Suicide in Children and Young People

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October 2021

NCMD

National Child Mortality Database

Knowledge, understanding and learning to improve young lives

NCMD Thematic Report on Suicide in Children and Young People

Publication date:

14th October 2021

www.ncmd.info

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Acknowledgements – Public and Patient Involvement

- Sarah Skelton (Head of Programme Development, Papyrus-UK) – member of report working group
- Ray, bereaved father of Ben, 14 years old and the young person who bravely shared their experiences with us, for section 7 of this report.
- Suzanne Howes, mother to Samuel Howes, aged 17 for reviewing the report and providing feedback as a bereaved parent.
- NCMD partner charity organisations: The Lullaby Trust, Sands and Child Bereavement UK for their review and contributions to the final draft.

Acknowledgements

All CDOPs & Professionals engaging in Child Death Review

NCMD Team

NCMD Professional Advisory Group

NCMD Steering Group

Prof Louis Appleby, for writing the foreword

The National Police Chief's Council Homicide Working Group, Child Death Sub-group for their review and contributions to the final draft.

Lemn Sissay OBE for granting permission to use his poem in section 8 of the report.

NCMD Partners

Acknowledgements – Authors

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Our Aim

To collate and analyse information nationally to ensure that deaths are learned from, that learning is widely shared and that actions are taken, locally and nationally, to reduce the number of children who die.

Suicide in Children and Young People

"Suicide is complex, rarely caused by one thing, and suicide prevention is also complex. We need to understand who is at risk and when, the stresses and settings, and the response of services. We need to know the numbers – these are not dry data; they tell us the size of the prevention challenge and whether risk is changing."

Prof Louis Appleby, Foreword

Methodology

Data relating to two separate cohorts of children and young people

Notification Cohort: Children and young people who died between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 and whose death was coded by the NCMD team as being **highly or moderately likely due to suicide**.

Review Cohort: Children and young people whose deaths were reviewed by a CDOP between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 and classified by CDOP as Category 2* on the statutory analysis form, excluding those assessed as substance misuse related deaths. **The deaths of these children and young people occurred between 2015/16 and 2019/20**.

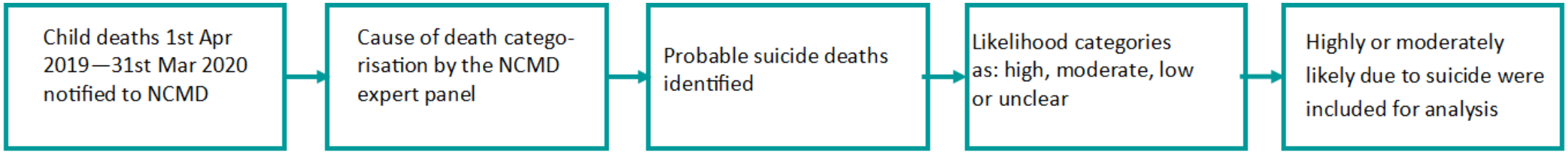
* Category 2 relates to deaths due to suicide or deliberate self-inflicted harm. This includes deaths as the result of hanging, shooting, self-poisoning with drugs, death by self-asphyxia, from solvent inhalation, alcohol or drug abuse, or other form of self-harm.

Methodology – Notification Cohort

Aim: To describe the characteristics of children and young people whose deaths are likely to have been due to suicide

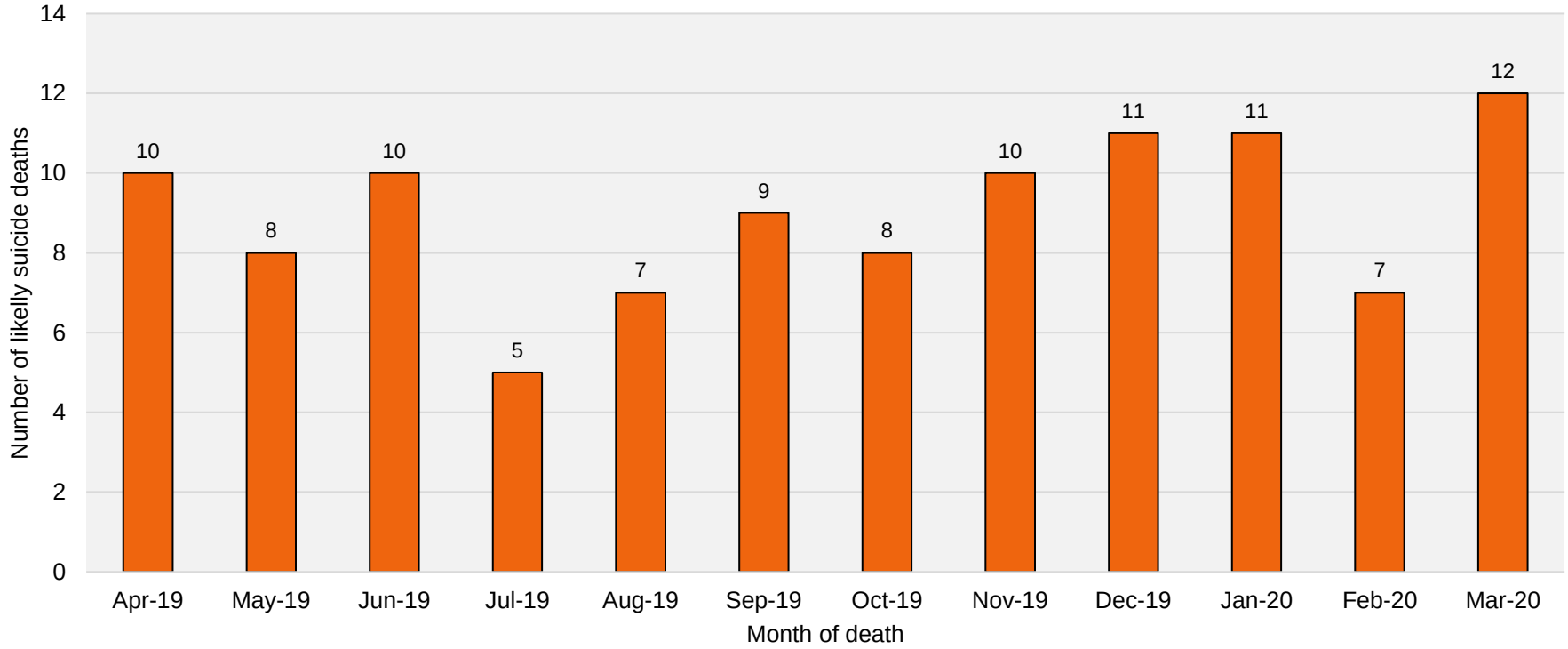
Data Source: The child death notification form, completed within 48 hours of the death occurring, usually by a Joint Agency Response (JAR) practitioner (paediatrician, nurse or health visitor) or a police officer. Includes information from discussions with the child or young person's family in the 48 hours following the death. Some deaths may subsequently be re-classified as due to something other than suicide once the full post-mortem, investigation and review process have been completed.

Categorisation:



Analysis: Rates of suicide derived by:
-2019 ONS estimated data by sex, age and region of residence for 9 to 17 years-old
-Negative binominal distribution model for statistical comparisons
-P-values using the likelihood ratio test

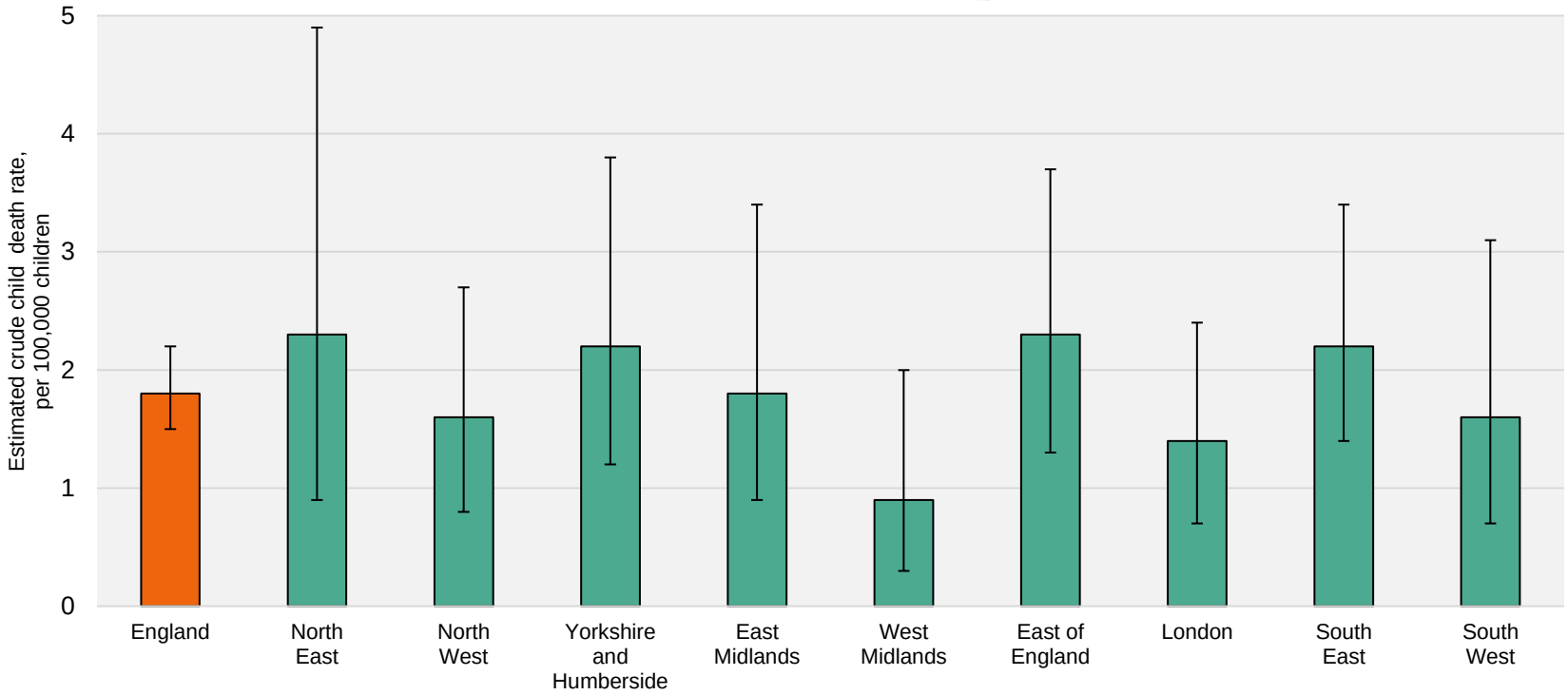
The number of child/young person death notifications received by CDOPs assessed as highly or moderately likely to be due to suicide by month, year ending 31 March 2020.



Total n=108

Data source NCMD

Rate of child/young person deaths assessed as highly or moderately likely to be due to suicide by region, year ending 31 March 2020.

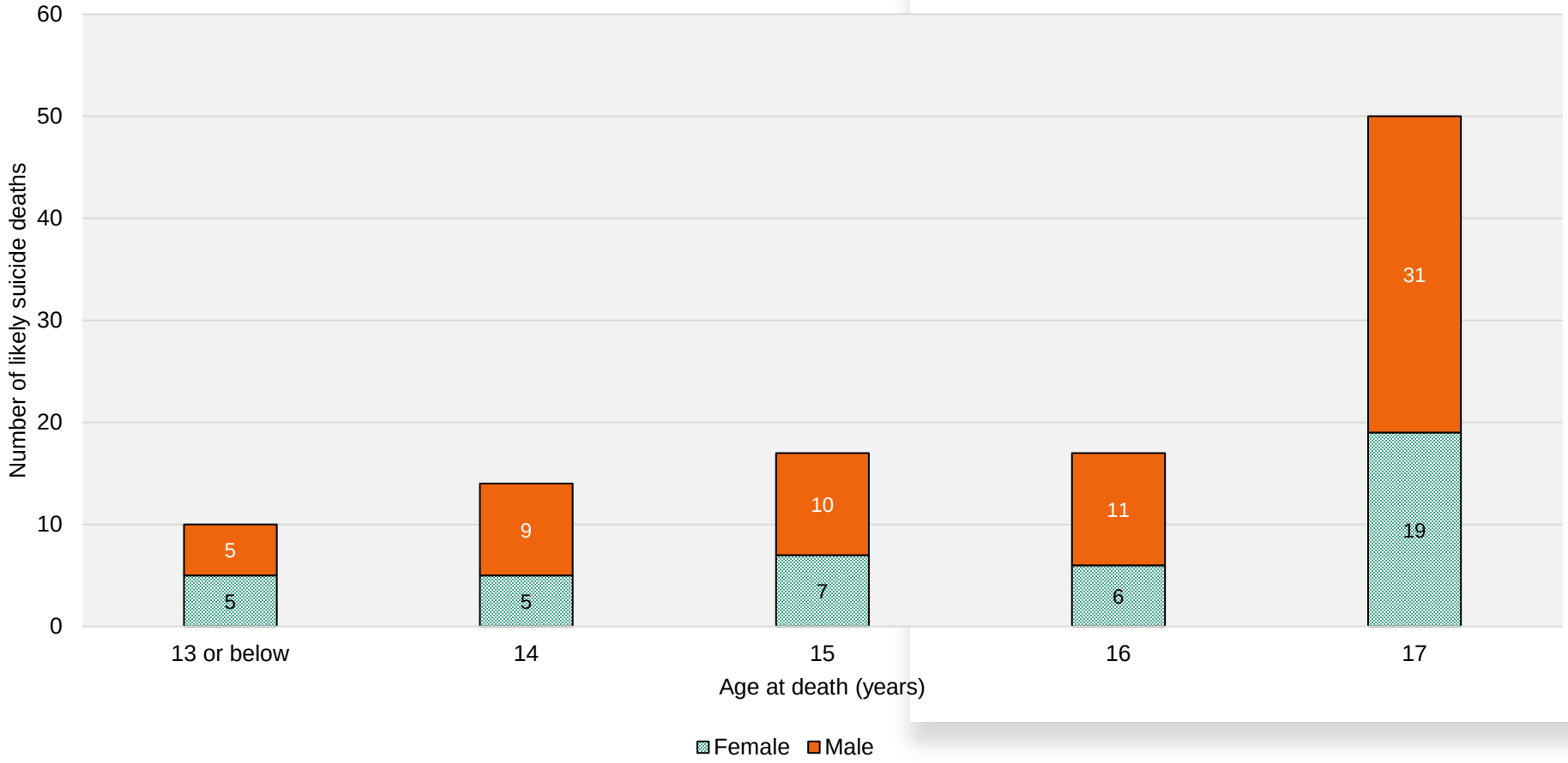


Data source: NCMD, 2019 mid-year population estimate (ONS)

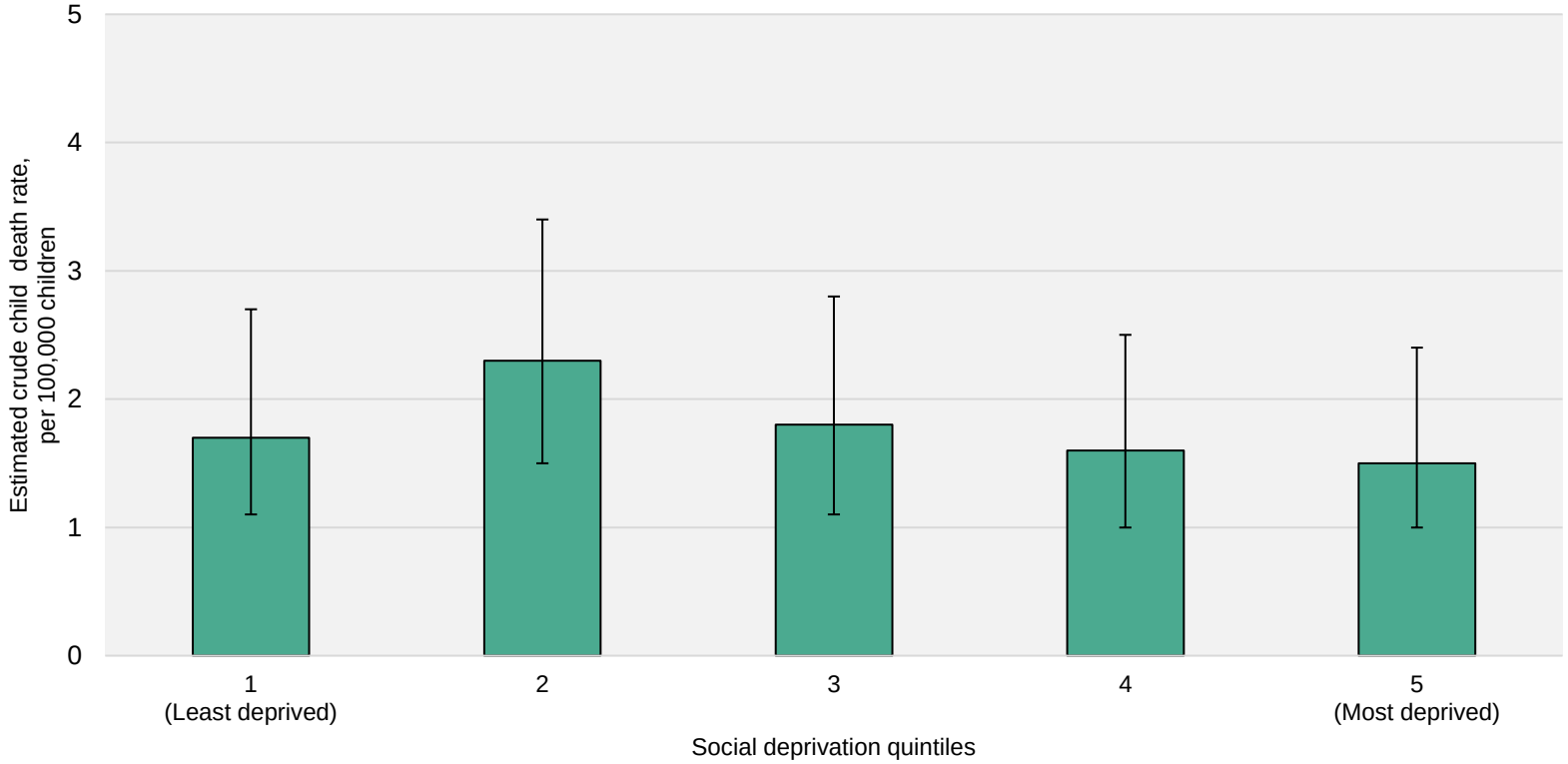
I represents 95% confidence intervals

In 3 instances postcode was not known or incomplete and data linkage to derive region was not possible

The number of deaths of children/young people assessed as highly or moderately likely to be due to suicide, by sex and age at death, year ending 31 March 2020.



The rate of child/young person deaths assessed as highly or moderately likely to be due to suicide and the estimated crude death rate by deprivation quintiles, year ending 31 March 2020

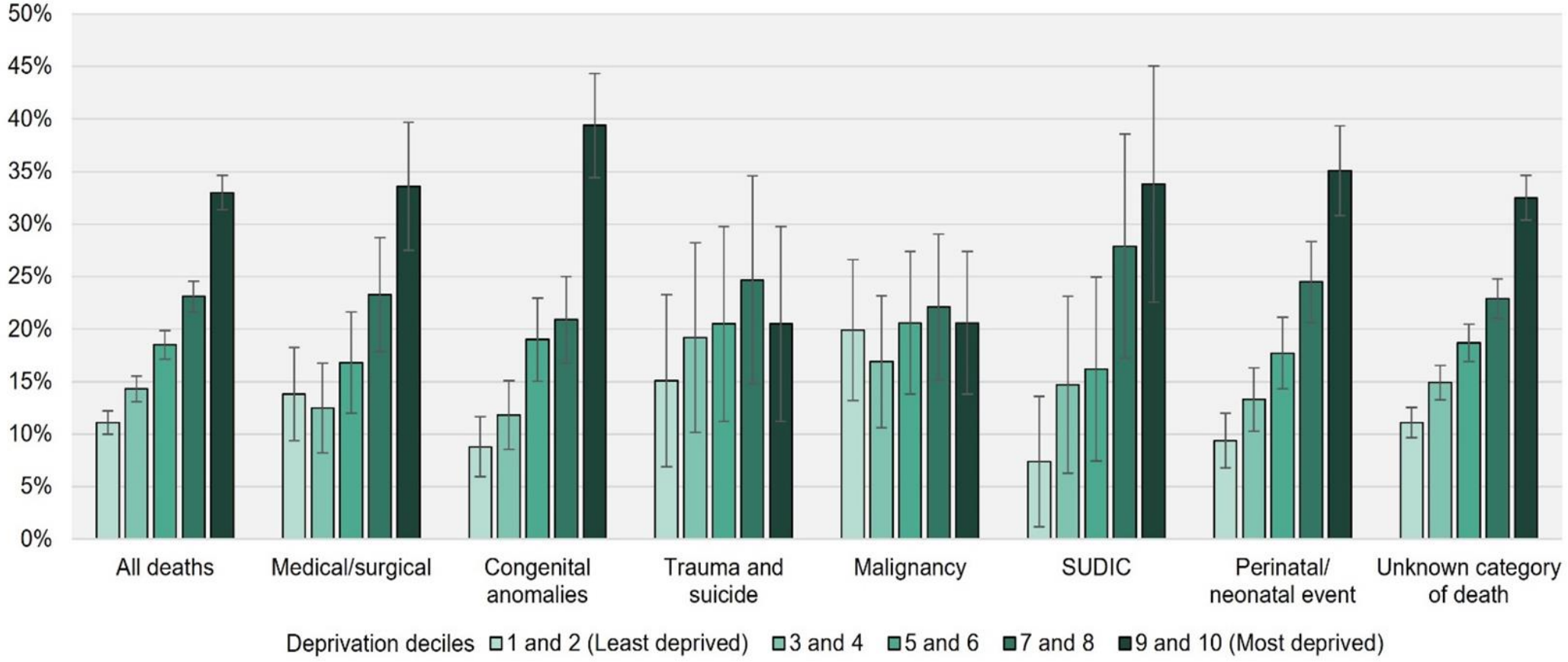


Data source: NCMD, IMD (2019)

I represents 95% confidence intervals

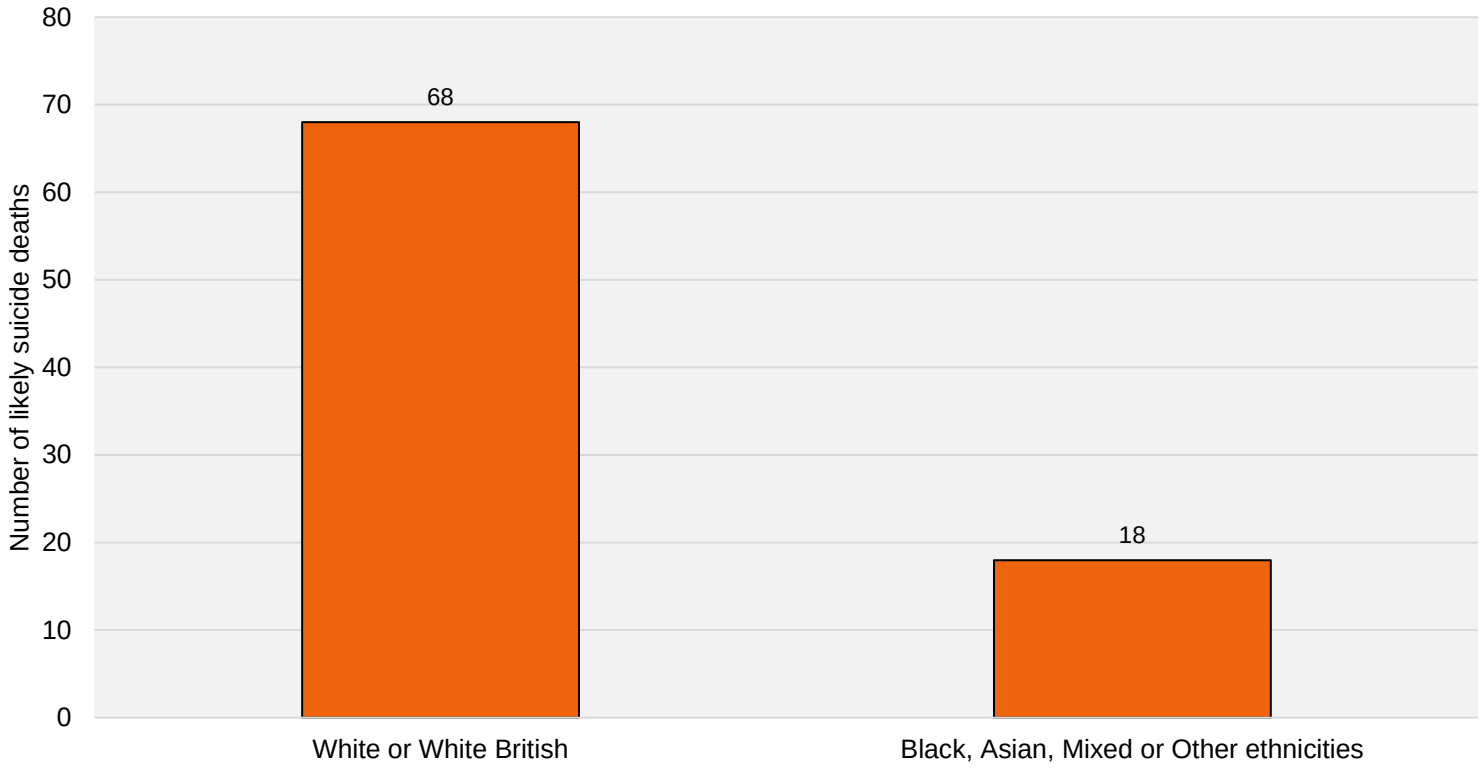
The postcode of each child or young person was linked to its corresponding Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2019) which is an areas base measure of social deprivation calculated to the granularity of around 1,500 people. Each neighbourhood is ranked from most deprived to least deprived, which are then divided into five equal sized groups (quintiles).

The proportion of deaths in each pair of deprivation deciles for all deaths and across each category of death, including 95% confidence intervals (Cohort 1)



Source: NCMD Thematic report on Child Mortality and Social Deprivation

The number of child/young person deaths assessed as highly or moderately likely to be due to suicide by ethnic group, year ending 31 March 2020.



Data source: NCMD

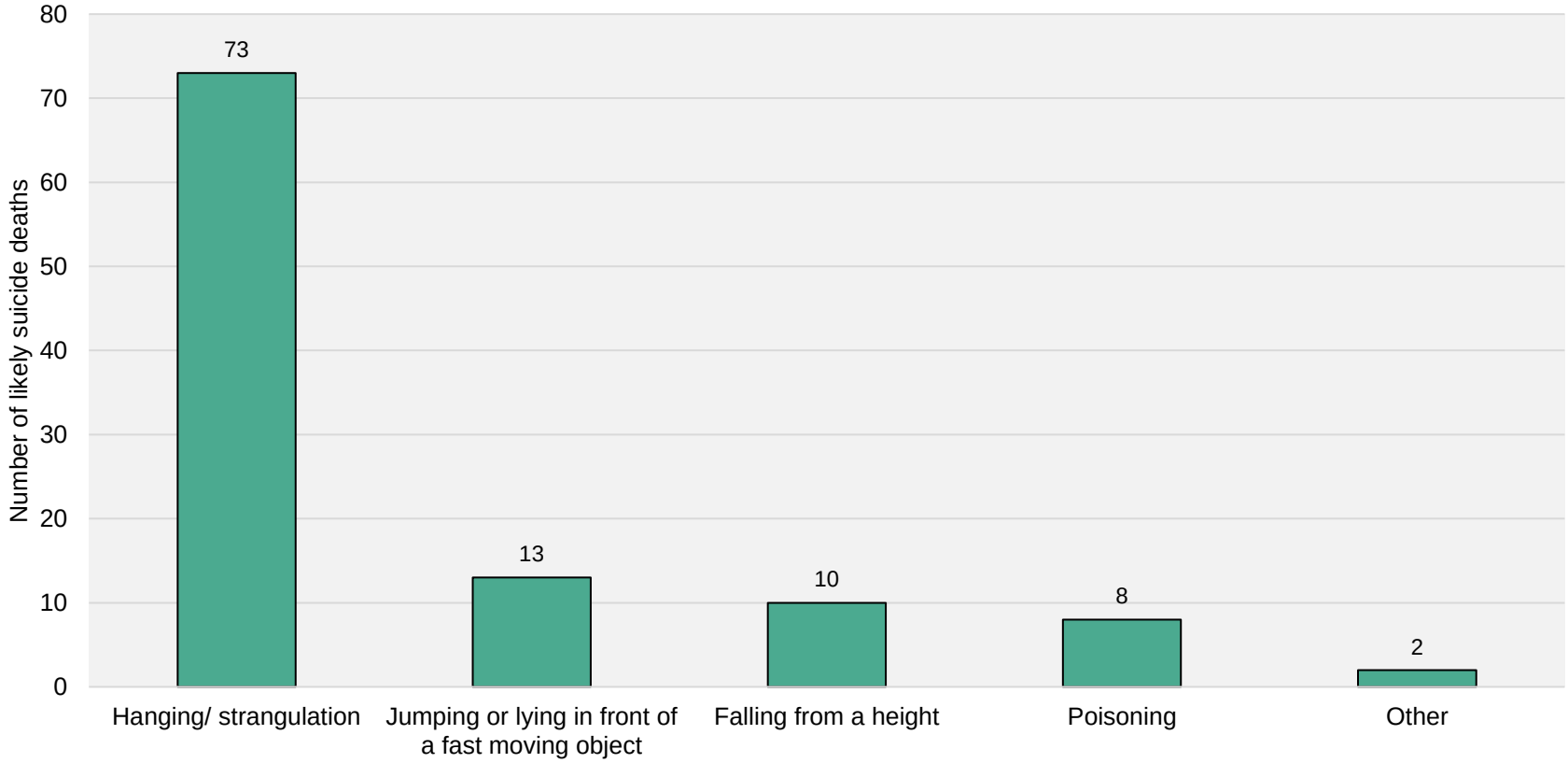
In 22 instances, data for the child's ethnic group was not known or incomplete.

NCMD National Child Mortality Database

The number and estimated rate of child/young person deaths assessed as being highly or moderately likely to be due to suicide by characteristic, year ending 31 March 2020.

	Number (%) of deaths	Estimated population (9 – 17 years)*	Estimated crude death rate, per 100,000 children/ young people (95% CI)	p-value
All likely suicide deaths	108 (100%)	5,886,033	1.8 (1.5-2.2)	
Age at death (years)				0.008
13 or below	10 (9%)	3,420,413	0.3 (0.1-0.5)	
14	14 (13%)	634,057	2.2 (1.2-3.7)	
15	17 (16%)	624,607	2.7 (1.6-4.4)	
16	17 (16%)	607,513	2.8 (1.6-4.5)	
17	50 (46%)	599,443	8.3 (6.2-11.0)	
Sex				0.042
Female	42 (39%)	2,867,247	1.5 (1.0-2.0)	
Male	66 (61%)	3,018,786	2.2 (1.7-2.8)	
Region^				0.524
North East	6 (6%)	265,152	2.3 (0.9-4.9)	
North West	12 (11%)	766,943	1.6 (0.8-2.7)	
Yorkshire and Humberside	13 (12%)	578,372	2.2 (1.2-3.8)	
East Midlands	9 (9%)	496,503	1.8 (0.9-3.4)	
West Midlands	6 (6%)	639,818	0.9 (0.3-2.0)	
East of England	15 (14%)	660,032	2.3 (1.3-3.7)	
London	13 (12%)	938,220	1.4 (0.7-2.4)	
South East	22 (21%)	985,645	2.2 (1.4-3.4)	
South West	9 (9%)	555,345	1.6 (0.7-3.1)	
Area^				0.920
Urban	88 (84%)	4,911,642	1.8 (1.4-2.2)	
Rural	17 (16%)	974,388	1.7 (1.0-2.8)	
Social deprivation quintile^				0.390
1 (Least deprived)	20 (19%)	1,161,657	1.7 (1.1-2.7)	
2	25 (24%)	1,084,237	2.3 (1.5-3.4)	
3	20 (19%)	1,101,612	1.8 (1.1-2.8)	
4	19 (18%)	1,179,815	1.6 (1.0-2.5)	
5 (Most deprived)	21 (20%)	1,358,709	1.5 (1.0-2.4)	

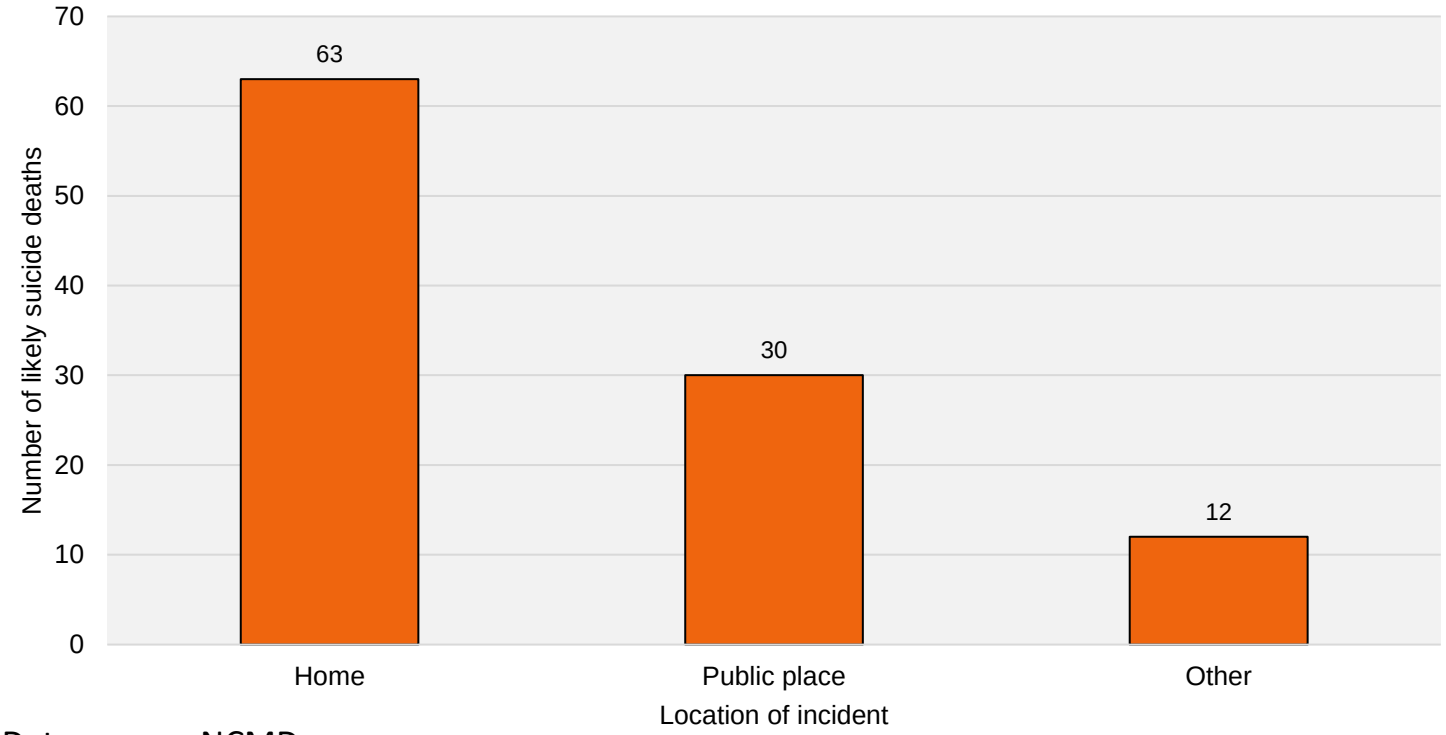
The number of child/young person deaths assessed as highly or moderately likely to be due to suicide by method, year ending 31 March 2020.



Data source: NCMD

n=106; In 2 instances the method was not known, or incomplete

The number of child/young person deaths assessed as being highly or moderately likely to be due to suicide by the location of incident, year ending 31 March 2020.



Data source: NCMD

In 3 instances the location of the incident was not known or incomplete

Other includes school or college, hospital, other private residences and accommodation

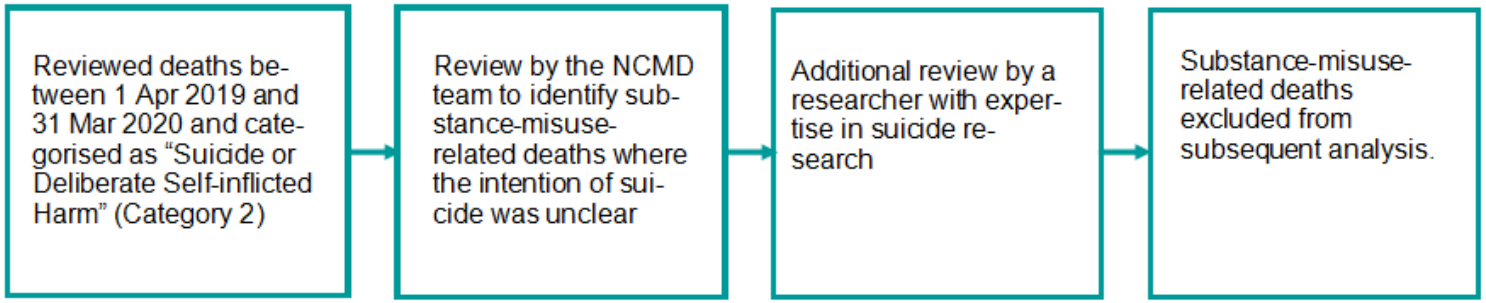
Methodology – Review Cohort

Aim: To analyse the background/antecedent factors present in those children and young people who died by suicide.

Data Source: Review cohort. From the details provided in the finalised child death review provided by the CDOP. It includes information from the:

- child death notification form
- reporting form
- supplementary reporting form for Suicide or Self-Harm
- analysis form (Multi-agency CDOP review)

Inclusion criteria:



Methodology – Review Cohort

The value in analysing this information

- Identifies features in the background and social context of the child or young person, which may have contributed to their suicide risk

- The data is submitted following the conclusion of the post-mortem and coronial process and the conclusion of the child death review process

- Using the CDOP classification of death enables identification of any deaths not classified as suicide by the coroner, particularly for those deaths that occurred prior to July 2018 when the standard of proof required for a suicide conclusion at a coronial inquest was higher.

Appendix A: Definition of factors

Factor	Definition
Mental health needs of the child	Children and young people with a confirmed diagnosis of one or more mental health conditions at the time of their death. Examples include: depression, anxiety, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation.
Risk-taking behaviours	Children and young people who have previously attempted suicide or have engaged in non-suicidal self-harm. Those who have shown non-compliance with treatment or medication and other risk-taking behaviours such as driving while under the influence of alcohol.
Household functioning	Factors within household circumstances that may contribute to the child's vulnerability or mental ill health. Examples include family members with a medical or mental health problem. Alcohol or substance misuse by a family member, domestic abuse and divorce or parental separation.
Loss of key relationships	The loss of any significant relationship for a child or young person. Examples include break-up of a relationship with a partner, the death of a friend or relative or other bereavement, or a move of house or school resulting in loss of contact with friends and communities.
Conflict within key relationships	An argument or any other conflict between the child or young person and any significant person in their life.

Bullying	Children or young people who have been the victim of bullying either online or face to face. Examples include physical or verbal attacks or threats, social exclusion and sexist or racist or homophobic abuse.
Social media and internet use	The presence of negative social media or internet use in the child's life. Examples include suicide related internet use (e.g., searching for information on suicide, communicating suicidal ideas online, visiting "pro-suicide" websites/ chatrooms) and sexting.
Problems with service provision	Any problem related to the provision of any service to children and young people. Examples include poor information sharing and communication between professionals, gaps in service provision (e.g., poor quality or absent referrals).
Abuse and neglect	Children or young people who have been subject to any form or abuse or neglect.
Problems at school	Any problem at school including fixed term or permanent exclusions, regular non-attendance, coursework or exam stresses or concerns about results.
Medical condition in the child	Children and young people with a confirmed diagnosis of one or more medical conditions at the time of their death. This includes chronic health conditions, chromosomal, genetic or congenital anomaly, malignancy, or any other medical condition.

Factor	Definition
Drug or alcohol misuse by the child	Children and young people who have previously used drugs or alcohol or have used drugs or alcohol excessively.
Problems with the law	Children and young people who were the known perpetrators of a crime, known to the criminal justice system or youth offending service.
Sexual orientation, sexual identity and gender identity	Children and young people who had worries or concerns around sexual identity, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
Neurodevelopmental conditions	Children and young people with a confirmed diagnosis of one or more neurodevelopmental condition at the time of their death. This includes autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and any other neurodevelopmental conditions.

The number of child/young person death reviews with factors present within each category, year ending 31 March 2020.

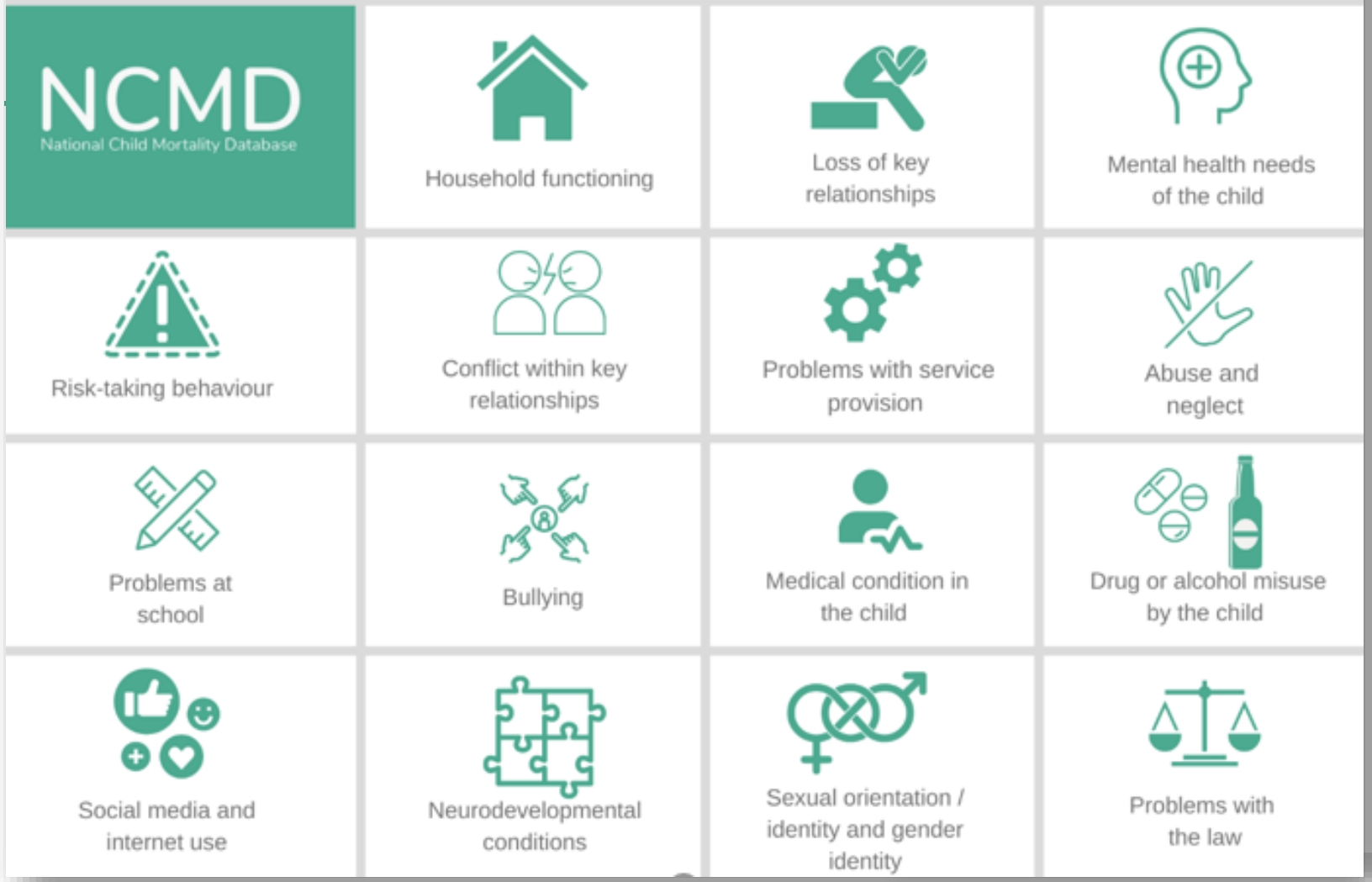
Out of a total of 91 deaths, 81 (89%) children or young people had an adverse factor in more than one category, with 51 (56%) children or young people identifying an adverse factor in 5 or more categories.

The interaction between these factors needs further investigation.

Category	Number (%) of deaths reviewed with at least one factor within the category
Household functioning	63 (69%)
Loss of key relationships	56 (62%)
Mental health needs of the child/ young person	50 (55%)
Risk taking behaviours	45 (49%)
Conflict within key relationships	41 (45%)
Problems with service provision	32 (35%)
Abuse and neglect	29 (32%)
Problems at school	27 (30%)
Bullying	21 (23%)
Medical condition in the child/young person	21 (23%)
Drug or alcohol misuse by the child/ young person	18 (20%)
Social media and internet use	16 (18%)
Neurodevelopmental conditions	15 (16%)
Sexual orientation, sexual identity, and gender identity	8 (9%)
Problems with the law	8 (9%)

Factors present in suicides reviewed by CDOPs

Based on child death reviews (England) 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020



Key Findings in Brief

- Services should be aware that child suicide is not limited to certain groups; rates of suicide were similar across all areas, and regions in England, including urban and rural environments, and across deprived and affluent neighbourhoods.

- 62% of children or young people reviewed had suffered a significant personal loss in their life prior to their death, this includes bereavement and “living losses” such as loss of friendships and routine due to moving home or school or other close relationship breakdown.

- Over one third of the children and young people reviewed had never been in contact with mental health services. This suggests that mental health needs or risks were not identified prior to the child or young person’s death.

- 16% of children or young people reviewed had a confirmed diagnosis of a neurodevelopmental condition at the time of their death. For example, autism spectrum disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This appears higher than found in the general population.

- Almost a quarter of children and young people reviewed had experienced bullying either face to face or cyber bullying. The majority of reported bullying occurred in school, highlighting the need for clear anti-bullying policies in schools.

Learning from CDOPs (Chapter 8)

- Poor joint working and information sharing
- Lack of confidence amongst professionals to talk about suicide with children and young people.
- The importance of safe and accessible spaces for children and young people.
- The importance of recognising the impact of background social factors on the mental health and well-being of children and young people.
- The importance of accessibility to mental health services
- Lack of clear policies on bullying and cyber bullying in schools and colleges.
- The importance of recognition of challenges for children and young people related to their protected characteristics

- **Best Practice Case Study: South East Region – Sub-Regional 0-25 Suicide Analysis**

The report's recommendations

are based on the data contained in the analysis of the notification and review cohorts and the learning points identified by CDOPs

They are aimed at:

Everyone who is involved in the provision of services for children and young people

We recommend that everyone should:

Study the recommendations relevant to their sector and areas of practice

Take action by utilising quality improvement methodologies in their local area

Do this by working collaboratively across agencies to ensure a systematic approach to improving the safety and effectiveness of their service provision (Case Study: South East England)

Recommendations for everyone involved in the provision of services for children and young people

1. Ensure all frontline staff working with children and young people 10 years of age and over are supported to attend suicide prevention training
2. Improve awareness of the impact of domestic abuse, parental physical and mental health needs and conflict at home
3. Review existing national policies and guidance to ensure they emphasise the range of indicators that this report has identified to improve awareness of the possibility of child suicide
4. Ensure all schools and colleges (including independent and faith-based schools) have clear anti-bullying policies that include guidance on how to assess the risk of suicide for children and young people experiencing bullying and when and under what circumstances multi-agency meetings will be called to discuss individual children/young people
5. Review local policies on information sharing and escalation to ensure children and young people at risk of suicide can be identified and supported
6. Issue revised guidance to schools on the use of exclusion. Guidance should recognise that when a child or young person is permanently excluded from school or college, any relationships with universal services are at risk of becoming fractured
7. Support the continued roll out of children and young people's mental health services across community settings such as schools, local authorities and criminal justice to improve accessibility (including availability of clear referral criteria, pathways and adult service transition) and capacity of services for children and young people.
8. National roll-out of the questions developed in the South-East England Best Practice case study included in this report to ensure appropriate identification and targeting of postvention support (actions taken to support the community after someone dies by suicide)
9. Improve information and advice available to parents/carers, primary care and community services about monitoring (signs to be concerned) and support for children and young people, including those who disengage with mental health services. This should include access to local crisis helplines and national resources

Further information

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NCMD
National Child Mortality Database

Knowledge, understanding and learning to improve young lives