

**From:** Dan Watkins, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Dr Anjan Ghosh, Director of Public Health

**To:** Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee, 19 November 2024

**Subject:** Young People and Mental Health (to include body image and the impact with the implementation of the new regulations of non-surgical procedures set out in the cosmetics act 2020)

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Summary:** The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of Young People and their mental health and the impact body image has.

**Recommendations:** The Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** and to **COMMENT** the information contained within this report.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 This report was requested by committee members to provide an overview of Young People and Mental Health (to include body image and the impact with the implementation of the new regulations of non-surgical procedures set out in the cosmetics act 2020).

## 2. Mental health of adolescents

2.1 The mental health of adolescents has been reported as declining with concerns about capacity within the system and waiting lists in a context of a range of services with different access points. The longitudinal study of children and young people's mental health which started in 2017 has reported change with needs being observed earlier in childhood. The most recent study reported in 2023<sup>1</sup> found that among 8 – 16 year olds, 1 in 4 had a probable mental disorder. The figures were similar for boys and girls in this age band. The 2023 survey found that 11 - 16 year olds with a probable mental disorder were five times more likely than those unlikely to have a mental disorder to have been bullied in person (36.9% compared with 7.6%). They were also more likely to have been bullied online (10.8% compared with 2.6%).<sup>2</sup>

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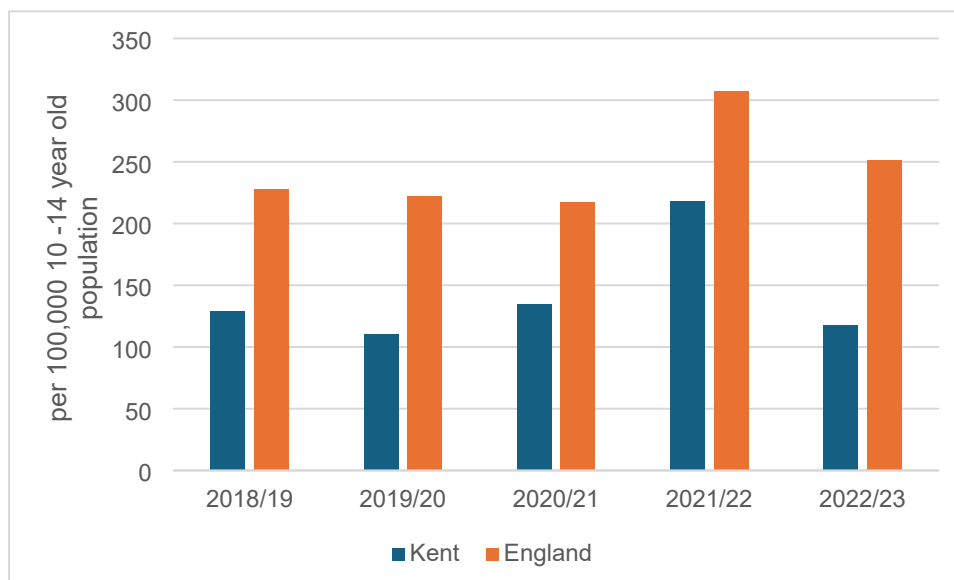
<sup>1</sup> [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023 - wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey - NHS England Digital](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023 - wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey - NHS England Digital](#)

2.2 The SMART Schools study which involves 30 secondary schools is due to complete in July 2025. It explores the impact of daytime restrictions of smartphone and social media use on indicators of adolescent mental well-being, anxiety, depression, physical activity, sleep, classroom behaviour, attainment and addictive social media use. Current outputs includes a paper on safeguarding concerns in research. They report "a high prevalence of participants (aged 12–13 and 14–15 years) reporting thoughts and behaviours related to self-harm or suicide (24% of participants)".<sup>3</sup>

2.3 Mental health needs may lead to requiring care in hospital as shown below.

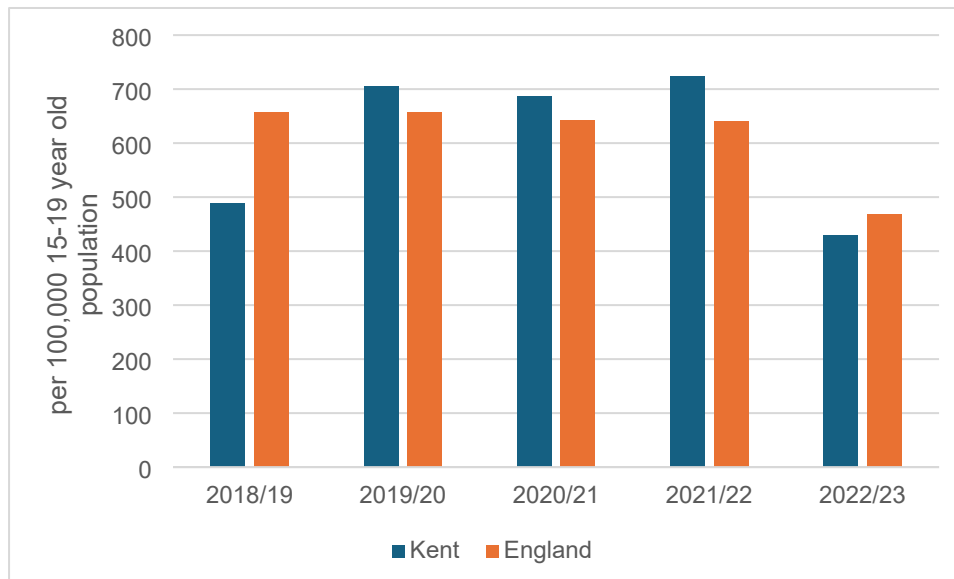
Figure 1: Crude rate of finished admission episodes for self-harm per 100,000 population aged 10-14 years 2018/19- 2022/23 Kent and England.



Source: Fingertips

<sup>3</sup> [Safeguarding in adolescent mental health research: navigating dilemmas and developing procedures | BMJ Open](#)

Figure 2: Crude rate of finished admission episodes for self-harm per 100,000 population aged 15-19 years 2018/19- 2022/23 Kent and England.



Source: Fingertips

- 2.4 These two figures show changes regarding admission for self-harm across the five year period. The higher rates of admission for self-harm are amongst 20-24 year olds.
- 2.5 There is growing concern about how body image dissatisfaction negatively impacts the health and wellbeing of children and young people. These concerns have led to calls for the implementation of stricter legislations and control measures regarding the access and licensing of cosmetic procedures in England.
- 2.6 The Mental Health Foundation defines body image as the way people think and feel about their bodies, including how satisfied they are with their body and how much they value what other people think about their body. The Mental Health Foundation study in 2019 <sup>4</sup>reported that 31% of teenagers and 35% of adults felt ashamed or depressed because of their body image. Of young people aged 13–19, 40% reported that images on social media made them worry in relation to their body image, which was tied for the most reported factor along with things their friends said. These findings were corroborated in the Good Childhood report in 2021<sup>5</sup> which highlighted appearance as a leading cause of unhappiness among young people and indicated that appearance concerns are increasing year on year.

<sup>4</sup> Mental Health Foundation. (2019). Body Image: How we think and feel about our bodies. London: Mental Health Foundation <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/body-image-report>.

<sup>5</sup> . <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/2021>

The Body Dysmorphic Foundation <sup>6</sup>also projected that 1 in 5 adults and 1 in 3 teenagers feel shame about the way they look.

### **3. Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD)**

- 3.1 The term Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) describes a disabling preoccupation with perceived defects or flaws in appearance. A person's skin, hair, weight, or muscles become a complete pre-occupation. It can affect all genders, and makes sufferers excessively self-conscious. The body images presented through social media have a detrimental effect. People may react by withdrawing and avoiding [avoidance behaviour]. Accessible resources to support families and schools<sup>7 8</sup> are available.
- 3.1 The intensity of body dysmorphia to correct a flaw in appearance means the availability of and access to non-surgical cosmetics is a worry. A recent health box initiative at one healthy living centre in Kent for young people to leave questions on health, has found body imagery and mental health to be one issue highlighted.

### **4. Non-Surgical Cosmetic procedures**

- 4.1 The non-surgical cosmetic procedures <sup>9</sup> landscape encompasses a vast range of procedures, techniques, products and services, with wide variation in complexity and invasiveness. The range of procedures available in Kent includes ear piercing, cosmetic piercing, semi-permanent makeup, micro blading, tattooing, acupuncture, electrolysis and tooth whitening.
- 4.2 Parliament has been advocating for change<sup>10</sup> much of which has not been legislated at this time. The intention is to have all practitioners licensed and all premises licensed with the relevant local authority. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [Homepage - BDD Foundation](#)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/programmes/families-children-and-young-people/resources/body-image-school-pack>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/body-image-and-mental-health/mind-over-mirror/mirror-my-mind-comics>

<sup>9</sup> 'Cosmetic procedure' means a procedure, other than a surgical or dental procedure, that is or may be carried out for cosmetic purposes; and the reference to a procedure includes:

- (a) the injection of a substance
- (b) the application of a substance that is capable of penetrating into or through the epidermis
- (c) the insertion of needles into the skin
- (d) the placing of threads under the skin
- (e) the application of light, electricity, cold or heat

<sup>10</sup> Consultation on the licensing of non- surgical cosmetic procedures in England September 2023

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/licensing-of-non-surgical-cosmetic-procedures/the-licensing-of-non-surgical-cosmetic-procedures-in-england>

<sup>11</sup> Health and Care Act 2022 – powers and definitions. The powers prohibit people in England from: Carrying out specified cosmetic procedures in the course of business unless they hold a personal licence, and; Using or allowing the use of a premises for the provision of these procedures unless they have a premises licence

- 4.3 The information on premises which offer non-surgical procedures locally suggests that these may be registered annually with a local authority. Tattooing cannot be offered to under 18's, the police can enforce the Tattooing of Minors Act 1969. Consent by practitioners for piercing those under 16 years may require parental consent. Tooth whitening should not be undertaken with those under 18 years of age. Until the consultation on legislation for non-cosmetic procedures which was completed in the last parliament is progressed, access of young people to non-surgical procedures remains and the varying impacts on wellbeing continue.
- 4.4. From 1 October 2021 the [Botulinum Toxin and Cosmetic Fillers \(Children\) Act 2021](#) made it an offence for a person to administer botulinum toxin, or a filler by way of injection for a cosmetic purpose, to a person under 18 in England. The act also made it an offence to make arrangements to undertake, or arrange for another person to undertake, these procedures on a person under 18 in England. Botulinum toxins are medicines injected into the skin to smooth lines and wrinkles. Cosmetic fillers are gel-like substances commonly injected into the lips or face to add volume and plump the injected area.
- 4.4 The act was introduced in recognition of the fact that those procedures carry risks to physical health, including infection, blindness and, in rare cases, death and there are psychological implications associated with changing physical appearance. Young people are particularly vulnerable as they are developing physically and mentally, and there are ethical implications around the extent to which they can give informed consent to procedures. These procedures can only be carried out by qualified and regulated healthcare professionals working out of Care Quality Commissioning (CQC) registered premises. Guidance for families on this act is available.<sup>12</sup>
- 4.5 The Public Health grant conditions in 2023/24 included an adjustment to cover the cost of the roll out of local authority duties under the Botulinum Toxin and Cosmetic Fillers (Children) Act 2021. The value of the grant in Kent was £30,748 for local government trading standards. A memorandum of understanding [MoU] was developed as part of the enforcement elements of the Botulinum Toxin and Fillers (Children) Act 2021.
- 4.6 Trading standards engaged a contractor who identified and contacted 307 providers of Botulinum Toxin and Cosmetic Filler treatments in Kent. Letter and guidance notes regarding the legislation were provided with visits to businesses which found some closed. Checks on compliance with the legislation revealed some weakness in due diligence which led to the development of [#LetsTalkBotox Kent Trading Standards Botox Campaign](#). Recommendation from this work included that future advice and compliance visits and Challenge 25 tests are conducted.

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<sup>12</sup> [Botulinum toxin and cosmetic fillers for under 18s - GOV.UK](#)

## 5 Conclusion

- 5.1 It is unclear whether there has been change for young people in Kent through the introduction of the legislation on cosmetic procedures in 2021 as there is no information found which identifies the procedures undertaken previously or currently. It is not known whether questions are asked about mental health and wellbeing prior to any procedure and if any follow up takes place.

## 6. Recommendation

- 6.1 The Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** and to **COMMENT** the information contained within this report.
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## 7. Background Documents

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/programmes/families-children-and-young-people/resources/body-image-school-pack>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/body-image-and-mental-health/mind-over-mirror/mirror-my-mind-comics>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/licensing-of-non-surgical-cosmetic-procedures/the-licensing-of-non-surgical-cosmetic-procedures-in-england>

[Botulinum toxin and cosmetic fillers for under 18s - GOV.UK](#)

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