

Girls' suicide toll rises sharply as social media pressures grow

By Sarah Knapton SCIENCE EDITOR

SUICIDE rates among schoolgirls and young women have hit a record high, figures show, as experts warned that the pressures of modern life were fuelling the rise.

Data released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that 13.3 per cent of deaths of females aged between five and 19 are due to suicide, an increase of more than a third since 2016.

It is the highest percentage since records began in 2001. Of the 490 women between five and 19 who died in 2017, 65 took their own lives. Suicide is now the leading cause of death in that age group.

Experts are increasingly warning that young girls face unprecedented pressures to conform to idealised images of beauty on social platforms, as well as dealing with cyberbullying, sexual exploitation and grooming, all of which damage their mental health.

Dr Jon Goldin, vice-chairman of the child and adolescent faculty at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, said: "These are deeply concerning figures, which once again highlight the pressures facing young women in our society today.

"Girls are perhaps more susceptible than boys to the kind of pressures society increasingly places on them to look good, and lead a glamorous lifestyle.

"These pressures are transmitted in various ways, including via social media, and can be detrimental to young people's self esteem.

"Academic pressures, socio-economic pressures, family difficulties and pessimism about the future all also play

a part." *The Daily Telegraph* has been campaigning for a new statutory duty of care on social media firms to better protect children from threats such as cyberbullying, grooming and addiction.

Last week a study from the University of West England showed that girls as young as four are being encouraged to manipulate their images to appear more beautiful on selfie apps and games.

In September a study by the University of Nottingham also showed there

13.3

The percentage of deaths among girls aged five to 19 that are caused by suicide, a 38pc increase since 2016

was a tripling in poisonings from paracetamol and antidepressants among those aged between 10 and 24 in the UK between 1998 and 2014.

The research suggested around one in seven children and young people have attempted self-harm or suicide, most commonly by taking high quantities of drugs such as paracetamol. The ONS figures showed that among deaths of males between five and 19, those caused by suicide also rose, from 15.2 per cent to 16.2 per cent in 2017.

Alana Ryan, senior policy officer at the NSPCC, said: "Any death by suicide is a tragedy, and as a society we must ensure support is readily available for young people suffering with mental health problems."