score than LGBT*Q+ students (**18.8**).
- ▶ **20%** of LGBT*Q+ students fell within the low wellbeing category, compared to **8%** of heterosexual students.
- ▶ **Nearly three times** the percentage of heterosexual students had high wellbeing compared to LGBT*Q+ students (**15% vs. 5%**).



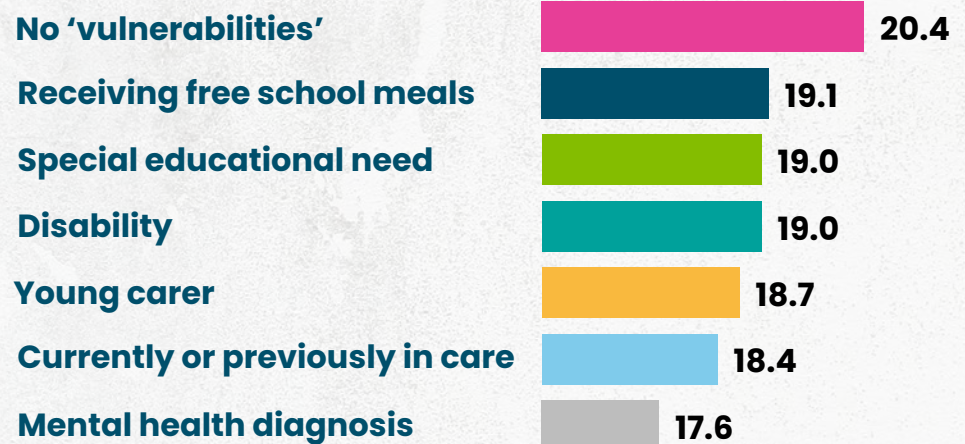
- LGBT*Q+ (**18.8**)
- Straight (**22**)

LGBT*Q+ young people were much more likely to have low wellbeing.



'VULNERABILITIES' AND WELLBEING

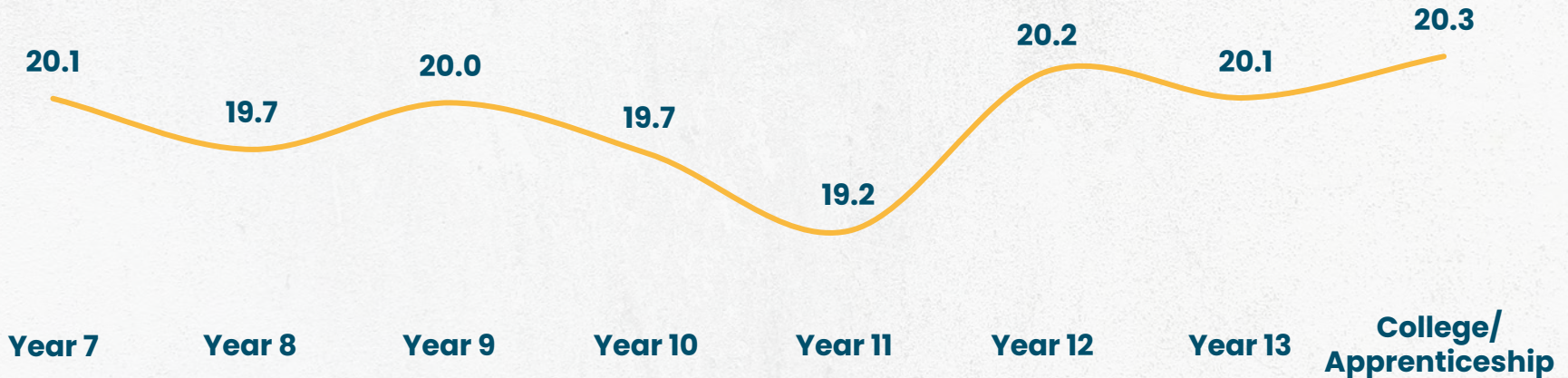
- ▶ Students with additional needs reported lower wellbeing scores on average than their peers. The lowest wellbeing score was reported by those with a diagnosed mental health difficulty (17.6).
- ▶ Students with additional needs were more likely to have low wellbeing. Those with a mental health difficulty were the most likely (23%) to belong to this category. This was followed by students who are, or have been, in care (22%).
- ▶ Additional needs, and 'vulnerabilities', have a major impact on young people's wellbeing. Wellbeing scores decrease further as young people identify with more than one 'vulnerability' (see chart right).



YEAR GROUP AND WELLBEING

- ▶ Wellbeing scores remain mostly consistent across all year groups.
- ▶ There is a slight drop in average wellbeing scores among Year 11 students this year. However, it should be noted that there were fewer responses from this year group.

On average, **11% of young people** between Year 7 and further education **fell into the 'low wellbeing' category.**



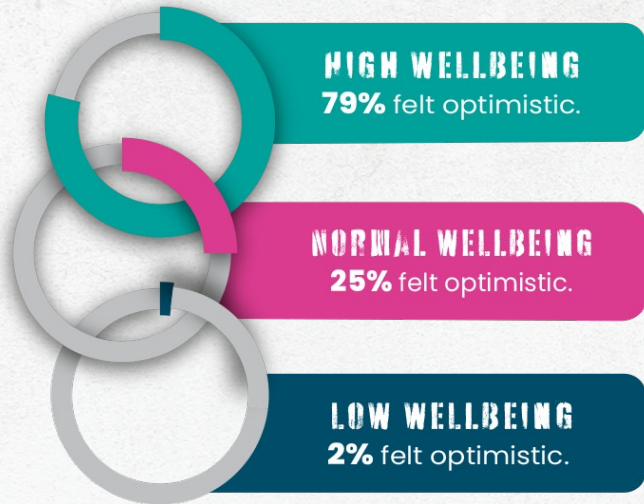
ETHNICITY AND WELLBEING

There were variations in average wellbeing score by ethnicity. However, it is important to acknowledge that sample sizes for individual groups were small. Therefore, caution is needed when considering how the results could be generalised to a wider population.

- ▶ White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British young people reported an average score of **19.9**.
- ▶ Young people from a Romanian (**21.3**), White - Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller (**21.4**), or Asian/Asian British (**20.7**) background reported the highest scores on average. However, these were also small groups of young people.
- ▶ Young people from the Black/African/Caribbean/ Black British (**19.0**) community reported the lowest wellbeing scores on average.

Ethnic group	Score
Arab	20.3
Asian/Asian British	20.7
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	19.0
Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	20.0
Other	19.8
Polish	19.8
Portuguese	19.6
Romanian	21.3
White	19.9
White - Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller	21.4

FEELING OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE



Young people with lower wellbeing were **less likely to feel optimistic about the future** 'all of the time' or 'often'.



ALMOST 1 IN 3 young people said they felt 'optimistic' about their future 'all of the time', or 'often'.

Some groups of young people were more likely to report feeling optimistic about their future 'all of the time' or 'often' than others. This included:

- **33%** of heterosexual students, compared to **21%** of LGBT*Q+ students.
- **37%** of male students, compared to **26%** of female and **13%** of those who described their gender another way.
- **32%** of students with no 'vulnerabilities', compared to **18%** of those young people who were in care, or who had been in care previously. Similar trends were observed amongst students who identified with other 'vulnerabilities'.



20%

felt loved 'none of the time' or 'rarely'. Young people with lower wellbeing scores were much less likely to feel loved.

FEELING LOVED

Some groups of young people were more likely to report feeling loved 'none of the time' or 'rarely'. This included:

- ▶ **29%** of LGBT*Q+ students, compared to **17%** of their peers.
- ▶ **36%** of students who described their gender in another way, compared to **20%** of female and **17%** of male students.
- ▶ Students that identified with more of the 'vulnerabilities' were amongst the most likely to say they felt loved 'none of the time' or 'rarely'.

Feeling loved 'none of the time' or 'rarely'

17%

No vulnerability

25%

1 vulnerability

29%

2+ vulnerabilities

HOW RESILIENT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE?

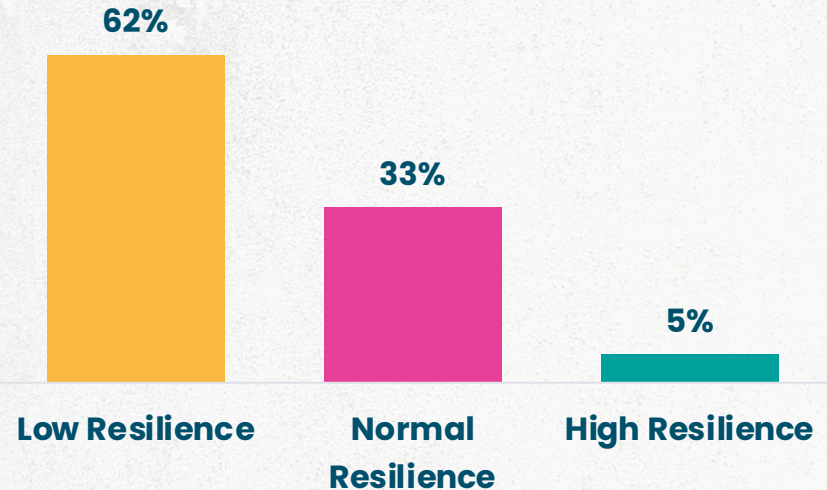
Resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). It was created to assess the perceived ability to 'bounce back' or recover from stress. More information available from:

www.whatworkswellbeing.org.

There are six statements on a five-point scale ('Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree', 'Strongly Agree'). An average score across these statements of 0 - 3 is considered 'low resilience', 3 - 4.3 is 'normal' and 4.3 - 5 is considered 'high resilience'.

- ▶ **4,469** young people responded to questions about resilience this year.
- ▶ The average resilience score for young people dropped between 2019 and 2021 to a 'low resilience' classification. In 2022, **average resilience slightly increased to 2.96** (just below the threshold for normal resilience classification).

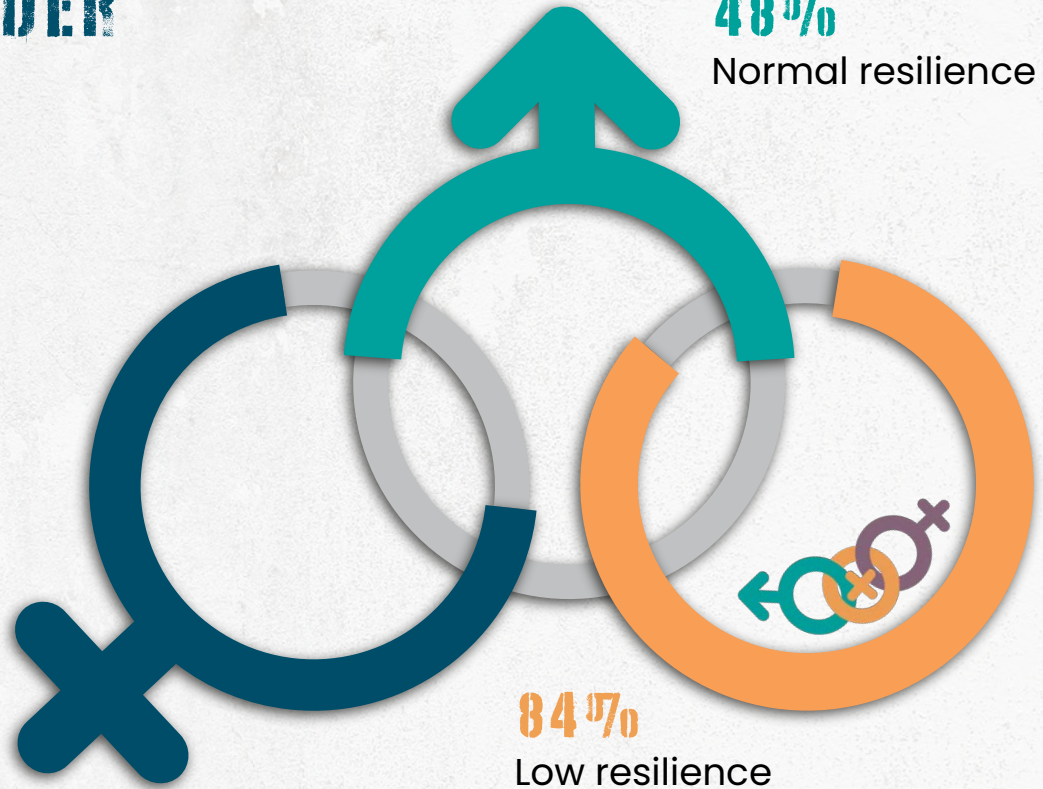
3 IN 5 young people had low resilience.



RESILIENCE AND GENDER

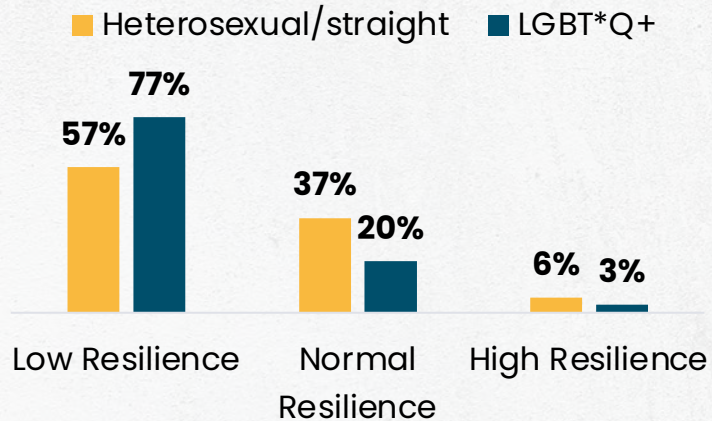
- ▶ **Male students: 48%** had a 'normal' resilience score.
- ▶ **Female students: 72%** had a 'low resilience' classification.
- ▶ **Students who described their gender in another way: 84%** had a 'low resilience' classification.
- Results are consistent with 2021 findings.

72%
Low resilience



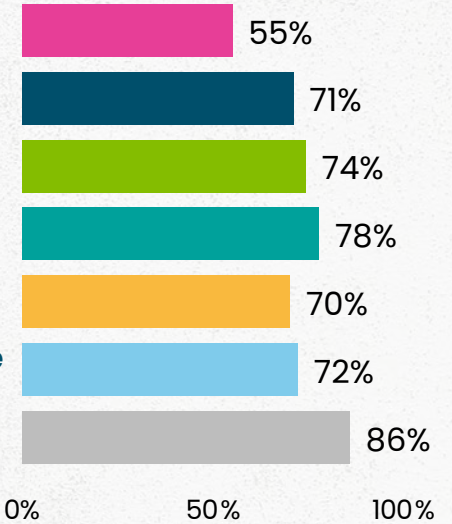
RESILIENCE (CONT.)

77% of LGBT*Q+ students reported low resilience compared to **57%** of their peers. They were also much more likely to report low wellbeing scores compared to non-LGBT*Q+ students.



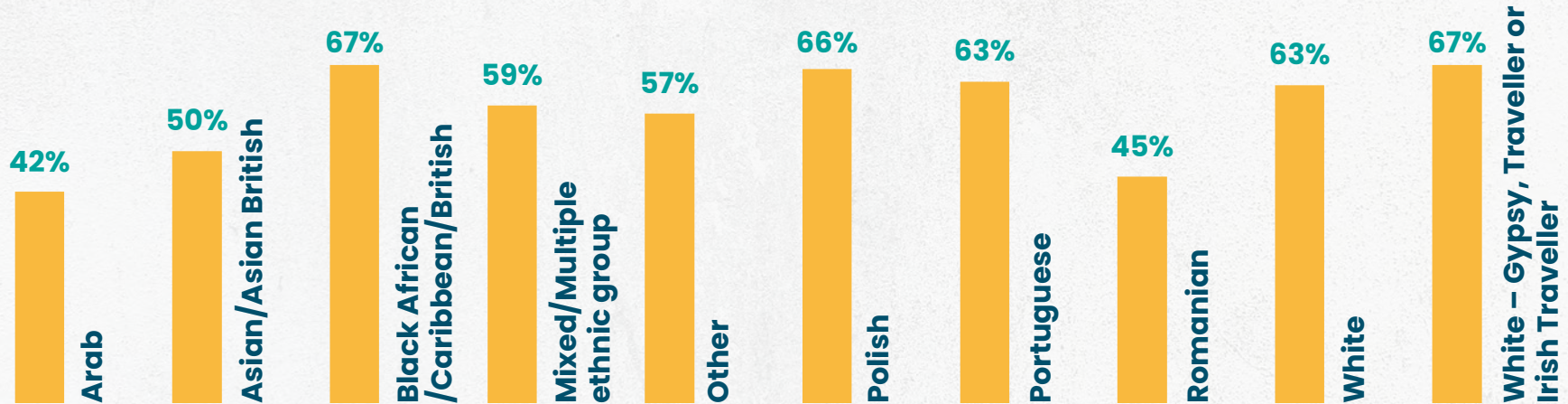
- ▶ Students with additional vulnerabilities were more likely to report low resilience than their peers.
- ▶ Those with a diagnosed mental health difficulty were at the greatest risk of low resilience. **86%** of young people with a diagnosed mental health difficulty fell within low category.

No 'vulnerabilities'



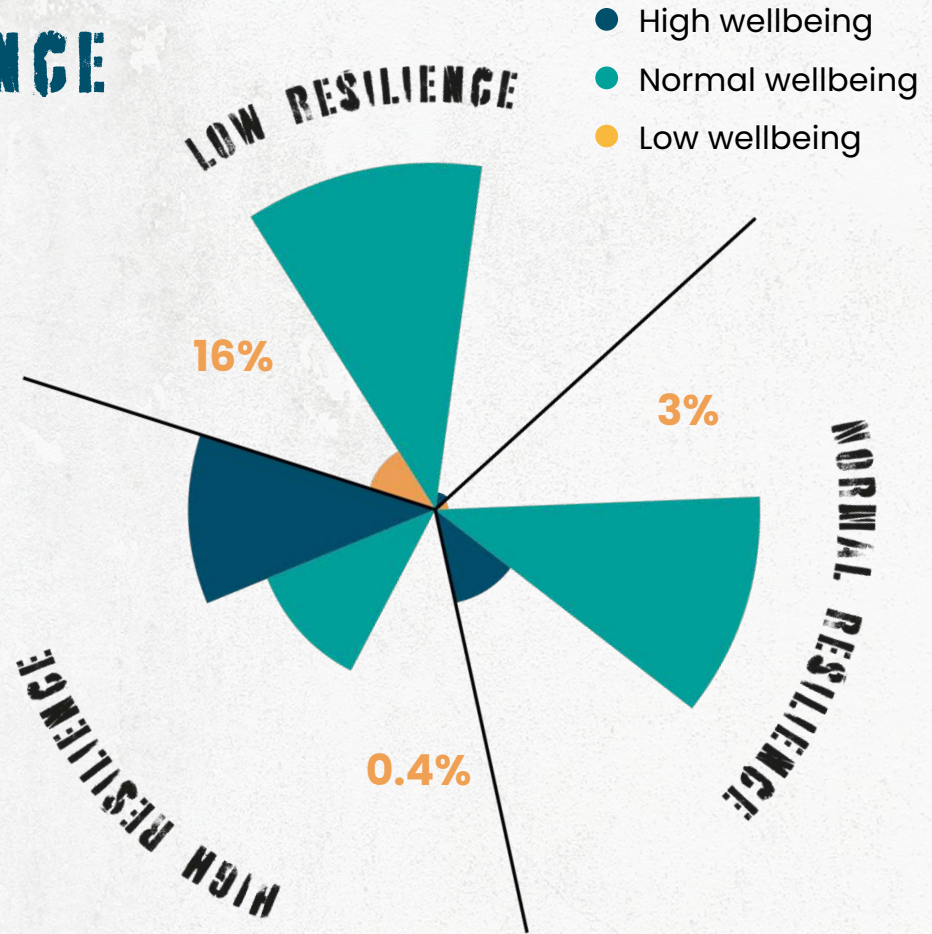
ETHNICITY AND RESILIENCE

- ▶ There were variations in resilience scores by ethnicity. However, it is important to acknowledge that sample sizes for individual groups were small. Therefore, caution is needed when considering how the results could be generalised to a wider population.
- ▶ Black/African/Caribbean/Black British students (67%), White – gypsy, traveller or Irish traveller students (67%), and Polish students (66%) reported the highest levels of 'low resilience'.



WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE

- ▶ Students with low resilience are much more likely to report low wellbeing (16% of students with low resilience reported low wellbeing compared to 3% of students with normal resilience).
- ▶ Students with high resilience were very unlikely to report low wellbeing (0.4%).
- ▶ Some groups already vulnerable to low wellbeing might benefit less from high personal resilience. For example, LGBT*Q+ students, and those with a diagnosed mental health condition, reported lower wellbeing scores regardless of resilience.
- ▶ Students who reported no 'vulnerabilities' were much more likely to report both high resilience and high wellbeing scores than their peers.



MEASURING ANXIETY

- ▶ Students were asked about their experiences of anxiety using the Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment (GAD-7) – a scale of seven statements to identify probable cases of Generalised Anxiety Disorder.
- ▶ Like SWEMWBS, the scale asks the respondents to rate the severity of their symptoms over the past two weeks. Response options include ‘not at all’, ‘several days’, ‘more than half the days’, and ‘nearly every day’.
- ▶ The possible score across the seven statements ranges from 0-21. A score of less than 5 indicates mild anxiety, 10 indicates moderate anxiety and 15 indicates severe anxiety.

IN OTHER RESEARCH...

Prince’s Trust (2021) reported a 19% increase in the percentage of young people aged 16 to 25 feeling anxious “always”, “often”, or “all the time” since 2009.

See <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/youth-index-2021>

RESPONSES TO GAD-7 INDICATED...

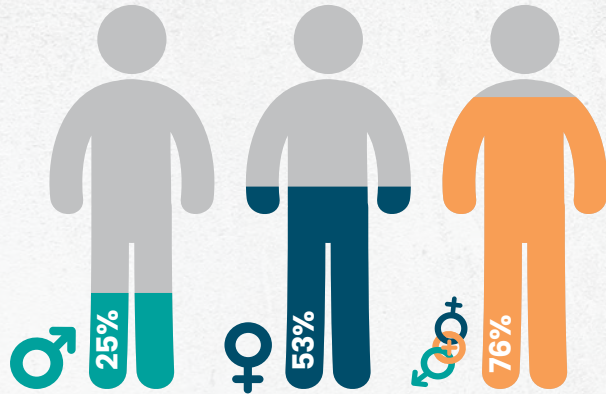
2 in **5** young people have
'moderate' to 'severe' levels of
anxiety.

NEARLY 1 in **4** young
people said anxiety made things
'extremely' or 'very' difficult for
them.



GENDER AND ANXIETY

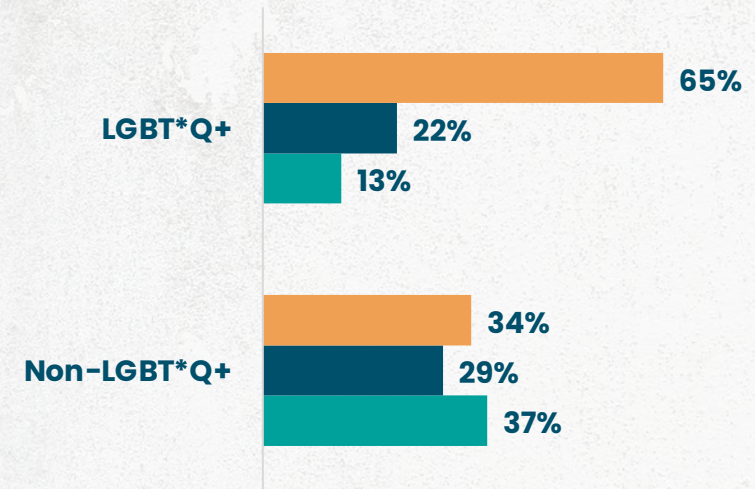
- ▶ **1 in 4 male students (25%)** indicated 'moderate' or 'severe' levels of anxiety, as well as **over half of female students (53%)**. **Young people that prefer to describe their gender in another way (76%)** were much more likely to report 'moderate' or 'severe' anxiety.



'Moderate' to 'severe' anxiety

LGBT*Q+ YOUNG PEOPLE

- ▶ **1 in 3 heterosexual students (34%)** report 'moderate' to 'severe anxiety', compared to **67%** of LGBT*Q+ young people.

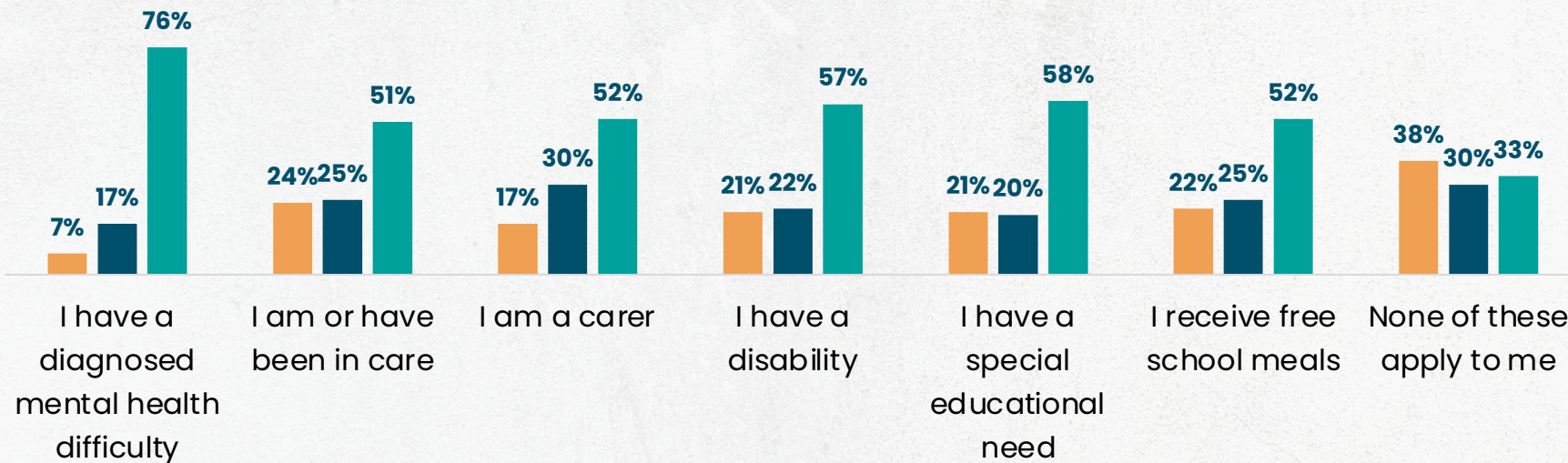


- Low anxiety
- Mild anxiety
- Moderate to severe anxiety

'VULNERABILITIES' AND ANXIETY

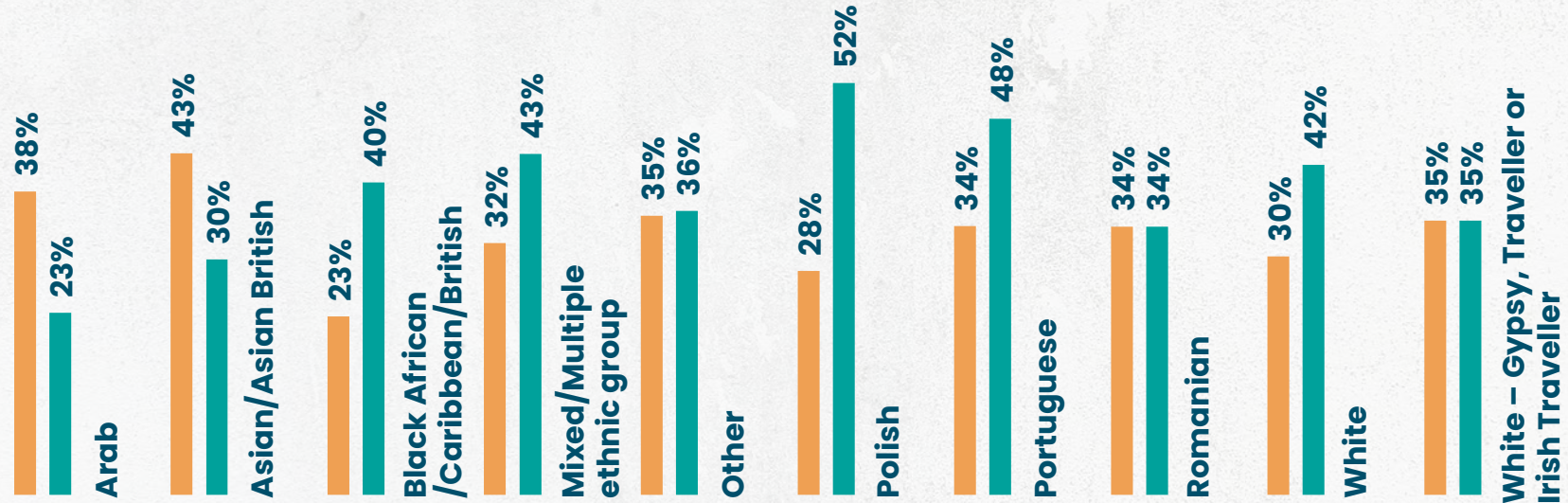
- ▶ Young people who identified with 'vulnerabilities' were more likely to report moderate to severe anxiety than individuals who did not identify having a vulnerability.
- ▶ Young people with a diagnosed mental health difficulty were most likely to have moderate to severe anxiety.

● Low anxiety ● Mild anxiety ● Moderate to severe anxiety



ETHNICITY AND ANXIETY

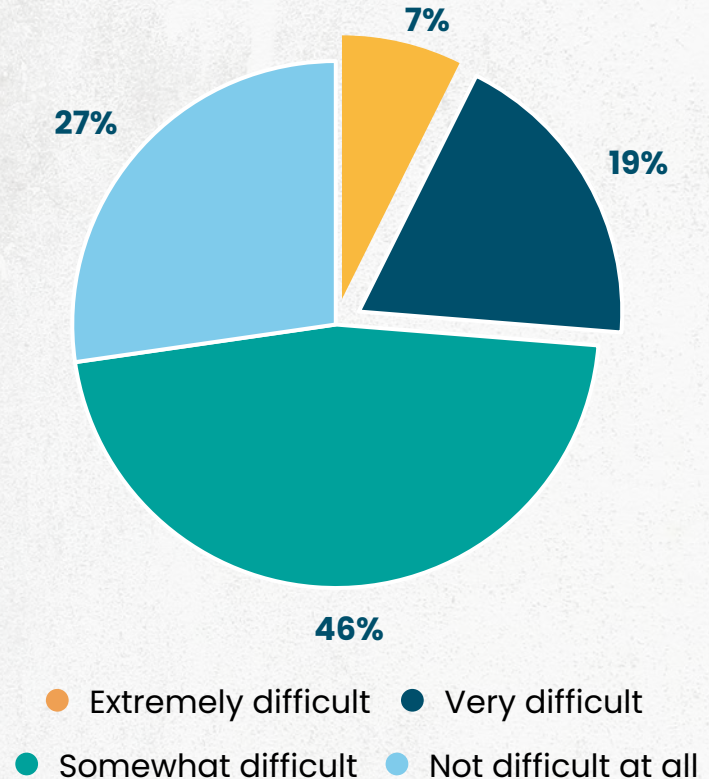
- ▶ Over **50%** of Polish young people indicated they had 'moderate' to 'severe' anxiety.
- ▶ Other ethnic groups that exhibited high levels of 'moderate' to 'severe' anxiety included Portuguese (**48%**), Mixed/Multiple ethnic group (**43%**), White (**42%**), and Black African/Caribbean/Black British (**40%**) students.




● Low anxiety ● Moderate to severe anxiety

'DIFFICULTY' OF LIVING WITH ANXIETY

- ▶ Only **27%** of young people indicated that anxiety didn't make it difficult for them at all.
- ▶ LGBT*Q+ students were considerably more likely to say that anxiety was making it extremely or very difficult for them (**46%**), compared to peers (**20%**).
- ▶ Young people with indicated 'vulnerabilities' were also considerably more likely to suggest that anxiety was making it extremely, or very difficult for them.
- ▶ **3 in 5** young people with a diagnosed mental health condition said anxiety made it extremely or very difficult for them.





“It physically stops me from doing things. I can’t leave the house sometimes, if I do then I end up going in tears.”

– Year 12

“Extremely detrimental to all areas of my life, including focusing on studying, arranging to meet friends and preparing for the future.”

– Year 13.



WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ANXIOUS – CONTEXT MATTERS

- ▶ The most common situation in which young people experienced anxiety was during tests and assignments. **14%** of students at low, or no risk of anxiety said they experienced anxiety during tests and assignments.
- ▶ **38%** of students who said exams made them anxious said anxiety made it 'extremely' or 'very' difficult for them. This was lower than for young people who said that they felt anxious in social situations (**see right**). This may reflect a perception that it is normal to experience anxiety during exams.
- ▶ A high percentage of young people who experienced anxiety during tests and assignments may also explain why over **half wanted to learn how to manage stress in school/college**. This includes **45%** of those who had low anxiety, and **55%** with moderate anxiety.



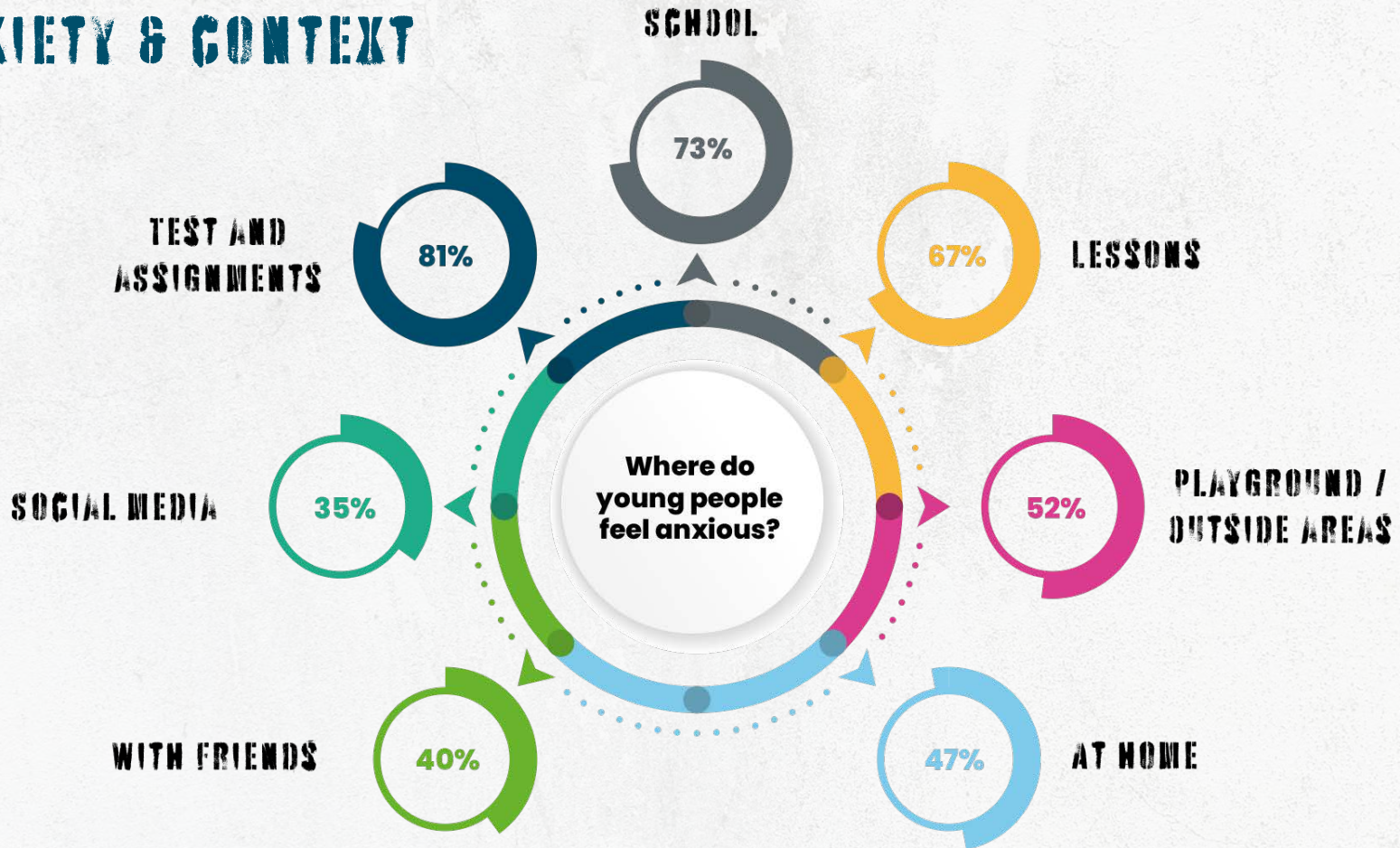
Young people tended to find anxiety most difficult within social contexts.

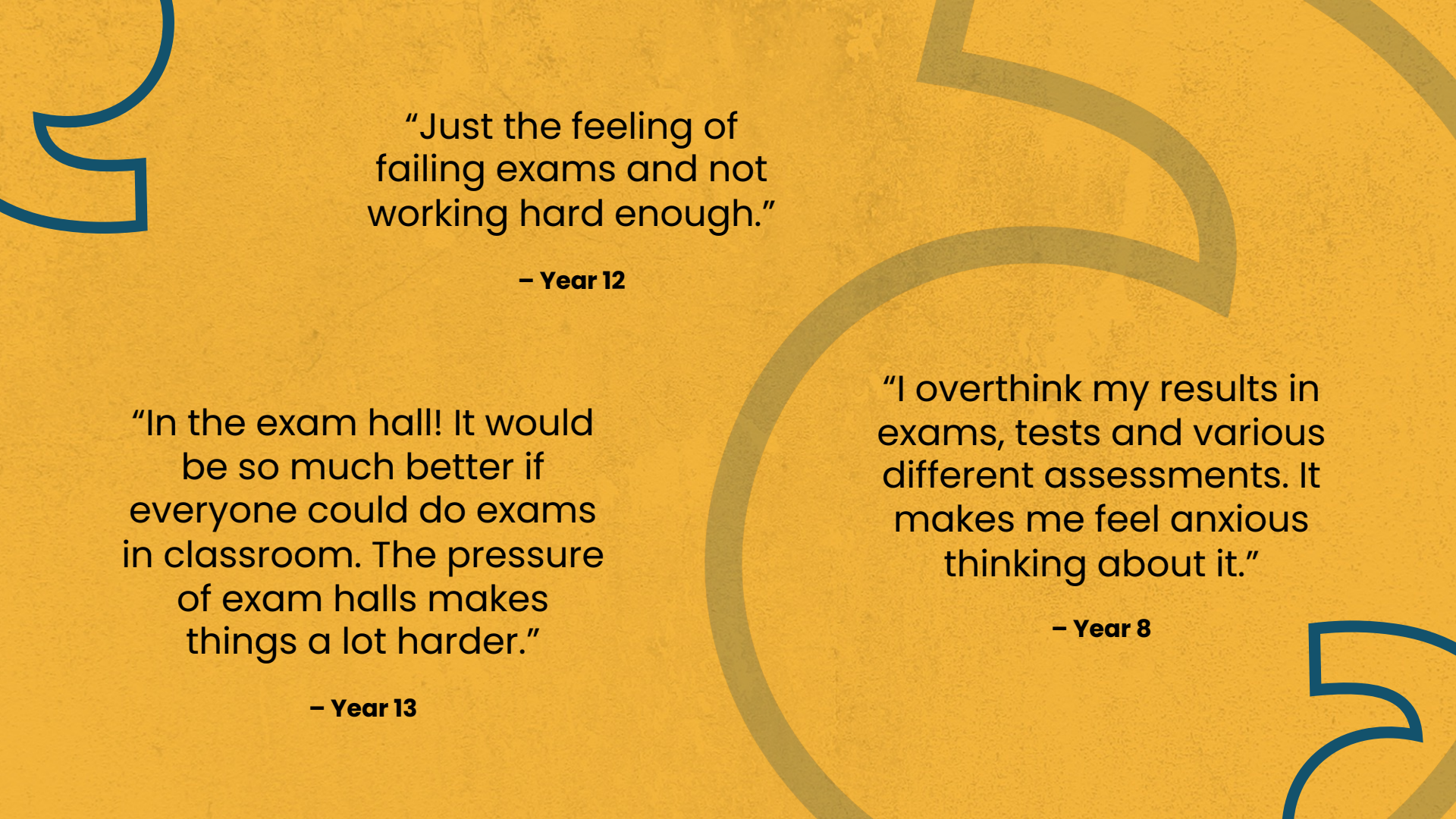
60% of young people who felt anxious with friends said their anxiety made it 'extremely' or 'very' difficult for them.

55% of those who said they felt anxious in the playground and;

54% of those who felt anxious when using social media.

ANXIETY & CONTEXT



The background is a textured yellow. On the left, there are blue abstract shapes resembling stylized brackets or arrows pointing right. On the right, there are green abstract shapes, including a large curved arrow pointing left and some blue shapes at the bottom right.

“Just the feeling of failing exams and not working hard enough.”

– Year 12

“In the exam hall! It would be so much better if everyone could do exams in classroom. The pressure of exam halls makes things a lot harder.”

– Year 13

“I overthink my results in exams, tests and various different assessments. It makes me feel anxious thinking about it.”

– Year 8

ANXIETY- OTHER CAUSES

Young people were asked what else caused them to feel anxious.

Some causes of anxiety were related to instances of bullying and harassment. The quotes below exhibit examples where young people experienced increased anxiety and fear due to concerns that they will be bullied or picked on for their ethnicity, gender identity, or how they look.

- ▶ *“Somewhat when I’m walking around in town alone and without friends. It sort of came due to COVID – in a nutshell, I don’t want to be beaten up for my ethnicity. I know it’s unlikely, but the fear is still there sometimes.” – Year 12*
- ▶ *“In areas where I could be outed as gay or nonbinary, especially when it could be fed back to my homophobic parents.” – Year 10*
- ▶ *“I usually feel the most anxious whenever I’m nearby students that I don’t know very well, as I’m typically a target for picking on or catcalling.” – Year 9*
- ▶ *“That I get bullied often for how I looked, and it hurts my feelings so badly. I also feel that people hate me for how I look.” – Year 7*

ANXIETY- CAUSES (THEMES IN QUALITATIVE RESPONSES)

Causes of anxiety	Mentions
School or college	37
Walking in public places	25
Being around family	20
Being around new people	16
Being alone	14
Crowded places	14
Confrontation	9
Safety leaving the house	9
Work	9
Going to sleep	9
Everywhere	7
Personal future	7
Clubs (e.g., sports, gym or other clubs)	5

Causes of anxiety	Mentions
Social situations	5
Going on public transport	2
Waiting for public transport	1
Being alone at night	1

ANXIETY- EFFECTS (THEMES IN QUALITATIVE RESPONSES)

Effects of anxiety	Mentions
Impact on sleep and tiredness	39
Can't concentrate	38
Lack of social contact / loneliness	38
Overthinking	34
Nauseous	30
Crying a lot	19
Eating habits	17
Panic attacks	16
Lack of motivation to get up and go	15
Shortness of breath	12
Shaking	12
Feeling angry	11
Feeling low, or drained of energy	9

Effects of anxiety	Mentions
Difficulty communicating	6
Clouded judgment	5
Feeling paranoid	3
Fainting	2

THE EFFECTS OF ANXIETY

- ▶ Anxiety has shown to have major impacts on multiple aspects of young people's lives. Some of the impacts were common among students of all ages.
- ▶ These included:

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Difficult to communicate with others, go outside & do activities they enjoyed.



TROUBLE SLEEPING

Difficult to sleep at night, struggled in the day.

EATING HABITS

Feeling too anxious to eat, feeling sick, not eating enough.



LONELINESS

Felt isolated and lonely due to lack of social interaction.



ANXIETY- IMPACT IN WORDS

This is what young people told us about their own anxiety – in their words:

- ▶ *"I don't talk that much. I actually rarely talk in lessons. Some people forget I'm even in the lesson."* – **Year 10**
- ▶ *"It makes interacting with others more challenging, as well as it causes a fear of screwing something up and losing friends."* – **Year 13**
- ▶ *"It makes me feel sick, and impacts how much I eat. My parents are really worried that I don't eat enough, and try to encourage me to eat."* – **Year 9**
- ▶ *"I used to self-harm and not eat for a long time, and that came to me having a bad relationship with food. I feel anxious to eat in front of people or generally everywhere."* – **Year 7**
- ▶ *"I find it really hard to sleep even if I feel tired, since I am thinking about bad times that could happen at any point. I mostly feel anxious in bed since I've got nothing to focus on except my mind."* – **Year 7**
- ▶ *"You feels empty, dead and just lonely."* – **Year 9.**
- ▶ *"I feel dizzy when I feel so upset and that is when my anxiety kicks in, I always feel lonely and so shy I never want that so help me."* – **Year 7**



This report has been produced to support the ongoing development and implementation of children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing support in Suffolk. It will be publicly available on the Healthwatch Suffolk website. It will also be made available to Healthwatch England, and bodies responsible for the commissioning, scrutiny or delivery of local health and care services.

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