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State of the nation 2022: children and young people's wellbeing

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Executive Summary

Children and young people's wellbeing

The wellbeing of children and young people has been a focus of Government policy for a number of years. The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has further emphasised the importance of supporting our children and young people's wellbeing, which is why it remains a central part of the Department for Education's plans for recovery. This report, the fourth State of the Nation, focuses on trends in mental health and wellbeing over the 2021/22 academic year, when a range of recovery-focused activity was in place across Government, which included the Department for Education's education recovery programme.

Over the past year, schools and colleges have returned to full-time face-to-face teaching and formal examinations have resumed, supported by the Department for Education's education recovery programme. As the focus has shifted beyond the immediate impacts of COVID-19 towards recovery and the future, a range of national and global issues have emerged or come into focus. These include war in Ukraine, the increasing cost of living, concerns over the environment and climate change, and wider social issues.

The report brings together a range of published information from government, academic, voluntary, and private sector organisations to provide a clear narrative for all those interested in the wellbeing of children and young people in England. It provides a shared evidence base for everyone - in government, services, schools & colleges, parents & families, communities, and employers - to reflect upon and deliver better wellbeing outcomes for all children and young people.

This report follows the structure of the Office for National Statistics' domains of wellbeing for children and young people¹. While we do not include separate chapters for 'where we live' and 'personal finance', we report on measures related to each of these domains throughout the report as well as indirectly dealing with issues related to them by presenting trends by subgroups where data exists, including by economic disadvantage. We also provide data on children and young people's views about wider society and the future with a separate chapter focused on children and young people's concerns about self, society, and the future.

¹See: [Children's Well-being measures](#) and [Young people's well-being measures. Current set of ONS children's wellbeing domains: Personal wellbeing, Health, Our relationships, Education and skills, What we do, Where we live, Personal finance.](#)

This report is about children and young people aged 5- to 24-years old in England, though some of the indicators, for pragmatic reasons, relate to children and young people across Great Britain or the United Kingdom. In general, data reported is of two types – longer term trend data, with data pre-pandemic and continuing into the 2021/22 academic year, or more frequent data collections since the start of the pandemic, providing data for the 2021/22 academic year.

This is not an exhaustive review of all available information about children and young people's wellbeing during this period. Findings are based on the indicators selected to represent the different areas of children and young people's lives. Much of the available data are about children and young people on average and as a whole, which may overlook the experiences of subgroups and those outside the average. Where possible, we include the experiences of different groups of children and young people, in particular by age, gender, economic disadvantage, special educational needs and/or disability (SEN/D), and ethnicity. Further, we seek to present the variation that exists in the data, such as the percentage of those with particularly poor outcomes. There are further quantitative data sources and qualitative evidence which can also provide very useful insights into the experiences of children and young people across the pandemic².

Much of the evidence presented here has already informed the department's approach to supporting children, young people and their families, as well as teachers, schools and colleges. It will, alongside other evidence, continue to be used in developing this support further.

Data sources, methods, and limitations

This report draws on published information from a range of government, academic, voluntary, and private sector organisations. Key sources of data in this report include:

- Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel (PPLP) - Department for Education (DfE)
- National Behaviour Survey (NBS) – DfE³
- Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP) - NHS Digital
- The Good Childhood Report (GCR) - The Children's Society

² See, for example: [NFER's Children and young people's wellbeing and mental health during the Covid -19 pandemic](#) report.

³ Note: Data collection for the National Behaviour Survey (NBS) was delivered through the DfE's omnibus surveys. In this report the June 2022 data point is taken from the dedicated NBS wave of the PPLP. At the time of this publication, the final report for NBS, including this June data, is forthcoming. For more information, please see '[Annex A – Data sources and methods](#)'

- People and Nature Survey - Natural England
- Active Lives Survey – Sport England

The methodologies underpinning the findings are varied, including robust, randomly sampled, cohorts and weighted representative online panels. Data sources include annual snapshot surveys, as well as more regular panel surveys with the same sample throughout 2021/22. While sources have been selected to provide the most robust assessment available, there are clear limitations in what can be concluded about children and young people's experiences and wellbeing during the 21/22 academic year. It is also worth noting that the data presented here are correlational only, meaning they cannot determine casual relationships. Future analysis on data collected in this time and following the progress of children and young people in years to come, particularly those that include a pre-pandemic baseline, will strengthen the evidence.

Because of the different methodologies of the various data sources included within this report, there are limitations that should be considered when drawing conclusions from the data presented. Not all data sources employed random probability samples which can reduce generalisability to the general population. Significance testing across sources was inconsistently applied. Where significance testing was not applied, caution should be exercised when assessing whether reported differences represent meaningful population differences⁴. Analysis and reporting of subgroups was inconsistent. This limits our ability to draw robust conclusions about the experiences of some subgroups and our ability to detect differences that may exist in the population. Some sources report by gender, others by sex. We have matched our terminology to that used in the source data.

The 'Introduction and methods' section gives more information on how the indicators and measures included in this report were selected. See 'Annex A - Data sources and methods' for more information on the methods used in the individual data sources.

Key findings

Personal wellbeing

The trends presented in this report indicate that children and young people's subjective wellbeing, measured annually, appears to have dipped in 2020 and recovered close to pre-pandemic levels by 2021, remaining at similar levels in 2022 (The Children's Society, 2020, 2021, 2022). During the 2021/22 academic year, while wellbeing on most

⁴ Where differences are presented as to 'appear' and are not indicated as 'significant differences', this means there has not been statistical testing of the data.

measures remained consistent, anxiousness among both primary and secondary-age pupils appears to have increased and is higher than in 2020/21 (DfE, 2022e).

Considering differences in wellbeing trends by subgroup, secondary-age boys reported better wellbeing than girls throughout the 2021/22 academic year on all measures; this was consistent with State of the Nation reports in previous years (DfE, 2019, 2020, 2022i). Within secondary-aged pupils, older pupils consistently reported poorer wellbeing than younger pupils. Secondary-age pupils with SEN were more likely to report low wellbeing on some time points and in some measures than those without SEN in 2021/22, though there was no consistent pattern. Finally, secondary-age white pupils reported greater anxiousness than those from an ethnic minority background throughout the 2021/22 academic year. This contrasts with the 2020/21 academic year, when no differences in anxiousness were detected by ethnicity (DfE, 2022i).

Together, these findings suggest a mixed picture regarding children and young people's personal wellbeing in 2021/22, though anxiousness among primary and secondary age pupils may have worsened through the year.

Mental and physical health

The percentage of children and young people reporting low happiness with their health appears to have increased in recent years (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). Rates of probable mental disorders and eating problems remain at elevated levels compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic (NHS Digital, 2022b). Based on parent/carer reports in a different data source, children's behavioural and attentional difficulties had, on average, remained relatively stable between July 2021 and March 2022, while children's emotional difficulties had increased since during this period (Co-Space, 2022).

While rates of probable mental disorder among younger age groups have remained consistent in recent years, amongst 17- to 19-year-olds, the percentage had increased to one in four in 2022, up from 1 in 6 in 2021. Rates of eating problems and self-harm were also higher in older age groups. Primary aged boys were more likely to have a probable mental disorder than primary aged girls whereas older young women were more likely to have a probable mental disorder than older young men. There was no difference by sex among secondary-aged children and young people for likelihood of a probable mental disorder (NHS Digital, 2022b).

At primary level, children in year 6s have consistently been more likely to be obese than those of reception age. Rates of obesity among year 6s remain higher than before the pandemic (NHS Digital, 2021c, 2022c).

A related issue concerns the frequency of problems with sleep experienced by children and young people. In 2022, those who regularly struggled with sleep were more likely to have a mental disorder. Sleep problems were more prevalent in older children and young people, specifically young women (NHS Digital, 2022b), groups particularly at risk for poorer mental health and wellbeing in general.

While these results point to a heightened risk for health problems in older ages, those aged 17- to 23-years old were less likely than those aged 7- to 16-years-old to have sought help for a mental health concern in 2022 (NHS Digital, 2022b). It is unclear from these data why help seeking is lower amongst older young people. However, potential reasons may include: being unable to recognise symptoms of mental health disorders in themselves; perceived social stigma of mental health problems; and, losing access to school support once leaving school (Radez et al., 2022).

Together, these findings suggest an inconsistent recovery of children and young people's mental and physical health towards pre-pandemic levels.

Education and skills

In June 2022, most secondary-age children and young people reported being motivated to learn, were managing to concentrate in class, felt safe at school, enjoyed being at school, and felt that they belonged at school (DfE, 2022a).

While children and young people's happiness with school has remained at a similar level to previous years on average, the percentage of those reporting low happiness with school appears to have increased (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Boys continue to score higher on measures related to their experience of school, including happiness with school, enjoying coming to school, feeling safe in school (The Children's Society, 2022), motivation, concentration, and school belonging (DfE, forthcoming). Pupils who were eligible for free school meals were less likely to report being motivated to learn, being able to concentrate in class, feeling safe in school, and having a strong sense of belonging at school, compared to those not eligible for free school meals (DfE, forthcoming).

Differences in other groups were less consistent across measures. Pupils from an ethnic minority background were more likely to report being motivated to learn, managing to concentrate in class, and enjoying coming to school than white pupils. Pupils with SEN were more likely to report low happiness with school compared to those without. Pupils with SEN were more likely to report having difficulty concentrating in class, compared to those without SEN (DfE, forthcoming).

This report also highlights how many of the daily experiences, thoughts, and feelings about school expressed by children and young people reflect their current mental health and wellbeing; those who feel safe in school, enjoy coming to school, and that they belong in school were less likely to have a mental disorder (NHS Digital, 2022b), and report greater subjective wellbeing (DfE, 2022e).

While these correlational data, we are unable to establish the causal relationships between these feelings and experiences, they highlight importance of a supportive school environment in the mental health and wellbeing of many children and young people.

Relationships

The percentage of those reporting low happiness with their family and friends remains at elevated levels compared to before the pandemic. While annual data show that rates of loneliness appear similar in 2020, 2021, and 2022 (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022), within-year data suggests increases in rates of loneliness through the 2021/22 academic year (DfE, 2022c, 2022a, 2022g). Those who reported often feeling lonely were more likely to have a probable mental disorder.

Considering children and young people's happiness with their relationships at school, around 7 in 10 children and young people agreed or strongly agreed that adults at their school were interested in their wellbeing, that there was at least one adult at their school who they could talk to about how they were feeling, and that young people in their school got on well together (The Children's Society, 2022). However, around a quarter of primary-aged children (parent-report) and around a fifth of secondary-aged (self-report) children reported having been bullied in the previous 12 months when responding in June 2022 (DfE, 2022e).

Looking at subgroup differences, boys reported greater happiness with peer and teacher relationships, were more likely to report that young people in their school got on well together and were less likely to report often feeling lonely throughout 2021/22 (The Children's Society, 2022). These trends are consistent with gender differences in subjective wellbeing.

Both primary- (parent-report) and secondary-age children with SEN/SEND⁵ were more likely than those without SEN to report having been a victim of bullying in the previous 12 months. Rates of bullying victimisation were also higher for those eligible for free school meals compared to those not eligible for free school meals (DfE, 2022e).

⁵ Demographic information among self-reporting secondary-aged pupils was pulled from the NPD which provides SEN status. Parents (reporting for primary-aged pupils) were asked if their child had SEND.

Finally, secondary-age white pupils were more likely to report having been a victim of bullying than pupils from an ethnic minority, though no difference was found for primary pupils (parent-report) (DfE, 2022e).

‘What we do’

Overall, children and young people’s happiness with their time use dropped between 2019 and 2020 during the height of the pandemic but appears to have since recovered and remains at a similar level in 2022 to 2021 (The Children’s Society, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Rates of participation in extracurricular and physical activity have also increased since 2020/21 academic year with nearly half of children and young people being physically active for at least 60 minutes per day (Sport England, 2022) and 8 in 10 reporting having engaged in at least one type of extracurricular activity in summer term of 2022 (DfE, 2022e). Most children and young people reported spending time outside most days of the week, and 4 in 10 having a high connection to nature (Natural England, 2022). Regular physical activity (Sport England, 2022) and regular experiences in the natural environment were associated with greater wellbeing (Natural England, 2022).

These data also highlight inequalities in participation in activities and access to outdoor spaces. Female respondents were more likely than males to report having not attended any extra-curricular activities in the summer term of 2022 (DfE, 2022e). Further, there was some evidence that female respondents were more likely than male respondents to indicate high connection to nature (Natural England, 2022).

Younger children aged 8- to 11-years-old were more likely than those aged 12- to 15-years-old to have regularly spent time outside in school in the previous week and to indicate high connection to nature (Natural England, 2022).

Children and young people with families whose annual household income was greater than £50,000 were more likely than those with families whose annual household income was less than £15,000 to have regularly spent time outside in school in the previous week and indicate high connection to nature (Natural England, 2022). Those with high family affluence were also more likely to be physically active than those with low family affluence (Sport England, 2022).

Finally, white children and young people were more likely than those from an ethnic minority background to have regularly spent time outside in school in the previous week; this difference was also observed between those with without a disability compared to those with a disability (Natural England, 2022).

Self, society, and the future

Children and young people's average happiness with the things they own, and their appearance, appear similar to previous years, but their happiness with their choice in life and what may happen to them later in their lives appear to have increased between 2020 and 2022, after having dipped between 2019 and 2020 during the height of the pandemic (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Most children and young people reported that they felt safe in and like living in their neighbourhood. Most also reported that they felt they could trust people and that there were enough places to play in their neighbourhood (NHS Digital, 2022b).

However, concerns about household finances were evident in responses, with around a third of parents and carers reporting that they had struggled with school costs (The Children's Society, 2022), and a quarter of secondary-age pupils being worried about being able to afford technology for studying (DfE, 2022g). Furthermore, around one in five 7- to 16-year-olds and one in ten 17- to 22-year-olds reported that their household had experienced a reduction in income in the previous 12 months (NHS Digital, 2022b), suggesting worsening of household finances for some families in the previous year.

There was also evidence that a sizeable minority of children and young people have had negative experiences with social media, with around one in eight 11- to 16-year-olds and one in seven 17- to 24-year-olds reporting that they have been bullied online (NHS Digital, 2022b).

Girls and young women were less likely than boys and young men to report that they felt safe using social media, and young women were more likely than young men to report that they had been bullied online (NHS Digital, 2022b).

General discussion

Overall, the findings presented in this report suggest an inconsistent recovery of children and young people's wellbeing and mental health towards pre-pandemic levels by the end of the 2021/22 academic year. While annual trends indicated that children and young people's subjective happiness and life satisfaction appears to have recovered to pre-pandemic levels by 2022 (The Children's Society, 2022), some measures, such as anxiousness among primary and secondary age pupils (DfE, 2022e), and loneliness (DfE, 2022g) and mental health among older young people (NHS Digital, 2022b), may have worsened further. However, it is not clear from these data why this might be the case. In addition, the percentage of those reporting low happiness with their health appears to have increased in recent years (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022) and eating problems remain at elevated levels compared

to before the COVID-19 pandemic (NHS Digital, 2022b). While a range of individual and societal factors may have contributed to this, the current data do not allow us to make strong claims about the main causes of these trends.

Considering wider concerns, the percentage of those with low happiness with family and friends remains higher than in 2020 (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). There are further concerns about household finances, with around a third of parents and carers reporting that they had struggled with school costs (The Children's Society, 2022), and a quarter of secondary-age pupils being worried about being able to afford technology for studying (DfE, 2022g). Despite happiness with school remaining at a similar level to previous years, on average, rates of those reporting low happiness with school appears to have increased in recent years (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

However, some positive signs emerged from the data. Most secondary-age children and young people indicated positive feelings about school, relationships with peers and school staff (The Children's Society, 2022), and that they liked and felt safe in their local area (The Children's Society, 2022). Rates of participation in extracurricular (DfE, 2022e) and physical activity (Sport England, 2022) have also recovered since 2020/21, and most children and young people reported spending time outside most days of the week (Natural England, 2022). Encouragingly, children and young people's happiness with their choice in life and what may happen to them later in their lives appear to have also increased between 2020 and 2022 (The Children's Society, 2020, 2021, 2022), suggesting a sense of optimism among some.

This report also highlights how many of the daily experiences, thoughts, and feelings expressed by children and young people reflect their current mental health and wellbeing, offering some avenues for positive action. Responses to a range of surveys reported here show that those who feel safe in school, enjoy coming to school, and that they belong in school were less likely to have a mental disorder and more likely to report greater subjective wellbeing (DfE, 2022a; NHS Digital, 2022b). Further, regular physical activity and nature experiences were associated with greater wellbeing (Natural England, 2022). While with these correlational data we are unable to establish the causal relationships between these feelings and experiences, and mental health and wellbeing, the data highlight the importance of a supportive school environment, strong social relationships, an active lifestyle, and nature experiences in the daily lives of children and young people.

Conclusions

The data presented here indicates a mixed picture as to the current state of children and young people's wellbeing during the 2021/22 academic year. Some measures suggest

signs of recovery and positive experiences over this time, such as: some measures of subjective wellbeing; time use and participation in extra-curricular activities; obesity; physical activity levels; average happiness in a number of different areas of life. However, others indicate sustained poorer outcomes compared to before the pandemic, or worsening over the past academic year including: mental health problems, especially for older young people; feelings of anxiousness; the percentage reporting low happiness for a number of the different areas of life.

We have not been able to consistently scrutinise the outcomes and experiences for all subgroups of interest, due to a lack of data. However, across the measures considered, there are indications that outcomes and experiences may be poorer for older children and young people, and girls and young women. Patterns in outcomes and experiences are less consistent for other groups, however it is challenging to draw conclusions where there is less data.

While the data cannot tell us about the causes, there are indications that a range of emerging or continuing national and global issues may be causing worries and challenges for children and young people. These include worries about cost of living, the environment and wider social issues and inequalities, and negative experiences using social media.

Introduction and methods

Children and young people's wellbeing

This report is for all those interested in the wellbeing of children and young people in England. It aims to provide a shared evidence base for everyone - in government, services, schools & colleges, parents & families, communities, and employers - to reflect and build upon to deliver better wellbeing outcomes for all children and young people.

Supporting the wellbeing of children and young people has been a focus of Government policy for a number of years. The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has further emphasised the importance of supporting our children and young people's wellbeing, which is why it remains a central part of the Department for Education's plans for recovery.

Over the past year, schools have returned to full-time face-to-face teaching and formal examinations have resumed. As the focus has shifted beyond the immediate impacts of COVID-19 towards recovery and the future, a range of other national and global issues have emerged or come into focus. These include war in Ukraine, the increasing cost of living, ongoing concerns about climate change and the environment, and wider social issues.

This is the department's fourth state of the nation report, which brings together a range of evidence sources to build understanding of children and young people's wellbeing over the past year. This year's report focuses on trends in mental health and wellbeing over the 2021/22 academic year, when a range of recovery-focused activity was in place across Government, which included the Department for Education's education recovery programme.

As in previous years, this report follows the structure of the Office for National Statistics' domains of wellbeing for children and young people⁶. While we do not include separate chapters for 'where we live' and 'personal finance', we report on measures related to each of these domains throughout the report as well as indirectly dealing with issues related to these domains by presenting trends by subgroups, particularly by economic disadvantage.

The previous State of the Nation report showed that the pandemic had had substantial effects on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people (DfE, 2022j).

⁶See: [Children's Well-being measures](#) and [Young people's well-being measures. Current set of ONS children's wellbeing domains: Personal wellbeing, Health, Our relationships, Education and skills, What we do, Where we live, Personal finance.](#)

Both wellbeing and mental health appeared responsive to the course of the pandemic, including perhaps pandemic restrictions, with indications that downward trends in wellbeing may have mostly reversed following relaxation of restrictions (DfE, 2021a; NHS Digital, 2021c). Rates of probable mental health disorders among children and young people remained higher in 2021 than they were in 2017, though this may have been influenced by the timing of the Mental Health of Children and Young People Survey data collection, which occurred during and shortly after the periods of lockdown restrictions in early 2021. This current report includes a further 2022 update to these data.

The previous State of the Nation report also indicated potential pandemic impacts on other measures of health and wellbeing, including increased loneliness (DfE, 2021a) and poorer physical health as measured by obesity rates (NHS Digital, 2021c). Evidence was also found for a link between family connectedness, problems with family functioning, and mental health problems in children and young people (NHS Digital, 2021a), suggesting that disruptions in one domain could lead to poorer outcomes in another.

These data and trends continue to inform the context in which the more recent data in this report should be viewed. The continued production of this report underlines the department's commitment to understanding and supporting the wellbeing of children and young people.

The State of the Nation annual report series is intended to provide an accessible presentation of available data on the current status and changes in children and young people's wellbeing in England. This report covers the 2021/22 academic year (September 2021 – July 2022), the first full academic year since the start of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic where schools had returned to full face-to-face teaching (See Context section below for more details), and a time of substantial international economic turmoil.

In this context, we have continued the approach taken last year of focusing on very recent data sources that can illuminate children and young people's experiences of this time. This, it is hoped, will help government, children and young people's services, schools, parents, and anyone interested in children and young people's wellbeing, to understand their experiences as they navigate the challenges of childhood and early adulthood in a context of significant turbulence.

Much of the evidence presented here has already informed the department's approach to supporting children, young people and their families and teachers and schools. It will, alongside other evidence, continue to be used in developing this further.

Content and structure of the report

The report presents a collection of indicators of children and young people's wellbeing over the academic year 2021/22. As in previous years this follows the structure of the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) domains of wellbeing for children and young people⁷.

While we do not include separate chapters for 'where we live' and 'personal finance', we report on measures related to each of these domains throughout the report as well as indirectly dealing with issues related to these domains by presenting trends by subgroups, particularly by economic disadvantage.

This report provides data on children and young people's views about wider society and the future, with a separate chapter which focuses on children and young people's concerns about self, society, and the future.

The report is about children and young people aged between 5- to 24-years-old in England, though many of the indicators, for pragmatic reasons, relate to children and young people across Great Britain and the United Kingdom. In general, data reported are of two types – longer term trend data, with data pre-pandemic and continuing into the 2021/22 academic year, or more frequent data collections since the start of the pandemic, providing data for the 2021/22 academic year. As such data are not included that cover the autumn term 2022. Within the report, 'children' will be used to refer to any age group within the 5- to 13-years range and 'young people' will be used to refer to any age group within the 14- to 24-years range. The term 'older young people' will be used to refer to any age group within the 16- to 24-years range.

Where possible, the report will highlight the experiences of children and young people with different characteristics, noting any differences in experiences between them. The characteristics of children and young people included here are gender, age, ethnicity, special educational needs and/or disability (SEN/D), and economic disadvantage (measured variously by household income, compound measures of family affluence, index of multiple deprivation, or eligibility for free school meals (FSM)). Responses by these groups are only presented for those measures where data were available. We were not able to include any evidence on the wellbeing of young people with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) identities, as none of the data sources meeting our criteria for inclusion (see below) had included these identities in their research. None of the sources of data we identified included the experiences of children in need or looked after children.

⁷See: [Children's Well-being measures](#) and [Young people's well-being measures](#)

The data presented in this report draw upon published information from a range of government, academic, voluntary, and private sector organisations across the 2021/22 academic year, and therefore reflects the experience of children and young people during that time.

In keeping with the aim of the report to collate already available data from disparate sources we have not conducted new analyses of the data presented.

Finally, the report also highlights areas in which there are gaps in current data and understanding of children and young people's experiences during this time. Some of these may be addressed by further analysis of the data sets used here, others may require retrospective studies where the data has not been collected simultaneously.

Choice of indicators

As with previous years' reports, this is not an exhaustive review of all available information about children and young people's wellbeing during this period. Findings are based only on the indicators selected to represent the different areas of children and young people's lives. Much of the available data is about children and young people on average, which may overlook the experiences of subgroups and those outside the average. There are further quantitative data sources and qualitative evidence which can also provide very useful insights into the experiences of children and young people across the pandemic, many of which have been drawn on in other evidence reviews⁸.

Indicators of children and young people's wellbeing have been selected to provide pragmatic coverage of the various aspects of wellbeing and domains of children and young people's lives that influence it. Priority has been given to sources covering representative samples of children and young people and with validated, harmonised, or standardised measures.

We have necessarily had to limit the sources of evidence included and have done so by focusing on quantitative data that meets at least one of the two quality criteria outlined above (sample and measures). There is a wide range of further evidence using different methods and collected from groups of interest which we have not included here.

The domains and indicators included in the report are summarised in the table on the following page.

⁸ For example, but not limited to, [The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, Public Health England COVID-19: mental health and wellbeing surveillance report](#);

Domains and indicators used in the 2022 State of the Nation report

Domain 1: Personal wellbeing

- Happiness
- Life satisfaction
- Life being worthwhile
- Anxiousness

Domain 2: Mental and physical health

- Rates of probable disorder
- Eating problems
- Self-harm
- Psychotic-like symptoms
- Help seeking for mental health
- Obesity
- Sleep problems

Domain 3: Education and skills

- Happiness with school
- Broader school experiences
- Motivation and concentration
- School belonging
- School safety

- Enjoyment of school

Domain 4: Relationships

- Happiness with friends and family
- School relationships
- Bullying
- Loneliness

Domain 5: 'What we do' – Activities and time use

- Happiness with activities and time use
- Engagement in physical activity
- Participation in extracurricular activities
- Nature experiences

Domain 6: Self, society, and the future

- Happiness with their things, appearance and choice
- Finances
- Feelings about their neighbourhood
- Worry about societal issues
- Happiness with the future

Data sources and methods

This report draws on published information from a range of government, academic, voluntary, and private sector organisations. Key data sources used are:

- Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel (PPLP) - Department for Education (DfE)
- National Behaviour Survey (NBS) – DfE⁹
- Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP) - NHS Digital
- The Good Childhood Report (GCR) – The Children’s Society
- People and Nature Survey – Natural England
- Active Lives Survey – Sport England

The methodologies underpinning these findings are varied and include robust randomly sampled cohorts and weighted representative online panels. While sources have been selected to provide the most robust assessment available, and every effort has been made to include a wide variety of sources, some studies or data may have been omitted. Ongoing data collection as well as more nuanced analyses will be needed to understand the diversity of experience and wellbeing and any long-term negative impacts of the pandemic and other ongoing national and global challenges.

Reporting significant differences

Several studies included in this report have used significance testing methods to infer whether differences seen between groups or across time points are likely to be statistically meaningful; where significant differences are mentioned in the text of this report, the source analysis suggests a statistically significant difference between groups or between time points. In the specific cases where the data are presented with confidence intervals but no other estimate of statistical significance, non-overlapping intervals are referred to as indicative evidence for significant differences between groups or between time points.

⁹ Note: Data collection for the National Behaviour Survey (NBS) was delivered through the DfE’s omnibus surveys. In this report the June 2022 data point is taken from the dedicated NBS wave of the PPLP. At the time of this publication, the final report for NBS, including this June data, is forthcoming. For more information, please see [‘Annex A – Data sources and methods’](#)

Other studies have not attempted to infer differences between groups using statistical testing. In this case, differences may be described within the surveyed group of parents, children or young people but are not referred to in terms of statistical significance.

Where apparent differences are reported in the text of the report, and are not indicated as 'significant differences', this means there has not been statistical testing of the data. The reporting of differences is based on those that may be observed in the data for the surveyed individuals. For these cases, any differences will be stated tentatively to avoid over-interpretation, and readers are encouraged to exercise caution when assessing whether the reported differences represent meaningful differences in the wider population.

Full details of methods are included in ['Annex A – Data sources and methods'](#).

Limitations of this report

Because of the different methodologies of the various data sources included within this report, there are limitations that should be considered when drawing conclusions from the data presented. Not all data sources employed random probability samples which can reduce generalisability to the general population. Significance testing across sources was inconsistently applied. Analysis and reporting of subgroups was inconsistent across data sources and over time. This limits our ability to draw robust conclusions about the experiences of subgroups where there are less data. Small and unequal sample sizes in some subgroups may limit representativeness of the data and our ability to detect differences that may exist in the population. Some sources report by gender, others by sex. In this report we have matched our terminology to that used in the source data.

Context

In previous reports we have found it helpful in understanding trends and emerging issues in children and young people's wellbeing, to set out the wider context of issues faced by children and young people, in particular how it has affected their education. Similarly, it may be helpful when reading this report to consider the context of the 2021/22 academic year during which the data were collected. This includes the ongoing impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the emergence of other global challenges which may have impacted children and young people's wellbeing.

This was the first full academic year since the start of the coronavirus pandemic where schools and colleges had returned to full time face-to-face teaching and

formal examinations. However, despite the significant efforts of the education sector to support this return to normality, the pandemic continued to cause disruption to education and other areas of children and young people's lives that we know are important for wellbeing.

After a relatively stable start to the academic year, the Omicron variant of the virus was identified in the UK in late November 2021. This much more transmissible variant caused a large increase in cases and a sharp rise in the number of Covid-related absences among pupils and education staff. 'Plan B' measures were introduced to control the spread of the virus and secondary school pupils were again advised to wear masks in communal areas. By the end of January 2022, cases had begun to fall, and Plan B measures were removed. Nonetheless, COVID-19 continued to cause uncertainty throughout the remainder of the academic year, with fluctuating rates of infection and staff and pupil absence.

The 2021/22 academic year saw a range of government activity focused on helping children and young people to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. This included the continuation of a multi-year plan to support young people to catch up on missed education, the Wellbeing for Education Recovery programme to support the mental wellbeing of pupils and staff, and a focus on multi-agency working to improve school attendance.

In addition to the coronavirus pandemic, this year saw other global challenges which may have impacted children and young people's wellbeing. These included increasing financial pressures, the war in Ukraine, and ongoing concerns about the environment and climate change. These wider issues provide further context to the findings described in this report.

Domain 1: Personal Wellbeing

Examining how children and young people report on their own wellbeing can reveal a great deal about their lives. Low subjective wellbeing can indicate broader difficulties in children's lives, such as family difficulties (Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2016), as well as helping to identify groups of children who need more support to improve their lives (The Children's Society, 2021). Over the longer term, low wellbeing may be associated with poorer mental and physical health outcomes (The Children's Society, 2016), as well as poorer economic outcomes (What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2018).

In last year's State of the Nation, we reported that children and young people's subjective wellbeing was lower, on average, in 2020/21 than in previous years (DfE, 2022j). Wellbeing was lower at times when schools were closed to the majority of pupils and prevalence of COVID-19 was high in the population. As pandemic conditions have improved, it is important to continue to monitor wellbeing. A lack of recovery could have longer term impacts on national wellbeing, health, and personal and civic outcomes. Continued monitoring enables understanding of whether, how, and for who these downward trends might have begun to recover as well as any potential impacts of emerging and ongoing national and global challenges that could have consequences for the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

This chapter will focus on subjective measures of wellbeing from surveys of children and their parents, while other chapters will include a greater emphasis on objective measures.

This chapter presents:

- Annual survey trends in children and young people's subjective wellbeing utilising three of the four ONS personal wellbeing measures¹⁰.
- Measures of subjective wellbeing of primary and secondary school-aged children throughout the 2021/22 academic year, with comparison time points in 2020/21, utilising the ONS personal wellbeing measures.
- A comparison of the subjective wellbeing of children and young people with different socio-demographic characteristics throughout the 2020/21 and

¹⁰ The measures consist of questions about how happy they felt yesterday, their life satisfaction, the extent to which they feel the things they do in life were worthwhile, and their anxiousness levels. The scales range from 0-10; high scores for happiness, life satisfaction and life being worthwhile, as well as low scores for anxiousness indicate positive wellbeing. Annual survey trends report on happiness, life satisfaction and life being worthwhile.

2021/22 academic years. Reporting is made separately for children and young people by gender, SEN/SEND¹¹ status, FSM status, and ethnicity.

Key findings

- Overall, children and young people's average subjective wellbeing in the UK had remained relatively consistent in recent years, prior to 2020. On average, children and young people reported a small dip in their wellbeing in 2020 but scores had since recovered close to previous levels by April - June 2021 and remained at similar levels in May - June 2022.
 - The percentage of those reporting low wellbeing in 2022 was marginally lower than in 2021, and substantially lower than 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- During the 2021/22 academic year, and in England:
 - Wellbeing on most measures remained consistent throughout 2021/22, but anxiousness appears to have increased, and is higher than in 2020/21. This was shown for both primary and secondary pupils. Older pupils at secondary-level tended to report poorer wellbeing than younger pupils.
 - Secondary-age boys reported greater wellbeing than girls throughout the 2021/22 academic year, on all measures; this is consistent with previous years.
 - Secondary-age pupils with SEN were more likely to report poorer wellbeing at some time points in 2021/22, in some measures, than those without SEN, though there were no consistent differences by SEN status.
 - Secondary-age white pupils reported greater anxiousness than those from a minority ethnic background throughout the 2021/22 academic year. This contrasts with the 2020/21 academic year, when no differences in anxiousness were detected by ethnicity, and data suggests the difference in 2021/22 is due to an increase in white children reporting high anxiousness.
 - No significant differences in other measures of wellbeing were evident by ethnicity across 2021/22. This represents a closing of the ethnicity gap on these measures from 2020/21, when white

¹¹ Demographic information among self-reporting secondary-aged pupils was pulled from the NPD which provides SEN status. Parents (reporting for primary-aged pupils) were asked if their child had SEND.

respondents reported higher average wellbeing on some measures on some waves compared to those from an ethnic minority group. Data suggests the difference in 2021/22 is mostly due to an increase in wellbeing of ethnic minority children.

- Importantly, as sample sizes for children and young people from ethnic minorities were small, these trends do not allow for a comparison of wellbeing among children and young people in different ethnic minority groups.
- While these trends show us time periods in which there were likely significant differences in subjective wellbeing between different groups, they cannot tell us whether and how gaps in wellbeing may have fluctuated in size.

Annual trends in personal wellbeing

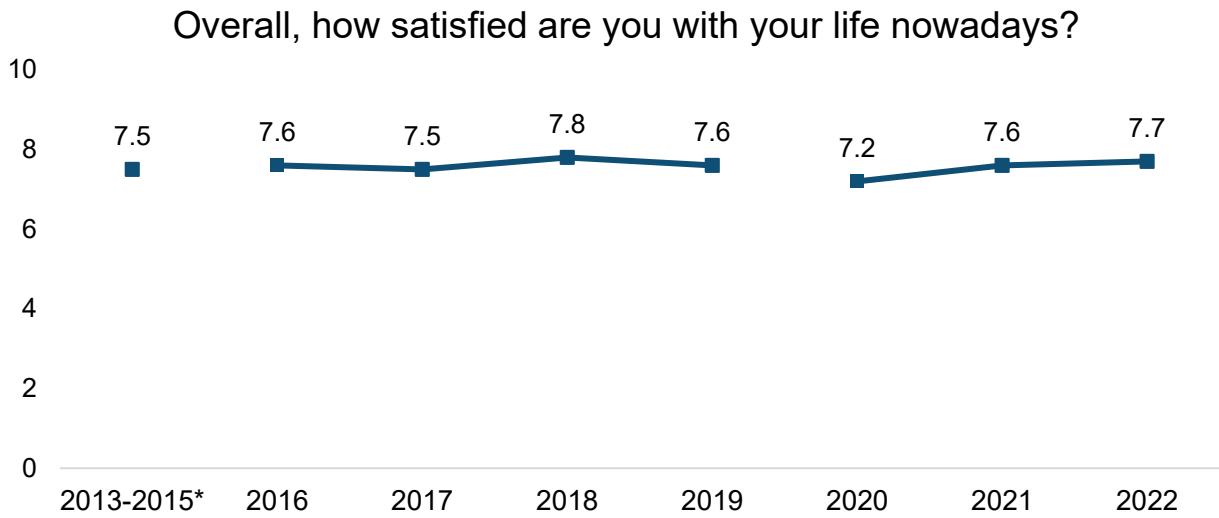
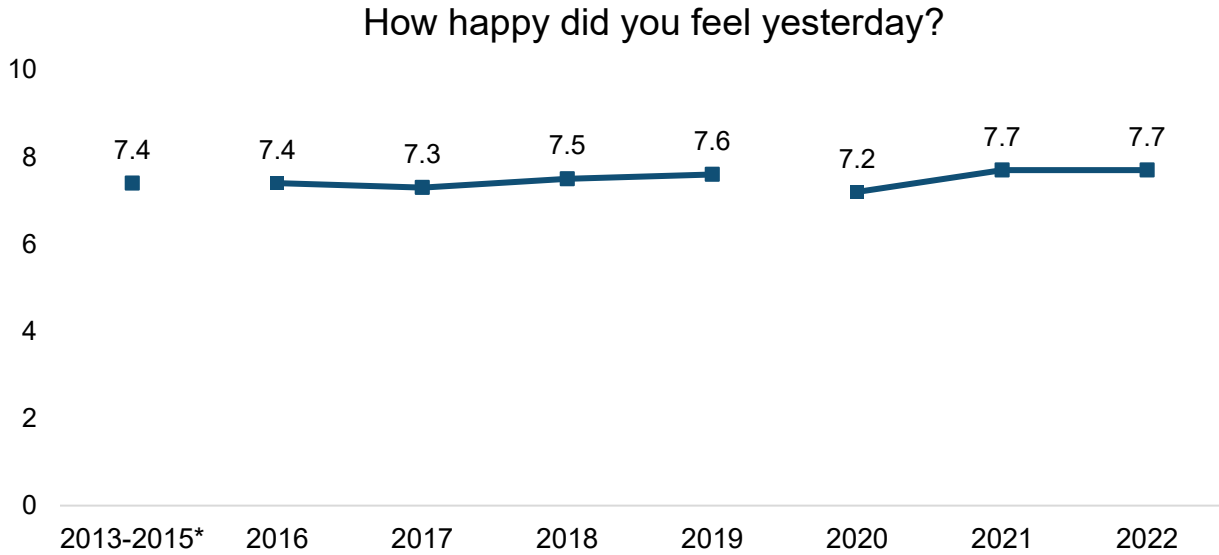
The Children's Society's annual Good Childhood report presents the results of a household survey of children and young people aged between 10 and 17 in the UK (as well as their parent or carer), usually conducted between April and June¹² (The Children's Society, 2021). Figure 1 presents the annual mean average ratings for three measures of wellbeing, from 2013 to 2022¹³ (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). Overall trends over this time indicate that children and young people's life satisfaction, happiness, or feelings of 'life being worthwhile' ratings have remained relatively stable, with average ratings consistently between 7 and 8 out of 10 in all three measures. The average scores (out of 10) for the three measures of wellbeing were similar in 2022, for life satisfaction (7.7), happiness (7.7) and life being worthwhile (7.8).

Trends in these data suggest that, on average, children and young people reported a small dip in their wellbeing in 2020 but scores appear to recover to previous levels by April – June 2021 and remained at similar levels in May-June 2022. These annual differences have not been significance tested.

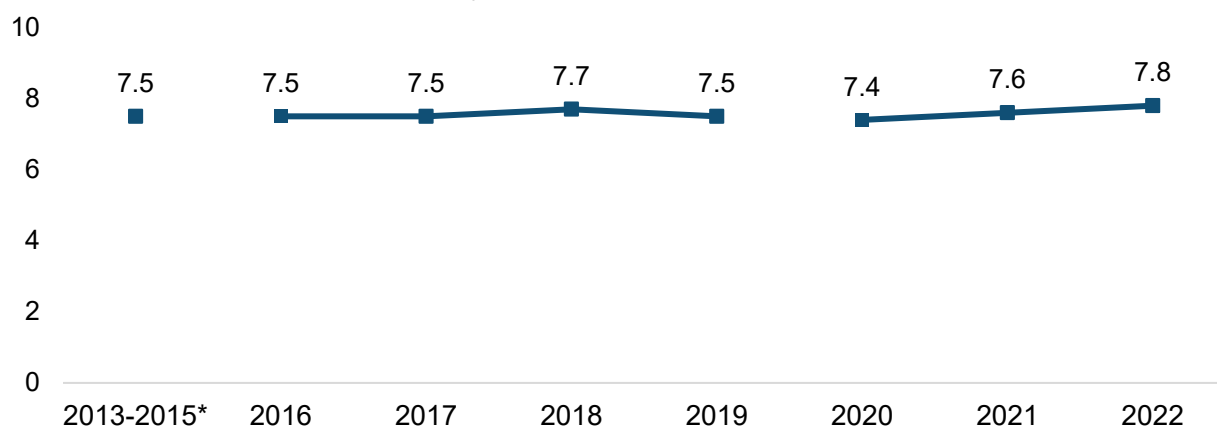
¹² The 2022 survey was conducted between May and June.

¹³ The survey has only been annual since 2015, so findings from 2013 to 2015 have been averaged to create a single 2013-2015 wave of data.

Figure 1. Annual trends in average happiness, life satisfaction, and life being worthwhile ratings of children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old



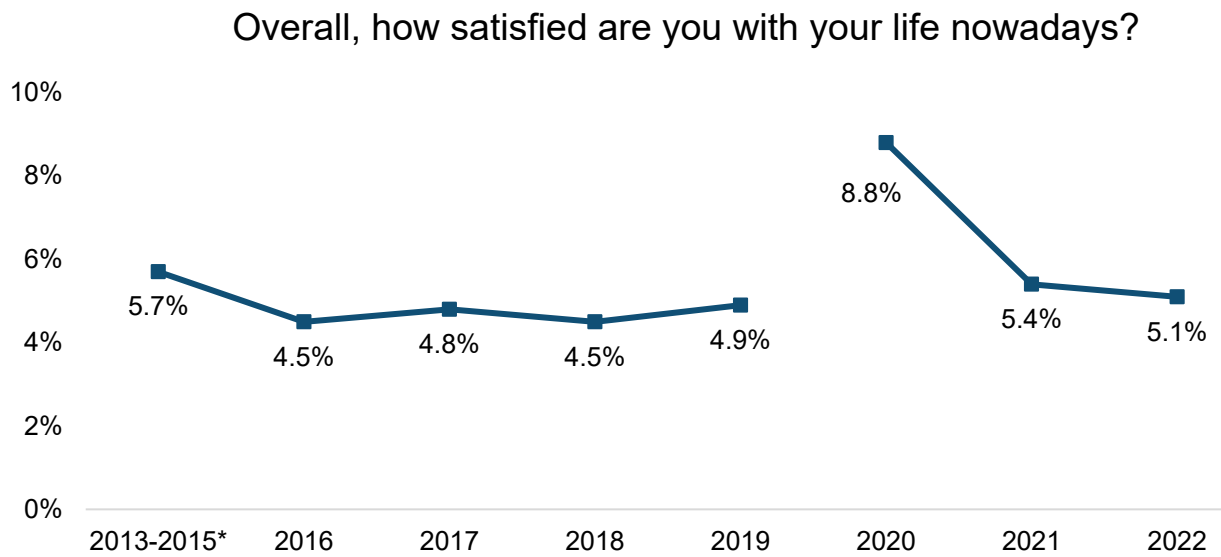
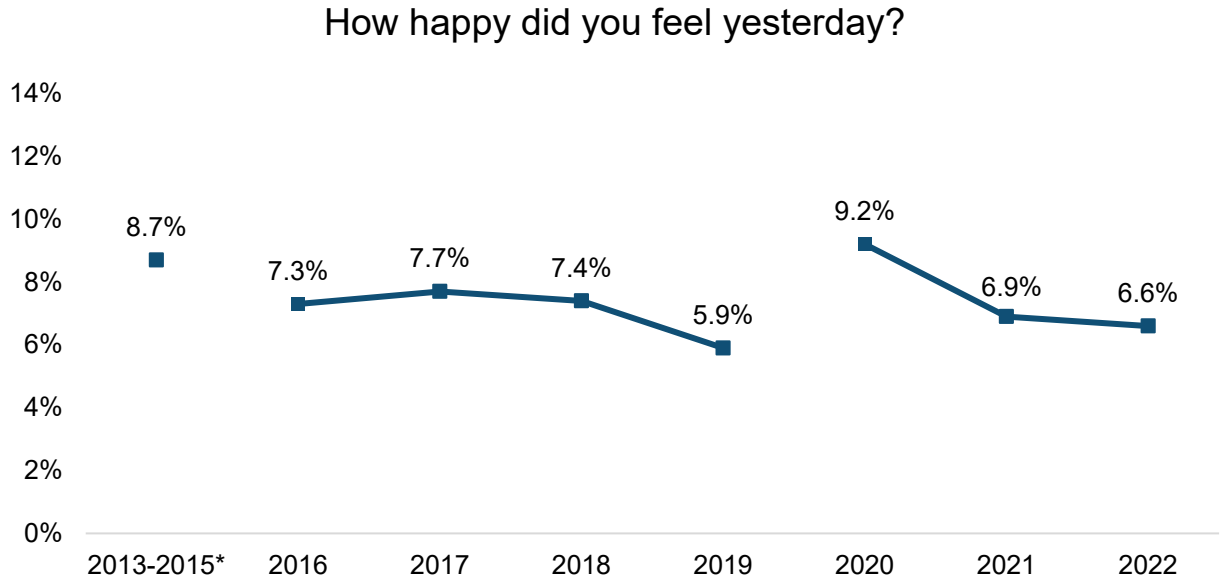
Overall, to what extent do you think that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?



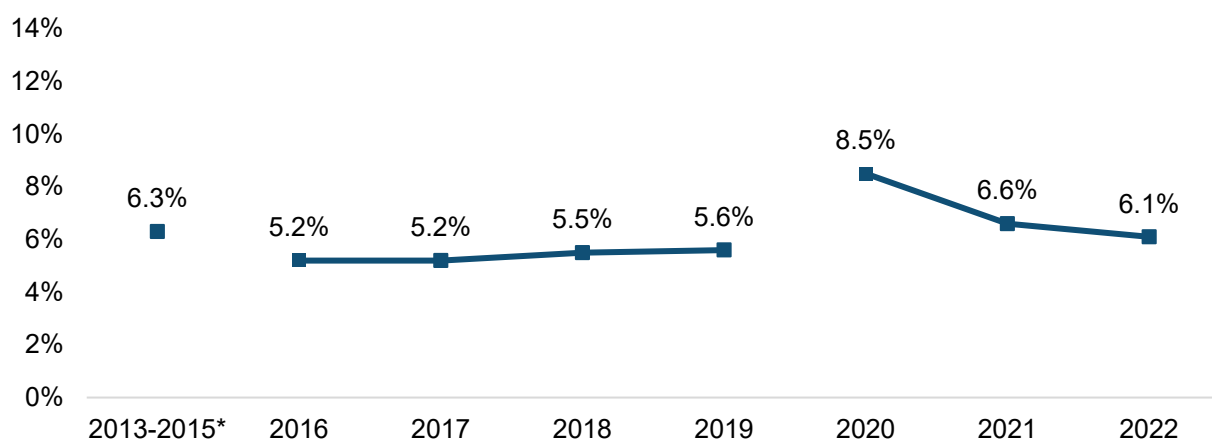
Coverage: 2020-2022 UK, 2013-2019 Great Britain, Note: Discontinuity in time series and different data collection periods for 2013-15, n = 2000+, see 'Data sources and methods' annex for further information. *The reported response for '2013 to 2015' is a pooled average based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report Source: The Children's Society.

There was also evidence of variation in the percentage of those giving low (<5) scores over time. In 2022, the percentage of those reporting low happiness (6.6%), life satisfaction (5.1%), and worthwhileness (6.1%), were marginally lower than in 2021 (happiness = 6.9%, life satisfaction = 5.4%, feelings of life being worthwhile = 6.6%), and substantially lower than 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (happiness = 9.2%, life satisfaction = 8.8%, worthwhileness = 8.5%). This suggests a continued improvement in wellbeing since the height of the pandemic in 2020.

Figure 2. Annual trends in the percentage of children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old with low happiness, life satisfaction, and life being worthwhile ratings



Overall, to what extent do you think that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?



Coverage: 2020-2022 UK, 2013-2019 Great Britain, Note: Discontinuity in time series and different data collection periods for 2013-15, n = 2000+, see 'Data sources and methods' annex for further information. *The reported response for '2013 to 2015' is a pooled average based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report. A 'low' score represents a score of less than five out of ten. Source: The Children's Society.

Personal wellbeing trends during academic year 2021/22

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned the Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel (PPLP) to collect robust and quick turnaround research during recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond (DfE, 2022d)¹⁴. For each wave of the PPLP, parents (of primary and secondary pupils) and secondary pupils themselves were asked the ONS4 wellbeing questions¹⁵. Here we present the average wellbeing trends of children and young people aged between 5- and 18-years-old. For primary school children (aged between 5 and 11) we present parent responses to these wellbeing questions, while for secondary school children and young people (aged between 11 and 18) we present their own responses.

¹⁴ Note: Data collection for the National Behaviour Survey (NBS) was delivered through the DfE's omnibus surveys. In this report the June 2022 data point is taken from the dedicated NBS wave of the PPLP. At the time of this publication, the final report for NBS, including this June data, is forthcoming. For more information, please see '[Annex A – Data sources and methods](#)'.

¹⁵ Secondary pupils were asked about how happy they felt yesterday, their life satisfaction, the extent to which they feel the things they do in life were worthwhile, and how anxious they felt yesterday. Parents of primary pupils were asked only about their child's happiness and anxiousness yesterday.

To allow for comparison with the 2020/21 academic year trends, where there was variation in average wellbeing which coincided with pandemic conditions including school closures, we have included data from six time points from the 2020/21 academic year. These data points were selected to mirror, broadly, the data collections in 2021/22. While they are not exact matches in terms of the time and duration of data collection fieldwork, they provide a useful comparison point to understand where variation over time could be due to pandemic and other contextual factors and where they may be due to seasonal trends, as well as allowing us to track wellbeing recovery into 2021/22. The sample of pupils and parents was slightly different for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years. In 2020/21, years 12-13 were sampled from sixth forms only. In 2021/22 years 12-13 were sampled from both sixth forms and colleges.

Primary-aged pupils

Average wellbeing

The time series charts presented in Figure 3 show the average parent-report wellbeing ratings of children aged between 5 and 11 at five time points during the 2021/22 academic year, and six time points during the 2020/21 academic year ; parents were asked about their children's happiness and anxiousness the previous day¹⁶ (DfE, 2021d, 2022b). These differences across waves have not been significance tested. Any observable differences should be treated with caution.

The trends shown here for 2021/22 indicate that average happiness ratings for primary-aged children remained broadly consistent across the year. Average wellbeing across 2021/22 was at a similar level to those reported in 2020/21, except for February 21 when average wellbeing was lowest, a time point which coincides with when schools were closed to the majority of pupils.

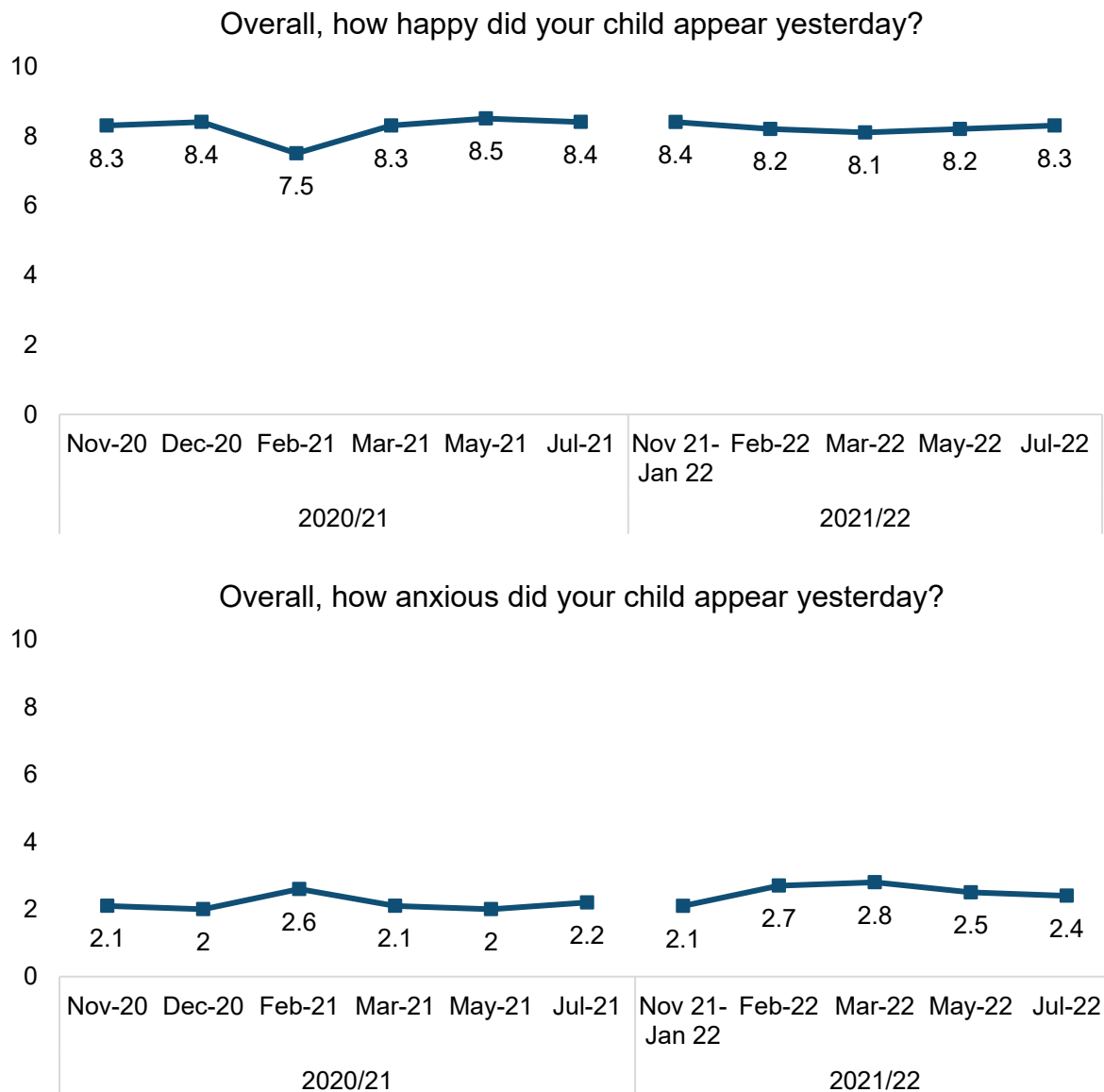
Parent-reported anxiousness in 2021/22 appears to have increased, on average, between the November 21-January 22¹⁷ wave (2.1) and February 22 (2.7) and March 22 (2.8) waves, before declining slightly to 2.4 by the final wave of the year in July. Average anxiousness appears to have been slightly higher across 2021/22 than in 2020/21, with average rating at or slightly above the peak of the previous

¹⁶ To note – it is not clear how accurately parents are able to report on these positive and negative affect questions on behalf of their primary aged child. We have access to data for both parent report and child report for secondary pupils. Descriptively comparing the overall mean responses for parents and secondary pupils indicates that parents reported similar trends to secondary aged pupils, however parents consistently had a more positive mean score than the child report. It is not possible to say, from the available data, whether this represents a significant difference.

¹⁷ Note: apparent differences may be due to those in years 12-13 being excluded from the sample in this wave only. For more information, please see 'Annex A – Data sources and methods'.

academic year in February 21 (2.6), when schools were closed to the majority of pupils.

Figure 3. Average parent-report happiness and anxiousness ratings of children aged 5- to 11-years-olds



Coverage: England, Note: primary parents (Highest n = November-January 2021; 2,197, Lowest n = July 2022; 1,164), Parents were not asked questions related to their child’s life satisfaction and ‘life being worthwhile’. Source: DfE

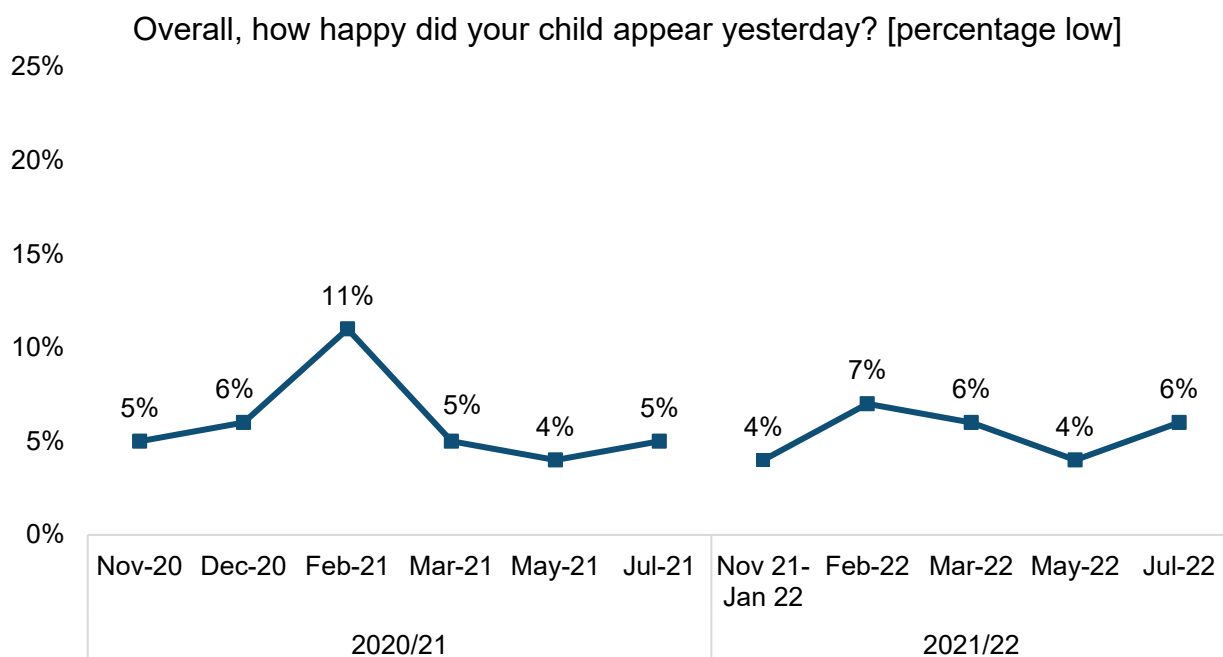
Low wellbeing

Figure 4 presents the percentage of parents reporting that their children had low levels of wellbeing in 2020/21 and 2021/22, measured as scores lower than 5 out of 10 for happiness, life satisfaction, and life being worthwhile, and scores greater than

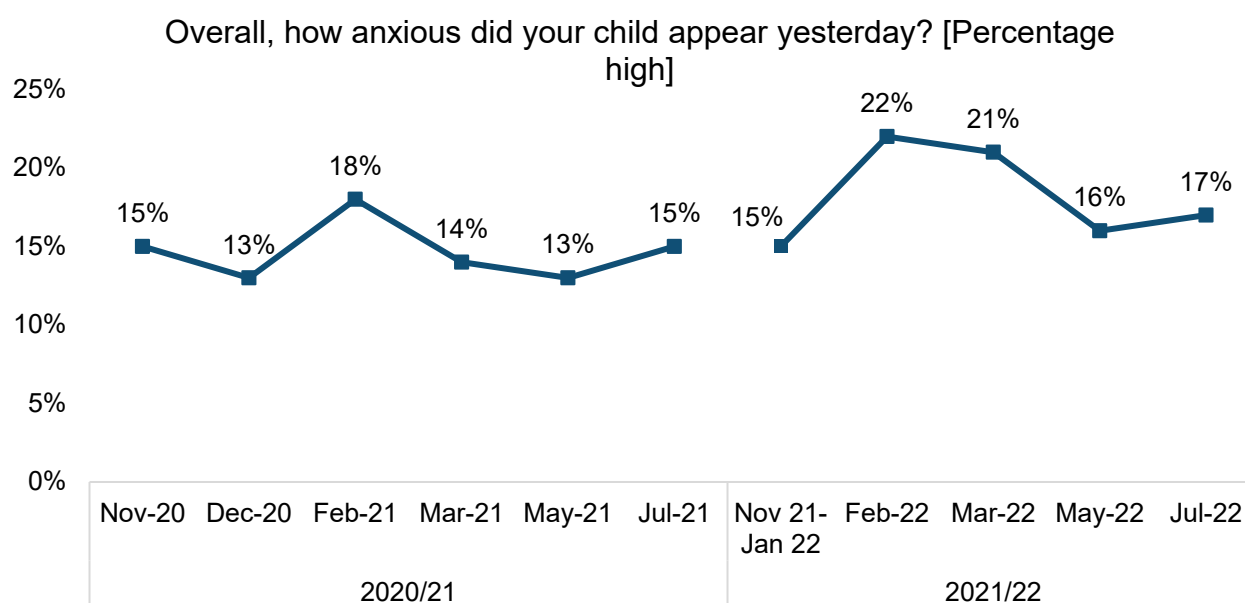
5 out of 10 for anxiousness (DfE, 2021d, 2022b). The trends indicate that rates of low happiness remained relatively consistent in 2021/22 at between 4% (November 21-January 22 & May 22) and 7% (February 22). These trends were similar to the previous academic year, except for a particularly high rate in February 21 (11%), when schools were closed to the majority of pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The percentage of those reporting high anxiousness in 2021/22 appears greater than the percentage reporting low happiness. The percentage of those reporting high anxiousness fluctuated from a low of 15% (November 21-January 22¹⁸) to a high of 22% (February 22). While rates of high anxiousness appear to have reduced towards the end of the 2021/22 academic year, there is some indication that they remain at higher levels than seen across the 2020/21 academic year.

Figure 4. Percentage scoring in the low range for parent-report wellbeing in children aged 5- to 11-years-old



¹⁸ Note: apparent differences may be due to those in years 12-13 being excluded from the sample in this wave only. For more information, please see 'Annex A – Data sources and methods'.



Coverage: England, Note: primary parents (Highest n = November-January 2021; 2,197, Lowest n = July 2022; 1,164), † Parents were not asked questions related to their child’s life satisfaction and ‘life being worthwhile’. Low wellbeing was defined as scores lower than 5 out of 10 for happiness, life satisfaction, and life being worthwhile, and scores greater than 5 out of 10 for anxiousness. Source: DfE

Secondary-aged pupils

Average wellbeing

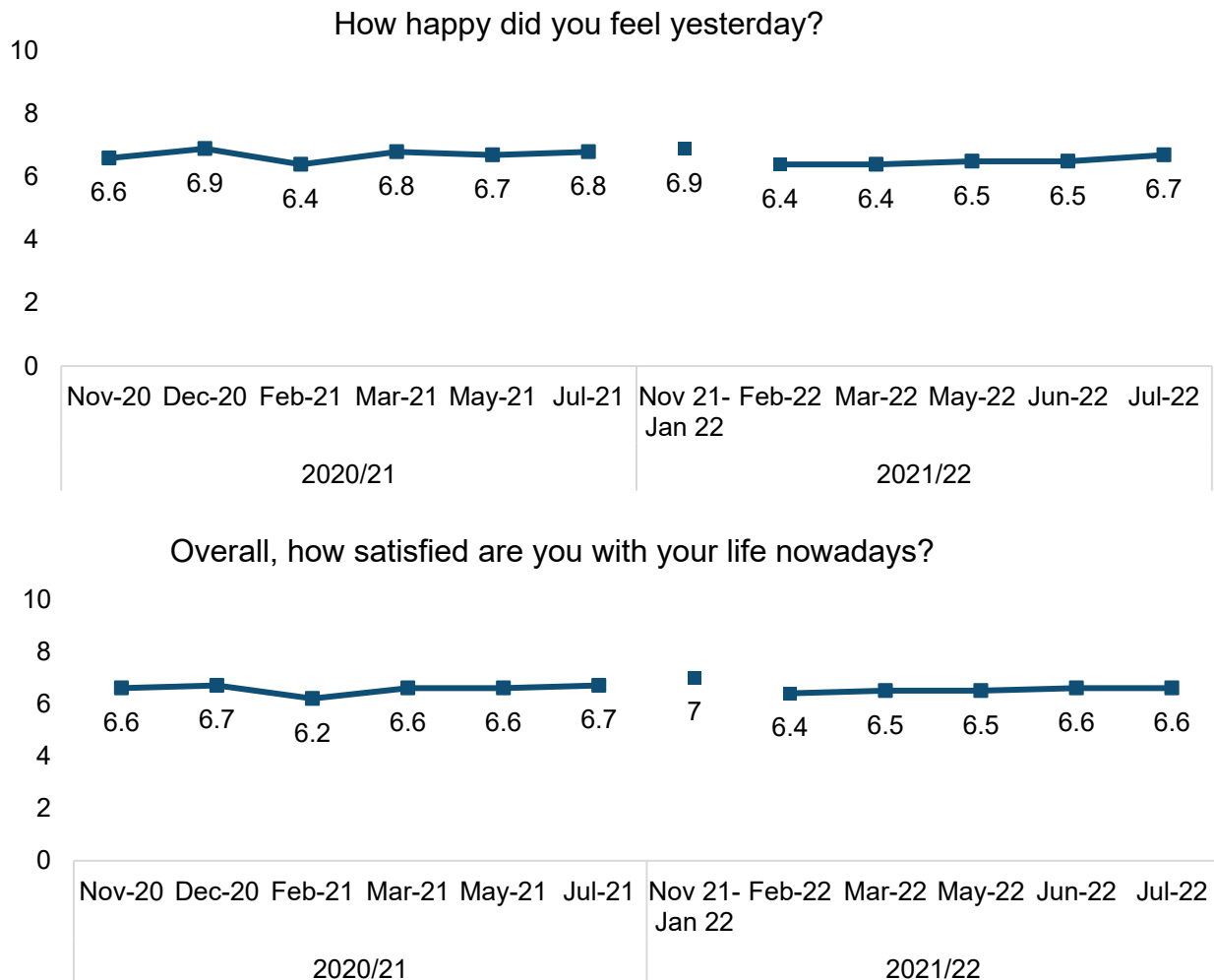
The time series charts presented in Figure 5 show the average ONS4 wellbeing ratings for secondary pupils at six time points across the 2021/22 academic year, as well as six time points across the 2020/21 academic year (DfE, 2021d, 2022b). These differences across waves have not been significance tested. Any observable differences should be treated with caution.

Average ratings of happiness, life satisfaction, and life being worthwhile were at similar levels and showed similar patterns across 2021/22. Ratings across these three measures appeared to decline slightly between the first November 21 – January 22 wave¹⁹ (Happiness: 6.9, Satisfaction: 7, Worthwhile: 7.1) and March 22 (Happiness: 6.4, Satisfaction: 6.5, Worthwhile: 6.5), before stabilising in the later waves. Average ratings on these measures remain similar to those across 2020/21, though there was no evidence for a specific drop in wellbeing in February 22 and recovery in March 22 waves, as was shown in 2020/21 when schools were closed to the majority of pupils.

¹⁹ Note: apparent differences may be due to those in years 12-13 being excluded from the sample in this wave only. For more information, please see ‘Annex A – Data sources and methods’.

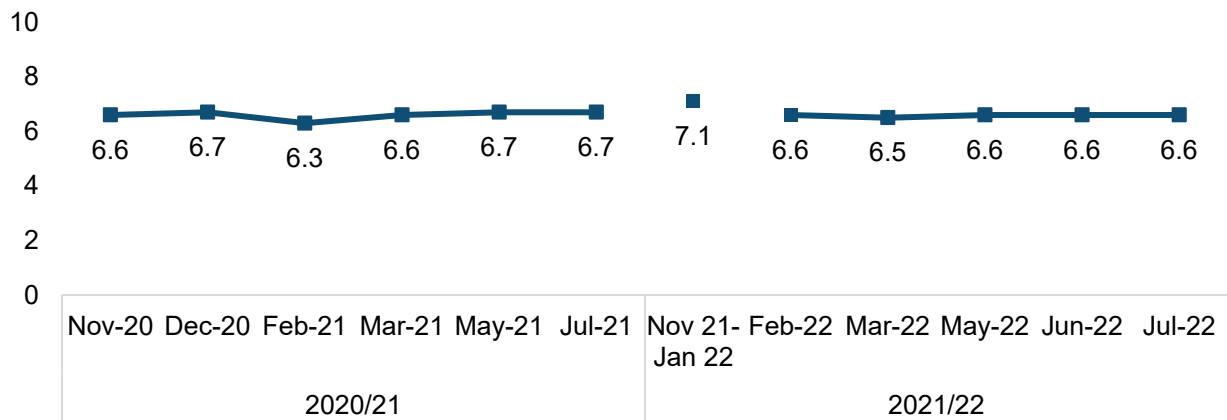
By contrast to the other measures of wellbeing, average anxiousness increased from a low of 3.6 in November 21-January 22²⁰ to 4.6 in June 22, while recovering slightly to 4.2 in the July 22 wave. Average anxiousness appears to remain higher at the end of 2021/22 academic year than shown across 2020/21.

Figure 5. Average ONS4 wellbeing ratings of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old

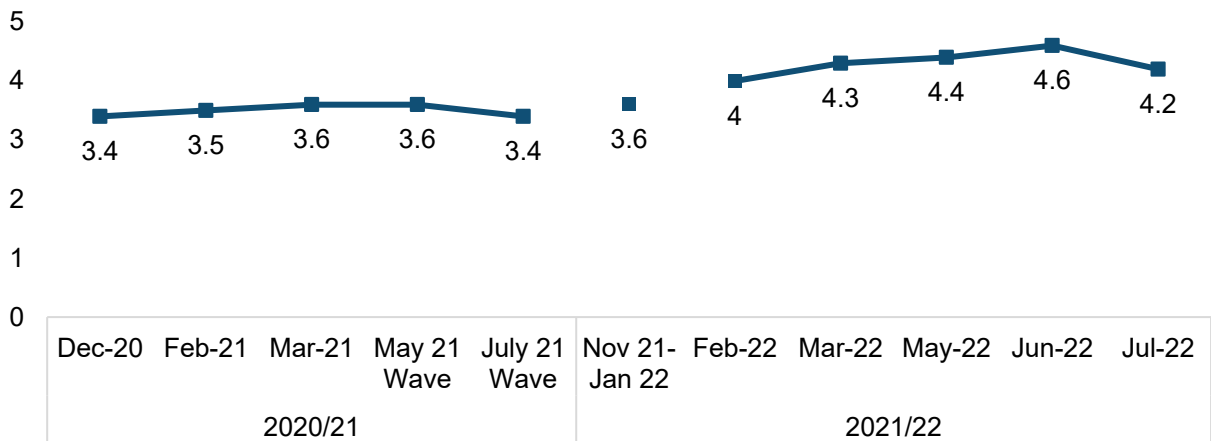


²⁰ Note: apparent differences may be due to those in years 12-13 being excluded from the sample in this wave only. For more information, please see 'Annex A – Data sources and methods'.

Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?



Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?



Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils (Highest n = November 2021 – January 2022; 4,228, Lowest n = June 2021; 1,511). The November 21- January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

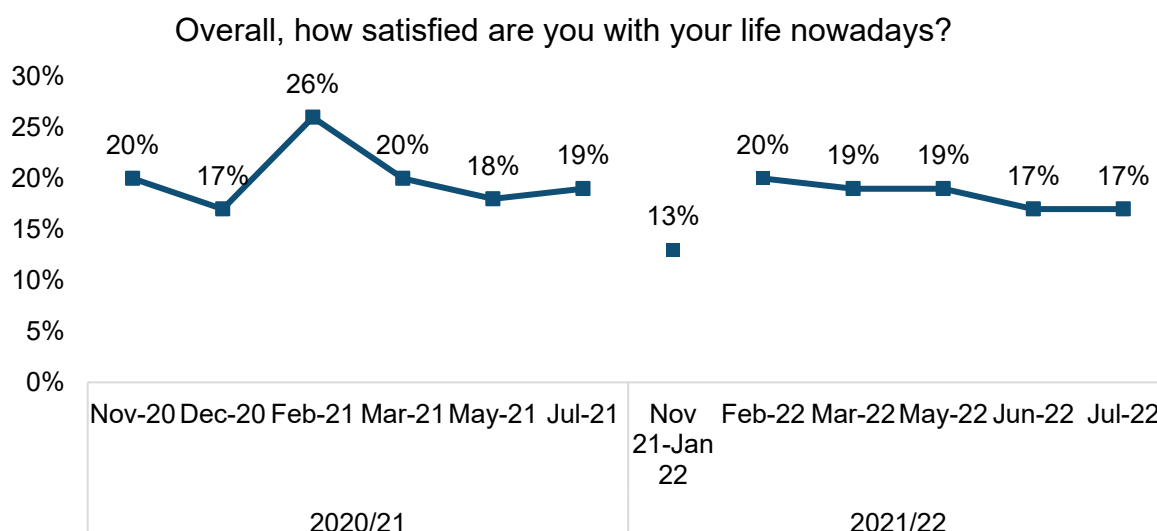
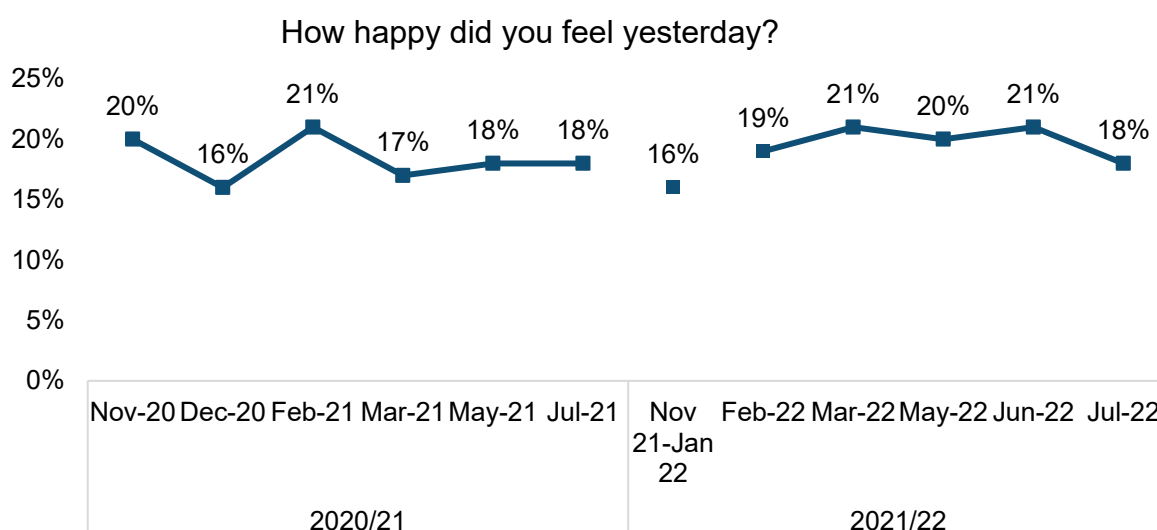
Low wellbeing

Figure 6 presents trends in the percentage of secondary-age children and young people who reported low wellbeing during the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years (DfE, 2021d, 2022b). Low wellbeing was defined as scores lower than 5 out of 10 for happiness, life satisfaction, and life being worthwhile, and scores greater than 5 out of 10 for anxiousness. Together, they suggest that rates of low happiness, life satisfaction, and high anxiousness increased between the November 21-January 22 and March 22 waves, before stabilising in later waves. Some of this initial increase from November 21 - January 22 and March 22 is likely to be due to inclusion of those in school years 12 and 13 from February 2022 onwards.

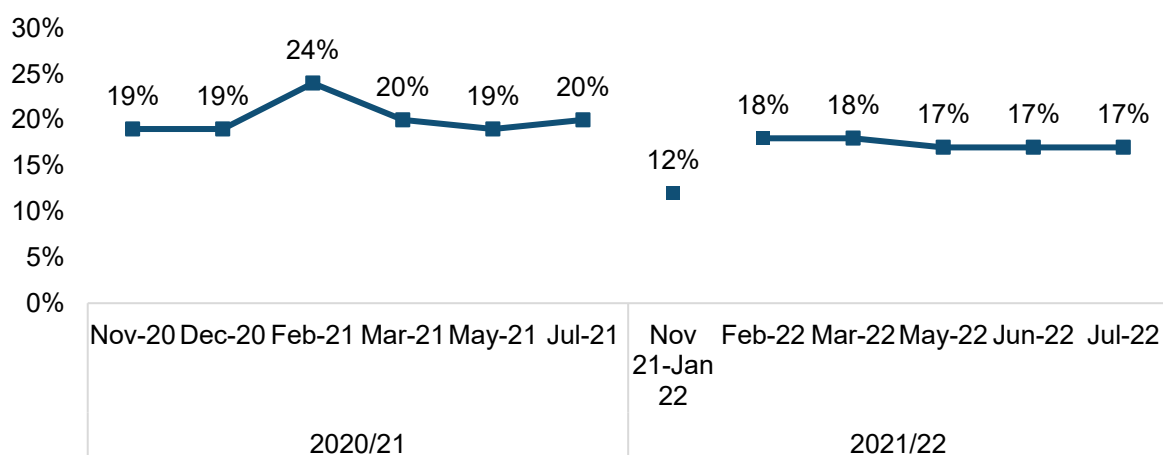
Rates of high anxiousness appear consistently higher than for low wellbeing in the other measures; in the final wave of the 2021/22 academic year, rates of high

anxiousness appear higher (35%), than for low happiness (18%), low life satisfaction (17%), and low worthwhileness (17%). Further, while rates of happiness, life satisfaction, and worthwhileness appear to be at similar levels in 2021/22 and 2020/21, rates of high anxiousness appear higher in the most recent academic year with a high of 40% of children and young people reporting high anxiousness in June 2022, compared to a high of 29% in February and May 2021.

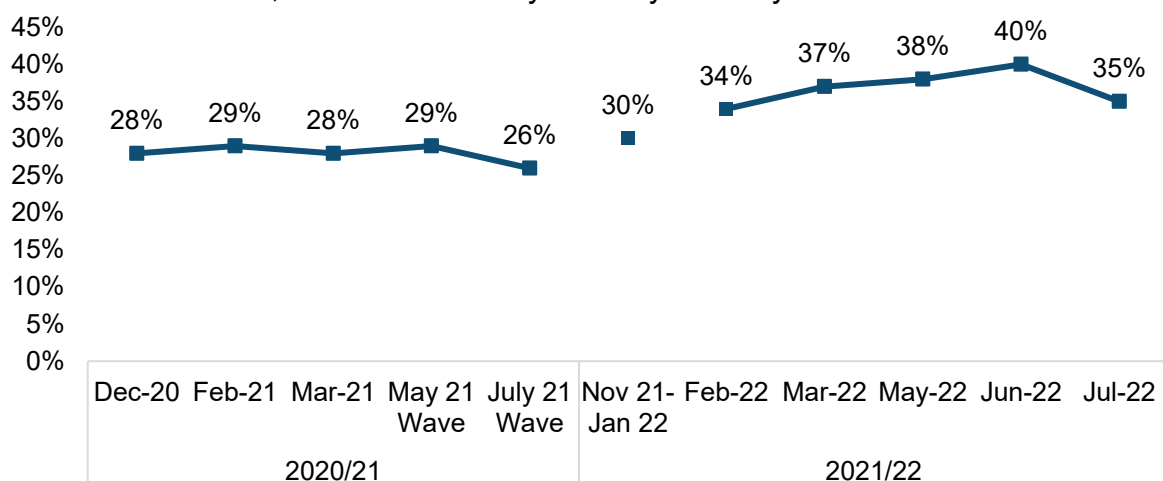
Figure 6. Percentage scoring in the low range for wellbeing in children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old



Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?



Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?



Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils (highest n = November 2021 – January 2022; 4,228, lowest n = June 2021; 1,511). Low wellbeing was defined as scores lower than 5 out of 10 for happiness, life satisfaction, and life being worthwhile, and scores greater than 5 out of 10 for anxiousness. The November 21- January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

Socio-demographic trends among secondary pupils

Figure 7 to Figure 11 show the average wellbeing scores of children and young people (aged between 11 and 18) across the academic years 2020/21 and 2021/22, split by relevant socio-demographic characteristics (DfE, 2021d, 2022b). Here we present average wellbeing by age, gender, SEN status, FSM status, and ethnicity. We do not present these analyses for primary-aged pupils due to previously discussed concerns about the validity of parent-report measures of children’s wellbeing.

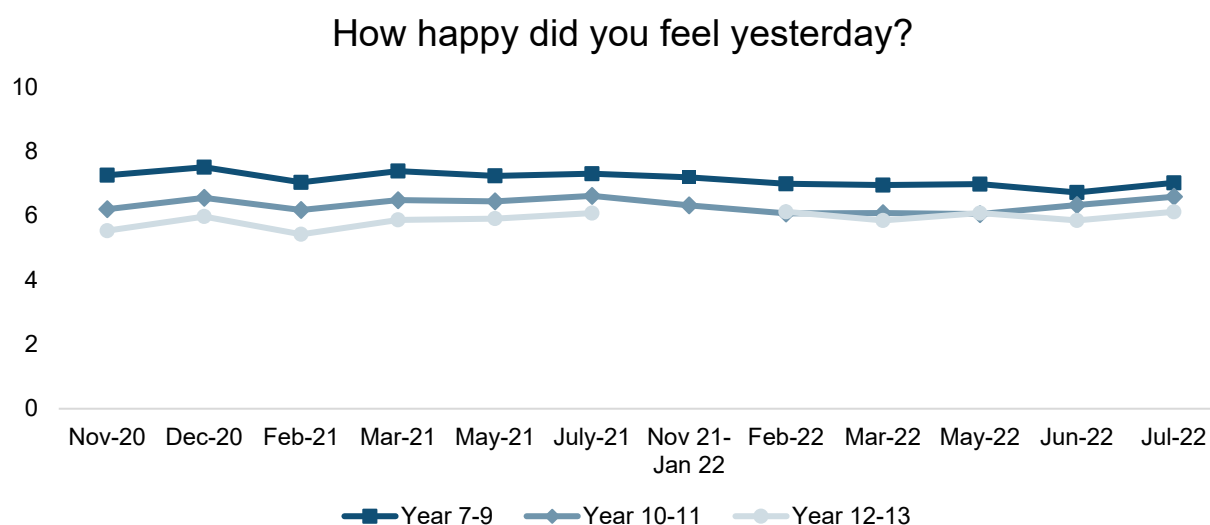
We present trends in low wellbeing in Annex B, but make reference to relevant and important trends in the main text.

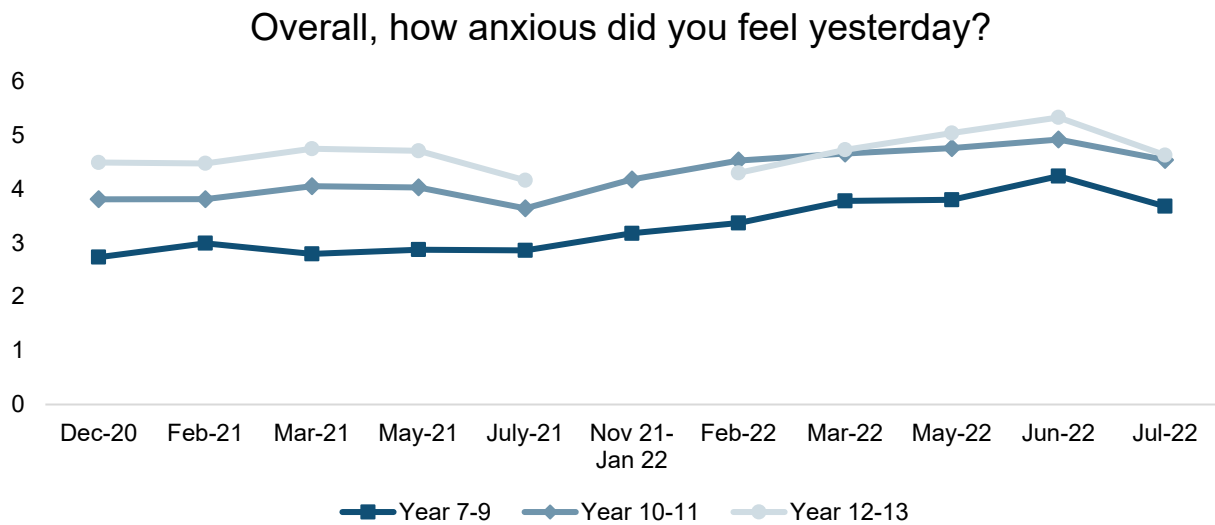
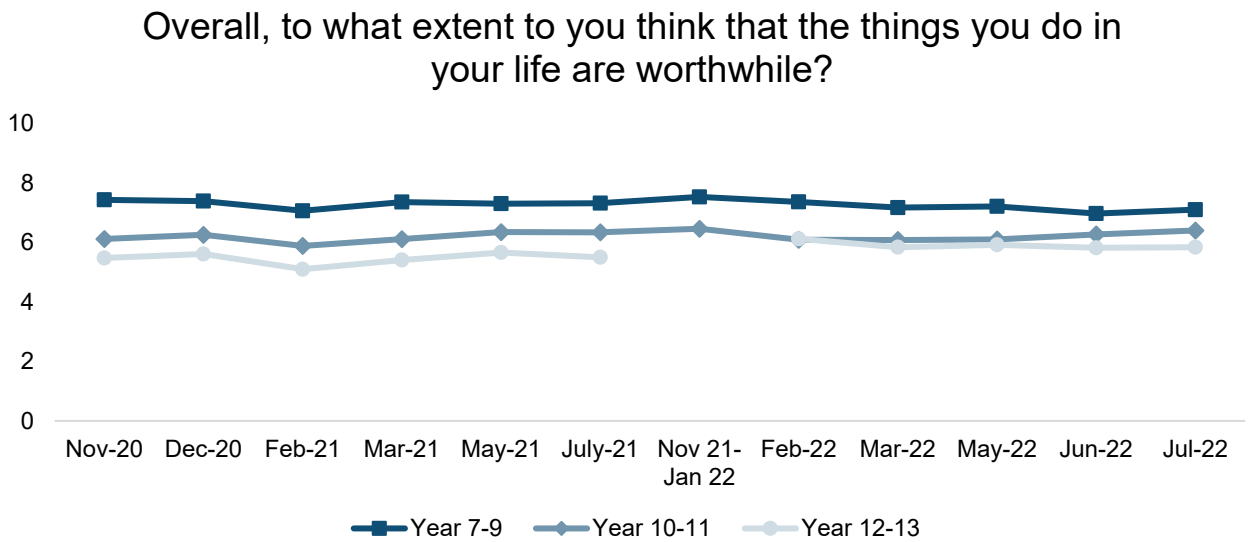
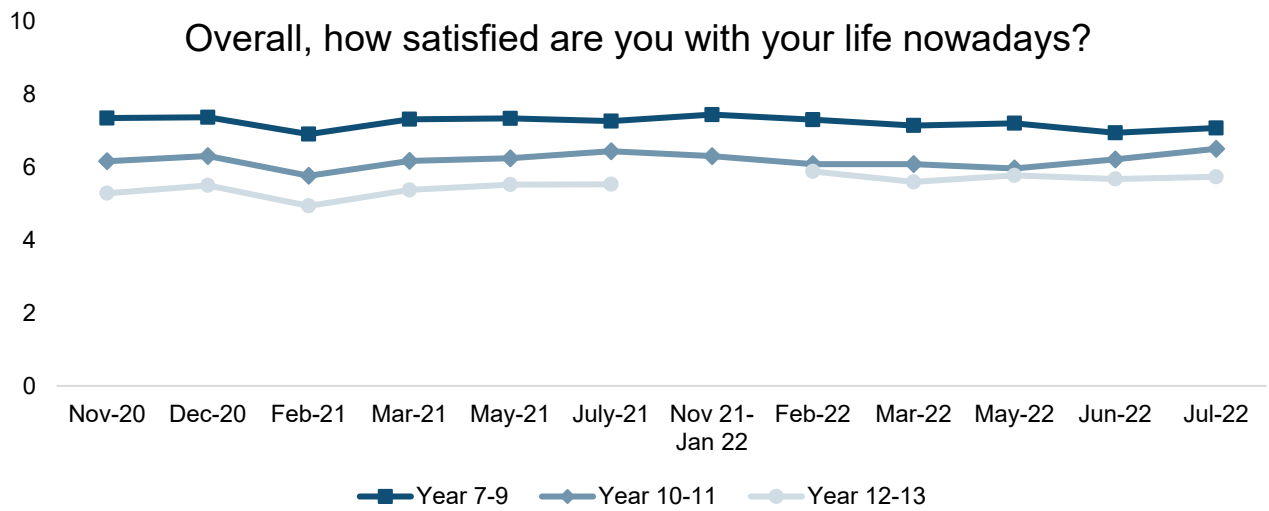
Age

Figure 7 presents average ONS4 wellbeing ratings of children and young people aged 11 to 18 by year group (DfE, 2021d, 2022b). Significance testing was not available for wellbeing by year group; therefore, any differences should be treated as indicative only.

Trends over the 2021/22 academic year suggest that those in years 7-9 (aged 11- to 14-years-old) had higher average happiness, life satisfaction, life being worthwhile, and lower anxiousness than those in years 10-11 (aged 14- to 16-years-old) and 12-13 (aged 16- to 18-years-old). Average wellbeing between those in years 10-11 and those in years 12-13 differed throughout the most recent academic year, with little or no differences shown between the age groups in the first few waves of the year. However, those in years 12-13 tended to report lower average wellbeing than those in years 10-11 for happiness, life satisfaction, and life being worthwhile in June and July 2022. Differences in average anxiousness were shown in the same direction in June but not July 2022. Similar patterns were shown for the percentage of those indicating low wellbeing on these measures (see '[Annex B – Trends in wellbeing](#)' for plots). These trends differ somewhat from the 2020/21 academic year when those in older age groups consistently reported lower average wellbeing and were more likely to report low wellbeing on these measures throughout the year, compared to those in younger secondary age groups.

Figure 7. Average ONS4 wellbeing ratings of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old by age





Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils (highest n = November 2021 – January 2022; 4,228 [male = 1919, female = 2166], lowest n = June 2021; 1,511 [male = 599, female = 912]), The November 21- January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

Gender

Figure 8 presents four time series plots showing the average ONS4 wellbeing ratings for secondary pupils across the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic year, split by gender (DfE, 2021d, 2022b). The clearest findings in these data are the consistent and statistically significant differences in average wellbeing between boys and girls that have persisted over the period covered. Boys and young men reported greater happiness, life satisfaction, feeling that life was worthwhile, and lower anxiousness than girls and young women at every wave of data collection, from November 2020 to July 2022. These trends reflect a continuation of persistent gender differences in wellbeing which, while varying in size, have been observed in this age group before the pandemic (e.g. Bradshaw & Keung, 2011; (DfE, 2019) What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2017). We are unable to establish whether this gap has remained at a consistent size with the current analysis.

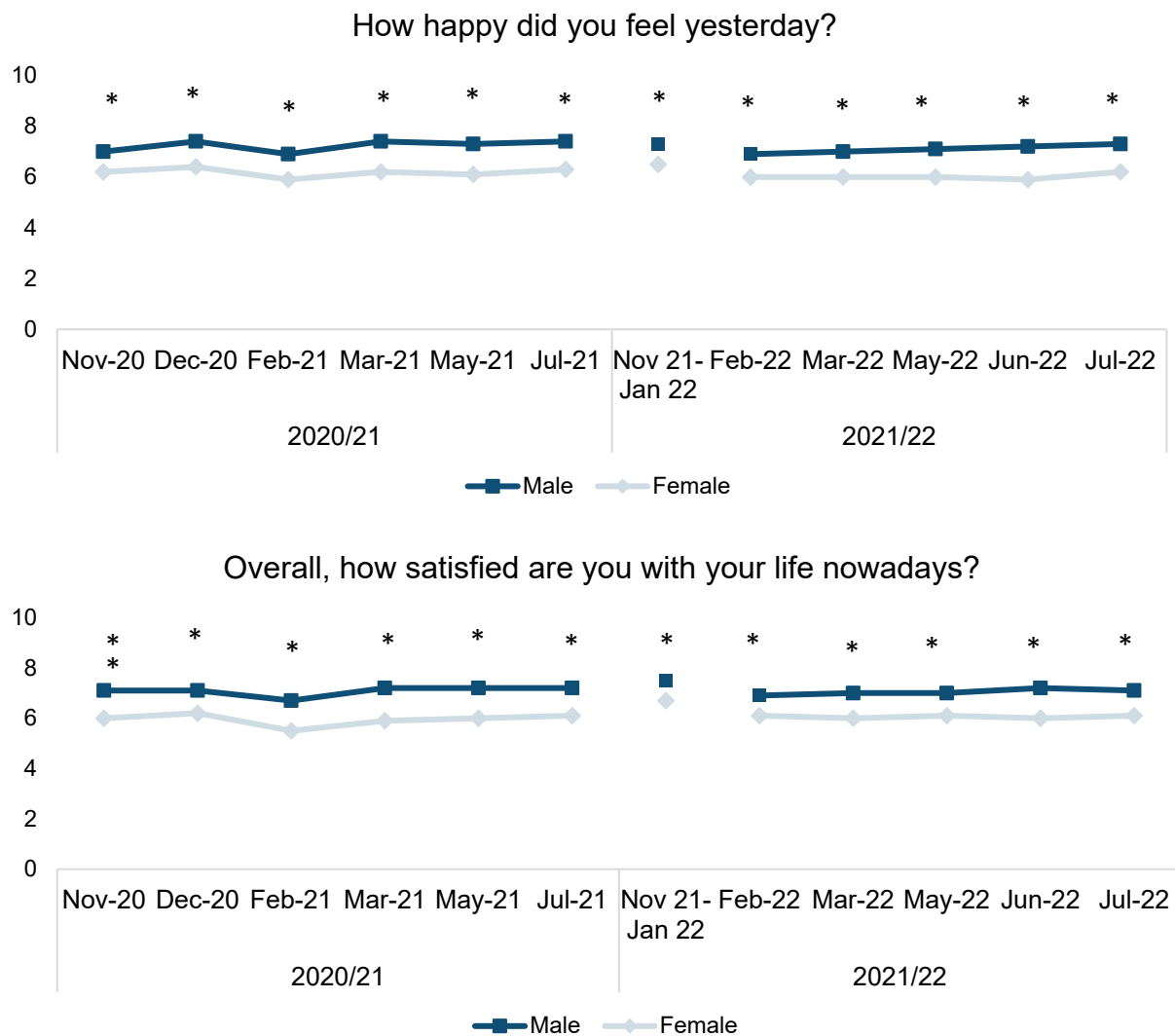
Patterns in the trends over time indicate similarities in wellbeing trends for male and female survey respondents. Trends in average happiness, life satisfaction, life being worthwhile, and anxiousness follow similar patterns for both genders²¹ across 2020/21 and 2021/22. Nonetheless, the gender gap in wellbeing appears to be particularly large for anxiousness (boys = 3.4, girls = 4.8, mean difference = 1.4 in June 2022), compared to for happiness (boys = 7.3, girls = 6.2, mean difference = 1.1 in June 2022), life satisfaction (boys = 7.1, girls = 6.1, mean difference = 1 in June 2022), and life being worthwhile (boys = 7.1, girls = 6.2, mean difference = 0.9 in June 2022). However, we cannot establish with this data whether the differences in the size of the wellbeing gender gap across different measures are statistically significant.

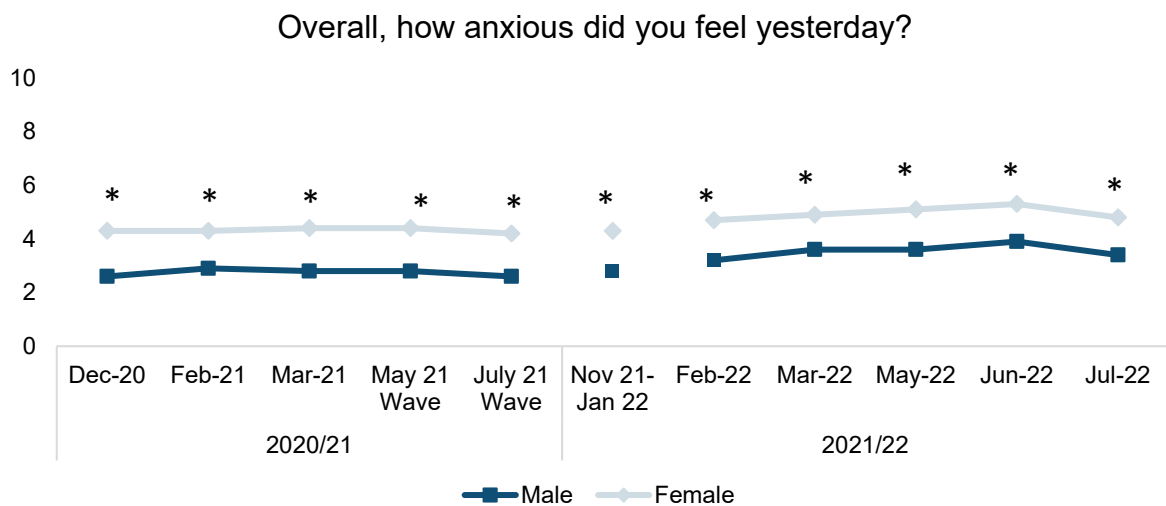
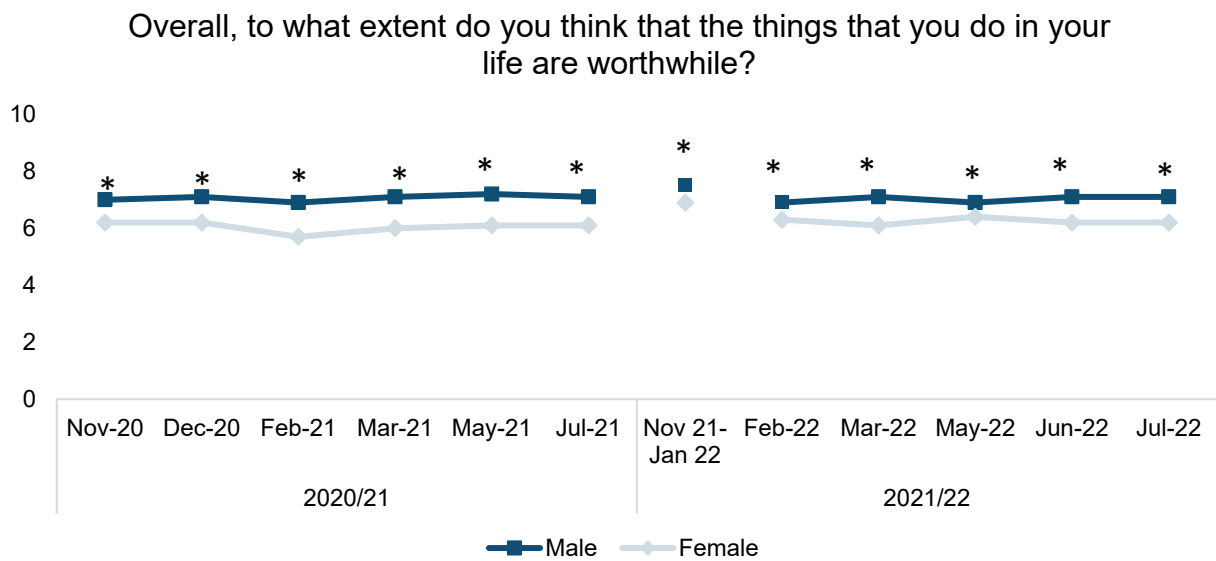
Analysis of the percentage of low wellbeing ratings given by boys and young men and girls and young women mirrors these average effects. Female respondents were more likely than males to report low scores on all four measures at all time points across the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years. There is tentative evidence that the gender gap in wellbeing was narrower in 2021/22 than 2020/21 in life satisfaction and worthwhileness, but this effect was not evident in other measures, nor can we test for statistical significance with this current data. In July 2022, the percentage of girls who reported low wellbeing was higher than boys for happiness (Males = 11%,

²¹ Survey also included an 'other' gender category. Data is not reported for this group due to small sample size.

Females = 24%), life satisfaction (Males = 11%, Females = 22%), life worthwhile (Males = 11%, Females = 23%), and anxiousness (Males = 25%, Females = 43%), with the gender gap appearing to be largest for anxiousness at a percentage point difference of 18.

Figure 8. Average ONS4 wellbeing ratings of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old by gender





Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils (highest n = November 2021 – January 2022; 4,228 [male = 1,919, female = 2166], lowest n = June 2021; 1,511 [male = 599, female = 912]), *indicates a significant difference between groups in highlighted wave. The November 21- January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

SEN status

Figure 9 presents trends in average wellbeing across the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years by SEN status. The results show that average wellbeing across the four measures did not consistently differ statistically between SEN and non-SEN secondary pupils in 2020/21 and 2021/22. Nonetheless, in 2021/22 there was some evidence that pupils with SEN reported lower average happiness in November 21 -

January 22 (SEN = 6.6, non-SEN = 6.9)²², May 22 (SEN = 6.2, non-SEN = 6.6) and June 22 (SEN = 6.1, non-SEN = 6.6) than non-SEN pupils, while no statistical difference was observed in the final wave of the year, July 22 (SEN = 6.7, non-SEN = 6.7).

Pupils with SEN were also more likely to report greater anxiousness on average than those without SEN in November 21-January 22 (SEN = 3.9, non-SEN = 3.5)²³ and February 22 waves (SEN = 4.6, non-SEN = 3.6), though this difference was no longer evident in later waves. This trend somewhat mirrors the 2020/21 academic year where those with SEN reported more anxiousness than those without SEN in February 21 when schools were closed to the majority of pupils and March 21, but not in other waves.

There was no difference between SEN and non-SEN pupils in average life satisfaction in any wave across 2020/21 or 2021/22.

It is not possible from this analysis to assess whether these differences in average wellbeing are due to greater increases or decreases in anxiety in one group relative to the other.

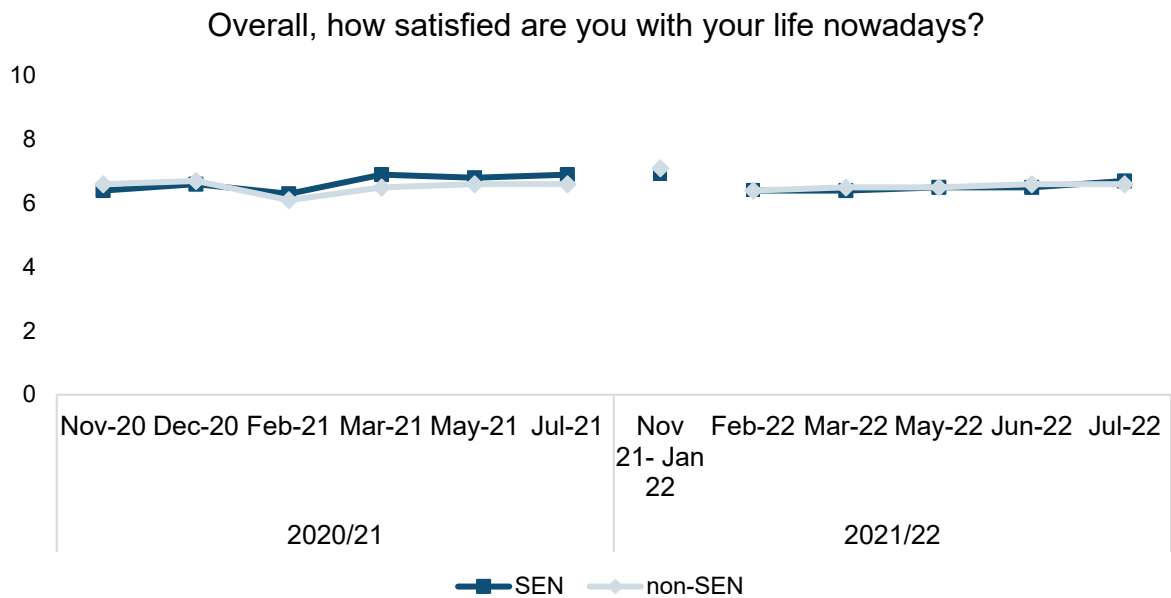
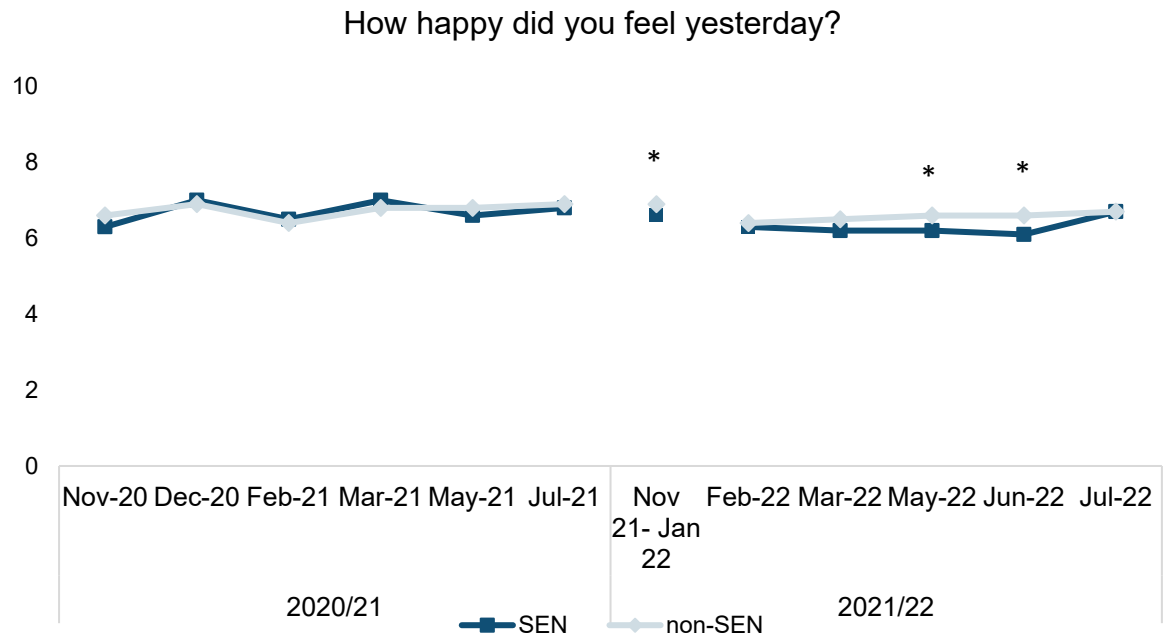
Analysis of the percentage of low wellbeing ratings given by those with and without SEN mirrors those of average wellbeing. In July 2022, the percentage of those with and without SEN was not statistically different for happiness (SEN = 17%, non-SEN = 18%), life satisfaction (SEN = 16%, non-SEN = 18%), life worthwhile (SEN = 17%, non-SEN = 17%), and anxiousness (SEN = 33%, non-SEN = 35%).

Together, these data suggest that there was not a clear and consistent wellbeing gap between SEN and non-SEN secondary-age children in 2021/22.

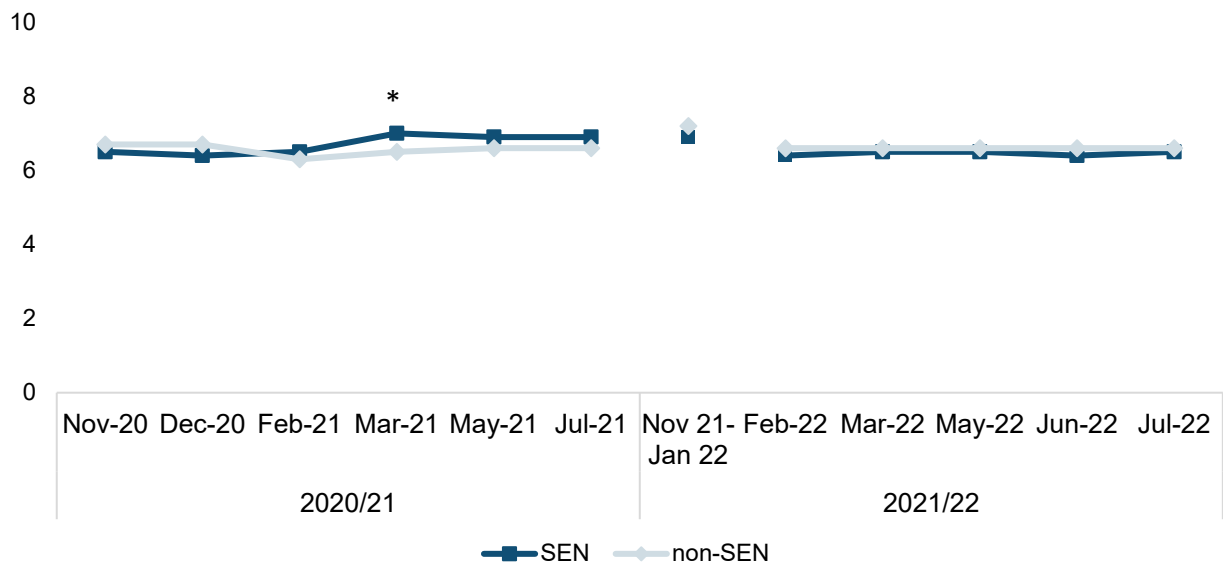
²² Note: apparent differences may be due to those in years 12-13 being excluded from the sample in this wave only. For more information, please see 'Annex A – Data sources and methods'.

²³ Ditto.

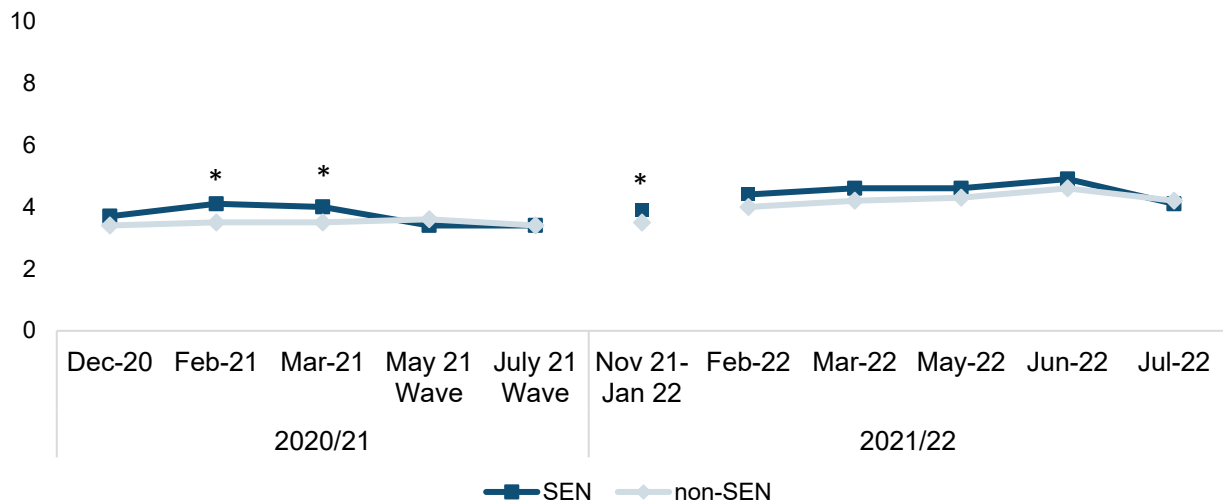
Figure 9. Average ONS4 wellbeing ratings of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old by SEN status



Overall, to what extent do you think that the things that you do in your life are worthwhile?



Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?



Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils (highest n = November 2021 – January 2022; 4,228 [SEN = 755, non-SEN = 3,473], lowest n = June 2021; 1,511 [SEN = 208, non-SEN = 1,303]), *indicates a significant difference between groups in highlighted wave. The November 21 – January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

FSM status

Figure 10 shows average wellbeing ratings of secondary pupils across the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years by eligibility for FSM.

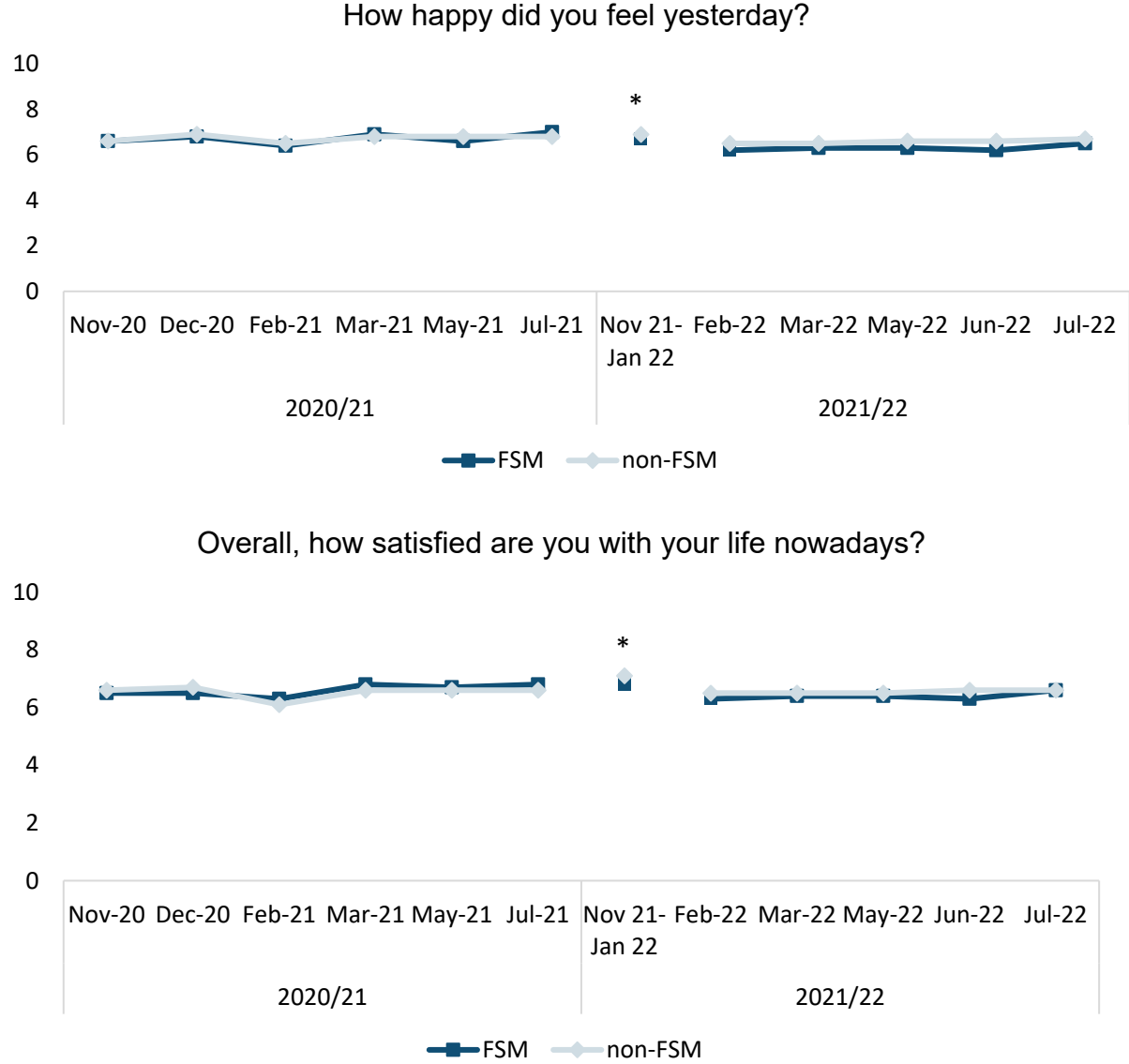
The results show a similar pattern across all four measures. Pupils eligible for FSM reported lower average happiness, life satisfaction, life being worthwhile, and higher anxiousness than those not eligible for FSM, in the November 21-January 22 wave, when those in school years 12 and 13 were not included in the survey. No differences in average wellbeing were observed in later waves in 2021/22.

Analysis of the percentage of low wellbeing ratings given by those with and without FSM eligibility broadly mirrors those of average wellbeing, with differences in November 21- January 22 and wave²⁴, before a closing of the gap in later waves. However, FSM-eligible children and young people were more likely to indicate low happiness in July 2022. In July 2022, the percentage of those with and without FSM eligibility was statistically different for happiness (FSM = 22%, non-FSM = 17%), but not for life satisfaction (FSM = 18%, non-FSM = 17%), life worthwhile (FSM = 17%, non-FSM = 17%), and anxiousness (FSM = 36%, non-FSM = 35%).

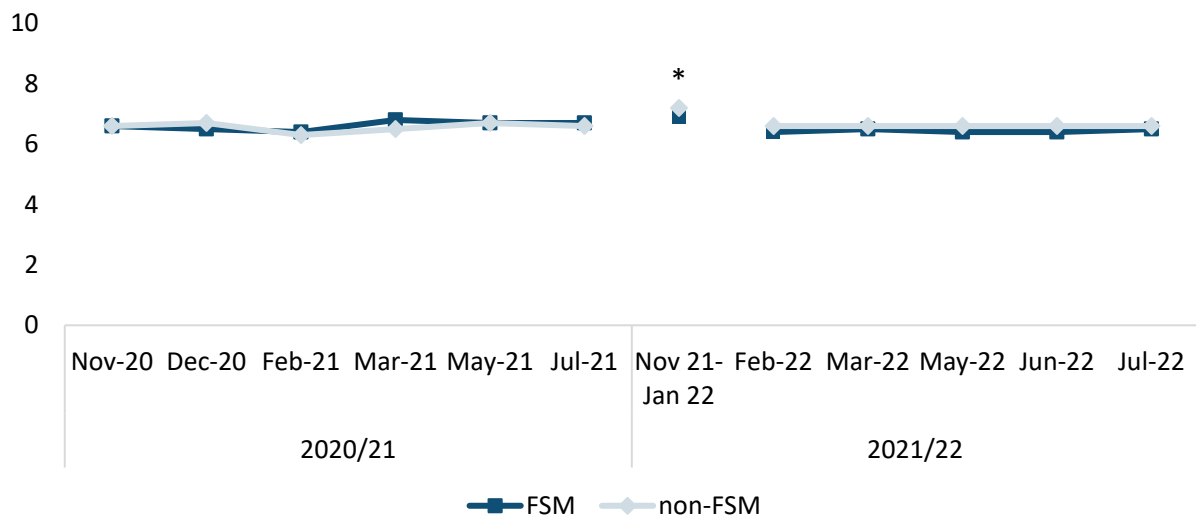
Together, these data suggest a small wellbeing gap between FSM and non-FSM children may have appeared in early 2021/22 before closing in later waves. It is unclear from these data what accounts for this difference, and why it was not sustained in later waves.

²⁴ Note: apparent differences may be due to those in years 12-13 being excluded from the sample in this wave only. For more information, please see 'Annex A – Data sources and methods'.

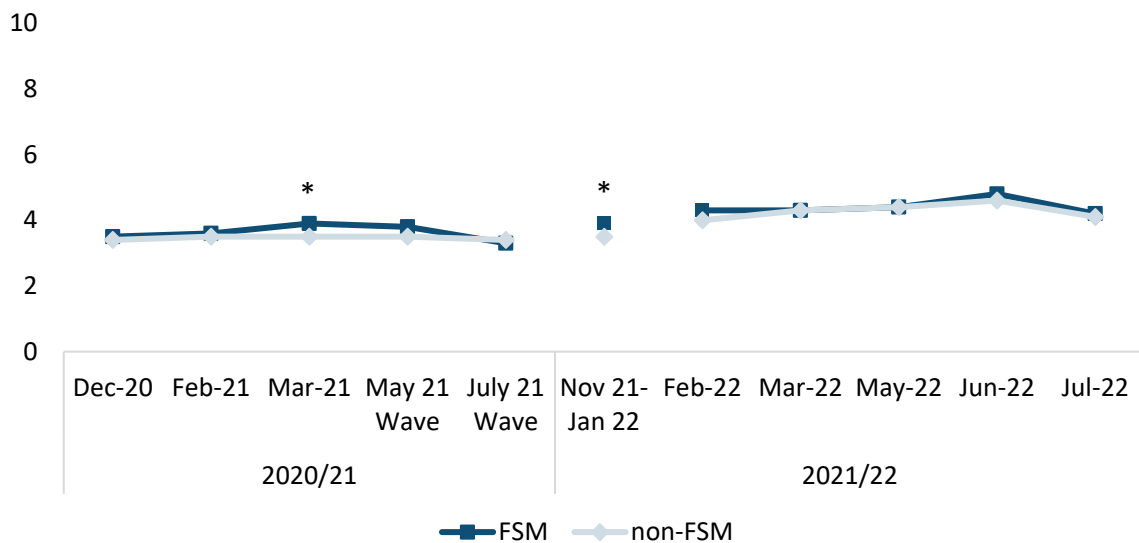
Figure 10. Average ONS4 wellbeing ratings of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old by FSM status



Overall, to what extent do you think that the things that you do in your life are worthwhile?



Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?



Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils (highest n = November 2021 – January 2022; 4,228 [FSM = 1,351, non-SEN = 2,877], lowest n = June 2021; 1,511 [SEN = 279, non-SEN = 1,232]), *indicates a significant difference between groups in highlighted wave. The November 21- January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

Ethnicity

Figure 11 shows average wellbeing ratings of secondary pupils across the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years, by ethnicity. As the subgroups were too small to present separately, we report by white and minority ethnic identity (referred to as BAME in the survey), only. Results suggested that there were no significant

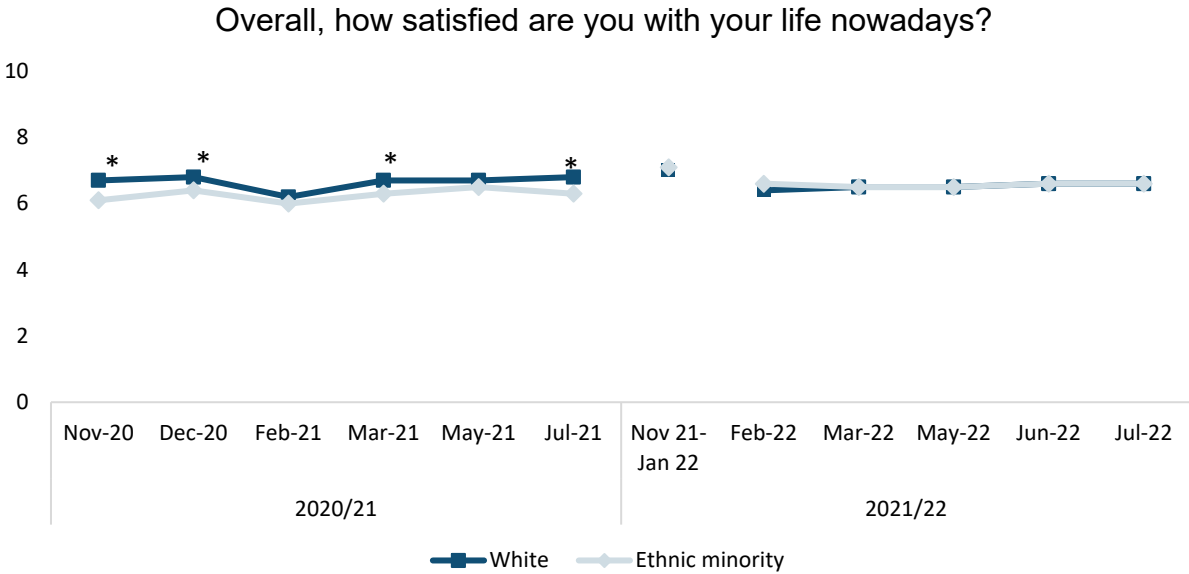
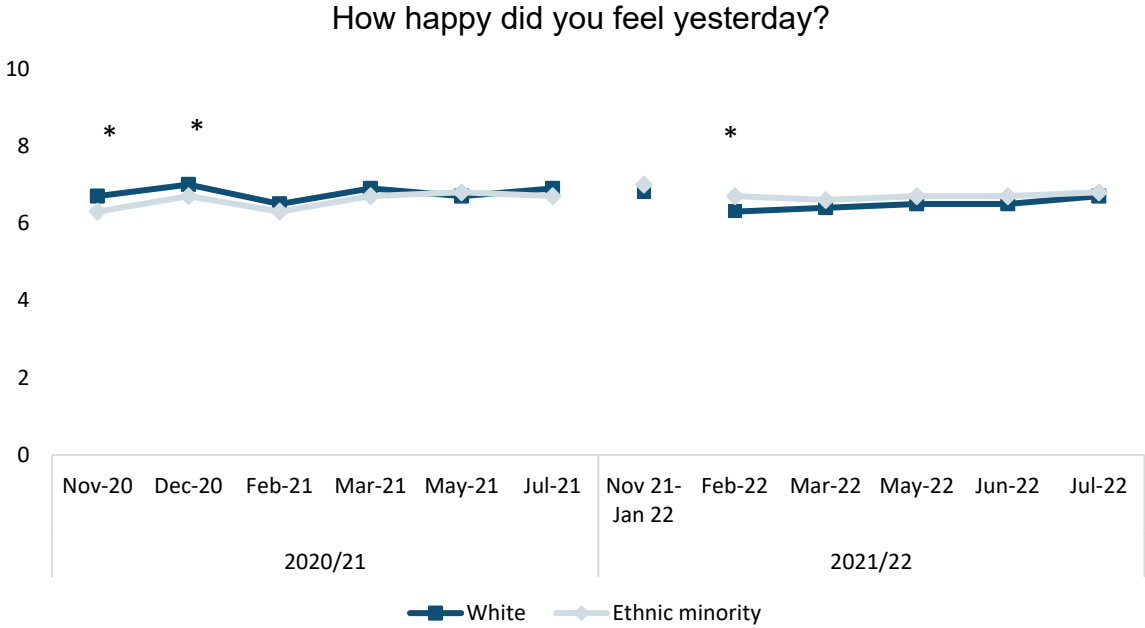
differences in average happiness, life satisfaction, and feeling of life being worthwhile across 2021/22. This represents a closing of the ethnicity gap on these measures from 2020/21, when white respondents reported higher average wellbeing on some measures, on some waves, compared to those from an ethnic minority group. This appears to be due to an increase in average wellbeing on these measures in ethnic minority pupils, rather than a decrease in wellbeing among white pupils.

By contrast, white children and young people reported greater average anxiousness than those from an ethnic minority group in every wave of the 2021/22 academic year. This contrasts with the 2020/21 academic year, when no differences in anxiousness were detected by ethnicity. This appears to be due to a larger increase in anxiousness among white pupils than ethnic minority pupils in 2021/22.

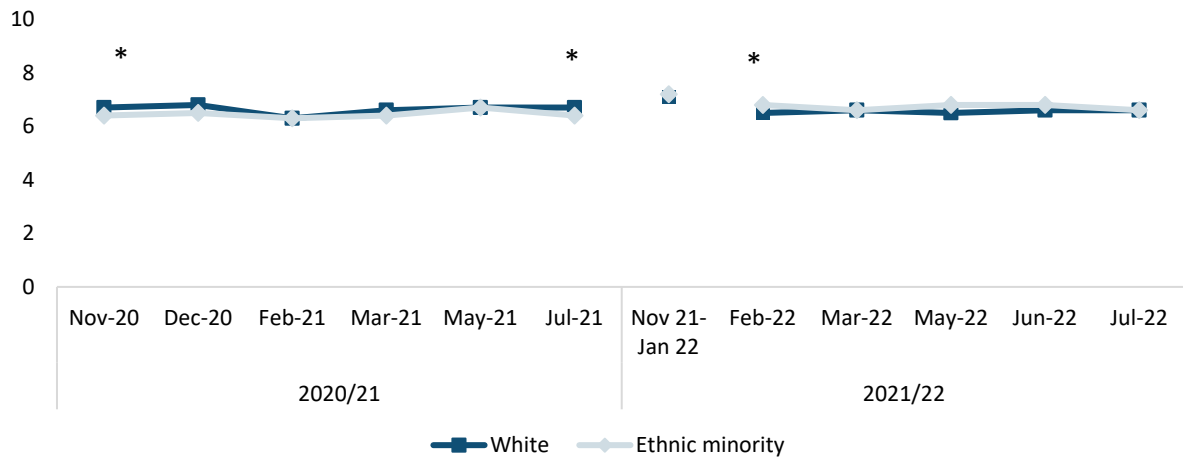
Analysis of the percentage of children and young people reporting low wellbeing broadly mirrors these results, though a greater percentage of white children and young people also reported low wellbeing across all measures in the February 22 wave (happiness: white = 18%, ethnic minority = 13%; life satisfaction: white = 16%, ethnic minority = 11%; feeling of worthwhileness: white = 17%, ethnic minorities = 8%; anxiousness: white = 34%, ethnic minorities = 22%), before closing in all measures except anxiousness. In July 2022, the percentage of those who were white and belonged to an ethnic minority group was statistically different for anxiousness (white = 37%, ethnic minorities = 31%), but not for happiness (white = 25%, ethnic minorities = 18%), life satisfaction (white = 18%, ethnic minorities = 15%), or life worthwhile (white = 17%, ethnic minorities = 17%).

It is important to note that data by two-group ethnicity may mask differences between groups of ethnic minority children and young people. Future research with boosted samples of ethnic minorities may be needed to understand differences in the subjective wellbeing of people of different ethnicities.

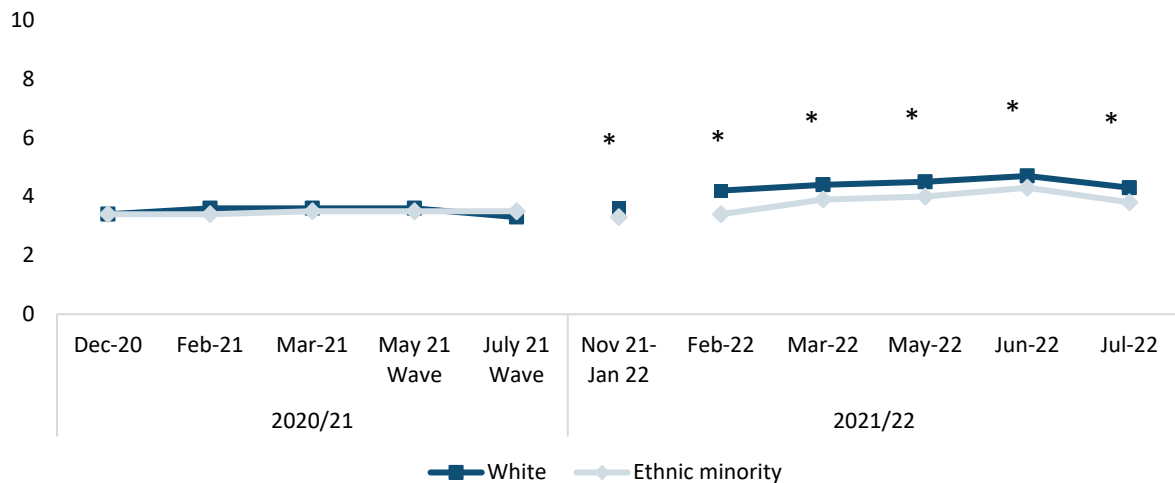
Figure 11. Average ONS4 wellbeing ratings of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old by ethnicity



Overall, to what extent do you think that the things that you do in your life are worthwhile?



Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?



Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils (highest n = November 2021 – January 2022; 4,228 [white = 3,061, ethnic minority = 1,063], lowest n = June 2021; 1,511 [white = 1,121, ethnic minority = 355]), *indicates a significant difference between groups in highlighted wave. The November 21- January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

Discussion of personal wellbeing trends

The trends reported in this chapter indicate that children and young people’s subjective wellbeing measured in the whole of the UK, as measured by the ONS4, had remained relatively consistent in recent years, prior to 2020. On average, children and young people reported a small dip in their wellbeing in 2020 but scores had since recovered to previous levels by April – June 2021 and remained at similar

levels in May-June 2022. The percentage of those reporting low wellbeing in 2022 was marginally lower than in 2021, and substantially lower than 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the 2021/22 academic year, and in England, wellbeing on most measures remained consistent, but anxiousness among both primary and secondary-age pupils appears to have increased and is higher than in 2020/21. It is not possible to interpret from the data reported what may have caused this increase. However, further analysis of the data, including uncovering the kinds of activities and experiences which correlate with increased anxiousness, as well as understanding the characteristics of those who have indicated a rise in poorer wellbeing, could add broader context to these findings. Investigation into these trends could provide invaluable insight into those who may require increased support for anxiousness, as well as indicate where and how to intervene.

Considering differences in wellbeing trends by subgroup, older secondary-age pupils tended to report lower wellbeing than younger secondary-age pupils. Secondary-age boys reported higher wellbeing than girls throughout the 2021/22 academic year, on all measures; this is consistent with previous years. Secondary-age pupils with SEN were more likely to report low wellbeing in some time points in 2021/22, and in some measures, than those without SEN. Secondary-age pupils eligible for FSM reported lower wellbeing than those not eligible for FSM early in the 2021/22 academic year, but this difference was no longer evident at the end of the year.

Another finding of interest was that secondary-age white pupils reported greater anxiousness than those from an ethnic minority background throughout the 2021/22 academic year. This contrasts with the 2020/21 academic year, when no differences in anxiousness were detected by ethnicity. No significant differences in other measures of wellbeing were evident by ethnicity across 2021/22. This represents a closing of the ethnicity gap on these measures from 2020/21, when white respondents reported higher average wellbeing on some measures on some waves compared to those from an ethnic minority group. These results partly mirror epidemiological studies of mental health and wellbeing, which have shown that adolescents from a minority ethnic background, including being Asian or Black, tend to report fewer mental health difficulties and better subjective wellbeing than white adolescents (Lereya et al., 2022; Maynard & Harding, 2010). It is unclear from current analysis why these trends in wellbeing by ethnicity have occurred. Future work which focuses on individual, social, and cultural factors that influence wellbeing in children and young people may help to provide greater insight into these trends.

Domain 2: Mental and physical health

Mental health and physical health are inextricably linked; good mental health can ensure we have the capability to lead a healthy lifestyle and to manage and recover from physical health conditions (Public Health England, 2017). Recent qualitative work from the ONS demonstrates that children and young people understand that having good mental and physical health allows them to do the things they enjoy, as well as the importance of recognising and managing stressors, and getting enough sleep, for mental and physical health (ONS, 2020).

Data presented in the previous State of the Nation suggested that rates of probable mental disorder remained at elevated levels in 2021 compared to before the pandemic (NHS Digital, 2021b). Further, rates of obesity among reception- and year 6-age children had also continued to climb and indeed had accelerated between the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years. It therefore remains important to continue to monitor the status of children and young people's mental and physical health to understand where improvements may have occurred and where difficulties remain.

This chapter presents:

- Happiness with health
- Rates of probable mental disorder using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
- Eating problems
- Self-harm
- Psychotic-like symptoms
- Help seeking for mental health
- Obesity
- Sleep problems

Key findings

Overall health

- While children and young people's happiness with their health has remained stable since responses to this question began to be collected in 2013-2015, the percentage of those reporting low happiness with their health appears to have increased between 2019 and 2020 and has continued to increase in subsequent years.

Mental health

- Rates of probable disorders among both 7- to 10-year-olds and 11- to 16-year-olds increased between 2017 and 2020 but have remained at similar levels in subsequent years. Among 17- 19-year-olds, rates of probable disorder have risen from one in six in 2020 and 2021 to one in four in 2022. In the 20- to 23-year-olds, rates of probable disorder were similar in 2021 and 2022.
- Based on parent/carer reports, children's behavioural and attentional difficulties had, on average, remained relatively stable since between July 2021 and March 2022, while children's emotional difficulties had increased since during this time period.
- In both 11- 16-year-olds and 17- 19-year-olds, rates of possible eating problems increased between 2017 and 2021, but remain at a similar level in 2022.
- 3.9% of 7- to 9-year-olds, 11.1% of 11- to 16-year-olds, and 32.8% of 17- to 24-year-olds were reported or reported themselves as having self-harmed in their lifetimes. This increasing prevalence by age was shown for both boys and young men and girls and young women.
- In 2022, 18.4% of 17- to 24-year-olds screened 'at-risk' for psychotic-like experiences. Those who either had a probable or possible mental disorder were more likely to screen at-risk for psychotic-like experiences in 2022 than those unlikely to have a disorder.
- 76% of 7- to 16-year-olds were reported in 2022 as having sought help or advice for a mental health concern in the previous year, compared to 53% of 17- to-23-year-olds.
- Considering responses by sex, rates of probable disorder were greater for younger boys than younger girls (7- to 10-year-olds), but this trend reversed among 17- to 24-year-olds with young women more likely to have a probable disorder than young men.

- Girls and young women were more likely than boys and young men to screen positive for a possible eating problem in all three age groups, and in every wave where each group was surveyed. This sex difference appears to be particularly large in older age groups (17- 19-year-olds and 20- 23-year-olds).
- Girls and young women were more likely to have tried to harm themselves in their lifetime than boys and young men.

Physical health

- Prevalence of obesity appears to have reduced among year 6- and reception-age children between 2020/21 and 2021/22. Rates of obesity remain higher among year 6-age children than before the pandemic.
- Rates of obesity were similar for boys and girls of reception age in 2021/22. By contrast, rates of obesity were larger for boys than girls among those of year 6-age.
- Among those of reception age, rates of obesity were similar across ethnic groups. However, among children in year 6, rates of obesity were highest among Black pupils (33%); the lowest rates of obesity in this age group were among Chinese pupils (18%).
- In 2022, 34% of parents of children aged 7- to 16-years-old and 64% of young people aged 17 to 23 reported or were reported as having experienced problems with sleep on three or more occasions in the previous week.
- Those who regularly struggled with sleep were more likely to have a mental disorder in 2022.
- Considering problems with sleep by sex in 2022, young women aged 17 to 23 were more likely to report having experienced problems with sleep on three or more occasions in the previous week (76.7%) than young men (52.3%).

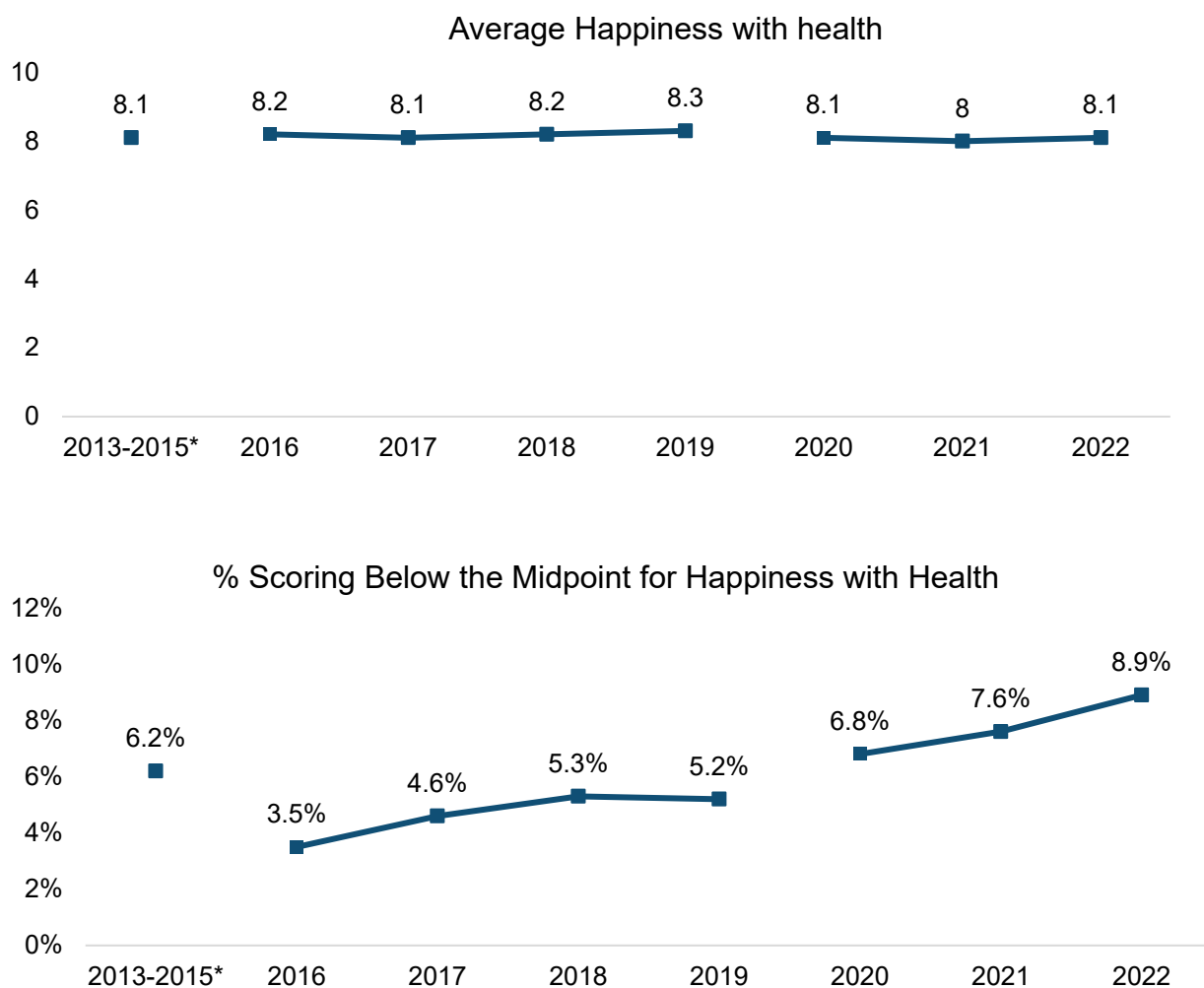
Happiness with health

The Good Childhood Index has collected regular data on children and young people's happiness with their health. Figure 12 presents this data as a time series of average annual happiness scores (on a scale of 0-10) of children and young people aged 10 to 17 from 2013-2015 to 2022 (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021).

The data shows that while children and young people's happiness with their health has remained stable at around 8 out of 10 since responses to this question began to be collected in 2013-2015, the percentage of those reporting low happiness with

their health (scores less than 5 out of 10) appears to have increased between 2019 (5.2%) and 2020 (6.8%) during the height of the pandemic. This percentage appears to have increased further in subsequent years, with 8.9% of respondents reporting low happiness with their health in 2022.

Figure 12. Average and percentage of low ratings of happiness with their health among children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old



Coverage: 2020-2022 UK, 2013-2019 Great Britain, Note: Discontinuity in time series and different data collection periods for 2013-15, n = 2000+ see 'Data sources and methods' annex for further information. † *The reported response for '2013 to 2015' is a pooled average based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report. A 'low' score represents a score of less than five out of ten. Source: The Children's Society.

Mental ill-health

This section reports on a range of measures of children and young people's mental ill-health, as measured by the validated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire²⁵ (SDQ), as well as a measure of possible eating problems as measured by responses to screening questions from the Development and Well-Being Assessment²⁶ (DAWBA). These scales cannot diagnose mental health disorders but can be used to indicate potential difficulties.

Rates of probable disorder

The SDQ includes 25 questions on different aspects of behaviour related to emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention (restlessness), peer relationship problems and positive prosocial behaviour. The responses to the 4 problem scales can be viewed together to assess a person's total difficulties, or separately to look at particular problems. The scores for these scales can then also be combined with answers to questions about the impact that the difficulties have on the child's life to create a score which indicates likelihood of that child having a mental disorder from unlikely to probable. This section presents annual rates of probable disorder by age and sex.

Trends by age

Data from NHS Digital's Mental Health of Children and Young People survey (MHCYP) presented in Figure 13 show that rates of probable disorders among both 7- to 10-year-olds and 11- to 16-year-olds increased between 2017 and 2020, but have remained at similar levels in subsequent waves of the survey. In 2022, 15.2% of 7- to 10-year-olds and 20.4% of 11- to 16-year-olds were estimated as having a probable mental disorder.

Among 17- 19-year-olds, rates of probable disorder increased from one in ten (10.1%) in 2017 to one in six in 2020 (17.7%) and 2021 (17.4%). In 2022, rates of probable disorder in this age group have again risen to one in four (25.7%).

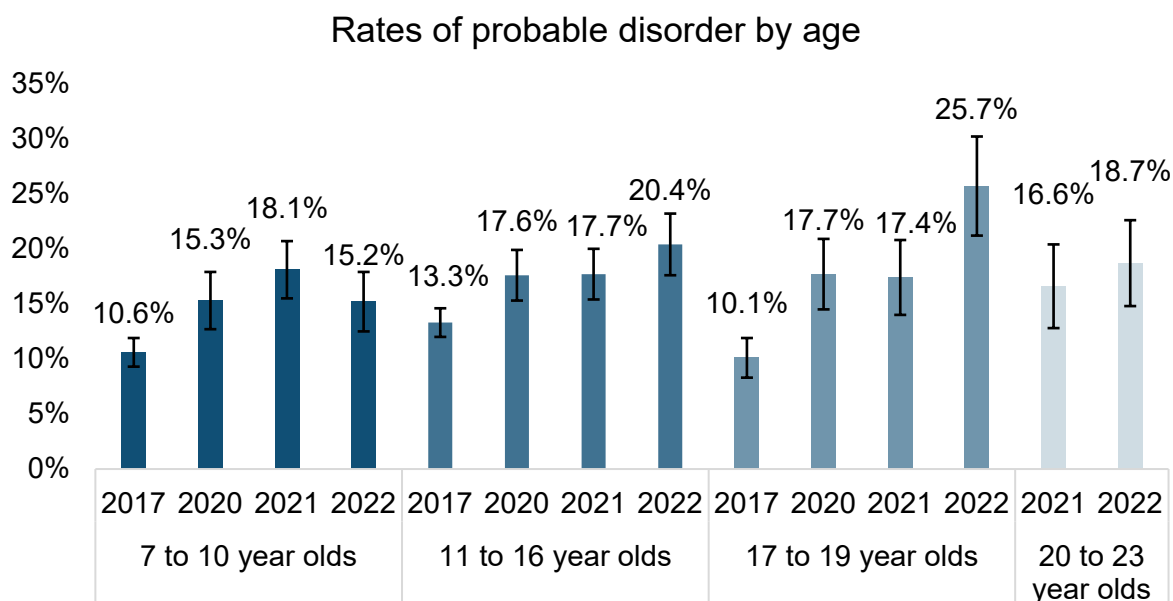
Among 20- to 23-year-olds, rates of probable disorder were similar and not statistically different in 2021 (16.6%) and 2022 (18.7%)²⁷.

²⁵ Information on the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire can be found at <https://www.sdqinfo.org/>

²⁶ Information on the Development and Well-Being Assessment can be found at <https://dawba.info/>

²⁷ The 2017 and 2020 waves did not have a comparable sample of 20- to 23-year-olds.

Figure 13. Rates of probable disorder 2017, 2020, 2021, and 2022 by age



Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. n's in 2022 = 7 to 10 year olds (853), 11 to 16 year olds (1,052), 17 to 24 year olds (961).

Source: NHS Digital

Trends by sex

Figure 14 presents a time series of rates of probable disorder by age and sex from the 2022 MHCYP survey. In 2022, boys aged 7- to 10-years old were more likely (19.7%) to have a probable mental disorder than girls in the same age group (10.5%). This sex difference was also shown in 2017, 2020, and 2021.

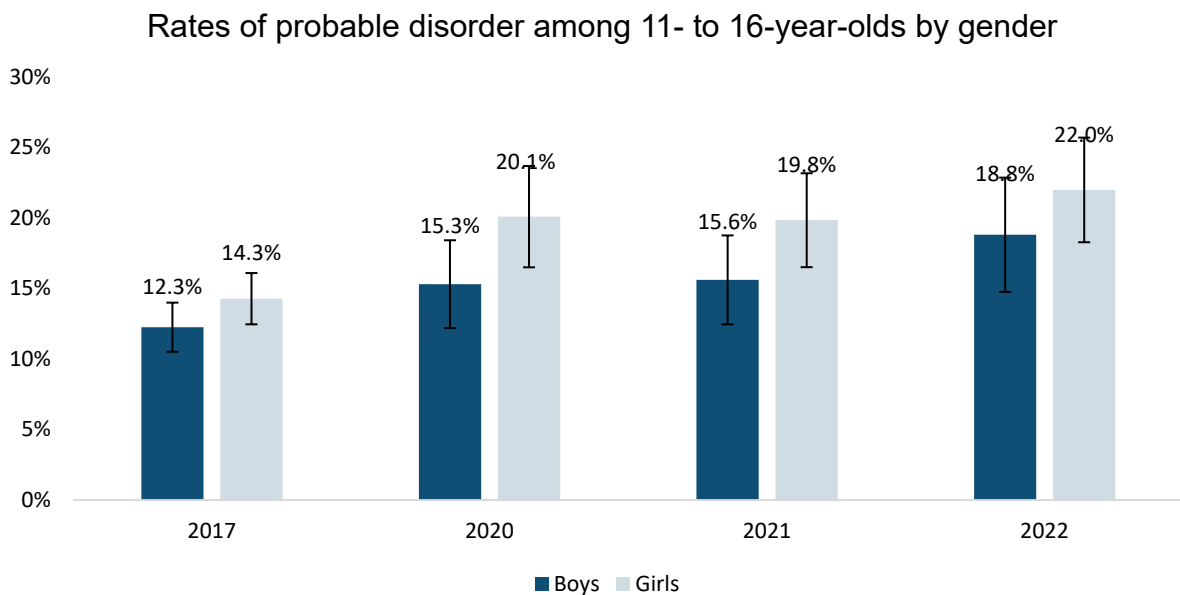
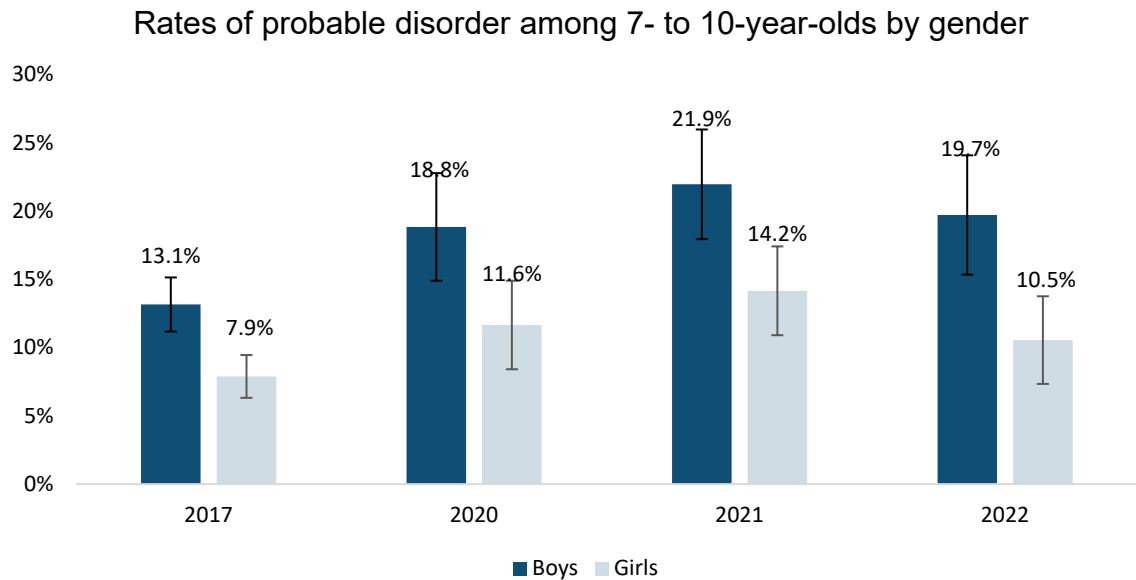
Among children aged 11- to 16-years-old, rates of probable disorder were similar for girls (22%) and boys (18.8%) in 2022. No differences by sex in rates of probable disorder were shown for this age group in 2017, 2020, or 2021.

Among young people aged 17- to 19-years-old, young women were more likely to have a probable disorder (33.1%) than young men in 2022 (18.7%). Young women were also more likely than young men to have a probable disorder in 2019, 2020, and 2021.

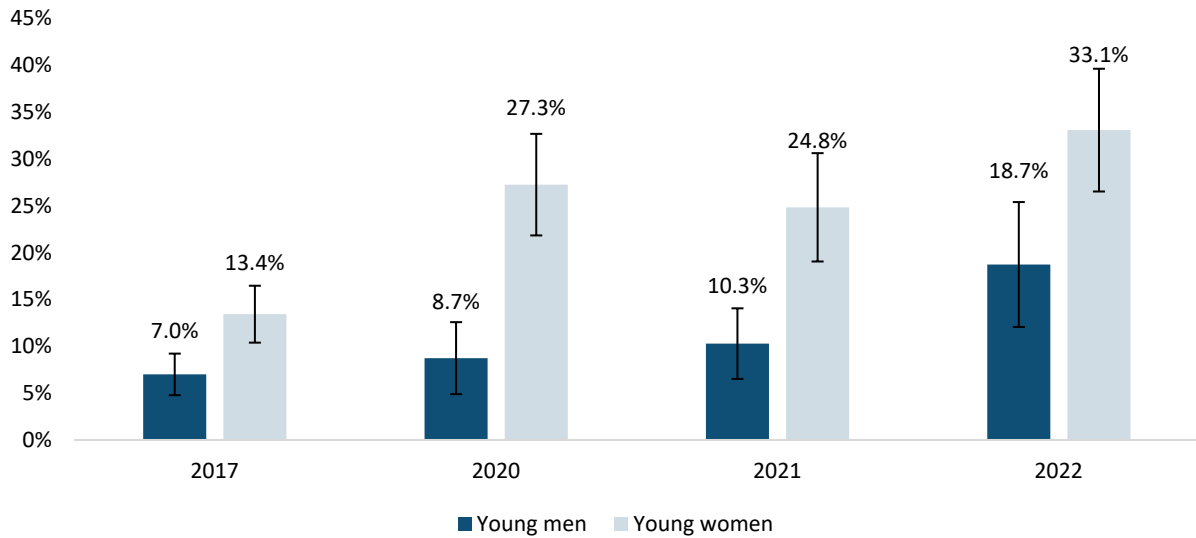
Finally, among young people aged 20 to 23 years old, young women were more likely to have a probable disorder (28.3%) than young men (10.2%) in 2022. A sex difference was also shown in 2021.

Together, these results suggest that rates of probable disorder were greater for younger boys than younger girls, but this trend reversed in older age groups with young women more likely to have a probable disorder than young men.

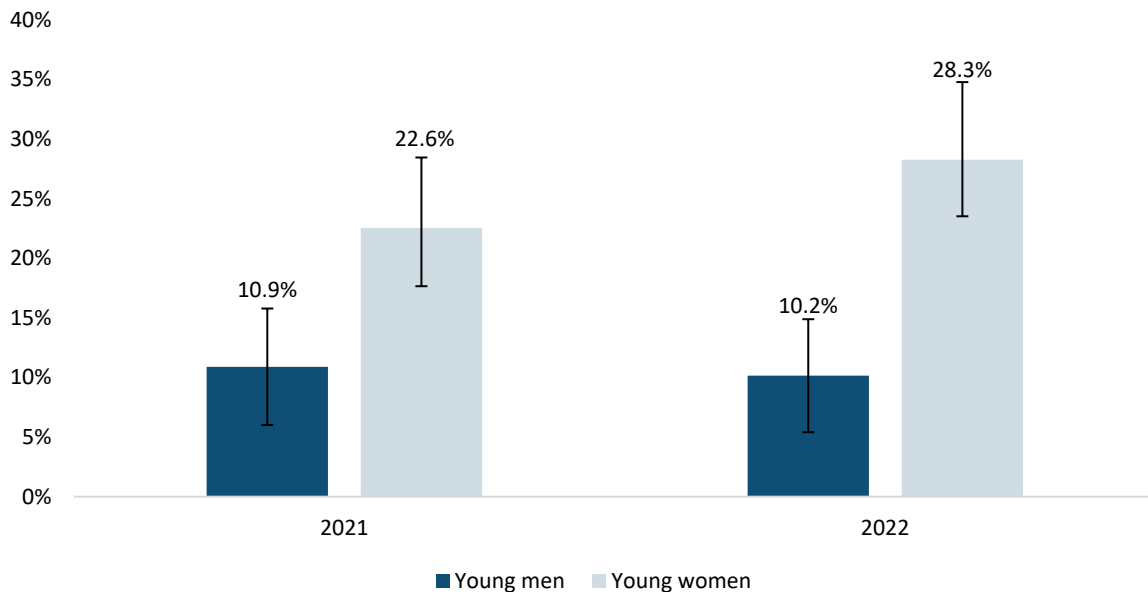
Figure 14. Percentage of children and young people with a probable disorder in 2017, 2020, 2021, and 2022 by age and sex



Rates of probable disorder among 17- to 19-year-olds by gender



Rates of probable disorder among 20- to 23-year-olds by gender



Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. n's in 2022 = 7 to 10 year olds (boys = 432, girls = 421), 11 to 16 year olds (boys = 503, girls = 549), 17 to 19 year olds (young men = 196, young women = 272), 20 to 23 year olds (young men = 163, young women = 225. Source: NHS Digital

Co-space follow-up survey on children's mental health symptoms

The Co-SPACE project has tracked the mental health of school-aged children and young people aged 4- to 16-years-old (at the beginning of the study) throughout the COVID-19 crisis (Co-Space, 2021). The most recent report was a 24-month follow-

up survey conducted between 30th March 2022 and 30th April 2022 (Co-Space, 2022).

Based on parent/carer reports in this non-representative sample, children's behavioural and attentional difficulties had, on average, remained relatively stable between July 2021 and March 2022, while children's emotional difficulties had increased since July 2021. However, it is possible that the statistically significant increase in emotional difficulties is a product of the increasing age of the Co-SPACE sample over the two-year period since the beginning of the study.

Since July 2021, trends in difficulties among both primary and secondary school-aged children mirror overall trends. In general, higher levels of behavioural, attentional, and emotional difficulties were reported among children with SEN/ND, and those from low-income families.

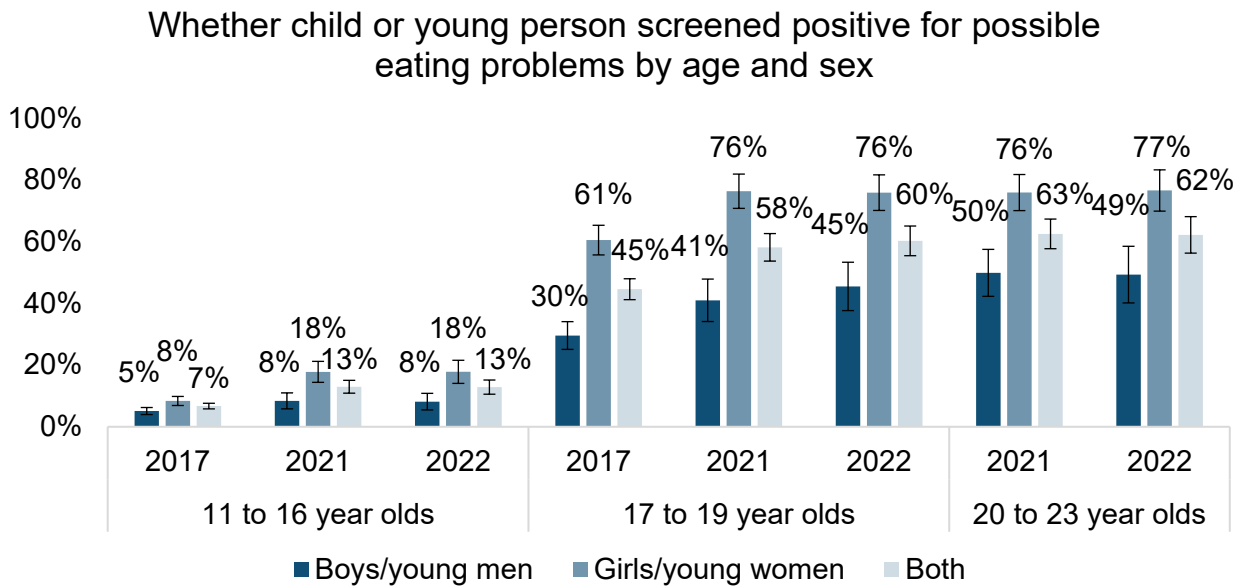
Eating problems

Figure 15 presents the percentage of children and young people who screened positive for possible eating problems by age and sex in 2017, 2021 and 2022²⁸. In both 11- to 16-year-olds and 17- to 19-year-olds, rates of possible eating problems increased between 2017 and 2021, but remain at a similar level in 2022 (11- 16-year-olds = 13%, 17- to 19-year-olds = 60%); this was shown for both boys and young men and girls and young women. Rates of possible eating disorders among 20- to 23-year-olds remained similar in 2021 (63%) and 2022 (62%). The 2017 sample did not contain a comparable age group of 20- to 23-year-olds.

Considering rates of possible eating problems by sex, girls and young women were more likely than boys and young men to screen positive for a possible eating problem in all three age groups, and in every wave where each group was surveyed. This sex difference appears to be particularly large in older age groups (17- to 19-year-olds and 20- to 23-year-olds).

²⁸ Screened positive does not mean that the child or young person had an eating disorder but indicates an increased likelihood of problems with eating.. Respondents were asked five screening questions from the Eating Disorders Development and Well-Being Assessment (DAWBA) module. If they answered yes to a question, they were given a score of 1 and a score of 0 if they answered no. These scores were added together across the 5 questions to give a total score out of 5. For 11 to 16 year olds, parent responses were used, and children were classed as 'screened positive' if they scored 2 or more out of 5, otherwise they were classed as 'screened negative'. For young people aged 17 and over their self-report responses were used with a score of 1 or more classed as 'screened positive' otherwise they were classed as 'screened negative'.

Figure 15. Percentage of children and young people with possible eating problems in 2017, 2021, and 2022 by age and sex



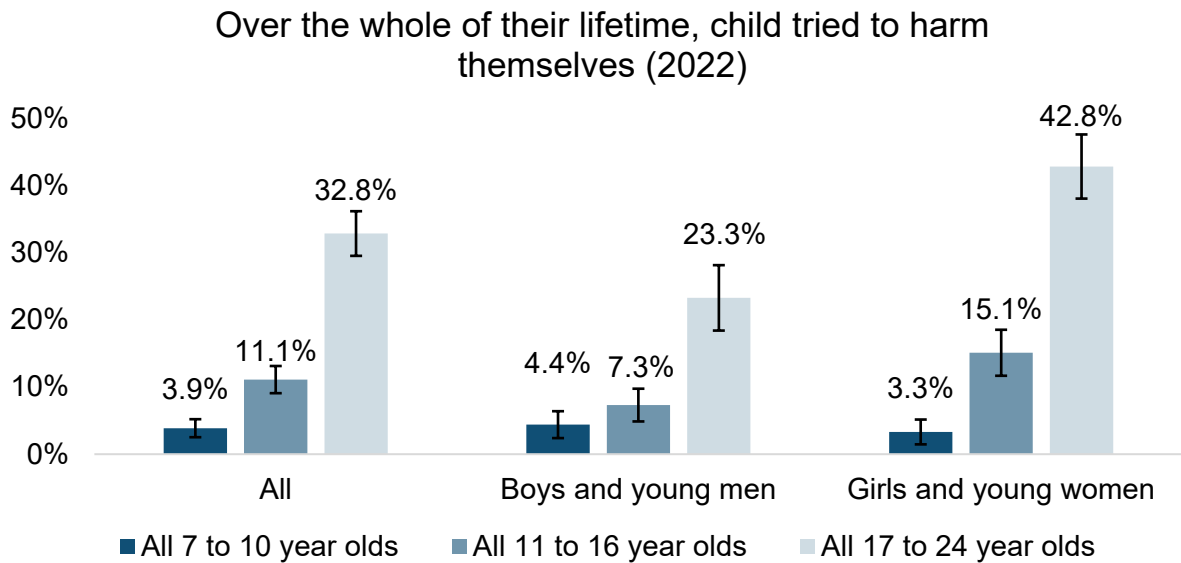
Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: NHS Digital

Self-harm

Figure 16 presents the percentage of children and young people who had tried to harm themselves in their lifetimes²⁹. Results suggested that 3.9% of 7- to 9-year-olds, 11.1% of 11- to 16-year-olds, and 32.8% of 17- to 24-year-olds were reported or reported themselves as having self-harmed in their lifetimes. This increasing prevalence by age was shown for both boys and young men and girls and young women. Considering trends by sex, differences in rates of self-harm were similar for boys (4.4%) and girls (3.3%) aged 7- to 10-years-old. However, in those aged 11- to 16-years-old, and 17- to 24-years old, girls and young women (11- to 16-years-old = 15.1%, 17- to 24-years-old = 42.8%) were more likely to have tried to harm themselves in their lifetime than boys and young men women (11- to 16-years-old = 7.3%, 17- to 24-years old = 23.3%) in their respective age group.

²⁹ Based on the parent report for 7- to 16-year-olds and on the young person report for 17- to 24-year-olds. The questions asked about the child harming themselves on purpose, for example by taking an overdose of pills or other medication, cutting themselves, or injuring themselves in some other way.

Figure 16. Percentage of children and young people who had tried to harm themselves in their lifetime by age and sex



Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

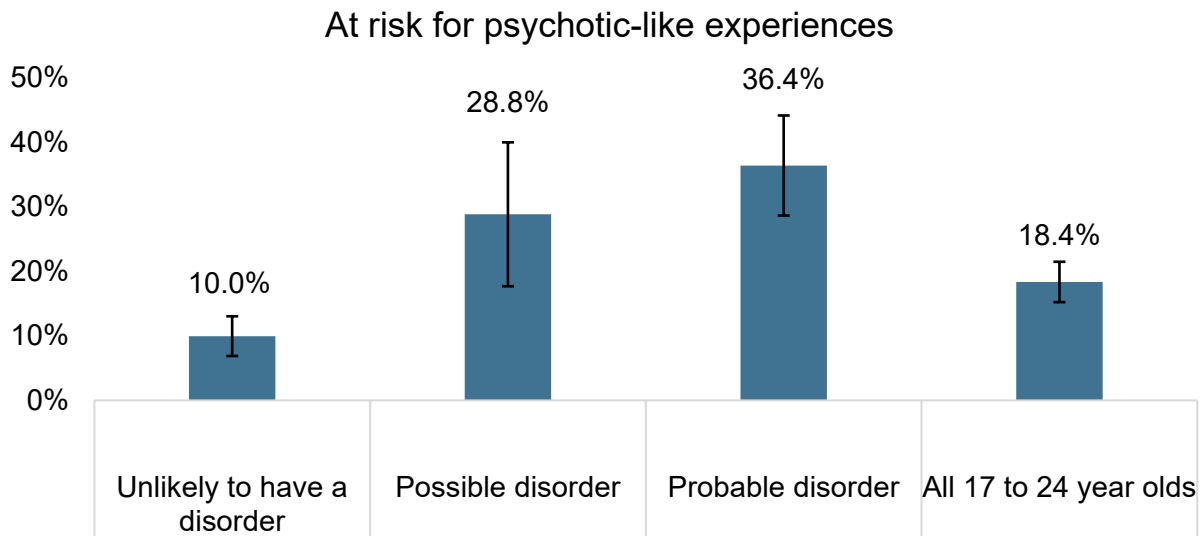
Source: NHS Digital

Psychotic-like symptoms

In 2022, young people aged 17 to 24 completed the Adolescent Psychotic-Like Symptom Screener (APSS) is designed to assess a variety of psychotic symptoms over the past 12 months³⁰. Across all responses, 18.4% of 17- to 24-year-olds screened 'at-risk' for psychotic-like experiences. Those who either had a probable (36.4%) or possible (28.8%) mental disorder were more likely to screen at-risk for psychotic-like experiences in 2022 than those unlikely to have a disorder (10.0%).

³⁰ The screener has 7-items with three possible response options: 'yes, definitely', 'maybe' and 'no, never.' The screener was scored as follows: yes, 1 point; maybe, 0.5 point; no, 0 point. Total scores were calculated by summing the scores from each of the 7 items. Scores of 2 or more were considered as 'at-risk' group for psychotic-like experiences.

Figure 17. Percentage of young people aged 17- to 24-years-old who were considered 'at-risk' for psychotic-like experiences in 2022

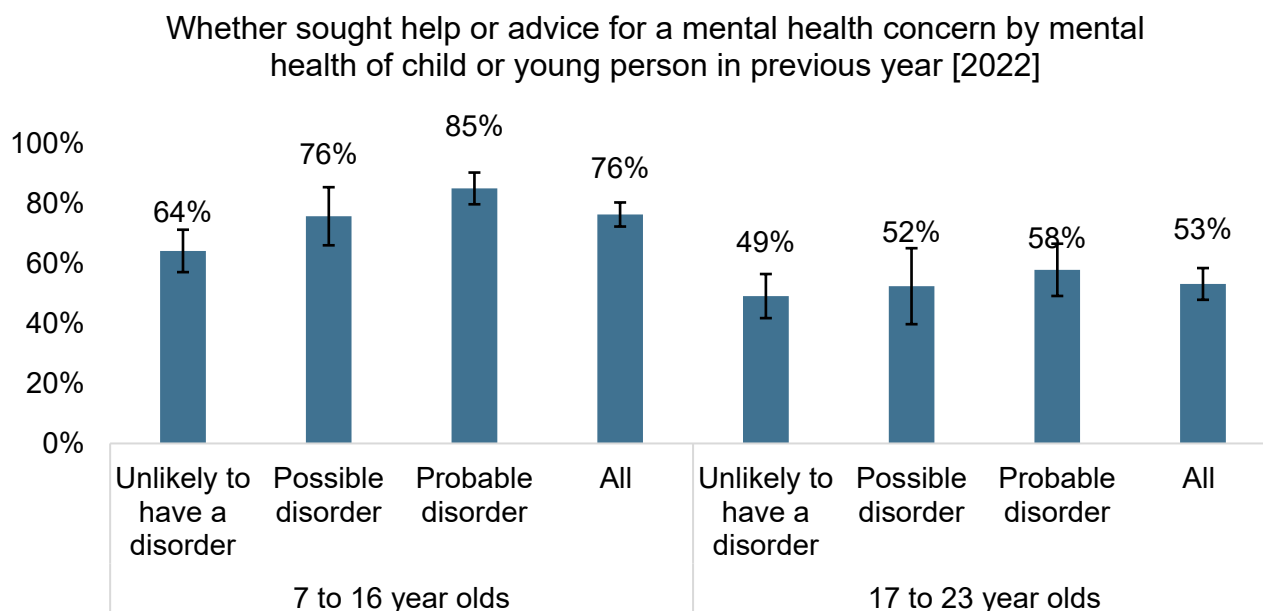


Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: NHS Digital

Seeking help for mental health

The data presented in Figure 18 shows that, overall, 76% of parents of 7- to 16-year-olds reported having sought help or advice for a mental health concern for their child between April 2021 and April/May 2022, compared to 53% of 17- to 23-year-olds by self-report. Considering help seeking by likelihood of a mental disorder, parents of 7- to 16-year-olds with a probable disorder were more likely (85%) to have sought help or advice for a mental health concern than those unlikely to have a disorder (64%). However, among 17- to 23-year-olds, those with a probable disorder were not more likely (58%) to report having sought help or advice for a mental health concern than those unlikely to have a disorder (49%).

Figure 18. Percentage of children and young people who sought help or advice for a mental health concern in previous 12 months by likelihood of mental disorder



Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: NHS Digital

Physical health

This section reports on rates of obesity and sleep problems.

Obesity

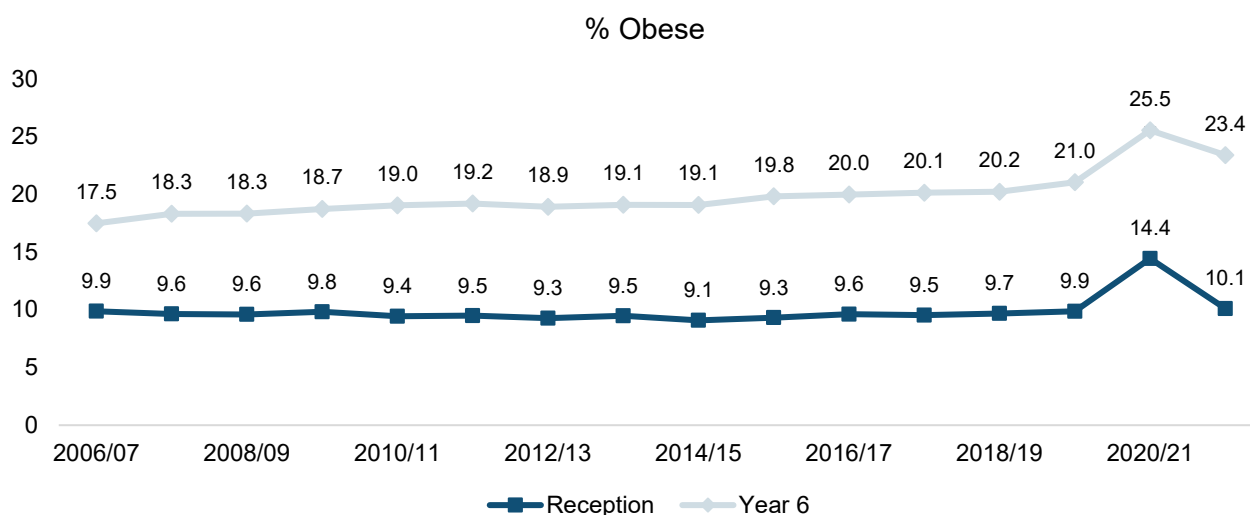
Figure 19 presents annual rates of obesity among reception and year 6 pupils over 16 years as part of the National Child Measurement Programme (NHS Digital, 2022c)³¹.

The data presented here show that the prevalence of obesity among reception- and year 6-age pupils increased between the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years, from 9.9% to 14.4% of those of reception age, and 21% to 25.5% of those of year 6 age. While the prevalence of obesity appears to have since reduced among reception-age

³¹ Statistical weighting was applied to data collected to produce estimates of obesity prevalence at national level for the year 2020/21, due to pandemic disruption resulting in a smaller sample in this year. Confidence intervals are not presented in Figure 19 for ease of interpretation; 95% confidence intervals range from 0.1-0.2; full data-tables can be accessed [here](#).

children to 10.1% in 2021/22, rates of obesity remain higher (23.4%) among year 6-age children) compared to before the pandemic.

Figure 19. Prevalence of obese children by school year and collection year



Coverage: England. Note: Highest n = 2021/22; 1,171,322, Lowest n = 2020/21; 253,816. Source: NHS Digital

Obesity by sex

Figure 20 presents rates of obesity in 2021/22 by sex and school year. The data shown here indicated that rates of obesity were similar for boys (10.3%) and girls (9.9%) of reception age in 2021/22³². By contrast, rates of obesity were larger for boys (26.4%) than girls (20.4%) among those of year 6 age.

³² Note: While these differences are likely to be statistically significant due to a large sample and therefore small confidence intervals, any difference is unlikely to be meaningful.

Figure 20. Prevalence of obese children by sex and school year, 2021/22



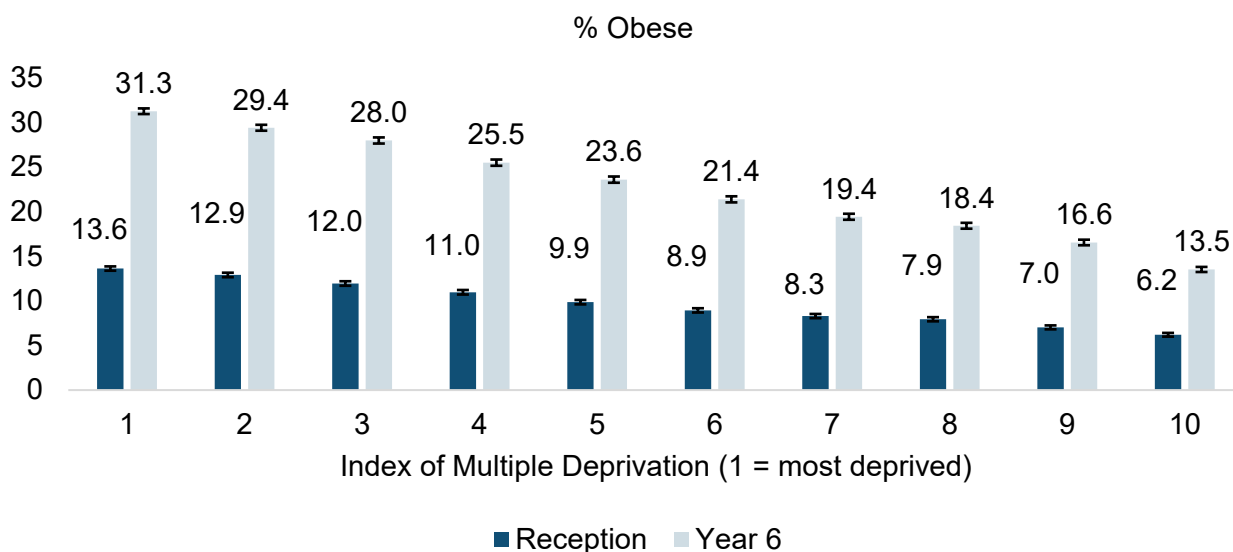
Coverage: England. Note: n = 1,171,322. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: NHS Digital

Obesity by deprivation

Figure 21 shows the prevalence of obesity by children's Index of Multiple Deprivation³³ in 2021/22, based on the child's postcode. These data indicate a positive relationship between relative deprivation and obesity, where the most deprived children are most likely to be obese (NHS Digital, 2022c). These trends are similar for both children of reception and year 6 age, though the relationship between index of multiple deprivation and obesity appears stronger in the older group.

³³ The Index of Multiple Deprivation is the government's official measure of relative deprivation for small areas. IMD deciles are calculated by ranking the 32,844 small areas in England from most deprived to least deprived and dividing them into 10 equal groups. For more information see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

Figure 21. Prevalence of obese children by index of multiple deprivation and school year, 2021/22



Coverage: England. Note: n = 1,171,322. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: NHS Digital

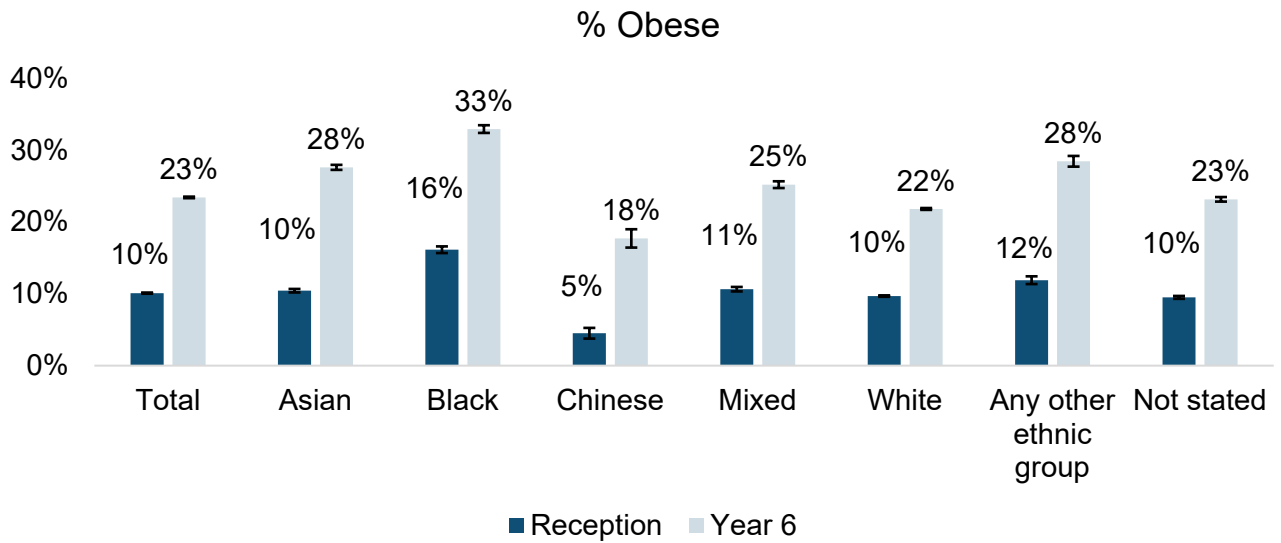
Obesity by ethnicity

Figure 22 shows rates of obesity prevalence among children from different ethnic groups in 2021/22.

Across all ethnic groups, those of year 6 age were more likely to be obese than those of reception age. Among those of reception age, rates of obesity varied across ethnic groups. Black pupils (16%) were most likely to be obese, followed by those in the 'other' category (12%), and mixed category (11%). The lowest rates of obesity in this age group were those with Chinese ethnicity (5%).

There appeared to be more variation in rates of obesity among different ethnic groups at year 6 age. Black pupils (33%) were more likely to be obese, followed by those in the 'other' category (28%), and Asian (28%). As with the younger group, the lowest rates of obesity in the year 6 age group were those with Chinese ethnicity (18%).

Figure 22. Prevalence of obesity by ethnicity and school year, 2021/22



Coverage: England. Note: n = 1,171,322. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: NHS Digital

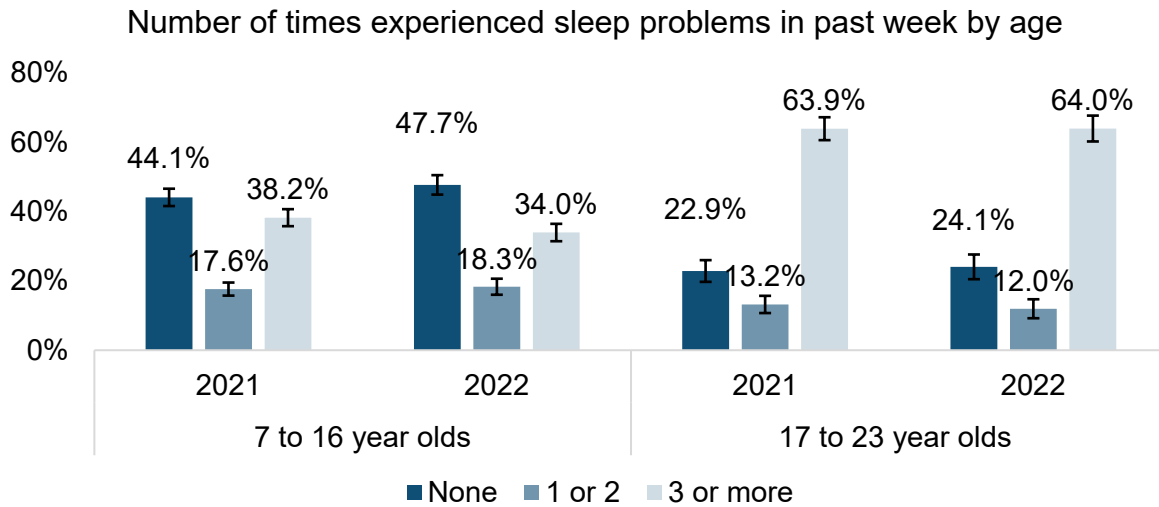
Sleep Problems

In NHS Digital's Mental Health of Children and Young People in England (MHCYP) 2022 survey (NHS Digital, 2022a), parents of 7- to 10-year-olds, older children aged 11- to 16-years-old, and young people aged 17- to 23-years-old were asked about sleep problems their child may have, including whether their child had problems getting to sleep, waking in the night, or waking early in the previous seven days. They were also asked on how many days their child had experienced each problem.

In 2022, 47.7% of parents of children aged 7- to 16-years-old reported that their child had not experienced any problems with sleep in the previous week, while 18.3% reported one or two problems, and 34.0% three or more problems with sleep in the previous week. These percentages were similar in 2021. However, it is unclear how parent-reported sleep problems reflect children's own experiences with sleep.

In 2022, 24.1% of young people aged 17- to 23-years-old reported having not experienced any problems with sleep in the previous week, while 12% reported one or two problems, and 64% reported three or more problems with sleep in the previous week.

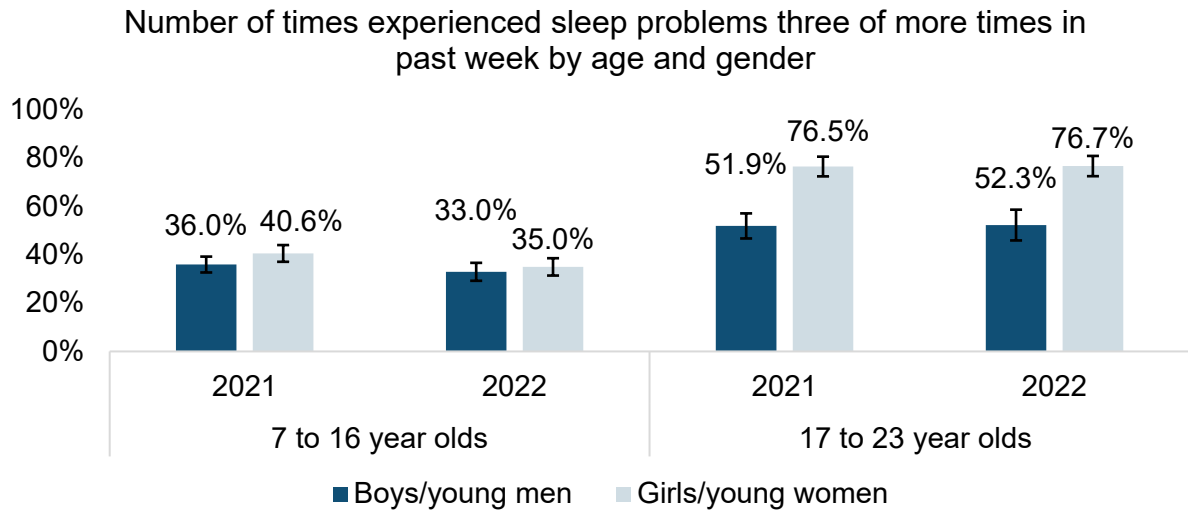
Figure 23. Sleep problems in the past week by age



Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.
Source: NHS Digital

Considering problems with sleep by sex in 2022, 33.0% of parents of boys aged 7- to 16-years-old reported that their child had experienced sleep problems three or more times in the previous week, which was a similar percentage for girls (35.0%) in this age group. By contrast, young women aged 17- to 13-years-old were more likely to report having experienced problems with sleep on three or more occasions in the previous week (76.7%) than young men (52.3%).

Figure 24. Sleep problems in the past week by age and sex

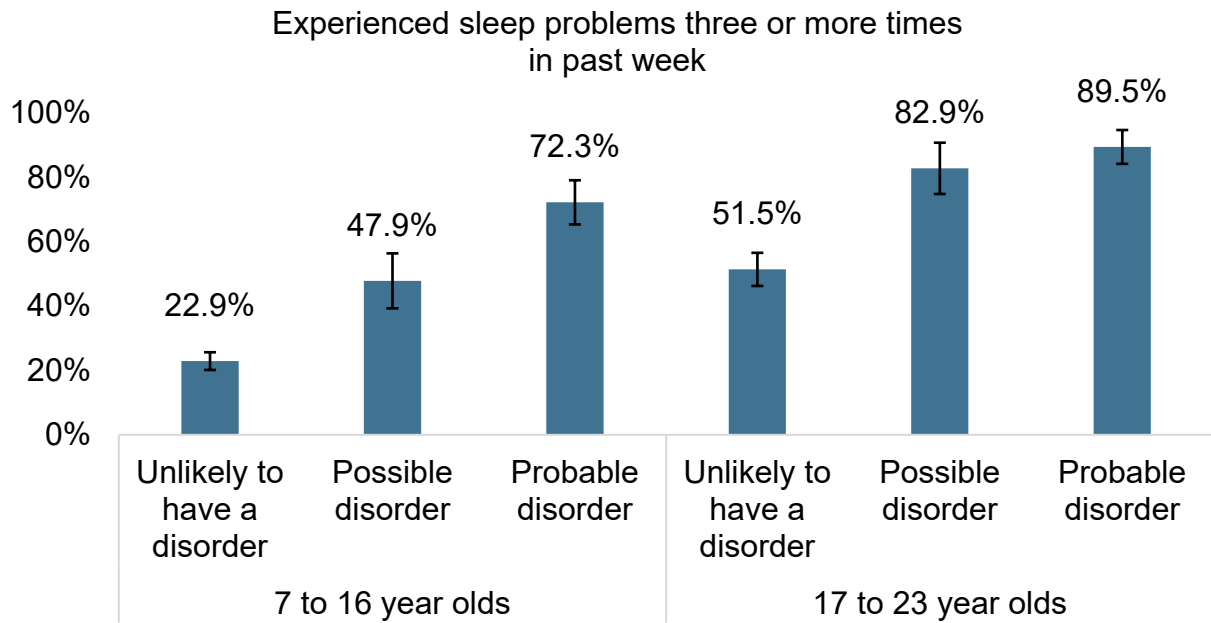


Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.
Source: NHS Digital

Considering sleep problems by likelihood of a mental disorder, children aged 7- to 16-years-old who were reported by their parent as having had problems with sleep at least three times in the previous week were more likely to have a probable mental disorder (72.3%) than to have a possible disorder (47.9%) or be considered unlikely to have a disorder (22.9%). Among 17- to 23-year-olds, those who reported having had problems with sleep on three or more occasions in the previous week were more likely to have a probable (89.5%) or possible (82.9%) disorder than to be considered unlikely to have a disorder (51.5%).

These findings suggest that those who regularly struggled with sleep were more likely to have a mental disorder in 2022.

Figure 25. Sleep problems in the past week by probability of a mental disorder



Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: NHS Digital

Discussion of trends in mental and physical health

This chapter presented findings from a range of sources on children and young people's mental and physical health in 2021/22, making comparisons with previous years, where available. Overall, these data suggested that the percentage of those reporting low happiness with their health appears to have increased in recent years, with rates of probable mental disorders and eating problems remaining at elevated levels compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the most consistent trends reported in this chapter was an apparent disparity in mental and physical health by age. While rates of probable mental disorder among younger age groups had remained consistent in recent years, among 17- to 19-year-olds, rates have risen once again to one in four in 2022. Rates of eating problems self-harm, and problems with sleep were also higher in older age groups. Further, at primary level, year 6s have consistently been more likely to be obese than those of reception age, and rates of obesity among year 6s remain substantially higher than before the pandemic. While these results point to a heightened risk for mental and physical health problems in older ages, those aged 17- to 23-years old, were less likely than those aged 7- to 16-years-old to have sought help for a mental health concern in 2022. It is unclear from these data what might account for lower rates of help seeking in this higher risk age group, which may include making sense of their difficulties, stigma, and young people losing access to school support once leaving school (Radez et al., 2022). Future research could improve understanding of how to remove barriers to and facilitate young people to seek professional help for mental health problems.

A related issue concerns the frequency of problems with sleep experienced by children and young people. In 2022, those who regularly struggled with sleep were more likely to have a mental disorder, and sleep problems were more likely in older children and young people, specifically young women - groups particularly at risk for poorer mental health and wellbeing in general (DfE, 2022j; NHS Digital, 2022a). Previous published research suggests a link between poor sleep and mental health problems in adolescents (Zhang et al., 2017) as well as in adults (Reid et al., 2006), suggesting that problems with sleep could act as an indicator of poor mental health.

Together, these findings suggest poorer mental and physical health, particularly around sleep and obesity, among older children and young people, as well as poorer mental health in young women. Further work is required to understand how other aspects of life, such as relationships, school and work, societal pressures, and child development may contribute individually as well as holistically to poorer mental health in children and young people. The general discussion will bring together data

from these areas, signposting relevant external research where relevant, and suggest areas for future research.

Domain 3: Skills and schools

Children and young people's school experience plays a significant role in their wellbeing. Safe, calm, supportive, and inclusive school environments can promote good wellbeing and social and emotional development in a range of ways. This may include by engendering a sense of belonging or connectedness to a school or college community (Jessiman et al., 2022; ONS, 2020; Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2016; Widnall et al., 2022), supporting positive and trusting teacher-pupil relationships (Roffey, 2012; The Children's Society, 2010), and helping to reduce worry, stress, or pressure about schoolwork (OECD, 2017; Scottish Government, 2020). Schools may also act to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing through early identification of emerging needs and providing access to support where needed.

As children and young people have returned to more regular in-person learning after the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the time children spend in school, and therefore the role of the school experience on wellbeing has likely increased in significance in 2021/22. It is therefore important to understand the school experience of children and young people through the 2021/22 academic year.

This chapter presents:

- Children and young people's happiness with school
- Happiness with a range of elements of the school experience
- Motivation and concentration in school
- School belonging, sense of safety, and enjoyment of school

For data on children and young people's happiness with friendships at school and relationships with teachers please see ['Domain 4: Relationships'](#).

Key findings

- Happiness with school remains at a similar level to previous years, on average. However, rates of those reporting low happiness with school appears to have increased in recent years. Happiness with school was lowest among a list of aspects of life that children and young people were asked about.
- Among a range of aspects related to the school environment, children and young people were more likely to report being happy with their sense of safety, school facilities, the things they learned in lessons, and schoolwork. Children and young people were least likely to feel that they were listened to at school.

- In February 2022, around two thirds of secondary-age children and young people reported that they were motivated to learn, and around three quarters felt that they were managing to concentrate in class.
- In June 2022, 30% of children reported that they felt that they belonged at their school every day, while 41% reported feeling safe every day, and 15% reported enjoying coming to school every day.
 - There was a strong relationship between school belonging and wellbeing.
- Considering responses by gender, boys were happier with school, less likely to report low happiness with school, more motivated to learn, better able to concentrate, and more likely to report belonging in school, feeling safe in school, and enjoying coming to school than girls.
- Pupils from a minority ethnic background were more likely to report being motivated to learn, managing to concentrate in class, and enjoying coming to school than white pupils.
- Pupils with SEN were more likely to report low happiness with school, were less motivated to learn, and struggled more with motivation in class compared to those without SEN.
- Pupils who were eligible for FSM were less likely to report being motivated to learn, being able to concentrate in class, feeling safe in school, and a sense of belonging at school, than those ineligible for FSM.

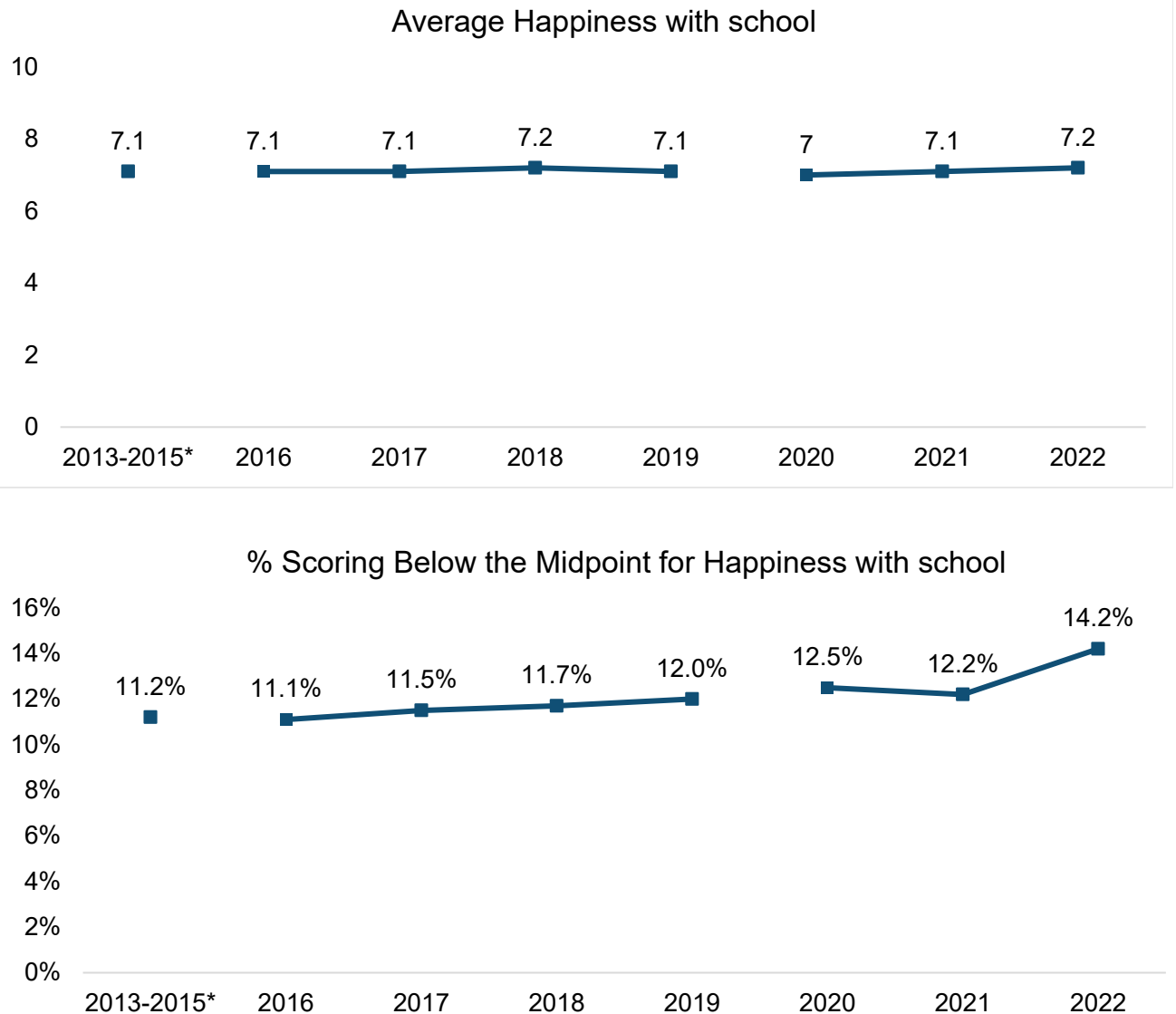
Happiness with school

The Children's Society has collected regular data on children and young people's happiness with school since 2010 using their Good Childhood Index, with annual collections beginning in 2015. Figure 26 presents this data as two time series of average annual school happiness scores and percentage of low scores (scores less than 5 on a scale of 0-10) of children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old from 2013-2015 to 2022 (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). Data from the 2016 survey onwards were collected between April-June each year except for 2022, which were collected between May-June.

The data presented below indicate that average happiness with school has remained consistent at around 7.1 out of 10 since this data first began to be collected in 2013. By contrast, rates of those reporting low happiness with school appears to have increased in recent years, from a low of 11.1% in 2016 to 14.2% in 2022. Further, school remains one of the areas of life asked about by The Children's Society with

the lowest average wellbeing score, and the area with the highest percentage of low happiness.

Figure 26. Happiness with school: average scores (out of 10) and percentages scoring below midpoint in children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old



Coverage: 2020-2022 UK, 2013-2019 Great Britain, Note: Discontinuity in time series, see 'Data sources and methods' annex for further information. *The reported response for '2013 to 2015' is a pooled average based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report. n = 2000+.

Source: The Children's Society.

In this year's report, The Children's Society also reported on subgroup differences in happiness with school³⁴. Results suggested that boys were happier with school on average than girls and a smaller percentage of boys scored below the midpoint of five out of ten. Further, children in key stages 2 (years 5 and 6) and 5 (years 12 and 13) were on average happier with school, and smaller percentages in these groups scored below the midpoint than in key stages 3 (years 7, 8, and 9) and 4 (years 10 and 11). No differences were observed for ethnicity (white versus all other ethnic identities) or between the mean scores for children with or without SEN. However, a difference was observed between the percentage of children with SEN and their peers who had low scores (19.3% of children with SEN had low scores compared with 12.8% without). Finally, there were differences in mean happiness with school for children who reported caring responsibilities, but not for the percentage scoring low for happiness with school. Children with caring responsibilities had the highest mean score (7.6), overall, after those in key stage 2 (7.7)

Broader school experiences

The Children's society

In May-June 2022, The Children's Society asked children and young people about their wider experiences of the school environment. This chapter presents responses to questions relevant to the school environment, while we report on responses to questions relevant to activities and relationships with others in school in the chapters focused on these areas.

In one set of questions, children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old were asked to score out of ten, how happy they felt with: how safe they felt at school; how the school facilities were (like the classrooms, toilets, sports facilities etc.); the things they were learning in lessons; how they were doing with their schoolwork; and how much they were listened to at school. Overall, children and young people were more likely to report being happy with their sense of safety (Average score = 7.9, % below midpoint = 7.1%), followed by school facilities (Average score = 7.5, % below midpoint = 8.8%), and the things they learned in lessons (Average score = 7.4, % below midpoint = 10.3%) and schoolwork (Average score = 7.4, % below midpoint = 10.8%). Children and young people were least likely to feel that they were listened to at school (Average score = 7.1, % below midpoint = 13.1%). Males were more likely than females to report being happy with these items, except for schoolwork where

³⁴ All results presented here were statistically significant at the <0.01 level.

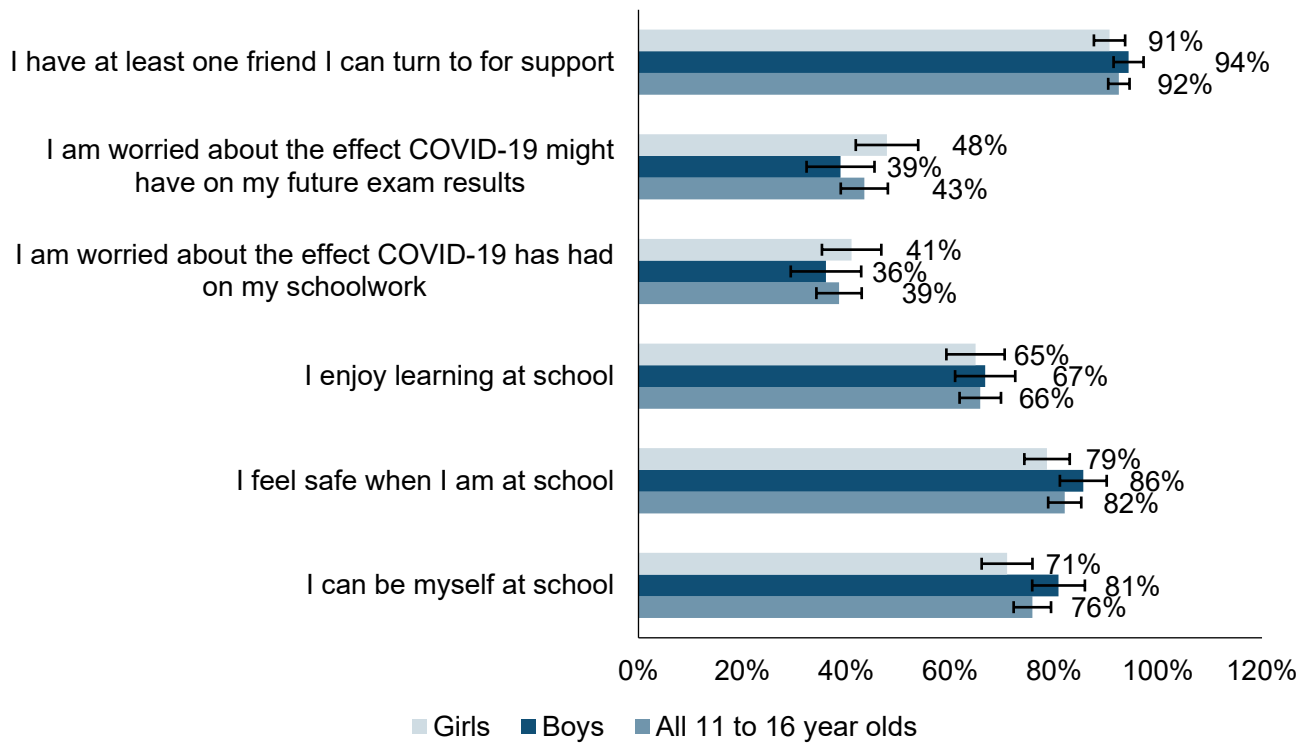
there was no statistical difference. Those in Key Stage 2 were more likely than those in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 to report being happy with all these items.

In a second set of questions, children and young people were asked how much they agreed with the following statements: 'my school is helping me to develop wider skills I will need later in life; 'what the school expects of me in my schoolwork, homework and exams is realistic'; 'in my school, if a young person does something wrong, they are treated fairly'; and 'I have a say in decisions that are important to me at school'. Overall, 70% of children and young people either agreed or strongly agreed that their school was helping them to develop wider skills they will need later in life, compared to 71% that homework and exams is realistic, 66% that in their school, if a young person does something wrong, they are treated fairly, and 57% that they have a say in decisions that are important to them at school. As with the previous set of questions, males and younger children and young people tended to be more likely to agree with these statements. There were no differences in the responses to these statements by aggregated ethnic group and no consistent differences for children with and without SEN.

Mental Health of Children' and Young People's Survey

Data from NHS Digital's Mental Health of Children and Young People survey (MHCYP) in 2022 suggested that 71% of children aged 11-16 felt that they could be themselves at school, while 78% reported that they felt safe at school, and 65% that they enjoyed learning at school. 91% reported that they had at least one friend at school they could turn to for support. Considering worries about COVID-19, 41% were worried about the effect the pandemic has had on their schoolwork, while 48% were worried about the potential effect of the pandemic on future exam results. There were no significant differences to responses to these questions by sex.

Figure 27. Feelings about school by sex

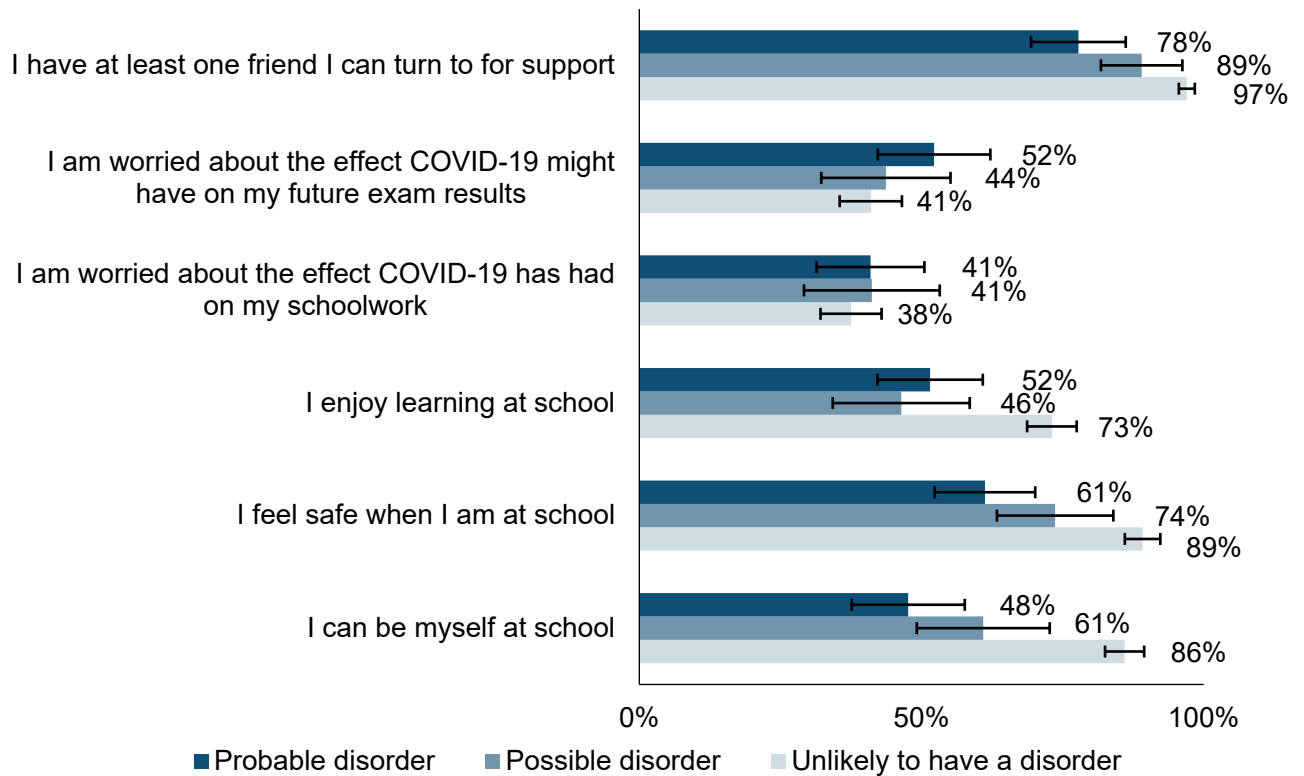


Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. n = 709.

Source: NHS Digital

Considering feelings about school by the mental health of children, those with a probable disorder were less likely to report that they can be themselves at school (48%), feel safe at school (61%), or enjoy learning at school (52%), than those unlikely to have a disorder (86%, 89%, & 73% respectively). Those with a probable disorder were also less likely to report that they have at least one friend at school they can turn to for support (78%) than those unlikely to have a disorder (97%). There were no differences by mental health for whether respondents were worried about the effect of COVID-19 on schoolwork or future exams.

Figure 28. Feelings about school by mental health of child



Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. n = 709.
 Source: NHS Digital

School belonging, sense of safety, and enjoyment of school

A commonly cited description of belonging in educational settings is ‘the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment’ (Goodenow, 1993).

Studies have regularly shown that children and young people with high levels of school belonging have better mental health and emotional wellbeing, and research shows that this may be particularly important for the health and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people, such as recent immigrants, those with special educational needs, and financially disadvantaged pupils (Allen et al., 2018; Arslan et al., 2020; Parr et al., 2020).

School belonging is also associated with wider outcomes, including reduced incidence of risk behaviours in children and young people, such as antisocial behaviour, drug taking, and truanting (Bonell et al., 2019; Catalano et al., 2004), and

academic attainment (Korpershoek et al., 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

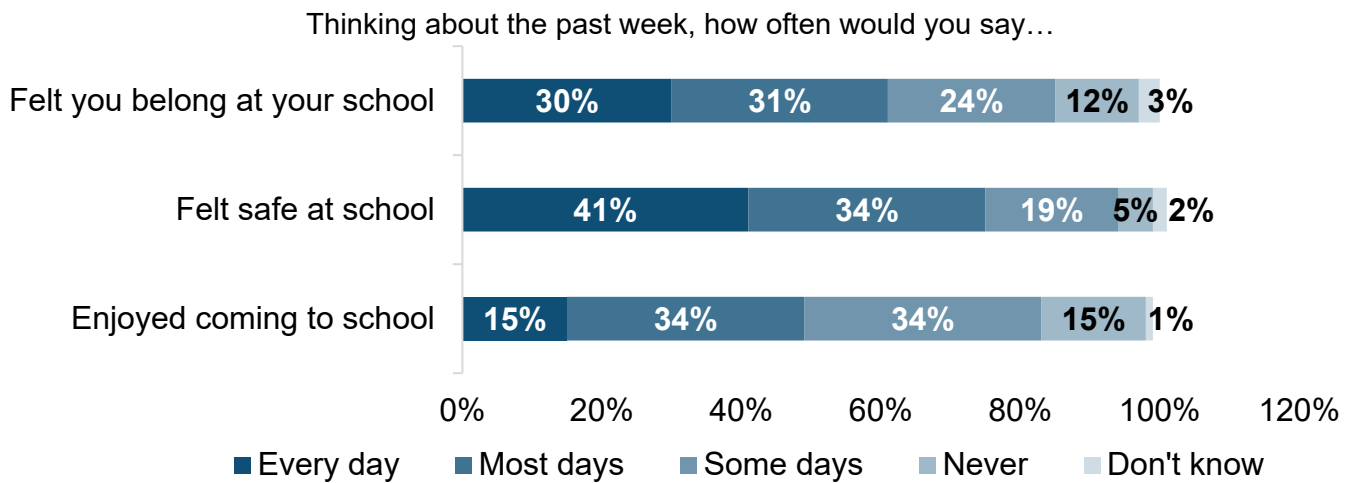
Here we report a subjective measure of how often children felt they enjoyed coming to school, felt safe at school, and belonged at their school in the previous week, collected in March 2022 (DfE, 2022f) and June 2022 (DfE, forthcoming) in the DfE's Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel³⁵ (PPLP). We then present subgroup differences in those responding 'every day' in the previous week to these questions, as well as the relationship between responses to these questions and subjective wellbeing.

The results presented in Figure 29 shows that, in June 2022, 30% of children reported that they felt that they belonged at their school every day (61% every/most days), 41% reported that they felt safe at school every day (75% every/most days), and 15% that they felt that they enjoyed school every day (49% every/most days). 12% reported that they never felt they belonged at school, 5% that they never felt safe at school, and 15% that they never enjoyed coming to school (DfE, forthcoming). The percentage of those who felt safe at school most or every day (75%) is similar to the percentage of those saying that they felt safe at school in the MHCYP, 82% (NHS Digital, 2022a).

These trends were similar in the earlier March wave of data collection, when 29% reported that they felt they belonged at school every day, 38% that they felt safe at school every day, and 13% that they enjoyed coming to school every day.

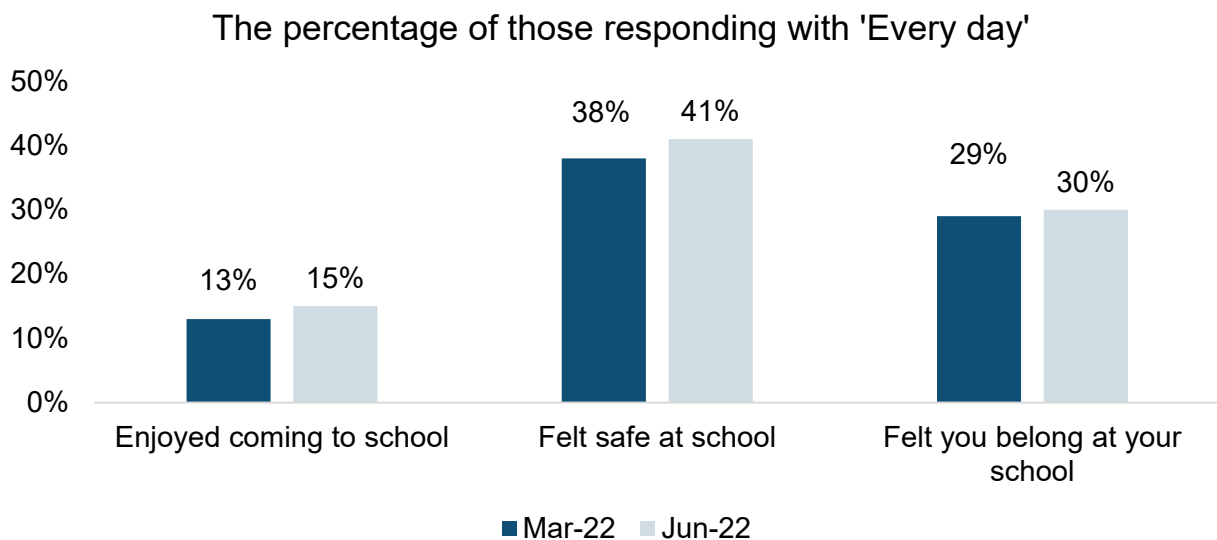
³⁵ The June 2022 data point is taken from the dedicated NBS wave of the PPLP. At the time of this publication, the final report for NBS, including this June data, is forthcoming. For more information, please see ['Annex A – Data sources and methods'](#).

Figure 29. Children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old school belonging, perceptions of school safety, and enjoyment of school, June 2022



Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils, Source: DfE

Figure 30. Percentage of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old reporting that they belong at school, feel safe at school, and enjoy school every day, March and June 2022



Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils, Source: DfE

Considering responses to these questions in June 2022 by subgroup, those in years 7 to 9 were more likely to report that they felt they belong at school every day (33%)

and enjoyed coming to school every day (17%), compared to those in years 10 & 11 (25% and 11% respectively). However, those in years 7 to 9 (41%) and years 10 & 11 (37%) were less likely to report that they felt safe in school every day compared to those in years 12 & 13 (51%).

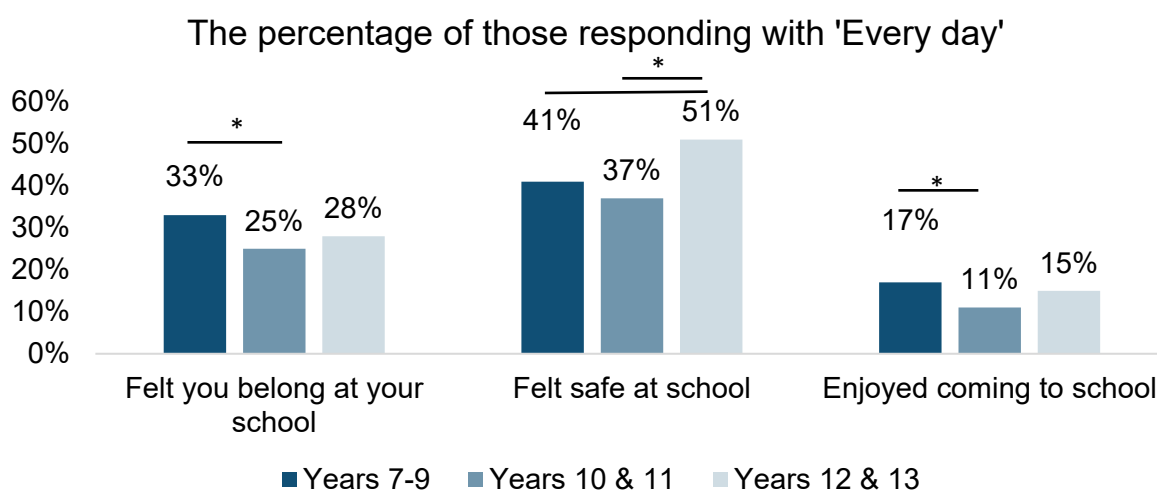
Males were more likely to report that they felt they belonged at school (38%), felt safe at school (48%), and enjoyed coming to school (19%) every day, compared to females (23%, 35%, and 11%, respectively).

There were no significant differences in the percentage of those who reported that they felt they belonged at school, felt safe at school, or enjoyed coming to school every day by SEN status.

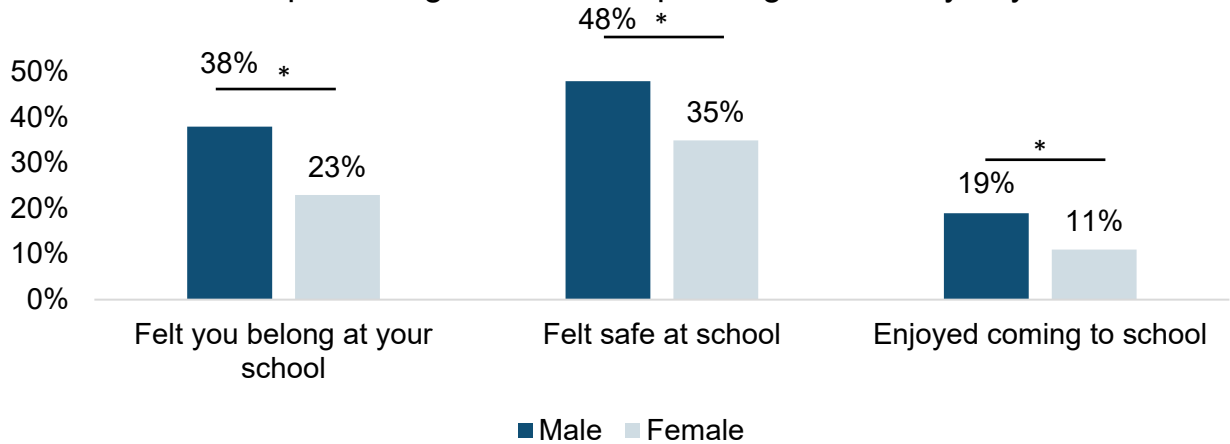
Those eligible for FSM were less likely to report that they belonged at school (21%) and that they felt safe at school (33%) every day, than those not eligible for FSM (32% and 43% respectively). There were no differences in enjoyment coming to school by FSM status.

Finally, pupils with an ethnic minority background were more likely to report that they enjoyed coming to school every day (21%) compared to white pupils (12%). No difference was shown for school belonging or feelings of safety by ethnicity.

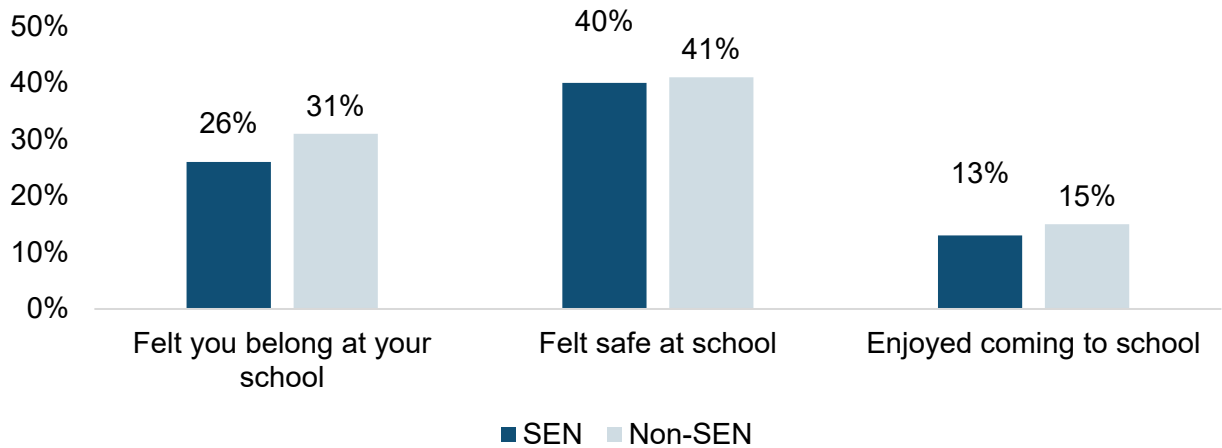
Figure 31. Percentage children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old with high school belonging by subgroup



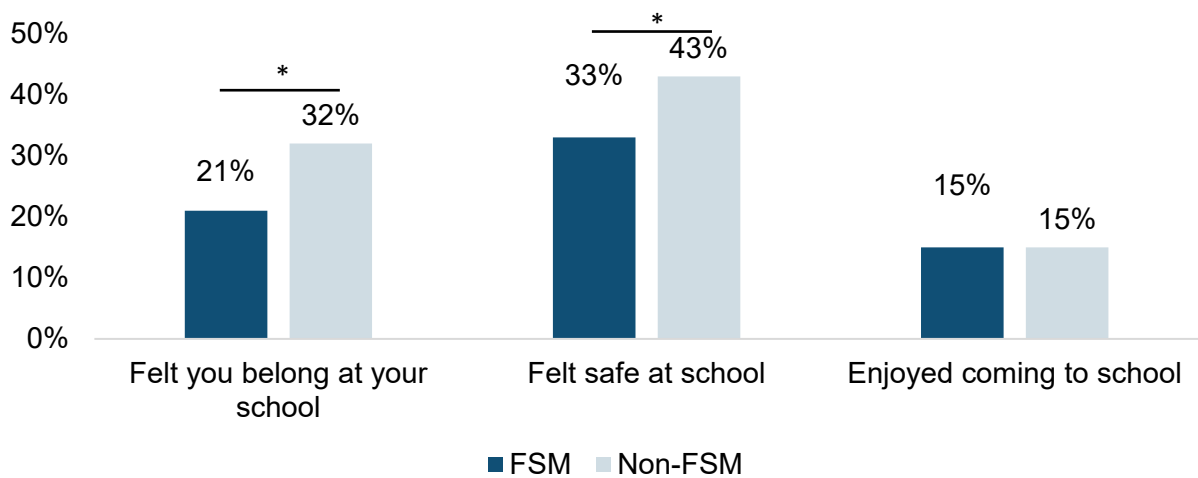
The percentage of those responding with 'Every day'

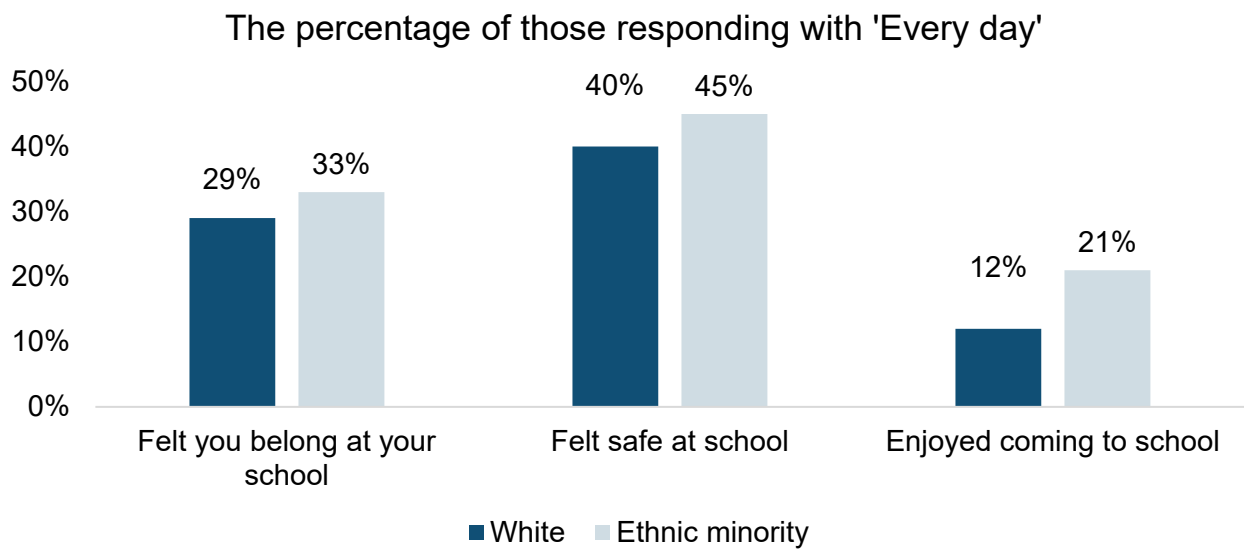


The percentage of those responding with 'Every day'



The percentage of those responding with 'Every day'



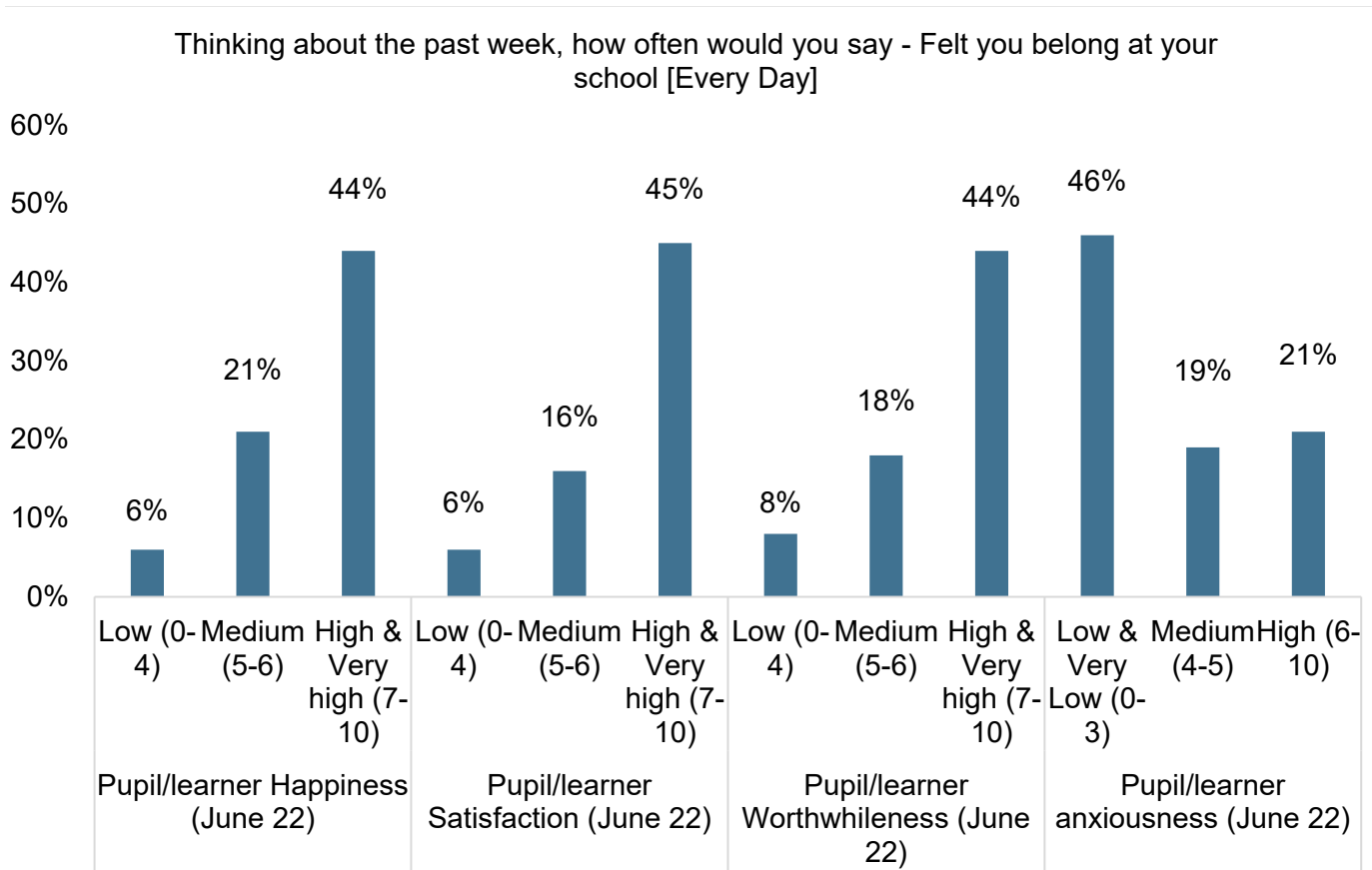


Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils, * represent statistically significant differences between groups. Source: DfE

To explore the potential relationship between school belonging and subjective wellbeing, Figure 32 presents the percentage of those who felt they belonged in their school every day by their subjective wellbeing. The results suggest a strong positive relationship between subjective wellbeing and school belonging whereby those with greater subjective wellbeing were substantially more likely to report that they felt they belonged at school every day. Specifically, those who reported high/very high happiness, life satisfaction, or worthwhileness were around seven times more likely to report that they felt like they belonged in their school every day, compared to those with low wellbeing on these measures. Those with low/very low anxiousness were at least twice as likely to report that they felt that they belonged in their school every day than those with medium or high anxiousness.

While these results suggest a strong relationship between wellbeing and school belonging, we cannot infer the causal relationships between them with this current data.

Figure 32. Percentage children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old with secondary school belonging by subjective wellbeing



Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils, Source: DfE

Motivation and concentration

Research on important factors in academic success highlights the role of pupil motivation and concentration, including students' ability and efficacy beliefs, achievement values, and goals (Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998). Studies have shown that low motivation and concentration are associated with poorer academic outcomes (Torppa et al., 2019), and may be linked to poorer emotional wellbeing (Parhiala et al., 2018). Therefore, a holistic understanding of children and young people's wellbeing can benefit from consideration of a range of factors within the school learning experience, including motivation and concentration.

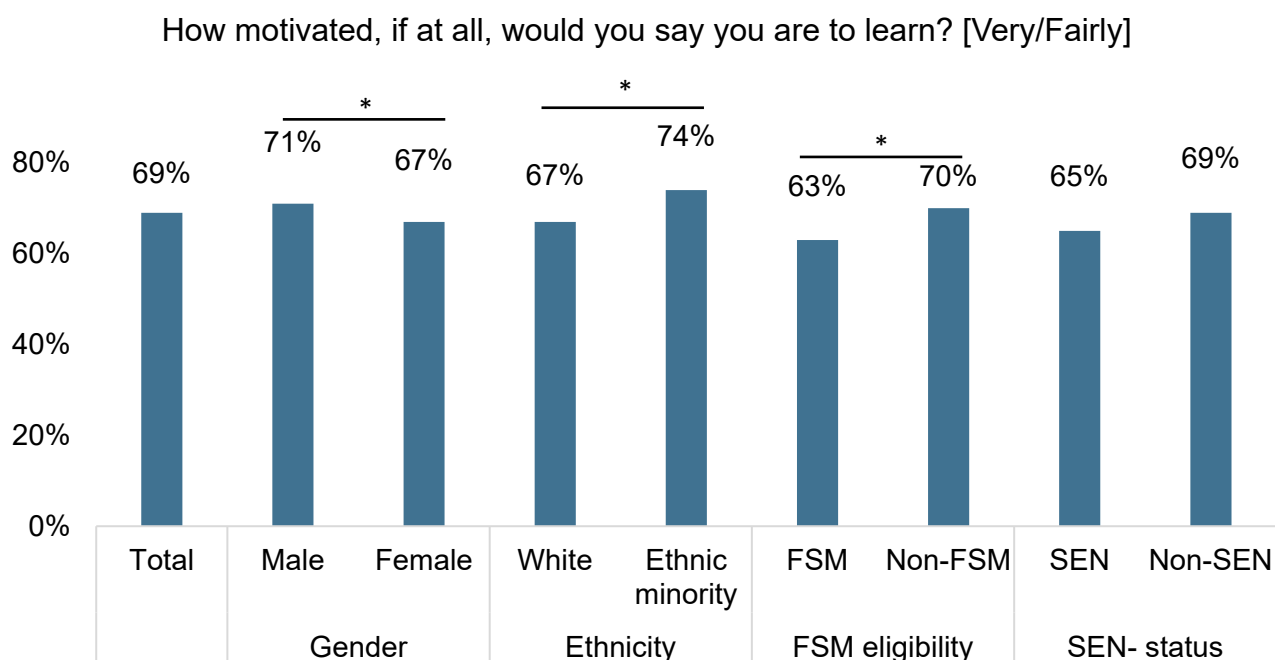
Secondary-age children and young people have been asked about their motivation to learn and concentrating in lessons at several points throughout the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years in DfE's Pupil and Parent Panel. We report on responses to

these questions in February 2022 in Figure 33, the most recent time they were asked together.

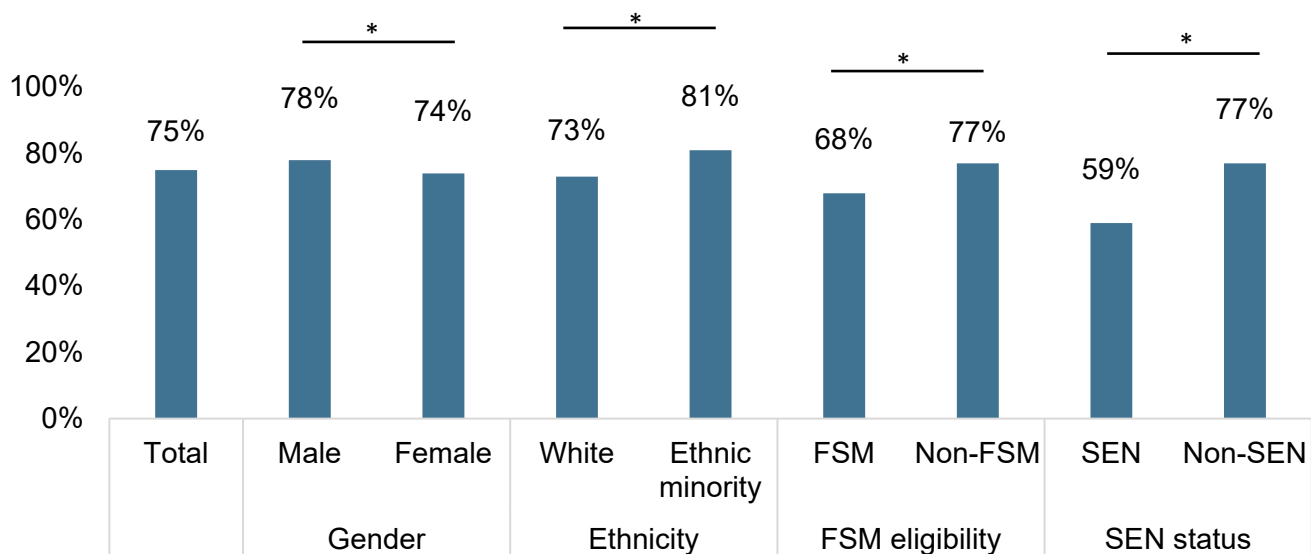
Overall, in February 2022 69% of secondary-age children and young people reported that they were motivated to learn, while 74% felt that they were managing to concentrate in class.

Boys were statistically more likely to report being motivated to learn (74%) and managing to concentrate in class (78%) than girls (66% and 71% respectively). Further, ethnic minority pupils were more likely to report being motivated to learn (80%) and managed to concentrate in class (84%) than white pupils (66% and 71% respectively). Those pupils who were not eligible for FSM were also more likely to report being motivated to learn (72%) and managed to concentrate in class (77%) than those eligible for FSM (61% and 65% respectively). Finally, pupils without SEN were more also likely to report being motivated to learn (70%) and managing to concentrate in class (77%) than those with SEN (64% and 58% respectively), through this difference was only statistically significant for concentration.

Figure 33. Percentage of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old who felt motivated to learn and that they could concentrate in class in February 2022



How well, if at all, are you managing to concentrate in lessons in the classroom? [Well/Very well]



Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils, * represent statistically significant differences between groups. Source: DfE

Discussion of trends in education and skills

Despite happiness with school remaining at a similar level to previous years, on average, rates of those reporting low happiness with school appears to have increased in recent years. Happiness with school was the lowest among a list of aspects of life. Among a range of aspects of school related to the school environment, children and young people were more likely to report being happy with their sense of safety, school facilities, the things they learned in lessons, and schoolwork. Children and young people were least likely to feel that they were listened to at school.

Survey responses indicated that most secondary-age children and young people were motivated to learn, were managing to concentrate in class, felt safe at school, enjoyed being at school, and felt that they belonged at school most or every day. However, there was significant variation in happiness with the school experience with a substantial minority reporting low scores on these measures. The data also indicate an association between school belonging and better wellbeing. Together, these results suggest areas of the school environment that might help to facilitate greater happiness with school and wellbeing, including increasing student voice and fostering a sense of school belonging, which was shown to correlate with subjective wellbeing, although the current literature is not yet clear on how school belonging can be built.

Considering sub-group differences in the school experience, boys continue to score higher on measures related to their experience of school, including happiness with school, motivation, concentration, and school belonging. Further research could usefully explore the factors that underlie this gender gap and how this might relate to other aspects of wellbeing, including participation in activities, relationships, and thoughts about the future. Pupils who were eligible for FSM were less likely to report being motivated to learn, being able to concentrate in class, feeling safe at school, and a sense of belonging at school, than those ineligible for FSM, though there were no differences in enjoyment of school by FSM status.

Differences in other groups were less consistent across measures. Pupils from a minority ethnic background were more likely to report being motivated to learn, managing to concentrate in class, and enjoyed coming to school than white pupils, but with no difference on other measures. Pupils with SEN were more likely to report low happiness with school compared to those without; however average responses were similar in these two populations. Pupils without SEN were more also likely to report that they managed to concentrate in class than those with SEN with no statistical differences for other measures.

A fuller understanding of how the school experience varies for different groups of pupils would benefit from a more granular analysis of subgroups (such as analysis of more specific ethnic groups), including how these different categories might intersect and interact. Further, school experiences do not exist in isolation from other aspects of children and young people's lives; contextualising these trends within a broader personal, social, and environmental context will enable us to better understand how elements of wellbeing may work together. The general discussion will go some way to addressing this question.

Domain 4: Relationships

The quality of social relationships, both with peers, family, and other trusted adults is important for the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. A range of evidence indicates the importance of supportive peer relationships and inclusion for good wellbeing, and conversely, the risk of bullying, discrimination, poorly developed friendships or peers who are not supportive for poor wellbeing (Moore et al., 2017; Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2016; Scottish Government, 2020). Further, having positive relationships with trusted adults and supportive friends has been shown to be associated with reduced risk of mental illness (Hughes et al., 2018). One systematic review has linked periods of social isolation and loneliness with depression and anxiety among children and adolescents (Loades et al., 2020).

We know that the pandemic has had a profoundly disruptive effect on the relationships of many people of all ages, due to the need to reduce social contact with those outside the household. The 2021 State of the Nation reported that children and young people's happiness with friends had reduced between 2019 and 2020, before scores recovered in 2021 (The Children's Society, 2021). Further, rates of loneliness were highest in February 2021, when schools were closed to the majority of pupils (DfE, 2022j). It therefore remains important to monitor whether and how children and young people's relationships with peers and adults has continued to evolve over time.

This chapter presents:

- Happiness with family and friends
- School relationships
- Bullying
- Loneliness

For more information on children and young people's experiences at school, outside of their relationships, please see '[Domain 3: Skills and Schools](#)'.

Key findings

- Children and young people's happiness with family has remained consistent in recent years, on average. However, the percentage of those who reported low happiness with their family has increased from 3.7% in 2019 to 8.3% in 2022.
- Children and young people's average happiness with friends appears to have recovered in 2022 following a reduction in 2020, during the height of the pandemic.
- Children and young people's happiness with their relationships with other young people at school was marginally higher (7.7) than that for relationships with teachers (7.5), on average. Happiness with these relationships was higher for younger children and young people.
- Overall, around 7 in 10 children and young people agreed or strongly agreed that adults at their school were interested in their wellbeing, that there was at least one adult at their school who they could talk to about how they were feeling, and that young people in their school got on well together.
- 23% of primary-aged children (parent-report) and 22% of secondary-aged children reported having been bullied in the previous 12 months.
- In 2022, 7% of children aged 11 to 16 years old and 14% of young people aged 17 to 22 years old reported often or always feeling lonely. These percentages were similar in 2021 and 2022.
 - Those with greater likelihood of having a mental disorder were more likely to report often or always feeling lonely.
- Rates of loneliness in May 22 were equivalent to those reported in February 2021 when schools were closed to the majority of pupils, during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Boys reported greater happiness with peer and teacher relationships, were more likely to report that young people in their school get on well together and were less likely to report often feeling lonely throughout 2021/22. However, the percentage of both boys and girls reporting often feeling lonely increased towards the end of the 2021/22 school year.
- Both primary- (parent-report) and secondary-age children with SEN/SEND³⁶ were more likely to report having been a victim of bullying in the previous 12 months

³⁶ Demographic information among self-reporting secondary-aged pupils was pulled from the NPD which provides SEN status. Parents (reporting for primary-aged pupils) were asked if their child had SEND.

than those without SEN/SEND. There was no clear difference in loneliness between SEN and non-SEN pupils.

- Both primary- (parent-report) and secondary-age children eligible for FSM were more likely to report having been a victim of bullying in the previous 12 months than those not eligible for FSM. There was no clear difference in loneliness between FSM and non-FSM pupils.
- Being a victim of bullying was more likely to be reported by white pupils versus ethnic minority pupils among secondary but not primary (parent-report) pupils.

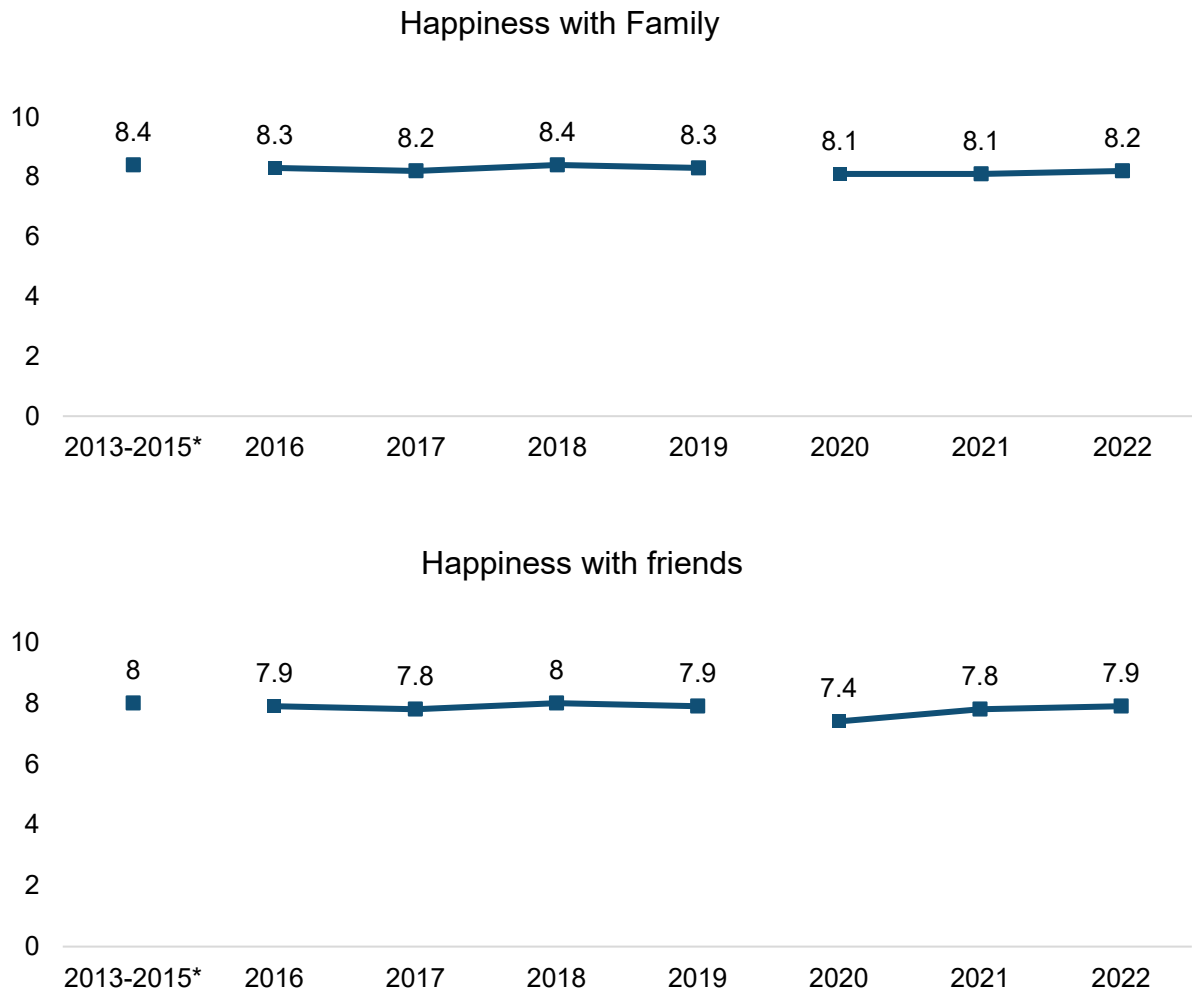
Happiness with family and friends

The Good Childhood Index has collected regular data on children and young people's happiness with their family and their friends (The Children's Society, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022). Figure 34 and Figure 35 present this data as a time series of average and percentage of low annual happiness scores (on a scale of 0-10) of children and young people aged between 10- and 17-years-old from 2013-2015 to 2022. Data from the 2016 survey onwards were collected between April-June each year except in 2022, when data were collected in May-June.

These data suggest that while average happiness with family has remained consistent in recent years, the percentage of those who reported low happiness with their family appears to have increased from 3.7% in 2019 to 8.3% in 2022.

Considering happiness with friends, average happiness appears to have recovered by 2022, following a reduction in 2020 during the height of the pandemic. The percentage of those reporting low happiness with their friends has also recovered from a height of 11.5% in 2020 to 8.3% in 2022, though this remains slightly higher than the most recent pre-pandemic estimate of 5.7% in 2019.

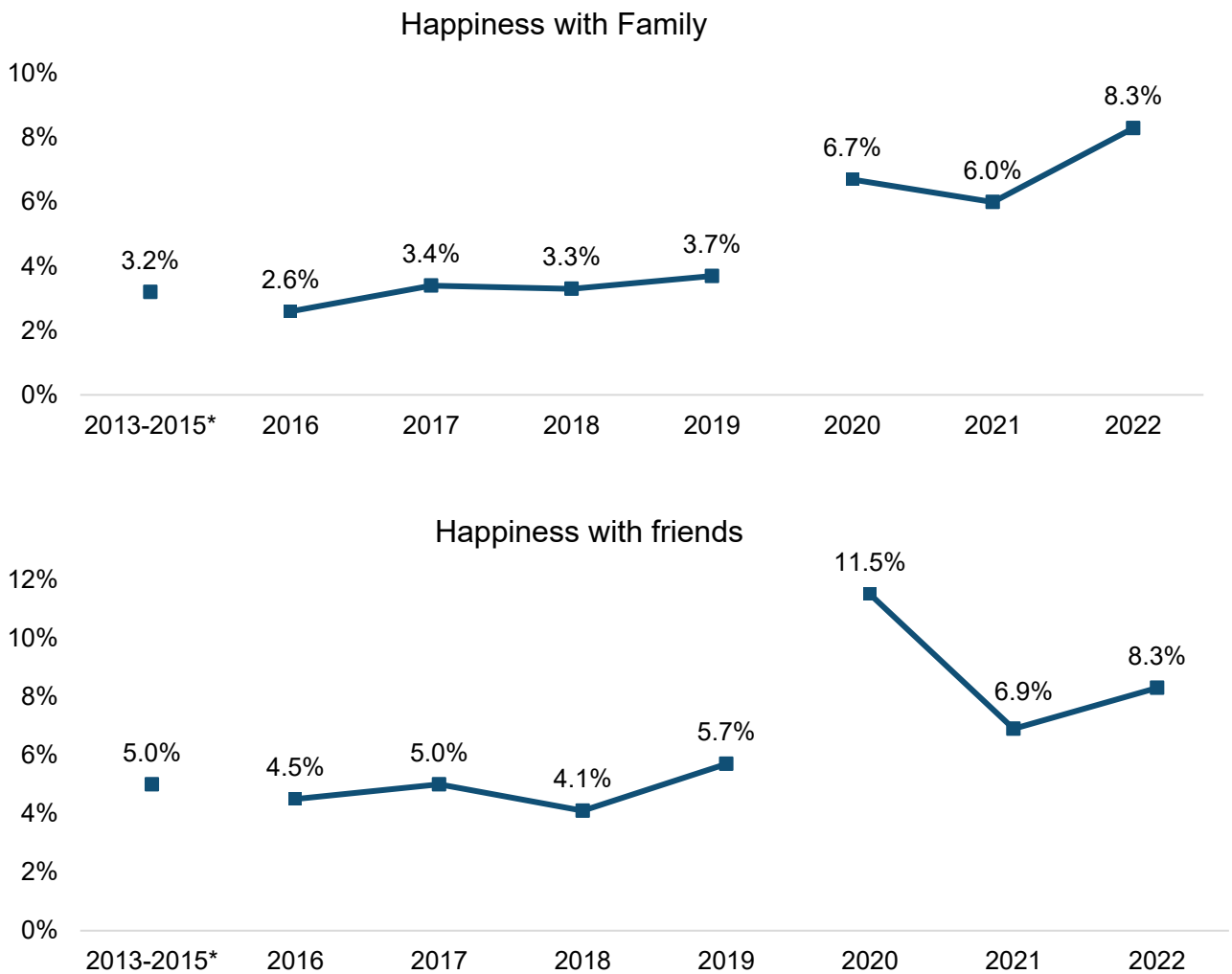
Figure 34. Average ratings of children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old happiness with family and friends



Coverage: 2020-2022 UK, 2013-2019 Great Britain, Note: Discontinuity in time series, see 'Data sources and methods' annex for further information. *The reported response for '2013 to 2015' is a pooled average based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report. n 2000+.

Source: The Children's Society.

Figure 35. Percentage children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old scoring low on happiness with family and friends



Coverage: 2020-2022 UK, 2013-2019 Great Britain, Note: Discontinuity in time series, see 'Data sources and methods' annex for further information. *The reported response for '2013 to 2015' is a pooled average based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report. Low scores were interpreted as scored below 5 out of 10. n = 2000+. Source: The Children's Society.

School relationships

In The Children's Society's 2022 household survey, children and young people aged 10-17 were asked their views about aspects of their school experience. Here we report on the experiences related to school relationships.

Children and young people were asked to rate out of ten how happy they were with their relationships with other young people, and their relationships with teachers. Children and young people's average happiness with their relationships with other young people was only marginally higher (7.7) than that for their relationship with teachers (7.5). Further, the percentage of those reporting low (less than 5 out of 10) happiness with their relationships with other young people (8.4%) was similar to the percentage of those scoring low on happiness with their relationships with teachers (8.6%). Boys had higher average scores than girls for these items, and children in key stage 2 scored higher on average than children in key stages 3, 4, and 5 across all items.

Children and young people were also asked their views about broader school experiences. Overall, 71% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that adults at their school are interested in their wellbeing. Further, 75% agreed or strongly agreed that there is at least one adult at their school who they can talk to about how they are feeling. Finally, 72% agreed or strongly agreed that young people in their school get on well together. Girls were more likely than boys to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that "Young people in my school get on well together." There were no consistent differences by SEN status or aggregated ethnic group.

Bullying

The June 2022 NBS wave of DfE's PPLP survey³⁷ asked secondary-aged pupils whether they had been a victim of bullying in the last year³⁸. Parents (of primary-aged and secondary-aged children) were asked whether their child had been a victim of bullying in the last year, in the May 2022 wave of the PPLP. While for primary school children (aged between 5 and 11) we present parent responses to these questions, we present secondary school children and young people's (aged between 11 and 18) own responses. We do not present parent report for secondary-aged children.

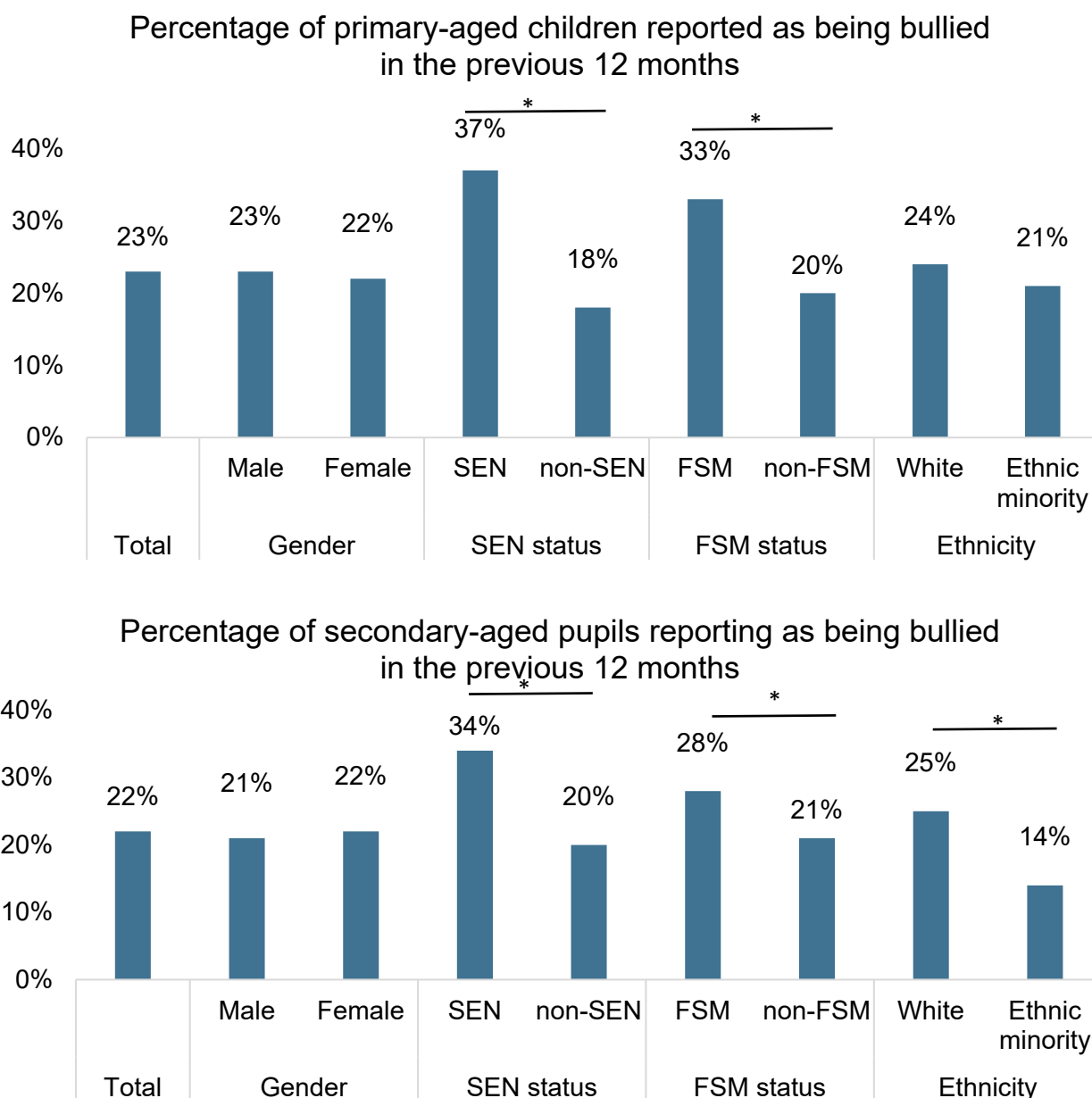
The responses shown in Figure 36 suggest that 23% of primary-aged children and 22% of secondary-aged children and young people reported or were reported as having been bullied in the previous 12 months. Among primary-aged pupils, being a victim of bullying was more likely to be reported by pupils with SEND (37%) versus those without SEND (18%) and by those eligible for FSM (33%) versus those not

³⁷ At the time of this publication, the final report for NBS, including this June data, is forthcoming. For more information, please see 'Annex A – Data sources and methods'.

³⁸ Note: The department's approach to gathering data on bullying through the omnibus panel surveys has changed over time. Additionally, pupils and parents were not always been asked at the same time in the school year. As such we have decided not to present data as a heavily caveated time series, and instead present the most recent available data.

eligible for FSM (20%). Among secondary-aged children and young people, being a victim of bullying was more likely to be reported by those with SEN (34%) versus those without SEN (20%), those eligible for FSM (28%) versus those not eligible for FSM (21%), and white pupils (25%) versus ethnic minority (14%) pupils.

Figure 36. Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 reporting/reported as being bullied in the last year, by primary or secondary



Coverage: England. Note: parents of primary pupils; May 2022 (n = 1,260), Secondary pupils; June 2022 (n = 1,908), *indicates a significant difference between groups. Source: DfE

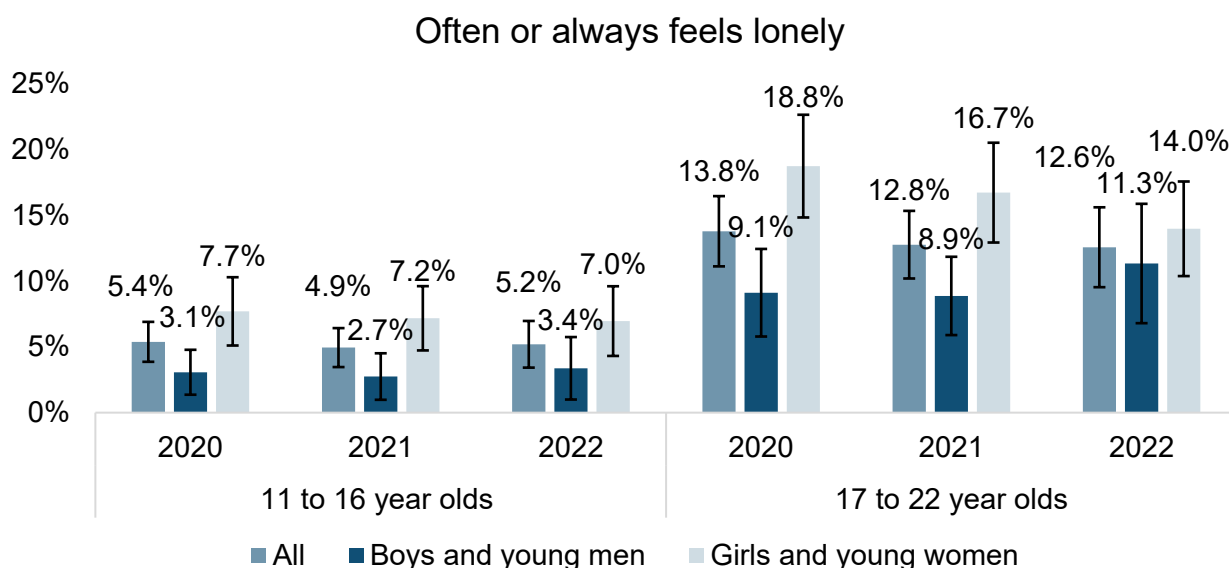
Loneliness

Annual trends in loneliness

NHS Digital’s 2020, 2021, and 2022 Mental Health of Children and Young People surveys asked children and young people how often they felt lonely, with scores recorded for ‘hardly ever or never’, ‘occasionally or sometimes’, and ‘often or always’ (NHS Digital, 2020, 2021b)³⁹. In this section we report the percentage of survey respondents who indicated they often or always felt lonely. We present these results by age group (11- to 16-years-old and 17- to 22-years-old), by sex, and by the likelihood that the child or young person had a mental disorder.

The results presented in Figure 37 show that, in 2022, 5.2% of children aged 11 to 16 years old and 12.6% of young people aged 17 to 22 years old reported often or always feeling lonely. These percentages were similar in 2020 and 2021. There were no significant differences in the percentage of children and young people reporting feeling often or always lonely by sex in any of the age groups surveyed in 2020, 2021, or 2022.

Figure 37. Percentage of 11- to 16-year-olds and 17- to 22-year-olds who report often or always feeling lonely in 2020, 2021, and 2022 by sex

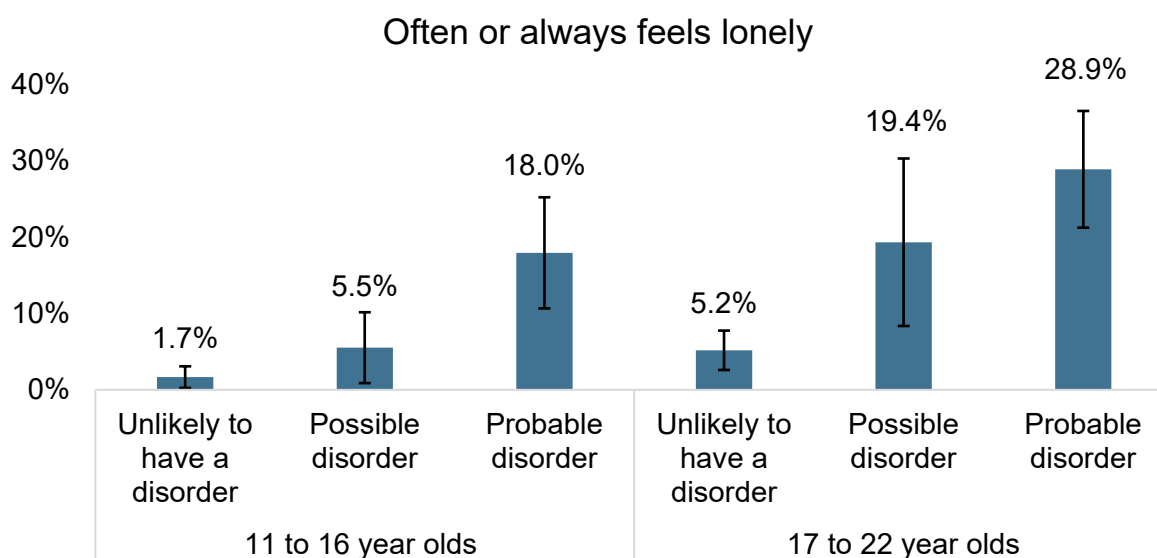


Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. n = 709.
Source: NHS Digital

³⁹ [The ONS recommended direct measure of loneliness](#)

Considering rates of loneliness by mental health of the child or young person, among those aged 11 to 16 years old those with a probable disorder were more likely (18%) than those unlikely to have a disorder (1.7%) to report often or always feeling lonely in 2022. Similarly, among those aged 17 to 22 years old those with a probable disorder were more likely (28.9%) than those unlikely to have a disorder (5.2%) to report often or always feeling lonely in 2022.

Figure 38. Percentage of 11- to 16-year-olds and 17- to 22-year-olds who report often or always feeling lonely in 2022 by mental health



Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. n = 709.

Source: NHS Digital

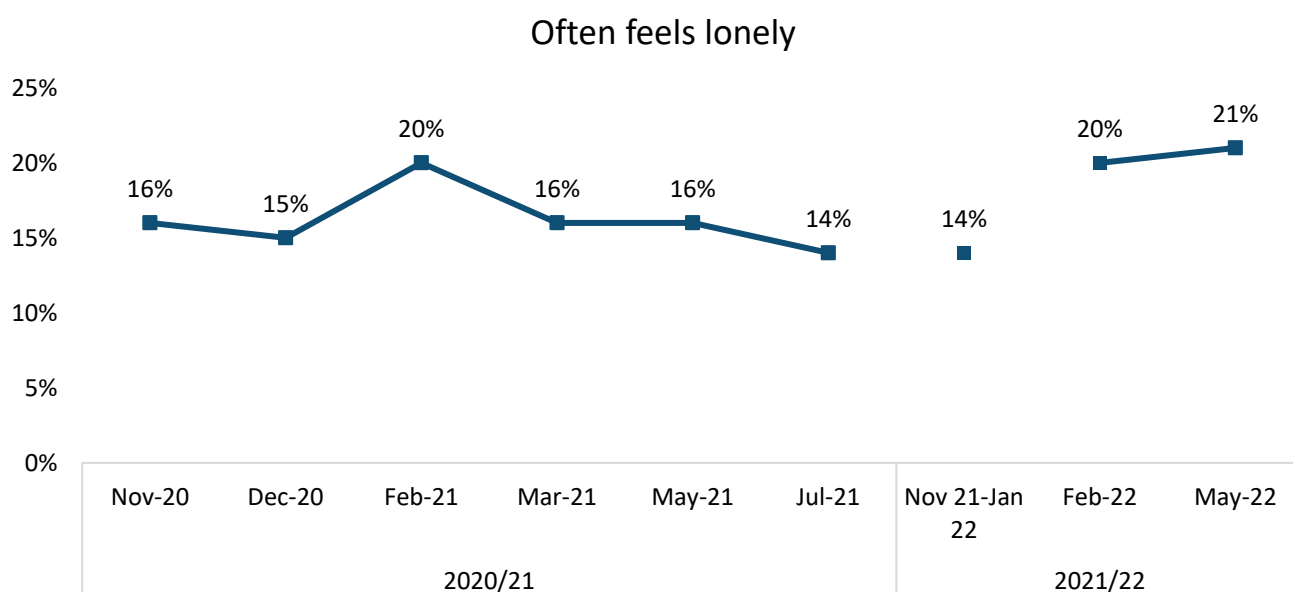
Trends in loneliness in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic year

The DfE’s parent, pupil and learner panel asked secondary-aged children how often they felt lonely at three time points across the 2021/22 academic year, with scores recorded for ‘hardly ever or never’, ‘some of the time’, and ‘often’ (DfE, 2022c, 2022a, 2022g). To enable more effective comparison with the MHCYP, in this section we present the percentage of PPP survey respondents who indicated feeling lonely often. We present these trends by gender, SEN status, FSM status, and ethnicity, with comparisons with trends in the 2020/21 academic year. Significance testing has not been conducted across waves, so suggested increases in loneliness are indicative only. It is not possible to infer from this data whether any gaps between subgroups have widened or narrowed over time.

Figure 39 presents a timeseries of the percentage of secondary-aged children and young people (11- to 18-years-old) who indicated often feeling lonely. The November 21 to January 22 wave of data collection presented for 2021/22 academic years includes children and young people in years 7 to 11 (aged 11- to 16-years-old), while all other waves include children and young people in years 7 to 13 (aged 11- to 18-years-old). As such, some of the change in rates of loneliness between November 21 to January 22 and February 22 waves, may be due to an increase in the average age of participants in the sample.

The trends suggest that rates of loneliness in 2021/22 were lowest in the November 21 to January 22 wave (14%) and highest in the May 22 wave (21%). Rates of loneliness in May 22 were equivalent to those reported in February 2021 (20%), when schools were closed to the majority of pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 39. Percentage of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old indicating often feeling lonely in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years



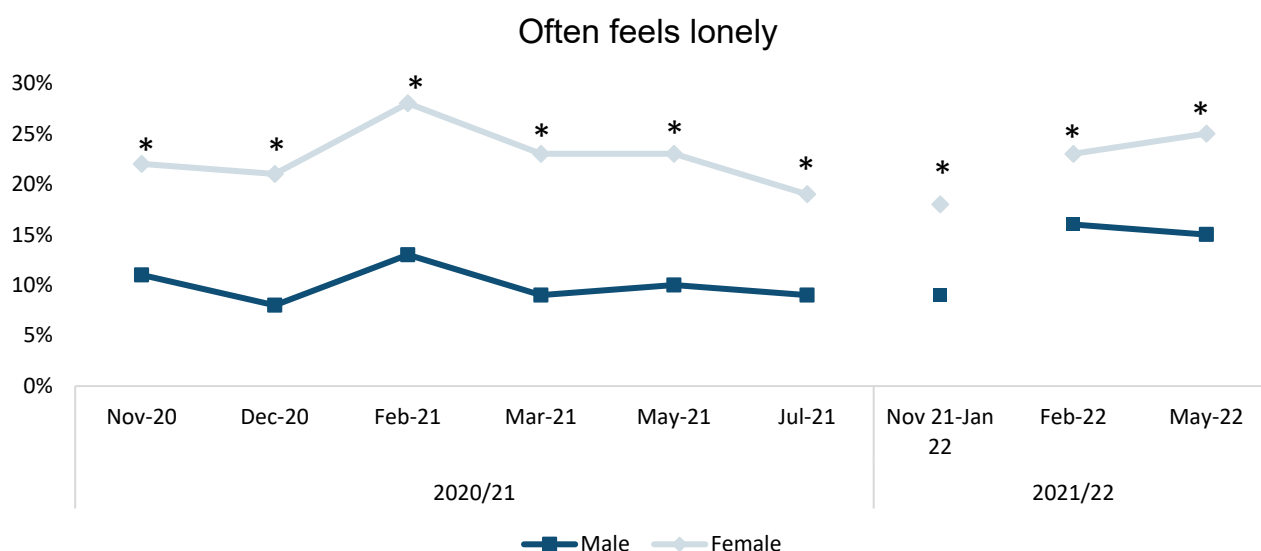
Coverage: England. Note: (highest n = January 2021 – November 2022; 4,228, lowest n = June; 1,511). The November 21 to January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

Trends in loneliness by gender

The trends presented in Figure 40 show that girls were more likely than boys to report often feeling lonely in the three data collection periods in 2021/22. The data suggest that the percentage of both boys and girls reporting often feeling lonely was greater in the latter two waves of the academic year, though this may be affected by

the inclusion of children and young people in years 12 & 13 in the latter wave. This loneliness gender gap was also shown throughout 2020/21.

Figure 40. Percentage of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old indicating often feeling lonely in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years, by gender



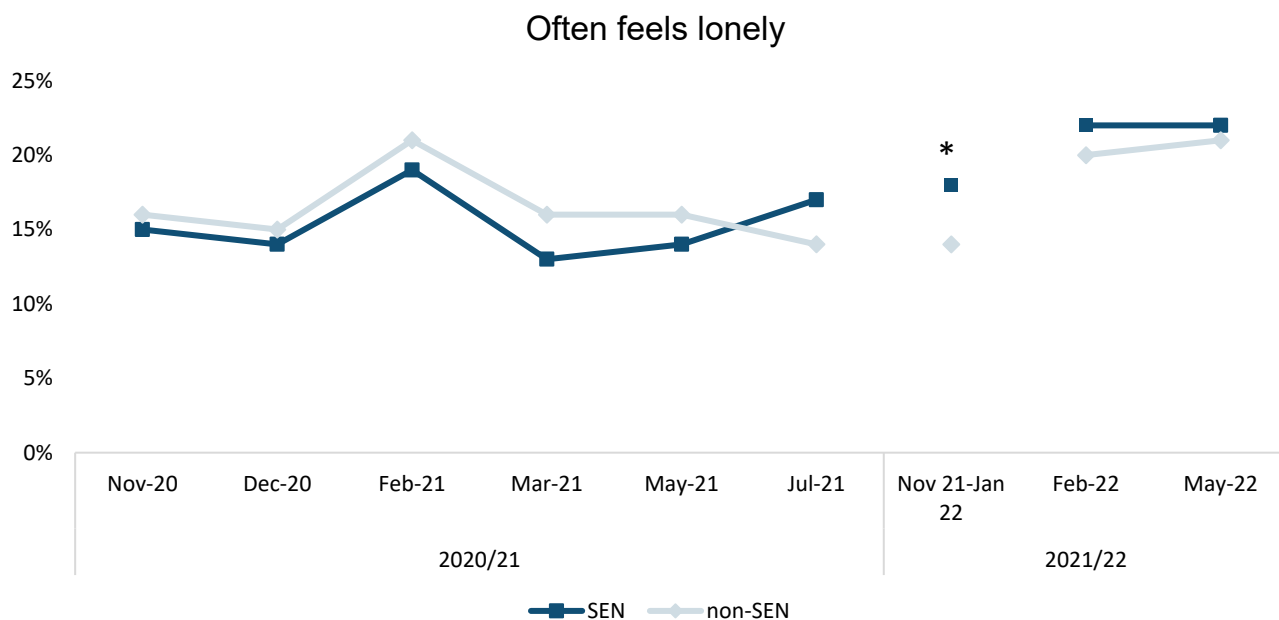
Coverage: England. Note: (highest n = January 2021 – November 2022; 4,228 [male = 1,919, female = 2,166], lowest n = June, 2021; 1,511 [male = 640, female = 915]), *indicates a significant difference between groups in highlighted wave. The November 21- January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

Trends in loneliness by SEN status

The trends presented in Figure 41 show that children and young people with SEN were more likely than those without SEN to report often feeling lonely in the November 21-January 22 wave⁴⁰, but this difference was no longer evident in the following two waves. No differences in rates of loneliness between those with and without SEN were shown in 2020/21.

⁴⁰ Note: apparent differences may be due to those in years 12-13 being excluded from the sample in this wave only. For more information, please see 'Annex A – Data sources and methods'.

Figure 41. Percentage of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old indicating often feeling lonely in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years, by SEN status

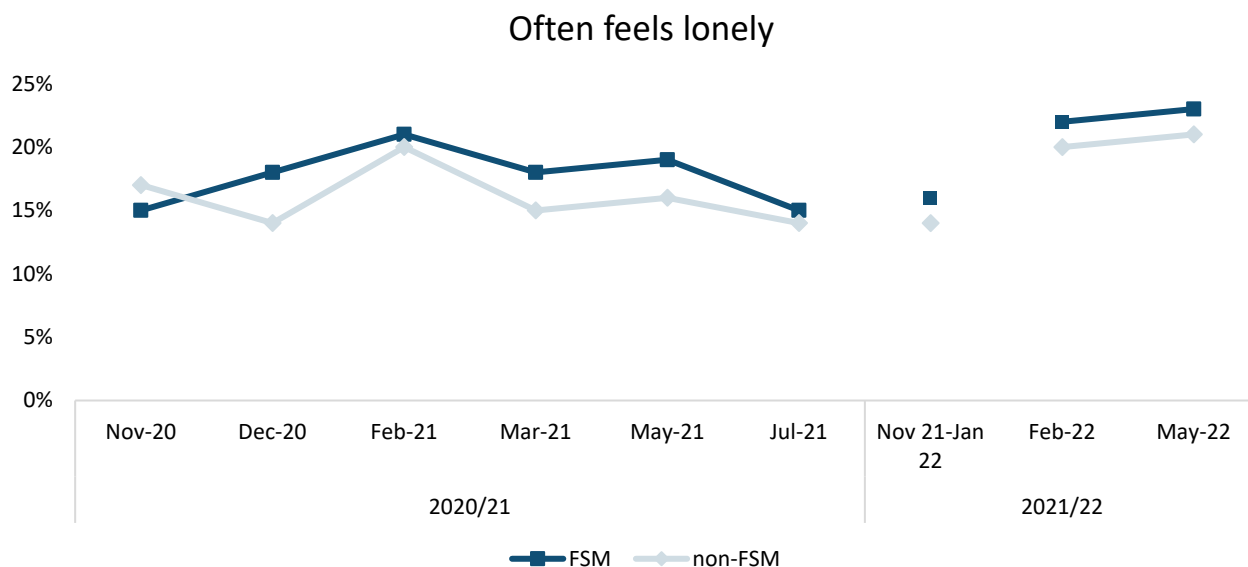


Coverage: England. Note: (highest n = January 2021 – November 2022; 4,228 [SEN = 755, non-SEN = 3,473], lowest n = June, 2021; 1,511 [SEN = 204, non-SEN = 1,351]), *indicates a significant difference between groups in highlighted wave. The November 21 - January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

Trends in loneliness by FSM status

The trends presented in Figure 42 show that there was no significant difference in rates of often feeling lonely between children and young people who were or were not eligible for FSM in both 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Figure 42. Percentage of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old indicating often feeling lonely in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years, by FSM status

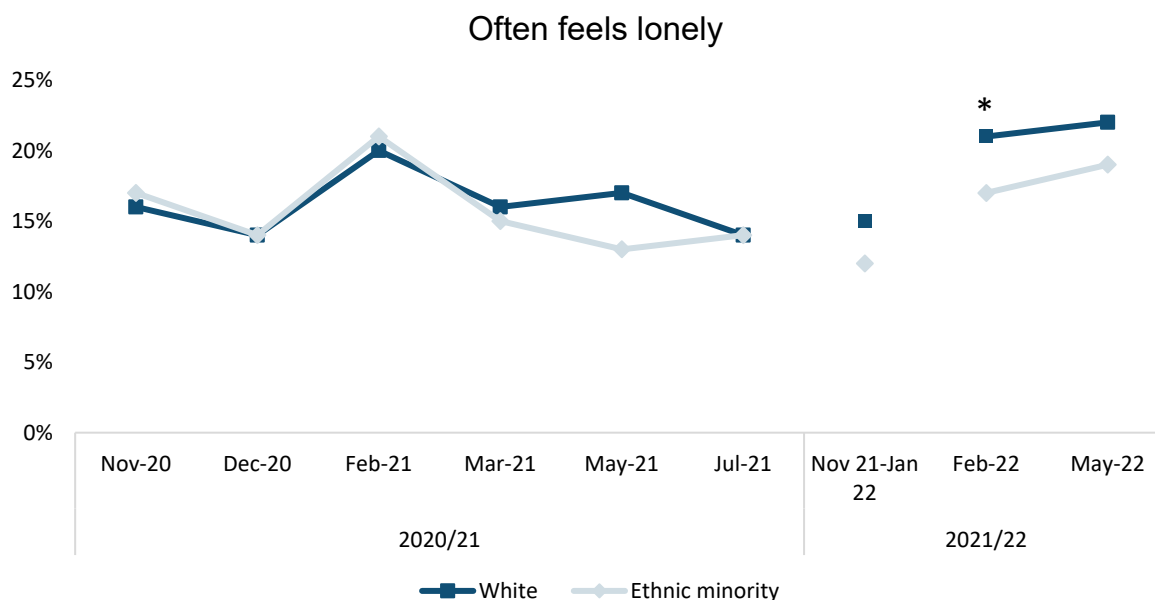


Coverage: England. Note: (highest n = January 2021 – November 2022; 4,228 [FSM = 1,351, non-FSM = 2,877], lowest n = June, 2021; 1,511 [FSM = 303, non-FSM = 1,252]), *indicates a significant difference between groups in highlighted wave. The November 21 - January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

Trends in loneliness by ethnicity

While the trends presented in Figure 43 provide tentative evidence that white respondents were more likely to report often feeling lonely than ethnic minority respondents in the three waves of data collection in 2021/22, these differences were statistically significant only in February 2022, and so caution should be taken when interpreting differences in loneliness between these groups. No differences in loneliness between white and ethnic minority respondents were shown in any wave of 2020/21.

Figure 43. Percentage of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old indicating often feeling lonely in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years, by ethnicity



Coverage: England. Note: (highest n = January 2021 – November 2022; 4,228 [white = 3,061, ethnic minority = 1,063], lowest n = June, 2021; 1,511 [white = 1,157, ethnic minority = 373]), *indicates a significant difference between groups in highlighted wave. The November 21 - January 22 wave did not include responses from those in school years 12 and 13. Source: DfE

Discussion of trends in relationships

Children and young people’s happiness with their family has remained consistent in recent years, on average, though the percentage of those who reported low happiness with family has increased since 2020. Further, both average and the percentage of those with low happiness with their relationships with friends appears to have improved in 2022, though the percentage of children and young people scoring low on this item remains at elevated levels compared to before the pandemic. Consistent with fluctuating trends in children and young people’s relationships with family and friends, rates of loneliness may have increased through the 2021/22 school year. Rates of loneliness in May 2022 were equivalent to those reported in February 2021 among those aged 11-18 when schools were closed to the majority of pupils during the pandemic.

Considering children and young people's happiness with their relationships at school, respondents were marginally happier with their relationships with other young people than with their relationship with teachers. Further, around 7 in 10 children and young people agreed or strongly agreed that adults at their school were interested in their wellbeing, that there was at least one adult at their school who they could talk to about how they were feeling, and that young people in their school got on well together. However, there was evidence for negative experiences with peers; in June 2022, 23% of primary-aged children (parent-report) and 22% of secondary-aged children reported having been bullied in the previous 12 months.

Considering subgroup differences, boys reported greater happiness with peer and teacher relationships, were more likely to report that young people in their school got on well together and were less likely to report often feeling lonely throughout 2021/22. These trends are consistent with gender differences in subjective wellbeing.

Both primary- (parent-report) and secondary-age children with SEN/SEND⁴¹ were more likely to report having been a victim of bullying in the previous 12 months than those without SEN/SEND. There was no clear difference in loneliness between SEN/SEND and non-SEN/SEND pupils.

Further, both primary- and secondary-age children eligible for FSM were more likely to report (or be reported as) having been a victim of bullying in the previous 12 months than those not eligible for FSM. There was no clear difference in loneliness between FSM and non-FSM pupils.

Finally, being a victim of bullying was more likely to be reported by white pupils versus ethnic minority pupils among secondary but not primary (parent-report) pupils.

Together, these results suggest that for some children and young people, relationships with their families and friends may have been negatively impacted by the pandemic and other emerging and ongoing national and international challenges, with the percentage of those with low happiness with family and friends remaining at elevated levels compared to before the pandemic. Further, children and young people's perceptions of their relationships had continued to change through 2021/22, with increases in loneliness evident. Further research could explore the conditions in which relationships with peers and adults may change for better or worse, and for

⁴¹ Demographic information among self-reporting secondary-aged pupils was pulled from the NPD which provides SEN status. Parents (reporting for primary-aged pupils) were asked if their child had SEND.

which groups of children negative changes in relationships may be most likely to occur.

Domain 5: 'What we do' – Activities and time use

Having the opportunity to take part in physical activity, spend time in nature and participate in activities such as arts, cultural activities, or volunteering can all promote positive wellbeing (Ahn et al., 2018; Rafferty et al., 2016; The Children's Society, 2010). Data presented in the previous State of the Nation report showed that usual sources of these activities, such as those offered in schools, were impacted by pandemic restrictions (DfE, 2022j).

As pandemic conditions eased through the 2021/22 academic year and into the new academic year, schools have returned to full-time face-to-face teaching, and the challenge of scaling up opportunities for P.E, sport, and extracurricular activities to pre-pandemic levels. At the same time, the opening up of civic institutions and groups, such as swimming pools, Scouts and Guides, and sports halls has increased the opportunity for children and young people to engage in a greater range of activities outside school.

In this context, it is important to understand how children and young people use their time, and whether they have been able to access activities that are likely to support their wellbeing.

This chapter presents:

- Happiness with activities and time use
- Engagement in physical activity
- Participation in extracurricular activities
- Exposure to the natural world

Key findings

- Children and young people's average happiness with their time use has remained stable in 2021 and 2022 following a small drop between 2019 and 2020, during the height of the pandemic. The percentage reporting low happiness has also shown some recovery compared to 2020, although remains elevated compared to before the pandemic.
- In a 2021/22 survey, 47.2% of children aged 5- to 16-years-old met the Chief Medical Officer's guidance for being active for 60 or more minutes per day, in the last 7 days. The percentage of those meeting the 60-minute target appears to have increased incrementally since the 2017-18 year when this figure was 43.3%.

- Regular engagement in physical activity was correlated with greater subjective wellbeing, on average.
- Participation in a range of extracurricular activities appears to have increased between 2021 and 2022, with 83% of children and young people reporting having engaged in at least one type of activity in the 2021/22 academic year by July 2022.
- In autumn 2021, nearly 9 in 10 children and young people reported spending time outside at school every or most days in the last week, while 56% reported spending time in a private personal or shared garden space.
 - 44% of respondents reported high connection to nature. Time spent outside was correlated with greater subjective happiness.
- Considering subgroup differences, children aged 8- to 11-years-old were more likely (92%) to have spent time outside in school every/most days in the previous week, and to indicate high connection to nature (47%) than those aged 12-15 (83% and 40%, respectively)
- Female respondents (21%) were more likely than males (15%) to report having not attended any extra-curricular activities this term, in July 2022. There was also tentative evidence that male respondents were more likely to indicate high connection to nature and be more physically active than female respondents.
- Children and young people with families whose annual household income was greater than £50,000 were more likely to have spent time outside in school every or most days in the previous week (90%) and indicate high connection to nature (51%), than those with families whose annual income was less than £15,000 (81% and 35%, respectively). Those in more affluent families were also more likely to be physically active than those in less affluent families.
- White children and young people (90%) were more likely than black or black British (77%) and Asian or Asian British (79%) children and young people to have spent time outside in school every or most days in the previous week. This difference was also observed between those without a disability (89%) compared to those with a disability (82%).

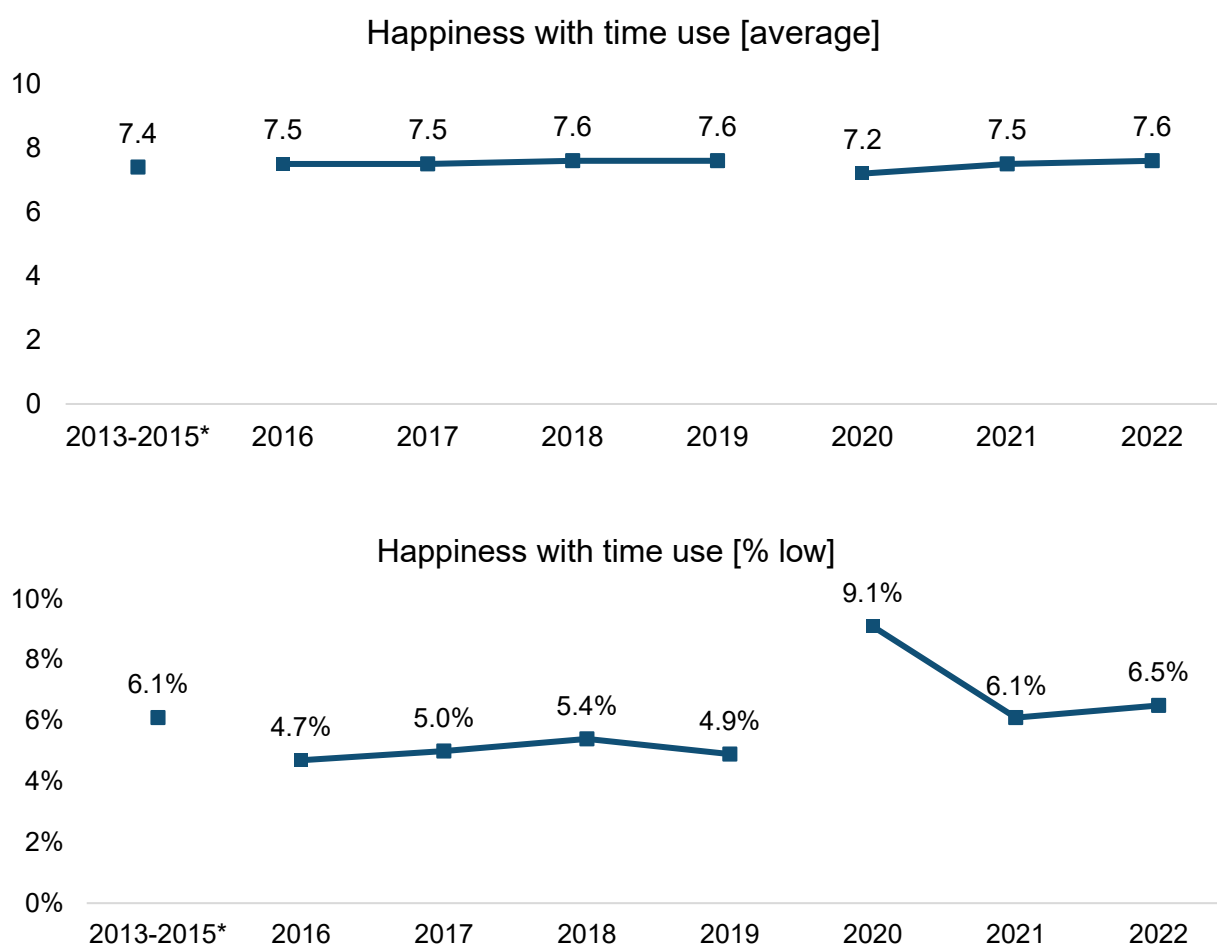
Happiness with activities and time use

The Good Childhood Index has collected regular data on children and young people's happiness with their use of time (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2019, 2020, 2021). Figure 44 presents this data as a time series of average annual happiness scores (on a scale of 0-10) of children and young people

aged 10 to 17 from 2013-2015 to 2021. Data from the 2016 survey onwards were collected between April-June each year.

These data shows that average happiness with time use remains at a similar level in 2022 (7.6 out of 10) to 2021 (7.5 out of 10), following a drop from 7.6 in 2019 to 7.2 in 2020, during the height of the pandemic. The percentage of those indicating low (scores less than 5 out of 10) happiness with their time use appears to have also recovered from 9.1% in 2020, to 6.1% in 2021 and 6.5% in 2022 though remains higher than pre-pandemic levels (4.9% in 2019).

Figure 44. Children and young people’s aged 10- to 17-years-old happiness with their time use



Coverage: 2020-2022 UK, 2013-2019 Great Britain, Note: Discontinuity in time series, see ‘Data sources and methods’ annex for further information. *The reported response for ‘2013 to 2015’ is a pooled average based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report. n = 2000+.

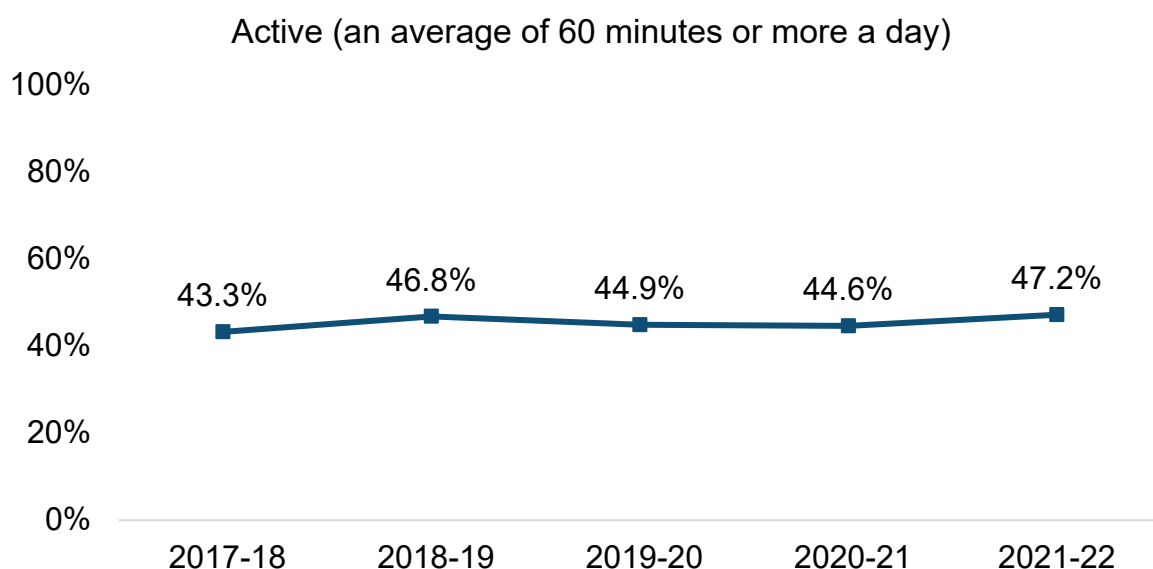
Source: The Children’s Society.

Engagement in physical activity

Sport England's Active Lives Children and Young People Survey for the academic year 2021-22 measured the activity levels of children and young people in school years 1 to 11 (aged 5- to 16-years-old) across each school term (Sport England, 2022). Data on activity levels was collected systematically by asking pupils to identify from a list which activities they had done in the last 7 days, in or outside of school, on which days they had done each activity in the last 7 days, how long they spent doing the activity the last time they did it, and whether it made them breathe faster or made them hot or tired. Parents reported on this for children in years 1 and 2, and children reported themselves for those in years 3 to 11.

Annual trends presented in Figure 45 suggest that 47.2% of children aged 5 to 16 were met the Chief Medical Officer's guidance for being active for 60 or more minutes per day, in the last 7 days. The percentage of those meeting the 60-minute target appears to have increased incrementally since the 2017-18 year when this figure was 43.3%.

Figure 45. The percentage of children aged 5- to 16-years-old who were active for 60 or more minutes per day

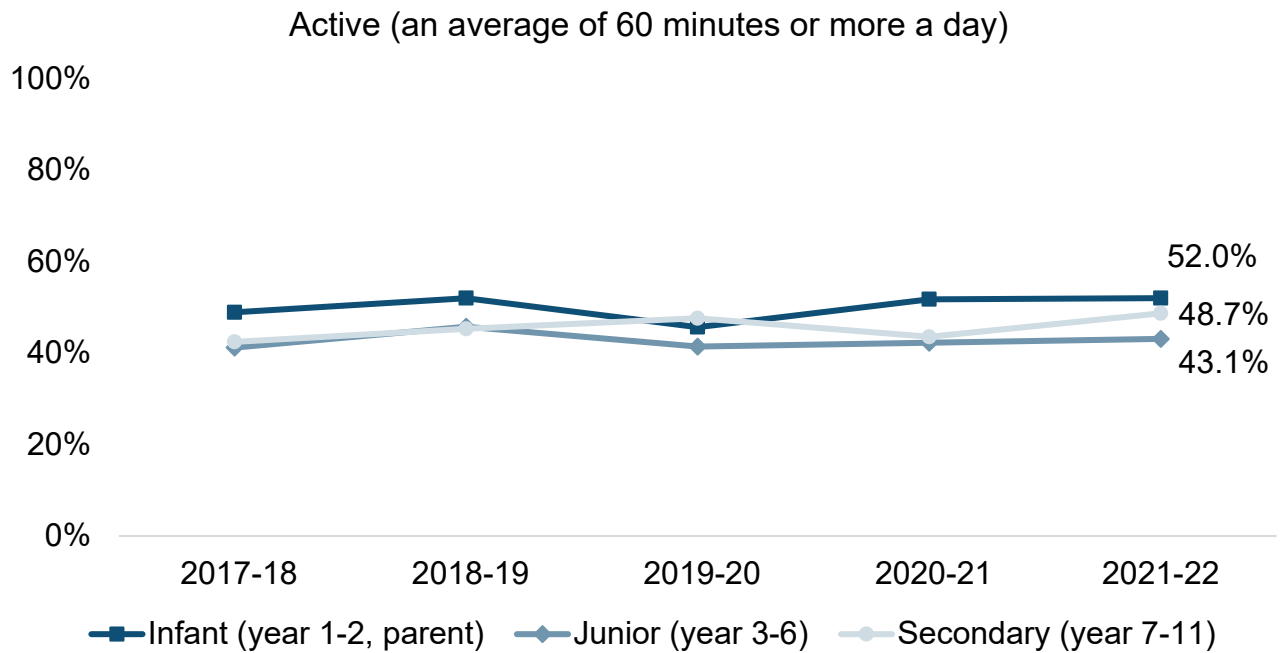


Coverage: England, n (2021/22) = 104,404. Source: Sport England

Considering activity levels by age, those in years 1 and 2 were marginally more likely to have been physically active for 60 or more minutes per day in the previous week (52%) than those in years 7 to 11 (48.7%), and those in years 3 to 6 (43.1%). Rates of participation in physical activity have tended to fluctuate over time in each age

group, with those in years 7 to 11 appearing to vary over time to a greater extent than other age groups.

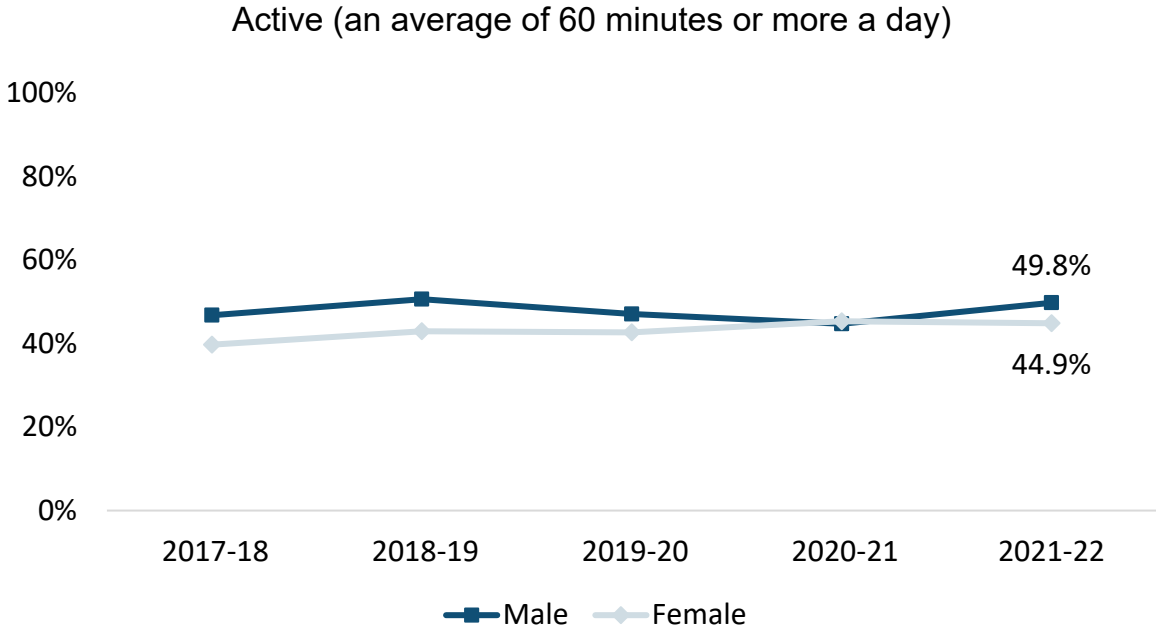
Figure 46. The percentage of children aged 5- to 16-years-old who were active for 60 or more minutes per day by age



Coverage: England, n (2021/22); infant = 5, 675, junior = 36,612, secondary = 62,117. Source: Sport England

Males appeared more likely (49.8%) than females (44.9%) to have been physically active for 60 or more minutes per day in the previous week, in 2021/22. This gender difference in participation has been shown in previous years, except for 2020/21, when no gender differences were observed.

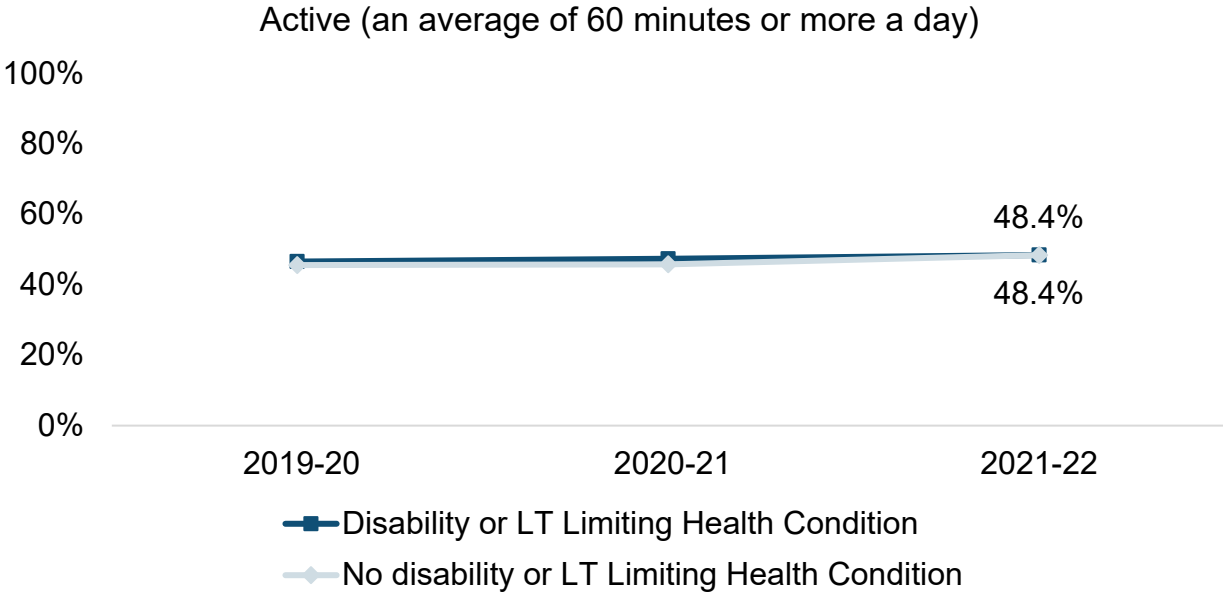
Figure 47. The percentage of children aged 5- to 16-years-old who were active for 60 or more minutes per day by gender



Coverage: England, n (2021/22); male = 46,255, female = 47,613. Source: Sport England

No differences were observed in whether those with or without a disability or long-term (LT) limiting health condition had been physically active for 60 or more minutes per day in the previous week (both 48.4%), in 2021/22.

Figure 48. The percentage of children aged 5- to 16-years-old who were active for 60 or more minutes per day by disability

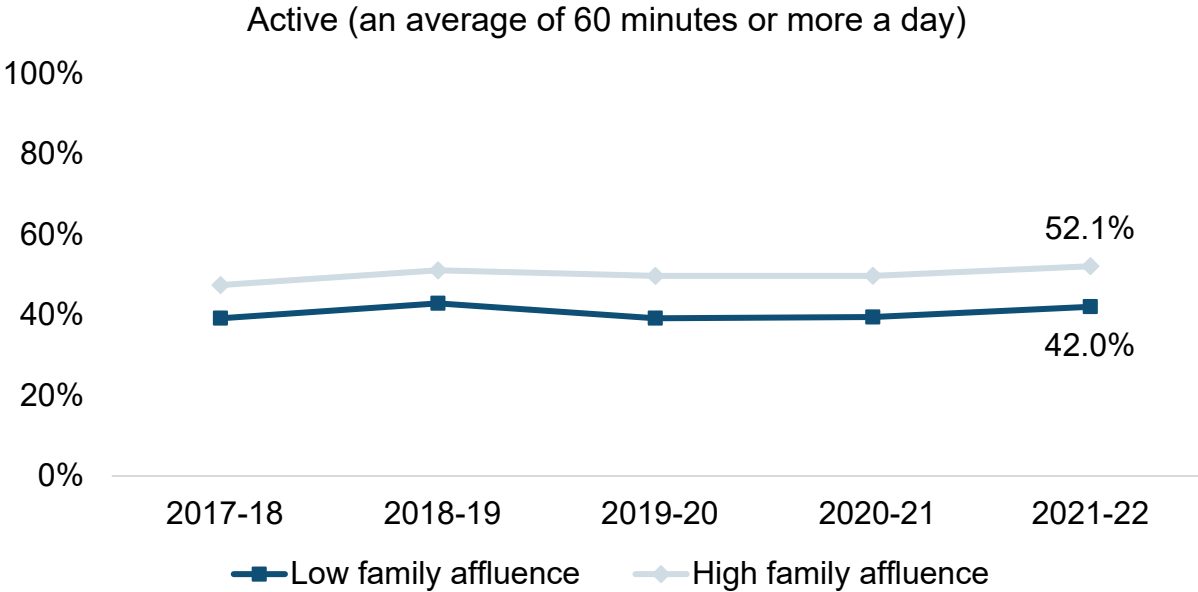


Coverage: England, n (2021/22); disability = 5,849, no disability = 63,185, Source: Sport England

Considering activity levels by family affluence, those with high family affluence appeared more likely (51.1%) than those with low family affluence (42.0%) to have been physically active for 60 or more minutes per day in the previous week, in 2021/22. This difference in participation by affluence has been shown in all previous years this has been surveyed⁴².

⁴² This is a standard scale developed for the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Survey (an international study of 11- to 15-year-olds). [See the technical note for more information on this scale](#)

Figure 49. The percentage of children aged 5- to 16-years-old who were active for 60 or more minutes per day by family affluence

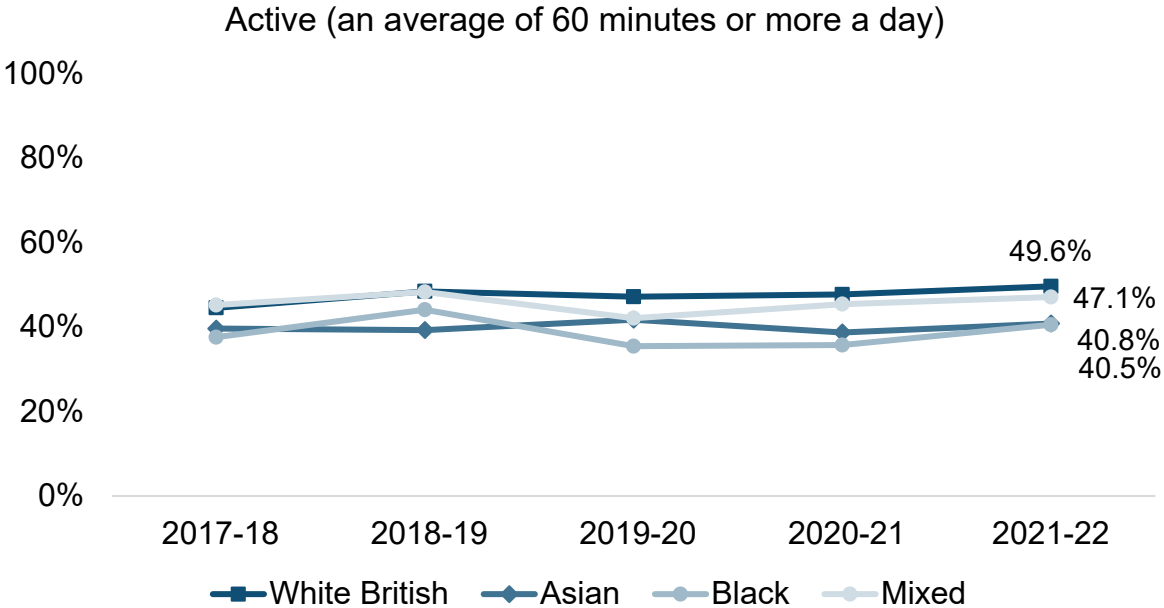


Coverage: England, n (2021/22); high affluence = 31,594, low affluence = 15,474.
 Source: Sport England

Considering activity levels by ethnicity, white British (49.6%) and mixed (47.1%) children appeared more likely than Asian (40.8%) and Black (40.5%) children to have been physically active for 60 or more minutes per day in the previous week, in 2021/22.

However, there have been no consistent differences by ethnicity across previous years. Therefore, it remains unclear whether the pattern in 2021/22 will sustain in future years.

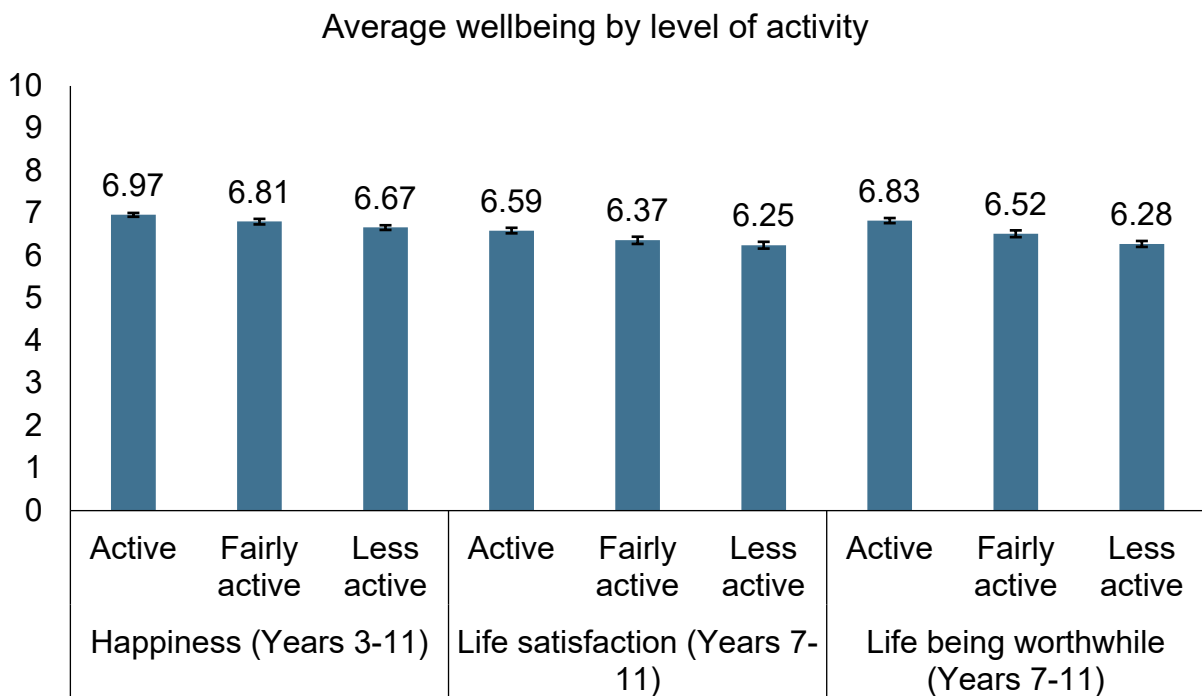
Figure 50. The percentage of children aged 5- to 16-years-old who were active for 60 or more minutes per day by ethnicity



Coverage: England, n (2021/22); white British = 69,321, Asian = 7,584, Black =
 Source: Sport England

Considering the relationship between levels of physical activity and subjective wellbeing, those who were active for 60 or more minutes per day in the previous week had greater happiness, life satisfaction, and feelings that life is worthwhile than those who were fairly active (doing an average of 30-59 minutes a day across the week), or less active (doing less than an average of 30 minutes a day across the week). However, these average differences were very small, and so should be treated cautiously. These correlational results cannot determine underlying causal relationships between physical activity and subjective wellbeing.

Figure 51. The relationship between level of activity and subjective wellbeing among children aged 5- to 16-years-old



Coverage: England, n (2021/22) = 104,404. Active – Doing an average of 60 minutes or more a day across the week (420+ minutes a week), Fairly active – Doing an average of 30-59 minutes a day across the week (210-419 minutes a week), Less active – Doing less than an average of 30 minutes a day across the week (less than 210 minutes a week). Source: Sport England

Participation in extracurricular activities

In July 2022⁴³, the DfE’s Parent, Pupil and Learner panel asked secondary-aged children and young people about the extracurricular activities that they had participated in at school or college in the current term. This is compared to participation in May 2021, during an academic year that had experienced substantial disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results show that 83% of respondents reported having participated in at least one extracurricular activity at school in the Summer Term 2022. The most popular types of activity were sports and physical activities (38%), creative arts (32%), and performing arts (29%). Comparing to the previous time this question was asked,

⁴³ Note: While reported as the July wave in this report, findings here refer to what is published as the June wave of the PPLP - fieldwork took place between the 29th June and the 4 July 2022.

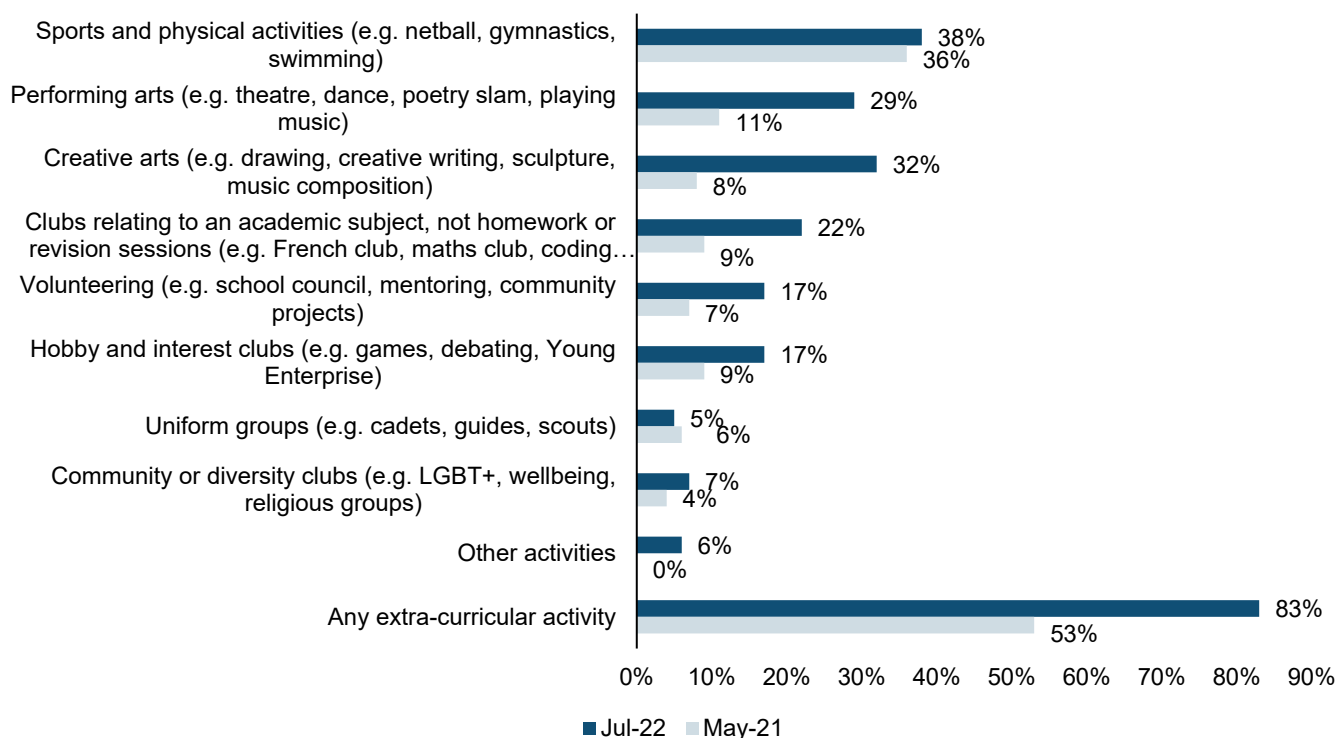
participation rates appear to have been substantially lower across a range of types of activity, and in terms of participating in at least one activity (53%), in May 21 compared to July 22⁴⁴. Nonetheless, rates of participation in sports and physical activities were similar at both waves. It is not possible to infer from these data why participation in extra-curricular activities appeared to be lower in 2021 compared to 2022, but this could have been partly due to a reduced range of types of activity being offered by schools during the pandemic.

Considering participation rates by subgroup, female respondents (21%) were more likely than males (15%) to report having not attended any extra-curricular activities this term, in July 2022. No differences in rates of those who reported not attending any extracurricular activities this term were found between those with SEN (19%) compared to those without SEN (17%), those eligible for FSM (18%) compared to those not eligible (17%), or white (17%) children and young people compared to those with an ethnic minority background (18%).

⁴⁴ As statistical significance testing was not possible, differences between these two waves should be interpreted as indicative only.

Figure 52. Participation of children and young people aged 11- to 18-years-old in extra-curricular activities at school/college this term

Which of the following extra-curricular activities, if any, have you taken part in this term at school/college?



Coverage: England. Note: Secondary pupils (n = July 2022; 2,232, May 2021; 1,535). Source: DfE

Nature experiences

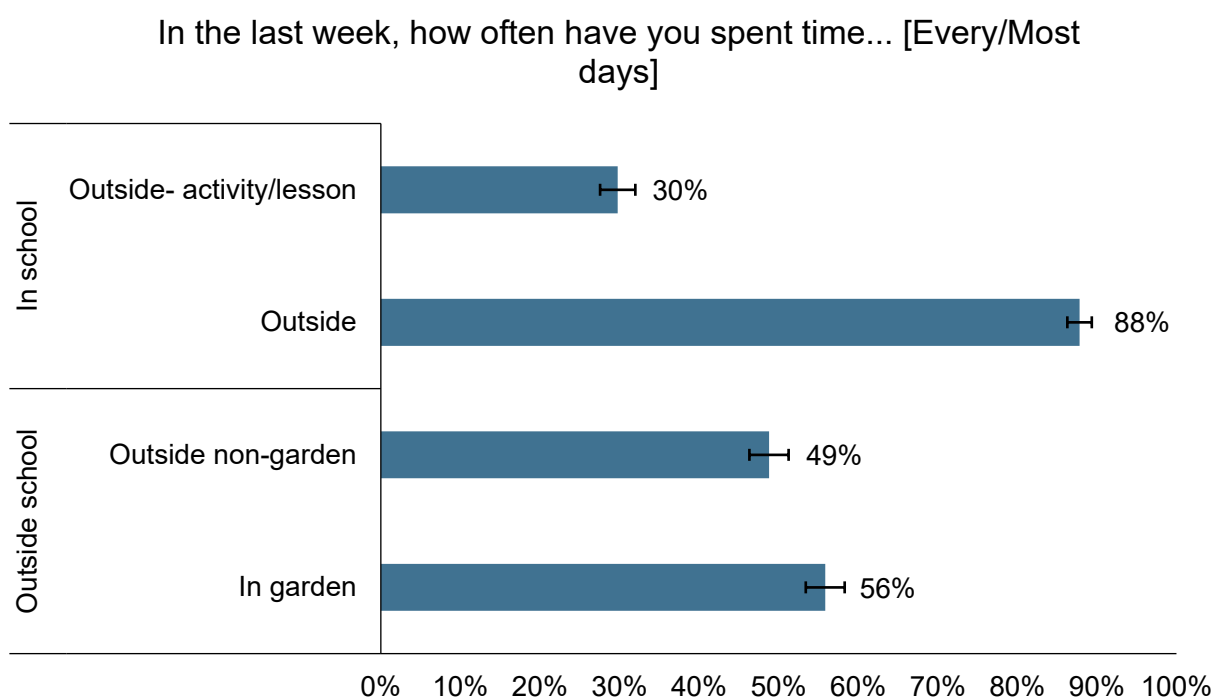
Natural England's 'Children's People and Nature Survey' provides information on how children and young people experience and think about the natural environment. It is run twice each year, once in term time and once in holiday time. Here we present findings on time spent outdoors, connection to nature, and the link between time spent outdoors and subjective wellbeing from the term-time (Wave 2) survey collected between September 21st and October 11th 2021. Statistical significance testing of group differences was conducted using chi-square tests.

The findings presented in Figure 53 suggest that nearly 9 in 10 children and young people reported spending time outside at school every or most days in the last week. 3 in 10 reported taking part in an outdoor activity or lesson every or most days in the previous week. Regarding nature experiences outside of school, 56% reported

spending time in a private personal or shared garden space and 49% reported spending time in an outside space that wasn't a garden every or most days in the previous week.

Considering subgroup differences, children aged 8- to 11-years-old were more likely (92%) than those aged 12- to 15-years-old (83%) to have spent time outside in school every or most days in the previous week. Further, white children and young people (90%) were more likely than black or black British (77%) and Asian or Asian British (79%) to have spent time outside in school every or most days in the previous week. Differences were also observed for those with a disability (82%) compared to those without a disability (89%), and those in a family with a household income of greater than £50,000 per annum (90%) compared to those in a family with a household income of less than £15,000 per annum (81%). No differences were observed for gender in this measure.

Figure 53. Time children and young people aged 8- to 15-years-old spent in nature in the last week



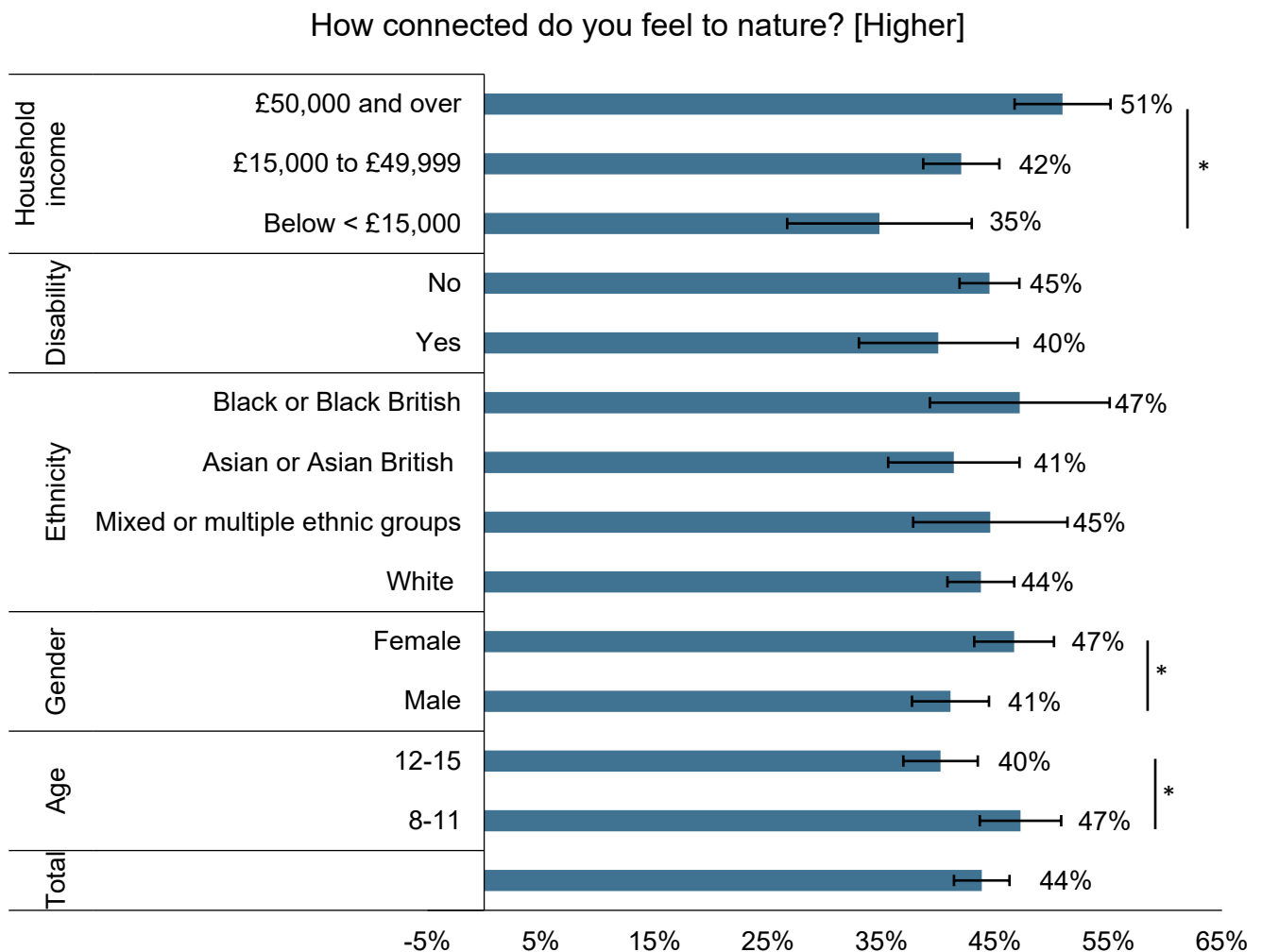
Coverage: England. n = 2051, bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: Natural England

Nature connection

The Children's People and Nature Survey also collected data on children's perceived connection to nature⁴⁵. Figure 54 shows that, overall, 44% of respondents reported high connection to nature. In terms of subgroup differences, statistical significance testing indicated that younger children and young people (8- to- 11-year-olds) were more likely to indicate high connection to nature (47%) than older children and young people (12- to 15-year-olds, 40%). Those with families whose annual household income was greater than £50,000 were more likely to indicate high connection to nature (51%) than those with families whose annual income was less than £15,000 (35%). Female respondents were more likely to indicate high connection to nature (47%) than male respondents (40%), but as the confidence intervals for male and female connection to nature overlap, this difference should be interpreted with caution.

⁴⁵ Measured by children and young people choosing images from the 'Inclusion of Nature in Self' scale (Kleespies et al., 2021)

Figure 54. Connection to nature of children and young people aged 8- to 15-years-old



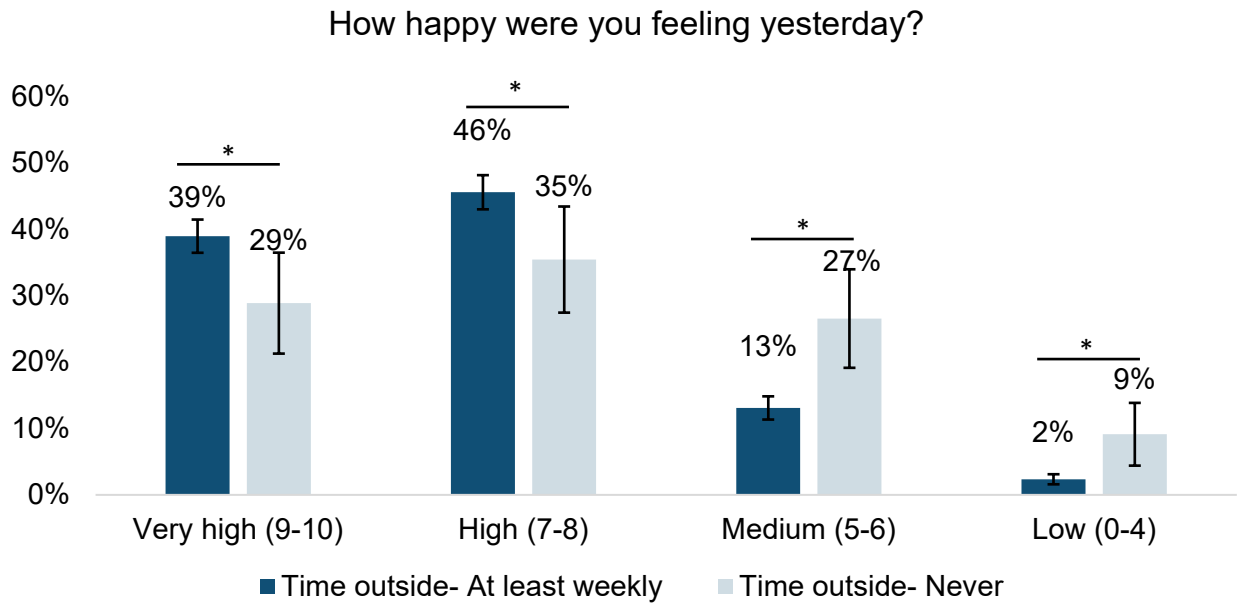
Coverage: England. n = 2051, *indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Source: Natural England

Nature connection and wellbeing

In addition to asking about connection to nature, the ‘Children’s People and Nature Survey additionally asked children and young people how happy they felt yesterday on a scale of 0 to 10. Responses to these questions suggested that those who reported spending time outside at least weekly were more likely to report very high (39%) or high (46%) happiness than those who reported never spending time outside (very high happiness = 29%, high happiness = 35%), suggesting that time spent outside was correlated with greater happiness. Importantly, these findings are unable to establish the causal relationships between time spent outdoors and subjective happiness.

Figure 55. Time in nature and subjective wellbeing of children and young people aged 8- to 15-years-old



Coverage: England. n = 2051, *indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Source: Natural England

Discussion of trends in ‘what we do’

Overall, children and young people’s happiness with their time use remains at a similar level in 2022 to 2021 following a drop from between 2019 and 2020, during the height of the pandemic.

In 2021/22, nearly half (47.2%) of children aged 5 to 16 were met the Chief Medical Officer’s guidance for being active for 60 or more minutes per day, in the last 7 days. The percentage of those meeting the 60-minute target appears to have increased incrementally since the 2017-18 year when this figure was 43.3%. Regular engagement in physical activity was correlated with greater subjective wellbeing, on average, although we cannot infer a causal relationship in these data.

Rates of participation in extracurricular activities appears to have increased between 2021 and 2022; increases in participation rates appeared greatest for performing arts, creative arts, and clubs relating to an academic subject between these two waves of data collection. However, rates of participation in sport and physical activities remained similarly high in 2021 and 2022. Female respondents were more likely than males to report having not attended any extra-curricular activities this term, in July 2022.

One explanation of participation differences between 2021 and 2022 could be that schools were forced to restrict their extracurricular offer during the 2020/21 academic year and were more likely to continue to offer sport and physical activities. Findings from the DfE’s COVID-19 School Snapshot Panel (DfE, 2021c) supports this interpretation; in a national sample of leaders of secondary schools in June 2021, schools were more likely to have been able to offer any sport or physical activity (82%) than other forms of extracurricular activity in the 2020/21 academic year including performing arts (61%), creative arts (54%), and hobby or interest clubs (54%).

DfE research to understand how schools responded to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic further supports the impact of the pandemic on extracurricular offers and also their prioritisation as part of their actions to support pupil wellbeing (DfE, 2022h, 2023). In the 20/21 academic year, schools reported having to reduce some extra-curricular activities. However, in the 2020 autumn term, 46% of primary schools and 36% of secondary schools reported that ensuring there was time for extracurricular activities was a strategy they used to support the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils, and 16% of primaries and 19% of secondaries increased the range of extra-curricular activities on offer. Schools reported running extra-curricular activities as a priority for the 2021/22 academic year (DfE, 2022h).

The second year of this research found that in the 2021 autumn, 83% of schools reported running extra-curricular clubs and that secondary schools reported focussing on extra-curricular activities as part of their activity around wellbeing recovery (DfE, 2023).

Survey evidence of children and young people in autumn 2021 from Natural England suggested that nearly 9 in 10 children and young people reported spending time outside at school every or most days in the last week, while 56% reported spending time in a private personal or shared garden space. A further 44% of respondents reported high connection to nature, and time spent outside was correlated with greater subjective happiness. Together these results suggest the importance of nature experiences to children and young people and a potential link between regular nature experiences and wellbeing.

These data also highlight inequalities in access to natural space among children and young people. Younger children aged 8- to 11-years-old were more likely to have spent time outside in school every/most days in the previous week, and to indicate high connection to nature than those aged 12- to 15-years-old. Further, children and young people with families whose annual household income was greater than £50,000 were more likely to have spent time outside in school every or most days in the previous week and indicate high connection to nature, than those with families whose annual income was less than £15,000. White children and young people were more likely than black or black British and Asian or Asian British to have spent time outside in school every or most days in the previous week; this difference was also observed between those without a disability compared to those with a disability. Further work would be required to understand the barriers that different children and young people face in accessing natural spaces, and how to reduce these inequalities.

Finally, there was tentative evidence that female respondents were more likely to indicate high connection to nature than male respondents, which may suggest a gendered aspect to nature experiences. Further research may seek to understand how gender may influence the ways in which children and young people engage in the natural environment.

Domain 6: Self, society, and the future

Recent years have seen a variety of major national and global challenges, including lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing concerns about climate change, economic disruption and the increasing cost of living, war in Ukraine, and wider social issues. These are ongoing issues which will likely have substantial impact on the lives and wellbeing of children and young people.

This chapter explores how children and young people feel about themselves, society, finances, and the future.

This chapter presents:

- Happiness with children and young people's things, appearance, and choice
- Feelings about social media
- School costs
- Financial situation at home
- Feelings about one's neighbourhood
- Worry about societal issues
- Happiness with the future

Key findings

- Children and young people's happiness with the things they have (like money and the things they own) has remained stable in recent years, on average. The percentage of children and young people reporting low happiness with their things has fluctuated over the previous five years.
- Children and young people's happiness with their appearance has also remained stable in recent years, on average. The percentage of those with low happiness with their appearance increased between 2019 and 2020, but has reduced slightly in subsequent years, though remains higher than pre-pandemic.
- Children and young people's average happiness with their choice in life has recovered in 2022, following a drop between 2019 and 2020. The percentage of those who reported low happiness with their choice in life has also recovered over this time, though remains higher than pre-pandemic levels.
- Overall, 62.8% of 11- to 16-year-olds and 65.9% of 17- to 24-year-olds agreed a little or a lot that they feel safe using social media. 12.6% of 11- to 16-year-olds

and 15.3% of 17- to 24-year-olds agreed a little or a lot that they have been bullied online.

- Girls and young women were less likely than boys and young men to report that they feel safe using social media. Further, young women were more likely than young men to report that they have been bullied online.
- Children aged 7 to 16 years were more likely (19.9%) than young people aged 17 to 22 years (9.6%) to report that their household had experienced a reduction in income in the previous 12 months.
- Around a third of parents and carers reported that they had struggled with the cost of school trips, school uniform, and school shoes.
- In May 2022, around a quarter of secondary-aged pupils in years 12 and 13 reported being worried about being able to afford technology for studying e.g. a computer or laptop, school/college trips that are not part of lessons e.g. trips abroad, travel to school/college, and school/college trips that are part of lessons.
- Overall, the majority of respondents reported that they felt safe in their neighbourhood (83.8%), like living in their neighbourhood (83.9%), can trust people in their neighbourhood (73.2%), and that there are enough places to play in their neighbourhood (69.8%).
- In a list of societal concerns, children and young people were most likely to report feeling quite/very worried about the environment (41%), new illnesses/pandemics (37%), crime (32%), inequality (32%), and the refugee and migrant crisis (32%).
- Children and young people's happiness with what may happen to them later in their lives has increased slightly since 2020 and is similar to pre-pandemic levels. The percentage of those reporting low happiness with what may happen to them later in their lives has also slightly declined since 2020 though remains substantially higher than pre-pandemic.

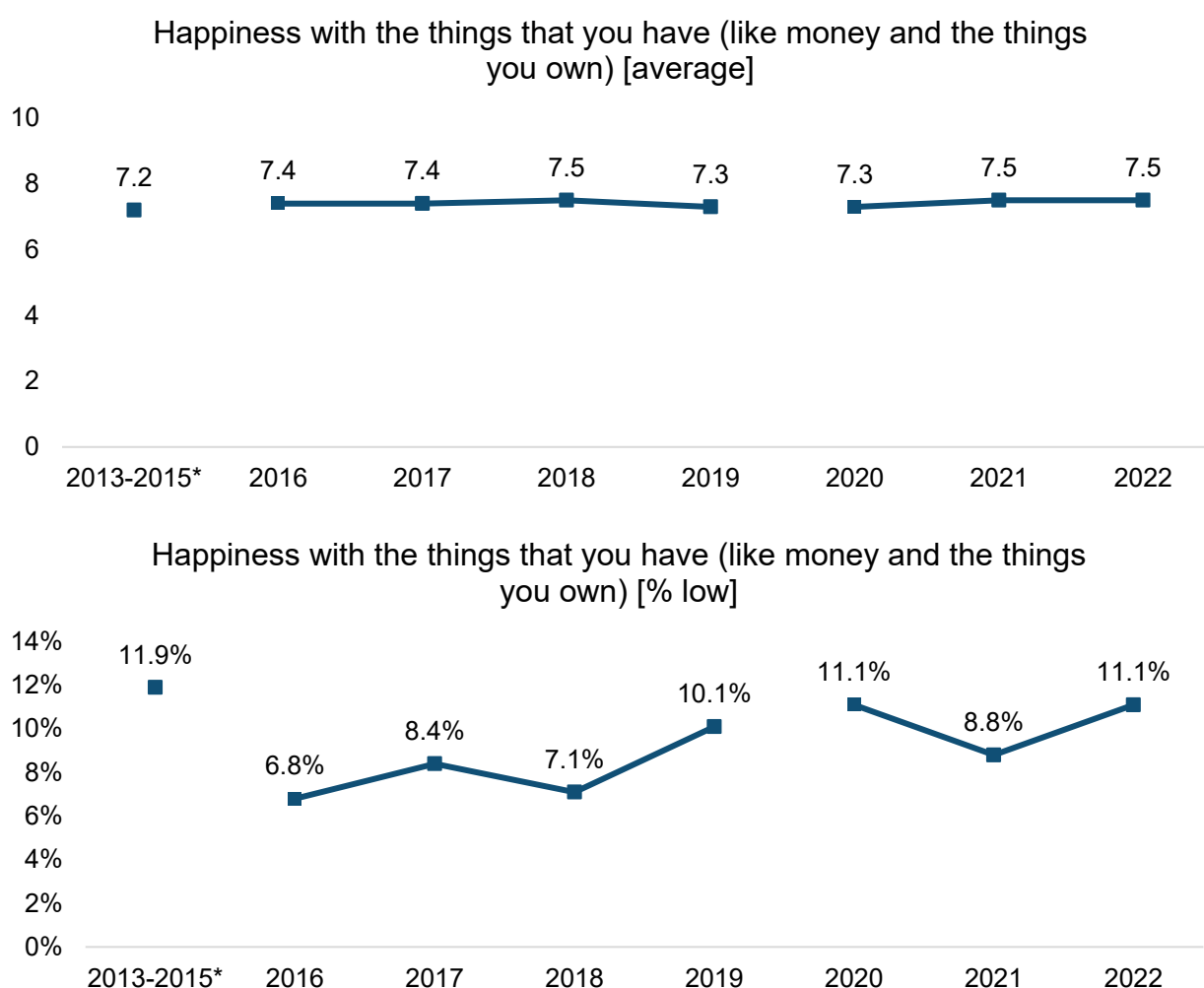
Self

Happiness with their things, appearance, and choice

The Good Childhood Index has collected regular data on children and young people's happiness with the things they own, their appearance, their feelings of choice in life (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021). Figure 56 to Figure 58 present these data as time series of average annual scores (on a scale of 0-10) and percentage of low happiness scores (less than 5 out of 10) of children and young people aged 10 to 17, from 2013-2015 to 2022. Data from the 2016 survey onwards were collected between April-June each year.

Children and young people’s happiness with the things they have (like money and the things they own) has remained stable at between 7.3 and 7.5, on average since 2016; in 2022, children and young people’s happiness with their things was 7.5 on average. The percentage of children and young people reporting low happiness with their things has fluctuated from a low of 6.8% in 2016, to a high of 11.1% in 2020 and 2022, though this percentage was marginally higher in the pooled 2013-15 waves (11.9%).

Figure 56. Average and percentage of low ratings of children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old happiness with their things

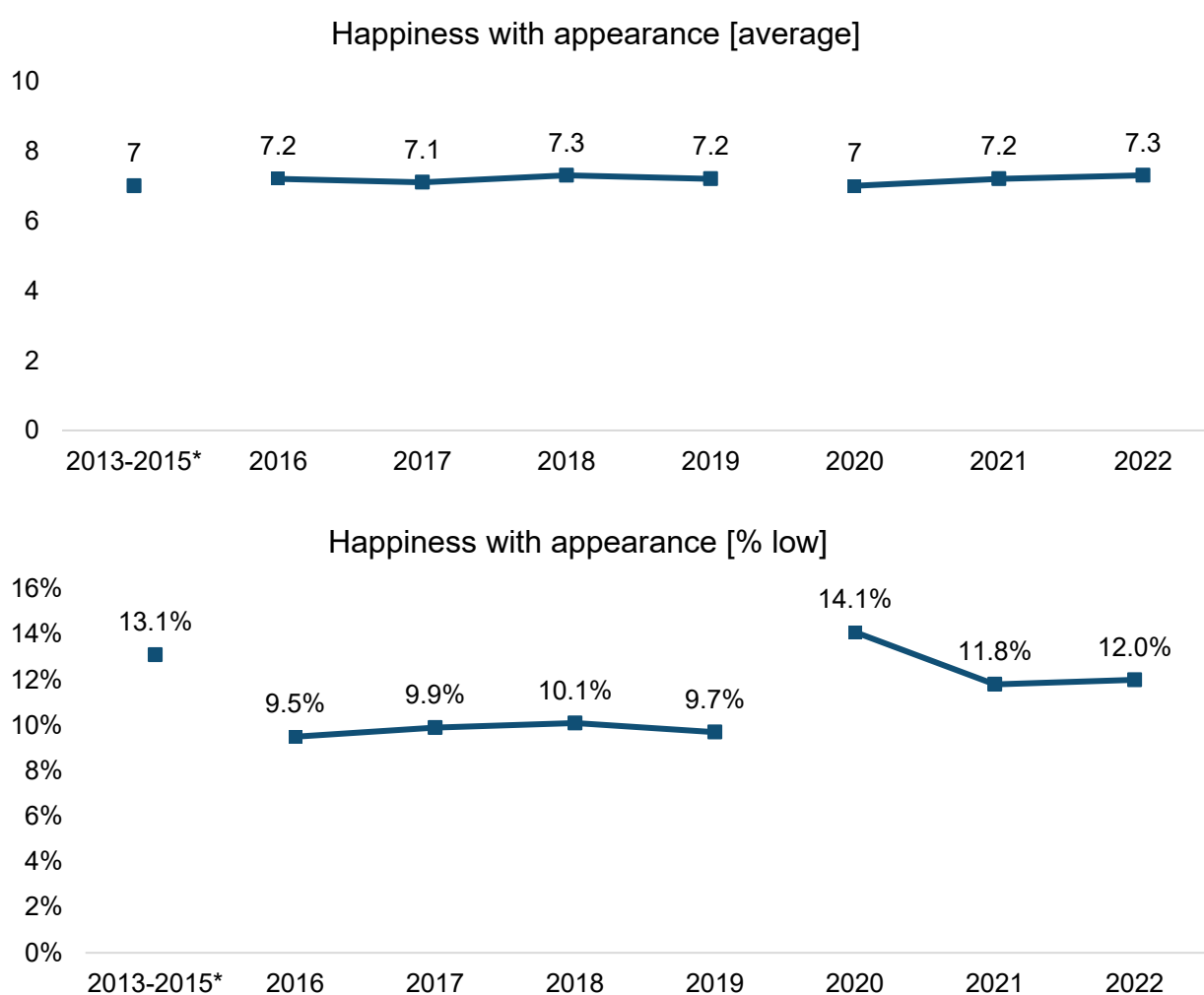


Coverage: 2020-2022 UK, 2013-2019 Great Britain, Note: Discontinuity in time series, see ‘Data sources and methods’ annex for further information. *The reported response for ‘2013 to 2015’ is a pooled average based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report. n = 2000+.

Source: The Children’s Society.

Children and young people’s happiness with their appearance has remained at a similar level, on average, since data on this measure began to be collected in the 2013-2015 wave, ranging from 7 out of 10 in the 2013-2015 and 2020 waves to 7.3 out of 10 in the 2018 and 2022 waves. However, the percentage of those with low happiness with their appearance has fluctuated in recent years with an increase from 9.7% of respondents indicating low scores in 2019 to 14.1% in 2020. The percentage of low scores on this measure have slightly reduced since to 12% in 2022, though this remains more prevalent than pre-pandemic.

Figure 57. Average and percentage of low ratings of children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old happiness with their appearance

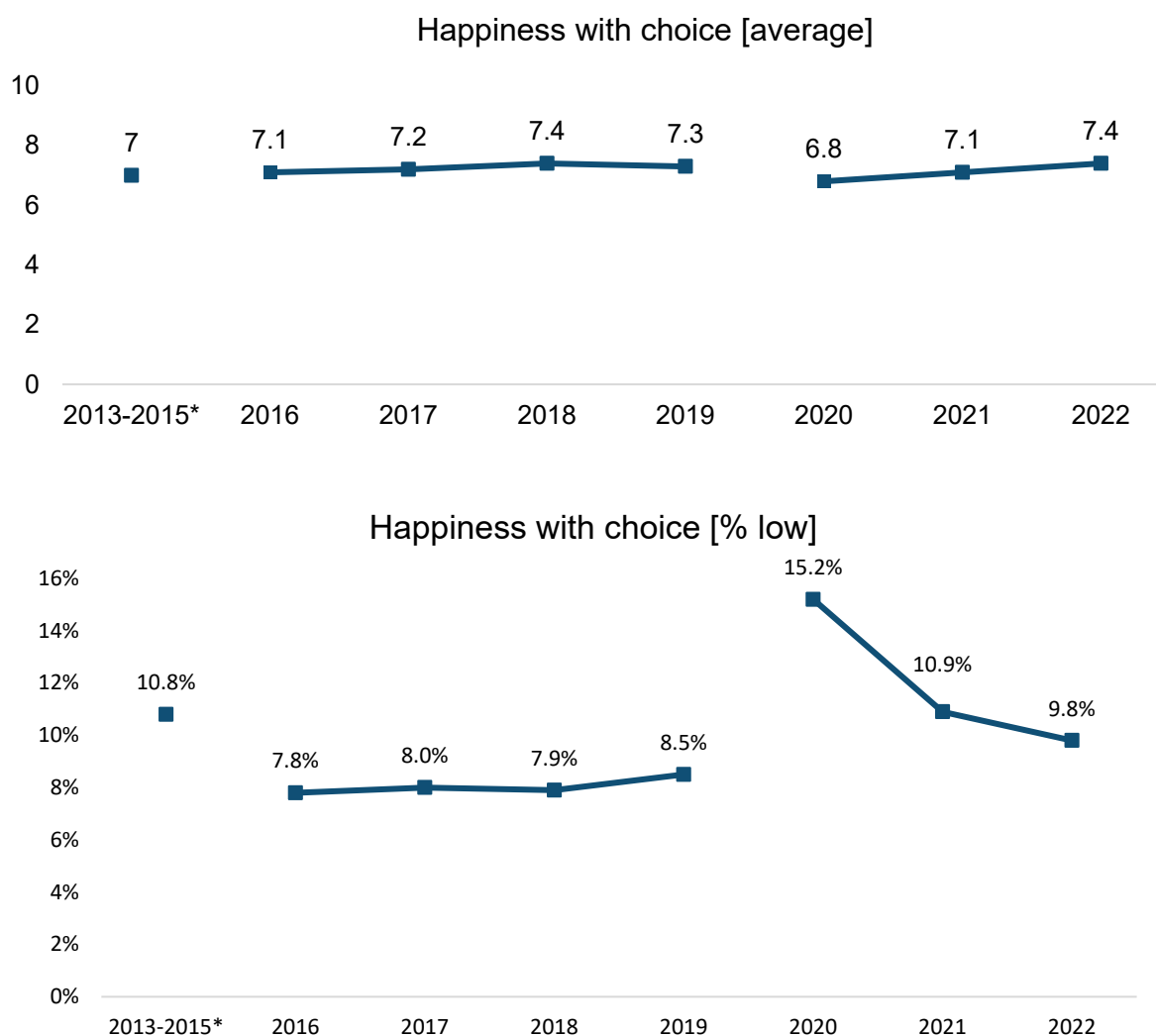


Coverage: 2020-2022 UK, 2013-2019 Great Britain, Note: Discontinuity in time series, see ‘Data sources and methods’ annex for further information. *The reported response for ‘2013 to 2015’ is a pooled average based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report. n = 2000+.

Source: The Children’s Society.

Children and young people’s happiness with their choice in life has recovered to 7.4 out of 10, on average, in 2022, following a drop between 2019 (7.3) and 2020 (6.8). After sharply rising from 8.5% in 2019 to a high of 15.2% in 2020 during the pandemic, the percentage of those who reported low happiness with their choice in life (scores below 5 out of 10) has recovered to 9.8% in 2022.

Figure 58. Average and percentage of low ratings of children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old happiness with their choice in life



Coverage: 2020-2022 UK, 2013-2019 Great Britain, Note: Discontinuity in time series, see ‘Data sources and methods’ annex for further information. *The reported response for ‘2013 to 2015’ is a pooled average based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report. n = 2000+.

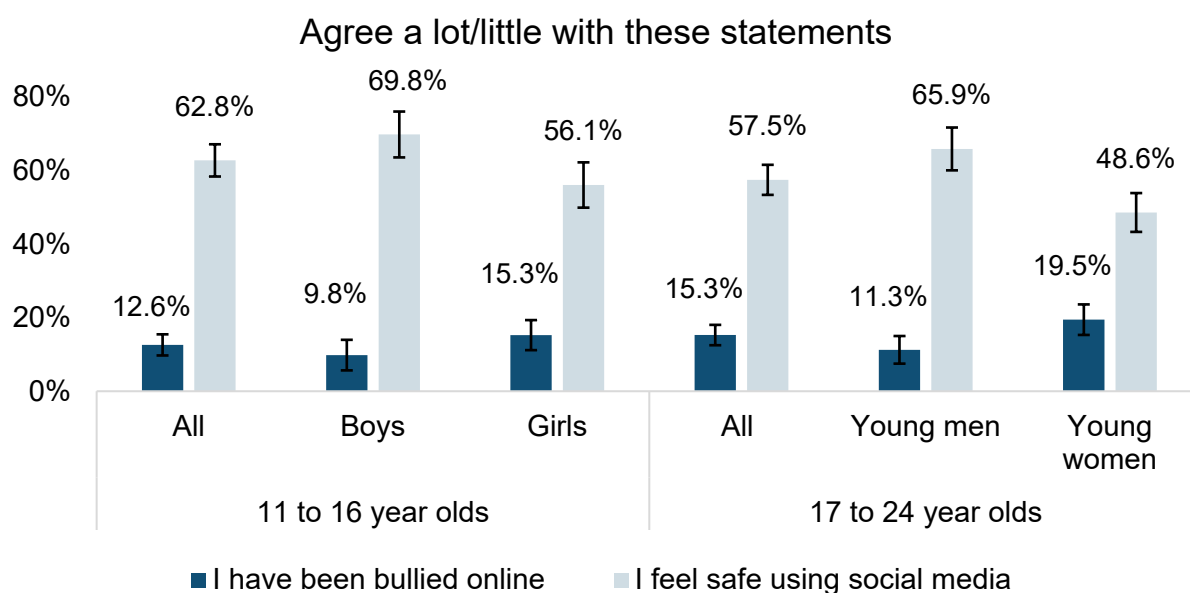
Source: The Children’s Society.

Feelings about social media

In 2022, the Mental Health of Children and Young People survey asked social media users whether they have been bullied online and whether they feel safe using social media. Overall, 12.6% of 11- to 16-year-olds and 15.3% of 17- to 24-year-olds agreed a little or a lot that they have been bullied online. Further, 62.8% of 11- to 16-year-olds and 57.5% of 17- to 24-year-olds agreed a little or a lot that they feel safe using social media. As the confidence intervals for these measures by age overlap, we cannot be sure that these differences are statistically significant.

Considering responses by sex, girls aged 11- to 16-years-old (56.1%) and young women aged 17- to 24-years-old (48.6%) were less likely than boys (69.8%) and young men (65.9%) to report that they feel safe using social media. Further, young women aged 17- to 24-years-old (19.5%) were more likely than young men aged 17- to 24-years-old (11.3%) to report that they have been bullied online, but there were no significant sex differences on this measure in 11- to 16-year-olds.

Figure 59. Feelings about social media by sex, 2022



Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. n's [7- to 16-year-olds] = 621, [7- to 22-year-olds] = 906 social media users. Source: NHS Digital

Finances

School costs

In May-June 2022, The Children's Society asked parents and carers of children and young people to indicate from a list of options what school costs they had struggled with over the last year (The Children's Society, 2022).

Results indicated that around a third of parents and carers reported that they had struggled with the cost of school trips (36%), school uniform (34%), and school shoes (31%). More than a quarter had struggled with the cost of computer equipment (29%) and PE or sport kits (27%). Around 1 in 5 had struggled with buying school meals, school books and equipment, paying for after-school clubs, and buying a school bag.

Considering the combined impact, around half (49%) of parents and carers reported that they hadn't struggled with any items in the last year. 20% reported struggling with the cost of one to three items, and 31% had struggled with four or more items.

In May 2022, the DfE asked secondary-aged pupils in years 12 and 13 whether they were worried about being able to afford a range of things for school in the 2021/22 academic year. Respondents were most likely to report being worried about being able to afford technology for studying e.g. a computer, laptop (24%), school/college trips that are not part of lessons e.g. trips abroad (24%), travel to school/college (21%), and school/college trips that are part of lessons (21%).

Financial situation at home

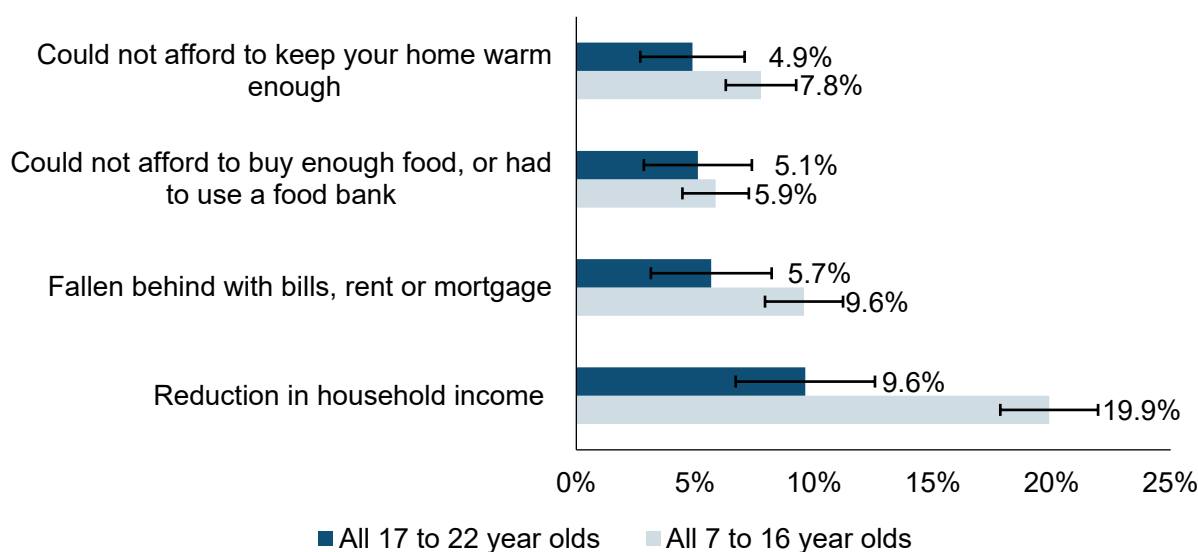
In 2022, the Mental Health of Children and Young People survey asked respondents to report whether they have experienced a change in a range of factors in their household circumstances in the previous 12 months⁴⁶. Here we report on a subsection of factors related to financial changes.

Responses show that those aged 7- to 16-years-old were more likely (19.9%) than those aged 17- to 22-years-old (9.6%) to report that their household had experienced a reduction in income in the previous 12 months. Further, 9.6% of 7- to 16-year-olds and 5.7% of 17- to 22-year-olds reported that their household had fallen behind with rent, bills, or mortgage payments in the previous 12 months. Finally, 5.9% of 7- to

⁴⁶ Those aged 7 to 16 were asked about whether their household had experienced the following in the previous 12 months: Parent or partner lost their job or business; Reduction in household income; Fallen behind with bills, rent or mortgage; Could not afford to buy enough food, or had to use a food bank; Could not afford to keep your home warm enough; You have lost your home or become homeless; Parent or somebody close to them is or was seriously ill. Those aged 7 to 22 were asked about whether their household had experienced the following in the previous 12 months: You moved in with a partner; You moved out of your parents or carer's home; You started a new job or course of study; You have lost your job or business; You or your partner have had a baby; You have lost your home or become homeless; Reduction in household income; Fallen behind with bills, rent or mortgage; Could not afford to buy enough food, or had to use a food bank; Could not afford to keep your home warm enough; Either you or somebody close to you is or was seriously ill.

16-year-olds and 5.1% of 17- to 22-year-olds reported that their household could not afford to buy enough food or had to use a foodbank, while 7.8% of 7- to 16-year-olds and 4.9% of 17- to 22-year-olds reported that their household could not afford to keep their home warm enough during the last 12 months. There were no statistically significant differences in these last three types of experiences by age.

Figure 60. Changes in household circumstances in the previous 12 months, 2022



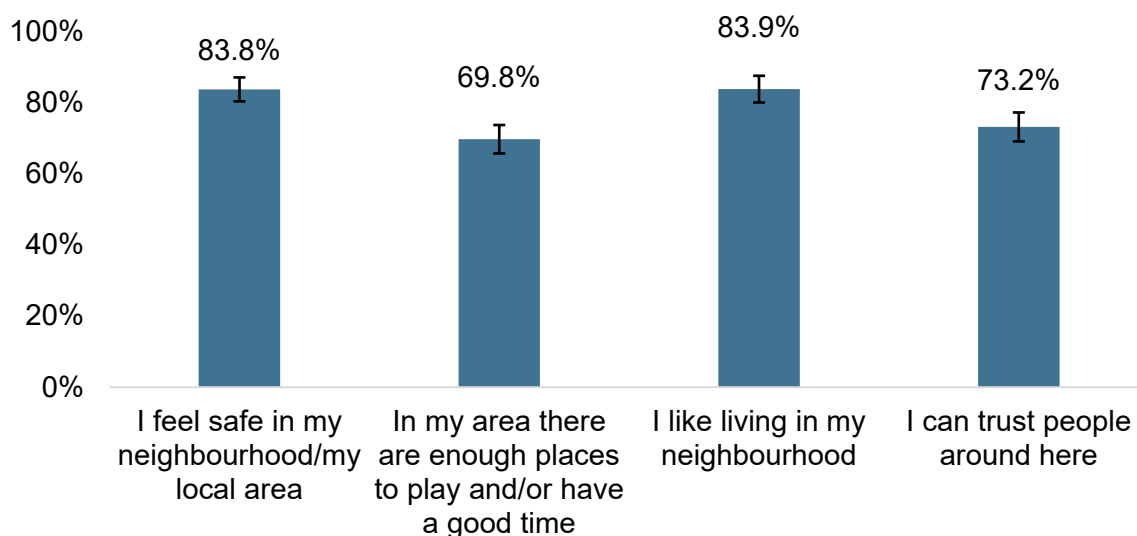
Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. n's [7- to 16-year-olds] = 1,874, [7- to 22-year-olds] = 767. Source: NHS Digital

Society

Feelings about my neighbourhood

In 2022, the Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP) survey asked 11- to 16-year-olds how they felt about their neighbourhood. Overall, the majority of respondents reported that they felt safe in their neighbourhood (83.8%), like living in their neighbourhood (83.9%), can trust people in their neighbourhood (73.2%), and that there are enough places to play in their neighbourhood (69.8%).

Figure 61. Children and young people aged 11- to 16-years-old feelings about their neighbourhood, 2022



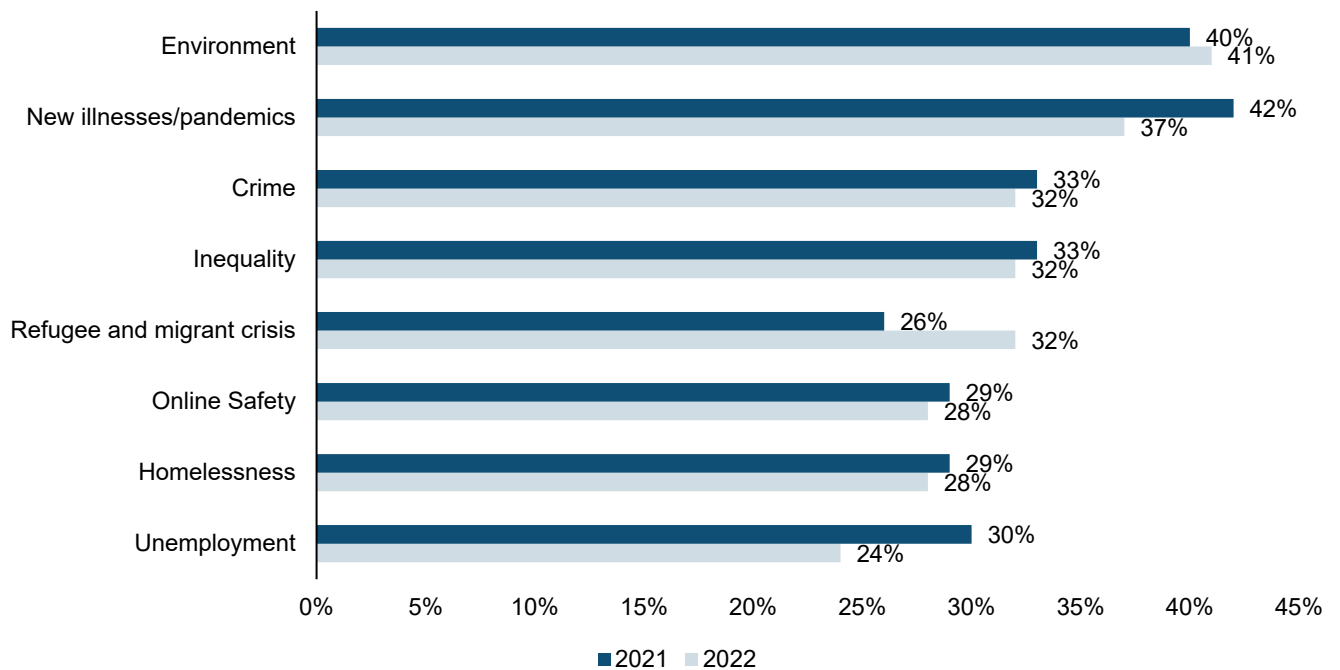
Coverage: England. Note: error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. n = 712 11- to 16-year-olds. Source: NHS Digital

Worry about societal issues

In their 2021 and 2022 surveys of children’s wellbeing, The Children’s Society asked children and young people a series of questions on their worries about a range of societal issues (The Children’s Society, 2021).

Responses in 2022 indicated that children and young people were most likely to report feeling quite/very worried about the environment (41%), new illnesses/pandemics (37%), crime (32%), inequality (32%), and the refugee and migrant crisis (32%). Comparisons with when these questions were asked in 2021, children and young people appeared less likely to report being worried about new illnesses/pandemics (42% in 2021) and unemployment (29% in 2021 compared to 24% in 2022) in 2022. By contrast, in 2022 children and young people appeared more likely to have reported being worried about the refugee and migrant crisis (26% in 2021) compared to 2021 when this was the item that the least children and young were worried about. These differences were not subjected to significance testing.

Figure 62. Percentage of children aged 10- to 17-years-old in 2021 and 2022 indicating feeling quite/very worried about wider societal issues



Coverage: UK, n = 2000+. Source: The Children’s Society

The future

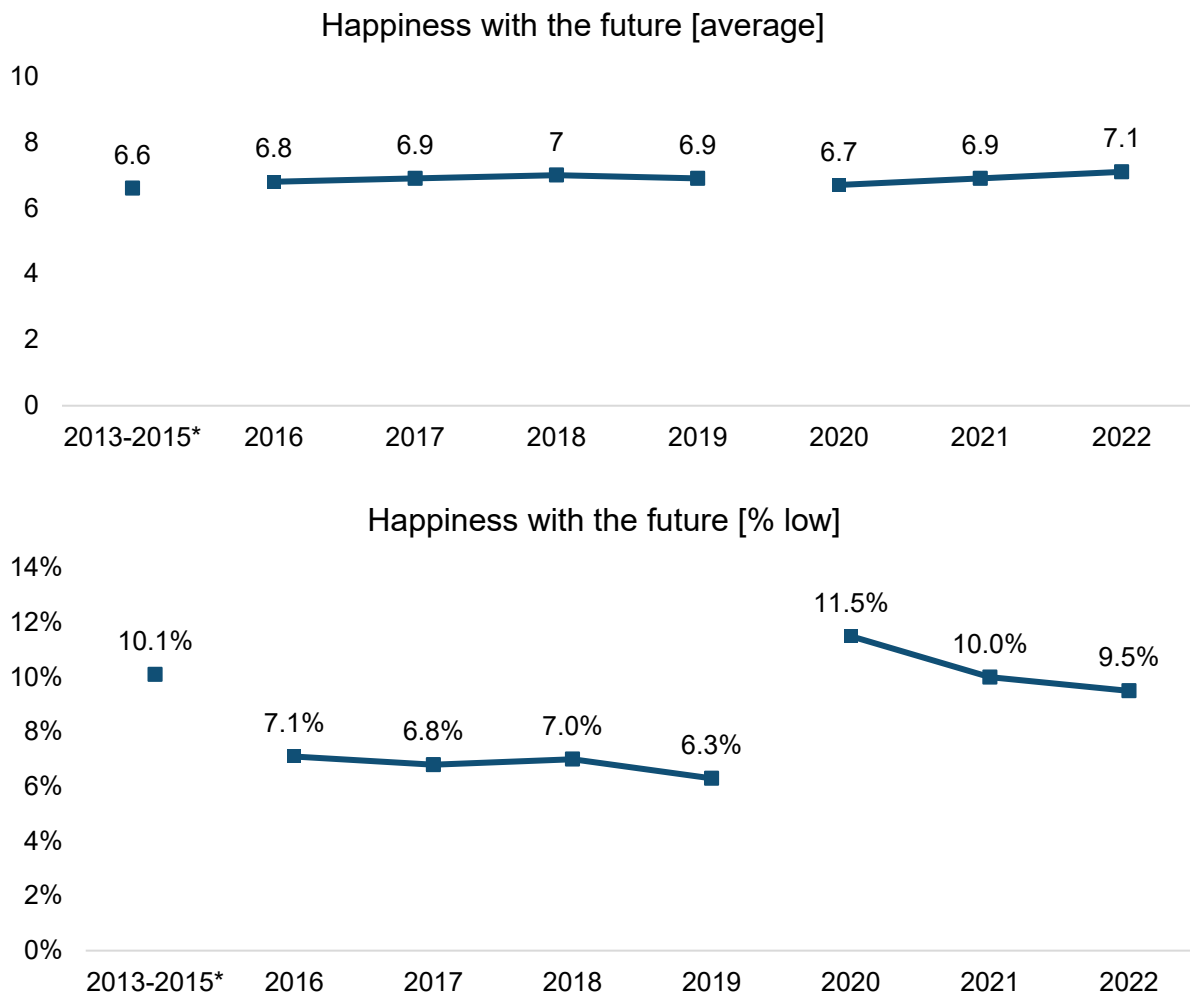
Happiness with the future

In addition to collecting regular data on children and young people’s happiness with the things they own, their appearance, and their feelings of choice in life, The Children’s Society have also regularly gathered data on children and young people’s happiness with what may happen to them in their later lives (The Children’s Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). Figure 63 presents these data as time series of average annual scores (on a scale of 0-10) and percentage of low happiness scores (less than 5 out of 10) of children and young people aged 10 to 17, from 2013-2015 to 2022. Data from the 2016 survey onwards were collected between April-June each year except in 2022, when data was collected in May-June.

Children and young people’s happiness with what may happen to them later in their lives appears to have increased slightly, on average, from 6.7 out of 10 in 2020 to 7.1 out of 10 in 2022 which is similar to, if not slightly higher than, pre-pandemic levels. The percentage of those reporting low happiness with what may happen to

them later in their lives (scores less than 5 out of 10) appears to have also slightly declined to 9.5%, following an increase between 2019 (6.3%) and 2020 (11.5%).

Figure 63. Average and percentage of low ratings of children and young people aged 10- to 17-years-old happiness with what may happen to them later in their lives



Coverage: 2020-2022 UK, 2013-2019 Great Britain, Note: Discontinuity in time series, see 'Data sources and methods' annex for further information. *The reported response for '2013 to 2015' is a pooled average based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report. n = 2000+.

Source: The Children's Society.

Discussion of trends in self, society, and the future

This chapter focussed on children and young people's feelings about themselves, their financial situation, their local neighbourhood and wider society, and their future.

Overall, responses suggested that children and young people's happiness with the things they have and their appearance remain similar to previous years, but their happiness with their choice in life and what may happen to them later in their lives appears to be recovering in 2022 following a dip in 2020. Further, most reported that they felt safe in their neighbourhood, liked living in their neighbourhood, could trust people in their neighbourhood, and that there are enough places to play in their neighbourhood. Together these provide tentative evidence for a potential recovery in children and young people's conceptualisations of how their lives are going and where they may go in future compared to the height of the pandemic.

However, there were also signs of problems with household finances. Around a third of parents and carers reported that they had struggled with the cost of school trips, school uniform, and school shoes over the previous 12 months, and a quarter of secondary-age pupils in years 12 and 13 reported being worried about being able to afford technology for studying. Further, around one in five 7- to 16-year-olds and one in ten 17- to 22-year-olds reported that their household had experienced a reduction in income in the previous 12 months, suggesting a potential worsening of household finances for some families in the previous year.

There was also evidence that a sizeable minority of children and young people have had negative experiences with social media, with around one in eight 11- to 16-year-olds and one in seven 17- to 24-year-olds reporting that they have been bullied online. Girls and young women were less likely than boys and young men to report that they feel safe using social media, and young women were more likely than young men to report that they have been bullied online. These results suggest that, for some, social media can be a problematic and distressing experience. There are other potentially negative experiences while using social media not covered here, including: exposure to fake news, scams, extremist material, as well as potential negative effects of heavy use of social media on mental health and wellbeing. Research could usefully consider how the whole social media experience, including frequency and nature of use to understand the potential impacts on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

General discussion

Wellbeing and mental health

The trends reported in this report indicate that children and young people's subjective wellbeing had dipped in 2020 but appears to have since recovered to pre-pandemic levels by 2022 (The Children's Society, 2022). However, while wellbeing on most measures remained consistent during the 2021/22 academic year, anxiousness among both primary and secondary-age pupils appears to have increased and is higher than in 2020/21 (DfE, 2022e).

These data also suggest that the percentage of those reporting low happiness with their health appears to have increased in recent years (The Children's Society, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022), with rates of probable mental disorders and eating problems remaining at elevated levels compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic (NHS Digital, 2022a).

One of the most significant trends reported in this report was an apparent disparity in mental and physical health by age. While rates of probable mental disorder among younger age groups had remained consistent in recent years, among 17- 19-year-olds, rates have risen from one in six in 2020 and 2021 to one in four in 2022. Rates of eating problems, self-harm, and problems with sleep were also higher in older age groups.

A related issue concerns the frequency of problems with sleep experienced by children and young people. In 2022, those who regularly struggled with sleep were more likely to have a mental disorder. Sleep problems were more prevalent in older children and young people, particularly young women, groups particularly at risk for poorer mental health and wellbeing in general (DfE, 2022j; NHS Digital, 2022a). Previous published research suggests a link between poor sleep and mental health problems in adolescents (Zhang et al., 2017) as well as in adults (Reid et al., 2006), suggesting that sleep could act as an indicator of poor mental health.

While these results point to a heightened risk for mental health problems in older ages, those aged 17- to 23-years old were less likely than those aged 7- 16-years-old to have sought help for a mental health concern in 2022. It is unclear from these data what might account for lower rates of help seeking in this higher risk age group. However, recent qualitative work found that potential reasons for lower rates of help seeking among older young people may include: being unable to recognise symptoms of mental health disorders in themselves; perceived social stigma of

mental health problems; and, losing access to school support once leaving school (Radez et al., 2022).

Together, these findings suggest a mixed picture regarding children and young people's personal wellbeing and mental health in 2021/22.

Wider experiences

In addition to measures of children and young people's wellbeing and mental health, we also reported on a broad range of measures relevant to these outcomes, including: those around social relationships, physical health, rates of activity, educational experiences, and worries about the future.

The data presented here paints a mixed picture of the state of children and young people's mental health and wellbeing in England in 2021/22. Among a range of aspects of school related to the school environment, most secondary-age children and young people were motivated to learn, were managing to concentrate in class, felt safe at school, enjoyed being at school, and felt that they belonged at school. Further, most children and young people agreed or strongly agreed that adults at their school were interested in their wellbeing, that there was someone at their school they could talk to about how they were feeling, and that young people in their school got on well together. Considering feelings about their local area, most reported that they felt safe, can trust people, and like living in their neighbourhood. Rates of participation in extracurricular and physical activity have also recovered since 2020/21, and most children and young people reported spending time outside most days of the week. Encouragingly, children and young people's happiness with their choice in life and what may happen to them later in their lives has also increased between 2020 and 2022, suggesting a sense of optimism among some children and young people.

However, there are also areas for concern. The percentage of those with low happiness with family and friends remains at elevated levels compared to before the pandemic and increases in loneliness were evident through the 2021/22 academic year. There are further concerns about household finances, with around a third of parents and carers reporting that they had struggled with a range of school costs, and a quarter of secondary-age pupils being worried about being able to afford technology for studying. Despite happiness with school remaining at a similar level to previous years, on average, rates of those reporting low happiness with school appears to have increased in recent years. In the context of potential increases in anxiousness among both primary and secondary-age children and young people,

elevated rates of probable mental disorders compared to before the pandemic and worsening mental health among 17- to 19-year-olds, significant challenges remain.

This report highlights how many of the daily experiences, thoughts, and feelings expressed by children and young people reflect their current mental health and wellbeing, offering some avenues for positive action. Responses to a range of surveys reported here show that those who feel safe in school, enjoy coming to school, and feel that they belong in school are less likely to have a mental disorder (NHS Digital, 2022a), and report greater subjective wellbeing (DfE, forthcoming). Further, while those who reported often feeling lonely were more likely to have a probable mental disorder, regular physical activity and nature experiences were associated with greater wellbeing. While these correlational data are unable to establish the causal relationships between these feelings and experiences, they highlight the importance of a supportive school environment, strong social relationships, an active lifestyle, and nature experiences for the mental health and wellbeing of many children and young people.

Trends by subgroup

Age

Analysis of the data by age suggested that rates of anxiousness had increased for both primary- and secondary-age children and young people. However, loneliness was more common among those aged 17- to 22-years-old compared to those age 11- to 16-years-old. Further, rates of probable mental disorder have increased among those aged 17- to 19-years-old between 2021 and 2022, while rates remained similar in younger ages between these two years.

Many of the data sources in this report did not allow for a fine-grained analysis by age. Further consideration should be given to potential differences in mental health and wellbeing by age, particularly where there appear to be poorer outcomes among older groups.

Gender

Secondary-age boys reported higher wellbeing than girls throughout the 2021/22 academic year, on all measures; this is consistent with trends in previous years. Among 11- to 16-years-olds, rates of probable disorder were also greater for younger boys than younger girls, but this trend reversed in older age groups (aged 17- to 19-years-old and 20- to 23-years-old) with young women more likely to have a probable disorder than young men.

Girls and young women were also more likely than boys and young men to screen positive for a possible eating problem and to have tried to harm themselves in their lifetime.

Considering gender differences in the school experience and relationships, boys continue to score higher on measures related to their experience of school, including happiness with school, motivation, concentration, sense of safety at school, enjoyment of coming to school, and school belonging. Boys also reported greater happiness with peer and teacher relationships, were more likely to report that young people in their school got on well together and were less likely to report often feeling lonely throughout 2021/22. Female respondents were more likely than males to report having not attended any extra-curricular activities this term, in July 2022.

Girls and young women were less likely than boys and young men to report that they feel safe using social media, and young women were more likely than young men to report that they have been bullied online. Finally, males appeared more likely than females to have been physically active for 60 or more minutes per day in the previous week, in 2021/22. This gender difference in participation has been shown in previous years, except for 2020/21, when no gender differences were observed.

Together, these data suggest poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes for females than males, particularly in older groups.

Economic disadvantage

Considering responses by economic disadvantage suggests that those from more disadvantaged backgrounds had poorer outcomes on some measures than those with less disadvantage.

Secondary-age pupils eligible for FSM reported lower wellbeing than those not eligible for FSM early in the 2021/22 academic year, but this difference was no longer evident at the end of the year.

Pupils who were eligible for FSM were less likely to report being motivated to learn, being able to concentrate in class, feeling safe at school, and a sense of belonging at school, than those ineligible for FSM.

Further, both primary- and secondary-age children eligible for FSM were more likely to report (or be reported as) having been a victim of bullying in the previous 12 months than those not eligible for FSM.

Finally, those with higher family affluence were more likely than those with low family affluence to have been physically active for 60 or more minutes per day in the

previous week, in 2021/22. This difference in participation has been shown in previous years.

SEN

Considering responses by SEN status suggests that those with SEN had poorer outcomes on some measures than those without SEN.

Secondary-age pupils with SEN were more likely to report low wellbeing in some time points in 2021/22, and in some measures, than those without SEN. Pupils with SEN were more likely to report low happiness with school compared to those without; however average responses were similar in these two populations. Pupils without SEN were also more likely to report being motivated to learn and managed to concentrate in class than those with SEN, though this difference was only statistically significant for concentration.

Both primary- (parent-report) and secondary-age children with SEN/SEND⁴⁷ were more likely to report having been a victim of bullying in the previous 12 months than those without SEN/SEND.

Ethnicity

Considering responses by ethnicity status suggests that white pupils reported poorer outcomes on some measures than those with a minority ethnic background. However, it is unclear how variation on these outcomes varies between those with different minority ethnic backgrounds.

Secondary-age white pupils reported greater anxiousness than those from an ethnic minority background throughout the 2021/22 academic year. This contrasts with the 2020/21 academic year, when no differences in anxiousness were detected by ethnicity. No significant differences in other measures of wellbeing were evident by ethnicity across 2021/22.

Among reception age pupils, rates of obesity were similar across ethnic groups. However, among children in year 6, rates of obesity were highest among black pupils (33%) while the lowest rates of obesity in this age group were among Chinese pupils (18%).

⁴⁷ Demographic information among self-reporting secondary-aged pupils was pulled from the NPD which provides SEN status. Parents (reporting for primary-aged pupils) were asked if their child had SEND.

Pupils from a minority ethnic background were more likely to report being motivated to learn, managing to concentrate in class, and enjoying coming to school than white pupils, and less likely to report having been bullied in the previous 12 months.

However, white children and young people were more likely than Black or Black British and Asian or Asian British to have spent time outside in school every or most days in the previous week.

Conclusion

The data presented here indicates a mixed picture as to the current state of children and young people's wellbeing during the 2021/22 academic year. Some measures suggest signs of recovery and positive experiences over this time, such as: some measures of subjective wellbeing; time use and participation in extra-curricular activities; obesity; physical activity levels; and average happiness in a number of different areas of life. However, others indicate sustained poorer outcomes compared to before the pandemic, or worsening over the past academic year, including: mental health problems, especially for older young people; feelings of anxiousness; the percentage reporting low happiness for a number of the different areas of life.

We have not been able to consistently scrutinise the outcomes and experiences for all subgroups of interest, due to a lack of data. However, across the measures considered, there are indications that outcomes and experiences may be poorer for older children and young people, and girls and young women. Patterns in outcomes and experiences are less consistent for other groups, however it is challenging to draw conclusions where there is less data.

While the data cannot tell us about the causes, there are indications that a range of emerging or continuing national and global issues may be causing worries and challenges for children and young people. These include worries about cost of living, the environment and wider social issues and inequalities, and negative experiences using social media.

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Annex A – Data sources and methods

The Children’s Society: Annual survey of children and young people’s wellbeing

The Children’s Society has conducted a regular survey of children and young people’s wellbeing since 2010. Among a range of other questions, this survey has tracked two specific sets of questions which are drawn on in this report, the ONS Children and Young People’s Wellbeing questions (life satisfaction, happiness yesterday, whether life is worthwhile) and their own Good Childhood Index (questions about happiness with a range of different aspects of life).

The 2022 Children’s Society Household survey reached 2,012 children and young people, aged 10- to 17-years-old⁴⁸. The survey took place in May-June 2022.

Although findings from the survey are weighted, sampling for the survey was not random and therefore there are no confidence intervals or other significance testing to define the accuracy of the findings. There is a greater level of uncertainty in how well these findings represent the whole population than there would be for a randomly sampled survey.

Although the survey is regular and longstanding, there have been some methodological changes and differences in the presentation of the data over the years. Two of these changes have been noted by a discontinuity in the charts used to show the data in this report about children and young people’s personal wellbeing and happiness in different areas of their life.

1) While previous surveys (up to and including 2019) have been of children and young people in Great Britain only, the 2020-2022 year surveys covered children and young people across the whole of the UK. As part of these changes, a more comprehensive weighting strategy has been implemented to match the sample with the wider UK population on key demographic characteristics.

2) The reported responses for ‘2013 to 2015’ are based on four half-annual surveys of children and young people, as reported in the 2015 Good Childhood Report. The results have been pooled, but the sample is unweighted and may be less comparable than the other years shown.

⁴⁸ Previous year’s waves of The Children’s Society Household Survey are: 2016, n = 2000; 2017, n = 3101; 2018, n = 2007; 2019, n = 2394; 2020, n = 2002; 2021, n = 2012; 2022, n = 2012

Comparisons with previous years are cautious to take account of these methodological changes, but nevertheless offer a helpful context to the results of this year's survey.

Department for Education: Parent, pupil and learner panel

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned the Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel (PPLP) to collect robust and quick turnaround research to support policy development during recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The PPLP aims to help DfE make evidence-based policy decisions and see how views and experiences of parents, pupils and learners change over time.

The panel comprised of primary-age parents, secondary-age parents, and secondary school pupils from year 7 to 13. The sample was drawn to ensure those invited to the panel would be representative of the population of school pupils in England.

Results from all waves have been weighted to be representative of the pupil population. Pupils (and parents of pupils) in state-funded secondary schools in England were included in the sample. Parents of pupils in state-funded primary schools in England were.

The overall response from contacting 27,050 parents and 23,570 pupils was 16%.

The November 2021 recruitment wave (November 2021-January 2022) invited pupils in years 6-10 and parents of pupils in reception to year 10 in the 2020/21 academic year to take part in a 15-minute online survey and join the PPLP. Panel members were sampled from the National Pupil Database (NPD). A subsequent recruitment wave was conducted in February 2022 to recruit pupils and learners in years 12 and 13 to the PPLP. Panel members were sampled from the NPD and the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). Subsequent waves involved emailing panel members and inviting them to take part in regular short 10-minute surveys.

For more information on the methodology of the PPLP, please see our COVID-19 [Parent and pupil panel technical report](#). For the results of each wave of PPLP fieldwork, see the [Parent, pupil and learner panel omnibus surveys page](#). For more information on the methodology of the PPP, please see the [Parent and pupil panel technical report](#). For results of each wave of the PPP fieldwork, please see the [parent and pupil panel: omnibus survey page](#). For any questions, please contact the Omnibus Surveys Team at omnibus.surveys@education.gov.uk

Department for Education: National Behaviour Survey

The NBS was designed to provide the Department for Education (DfE) with a tool to monitor pupil behaviour in mainstream primary and secondary schools, allowing the department and wider stakeholders to track perceptions of behaviour over time in a consistent manner. The publication of the first report of the NBS for academic year 2021/22 is forthcoming at the point of publication of this State of the Nation report.

Termly survey data is collected from multiple respondent groups (school leaders, teachers, pupils and parents) to allow for triangulation of views and is weighted to be nationally representative of teachers, schools and pupils (for England).

The National Behaviour Survey (NBS) was delivered via the Department for Education's omnibus surveys: the School and College Panel (SCP) and the Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel (PPLP), in March 2022 and June 2022. This State of the Nation report presents results from the previously published [PPLP report for March 22](#) which are also used in the forthcoming NBS report. This report also draws on data from a sample of 1,908 secondary aged pupils gathered through a specific NBS wave of the PPLP in early June 2022.

For more information on the methodology of the PLPP, including the NBS wave, please see the published technical report ⁴⁹.

NHS Digital: Mental health of children and young people (MHCYP) – Wave 3 follow up to the 2017 survey

The Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP) survey provides England's Official Statistics on trends in child mental health. The most recent face to face survey took place in 2017 and collected data from a large, nationally representative sample of children and young people (aged 2 to 19 years).

The MHCYP 2022 follow-up survey sample was based on children and young people who took part in the 2017 survey (now aged 7- to 24-years-old) that agreed to be recontacted about future research and continued to agree to be recontacted during the 2020 and 2021 survey if they participated in one or both of these.

The report presents results based on the responses of 2,866 children and young people aged 7- to 24-years-old from the 9,117 who participated in the 2017 survey

⁴⁹ See: [Parent Pupil and Learner Panel Technical report](#)

and the 3,667 who participated in the 2021 wave 2 follow-up survey of mental health of children and young people in England.

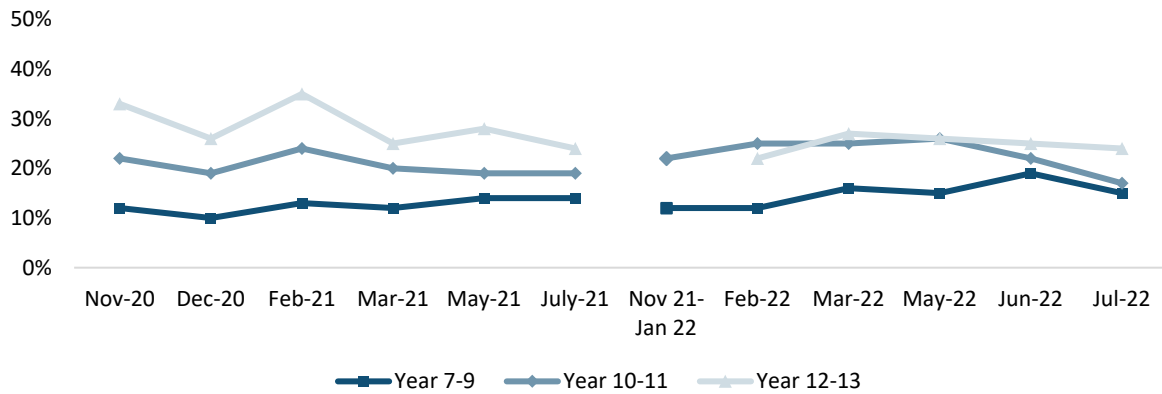
The survey took place over seven and a half weeks (4 April to 25 May 2022).

Further information on methods can be found in the reporting for the [2017 main survey](#) and [2020](#), [2021](#) and [2022](#) waves.

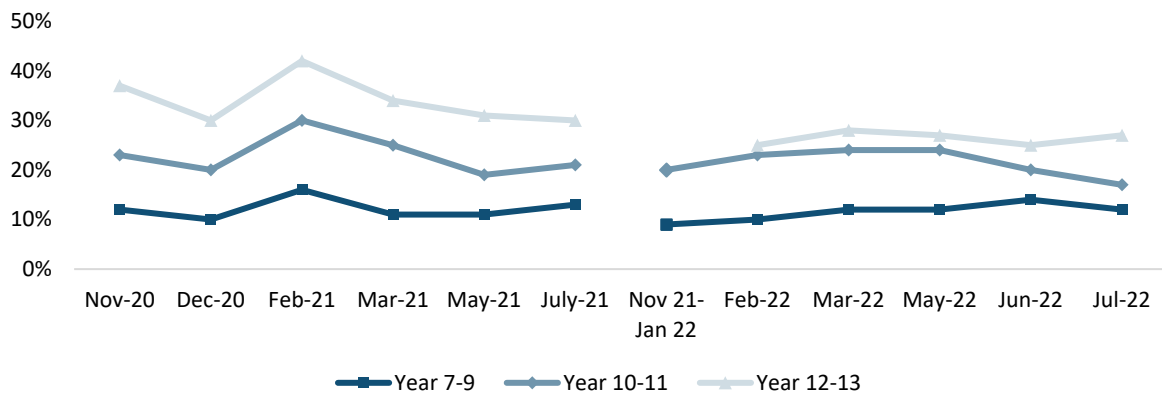
Annex B – Trends in low wellbeing

Age

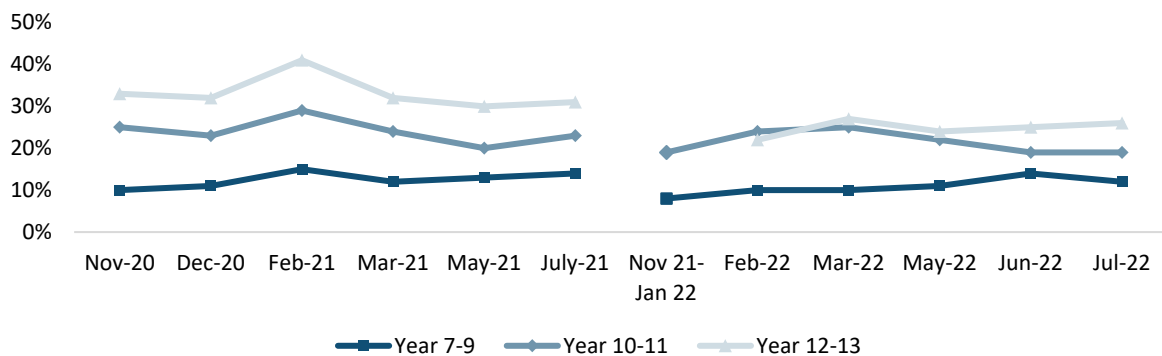
How happy did you feel yesterday?



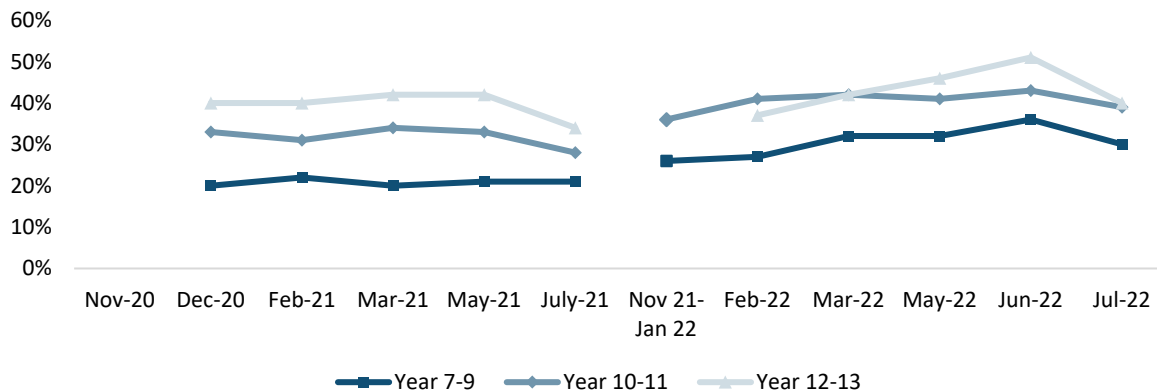
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?



Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

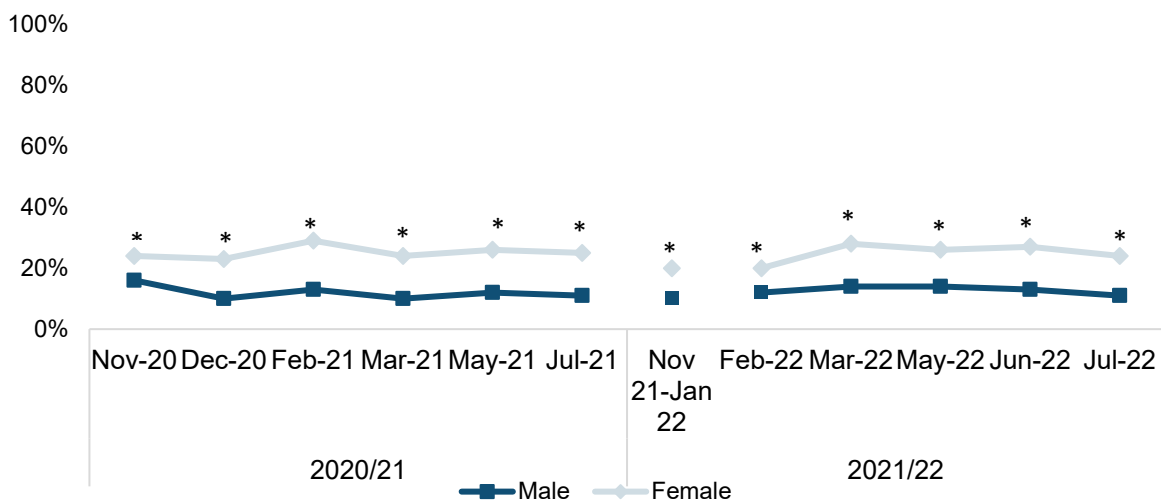


Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

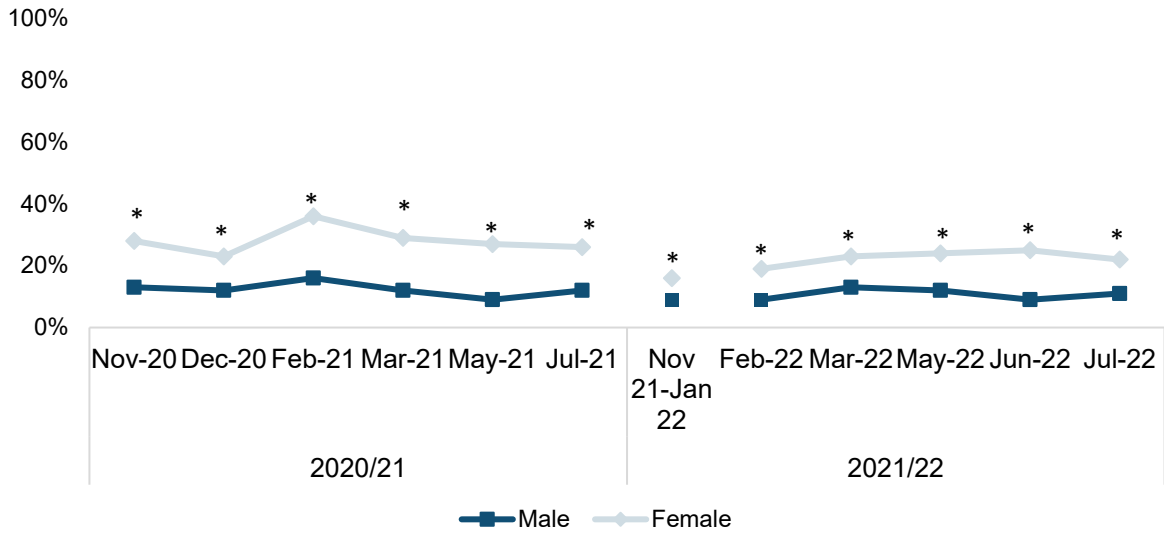


Gender

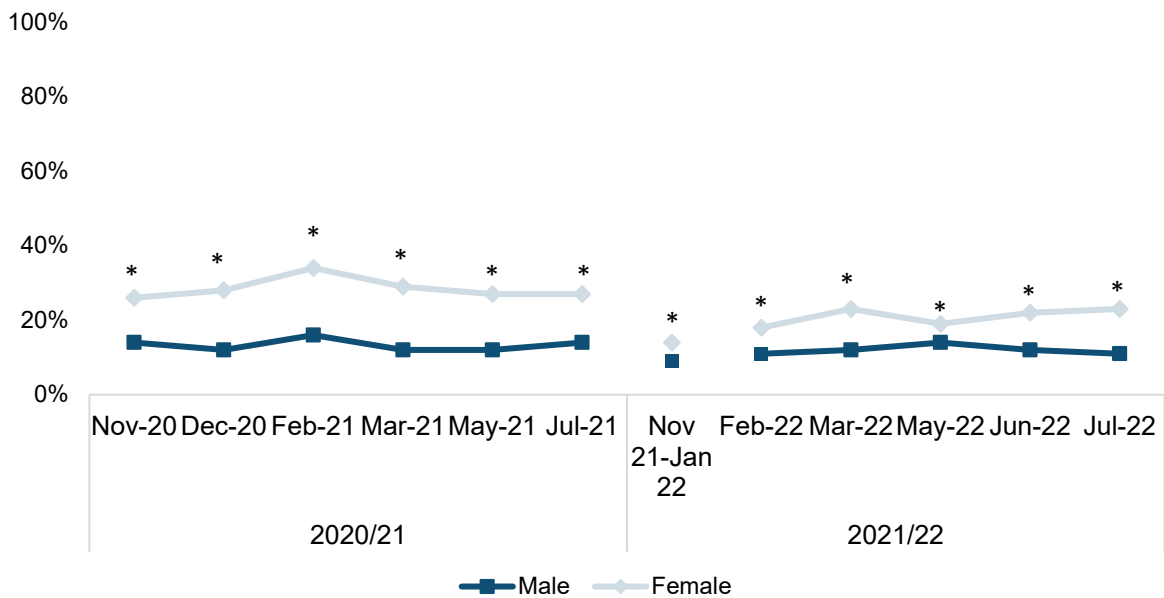
How happy did you feel yesterday?



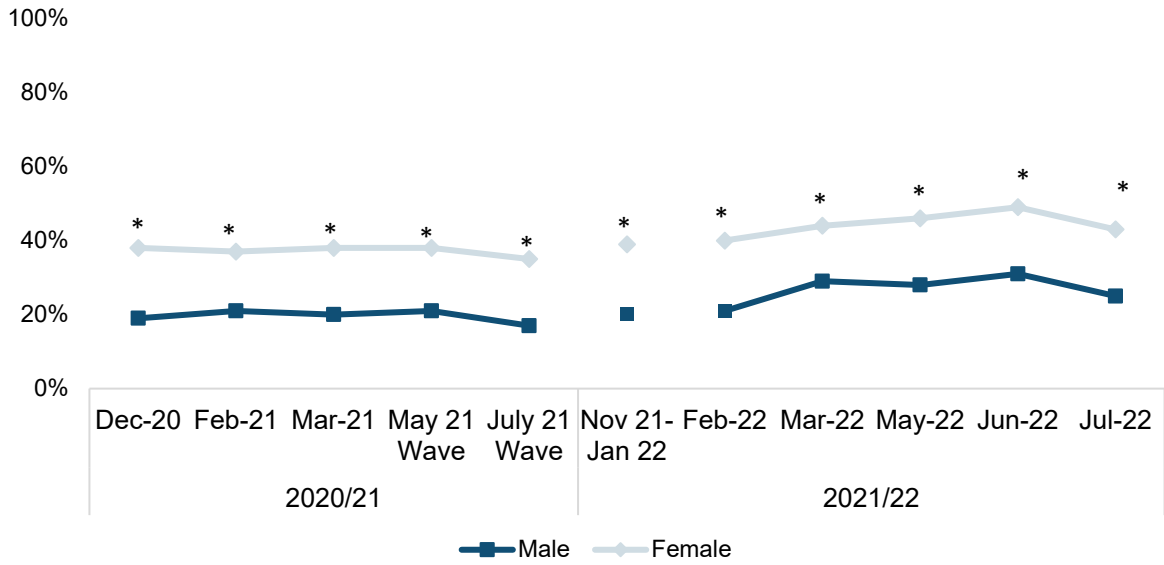
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?



Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

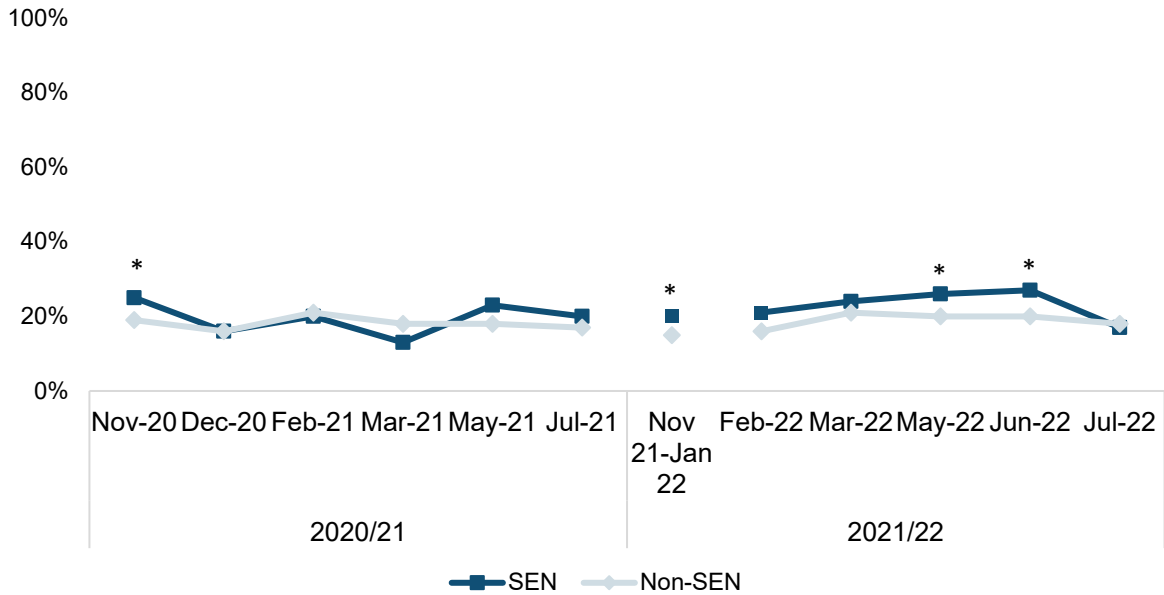


Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

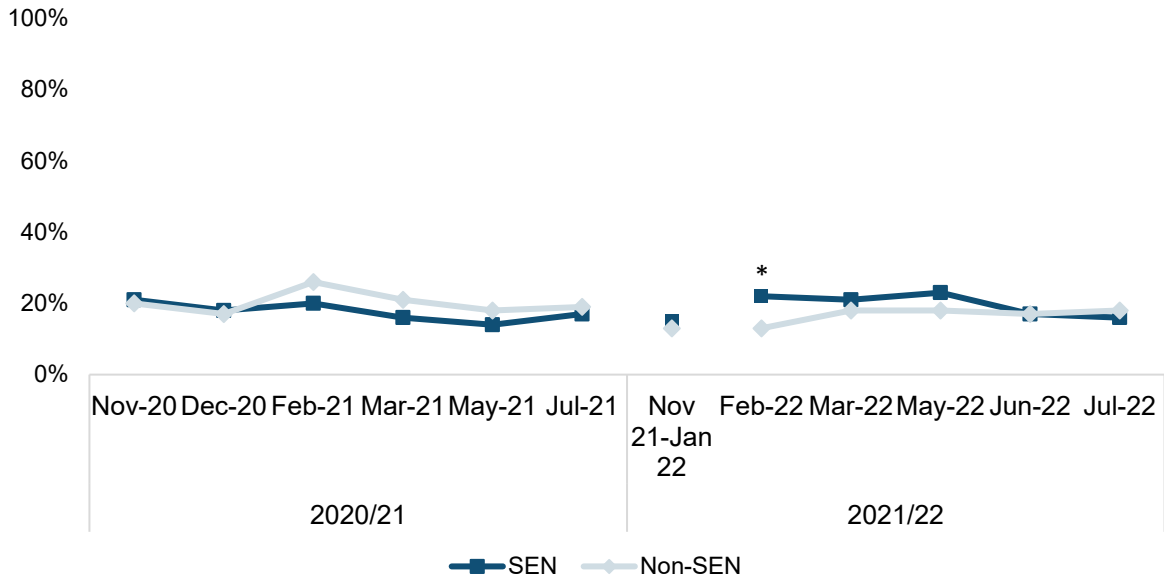


SEN status

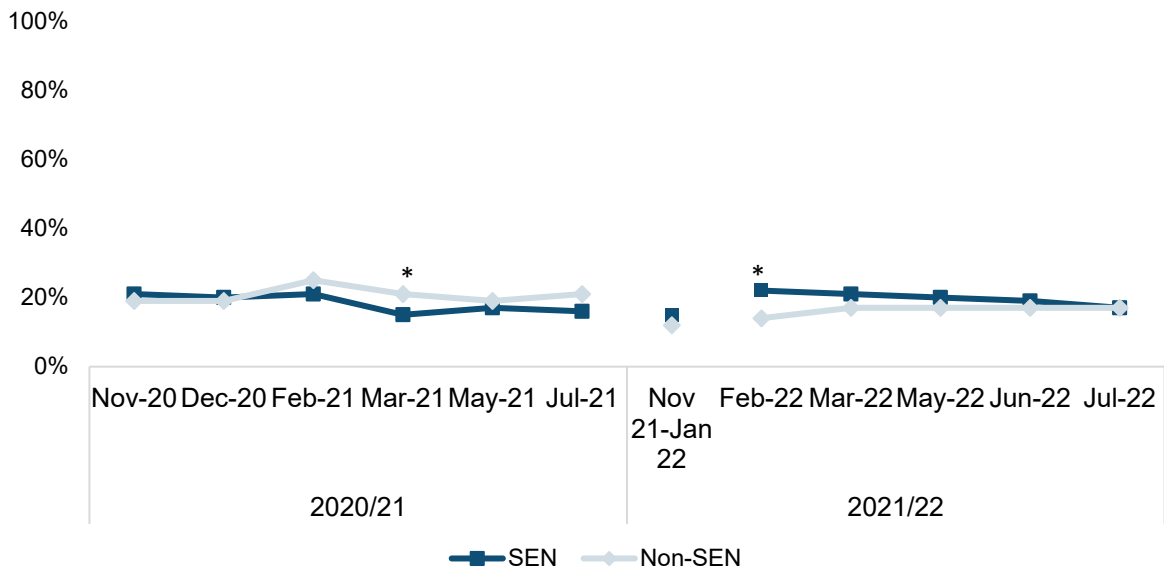
How happy did you feel yesterday?



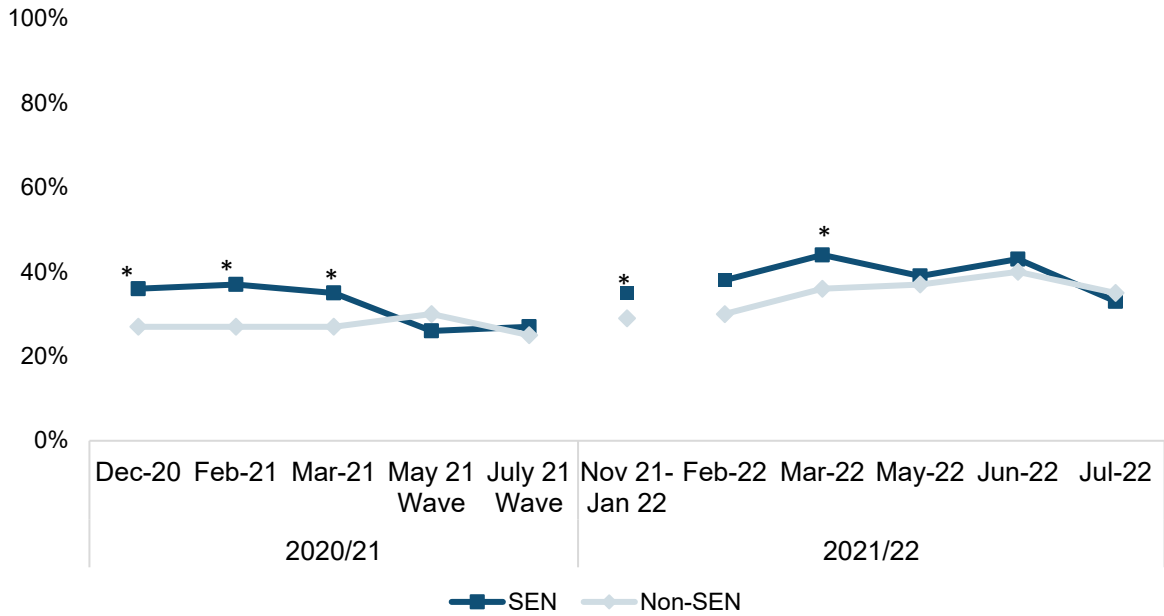
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?



Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

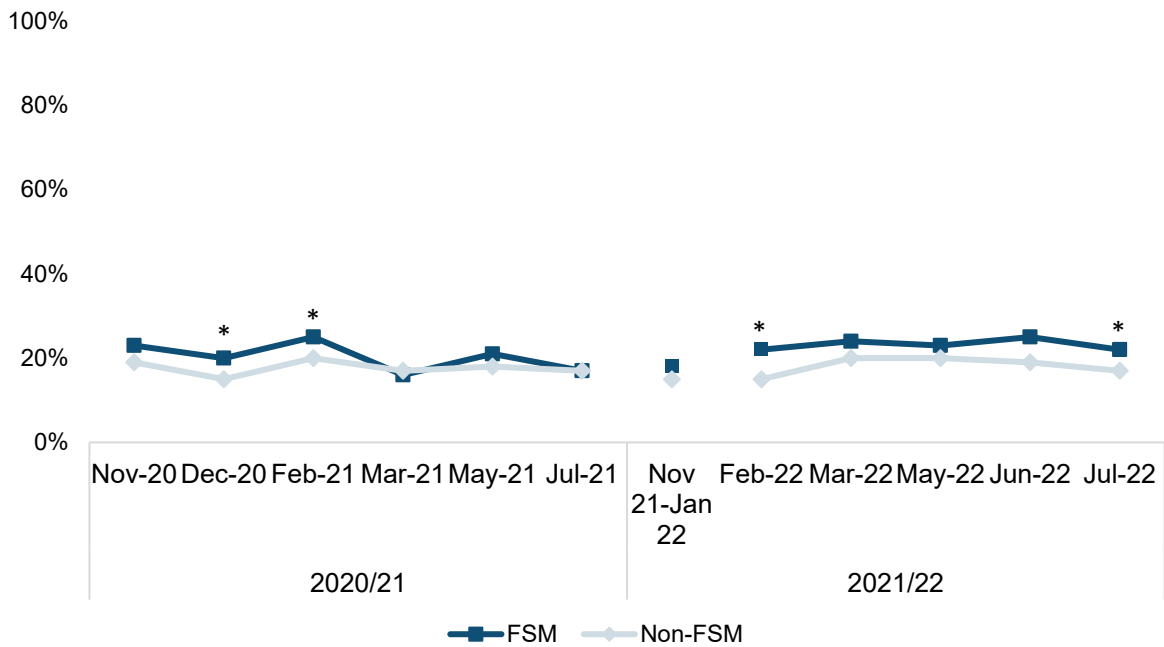


Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

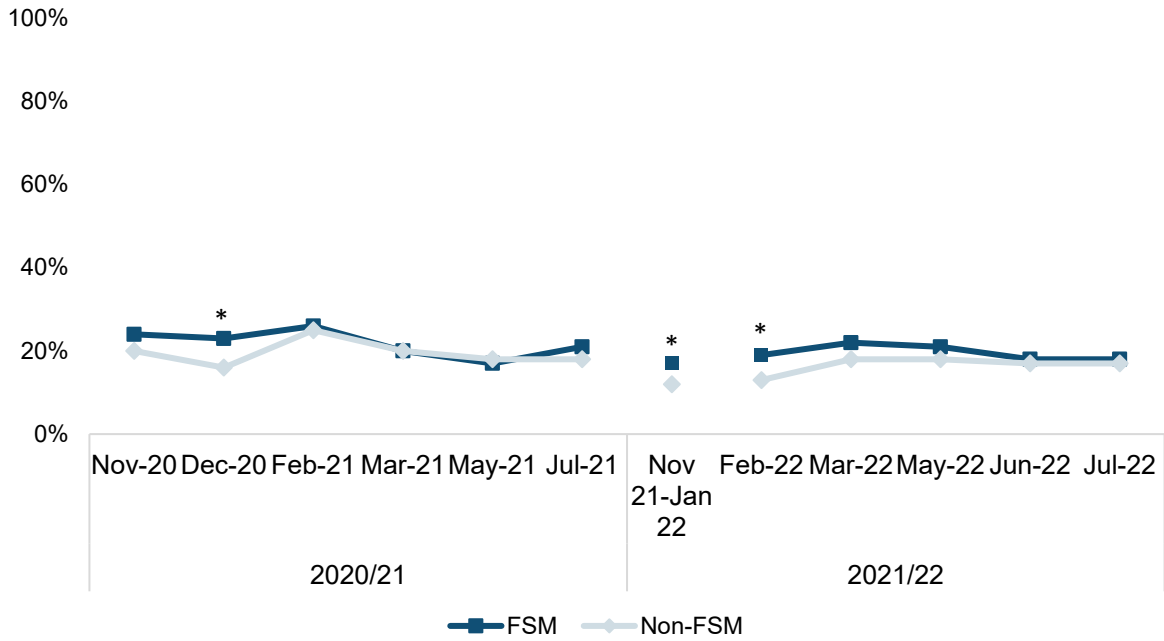


FSM status

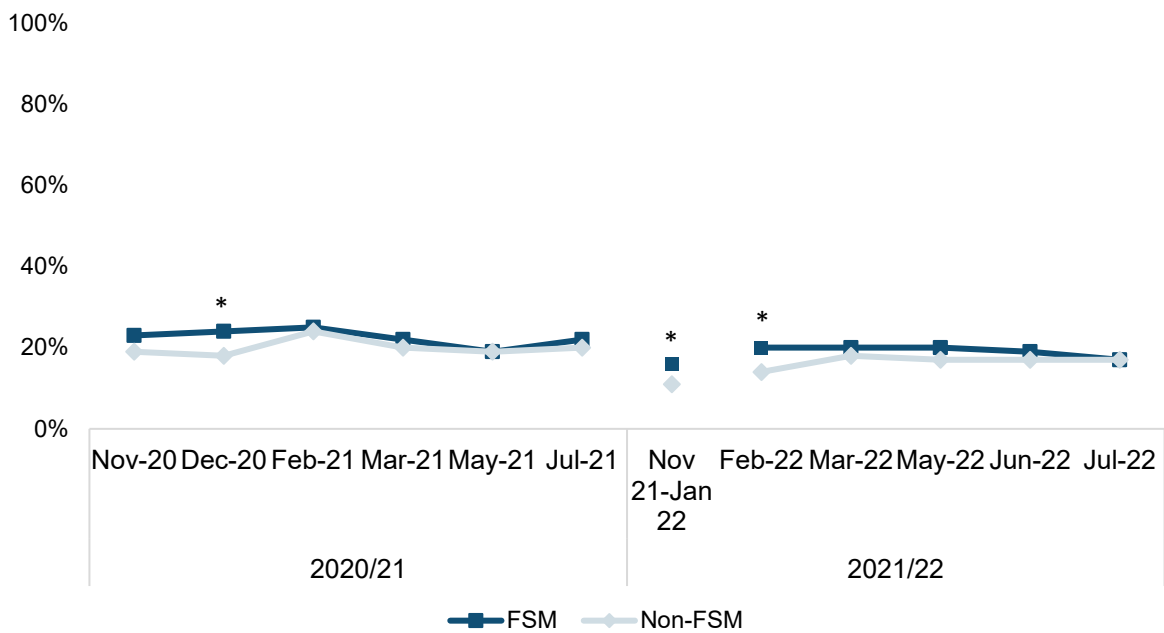
How happy did you feel yesterday?



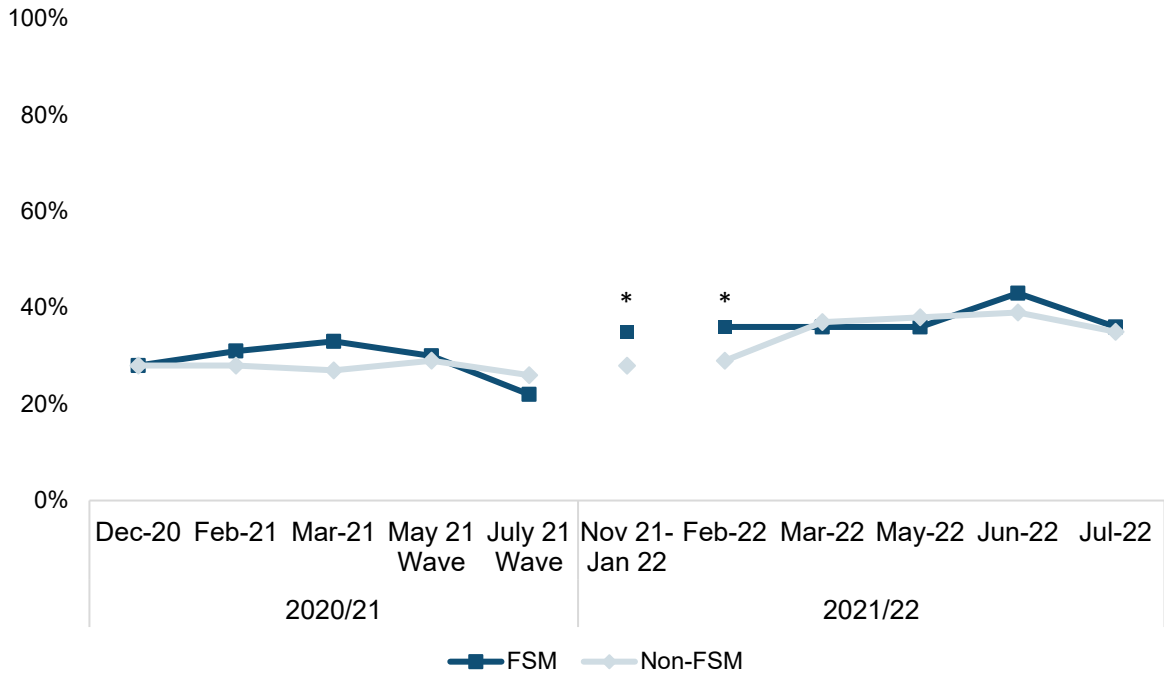
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?



Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

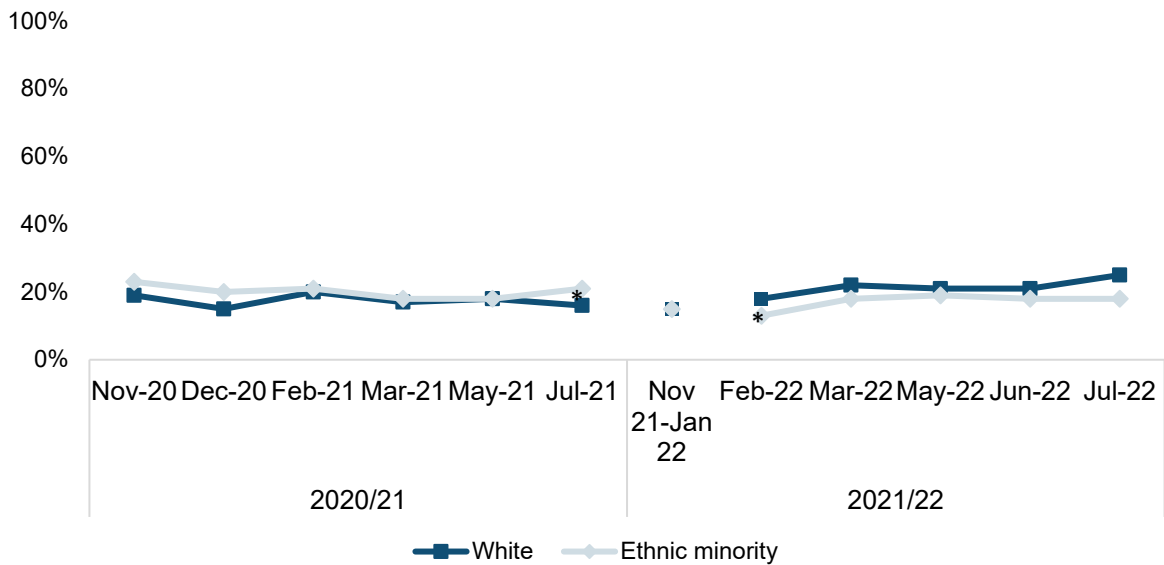


Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

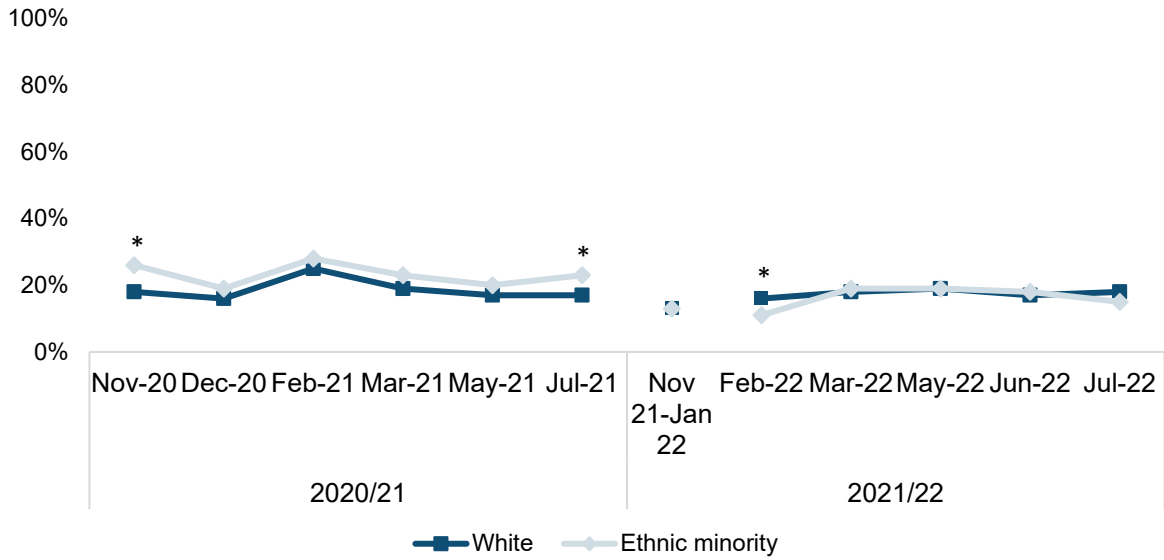


Ethnicity

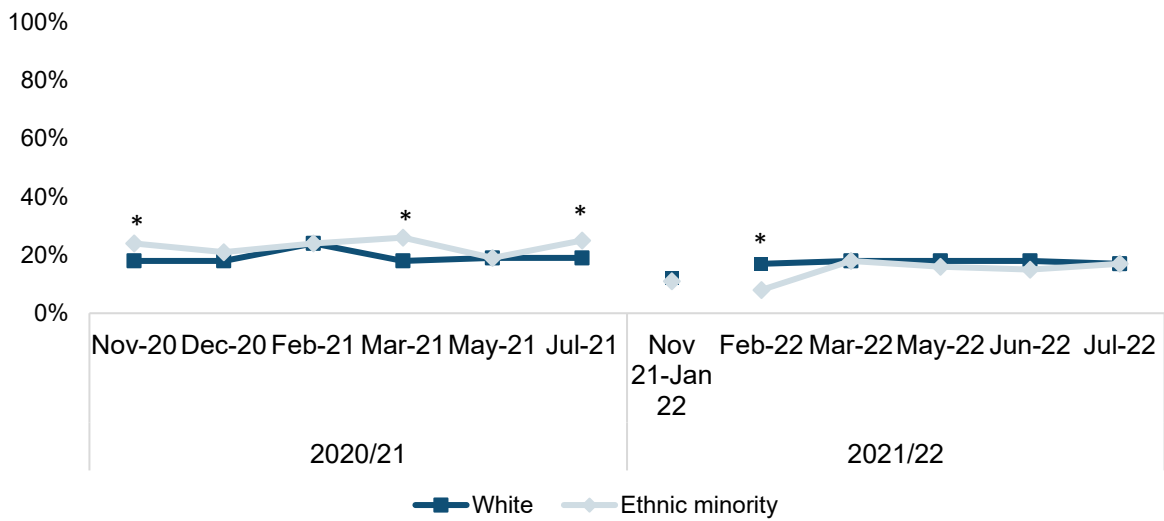
How happy did you feel yesterday?



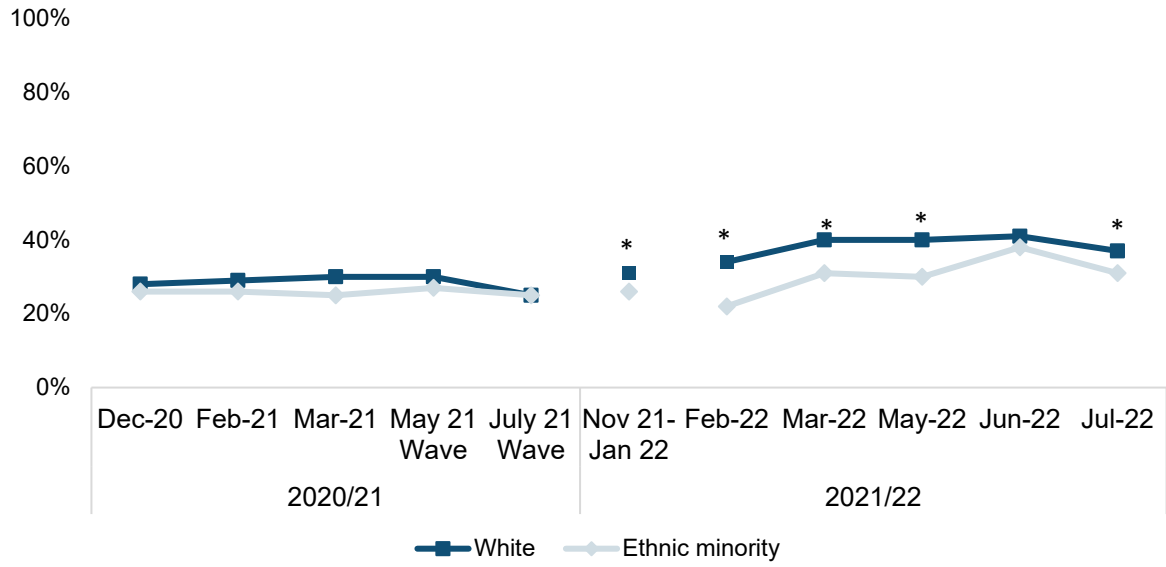
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Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?



Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?





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