# University of Brighton study links ghosting and gaslighting to depression and paranoia in young adults



Recent research led by the University of Brighton, in collaboration with the University of Coimbra in Portugal, sheds new light on the psychological ramifications of prevalent dating practices such as ghosting, gaslighting, and coercive control. As one of the pioneering studies in this realm, it surveyed 544 adults aged 18 to 40 in the UK, demonstrating a clear correlation between these behaviours and adverse mental health outcomes, including depression and increased paranoia.

The findings indicate that both ghosting and coercive control significantly contribute to rising paranoia levels among individuals, while gaslighting is notably linked to symptoms of depression. Importantly, this relationship persisted even when controlling for variables like age, income, and distinct personality traits, such as rejection sensitivity or intolerance of uncertainty. This highlights the substantial emotional toll these experiences can exact on individuals, particularly in a landscape shaped heavily by digital interaction.

Professor Rusi Jaspal, co-author and pro-vice-chancellor for research and knowledge exchange at the University of Brighton, commented on the implications of the study, stating, “The digital age has provided enormous opportunity for social connections but also comes with some risks.” He elaborated that as social media usage and dating platforms proliferate, so too does the risk of individuals encountering harmful behaviours that can negatively influence their mental health.

Dr Barbara Lopes, also a co-author of the study, noted the ubiquity of these behaviours and their largely overlooked effects on mental well-being. "Ghosting, gaslighting, and coercive control are very common relationship behaviours, but their association with mental health is poorly understood,” she remarked. By elucidating these connections, the research aims to fuel discussions about preventative measures and psychological support for those impacted by such detrimental relational dynamics.

In a broader context, the prevalence of ghosting among young adults is staggering, with reports suggesting that between 50% to 65% of this demographic has either ghosted someone or been ghosted themselves. The emotional fallout from these experiences can be severe, leading to confusion, self-blame, and a profound sense of abandonment, which can extend well beyond the immediate impact. Moreover, young people with a high need for closure experience heightened dissatisfaction and distress when ghosted, revealing a complex interplay between individual emotional needs and the effects of abrupt relational endings.

This study underscores the necessity for increased awareness surrounding the emotional consequences of modern relationship behaviours and advocates for the integration of psychological support, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), to help individuals navigate the distress stemming from ghosting and similar experiences. The call for enhanced relationship education is particularly pressing, as traditional frameworks often overlook the nuances of contemporary dating landscapes that heavily involve digital communication.

As the University of Brighton continues its mission to address contemporary mental health challenges through impactful research, this study stands as a testament to the urgent need for strategies that effectively respond to the evolving realities of romantic relationships. By investigating the psychological implications of ghosting and other damaging behaviours, the research provides a foundation for developing innovative solutions that cater to the emotional well-being of individuals in these often tumultuous interactions.

## 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25180433.brighton-university-study-reveals-impact-ghosting-young-adults/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/publications/exposure-to-ghosting-gaslighting-and-coercion-and-mental-health-o)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25180433.brighton-university-study-reveals-impact-ghosting-young-adults/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.bps.org.uk/research-digest/how-ghosting-affects-people-who-feel-need-closure)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.newportinstitute.com/resources/empowering-young-adults/ghosting-mental-health-effects/), [[6]](https://www.westsussexmind.org/news/2021/ghosting-depression-and-suicidal-thoughts)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.bps.org.uk/research-digest/how-ghosting-affects-people-who-feel-need-closure), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghosting_(behavior))
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25180433.brighton-university-study-reveals-impact-ghosting-young-adults/?ref=rss), [[6]](https://www.westsussexmind.org/news/2021/ghosting-depression-and-suicidal-thoughts)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25180433.brighton-university-study-reveals-impact-ghosting-young-adults/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/publications/exposure-to-ghosting-gaslighting-and-coercion-and-mental-health-o> - A study co-authored by Barbara Lopes and Rusi Jaspal, published in the journal 'Partner Abuse', examines the mental health consequences of exposure to ghosting, gaslighting, and coercion. The research analysed data from 544 UK participants aged 18-40, revealing that gaslighting is positively associated with depression, while ghosting and coercion are linked to paranoid ideation. The study recommends providing psychological support to victims of these abusive relationship behaviours to prevent the onset of depression and paranoia.
3. <https://www.newportinstitute.com/resources/empowering-young-adults/ghosting-mental-health-effects/> - An article from the Newport Institute discusses the mental health effects of ghosting on young adults. It highlights that between 50 and 65 percent of young adults have ghosted a romantic partner or interest, and between 45 and 72 percent have been ghosted. The piece outlines both short-term and long-term effects of being ghosted, including confusion, rumination, self-blame, rejection, loneliness, and decreased life satisfaction. It also explores why individuals may ghost others and the challenges in moving on from such experiences.
4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32050561/> - A study published in the 'International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health' examines the psychological correlates of ghosting and breadcrumbing experiences among adults. The research involved 626 participants aged 18-40, finding that those who experienced breadcrumbing or both breadcrumbing and ghosting reported lower satisfaction with life and higher feelings of loneliness and helplessness. However, no significant relation was found between ghosting alone and the examined psychological correlates.
5. <https://www.bps.org.uk/research-digest/how-ghosting-affects-people-who-feel-need-closure> - An article from the British Psychological Society discusses how ghosting affects individuals with a high need for closure. The study found that being ghosted had a more negative impact on those who need closure, leading to lower satisfaction in basic psychological needs. Interestingly, individuals with a higher need for closure were also more likely to use ghosting themselves, suggesting a complex relationship between the need for closure and the use of ghosting in relationships.
6. <https://www.westsussexmind.org/news/2021/ghosting-depression-and-suicidal-thoughts> - An article from West Sussex Mind explores the impact of ghosting on mental health, particularly focusing on depression and suicidal thoughts. It defines ghosting as the unprovoked, unilateral cessation of communication with a friend, relative, or romantic interest. The piece discusses the feelings of betrayal, confusion, and powerlessness experienced by those who are ghosted, and highlights the potential long-term effects on mental well-being, emphasizing the need for awareness and support for those affected.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghosting_(behavior)> - The Wikipedia page on 'Ghosting (behavior)' provides a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon, defining it as the act of ending a relationship by ceasing all communication without explanation. It discusses the prevalence of ghosting, its association with negative mental health effects on the recipient, and its classification by some mental health professionals as a passive-aggressive form of emotional abuse. The page also explores various explanations for the rise in ghosting, including the influence of social media and dating apps.