

Child mental health referrals up 28% in a year

Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children's Commissioner for England, has published a new report to coincide with the end of Mental Health Awareness Week, revealing that the number of children and young people referred to mental health services rose by 28% in a single year, from 147,600 in 2022/23 to 188,700 in 2023/24, while children with referrals for autism face the longest average waits, of around seven months. Last year in England, nearly 60,000, or 6% of all referrals, were for children "in crisis", including those feeling suicidal, wanting to self-harm, experiencing panic attacks or hearing voices. Dame Rachel said the "numbers in this report are staggering", representing "real children who are not only missing previous moments of their childhood while stuck waiting for vital treatment ... but also the scaffolding that makes their lives happy and fulfilled with their friends. All too often, it is these children with unmet additional needs who go missing from education, falling off the radars of services and denied opportunities their peers take for granted."

London Evening Standard Sunday Express The Independent UK The Sunday Times

Childline sees surge in anger calls

Recent data from the NSPCC reveals a troubling trend: thousands of children are turning to Childline for assistance with anger management. In the past year, nearly 3,000 counselling sessions were conducted, marking a 6% increase from the previous year. Shaun Friel, director of Childline, explained: "The fact that children are reaching out for help about their anger issues reflects the growing emotional challenges young people face in today's complex world." Many children struggle to regulate their emotions, often expressing anger through shouting or self-criticism. The rise in these issues coincides with teachers reporting that young children are increasingly unprepared for school, with 58% attributing the phenomenon to a lack of communication at home.

The Independent UK

'Major nationwide operation' to reopen grooming gang cases

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper has announced that the National Crime Agency (NCA) will lead a "major nationwide operation" to identify more members of grooming gangs across the country, including reopening previously closed cases. Ms Cooper said a review earlier this year had already identified more than 800 cases, and said the NCA will work with specialist units like Operation Hydrant and the Tackling Organised Exploitation Programme to "prevent more children from being hurt". "The vulnerable young girls who suffered unimaginable abuse at the hands of groups of adult men have now grown into brave women who are rightly demanding justice for what they went through when they were just children", she said, "Not enough people listened to them then. That was wrong and unforgivable. We are changing that now." Elsewhere, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) has urged the Government to ensure that its planned national inquiry does not "delay urgent action on child sexual abuse that is long overdue", including the implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), which made its final report in 2022.

Daily Mail The Independent UK

Children taking ketamine and cocaine, teachers say

A NASUWT survey of almost 4,000 teachers has revealed that 25% of teachers believe children are taking the "zombie drug" spice, and some are even getting high in school. Other students are also taking ketamine, cocaine, and cannabis on school premises, drinking alcohol, and using gambling apps. Spice is a plant-based mix of herbs laced with synthetic chemicals meant to mimic cannabis's psychoactive substances. Other problems noted by teachers included the use of nicotine pouches, nitrous oxide, and excessive consumption of energy drinks. The teaching union is calling for increased government action to tackle the use of harmful substances and activities both in and out of school. The survey also found that 71% of teachers were aware of pupils using energy drinks

within school and 70% outside school. The union wants schools to have support from other services, including health and youth justice, to tackle problems, and has urged the government to ban the sale of drinks containing more than 150 mg of caffeine per litre to under-16s.

The Times

Deepfake crisis threatens school safety

Laura Bates, founder of the Everyday Sexism project, has warned that sharing deepfake pornography is "the next sexual violence epidemic" facing schools. During her testimony to the Women and Equalities Committee, she highlighted that schools have spent thousands on PR firms for reputation management but have failed to support victims or address the perpetrators. Bates stated: "It is happening, it's significant," noting that female teachers are also affected. She called for statutory guidance to help teachers handle this issue effectively, stressing the need for education, prevention, and regulation rather than criminalising underage boys. The Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, has also raised concerns about nudifying apps targeting young girls, calling for an immediate ban. The inquiry into the "manosphere" has revealed rising misogyny affecting both female pupils and staff, with sexual harassment described as "rife."

Sky News London Evening Standard