Central University Research Ethics Committee Reference: MS IDREC 3109867

KS3 COHORT STUDY

Information for Parents and Carers

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What is BrainWaves?

Mental health challenges among young people have risen sharply, yet research and evidence-based support in schools remain under-resourced.

BrainWaves is a charity, with research and education at its core. It aims to transform the quality of wellbeing support and education available for young people today.

BrainWaves is transforming how schools, researchers, and young people access data and tools so that they can understand how to improve mental wellbeing.

<u>What BrainWaves does:</u>



Empowers researchers with data.

Equips schools with evidence-based lesson resources and training.

Supports young people to understand their wellbeing through science.

What is a Research Partner?

Your child's school/college has partnered with BrainWaves and become one of our many BrainWaves Research Partners across the UK. BrainWaves Research Partners support mental health education, prioritise student wellbeing and bridge the gap between research and the young people it affects.

Attending a BrainWaves Research Partner school or college means that your child benefits from:



Evidence-based, award-winning wellbeing lessons developed by experts and backed by Oxford University.

Teachers who are well informed and passionate about prioritising your child’s wellbeing.





The chance to have their voice heard, impacting the future of wellbeing education for thousands of other students across the country.

What is the Cohort Study?

The Cohort Study is an annual mental health and wellbeing questionnaire developed and led by Oxford University.

The aim of the study is to understand the causes and consequences of wellbeing in young people.

As of November 2025, there have been 24,000+ participants over two years.

The study is open to students aged 11 - 18 in BrainWaves Research Partner Schools and Colleges.





The Cohort Study is led and developed by experts at the University of Oxford.

Professors Sarah Bauermeister and John Gallacher
Co-directors, BrainWaves

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The Cohort Study: a timeline

The Cohort Study began in 2023, and has developed year on year.

2023: the study begins with a trial

The Study began in 2023 with a trial on how young people give consent in research. Learning from this trial, we launched our annual wellbeing questionnaire the following year.

24,000+ participants to date

As of November 2025, 24,000+ young people have chosen to participate and make their voices heard.

2026: expanded to include younger students

Previously, the study was only open to young people aged 16+ but from September 2026, students aged 11 - 14 (KS3 in England) have also been invited to take part.

In the future, we would like to continue expanding our offer and invite students aged 14 - 16 to take part.

This is funding dependent - we are a charity, and rely entirely on donations.

The Cohort Study: your child's participation

Your child attends a BrainWaves Research Partner school or college. They have been invited to participate in the Cohort Study as part of their timetabled sessions.

- Completed in supervised lesson time.
- Students log in to a secure online portal, hosted by Swansea University to complete an online questionnaire.
- Participation is not compulsory - there are opportunities for your child to opt out at the beginning and throughout the study.
- Your child can not be identified from their responses.
- Every participant will be invited back annually - this is one of the things that makes BrainWaves unique! This long term data is called 'longitudinal data'.
- After the data collection, your child's responses are de-identified and uploaded to a secure research platform. Researchers can then apply to have access to the pseudonymised data.

The Cohort Study: content

Your child will be asked about a range of age appropriate topics, such as:



The questions they are asked will depend on their age. A full list of the questions in the Cohort Study are available via your child's school / college.

Each section is **optional**. Each question is **optional.**

There will be **notifications** ahead of sensitive content, and the option for students to bypass.

No student will be made to answer any question if they opt out.

The Cohort Study: why take part?

By participating in the BrainWaves Cohort Study, your child helps develop the scientific community's knowledge and understanding of the causes and consequences of adolescent mental health and wellbeing.

Did you know?

According to NHS England, in 2023:

- One in five children and young people aged eight to 25 had a probable mental health condition. This number has been rising since 2017, most notably in the 17-19 age group.
- 32.8% of 17-24 year olds have self-harmed or attempted to self-harm at some point. This rises significantly to 69.5% of young people with a probable mental health condition.

Additionally, the charity PAPYRUS found that suicide was the leading cause of death for people aged 5-35 in England in 2022. Around three quarters were boys or young men.

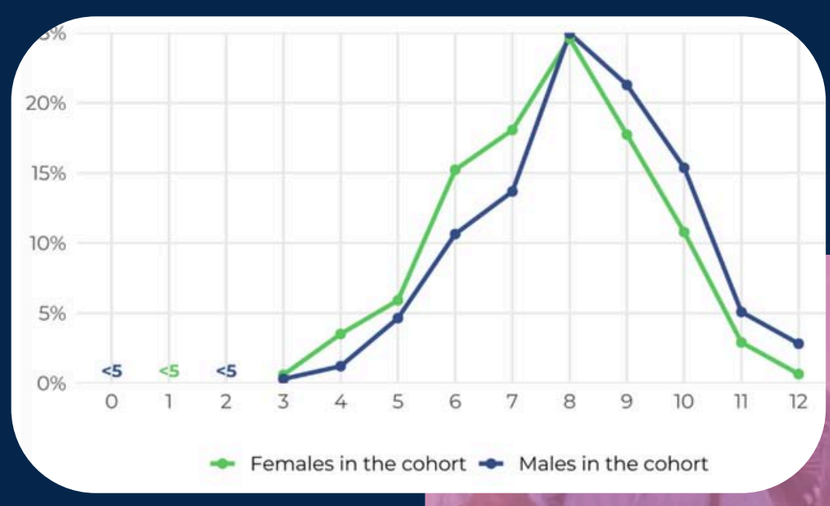
BrainWaves aims to address this growing mental health crisis in young people through research and education. Your child can help us in our mission simply by providing their answers.

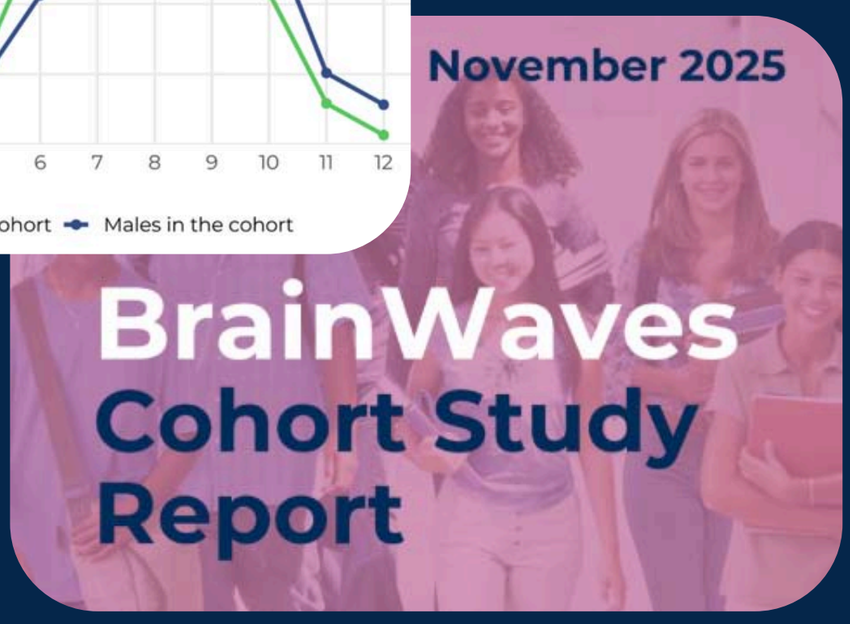
The Cohort Study: impact

BrainWaves is transforming how schools, researchers, and young people access data, tools, and learning to improve mental wellbeing. This is largely done through our Cohort Study.

Following each annual Cohort Study, the de-identified data is analysed by experts at the University of Oxford. Then...

Schools and colleges receive a personalised report on their cohort's wellbeing trends.





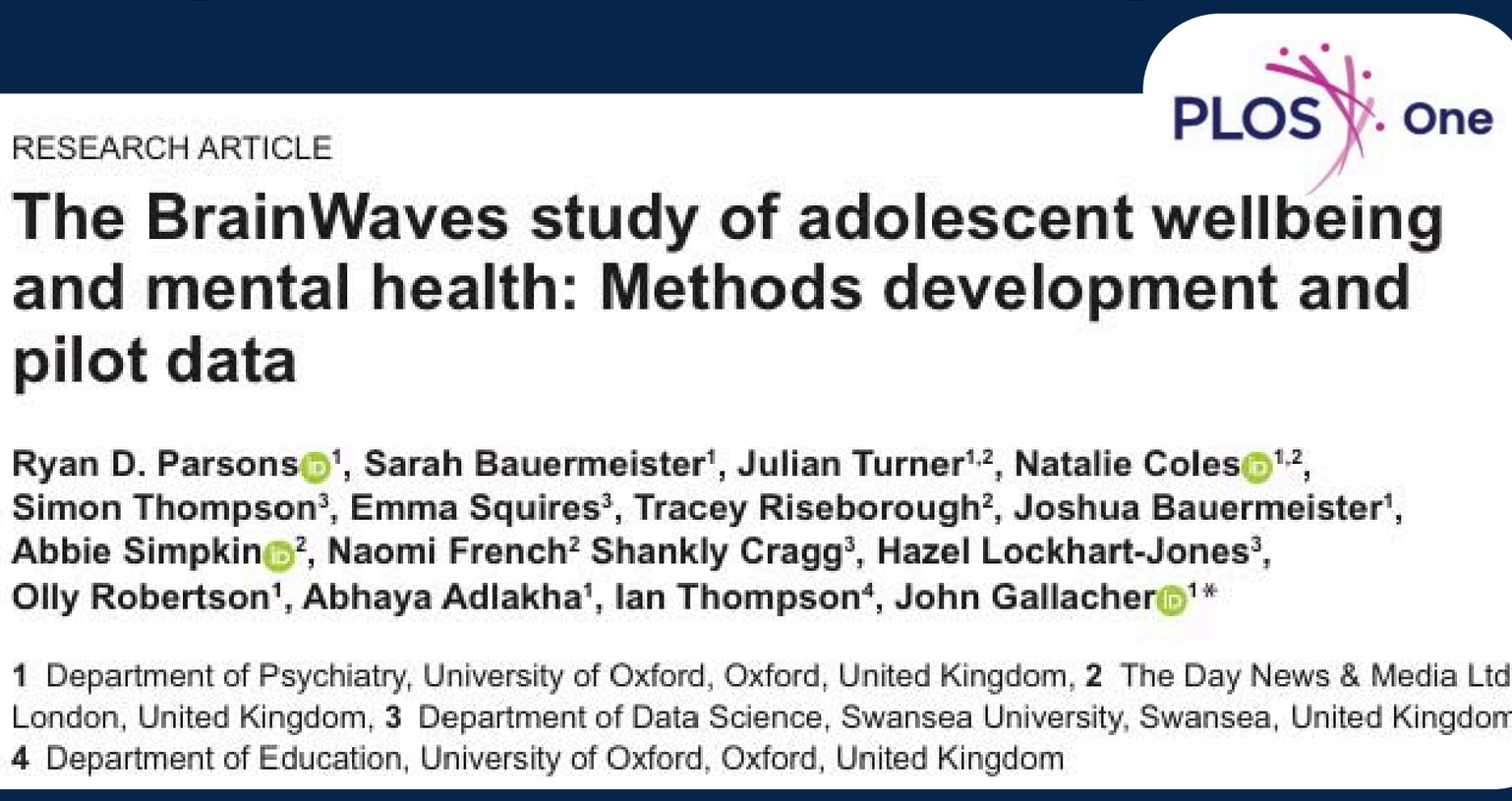
> **BrainWaves has been really formative in allowing staff to understand how our students are actually doing in school from their perspective. In order to tailor our PSHE provision to our students, knowing the areas that they might be struggling with rather than guessing has been instrumental.**

This allows them to use real data to inform their teaching and practice.

The Cohort Study: impact

Researchers can apply for access to de-identified data. This enables academic papers and studies to use our data and further scientific knowledge of adolescent wellbeing.





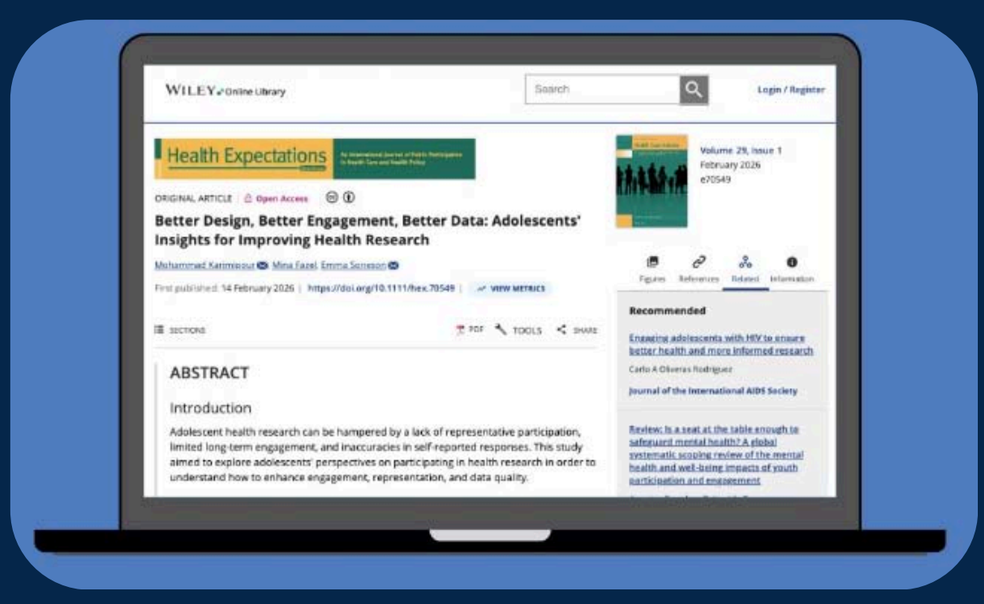
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The BrainWaves study of adolescent wellbeing and mental health: Methods development and pilot data

Ryan D. Parsons[1], Sarah Bauermeister[1], Julian Turner[1,2], Natalie Coles[1,2], Simon Thompson[3], Emma Squires[3], Tracey Riseborough[2], Joshua Bauermeister[1], Abbie Simpkin[2], Naomi French[2] Shankly Cragg[3], Hazel Lockhart-Jones[3], Olly Robertson[1], Abhaya Adlakha[1], Ian Thompson[4], John Gallacher[1]*

1 Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom, **2** The Day News & Media Ltd., London, United Kingdom, **3** Department of Data Science, Swansea University, Swansea, United Kingdom, **4** Department of Education, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

"Better Design, Better Engagement, Better Data: Adolescents' Insights for Improving Health Research" by M. Karimipour, M. Fazel, and E. Soneson



Findings from the study can be used to inform the wider discussion around adolescent mental health and wellbeing at events and conferences, and influence change at a higher level.

Living Well Conference 2026

Data protection

Protecting your child's data is one of our **key priorities**. We pride ourselves on our ability to keep data secure - it's why we are working with Swansea University, a worldclass leader in data security, via their online data platform, SeRP.

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

Learn more about how we look after your child's data by contacting support@brainwaveshub.org

Our findings show how complex adolescent development is. Much more work is required to obtain a better understanding of how various lifestyle factors interact with mental health and wellbeing. This requires population-level longitudinal data that maps the trajectory of mental health and wellbeing and their causes over time, which is what we want to do with BrainWaves.



Professor John Gallacher
Co-Director, BrainWaves

University of Oxford
Department of Psychiatry

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Frequently Asked Questions

What if I do not want my child to take part?

If your child is under the age of 16 and you do not want your child to take part, please notify your child's school in writing. The school will make alternative arrangements on the day(s) the study takes place. If your child is over the age of 16, consenting to the study is their choice.

What if my child does not want to take part?

If your child does not want to take part, during the questionnaire session they have the choice to opt out. For children under the age of 16, both parental and student consent is required to participate.

Does this questionnaire have ethical approval?

Yes. Ethical approval was granted through the ethics application process at Oxford University (CUREC). If you wish to know more about our ethical approval, please get in touch.

How have the questions been developed?

The questions have been developed by experts at the University of Oxford, with input from the BrainWaves Young Persons Advisory Group. You can read more about their work here on our website.

Contacts

For more information about BrainWaves and the work we do, visit our website: brainwaveshub.org

For any other queries or support, please contact:

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BrainWaves KS3 Cohort Study: Parents' booklet v 1.0 April 2026

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