

YOUTH LONELINESS IN SOUTHAMPTON

TWO YOUNG PEOPLE LED
REVIEWS AND REFLECTIONS ON
YOUTH LONELINESS WITHIN
SOUTHAMPTON

**NO
LiMiTs**

Helping Young People
Help Themselves



About No Limits

No Limits is a charity offering free and confidential information, advice, counselling, advocacy and support to children and young people under the age of 26 in Southampton and Hampshire. Young people can come to No Limits for free support on a wide range of issues including housing, homelessness, debt, employment, relationships, sexual health, mental health and substance misuse. Support is offered at the No Limits Advice Centre in Central Southampton and through outreach work delivered in schools and colleges across Hampshire.

Youth Ambassadors

Youth Ambassadors are a group of young people aged 13-25 year who are interested in creating change and taking action to make life better for all young people in Southampton. They meet once a week to develop and deliver their own campaigns, engage with regional and national consultations and input into the improvement and evaluation of all of No Limits Services.

Currently the group is delivering a Youth Loneliness Project, exploring the issues that impact on young people in Southampton feeling lonely, through their campaign they aim to:

- Raise awareness with professionals, young people and families about the signs, impacts and support available for young people suffering from loneliness
- Work with young people and professionals to develop a toolkit for professionals to help them support young people suffering from mental ill health and loneliness
- Promote the idea of a Youth Loneliness Charter for Southampton that brings together a city wide commitment to tackling Youth Loneliness

**Helping Young People
Help Themselves**

Youth Loneliness in Southampton:

A young people led review and reflection on the frequency and causes of youth loneliness within Southampton

Introduction to the theme

Recent research and guidance highlights the impacts of loneliness on people's health and well-being and the prevalence of loneliness among young people.

Most people will feel lonely at some point, however experiencing long-term loneliness can have a negative impact on a young person's social connectivity, wellbeing and future life chances.

'Loneliness is the negative emotion that accompanies a discrepancy between one's desired and achieved levels of social relations'

UK Youth's 2018 report¹ identified four risk factors associated with youth loneliness:

1. Going through a significant or difficult situation
'Anything to do with change contributes to loneliness, whether that's in their body as they're going through puberty or it's a new school or new place'
2. Weak social networks
This can include; lack of support during a life event or situation, rejection or denial of support, refusal or inability to share with others, practical or geographical barriers
3. High expectations of social networks
Expectations of peers or society regarding individuals in friendship group; regularity of contact; quality of contact and ability to relate to others vs the reality.
4. Low ability to cope with difficulty
Individual resilience, communication and self-awareness

Recent national research has highlighted the prevalence of youth loneliness in wider society. The National Office of Statistics² and The Children's Society (2018) recently undertook the first national data analysis to determine the extent of youth loneliness and the factors that have an impact on it.

¹ UK Youth (2018) A Place to Belong: the role of local youth organisations in addressing youth loneliness.

² Office of National Statistics (2018) Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness:

Analysis of children's and young people's views, experiences and suggestions to overcome loneliness, using in-depth interviews, the Community Life Survey 2016 to 2017 and Good Childhood Index Survey, 2018.

They found that 11.3% of children said they were often lonely (10-15 years old) and 9.8% of 16-24 year olds felt the same, they also identified that high levels of loneliness were reported in young people in the below groups:

- Those in younger age group of 10-12 year olds (14%)
- Have a long-term illness or disability (only 19.3% reported 'hardly ever' feeling lonely compared to 44.8% of those without a long-term illness or disability), or are unsatisfied with their health (28% of those reported low satisfaction with health 'often' felt lonely, compared with about 10% in those with 'medium to very high' satisfaction with their health.
- Accessing free school meals (27.5% compared to 5.5% for those not)
- 19.5% of young people living in a city reported often feeling lonely, compared to about 5% of those in towns or rural areas.
- Those reporting 'low' satisfaction with relationships with friends (41.1%) and families (34.8%)

Design of collection

No Limits is an information, advice, advocacy, counselling and support charity for children and young people in Southampton under the age of 26. The charity supports, advises and educates young people, helping them to gain the skills and knowledge needed to manage their lives, grow in confidence and build brighter futures.

Young people can come to the No Limits for free support on a wide range of issues including housing, homelessness, debt, employment, relationships, sexual health, mental health and substance misuse. Support is offered at the No Limits Advice Centre in Central Southampton and through outreach work delivered in schools and colleges across Southampton and Hampshire.

In order to explore the prevalence of youth loneliness, and to explore the impacts of this on young people within Southampton, we undertook a range of explorative activities.

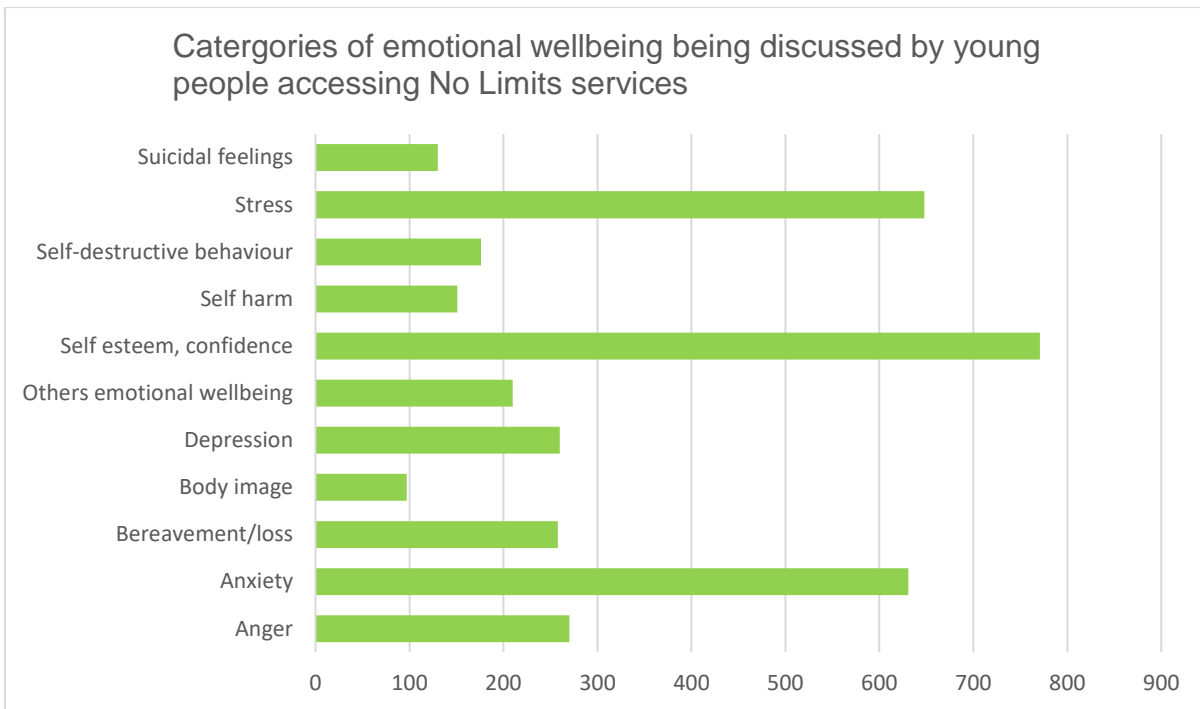
1. Reviewing Current Data: Exploring the data currently on our database regarding young people that have accessed our service over a three month period for issues relating to wellbeing and social isolation.
2. Survey: Over a two-week period we engaged with young people accessing our services and asked them to complete a short survey about social isolation and support
3. Young People's Focus Group: Bringing together an introduction to the theme, along with all of the data and information gathered in points 1 and 2 and taking this to a group of young people to explore the underlying drivers and reflect on the findings.

Findings

1. Reviewing the current data

1,144 young people accessed No Limits services for emotional wellbeing support between October and December 2018.

The primary emotional wellbeing reason for contact was around confidence and self-esteem, followed by anxiety and stress.

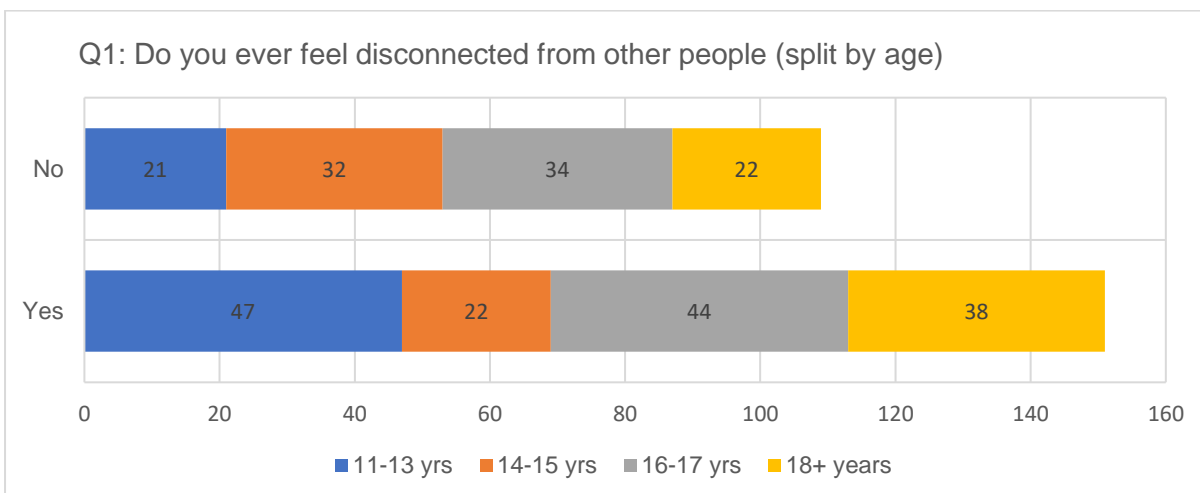


These factors link in with the internal ability for a young person to cope with difficulty (their individual resilience), which, as discussed above, is outlined as one of the risk factors associated with loneliness.

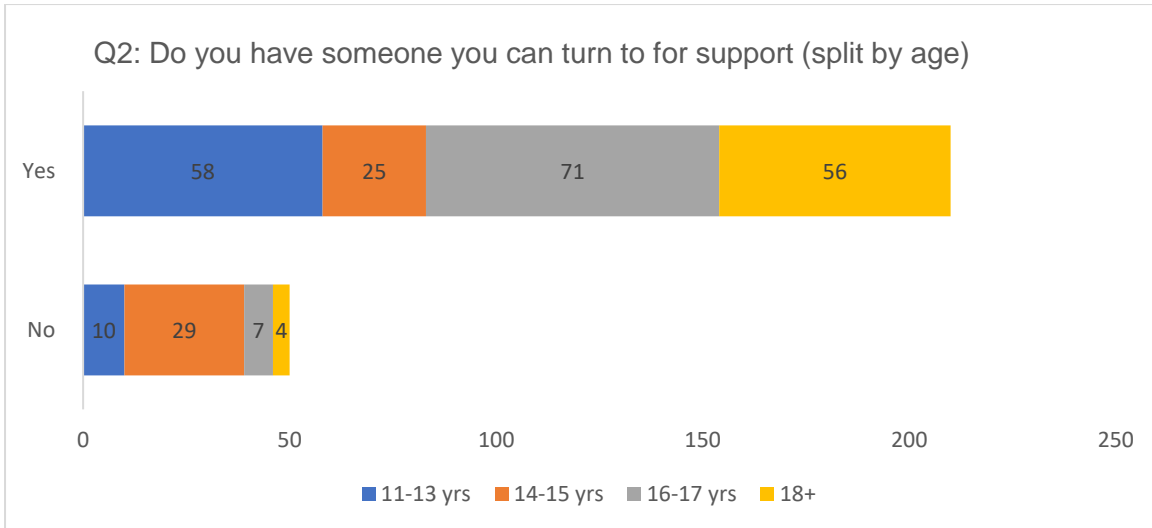
This might mean that a young person is suffering from loneliness. Alternatively, it could be an indicator that if a change in circumstance, internally or externally, occurs for one of these young people it could result in them suffering from loneliness in the future.

2. Survey

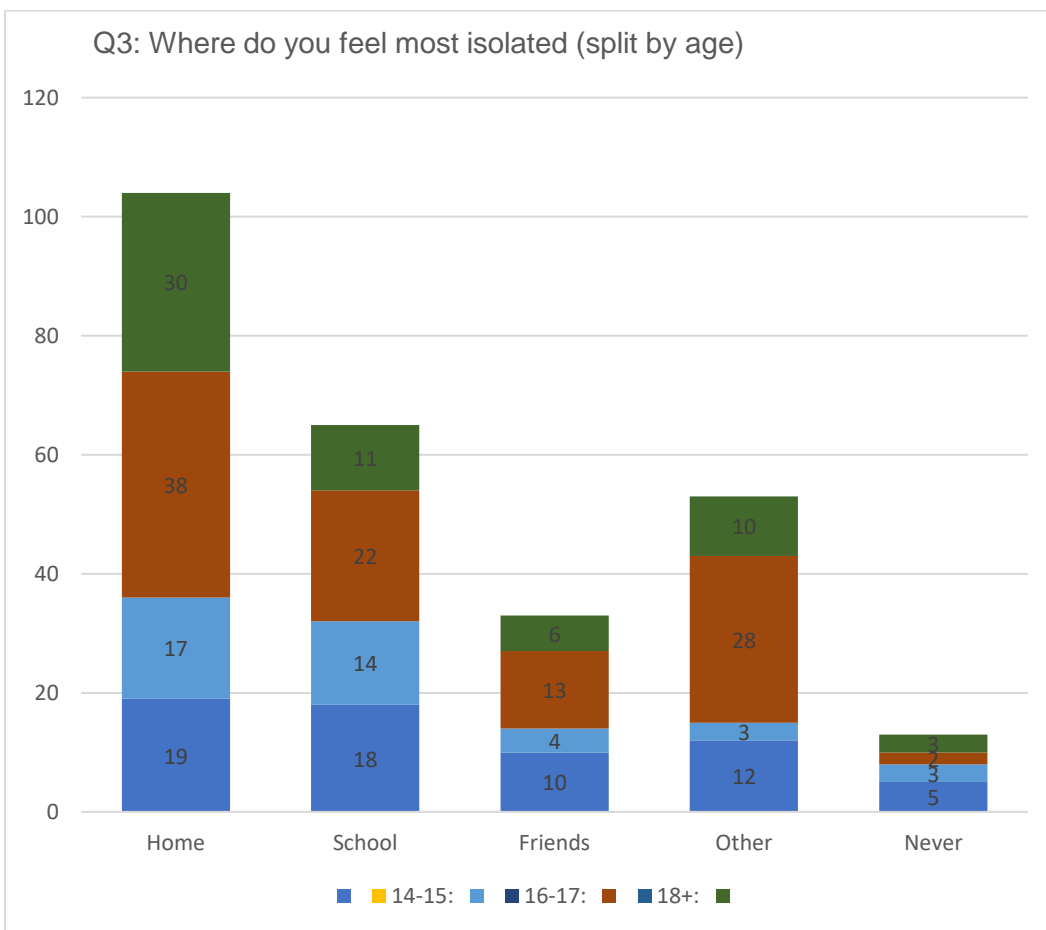
Over a 2-week period in February 2019 approximately 300 young people engaged in a short survey about Youth Loneliness. We asked three key questions that have been shown to be associated with youth loneliness and social connectivity:



58% said they have felt disconnected from people, this was highest in the 11-13 year old cohort (67%)



However only 19% said they did not have someone to turn to for support, this could be due to talking to young people who are accessing our services. However, the highest rate was 54% of the 14-15 cohort stating that they had no one to turn to.



When asked where they feel most isolated, 38% said at home, and 24% said at school. However within the 18+ group 50% felt isolated at home, and within the 14-15 age group 34% felt isolated at school.

3. Young People's Focus Group

We took the results from the two data collection points, along with an overview of the current national research and learning, to a group of our Youth Ambassadors³ who explored some potential reasoning and actions to support.

They highlighted aspects of the findings and discussed some of the reasoning behind this and area / ideas for ongoing work we could look at doing to support this work further.

Why do young people feel lonely?

- *Database showed a lot of young people experiencing mental health issues. The questionnaire showed a lot of young people thought loneliness felt like isolation, depression, sadness.*
- *Social media – young people are on social media far too much and compare their lives/looks to celebrities/social media bloggers.*
- *Young people struggle with self-esteem and confidence to tackle loneliness*
- *Have no trust in friends/family*
- *Parents are unaware of their child's loneliness*
- *No education around loneliness*

11-13 year olds feel lonely and disconnected the most

- *More independence*
- *Home alone a lot more*
- *Hormones/changes in the brain*
- *Need a lot more sleep*

14-15 year olds feel most isolated at home

- *Game consoles are very popular with teenagers*
- *Men stereotyped to be the 'man of the house' and aren't going to talk*
- *Puberty*
- *Parents have different views on adolescence years and could be difficult to understand their feelings*
- *Easier to go on phones/watch tv/ use social media at home instead of interacting*

11-13 year olds think loneliness is physically being alone

- *Never experienced being alone a lot until this age*
- *When they are left alone, it's first time they're being left alone with their thoughts*

16-17 year olds think loneliness is having no friends

- *Just left school around this age*
- *Loose a lot of friendships*

³ **Youth Ambassadors** are a youth participation group facilitated by No Limits that meets weekly and engages with internal and external opportunities, facilitating change, taking part in social action and supporting the development of young people's services.

- *Less friends around during the day*

Discussion

The aim of the research was to find out the extent to which young people within Southampton are suffering from loneliness, and how this compared with the national findings.

Based on these findings, it would appear that young people in Southampton are suffering high levels of loneliness. However, it is important to acknowledge some limitations as a far smaller, and arguably more homogeneous⁴ cohort was used within local collection in comparison to the national data.

UK Youth¹ highlighted six key activities for workers and professionals to address youth loneliness:

- Providing safe spaces for young people
- Fostering a sense of belonging for young people
- Providing positive relationships with other young people and trusted adults
- Supporting young people to gain the skills to respond to difficulty
- Referring young people to specialist support
- Delivering different types of youth work to provides all of this support.

As a Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Service within Southampton, our ethos and youth work fits within these key activities. We provide safe, healthy spaces and relationships for young people to access specialist support when needed through our open access drop in and range of specialist groups and projects.

We are working to further engage young people in this work and to address youth loneliness in Southampton through social action, direct support, signposting and community engagement. No Limits has several new projects of work currently being delivered to increase this offer.

“At 16/17 years old you lose a lot of friends and see friends less once you finish school, it can be a really lonely time”

“Being a part of a social action group has made me feel less lonely, it creates friendships and helped me listen to others people from outside my bubble”

“A lack of youth clubs means that a lot of young people don’t get the chance to socialise unless that have an issue and are referred to a service”

⁴ Young people completing the survey were all engaging with No Limits over the two week period



Youth Loneliness and Mental Ill Health:

A young people led review and reflection on the link between youth loneliness and mental ill health within Southampton

Introduction to the theme

Following initial research by Youth Ambassadors at No Limits regarding the frequency and impact of youth loneliness on young people in Southampton, the group decided to explore how youth loneliness and mental ill health are linked, and the impacts that each have on the other. As a sub-question they also wanted to explore the impact social media has on youth loneliness and mental ill health for young people.

Recent research and guidance highlight the impacts of loneliness on people's health and well-being and the prevalence of loneliness among young people.

Most people will feel lonely at some point, however experiencing long-term loneliness can have a negative impact on a young person's social connectivity, wellbeing and future life chances.

The young people wanted to explore whether the long-term impact of youth loneliness resulted in diagnosed mental ill health, or whether having a diagnosed mental illness resulted in young people feeling more socially isolated and lonely.

Recent research by No Limits highlighted that 58% of young people in Southampton said they have felt disconnected from people and 19% said they did not have someone to turn to for support⁵. In comparison to the national average of 11.3% (10-15yr olds) and 9.8% (16-24 years) reporting feeling lonely⁶, Southampton's young people are struggling with loneliness at a greater degree than that recognised nationally.

It is also estimated that in Southampton 6,189 (9.8%) of children and young people aged 19 or under have a Mental Health condition, which is higher than the England average (9.2%)⁷.

Understanding the interconnectivity of this situation for young people in Southampton is important for development of appropriate identification and support across the city.

⁵ No Limits (2019) Youth Loneliness in Southampton: A young peoples led review and reflection on the frequency and causes of youth loneliness within Southampton.

⁶ Office of National Statistics (2018) Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness: Analysis of children's and young people's views, experiences and suggestions to overcome loneliness, using in-depth interviews, the Community Life Survey 2016 to 2017 and Good Childhood Index Survey, 2018.

⁷ Children and Young People's Wellbeing and Mental Health Needs Assessment in the School Setting (2018), Southampton City Council.

Design of collection

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Young people can come to No Limits for free support on a wide range of issues including housing, homelessness, debt, employment, relationships, sexual health, mental health and substance misuse. Support is offered at the No Limits Advice Centre in central Southampton and through outreach work delivered in schools and colleges across Southampton and Hampshire.

To explore the link between youth loneliness and mental ill health, and how social media impacts on these issues we:

- Put out a survey, engaging with young people accessing our services and asked them to complete a short survey about the connection between mental health, youth loneliness and social media
- The Youth Ambassadors held a focus group to bring together and discuss the findings from the survey.

Findings

The Youth Ambassadors created a survey asking children and young people in Southampton about the issues. A total of 70 people responded, however not all respondents answered all questions.

Demographics

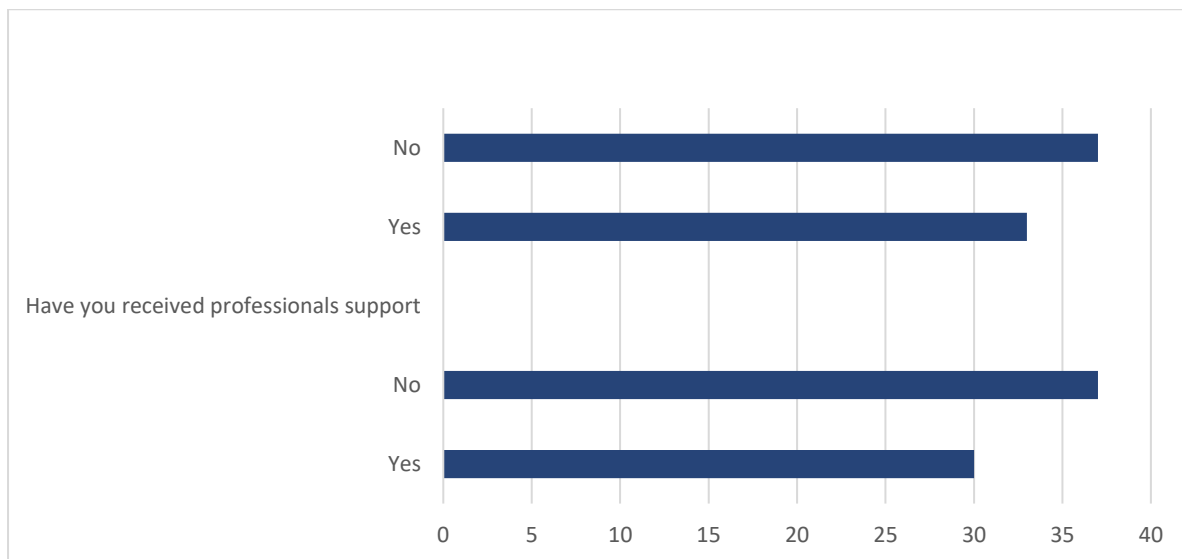
The majority of respondents were in the 14-17 year age bracket (the total age range of those engaging was from 8-25 years old); female (60%) with the remaining being male (35%) and 4.2% being non-binary or 'other'. 77% of respondents were White British with the remaining 23% made up of Asian British, White other and Mixed race.

Mental health and Loneliness

To explore the links between mental ill health and loneliness we asked the cohort whether they had experienced loneliness and/or mental ill health.

44% of respondents reported that they suffered from a diagnosed mental health illness. Of those reporting only 47% had received professional support and only 47% reported that support was easy to access. Although this cohort takes into account 9% of young people that are above 19 years old, this still represents a much higher average rate of mental ill health than outlined in the city's Children and Young People's wellbeing plan, (9.8% of under 19 year olds). This could be due to the data primarily being gathered through No Limits services, so these young people are much more likely to be struggling with mental health and emotional wellbeing issues than the wider population.

Number of young people reported having a diagnosed mental illness and those that are receiving support.



23% of young people reported having no one to turn too (or not being able to reach out to people). This level of reporting of loneliness / lack of support is higher than the levels seen nationally and in the previous research done in Southampton (19%).

The increase in both levels of mental ill health and reported loneliness in this cohort could suggest that there is a link between these areas. To explore this further we asked young people involved whether they felt there was a correlation - 62% of young people felt that mental health and loneliness were related.

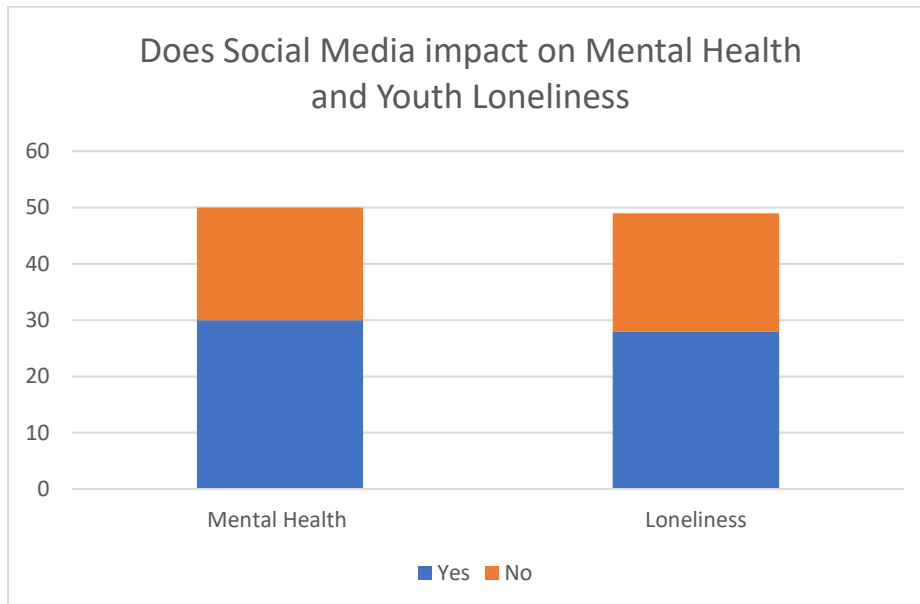
Discourse analysis on follow up comments shows that there was an equal division of people thinking that loneliness leads to mental ill health, as those thinking that mental ill health leads to loneliness (33% each), with 16% believing they occurred together (and 8% unsure).



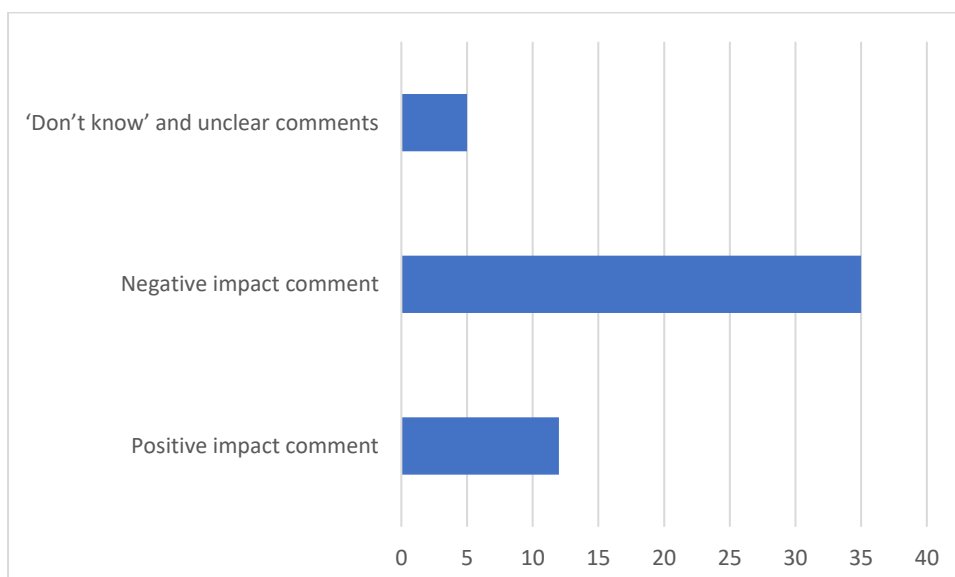
Discourse analysis of causation connection between mental ill health and youth loneliness

Social Media

Alongside this research the young people also wanted to explore the impact of social media on mental health and loneliness. 60% of young people felt it impacted on mental health and 57% felt it impacted on youth loneliness.



In order to explore the impact discourse analysis was undertaken on the comments relating to this. When reviewing the comments, it appears that 67% implied a negative connection between social media and mental health, and 100% of comments implied a negative connection between social media and youth loneliness.



Discourse analysis of the association between mental ill health and social media.

Focus Group

Initially we discussed the demographics of the research to put the findings into context:

Ages

- The young people were surprised how many 8-12-year olds took part in the questionnaire and felt that if we didn't run groups for this age group, we would not have had their input.
- The young people would have liked these questionnaires to have been sent out to more young people and more groups.
- The young people said they would like to have a separate questionnaire in the future for the younger participants and wondered how well the younger participants understood the questions.

Gender

- The young people thought more females participated in the questionnaire as they can share their emotions without being judged.
- The young people thought that males are stereotyped and worry that they will be judged.
- The young people thought that some young people may not feel comfortable enough to share how they identify, if they identify as something different to male or female.
- Due to the low numbers of respondents, the young people were not shocked at the lack of gender diversity.

Ethnicity

- The young people were shocked that there was not much ethnic diversity within the participants with 93% being White British.

We then discussed the correlation between mental ill health and loneliness, looking at what the findings told us and the experiences of the young people in the group.

Do you feel lonely, do you have a diagnosis?

- The young people feel that young people with mental health issues become lonely because they receive poor help due to lack of services and young people become secluded
- Lack of youth clubs means that young people don't get the chance to socialise unless they have an issue and it is referral based.
- Long waiting lists- young people are waiting a long time for a diagnosis.

Do you have someone to turn to?

- Young people thought it was good that most of the young people had someone to turn to with only 5 participants saying they did not.
- The young people stated that engaging with No Limits helps build relationships

Does feeling lonely affect your everyday life?

- The results were what the young people thought they would be.
- 25% reported that it did not impact their everyday life. The young people felt this was a high amount of respondents not being impacted and they did not know why this would be.

Are Mental Health and Loneliness related?

Young people felt that you could tell ages from responses, and that this was differing and unclear.

Do you believe social media affects your life?

- The group discussed that people look for approval/validation from others online which can be negative, however social media can be good for socialising.
- You compare yourself to others.
- Body image- makes yourself judge yourself.
- Only share to show off, creates competition between peers.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to find out how mental ill health and youth loneliness are connected for young people in Southampton.

The findings give a mixed picture. This cohort appeared to suffer higher levels of loneliness and mental ill health than national and Southampton specific averages. This can be explained by the nature of data collection - primarily young people engaged with No Limits services completed the surveys. The majority of young people engaged with No Limits are subject to multiple vulnerabilities and are therefore more likely to be social isolated and have a diagnosed mental illness.

During discussion the Youth Ambassadors all felt that mental ill health and youth loneliness were connected, although they did concede that this was a perception based on their personal experience. However, the research supports this to some degree with 82% believing that they occur together - mental health leads to loneliness or loneliness leads to mental health.

The exact causal relationship is harder to determine, however the young people highlighted that for those with mental ill health and those not gaining professional support (52%), were potentially more isolated and struggling with loneliness. They commented on the lack of services for these young people with 52% of those in receipt of support saying it was not easy to gain support.

'I don't reach out to other people when my mental health is bad, which means I feel really lonely'

The Youth Ambassadors felt that social media could be a good or bad thing. They talked about the dangers of seeking validation and approval online, and the impacts on self-esteem and confidence. However, they also acknowledged the benefits and how you can feel less isolated by using social media.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings the following work is suggested:

- Awareness raising with young people and families about youth loneliness and mental ill health, linking young people in the city with opportunities to engage with other young people face to face.
- Awareness raising with professionals across the city on how to identify, respond and support young people across the city.
- Supporting the self-esteem and confidence of young people across the city to prevent the negative impact that social media might be having on their wellbeing.

As a Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Service within Southampton, No Limits provide safe, healthy spaces and relationships for young people to access specialist support when needed through our open access drop in and range of specialist groups and projects. We are working to further engage young people in this work and to address youth loneliness in Southampton through social action, direct support, signposting and community engagement.

Co-operative Building Connections Co-design Fund: Unlocking Loneliness

This three-month project, led by our Youth Ambassador³ Participation group, have focused on creating a suitable campaign to engage young people who may be facing loneliness.

The group have engaged to discover who is accessing No Limits, how many young people within our services consider themselves lonely and how we can support them better.

The resulting findings and outcomes from this report have supported the group to create a series of campaign messages and engagement activities to roll out across Southampton.

Co-operative Funded #Iwill fund

No Limits is currently delivering an exciting programme that places young people at the centre of addressing youth loneliness. We work with young people to support their personal development through activities, skills training and campaign development to empower them to take a lead role in social action to address youth loneliness in all its forms.

We support the young people to develop key actions to address areas of youth loneliness and use their skills and knowledge to reach out to other young people; to provide peer support within our services; hold events for members of the public and key stakeholders to support them to make change; and to attend outreach events to engage with other young people.

Since undertaking this research, the Youth Ambassadors involved in #Iwill are planning two events, one for professionals and one for young people, to talk about the findings from their research to date and how young people can get support.

Community Navigator, Young People's Social Prescribing Project (StreetGames)

We are also currently delivering a local Young People's Social Prescribing service as part of a national partnership. This service encourages young people who may be suffering from low emotional wellbeing and social isolation to engage with support and community activities, working to connect young people with their communities and local support, to improve their health and wellbeing.

If you interested in finding out more about our work at No Limits, please contact us enquiries@nolimitshelp.org.uk or phone 023 8022 4224.

