

School leaders express concern over cannabis sweets

School leaders have expressed concern that cannabis sweets are being sold in child-friendly packaging and urged people not to buy them. It comes after the death of law student Damilola Grace Olakanmi, 23, who died after consuming a suspected cannabis sweet in east London. Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the ASCL, said: "It is very worrying that cannabis sweets may come in child-friendly packaging. We haven't heard any reports of these sweets being brought into school premises but, as with all problems in wider society, there is obviously a risk of that happening." He said schools do their best to be vigilant to anything which poses a danger to pupils but "there is clearly a finite limit on what they can do, and what they need is for people not to produce, sell and purchase such items in the first place."

Evening Standard

Former Met officer warns gangs will take advantage of living costs to recruit youngsters

Former Metropolitan Police chief superintendent Dal Babu has warned that the increased cost of living will prompt an increase in youth violence. He said: "I think there's a danger that food and hunger will be used to snare young people into being in situations where they're in debt to gangs. What you're seeing increasingly is young people being groomed and targeted on the internet or directly outside schools, they will be given a free chicken and chips meal, a lot of these kids will be hungry, they get an offer of free food then they're in debt to a gang who will want them to do things in return". Mr Babu also said the cuts to policing and other public sector roles in the last 10 years have impacted the "glue of safeguarding" to protect young people.

The Independent UK

Child mental health services at 'breaking point'

Campaigners have warned of an "unprecedented crisis" in young people's mental health, with the NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services system close to "breaking point" after a surge in demand during the pandemic. Figures show young people at risk of suicide face waiting times of more than two years to be seen by professionals, with referrals up 52% in 2021 compared with the previous year. Olly Parker, head of external affairs for YoungMinds, said: "The system is at breaking point. There are two-year waiting lists in some parts of the country. That's two years for people at risk of self-harm." Parker said that demand also had increased after children returned to school last September. He added: "During the pandemic, young people were more isolated from services, from friends, from social groupings - and the wellbeing benefits we all get from that. Now what we've seen is a huge explosion in the number of people being referred. It's just a huge backlog."

The Times

23% of rape victims are girls under 16

The Independent reports that girls under the age of 16 account for 23% of rape cases in England and Wales in the five years up to last spring, while children under 13 account for nearly one in 10 cases. The figures have been released by the Home Office, upon request by the Liberal Democrats. Charities have said the figures are "unacceptable", highlighting that the true number is likely to be higher due to under-reporting.

The Independent

Dorries and de Souza urge MPs to pass Online Harms Bill

Writing in the *Telegraph*, Digital Secretary Nadine Dorries and Children's Commissioner Rachel de Souza, urge MPs to pass the Online Harms Bill in order to "make the UK the safest place in the world to go online". This comes as MPs will be debating the introduction of the legislation - the first of its kind in the world - this afternoon. The Bill would legally require platforms to protect children and young people from a range of harms, including child abuse, cyberbullying and pornography. Technology companies would need to use technology to determine a user's age in order to limit access to certain age groups, with "severe penalties" for those that fail to do so.

The Daily Telegraph

NSPCC calls for urgent action to protect children

The NSPCC has called for urgent action to protect children at risk of abuse, after new figures revealed 12 infants aged under two are referred to police or social services every day by the charity's helpline. Data showed child protection agencies were alerted by the helpline to 22,505 children at risk of neglect and abuse last year - an average of 62 children a day. Some 4,475 were aged two and under. It comes after last week's conviction of a mother, stepfather and teenage boy for the murder of Logan Mwangi, five, who died in July 2021 following a "brutal and sustained" attack at home, that left him with "catastrophic" injuries. Sir Peter Wanlass, the NSPCC's CEO, said: "This must be the year we make child protection a national priority. The stark figures we've released underline the ongoing scale of the issue, and it's time to act. The Government has a unique opportunity this year to transform our overstretched and underfunded child protection system." He added: "We know the pandemic increased the risk of abuse and neglect and recent tragic cases have rightly led to a public outcry as these innocent children's lives were brutally cut short."

Sunday Express

Childhood obesity soars in pandemic

Research shows that obesity rates among children soared during the pandemic. The proportion of obese Reception-aged children in England rose from 9.9% before the pandemic to 14.4% last April, while the proportion of overweight Year 6 pupils from 21% in 2019/20 to 25.5% in 2020/21. According to the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, up to 30% of children in disadvantaged areas were obese, compared to as little as 8% in the wealthiest areas.

Daily Mirror