

Factsheet

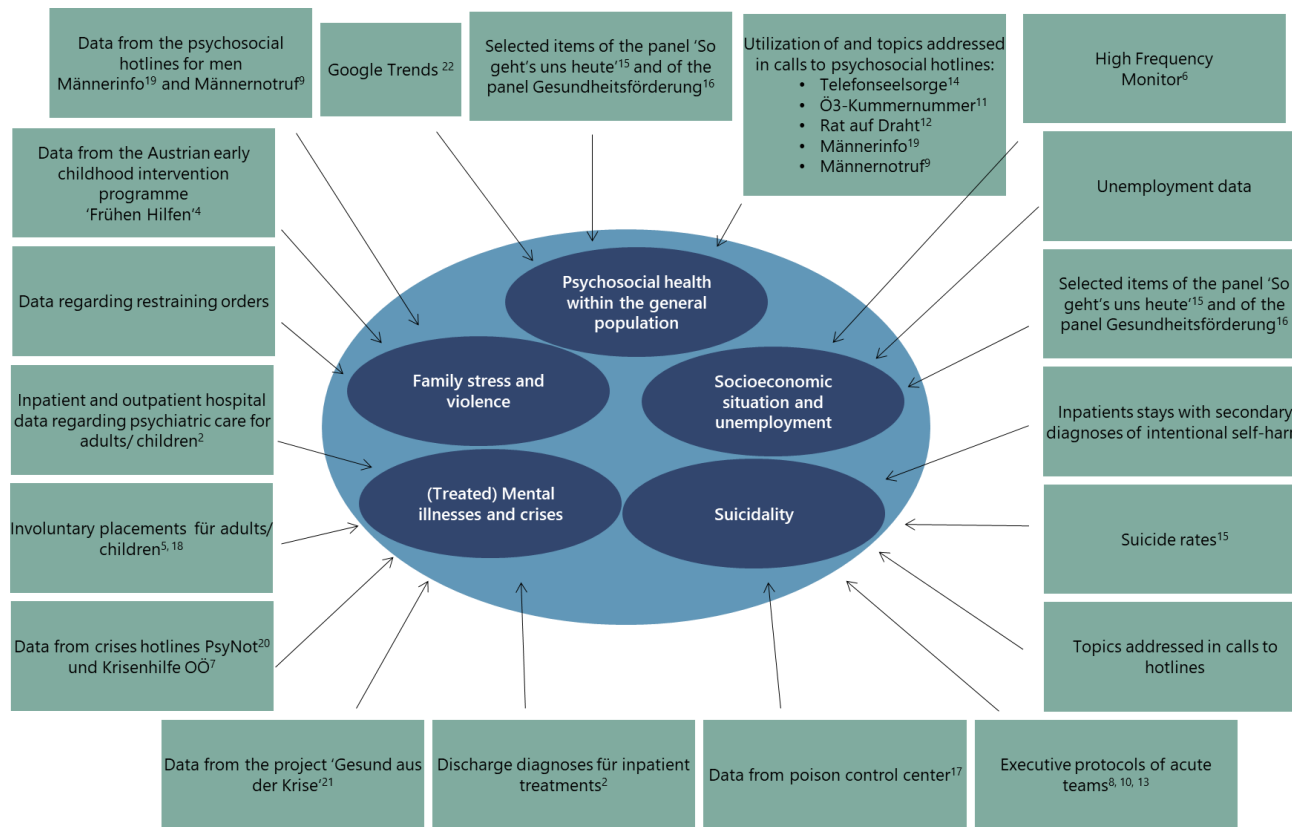
Austrian Psychosocial Health Surveillance: Current Results

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Introduction

Mental health surveillance is becoming increasingly important in view of multiple social crises and the associated increase in mental stress. Internationally, there are already several initiatives which monitor psychosocial health closely over time (Thom et al. 2023). Psychosocial stress and the consequences of crises cannot be easily quantified, however. Unlike infection figures or bed occupancy rates in intensive care units, for example, there is no generally established and up-to-date measure of psychosocial health. In addition to collecting survey data regularly, monitoring routine data closely can help to identify changes in the psychosocial health of a society at an early stage (Thom et al. 2023). In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, a concept for a topic specific early warning system based on the monitoring of existing data sources was developed on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (Bundesministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz; BMSGPK). The data sets included in this system (see Figure 1) have been continuously processed, validated and interpreted since then. Selected results are published in factsheets at regular intervals.

Figure 1: Data currently included in the national monitoring of psychosocial health in Austria ⁷



Sources: 1 AMS (Austrian Public Employment Service), 2 BMSGPK: diagnosis and service reports drawn up by Austrian hospitals, 3 Bundeskriminalamt (Criminal Intelligence Service Austria), 4 FRÜDOK, (documentation of the Austrian early childhood intervention programme) 5 ifs Vorarlberg (Institute for Social Services), 6 IHS (Institute for Advanced Studies), 7 Krisenhilfe Oberösterreich (crisis support service), 8 Landessicherheitszentrale Burgenland (Burgenland State Security Center), 9 Männernotruf Steiermark (Styrian helpline for men), 10 Notruf Niederösterreich (emergency control center), 11 Ö3-Kummernummer (hotline), 12 Rat auf Draht (hotline), 13 Rotes Kreuz Oberösterreich (Red Cross Upper Austria, 14 Telefonseelsorge (hotline), 15 Statistics Austria, 16 Gesundheit Österreich GmbH (Austrian National Public Health Institute), 17 Vergiftungsinformationszentrale (Poison Information Centre), 18 VertretungsNetz – Patientenadvokatschaft (patient advocacy), 19 MÄNNERINFO (24/7 crisis helpline for men), 20 PsyNot Steiermark (crisis hotline Styria), 21 BÖEP (Association of Austrian Psychologists), 22 Google Trends; Illustration: GÖG

Limitations

When interpreting the results, a number of limitations in terms of data availability must be taken into account that restrict both the selection of indicators and the validity of the results. For some indicators, the relevant data are currently not available with the necessary frequency or are incomplete. For most data sources, data are only available from 2019 onwards, which makes it difficult to identify trends. Data sources that depict utilization behaviour (e.g. data from hotlines, inpatient psychiatry) cannot provide any information on those groups of people who are unable to access/use the support services available due to various barriers or who do not actively seek help. There is also the possibility that an increased need for support is not reflected in the data provided by some institutions if they have already reached the limits of their capacity. It should also be noted that the improved availability of data can lead to certain problem areas being given greater weight. The recent inclusion of survey data and Google Trends analyses can counteract the above-mentioned limitations. However, it should be noted that Google Trends data primarily reflect interest, information needs and awareness with regard to a specific topic. They are useful for identifying temporal patterns and seasonal fluctuations in user search behaviour. Whether Google Trends data are sufficiently meaningful for assessing the actual mental health of the population is currently being debated by researchers. However, studies show that Google Trends data on indicators like depression, anxiety and loneliness are sufficiently valid to provide indications of psychosocial stress (Alibudbud 2023; Barros et al. 2019; Misiak et al. 2020; Tran et al. 2017; Vaidyanathan et al. 2022). The developments and key figures listed below can, therefore, only represent an approximation of the actual situation and cannot be interpreted as a complete reflection of reality.

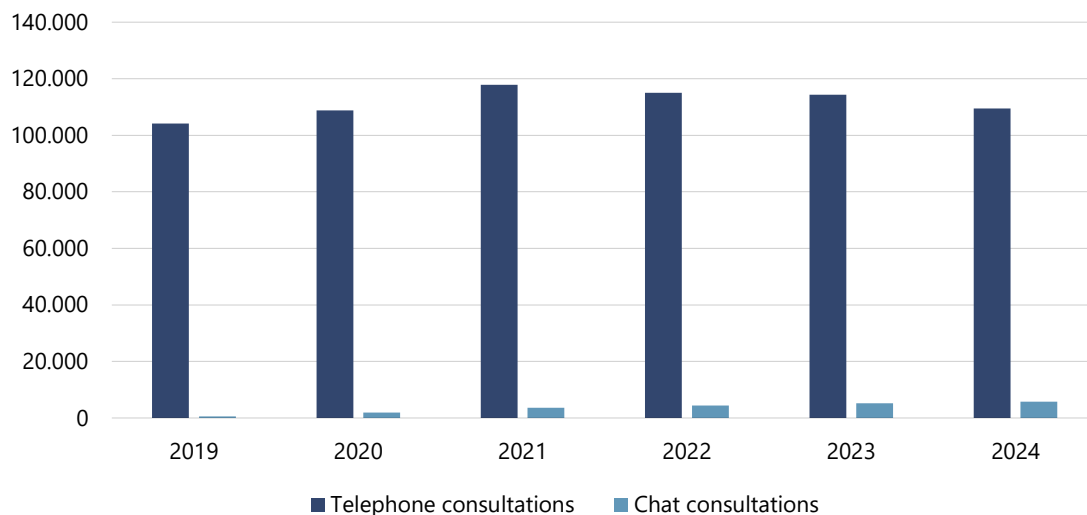
Recent developments

The following graphs and information are based on the available data up to and including September 2024, whereby only selected relevant results are cited. For most data sources, data are available from 2019 onwards.

Psychosocial health in the general population

The number of counselling sessions at **Telefonseelsorge**, the largest psychosocial helpline in Austria, was lower between January and August 2024 than in the same period in 2023 (2023: 120,659, 2024: 116,058). The decrease is due to a decline in telephone consultations. Chat consultations, in contrast, have been greatly expanded by the telephone counselling service in recent years and well received by the target group. While around 1% of consultations took place via chat in 2019, the figure for 2024 (up to and including August) was around 5% (almost 6,000 chat consultations) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of counselling sessions at Telefonseelsorge by type of counselling in the comparison period January to August, 2019–2024



Data source: Telefonseelsorge; Analysis and presentation: GÖG

Rat auf Draht, the biggest national psychosocial hotline for children and adolescents, also recorded fewer consultations between January and September 2024 than in the same period of the previous year (2023: 41,614, 2024: 37,691).

From January to September 2024, the number of consultations on the **Ö3 Kummernummer** hotline was roughly the same as in the equivalent period in 2023 (2023: 11,887, 2024: 11,639).

Both the regional helpline for men **Männernotruf Steiermark** and the nationwide 24/7 crisis helpline for men **MÄNNERINFO 24/7 Crisis Helpline** recorded significantly more calls in 2024 up to and including September than in the same period in 2023,¹ with the number of calls continuing to rise steadily over the year.

The **MÄNNERINFO 24/7 Crisis Helpline** saw a steady increase in the number of support sessions and consultations in which information on psychosocial counselling was passed on or psychological support provided in the course of 2024. In September 2024, in around 49% of the consultations stress relief was the main focus, and around 40% of them involved information on psychosocial counselling or psychological support.

Data from the online tool **Google Trends** are included in the surveillance in order to depict the psychosocial burden of those members of the population who cannot be captured by routine or survey data. The results of Google Trends are based on search queries by Google users and are presented in the form of index values ranging from 0 to 100. These index values indicate how

¹ Männernotruf Steiermark: January to September 2023: 2,413, January to September 2024: 4,402
MÄNNERINFO: January to September 2023: 2,241, January to September 2024: 3,604

often a search term was searched for in relation to the greatest number of searches for this term in a certain period and in a certain area, with a value of 100 representing the highest relative search activity. Periods with very low search volumes are marked as "zero activity". When several search terms are queried together in Google Trends, the index values refer to the highest total point query value.

Google queries on the topics of *Einsamkeit (loneliness)*, *Angst (anxiety)*, *Depression (depression)*, *Psychotherapie (psychotherapy)*, *Psychopharmaka (psychoactive drugs)* and *Schlafprobleme (sleep problems)* were examined. For a descriptive presentation of the search queries for these indicators the period from 1st January 2016 to 23rd October 2024 was selected.² For a cross-correlation analysis with relevant routine data, the period from 1st January 2019 to 31st December 2023³ was selected. Table 1 shows the syntax used for the indicators in Google Trends.

Table 1: Syntax per indicator for generating Google Trends data

Syntax	Indicator
Einsamkeit + einsam + allein + isoliert + verlassen	Einsamkeit
Angst + Sorgen + unruhig + Panik + nervös + verzweifelt	Angst
Depression + depressiv + erschöpft + traurig + niedergeschlagen + unruhig + Sorgen + freudlos	Depression
Psychotherapie + "Hilfe bei Depression" + "Hilfe bei Stress" + Psychologen + Psychiater	Psychotherapie
Antidepressiva + Schlafmittel + Beruhigungsmittel + "Medikamente gegen Angst" + Psychopharmaka	Psychopharmaka
Schlafprobleme – Baby + "kann nicht schlafen" + Schlafmittel + "schlecht schlafen" + Schlafstörung	Schlafprobleme

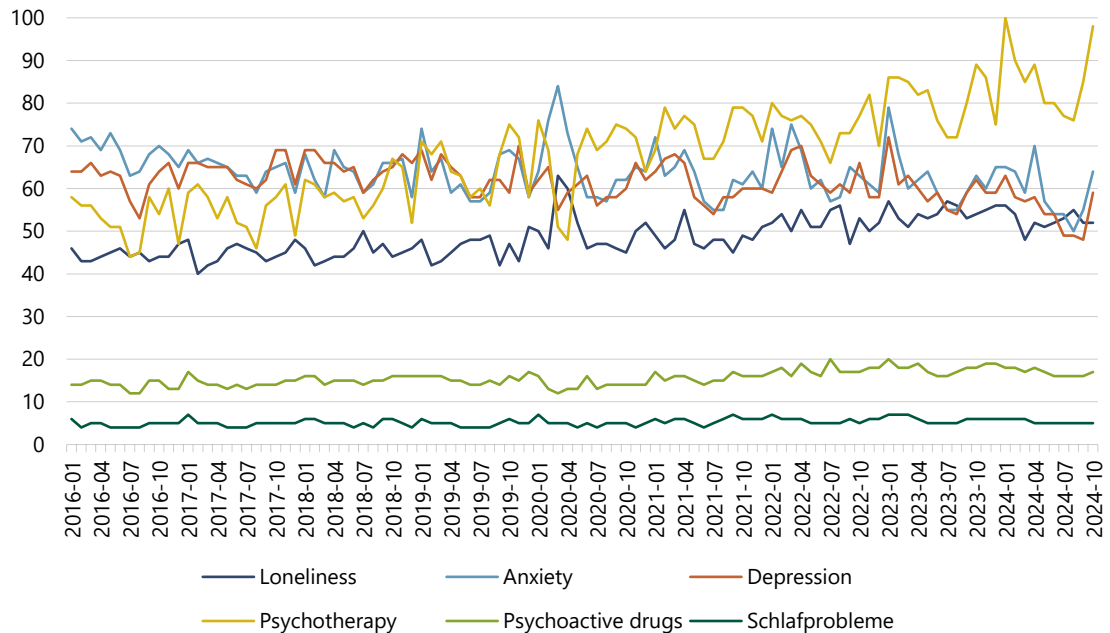
Illustration: GÖG

The Google Trends data show that the search queries for psychotherapy in recent years have the highest index values, followed by anxiety, depression and loneliness, while psychotropic drugs and sleep problems have the lowest search queries in comparison (see Figure 3). The **increasing number of queries on psychotherapy** over the years could indicate that the population is becoming more aware of and concerned with psychosocial health and psychotherapy. Temporary sharp increases in search queries, followed by rapid decreases, could reflect public discussions on the treatment of mental illness or support for psychosocial stress. One such peak could have been triggered by the amendment to the law on psychotherapy training in Austria at the beginning of 2024, which was covered extensively in the media. Likewise, anxiety and loneliness showed comparatively high index values at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which can be interpreted as an increase in psychosocial stress in the population.

² Retrieval date: 23.10.2024

³ Retrieval date: 24.08.2024

Figure 3: Google Trends search queries by month, 2016–2024



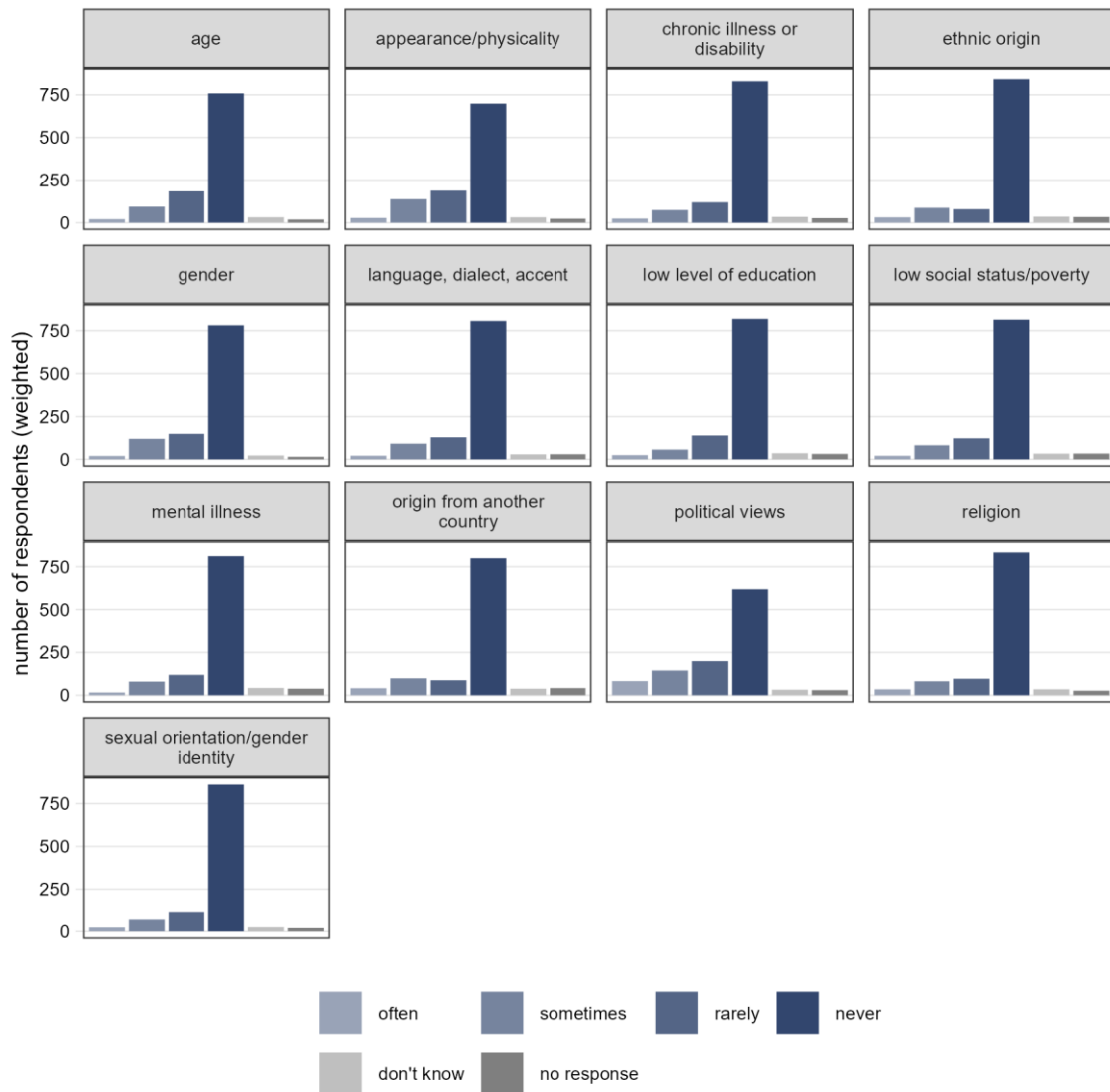
Data source: Google Trends; Queries and presentation: GÖG

A cross-correlation analysis between **search queries on depression** and the number of patients with ICD-10 F3 and F4 diagnoses in the inpatient sector shows that search queries increase **around one to four months before an increase in the number of patients**. Googling symptoms or information on depression could be an early indication of the need for information among those affected before they seek inpatient help.

One factor that has been shown to influence psychosocial health is **discrimination** (Compton/Shim 2015). In the fourth wave of the **panel Gesundheitsförderung**,⁴ respondents were asked whether and how often they experience devaluation based on various characteristics. Experiences of devaluation based on political views, appearance/physicality, age or gender were reported most frequently (see Figure 4) but most respondents in all categories stated that they had not experienced any devaluation.

⁴ The "Panel Gesundheitsförderung" is a representative repeat survey as part of the Agenda Gesundheitsförderung (Agenda for Health Promotion), which was conducted for the first time in September 2023 and is repeated several times a year. A representative sample of the Austrian resident population aged 16 and over is surveyed.

Figure 4: Devaluation experienced by characteristics and frequency, Gesundheitsförderung panel, 4th wave

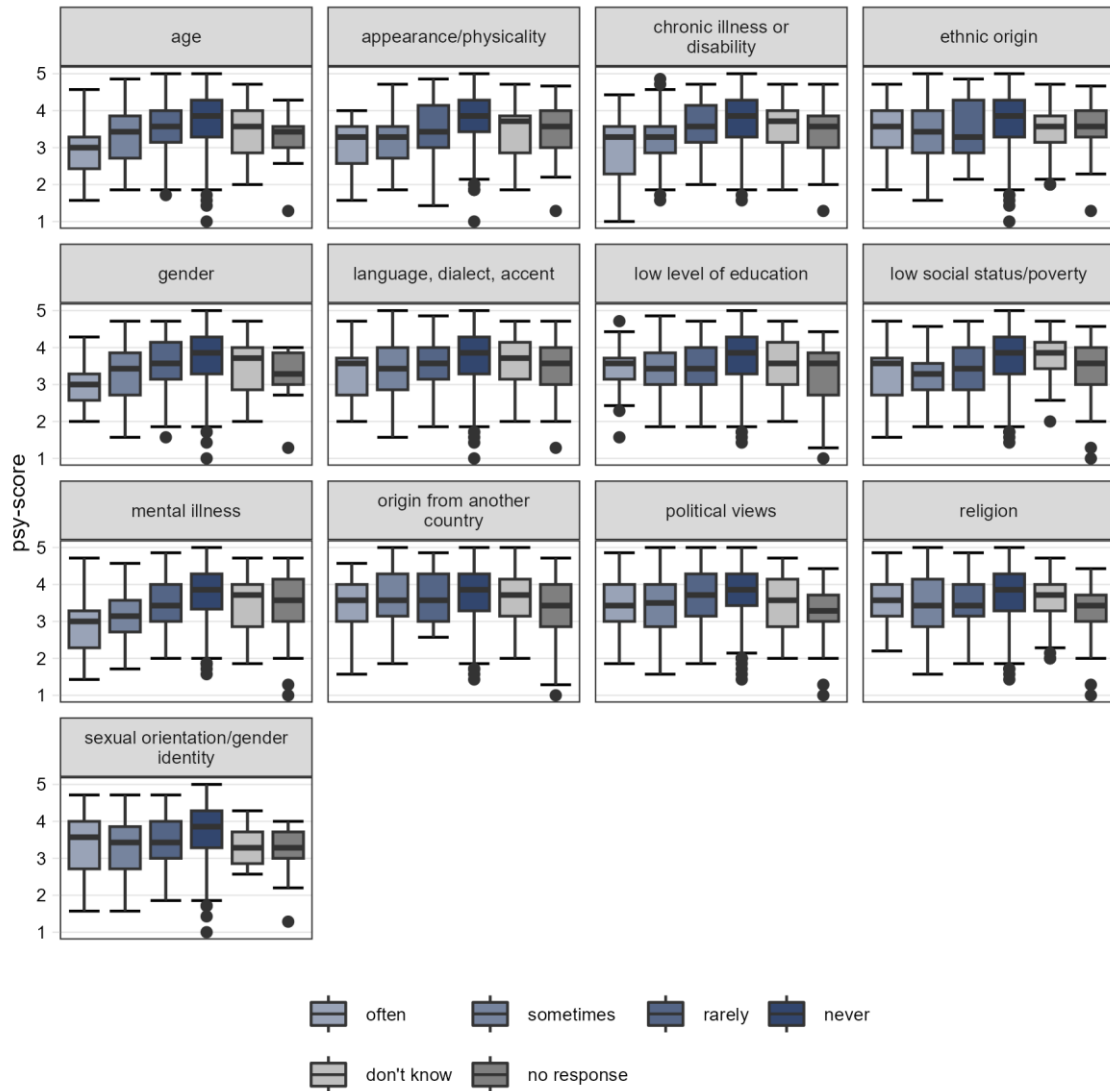


Data source: Panel Gesundheitsförderung; Analysis and presentation: GÖG

People who did not report any experiences of devaluation achieved a better score for psychological well-being.⁵ Experienced devaluations related to various characteristics were associated with lower mental well-being. The clearest correlations were seen for age, gender and mental illness (see Figure 5).

⁵ Score based on 7 variables of psychological well-being.

Figure 5: Correlation by frequency of experiences of devaluation due to various characteristics, Gesundheitsförderung panel, 4th wave



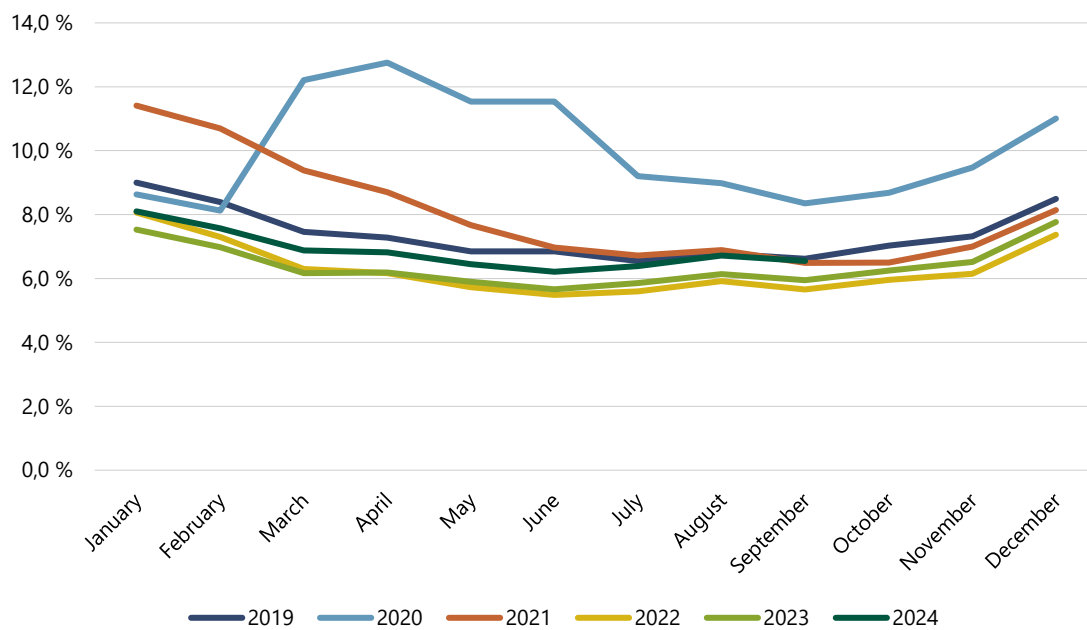
Data source: Panel Gesundheitsförderung; Analysis and presentation: GÖG

Socioeconomic situation and unemployment

An individual's socioeconomic situation and unemployment in particular can have a demonstrably negative impact on psychosocial health (Compton/Shim 2015).

In the third quarter of 2024, the Austrian unemployment rate was at the same level as in 2019 and therefore higher than in the previous two years (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Monthly unemployment rate Austria, 2019–2024



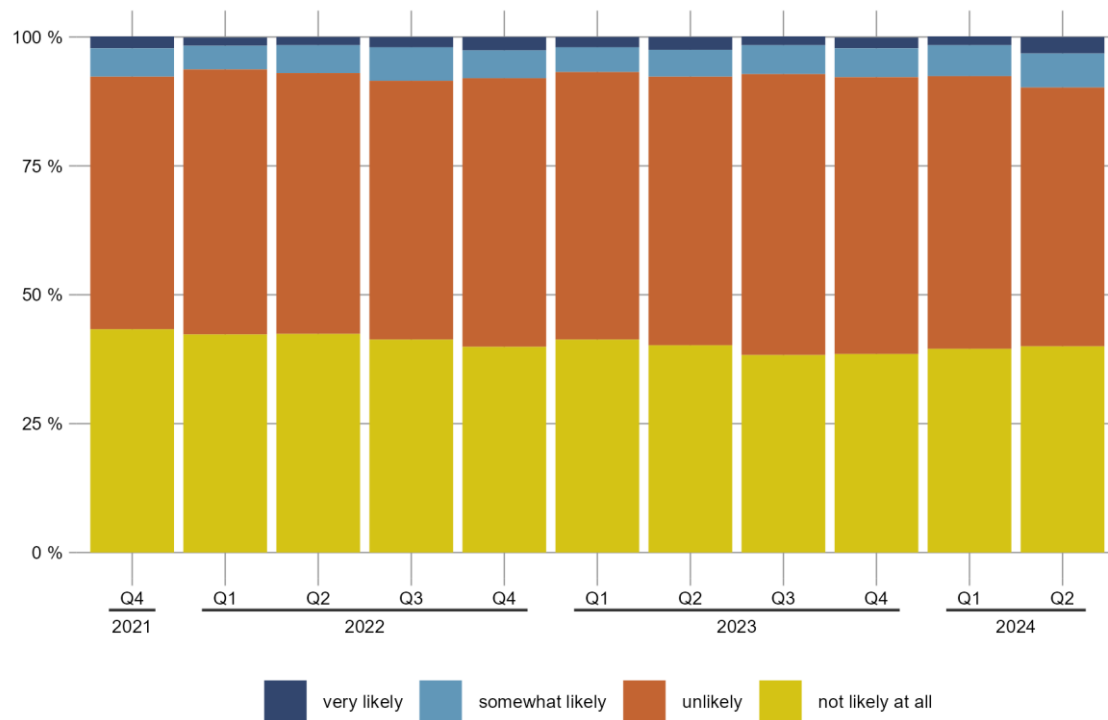
Data source: AMS; Analysis and presentation: GÖG

As part of Statistics Austria's "Wie geht's uns heute" panel,⁶ people are regularly asked how likely they think it is that they will become unemployed within the next 12 months. In the second quarter of 2024, more people (9.8%) stated that they thought it was very likely or likely that they would become unemployed within a year than in the first quarter of 2024 (7.7%) (see Figure 7).

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<https://www.statistik.at/statistiken/bevoelkerung-und-soziales/einkommen-und-soziale-lage/soziale-krisenfolgen>

Figure 7: Answers to the question "When you think about the next 12 months: How likely is it that you will become unemployed?" (only for employed persons), Q4/2021–Q2/2024



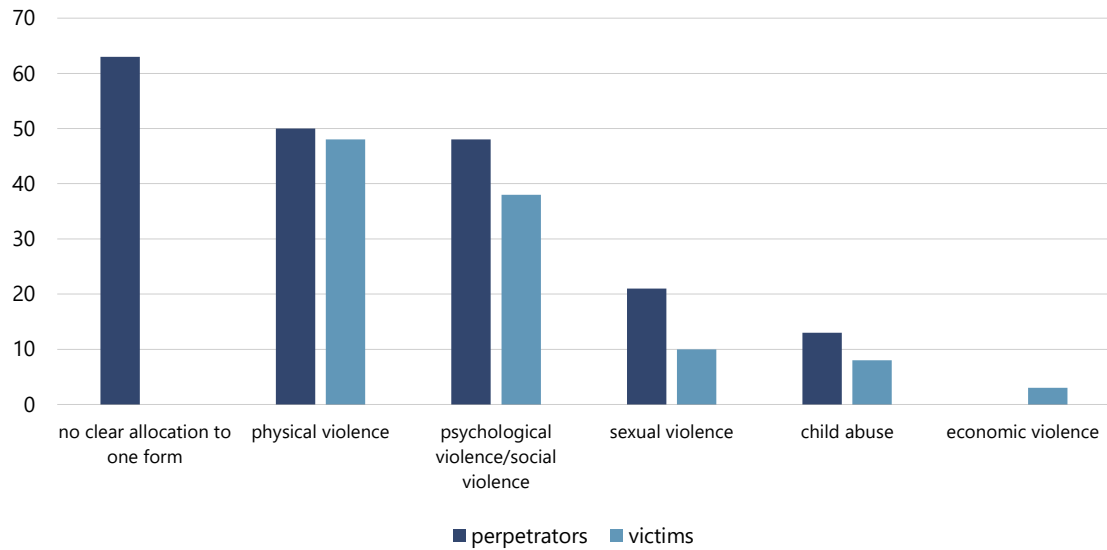
Data source: Statistik Austria; Analysis and presentation: GÖG

However, **satisfaction with finances** did not deteriorate compared to the previous wave. The proportion of those who rated their financial satisfaction with 8 or more points actually increased slightly between the first quarter (35.2%) and the second quarter (37.5%) of 2024. Similarly, the proportion of those who stated that they had **some difficulty, difficulty or great difficulty making ends meet with their household income** continued to fall slightly from the first quarter (41.5%) to the second quarter (40.5%).

Family stress and violence

The two most frequently discussed topics on the crisis helpline **MÄNNERINFO** are **relationships/separation** (January to September 2024: discussed in 479 consultations) and **violence** (January to September 2024: discussed in 302 consultations). The data indicate that both perpetrators and victims make use of the counselling services on violence. Just under two thirds of the consultations were taken by perpetrators and one third by victims. The consultations concerned various forms of violence (see Figure 8).

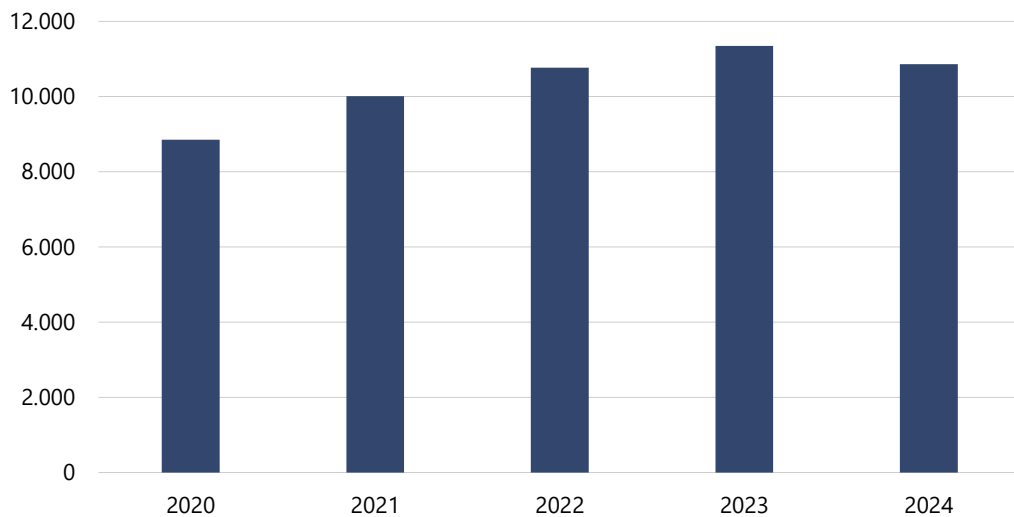
Figure 8: Number of consultations on various forms of violence discussed on the crisis helpline MÄNNERINFO divided into perpetrators and victims, Q1–Q3/2024



Data source: MÄNNERINFO; Analysis and presentation: GÖG

From January to September 2024, the number of people who were protected by a police **barring order against an endangering person** was 4% below the level of 2023 (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Number of people who were protected by a police barring order between January and September, 2020–2024

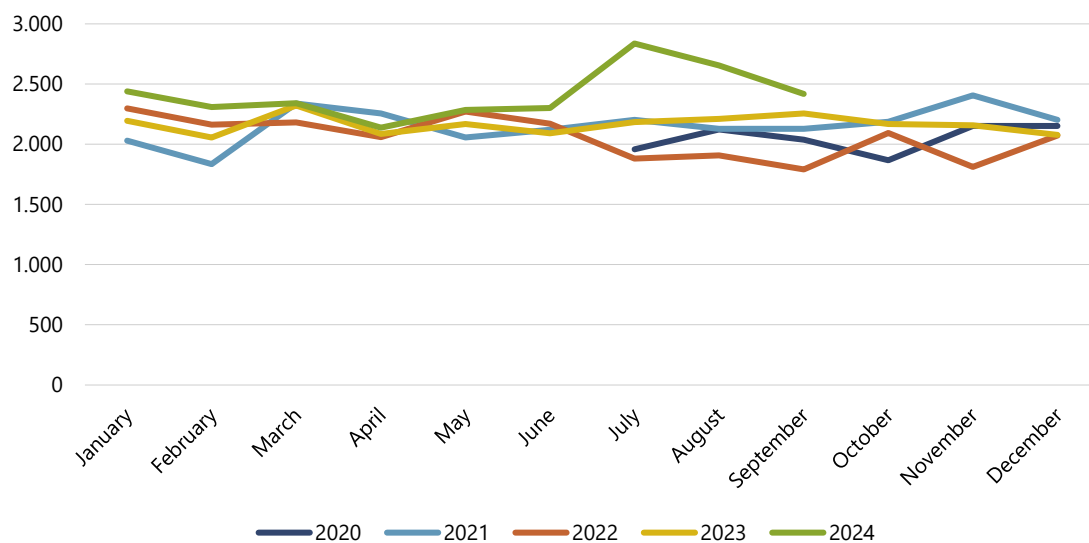


Data source: Bundeskriminalamt (unvalidated raw data for 2024); Analysis and presentation: GÖG

(Treated) Mental illnesses and crises

There was a significant increase in the use of the regional Upper Austrian crisis support service **Krisenhilfe Oberösterreich** in the summer of 2024 (see Figure 10). The Styrian psychiatric crisis hotline **PsyNot** showed a similar trend.

Figure 10: Number of contacts with the Upper Austrian crisis support service by month, 2020–2024

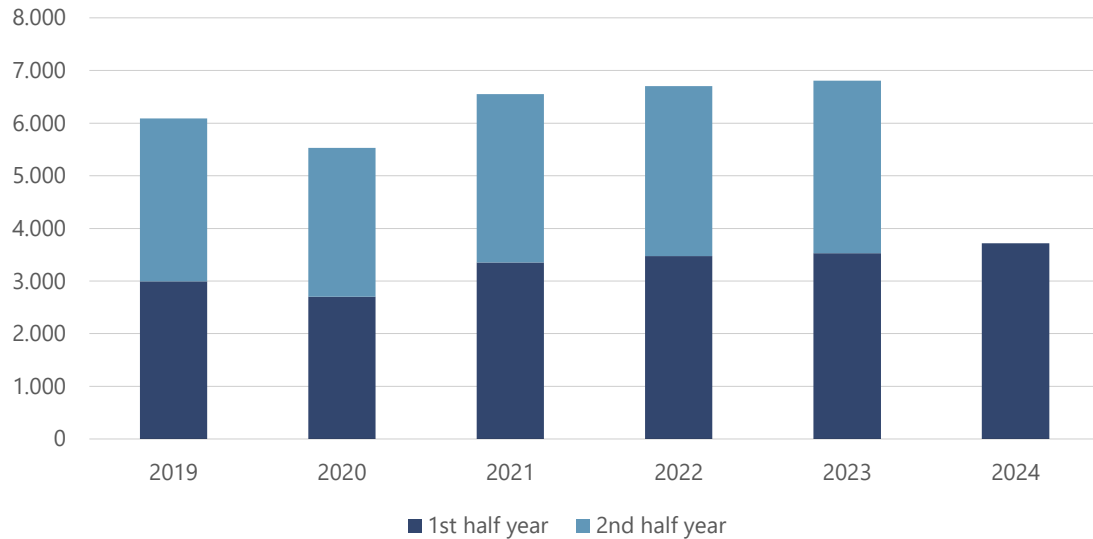


Data source: Krisenhilfe Oberösterreich; Analysis and presentation: GÖG

In the first half of 2024, both the number of inpatient stays in **adult psychiatric wards** and the number of inpatient stays for adult patients with a main diagnosis of a mental or behavioural disorder in fund hospitals (publicly funded hospitals which provide the vast majority of acute care in Austria) **were at the same level as in previous years.**

There was an increase in the number of stays in **child and adolescent psychiatry** in the first half of 2024. From January to June 2024, **more inpatient stays** were counted than in any other six-month period within the 2019 to 2024 observation period (see Figure 11).

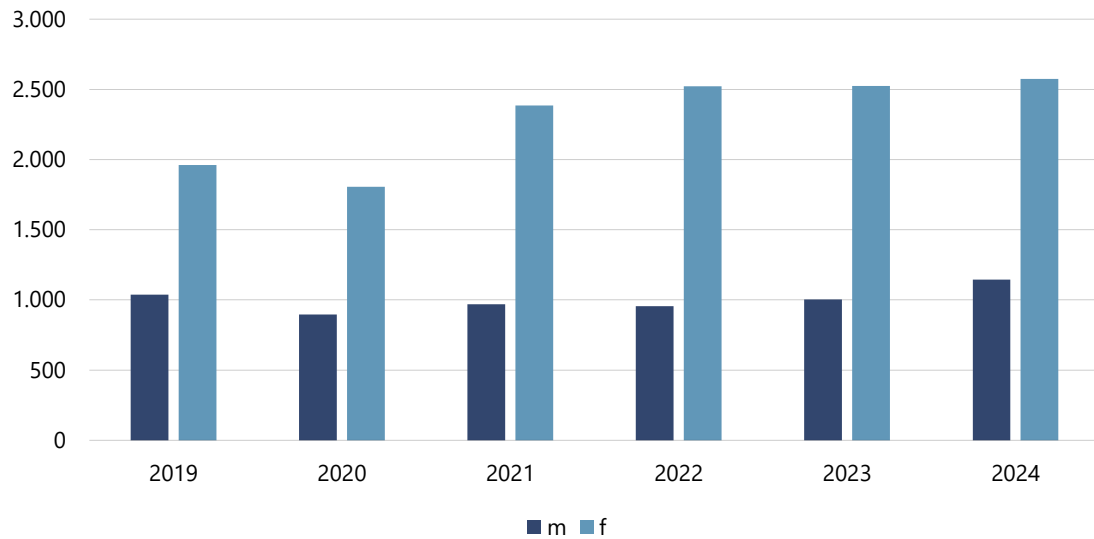
Figure 11: Number of inpatient stays in child and adolescent psychiatry, 2019–2024



Data source: BMSGPK: diagnosis and service reports drawn up by Austrian hospitals (data for 2024 incomplete); Analysis and presentation: GÖG

In contrast to previous years, the increase in inpatient stays in the first half of 2024 was also clearly attributable to increased inpatient treatment for boys and young men, although significantly more girls and young women continued to be treated on child and adolescent psychiatric wards (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Number of inpatient stays in child and adolescent psychiatry by gender in the first half of 2019–2024

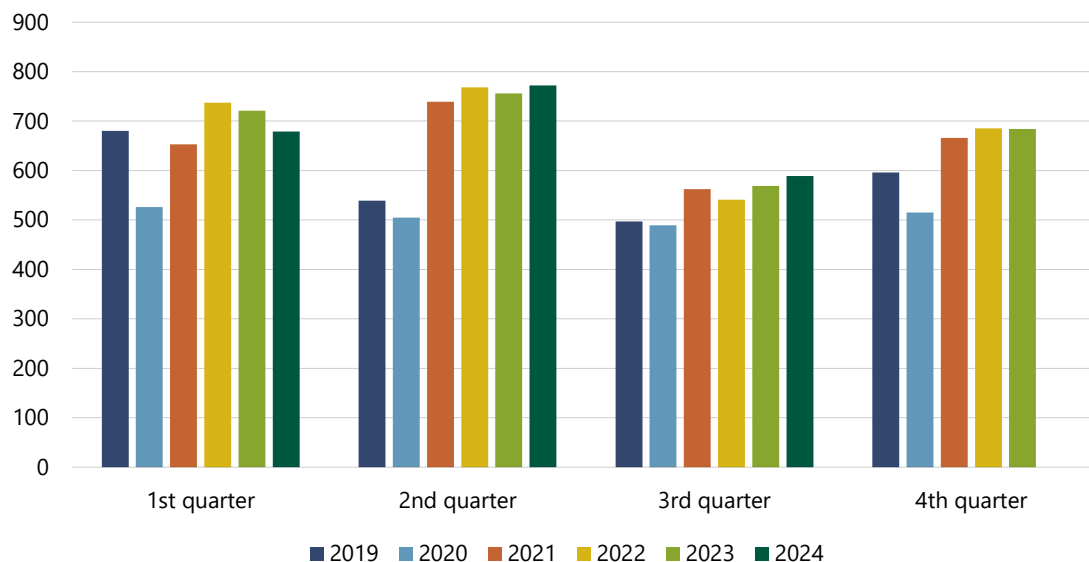


Data source: BMSGPK: diagnosis and service reports drawn up by Austrian hospitals (data for 2024 incomplete); Analysis and presentation: GÖG

In the first three quarters of 2024, there was a slight decrease in the number of **involuntary placements** on psychiatric wards to 19,740 compared to 2022 (20,345) and 2023 (20,162). The sharpest decline was observed among men aged between 19 and 64.

Viewed separately, involuntary placements of minors from January to September 2024 remained on average at the level of the same period in 2023, with slightly more placements in the second and third quarters of 2024 than in previous years (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Number of involuntary placements of minors on psychiatric wards by quarter, 2019–2024



Data sources: VertretungsNetz – Patientenadvokatur, ifs Vorarlberg; Analysis and presentation: GÖG

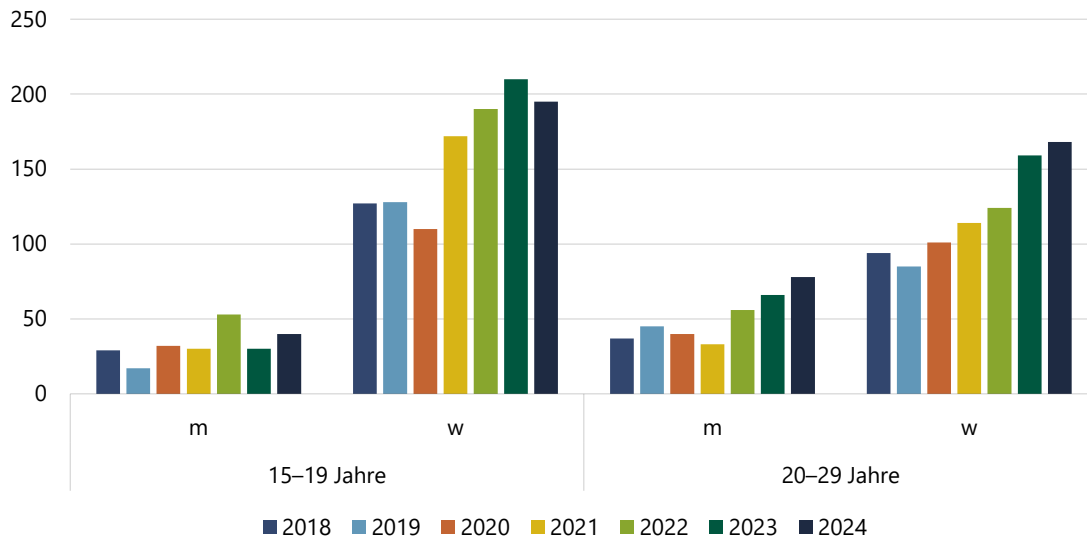
It is also striking that there were more placements for boys and young men in the second quarter of 2024 than in any other quarter within the observation period since 2019.

Suicidal tendencies

Various data sources are used to assess the development of suicidal tendencies in Austria, which can provide indications of suicidal thoughts or behaviour. However, increases in suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts do not necessarily predict increases in suicides.

In the first quarter of 2024, the **Poison Information Centre** recorded **more intentional self-poisonings** than in the same period in previous years, with most cases continuing to be among 15-to-29 year olds (45%). While there was a slight decrease in the largest group, namely 15-to-19 year old girls and young women compared to the same period in the previous year, the figures in the group of 20-to-29 year olds were slightly higher for both genders than in the same period in previous years (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Number of reports of intentional self-poisoning to the Poison Information Centre in the age groups 15–19 and 20–29 years by gender in the first quarter, 2018–2024

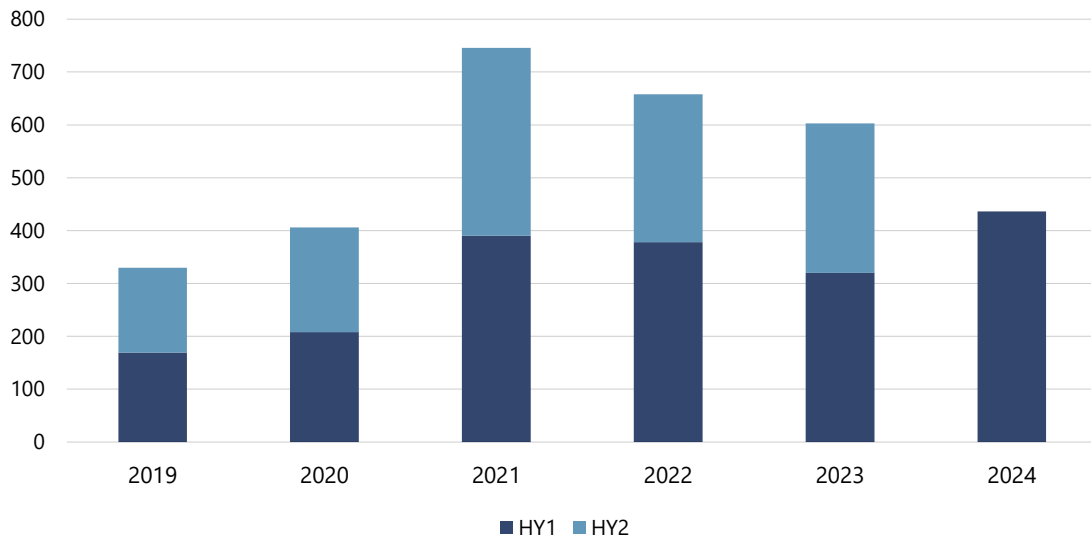


Source: Vergiftungsinformationszentrale; Analysis and presentation: GÖG

In the first half of 2024, following declines in 2022 and 2023, significantly more **diagnoses of attempted suicide or deliberate self-harm**⁷ were assigned to inpatients under the age of 20 in fund hospitals such that the number of diagnoses in the first half of 2024 was higher than the total annual values for 2019 and 2020. The increase was seen in both males and females under the age of 20, with significantly more additional diagnoses still being assigned for stays by girls and young women (see Figure 15 and Figure 16). This is consistent with the observations in connection with the figures for inpatient stays in child and adolescent psychiatry (see page 13).

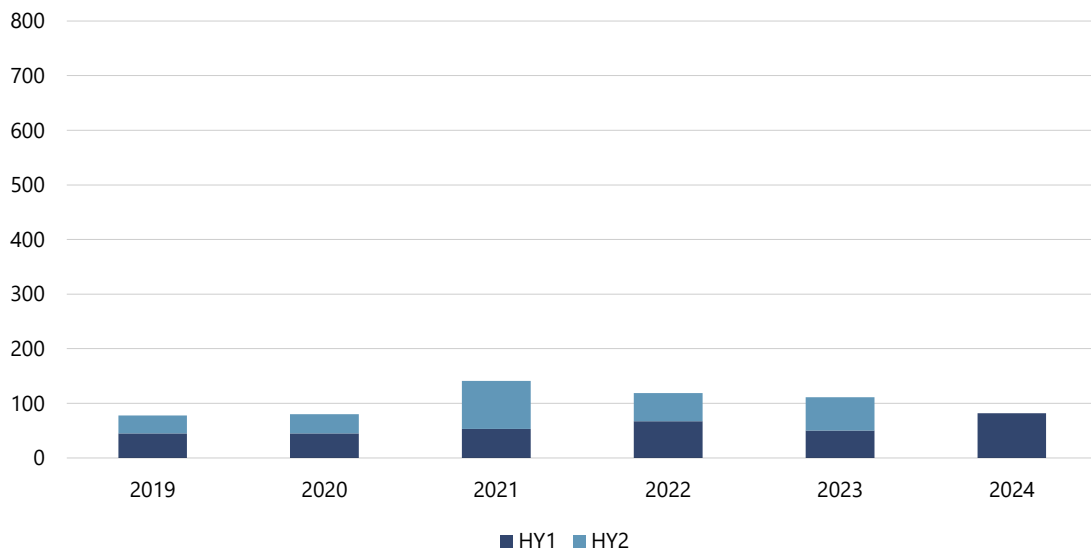
⁷ Diagnoses included: (931) Suicide attempt or deliberate self-harm, (931.9) Suicide attempt or deliberate self-harm, unspecified, (Z.915) History of self-harm, parasuicide, self-poisoning, attempted suicide

Figure 15: Number of inpatient stays of female patients under the age of 20 in fund hospitals with an additional diagnosis of suicide attempt or intentional self-harm, 2019–2024



Data source: BMSGPK: diagnosis and service reports drawn up by Austrian hospitals (data for 2024 incomplete); Analysis and presentation: GÖG

Figure 16: Number of inpatient stays of male patients under the age of 20 in fund hospitals with an additional diagnosis of attempted suicide or intentional self-harm, 2019–2024



Data source: BMSGPK: diagnosis and service reports drawn up by Austrian hospitals (data for 2024 incomplete); Analysis and presentation: GÖG

The number of suicide-related deployments by emergency services in Burgenland, Lower Austria and Upper Austria was **lower** from April to August 2024 (2,271) than in the same period in 2023 (2,457).

Executive summary

Data are available from 2019 for most data sources. The following developments can be observed based on the available data up to and including October 2024.

Psychosocial health within the general population

Both Telefonseelsorge and Rat auf Draht have so far recorded slightly fewer consultations in 2024 than in the same period in 2023. In the case of Telefonseelsorge, the decline can be attributed to fewer telephone consultations while chat consultations continued to increase in 2024. Use of the Ö3-Kummernummer hotline in the first to the third quarter in 2024 was roughly the same as in previous years. Both Männernotruf Steiermark and MÄNNERINFO continued to record strong increases in the number of consultations in 2024.

In addition, Google Trends data (queries on loneliness, anxiety, depression, psychotherapy and psychoactive drugs) from recent years were included in the monitoring for the first time. The increasing number of queries on psychotherapy over the years could indicate that the population is becoming more aware of and concerned with psychosocial health and psychotherapy. Analyses show that an increase in searches for depression occurs around one to four months before an increase in the number of patients with F3 or F4 diagnoses in the inpatient sector.

As part of the fourth wave of the Health Promotion panel, respondents were asked about their experiences of devaluation. The extent of devaluation experienced due to various personal characteristics was associated with a lower level of mental well-being.

Socioeconomic situation and unemployment

In the third quarter of 2024, the unemployment rate was at the same level as in 2019 and therefore higher than in the previous two years. As part of the "Wie geht's uns heute" panel, slightly more people in the second quarter of 2024 than in the first quarter stated that they thought it was very likely or likely that they would become unemployed within a year. However, satisfaction with finances and the assessment of their household income improved slightly.

Family stress and violence

The two most frequently discussed topics on the crisis helpline MÄNNERINFO were "relationship/separation" and "violence", with both victims and perpetrators seeking consultations on the topic of violence. The number of people who were protected by a police barring order was again below the level of 2023 in the third quarter.

(Treated) Mental illnesses and crises

There was a significant increase in the use of both the Upper Austrian crisis support service and the Styrian psychiatric crisis hotline PsyNot in the summer of 2024. While the number of inpatient stays in adult psychiatry remained stable in the first half of 2024, more inpatient stays were counted in child and adolescent psychiatry than in any other half-year period between 2019 and 2024. Unlike in 2021 and 2022, this increase was also due to more inpatient stays by boys and young men, although there were still significantly more inpatient stays by girls and young women under 20 years.

While there was a slight overall decrease in the number of involuntary placements in psychiatric wards compared to previous years, involuntary placements of minors remained on average at the same level as in the equivalent period of the previous year, with slightly more placements being recorded in the second and third quarters of 2024 than in the same period in previous years.

Suicidal tendencies

The number of suicide-related interventions by emergency response organizations in Burgenland, Lower Austria and Upper Austria was lower from April to August 2024 than in the same period in 2023. However, in the first half of 2024, significantly more diagnoses of attempted suicide or intentional self-harm were made for under 20-year-old inpatients in fund hospitals than in previous years. As in previous years, the Poison Information Centre recorded an increase in intentional self-poisoning in the first quarter of 2024, with most cases continuing to be among 15-to-29 year old girls and young women.

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