

## Self-harm in Oxfordshire

The National Institute of Excellence (NICE) defines self-harm as the “intentional act of self-poisoning or self-injury, irrespective of the motivation or apparent purpose of the act, and is an expression of emotional distress”. Self-harm should not be considered a primary mental health condition like anxiety or depression, but more of a behavioural change as a result of multiple factors including emotional distress and trauma.

Hospital admissions in this bitesize are used as a proxy of the prevalence of severe self-harm, these are only the tip of the iceberg in relation to the health and well-being burden of self-harm.

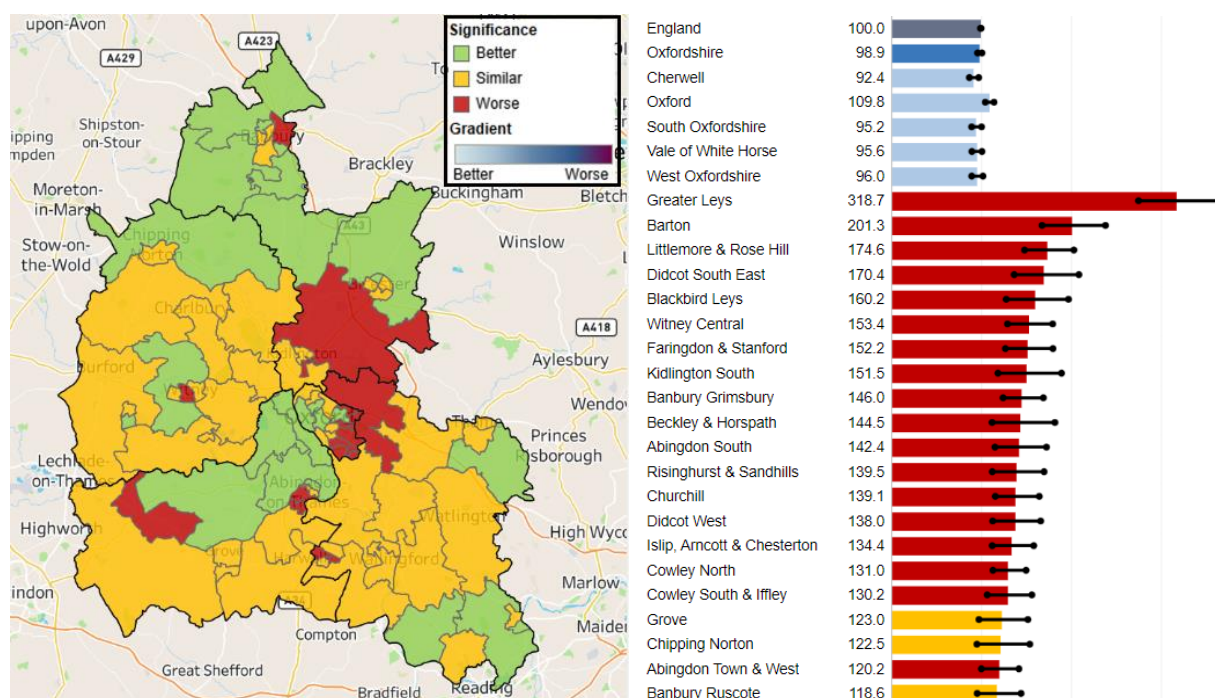
This bitesize accompanies the Self-harm Rapid Needs Assessment for Oxfordshire (2024) and shows rates of self-harm for districts and small areas in Oxfordshire, and risk factors.

**The Oxfordshire district with the highest number of emergency admissions due to intentional self-harm was Oxford, the highest rate per population was West Oxfordshire.**

- In 2022/23 there was a total of 705 emergency hospital admissions due to intentional self-harm in Oxfordshire<sup>1</sup>, equivalent to a directly standardised rate of 91.9 per 100,000 population, this was statistically below (**better** than) the England average of 126.3.
- The numbers (and rates) of emergency admissions for intentional self-harm per district were:
  - Cherwell 165 (101.3, **better** than Eng av)
  - Oxford **190** (92.9, **better** than Eng av)
  - South Oxfordshire 120 (81.5, **better** than Eng av)
  - Vale of White Horse 120 (87.3, **better** than Eng av)
  - West Oxfordshire 115 (**105.8**, **similar to** Eng av)

**Small area data (combined years 2016/17 to 2020/21) for emergency hospital admissions due to self-harm shows 18 areas<sup>2</sup> of Oxfordshire as significantly above the England average, with at least one above-average area in each district of the county<sup>3</sup>.**

- The areas of Oxfordshire with the highest levels of emergency admissions due to self-harm (standardised admissions ratio) were Greater Leys, Barton, Littlemore & Rose Hill (Oxford), Didcot South East, Blackbird Leys (Oxford) and Witney Central (West Oxfordshire).



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## Population groups at higher risk of self-harm

- In Oxfordshire (and nationally) **females had significantly higher rates** of emergency hospital admissions as a result of self-harm than males (Oxfordshire females 134.0 vs males 51.1, 2022/23<sup>4</sup>).
- The 2023 national **children & young people** mental health survey<sup>5</sup> found a link between mental disorder and self-harm:
  - 5.9% of children aged 8 to 16 years with a probable mental disorder had tried to harm themselves in the past 4 weeks, compared with 0.4% of those unlikely to have a mental disorder.
  - 10.6% of young people aged 17 to 24 years with a probable mental disorder had tried to harm themselves in the past 4 weeks, compared with 0.8% of those unlikely to have a mental disorder.
- Oxfordshire's Self-harm Needs Assessment<sup>6</sup> (2024) found that groups who are at higher risk than the general population to self-harm include those who **identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning Plus (LGBTQ+), ethnic minorities, prisoners, those with a mental illness and those who use drugs or alcohol**. There is an association between those aged under 60, living alone, employment status, benefit status and risk of self-harm.
- Individuals who self-harm can be associated with multiple high-risk groups.

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When life is difficult, Samaritans are here – day or night, 365 days a year. You can call them for free on 116 123, email them at [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org), or visit [samaritans.org](https://samaritans.org) to find your nearest branch.

Journalists should be aware that young people are a particularly vulnerable audience in relation to media coverage of suicide and self-harm, more information is available here [Guidance for reporting on self-harm and suicide content online](#)

Samaritans' media advice team is available to support journalists and to answer questions relating to reporting suicide at: [mediaadvice@samaritans.org](mailto:mediaadvice@samaritans.org)

Samaritans also offer training for journalists and programme makers, covering all of the key issues relating to covering suicide and self-harm in the media. To arrange a free session for your team you can contact them at: [mediaadvice@samaritans.org](mailto:mediaadvice@samaritans.org)

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### Sources and notes:

[1] OHID based on NHS England and ONS data [Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care](#)

[2] Small areas are Middle Layer Super Output Areas (2011 boundaries), average population 7,600, 86 MSOAs in Oxfordshire.

[3] NHS England, Hospital Episode Statistics. Emergency hospital admissions for intentional self-harm, standardised admission ratio (2016/17 to 2020/21) [Local health, public health data for small geographic areas - Data | Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care](#)

[4] Inequalities by sex, Emergency Hospital Admissions for Intentional Self-Harm Directly standardised rate per 100,000 [Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care](#)

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

[6] Self-harm Rapid Needs Assessment for Oxfordshire (2024)

Chart and map from [Local Area Inequalities Dashboard](#) for Oxfordshire.

We welcome your comments, please email [jsna@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:jsna@oxfordshire.gov.uk)