Campaign launched to tackle "postcode lottery" of youth mental health services

The *Sunday Express* has launched a campaign calling on the Government to ensure all vulnerable children are provided mental health treatment as a matter of urgency. The campaign comes as a report found that children in some parts of the country with severe mental health problems are facing waiting times of almost three years to access vital care, which campaigners have described as a "scandalous postcode lottery". Experts have warned that further delays to care could be a matter of "life or death", particularly given the additional pressure caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. One in six children reported a mental health disorder in 2020 and 2021, compared to just one in nine in 2017, while a recent study found eight in ten young people were suffering some form of mental health problem linked to lockdown measures. In the *Express*, Emma Thomas, CEO of charity Young Minds, calls for early support hubs to be placed in every community, which allow young people to walk in and receive mental health support on the spot. There is evidence that such services can prevent more serious mental health issues and relieve pressure on the NHS. Also in the *Express*, teenager Like Joshua, now 17, shares his experience trying to access support while suffering from PTSD due to bullying at school.
Sunday Express

Soaring demand for mental health support for families

Figures from mental health charity YoungMinds show that demand for online mental health support for families rose by 48% from 2019 to 2021, highlighting the extent of the crisis among young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Between last September to January, 47% of calls from parents were relating to anxiety, 24% to depression, and 19% relating to issues with school or school refusal. There was also a 57% rise in demand for the charity's webchat service, while there was a 62% rise in users of its "Find Help" webpages last year. It is estimated that 15% of children in England - 1.5m - have new or worsening mental health issues due to the pandemic and related measures. Stevie Goulding, from YoungMinds, said that the prevalence of school-based problems is "largely because the return to school after lockdown was really challenging. Pupils had been in such a safe environment, in a protected bubble with their family, and then they had to go back into the world and socialise in groups".
Sunday Express

Calls to tackle child bed poverty

The Express is launching a campaign urging the Government to implement a National Sleep Strategy to ensure A Bed For Every Head - and to eradicate sleep poverty. Research in 2017 by young people's charity Buttle UK found that 400,000 children lacked a bed, but the figure is now expected to be around 500,000. Chronic sleep deprivation is harming children's ability to concentrate in schools. The End Furniture Poverty charity will this week reveal that more than 30 English local authorities have cut their welfare scheme, leaving them unable to provide emergency furniture to 13m people. The problem is made worse by just 2% of social housing being furnished, compared with 29% of private rentals. Primary deputy head

teacher Rebekah Wilson, who runs the Zarach charity which provides vulnerable children with beds, said: "We need central Government acknowledgement that the current system is broken".
Daily Express

Inquiry: Extensive failures in tackling grooming

A report by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) has found that children are being sexually exploited by networks in all parts of England and Wales in the "most degrading and destructive ways." The report found that perpetrators are finding "new ways" to groom younger children, including through social media and dating apps. The inquiry said there is a "flawed assumption" that child sexual exploitation was decreasing, when in reality it has become more of a "hidden problem" that is underreported unless linked to other forms of criminal behaviour such as county lines. The report makes a number of recommendations, including strengthening the criminal justice system, updating government guidance on child sexual exploitation and better data collection by police forces and local authorities.
BBC News   London Evening Standard   The Guardian   The Independent

Teens who smoke cannabis six times more likely to develop schizophrenia

A study has found that adolescents aged between 12 and 18 who smoke small amounts of cannabis are six times more likely to develop schizophrenia than those who do not. NHS data also shows that 24% of children aged 11 to 15 have previously taken drugs, with cannabis accounting for 8%.
The Daily Telegraph

Sharing sexual images has become "dangerously normalised" among teens

A new report has warned that the unwanted sharing of sexual images among teenagers in the UK has become "dangerously normalised". Research by the Institute of Education, University College London, shows that teenagers are reluctant to report such instances to their school, parents or social media platforms. The study found that 51% of young people aged from 12 to 18 who had received unwanted sexual content online, or had their image shared without their consent, said they did not take action to report it. Around a third of respondents said they did nothing about it because they "don't think reporting works". In addition, 75% of girls in that age group said they had received an image of male genitals, with the majority saying these were "unwanted". Unknown adult men accounted for nearly half the incidents of image-based sexual harassment. ASCL Inclusion Policy Specialist, Margaret Mulholland, said: "School leaders will welcome this new report, which shows the enormous challenge schools face in supporting the disclosure of sexual harassment experienced by young people."
Daily Mirror

HEALTH

Nearly one in six children is struggling with mental health issues

A report by the children's commissioner for England reveals that about one child in six (16.6%) is believed to be struggling with mental health issues, a 50% rise on 2017, when the proportion was one in nine (11.1%). However, NHS data shows that the number of children who were referred - for example by GPs or teachers - to NHS mental health services fell during the pandemic. In 2020-21, 497,502 children were referred compared with 539,000 the year before. Rachel de Souza, the commissioner, said: "The responses to my Big Ask survey revealed a generation of children who are clearly very conscious of the importance of their physical and mental health and how interlinked these things are." She added: "While the majority were happy with their mental health, we know some are struggling. Where they need support from children's mental health services, I see improvements, and a focus on further improvements but there's a long way to go. Despite reductions in some waiting times children wait too long, even if fewer are being turned away."
The Guardian   The Times

Increase in children needing help for eating disorders

Analysis of NHS England data by the Royal College of Psychiatrists reveals that the number of children needing help for eating disorders is at "crisis point", with waiting lists in England at record levels. Research shows there are growing waiting lists for those under 19 suffering from illnesses including anorexia and bulimia. The RCP said delays to treatment risked lives and called for earlier intervention to help youngsters recover.