

**SAMARITANS**

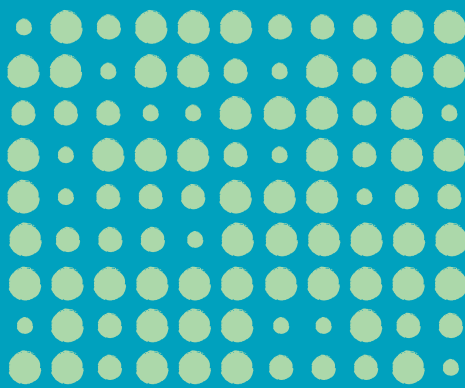
# Economic Disruption:

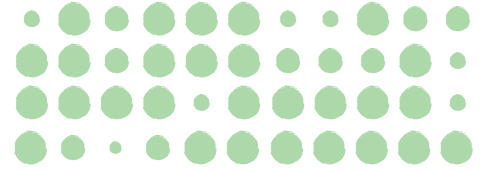
**Policy Briefing**

England, December 2021



What should be done to better support young adults who are struggling with their mental health having experienced economic disruption?





## Intro

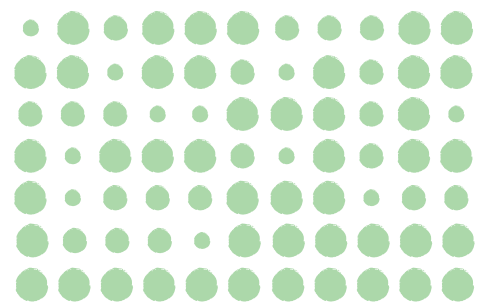
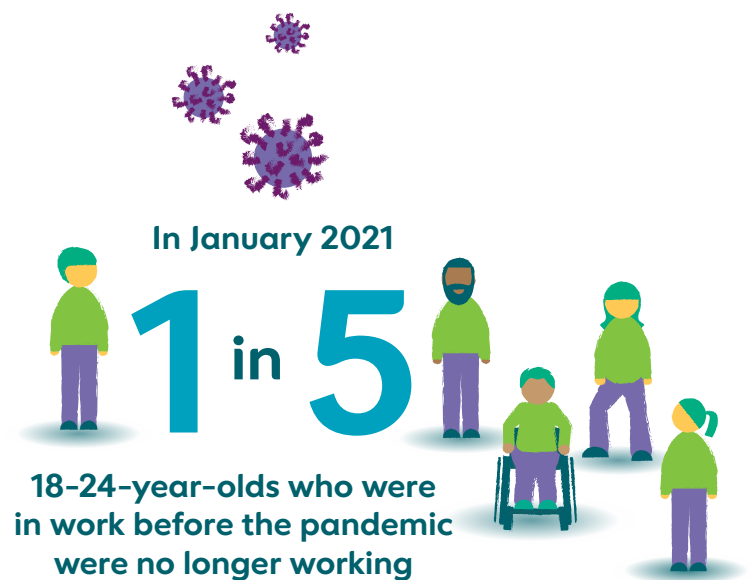
**This policy briefing puts forward five recommendations for policymakers in England, based on Samaritans' report *The impact of economic disruption on young adults*. Implementing these recommendations will help to ensure that young adults who have experienced economic disruption and are struggling with their mental health are better supported than many of the individuals we spoke to through our research.**

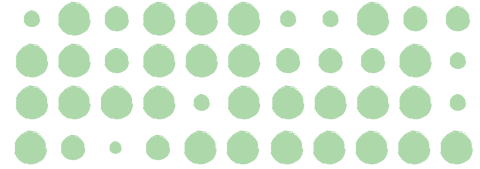
### Policy context

The historic link between socioeconomic disadvantage and suicide risk has been well evidenced<sup>1</sup>, as has the relationship between economic recessions and suicide<sup>2</sup>. However the relationship between suicidality and economic disruption has not been so well explored among young people specifically.

There is no data at the time of writing to suggest that national suicide rates have risen during the coronavirus pandemic<sup>3</sup>. However there are a number of reasons that we are concerned about the impact economic disruption linked to the pandemic has had, and may continue to have, on the wellbeing and suicide risk of young people. Young people have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic both in terms of their mental health and economically. In January 2021, one-in-five (20%) 18-24-year-olds who were in work before the pandemic were no longer working, compared to 4% of 25-54 year olds<sup>4</sup>. We also know that rates of suicide<sup>5</sup> and self-harm<sup>6</sup> have been increasing among young people, and in particular young women, in recent years. As such, the prevalence of risk factors for suicidality among young people were worsening before the pandemic.

The Government has responded to the disproportionate economic impact of the pandemic on young people by creating the Kickstart Scheme. The Scheme supports young adults aged 16-24, who have been in receipt of Universal Credit for six months or more, into work. As of October 2021, the scheme has supported 95,000 young people into work<sup>7</sup>, with 498,000 listed as unemployed in June-August 2021<sup>8</sup>.

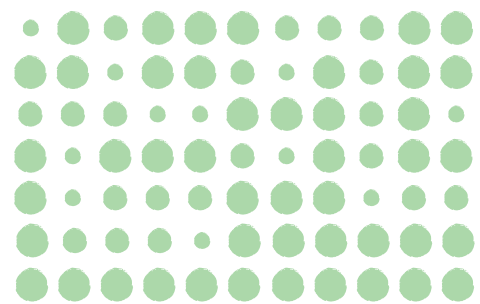
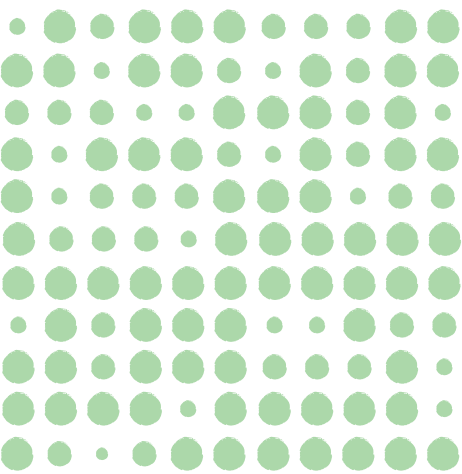


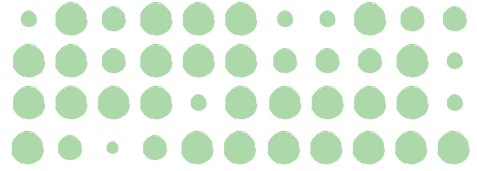


In our research, one of the primary events which acted as a trigger for feelings of defeat among young adults was feeling mistreated or exploited by their workplace. Young people are disproportionately more likely to be in insecure work<sup>9</sup> and those who took part in our research spoke of being overworked, underpaid, and having furlough payments worked out unfairly. They also spoke of being forced to work in unsafe conditions in the context of coronavirus. Others reported the negative impact of having hours reduced or contracts not extended by their employer. Being unaware of their workplace rights when facing job uncertainty was a factor in feeling powerless and demoralised.

There was concerningly little in the October 2021 Spending Review to address these issues<sup>10</sup>. The Resolution Foundation has noted the 'plausible risk' of employers relying more heavily on zero hour and temporary contracts as the UK economy begins to recover from the pandemic. They highlight the fact that the prevalence of insecure work rose, especially among young people, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis<sup>3</sup>. From our conversations with young adults, we know the importance of getting back into work to provide a financial 'escape route' from feelings of defeat, entrapment and hopelessness. However this must be into fairly paid, quality and stable work.

While suicide is never inevitable and is rarely caused by one thing, our research has evidenced a relationship between economic disruption and suicidality among young adults. This is particularly concerning in the context of 1.6 million people in England waiting for mental health treatment as of June 2021, with an estimated 8 million more not meeting the threshold to access mental health services which would benefit them<sup>11</sup>. Everyone Samaritans spoke to in our research who were in receipt of mental health services before the pandemic saw a drop in support since its onset. Concerningly, ring fenced funding for suicide prevention in many local areas will come to an end by the close of 2021, and others in 2023<sup>12</sup>, with no further funds yet committed.





## Overview of our research

### What did we do?

*The impact of economic disruption on young adults* examined the primary question:

**Does economic disruption among young adults increase levels of defeat, entrapment, suicidal thoughts and self-harm. And if so, how?**

We spoke to young adults who had experienced different forms of economic disruption during the first eighteen months of the pandemic. We defined economic disruption as job loss, a drop in income or job uncertainty, with the aim of understanding how economic disruption affects the psychological wellbeing of young adults. We explored the relationships between economic disruption and feelings of defeat, entrapment and suicidal thoughts – key antecedents for suicidal behaviour.

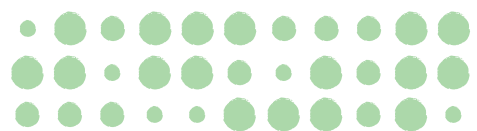
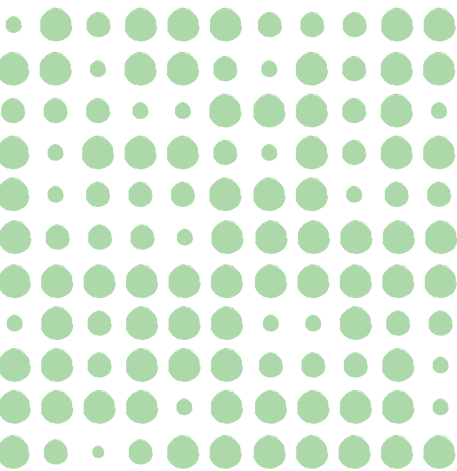
A full methodology can be found in the [main report](#).

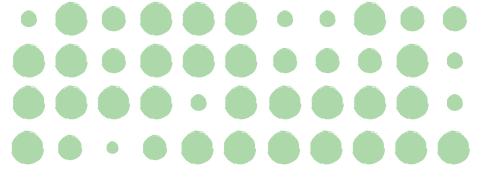
### What did we find?

There are four key findings from our research:

- **Young adults who experienced economic disruption in the past year were more likely to report suicidal thoughts.**
- **Economic disruption experienced by young adults, such as job loss, drop in income, reduced or less regular hours, predicted greater feelings of defeat and entrapment, key antecedents to suicidal feelings and behaviour.**
- **Young adults also felt feelings of shame and hopelessness after economic disruption.**
- **The impact of economic disruption is not experienced uniformly across all young people. The extent to which young adults' wellbeing was impacted was influenced by access to social support, financial support or other sources of income, pre-existing mental health conditions, and the nature of economic disruption itself.**

Our research told us that prolonged periods of financial uncertainty were associated with young people experiencing feelings of being trapped. We also found that people with pre-existing mental health conditions experience significantly higher levels of feelings of defeat compared to those without pre-existing mental health issues.





## Recommendations

Young adults who have experienced economic disruption need routes into secure, fairly paid work. They also need financial support and advice around their rights, as well as timely mental health support. The following recommendations provide routes to support, with the aim of alleviating or avoiding suicidal thoughts, as well as feelings of defeat, entrapment, shame and hopelessness.

### 1. The Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England should ensure that:

**(i)** Financial support within certain treatment pathways is broadened to everyone with a mental health care plan.

**(ii)** Mental health support workers are consistently trained in understanding relevant referral pathways for financial support and advice.

Currently, financial support, in the form of help with money problems, employment, training or education, is only required for people on certain treatment pathways in secondary mental health care<sup>13</sup>. Money advice and financial support should be consistently available to everyone on a mental health pathway in England, not just for those receiving secondary care but primary mental health support too.

Integral to achieving this will be training for mental health workers in primary care to understand and utilise referral pathways for financial support and money advice. Mental health support workers should be able to consistently provide warm referrals to debt advice, welfare advice and income maximisation services, in addition to effective signposting.

### 2. The Department for Work and Pensions should ensure that existing financial support and advice is proactively targeted at young adults who have experienced economic disruption and are struggling with their mental health

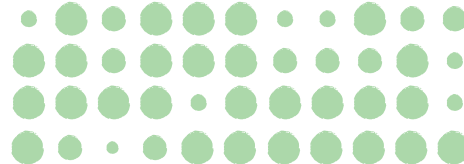
We know from our research that young adults who suffered economic disruption struggled to pay for essentials, such as household bills, and this left them feeling defeated. Those we spoke to who didn't have savings or other forms of financial support became reliant on loans and credit cards, compounding existing financial problems.

Some young adults told us that they lacked confidence in their workplace rights, including around the Government's furlough scheme, and so felt unable to challenge their employers when they felt they were being treated unfairly. For these young adults especially, greater awareness of their rights would have helped their financial situation and mental health.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should identify and proactively reach out to young adults who have experienced economic disruption with advice around their workplace rights and available financial support. This advice will empower young adults, especially those who are struggling with mental health issues, before they reach crisis.

“ I was being forced to go into work, but it felt unsafe... you can feel like there is no alternative... What do you do with your life? ”

Steven, 24, Male



### **3. Employment support from the Department for Work and Pensions should take into account the mental health needs of young adults more consistently**

Young adults told us that the more time they spent struggling to get back into work following job loss, the more trapped they felt. Not only did work provide financial security but access to social networks and also contributed to their sense of self. For many, returning to work represented a financial 'escape route' from feelings of defeat and entrapment and the trigger events which brought these feelings on. Getting young adults back into meaningful, secure work is therefore crucial for supporting their mental health.

#### **(i) Expand the individual placement support scheme to include a wider range of young adults.**

We know from our research that job uncertainty had a significant impact on feelings of defeat and entrapment for young adults. The flagship Kickstart Scheme, supporting young people into work after the pandemic, offers largely temporary roles often paid at the minimum wage.

An alternative option is placement and support schemes which help people struggling with their mental health back to work. These schemes provide intensive individual support, job searches and placement in paid employment. There is ongoing in-work support for both the employee and employer throughout the placement. At the present, such schemes are only available to people who experience severe mental health issues. However given what we know about the impact of economic disruption on the mental health of young adults, there is an opportunity to expand this to those who have experienced economic disruption but would not currently qualify for the scheme.

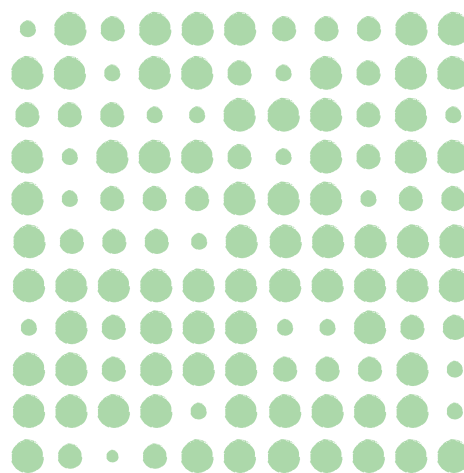
#### **(ii) Fund an expanded remit for Youth Hubs that includes increased mental health support.**

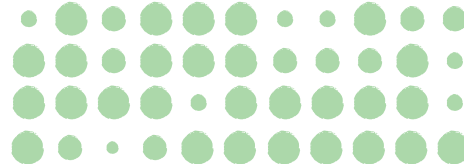
Youth Hubs within Jobcentre Plus, recently established by the DWP, represent an opportunity to provide support to young people who are struggling with mental health issues and have experienced economic disruption<sup>14</sup>. Youth Hubs should be funded to provide individualised, wraparound support to help young adults into good quality work, with intensive support for those experiencing mental health issues.

As well as helping young adults into high quality jobs, these hubs could go further by identifying people who are struggling with their mental health due to economic disruption and providing warm referrals to other forms of support. The hubs should recognise individual mental health needs which could impact a young person's ability to find and remain in work. It is important that these Youth Hubs are able to make and receive referrals from the Community Mental Health hubs mentioned in recommendation four.

“My lowest point, I felt hopeless and couldn't move forward as I was not working, so no income. But I got out of this when I started a new job, and this meant I could then move forward.”

**Susie, 21, Female**





#### 4. HM Treasury should provide funding for local areas in England to build a network of early access mental health hubs

“ My mental health was crashing down, and I felt like I didn't want to be here anymore. And for the first time it wasn't about me personally, but it was the world. I wanted to keep living, but not in that particular world. ”

**Carly, 21, Non-binary**

All the young adults we spoke to through our research with pre-existing mental health conditions experienced a reduction in support for their mental health as a result of the pandemic, either through increased waiting times or inconsistent appointments. One young adult who took part in a Samaritans' policy workshop was particularly isolated during the pandemic and told us that moving to an exclusively online system of support was a real struggle which entrenched their feelings of isolation, reflecting what Samaritans has heard through callers to our own helpline<sup>15</sup>.

It is crucial that there is investment in both crisis care and also preventative mental health support. We need sustainable funding for community-based, early intervention support for young people who have experienced economic disruption and are struggling with their mental health.

Samaritans is therefore backing the [#FundtheHubs](#) campaign, led by charity Young Minds and others, to implement a sustainable national funding model to build on the existing Youth Information Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) template. This will allow local areas to set up early access mental health hubs, drawing on and amplifying existing support and resources in the area. Reflecting the inextricable link between mental health and financial issues, lots of the hubs currently in existence provide financial advice and employment support for people up to the age of 25<sup>16</sup>.

#### 5. NHS England should ensure that social prescribing link workers are trained to support young adults struggling with their mental health having experienced economic disruption

“ Just speaking to my Mum 4-5 hours a day, nice to have that to look forward to and we got really close, the same with my partner too. ”

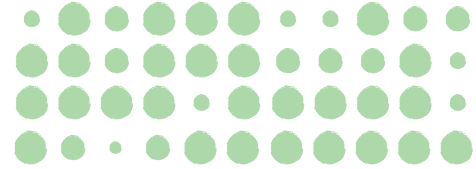
**Lisa, 23, Female**

In our conversations with young adults, social support was identified as a key mitigating factor for the impact of economic disruption. Conversely, people who lacked strong, supportive relationships tended to be more affected by economic disruption and felt very isolated.

Social prescribing allows GPs, nurses and other health professionals to refer people to non-clinical services in their local communities with the aim of supporting their health and wellbeing. Social prescribing link workers, based in local areas, help connect people with activities, groups and initiatives.

In October 2019 the Government announced a new National Academy of Social Prescribing, to standardise the quality and range of social prescribing available. The Government aims to refer 900,000 people into social prescribing schemes by 2023/24<sup>17</sup>.

Building on existing good practice<sup>18</sup>, social prescribing link workers should be trained in understanding the connection between economic disruption and key antecedents to suicidal feelings such as defeat and entrapment, taking into account the importance of social support in mitigating their impact. There should be a particular focus on supporting young people in this position, who are often isolated and lacking social support structures.



## References

1. Samaritans. 'Dying from Inequality: Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Suicidal Behaviour', 2017. <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/inequality-suicide/>
2. Oyesanya, Mayowa, Javier Lopez-Morinigo, and Rina Dutta. 'Systematic Review of Suicide in Economic Recession'. *World Journal of Psychiatry* 5, no. 2 (22 June 2015): 243–54. <https://doi.org/10.5498/wjp.v5.i2.243>
3. Pirkis, J et al. 'Suicide Trends in the Early Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Interrupted Time-Series Analysis of Preliminary Data from 21 Countries'. *The Lancet Psychiatry* 8, no. 7 (1 July 2021): 579–88. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(21\)00091-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00091-2).
4. Resolution Foundation, 'Double Trouble: Exploring the labour market and mental health impact of Covid-19 on young people', (2021), <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2021/05/Double-trouble.pdf>
5. ONS. 'Suicides in the UK: 2018 Registrations'. United Kingdom: Office for National Statistics, 2019. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2018registrations>.
6. Griffin et al., 'Increasing Rates of Self-Harm among Children, Adolescents and Young Adults: A 10-Year National Registry Study 2007-2016' *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol* 53 (2018): 663-771
7. HM Treasury, 'Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021', (2021) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1029973/Budget\\_AB2021\\_Print.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1029973/Budget_AB2021_Print.pdf)
8. House of Commons Library, 'Youth Employment Statistics', (October 2021), accessed 15 November 2021, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05871/>
9. ONS, 'Contracts that do not guarantee a minimum number of hours', (2018) accessed 15 November 2021 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/contracts-that-donot-guarantee-a-minimum-number-of-hours/april2018>
10. HM Treasury, 'Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021', (2021) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1029973/Budget\\_AB2021\\_Print.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1029973/Budget_AB2021_Print.pdf)
11. NHS Providers, 'Millions waiting for care as COVID-19 lays bare the challenges facing mental health services'. (August 2021), accessed 15 November 2021, <https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/news/millions-waiting-for-care-as-covid-19-lays-bare-the-challenges-facing-mental-health-services>
12. NHS England, 'Implementing the five year forward view for mental health', (2016), accessed 15 November 2021, <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mentalhealth/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2016/07/8.-Suicide-prevention.pdf>
13. Rethink Mental Illness, 'Care Programme Approach (CPA) Factsheet', last updated November 2020, accessed 15 November 2021, <https://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/treatment-and-support/care-programme-approach-cpa/>
14. Department for Work and Pensions, 'Over 110 new Youth Hubs offer job help', June 2021, last accessed 15 November 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-110-new-youth-hubs-offer-job-help>
15. Samaritans. 'One Year on: How the Coronavirus Pandemic Has Affected Wellbeing and Suicidality', June 2021. <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/coronavirus-and-suicide/one-year-on-data-on-covid-19/>.
16. Youth Access, 'The YIACS Model', last accessed 15 November 2021, <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/our-work/yiacs-model>
17. National Academy of Social Prescribing, 'What does the NHS think about social prescribing?', last accessed 15 November, 2021, <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/about-us/what-is-social-prescribing/what-does-the-nhs-think-about-social-prescribing/>
18. Bishop's Stortford Independent, 'New service signposts mental health support for Bishop's Stortford's young people.', October 2021, last accessed 15 November 2021. <https://www.bishopsstortfordindependent.co.uk/news/new-service-for-young-people-struggling-with-mental-health-i-9222438/>