

Teenage suicide rate soared last year

Figures have revealed a record increase in the number of 15 to 19 year olds taking their lives. Some 215 children in that age group killed themselves last year - the highest number since 1988, according to the Office for National Statistics. Charity YoungMinds said the total was 35% up on 2020. Meanwhile, the number of young people referred to child and adolescent mental health services is at a record high. NHS figures reveal a 23% rise in the number of under-18s needing treatment compared with the same point last year. YoungMinds said: "Services can't cope with demand, leaving schools and communities to plug the gaps. We are witnessing a crisis in young people's mental health and we need urgent action." The Samaritans added: "Young people bore the brunt of pandemic restrictions and have also been more affected by insecurities in the job market and the economic impact of the pandemic."

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MPs demand social media legal duty to tackle county lines gangs

MPs Lyn Brown and Sir Stephen Timms have produced a new "prospectus" for protecting children from involvement in county lines crime. Its demands include placing a legal duty on social media firms to police evidence of their platforms being used by county lines drug gangs to groom youngsters. The MPs also want new controls placed on sales of mobile phones to prevent the gangs covering their tracks by using untraceable devices. The prospectus arose from a Solving Youth Violence conference bringing together children's services, police, charities, and academics to seek a response to the county lines phenomenon. It also backs greater financial support for public services, schools and local authorities to fulfil their duties to protect children.

The Independent UK

Almost half of teens are sent unwanted sexual images online

Almost half of 16-year-olds have been sent unwanted sexually explicit pictures, photos or videos online, according to a new study. However, just under a fifth of boys regard posting a joke or nasty comments of a sexual nature on social media as "sometimes acceptable". This is according to responses from a sample of over 1,000 16-year-olds. It is part of research contributing to the first Stormont strategy on ending violence against women and girls. More than nine in 10 said they had experienced at least one of 18 named "violent acts and behaviours". The research also suggests that LGBT young people were more likely to face things like unwanted comments about their physical appearance or verbal threats or abuse. Those with disabilities were more likely to have experienced "coercive control" - belittling or controlling behaviour by a partner or family member.

BBC News

Nearly one in five girls do not feel safe at school

A new survey reveals 19% of girls and young women said they did not feel safe in school, with girls and young women of colour less likely to feel safe at school than their white counterparts (65% compared with 70%). The survey by the Girlguiding charity also revealed stark regional differences, with 22% of girls and young women in the north aged 11 to 16 blaming fear of sexual harassment for holding them back at school. The figure was 16% in London and the south. Similarly, 26% in the north of England said gender stereotyping was holding them back at school, compared with 18% in London and the south. The problem was particularly acute among LGBTQ+ girls and young women, with 37% complaining about gender stereotyping at school. Girlguiding's chief executive, Angela Salt, said: "It is shocking how many girls and young women, some as young as 11 years old, don't feel safe at school, on social media or out in public. Our research shows just how common discrimination, stereotyping and sexism is in our society and how unsurprisingly this creates barriers to happiness, confidence, and success."

The Guardian

NHS tightens controls on under 18s transgender treatment

NHS England has revealed details of its plans to tighten controls on the treatment of under 18s questioning their gender, including a ban on prescribing puberty blockers outside of strict clinical trials. The services, which will replace the controversial Tavistock clinic, will be led by medical doctors rather than therapists and will consider the impact of other conditions such as autism and mental health issues. The plans, which are currently under public consultation, are for an interim service for young people with gender dysphoria whilst Dr Hilary Cass continues her review into the treatment offered by the NHS. NHS England says that the interim Cass Report has advised that even social transition, such as changing a young person's name and pronouns or the way that they dress, is not a "neutral act" that could have "significant effects" in terms of "psychological functioning".

The Daily Telegraph

Child sexual exploitation cases surge after pandemic

A 33% rise in child sexual exploitation cases flagged by police over the past three years has been revealed. Police forces identified 17,486 crimes of child exploitation between 2021/2022 – an average of 48 offences a day. This was up a third in 2019/2020 when there were 13,133 child exploitation crimes logged by police. The data, covering England and Wales and based on Office of National Statistics figures, also showed this year's figure is 10% higher than last. NSPCC's Childline says its own counselling sessions on sexual abuse and exploitation also increased from 5,962 in 2021 to 6,230 in 2022. An NSPCC spokeswoman said the new figures represented only "the tip of an iceberg" as most cases are unreported.

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Primary school children running drugs for gangs

Primary school-aged children running drugs for gangs has "become the norm" while young teenagers are heading up county lines operations, the former children's commissioner has warned. Anne Longfield, who heads the Commission on Young Lives, urged the Government to treat the exploitation of children as seriously as terrorism by chairing regular Cobra meetings to tackle "the scourge of serious violence". The commission's new report warns of a crisis of hundreds of thousands of children being "groomed, harmed and even killed because the systems that are supposed to keep them safe are not fit for purpose". Ms Longfield said two trends had emerged in the past two years - younger children being targeted as well as children from middle-class backgrounds from "leafy suburbs", with social media used to lure them in.

The Daily Telegraph The Independent UK The Times