

MY HEALTH, OUR FUTURE (PHASE SIX)

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

Published December 2022

healthwatch
Suffolk



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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 TWO

‘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 one 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 ONE

Click title to explore data on **who took part, wellbeing, resilience** and **anxiety**.

DOWNLOAD PART THREE

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

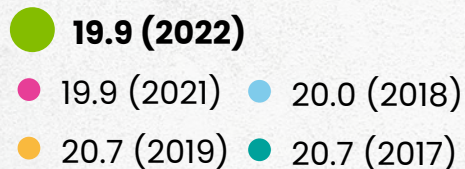
HOW WE MEASURE WELLBEING

In this report, you will see references to wellbeing categories (e.g., young people with 'low wellbeing') and average scores. These are determined using the 'Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale'.

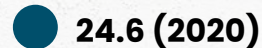
- ▶ Students responded to seven statements about their wellbeing, and received a score ranging between 7 and 35. A higher score indicates better wellbeing.
- ▶ **4,889** students responded to the WEMWBS questions this year.
- ▶ The average score for 2022 **remains the same as 2021**, and lowest of all MHoF years.
- ▶ Read our 'part one' report for more insight into young people's wellbeing in Suffolk.



Suffolk



National



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

HOW WE MEASURE RESILIENCE

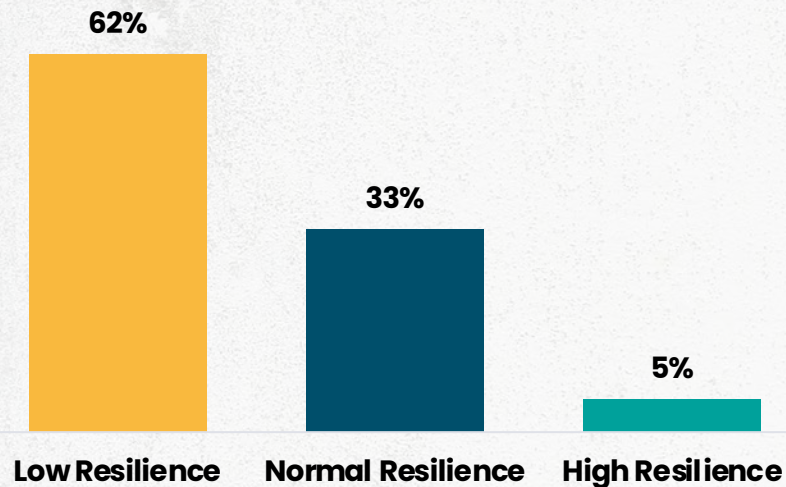
In this report, you will find references to students who have 'high', 'normal', or 'low' resilience.

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.
- ▶ For more information about the resilience of young people in Suffolk, please download our part one report.

3 IN 5 young people had low resilience.



HOW WE MEASURE ANXIETY

- ▶ In this report, you will find references to differing levels of anxiety amongst young people in Suffolk.
- ▶ Students were asked about their experiences of anxiety using the Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment (GAD-7) – a scale of seven statements to measure the severity 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>

A close-up shot of a person's hand raised in a crowd, with a golden bokeh background and falling confetti. The hand is positioned in the center-left of the frame, with fingers slightly curled. The background is filled with out-of-focus lights and the backs of people's heads, creating a sense of a large gathering or event.

OUR RESULTS

PART 2



“There needs to be support there at any time, whether you are in a crisis or not.”

- College

SELF-REPORTED MENTAL HEALTH

We asked students about their mental health at particular times of the year. Their responses offer an insight into young people's self-assessed state of mental health this academic year and currently.

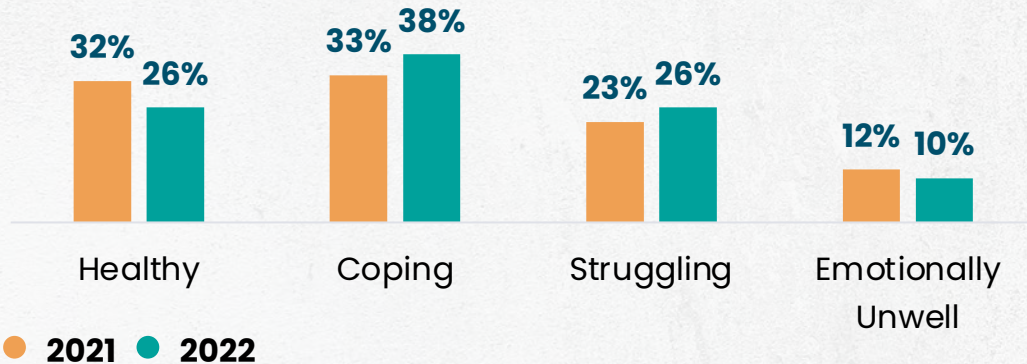
Students were presented with a graphic (see right) that asked them to assess their mental health against four possible categories. They were 'healthy', 'coping', 'struggling' and 'emotionally unwell'.

4,462 students responded to these questions.

Emotionally unwell ★	Struggling ★★	Coping ★★★	Healthy ★★★★
My mental health is impacting on daily functioning	My mental health regularly impacts on daily functioning	My mental health has minimal impact on daily functioning	My mental health has no impact on daily functioning
I am very anxious or depressed	I get angry and anxious	I have good and bad days emotionally	I have normal mood changes
I am extremely stressed	I am highly stressed or emotional	I am sometimes stressed but coping	I am not stressed
I am socially withdrawn	I avoid social activity	I do not feel like being social	I am socially active
My sleep is very poor	I regularly do not get enough sleep	I get enough sleep some of the time	I have normal sleep patterns
I have professional support for my mental health	Sometimes I need support for mental health from school	I get advice from friends or family when I feel low	I usually do not need support for my mental health
I experience panic attacks, hopelessness & struggle at school	I sometimes struggle at school and have low mood	I cope at school, but sometimes I have bad days	I always cope with school demands and workload

SELF-REPORTED MENTAL HEALTH - 2021 TO 2022

- ▶ There has been a drop in the number of young people who said they currently feel 'healthy', from **32%** (2021) to **26%** (2022). The number of young people who currently feel 'emotionally unwell' has also dropped since last year.
- ▶ Instead, more students suggested they are currently 'coping' (**5%** increase) or 'struggling' (**3%** increase) with their mental health since 2021.

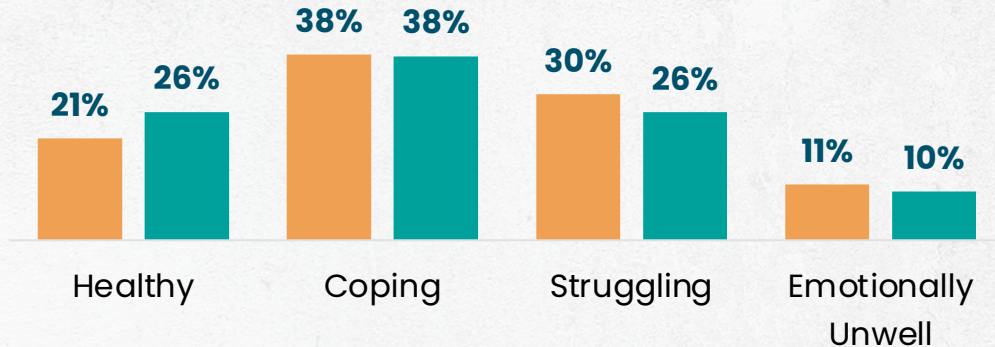


IN OTHER RESEARCH...

In 2022, NHS Digital reported a record number of more than 400,000 children a month being treated for mental health problems.

Prior to this, in 2021, the Prince's Trust reported that one in four 16-to 25-year-olds admit they feel unable to cope with life.

- ▶ The chart below shows the difference between how young people perceived their mental health during the academic year, and when they were completing the survey.
- ▶ The number of young people who said they felt 'healthy' increased, and fewer young people were 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell' at the time they completed the survey. However, more than **1 in 3 (2,124)** were 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell'.



● This academic year ● When completing survey

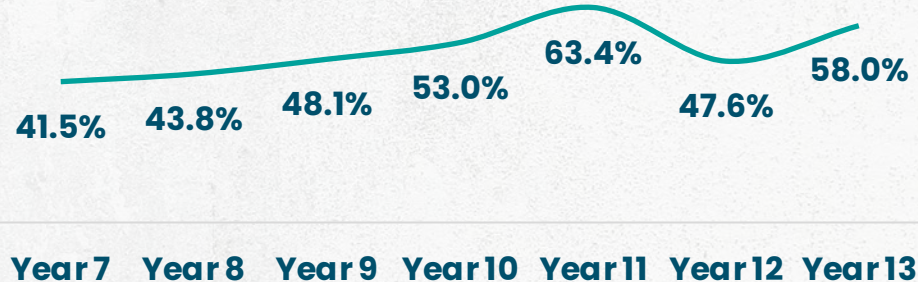
MORE NOTABLE FINDINGS:

- ▶ Young female students were twice as likely to say they were currently 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell' (**61%**), compared to male peers (**31%**). However, those who would prefer to describe their gender in another way were much more likely to report this (**86%**).
- ▶ LGBT*Q+ young people were also amongst the most likely to say they were 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell' (**76%**) at the time of the survey, compared to peers (**41%**).
- ▶ These findings are consistent with previous years of MHoF.

SELF-REPORTED MENTAL HEALTH – OTHER FACTORS

- ▶ Students with 'vulnerabilities' were much more likely to say they were 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell' compared to those with no 'vulnerabilities'.
- ▶ Young people with a diagnosed mental health difficulty were the most likely to report that they were 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell' (**83%**).
- ▶ Young people from Black/African/Caribbean/Black British communities were the most likely to say they were currently 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell' (**60%**). This compared to **50%** of those who described their ethnicity as white.

There was a weak positive relationship between year group and increased likelihood of students feeling that they were 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell'. These findings are similar to the 2021 survey, where 31% of Year 7 students said they were 'struggling' or 'unwell' compared to 38% of year 11 students.



Note: results for Year 11 may be influenced by small sample size.

SELF-REPORTED MENTAL HEALTH, RESILIENCE AND ANXIETY

- ▶ Young people that reported they were currently 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell' were more likely to report low wellbeing, low resilience, and moderate/severe anxiety compared to peers who reported they weren't struggling.

EXPLORE MORE INSIGHTS

This report is part of a series.



For more information about how young people responded about their **wellbeing**, **resilience** and **anxiety** in the phase six survey, please click here to download our part one report.



SELF-HARM

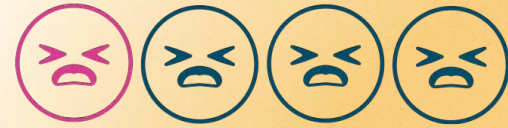
- ▶ Young people were asked whether they had ever self-harmed, and whether they currently self-harm. The following definition was included in the survey:

“Self-harm is when someone hurts their body on purpose. They might do this by cutting or burning their skin, punching or hitting things, poisoning themselves with tablets or other dangerous substances, using drugs and alcohol too much, not eating enough or eating too much.”

- ▶ **4,889** students answered these questions

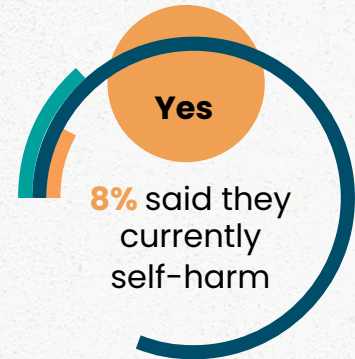
IN OTHER RESEARCH...

In 2021, the Prince’s Trust found 10% of young people (16-25) had self-harmed since the COVID pandemic started. In 2020/21, Childline said 5% of its counselling sessions with young people had related to self-harm.

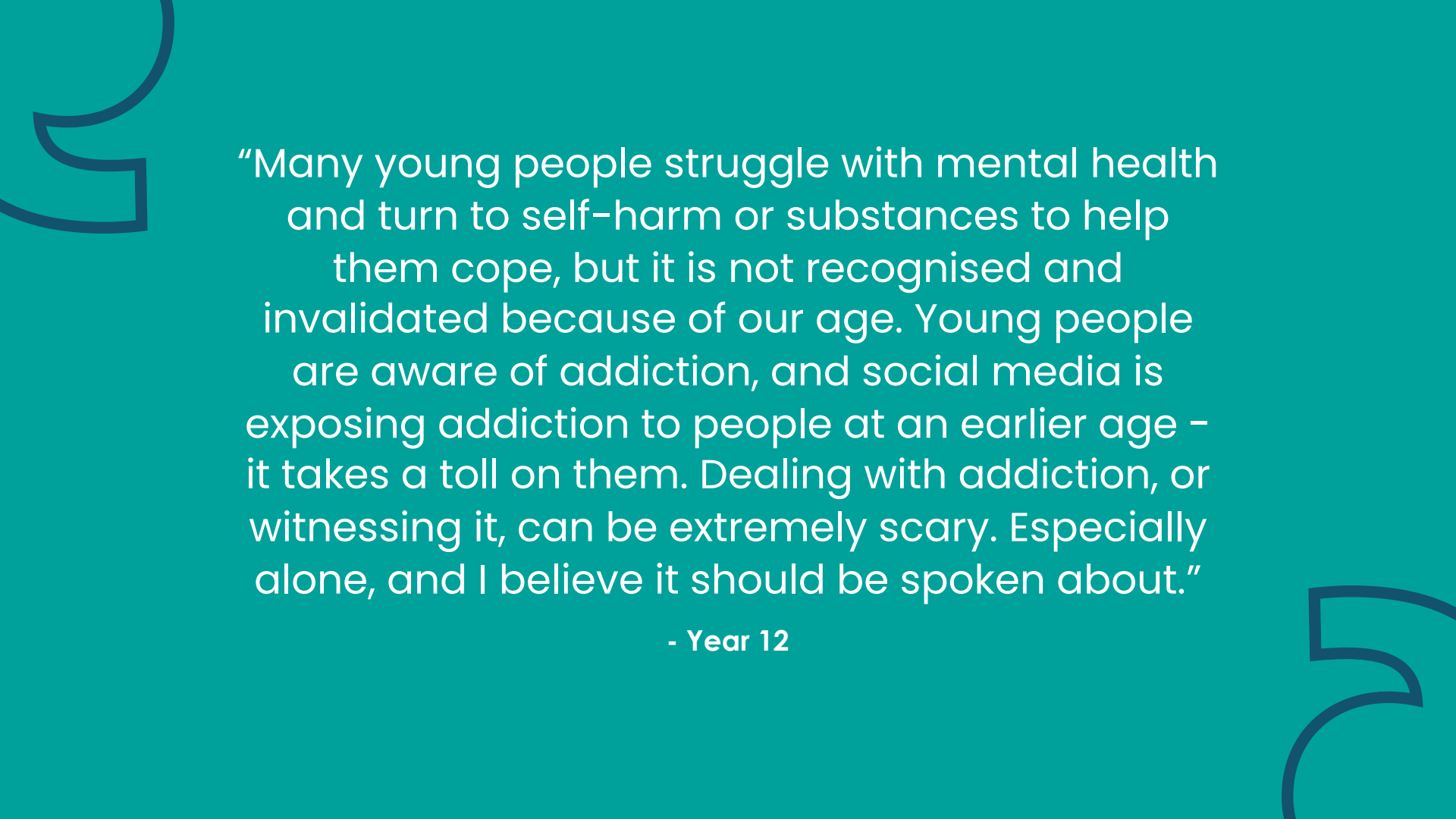


A QUARTER OF young people said they have self-harmed. **13%** preferred not to say.

DO YOU CURRENTLY SELF-HARM?



- **No (81%)**
- **Preferred not to say (12%)**

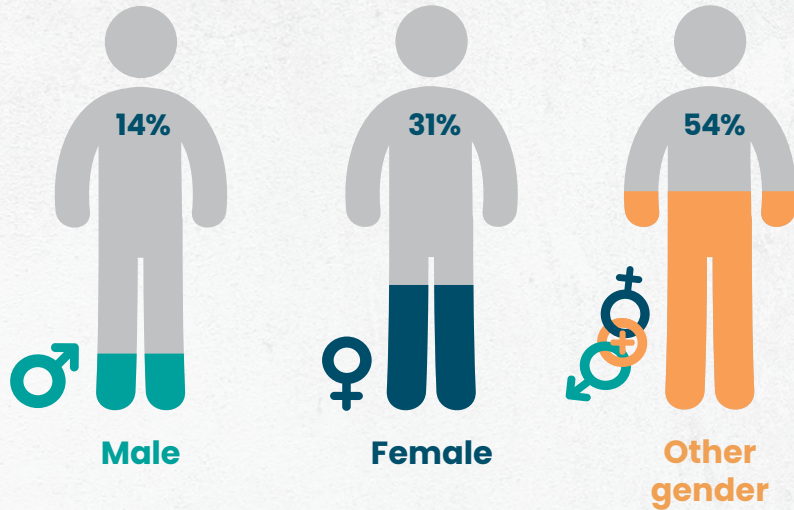


“Many young people struggle with mental health and turn to self-harm or substances to help them cope, but it is not recognised and invalidated because of our age. Young people are aware of addiction, and social media is exposing addiction to people at an earlier age – it takes a toll on them. Dealing with addiction, or witnessing it, can be extremely scary. Especially alone, and I believe it should be spoken about.”

- Year 12

SELF-HARM & GENDER

- ▶ There are clear gender differences related to self-harm. Those who preferred to describe their gender in another way were the most likely to be vulnerable to self-harm. **61% (108)** have experienced self-harm before, compared to **31% (704)** of female, and **14% (285)** of male students.



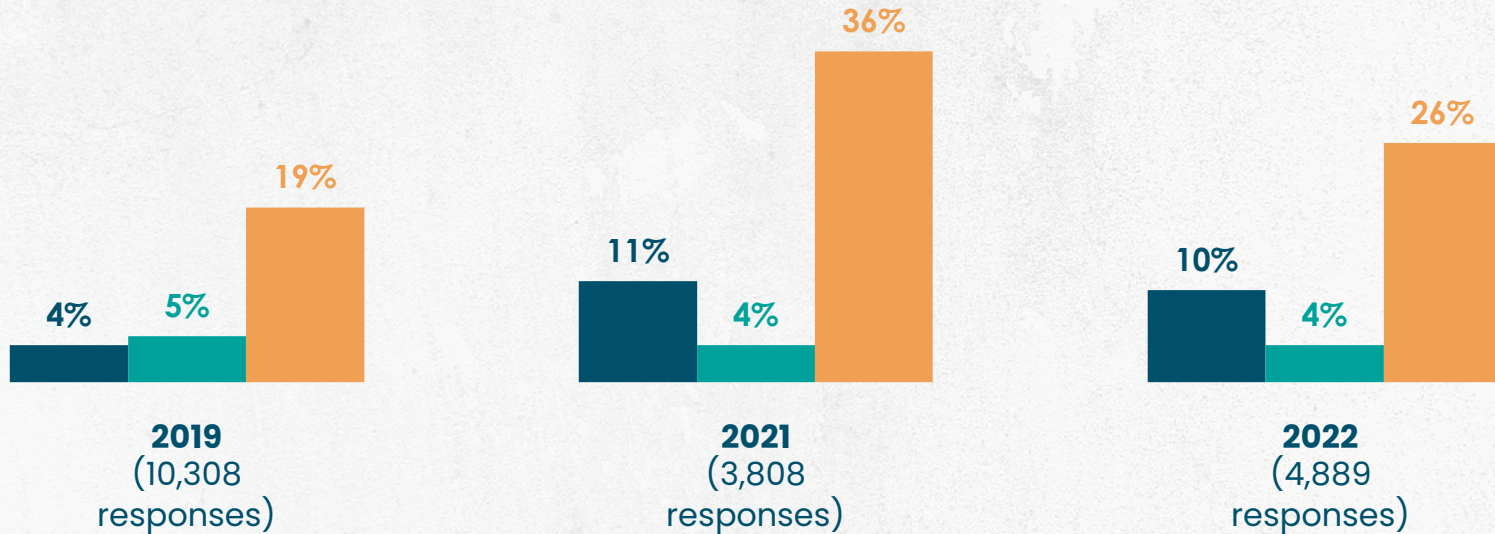
LGBT*Q+ YOUNG PEOPLE



- ▶ **1 in 5 (20%)** LGBT*Q+ students said they currently self-harm, compared to **4%** of their straight and cisgender peers. This means they reported five times the rate of self-harm.
- ▶ Of **335** students who said they currently self-harm, **202** identified as LGBT*Q+, and **133** were straight.

CURRENT SELF-HARM – 2019 TO 2022

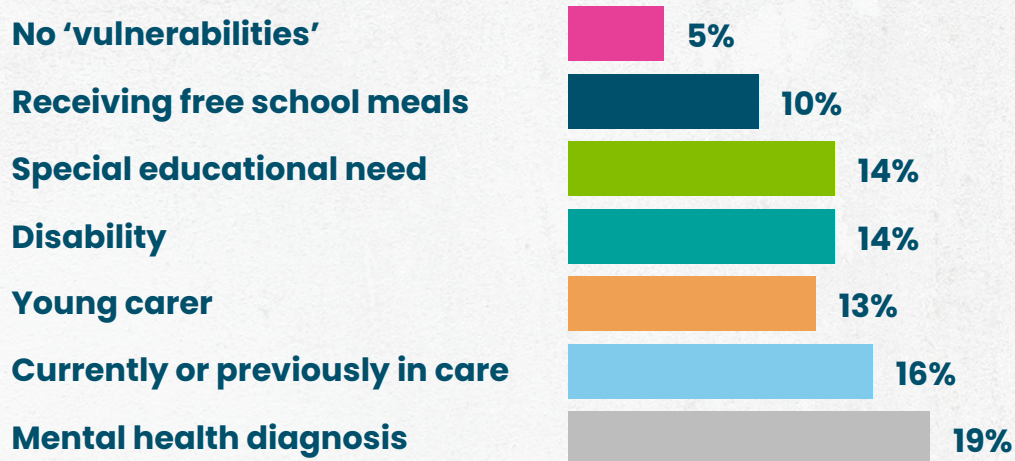
- ▶ Rates of reported current self-harm have slightly decreased (by 1%) in Suffolk since the 2021 MHoF survey.
- ▶ Rates of current self harm by students who are female or who prefer to describe their gender in another way have almost doubled since 2019.



● Male ● Female ● Described gender in another way

SELF-HARM & 'VULNERABILITIES'

- ▶ Across all categories, students with a 'vulnerability' were more likely to report current self-harm than their peers. In particular, young people with a diagnosed mental health difficulty were most likely to report this (19%).



SELF-HARM & ETHNICITY

- ▶ Analysing the data by reported ethnicity revealed that the highest rates of self-harm were reported by Arab students (17% of 12 students), Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (13% of 53 students), Polish (12% of 86).
- ▶ 8% of 3634 White – English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British students reported current self-harm.



95%

of young people who currently self-harm reported that they are currently 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell'. This compared to **40%** of young people who do not currently self-harm.

SELF-HARM, RESILIENCE AND ANXIETY SCORES

- ▶ Young people who reported current self-harm had significantly lower wellbeing scores than students that did not self-harm.
- ▶ **44%** of those who currently self-harm had low wellbeing, compared to **6%** of those who do not self-harm. Download our part one report for more data about wellbeing.



- Currently self-harms **(15.7)**
- Does not self-harm **(20.8)**
- Preferred not to say **(17.3)**

Young people who currently self-harm are at increased risk of experiencing low resilience and moderate to severe anxiety levels.

- **91%** of young people who currently self-harm reported low resilience compared to **55%** of young people who don't self-harm.
- **84%** of young people who currently self-harm reported moderate/severe anxiety levels compared to **32%** of young people who don't self-harm.

SUPPORT FOR SELF-HARM

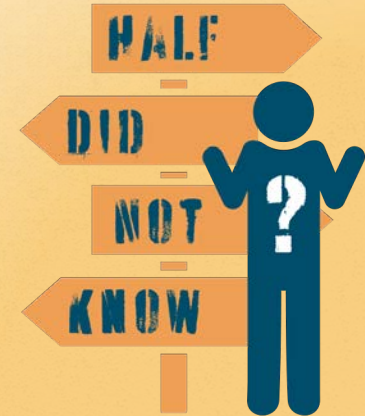
Young people who currently self-harm were asked whether they knew where to go for support. The question included signposting to local sources of help.

- ▶ Of the students who said they currently self-harm, female students (**53%**) were more likely than male students (**49%**) to say they knew where to go for support.
- ▶ Those who preferred to describe their gender in another way were most at risk of self-harm, but they were also less likely to know where to go for support to stop (**47%**).
- ▶ LGBT*Q+ students (**55%**) who currently self-harm were slightly more likely than straight students (**48%**) to say they knew where to go for support to stop self harming.

HALF (163)

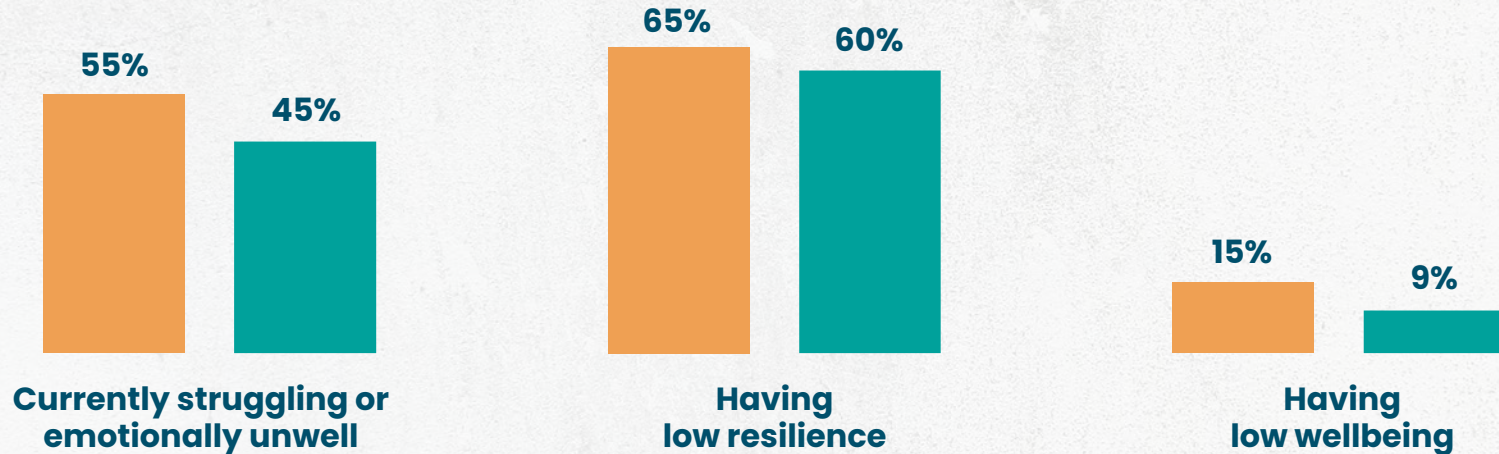
of the young people who reported current self-harm did not know where to find help to stop.

This finding is consistent with the 2021 MHoF survey.



KNOWING WHERE TO GO FOR HELP – INFLUENCE ON OTHER ASPECTS OF WELLBEING

Knowing where to seek support with stopping self-harm appears to have a positive influence on other aspects of wellbeing.



SELF-HARM – WHAT HELPED?

Students who previously self-harmed, but no longer do, were asked what had helped them to stop. Responses identified various coping strategies used by young people. Some unhealthy strategies were used by young people (like binge eating, and drugs). This shows the importance of young people knowing where to seek support with stopping self-harm.

What helped?	Mentions
Talking to someone	35
Other activities (e.g., gaming or music)	30
Seeking professional help	26
Fear of others seeing, or guilt	26
Being with friends	22
Learning coping strategies	16
Animal therapy	10
Accepting gender or sexual identity	7
The Butterfly Project	6
Building confidence	6
Managing stress	6

What helped?	Mentions
Creating distractions	6
Cannabis or other drug taking	6
The Sober Count application	5
School sports	6
Binge eating	5
Stress toys	4
Thinking of the future	4
Healthier eating habits	4
Medication	3
Inpatient treatment	3
Journaling	2



“Drawing butterflies where I want to cut. **The butterfly was like a pet that I didn't want to harm.** If I cut, then the butterfly died. By keeping the butterfly alive it stopped me from self-harming.”

- Year 11

THE BUTTERFLY PROJECT...

A common strategy some students suggested they had used to stop self-harm was the Butterfly Project. The Butterfly Project was created for self-harmers who feel they are ready to stop and need the motivation and support to do so.

<https://www.elysiumhealthcare.co.uk/butterflyproject/>

BULLYING

- ▶ Young people were asked whether they had experienced bullying. The types of behaviours that would be considered bullying were also explained to students.
- ▶ **4,473** students answered these questions.



16% (691) had been bullied online - up 6% since 2021.



28% (1,239) had been bullied in school - up 10% since 2021.



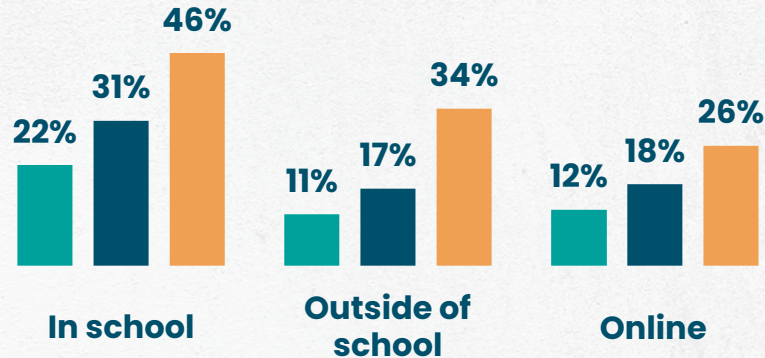
15% (662) had been bullied outside of school (new for 2022).



30% experienced bullying of any type.

BULLYING AND GENDER

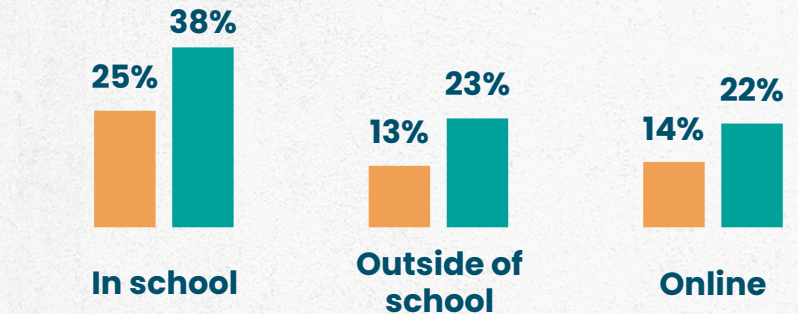
- ▶ **Half** of those who preferred to describe their gender in another way experienced bullying.
- ▶ **1 in 3** female students, and **1 in 4** male students, have experienced a form of bullying.
- ▶ Students who preferred to describe their gender in another way were the most likely to experience bullying in all locations. The results are consistent across multiple years of MHoF.



● Male ● Female ● Other gender

LGBT*Q+ YOUNG PEOPLE

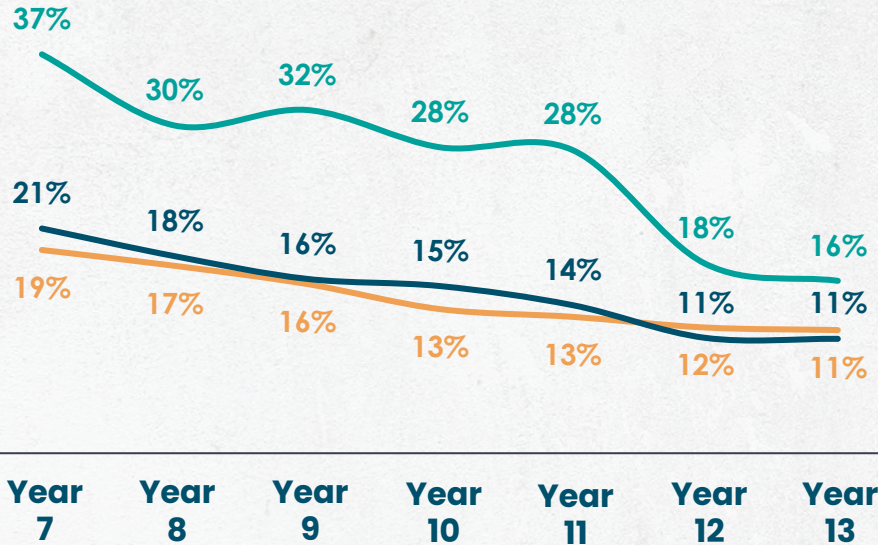
- ▶ **2 in 5** LGBT*Q+ students have experienced a form of bullying.
- ▶ **1 in 4** straight students have experienced a form of bullying.
- ▶ Most young people experienced bullying at school. As seen, LGBT*Q+ students are most at risk of bullying at school. They are also twice as likely to experience bullying outside school.



● LGBT*Q+ ● Straight

BULLYING & SCHOOL YEAR

- ▶ The proportion of students recording that they had been bullied at school, online, or outside school fell with age.



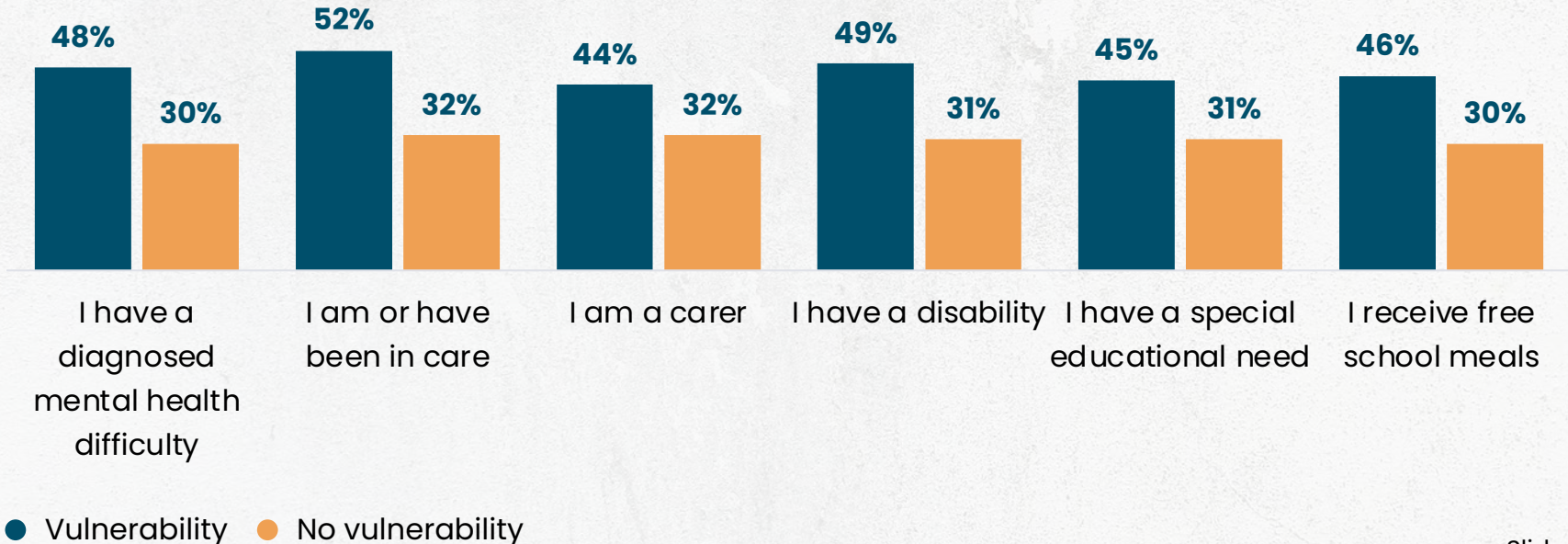
● In school ● Online ● Outside of school

BULLYING & ETHNICITY

- ▶ **62%** of young people that described their ethnic background as Arab have experienced a form of bullying. This was followed by **38%** of white – Gypsy or Irish Traveller.
- ▶ **30%** of young people that described their ethnic background as white have experienced a form of bullying.

BULLYING & 'VULNERABILITIES'

- ▶ Young people with additional support needs were significantly more likely to experience bullying.
- ▶ In particular, **52%** of young people who said they are or have been in care reported they had experienced a form of bullying.





“I think the root to reducing bullying is lessening ignorance and increasing compassion in young people. **A lot of kids grow up not understanding people’s differences and instead see them as ‘other’,** which can cause bullying.”

- Year 12

“There **needs to be more awareness and consequences for homophobic, xenophobic, ableist, racist, and sexist jokes that circulate our classrooms daily.** Many teachers don’t punish or recognise these horrible comments.”

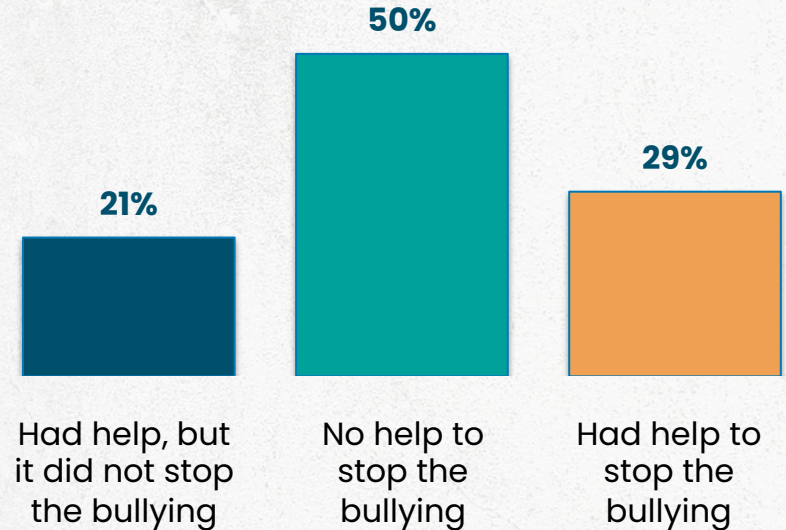
- Year 8



BULLYING SUPPORT

Students who had been bullied at school, outside of school, or online were asked whether they had received any help and support with the bullying.

- ▶ **3,001** students gave a response.
- ▶ **70%** of students bullied at school said they received help, but not enough to stop the bullying. Almost **2 in 5** students bullied outside of school, or online, received help but not enough to stop the bullying.
- ▶ Female students were most likely to say they received help and support for bullying.
- ▶ Male students, and those who preferred to describe their gender in another way, were more likely to say they did not receive any help or support.





“We need to emphasise the importance of being able to ask friends and family for support. There are many services and professionals available, which I’m sure are amazing, but **I personally feel more comfortable speaking to people close to me. I feel it’s an option that is often glossed over when talking about mental health.** Perhaps reassure young people that most people can relate to going through a hard time and may be able to talk about what helped them.”

– Year 12



THE IMPACT OF BULLYING


- ▶ The graphic below shows the difference in the wellbeing scores of those who said they have been bullied anywhere, and those who had not.



● Bullied (18.5) ● Not bullied (20.6)

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN BULLIED WERE:

- ▶ **Twice** as likely to have low wellbeing than those who had not (**18% vs. 7%**).
- ▶ **Almost twice** as likely to experience moderate to severe anxiety levels (58% vs. 32%).
- ▶ **More likely** to have low resilience (**75% vs. 55%**).
- ▶ **Much more likely** to say they were currently 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell', compared to those who had not been bullied (67% vs. 40%).



Students who had been
bullied were almost...

THREE TIMES

as likely to currently self-harm
than students who hadn't
been bullied.



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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