



YOUTH CULTURE AND TRENDS

SUMMARY OF INSIGHTS

THE BOYS' BRIGADE
> the adventure begins here



THE
YOUTHS
CAPE
CENTRE FOR
RESEARCH



CONTENTS

Acknowledgement

The Boys' Brigade wishes to thank the **Youthscape Centre for Research** for the work they have put into preparing this report.

Find out more about the Youthscape Centre for Research at: youthscape.co.uk/research

Our Vision

Is that children and young people experience **"life to the full"**. (John 10:10)

Our Mission

The Boys' Brigade has faith in young people and provides them with opportunities to **learn, grow** and **discover** in a safe, fun and caring environment which is rooted in the Christian faith.

Find out more about our Vision, Mission and Values at: boys-brigade.org.uk/ourvision

President: Rev Dez Johnston
Chief Executive: Jonathan Eales

UK & ROI Headquarters

Felden Lodge
Hemel Hempstead
Herts HP3 0BL

Tel: 0300 303 4454
Email: support@boys-brigade.org.uk

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Registered Office: Felden Lodge, Hemel Hempstead, HP3 0BL, UK

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INTRODUCTION



The Boys' Brigade is a Christian youth organisation working with over 20,000 children and young people in more than 750 communities.

In 2023 we are celebrating our 140th anniversary, an opportunity to celebrate the impact and reflect on how the organisation has helped **shape the lives of millions of people** across the United Kingdom & Republic of Ireland. Much has changed over the last 140 years, and the last four years have been particularly challenging for everyone, but especially for children and young people with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As an organisation, children and young people are at the heart of who we are and what we do. We are focussed on listening to and empowering children and young people, improving the quality and consistency of their experience; and growing our work to reach out to even more children and young people.

Our Vision explains why we do what we do:

Our Vision is that children and young people experience **“life to the full”** (John 10:10).

Our Mission explains what we do:

The Boys' Brigade has faith in young people and provides them with opportunities to **learn, grow** and **discover** in a safe, fun and caring environment which is rooted in the Christian faith.

We are currently working on delivering our Strategic Plan which sees us through to 2025. Our strategy focuses on three core areas **Quality** (to improve the quality and consistency of experience for children and young people), **Growth** (to stabilise and grow our membership) and **Voice** (to raise the profile of the organisation and increase participation of children and young people in shaping the future of the organisation). To support us in delivering our strategy we are committed to ensuring that we understand the needs of children and young people and have commissioned this report to assist us in doing so.

It is important for any organisation to continually reflect on how its work remains relevant, meaningful and meets the needs of the people it serves and of its founding vision. It is clear from the report that over the last 10 years there have been significant shifts in culture, technology, and wider society, all of which shape and impact the experiences of children and young people. By identifying key insights about the lives and culture of children and young people in 2023, we will be **well placed to respond to these needs** and shape the future of the organisation.

We are grateful to our dedicated volunteer and staff teams that make all of our work possible, and we can be proud of what the organisation has achieved over the last 140 years, but also what we are doing today in the midst of some of the most challenging times that we have known.

The Boys' Brigade is also grateful for the work that the Youthscape Centre for Research has put into preparing this report.

METHODOLOGY

There are many aspects of young people's lives that have not changed over the last 30-40 years. However, there have been significant shifts in culture, technology, and wider society, all of which shape young people's experiences and worldview.

By identifying these trends and pressures, this report aims to help The Boys' Brigade volunteers 'see' young people and the worlds they inhabit with clarity and compassion. In this document we aim to answer the following questions:

- 1 What shifts in culture and society define the experience of being a young person in 2023?
- 2 What are the primary ways that young people's lives have changed over the last 10 years?

Review of key trend data

This report is the summary of an extensive review of published data relating to young people's lives. It focuses almost exclusively on studies with a 'time-series' or 'longitudinal' design. This means that the same questions were asked of young people in a particular age bracket every year, or every few years.^A This allows us to see trends and visualize the ways young people's lives stay the same or change over time.^B

Wherever possible we have collected, synthesized, and summarized the best quality studies produced over the last 10 years or so, which help us understand shifts in young people's experience. We have prioritised evidence collected from government departments, longitudinal studies and research projects with large sample sizes and robust methodologies.

Who the report covers

This report is a summary of key research studies exploring the lives of 10-18 year across the UK.^C For ease of communication, we refer to 'young people' throughout the document.^D It has not always been possible to identify studies that are UK wide, and so we sometimes report on data that is solely from England.

Limitations and challenges

Each study is limited in the questions it covers, the age range it includes, the years the data was collected and by geographical reach. There are some areas where we just don't have trend data. In these cases, we have looked for cross-sectional or 'snap-shot' surveys that tell us something about one or more moments in time, even if the questions are not completely comparable.

We have collected far more data than we include in the report but prioritise that which is most **relevant** in helping volunteers understand how life has changed for young people, and which is most **robust** due to the design of the study.

There are many large-scale studies where the most recent published wave is a couple of years old, because it takes a long time to analyse and publish results. In these cases, we don't yet know what effect, if any, COVID-19 may have on these trends. Our second report will focus exclusively on the impact of the pandemic and help to address these gaps.

Finally, we have looked at data for young people as a group, rather than breaking it down by variables such as gender, ethnicity, location, disability, mental health diagnosis, specific age, or religion. This is primarily to make sure the report is manageable

but is also a reflection on the data available. It will be important to recognise that each young person is unique, and that their context and experience won't necessarily be reflected in this report.

Given the short timeframe for the work, this summary is not exhaustive or comprehensive. Despite these limitations we are confident that, taken together, this data gives a strong sense of the ways life has changed for 10-18-year-olds.

Longitudinal research

This report draws heavily on the following data sources:

Understanding Society	UK wide household panel survey. 40,000 households each year. 10-15 year olds.
Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England	Cohort 1: Next Steps – 2004-2010 Cohort 2: Our Future – 2013-current
Health Behaviour of School-aged Children (HBSC)	Cross-national research study across Europe and North America, every four years.
Millennium Cohort Study	Following 19,000 young people born in 2000/01.
The Census 2021	Survey of households in England and Wales. Collected every 10 years.

Footnotes

^A In some studies the same young people are surveyed every year (e.g. 10-15 year olds whose households answer the same questions each year as part of the 'Understanding Society' research) and in other studies different young people are asked the same question every year or every few years.

^B In exploring how life has changed for young people over 10 years we obviously needed to avoid simply picking up the ways that young people's views or experiences change simply by virtue of them growing older. The Millennium Cohort Study tracked the same young people over three time points, and we make clear when we use this data.

^C While The Boys' Brigade also works in the Republic of Ireland, the terms of this report only cover the United Kingdom.

^D The term 'children and young people' is frequently used by The Boys' Brigade.



Download the full report

Scan the QR code or visit:
[boys-brigade.org.uk/
youth-culture-and-trends](https://boys-brigade.org.uk/youth-culture-and-trends)

SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the key findings that can be found in this report.

Health & Wellbeing

Most young people consider their physical health to be good, and this hasn't changed over the last decade although there have been increases in the rates of disability and obesity. However young people today report being less satisfied with life overall.

The last decade has seen rising rates of probable mental health disorders, but much smaller increases in rates of diagnosis – possibly the result of services being unable to cope with the number of referrals they receive.

Rates of self-harm have also increased (both self-reported and hospitalisation rates) as have the number of counselling sessions/referrals by Childline related to suicidal feelings, thoughts, or concerns.

Despite this, suicide rates remain stable, suggesting that community support and talking therapies may be helping young people with their mental health.

Identity, Values & Beliefs

Fewer young people identify as Christian now than a decade ago, but there is still openness to the idea of God and to prayer.

In contrast almost all young people now believe climate change will impact the UK, while remaining uninterested in general politics. However, they are democratically active to a degree, taking part in protests, signing petitions and often using digital spaces to participate.

16-24-year-olds are the most likely age-group to identify with a gender that is different to the sex assigned at birth, and there has been a steep rise in referrals to the NHS Gender Identity Service in recent years.

There is also greater diversity in young people's sexual orientation with more saying they feel attraction to both sexes. Surveys suggest young people are pro-trans, but despite this, there has also been a rise in reported bullying related to ethnicity, gender, disability, and sexual orientation, suggesting this generation is not always accepting of this diversity.

Behaviour & Lifestyle

Nicknamed 'Generation Sensible', today's teenagers are much less likely to engage in 'risky behaviours' such as smoking, drinking alcohol, or taking illegal drugs, and there has been a steady decline in the rate of under-18 pregnancies. They are also less likely to perceive these behaviours as risky.

Rates of youth offending have decreased in the last decade as have numbers of first-time offenders and reoffenders, and most young people aren't worried about being a victim of crime.

There has been no overall rise in sexting by young people, but younger people are now receiving sexts at similar rates to older young people.

However, knife crime rates are up, young people are 'vaping' more regularly, accessing online pornography at a younger age than previously and are more likely to have seen content or had experiences online that make them feel uncomfortable.

Relationships

Similar numbers of young people have been living with two married parents over the last ten years. They are now more likely to talk to their parents about things that matter to them most days, but fewer are eating a family meal together each day.

Satisfaction with friendships has dropped, and young people are more likely to report feeling lonely sometimes. They spend less time in-person socialising, less time engaged in play and more time with friends online.

Young people are less likely to have a steady boyfriend/girlfriend and less likely to be sexually active than in previous years.

The number of young people in care has increased and 1 in 10 experience high instability of placements.

Education & Future

More young people are receiving SEN support and attending out-of-school tutoring. Most continue to think it's important to do well in their GCSEs, and greater numbers are staying in school post-16 and continuing to apply to university. Nevertheless, young people are less satisfied with school and schoolwork than in previous years.

They are more likely to delay moving out of home and getting married, though just as likely to want to learn to drive or have a part-time job.

What do they need from us, and what might this mean for The Boys' Brigade?

As a Christian organisation that has faith in young people and confidence in the power of the God who calls us to boldly step forward and advance his Kingdom, some key opportunities for The Boys' Brigade could be around the following areas.

Faith

Adolescence can be a key time in a young person's faith journey as they begin to question, search and ultimately 'own' their faith. Youth groups can be important places of connection and safety as young people question and wrestle with the beliefs and values they may have grown up with. Young people these days are much less likely to consider themselves 'Christian' and less likely to have grown up in environments where they have gained knowledge or experience of the Christian faith. However, this doesn't necessarily mean they are all actively rejecting faith, and they may be more open to belief in God than we expect. Faith in action such as that demonstrated by volunteers at Boys' Brigade groups can be a powerful experience for young people with little or no experience of Christianity. Young people in disadvantaged areas are less likely to have access to faith-based youth groups than those living in affluent areas. There is a real opportunity for The Boys' Brigade to target their new funding to provide access to young people in areas without existing access to faith-based provision.

Key Opportunity: Providing access to Christian-based youth work in disadvantaged areas where young people currently have less opportunity than their more affluent peers to experience faith and spirituality in a youth setting.

Inspiring

Young people are spending more time online consuming content that is influencing their values, and views of the world and themselves. Higher rates of mental health disorders and overwhelmed services mean young people need community-based support more than ever. The dynamics of young people's friendships are also changing, as relationships are conducted more and more online. This may be related to a drop in satisfaction with friendships, and feelings of isolation as they spend more time on their own. Volunteer youth workers at Boys' Brigade can be role models and provide safe spaces to build trusted relationships with young people, as well as helping them to build healthy relationships with each other. In our increasingly polarised world where cancel culture seems rife, demonstrating the Christian model of relationship that values difference and overcomes conflict can help to inspire young people to experience all the fullness of life found in Christ.

Key Opportunity: Modelling the inclusive nature of the Kingdom of God, helping to equip young people to reach across the divisions in our society and to experience the hope, freedom, and community that life in Christ brings.

Caring

Discovering and owning their identity is a major focus for young people in adolescence. But while there is greater diversity in identity expression, young people are also more likely to be bullied because of their gender, sexuality, or ethnicity. Boys' Brigade youth groups can be spaces where young people are accepted, supported to work through conflict with peers, and where inclusivity and compassion can be modelled. We know that many struggle with their mental health and that statutory services are overwhelmed. By being present with young people at a significant time in their life, volunteers can offer the care, support, and space to talk that can make a real difference.

Key Opportunity: Providing safe and inclusive spaces within local communities where young people can be encouraged and supported to build authentic relationships with trusted adults who provide a non-judgemental and compassionate ear.

Trusting

The evidence suggests that young people are taking fewer risks and moving into independent adult life at a later age than previous generations. School is often very academically focused and structured, young people are spending less time outside the home socialising and they may be lacking opportunities for informal education and personal development. Organisations like Boys' Brigade provide young people with a chance to become a role model themselves through taking on the responsibilities of leadership. By giving them a platform to be heard, young people can feel empowered and able to influence. Helping them to have the confidence in their own skills, abilities and ideas is preparing them to lead in a world that needs their contribution, demonstrating the value Christ places on them as intentionally created individuals who are lovingly called and equipped to live for him.

Key Opportunity: Empowering young people to believe in themselves and their God-given potential, providing opportunities for them to develop leadership skills and supporting them to encourage and build up each other.





HEALTH & WELLBEING

Young people's happiness has declined in recent years: 1 in 15 expressed unhappiness with their life in 2020-21, compared to 1 in 30 a decade ago.

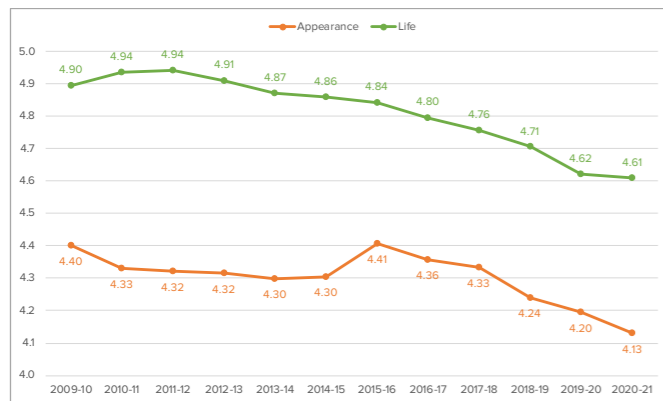


Figure 1: Mean scores (out of 7) given by young people aged 10-15-years-old for their happiness with life and their appearance.¹

Young people report being least happy with their appearance, compared with other factors such as family, friends, school and schoolwork. 1 in 7 now say they're unhappy with their appearance, up from 1 in 10 a decade ago. This change was particularly noticeable during the pandemic when face-to-face interactions were limited. Greater use of social media during this period may have negatively affected young people's self-image, as some girls reported feeling pressure from body-conscious exercise content and comparing themselves to others.²

“ I hate them [selfies]. They've caught on so much with everyone. Endless photos of girls with duck faces in soft-lensing. The whole world looks like a bad seventies porn film again. And the weird thing is they never look like the actual person.”

Joni (age 17)³

Young people's mental health has worsened, as we've seen a rise in psychological distress (Figure 2). Alongside this, in 2017, 1 in 9 young people had a probable mental health disorder, and this increased to 1 in 6 in 2021.⁴

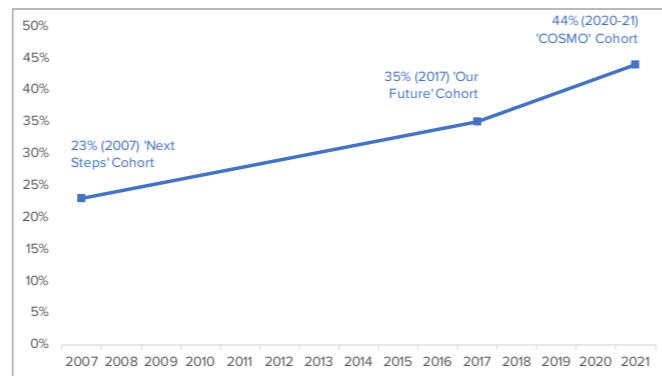


Figure 2: Percentage of young people reaching the threshold for probable psychological distress.⁵

However, mental health diagnoses have only increased slightly, and the pandemic has worsened this trend as services struggle to meet the growing demand for support. There has been a significant increase in the number of young people referred to child and adolescent services, but the number of doctors in these services has remained stagnant – leaving a significant gap between young people's mental health needs and the available care.

“ I wouldn't have cost the NHS so much if I was helped earlier. I was in a much better place when I presented than when I was admitted.”

Jess⁶

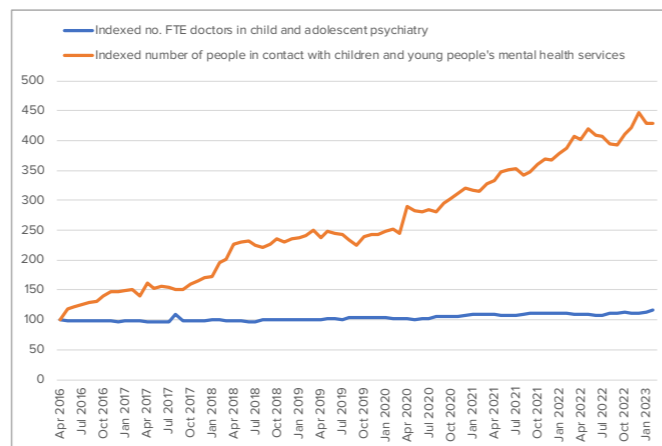


Figure 3: Number of young people in contact with mental health services compared to number of FTE doctors.⁷

Self-harm rates among young people have increased over time, including the number of young people being hospitalised. The average age of onset is estimated to be around 13 years old and certain groups, such as non-binary young people, are particularly vulnerable to self-harm.

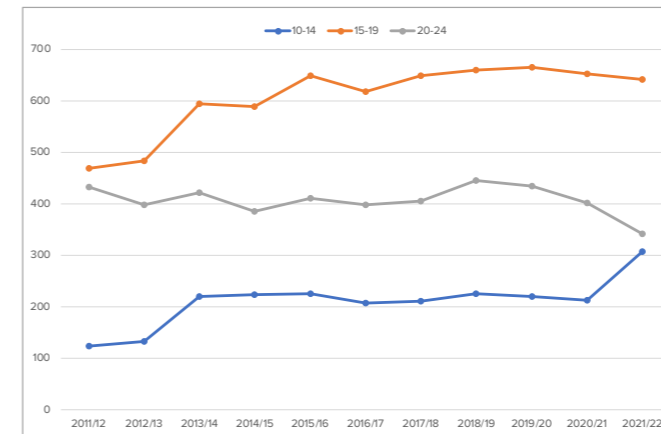


Figure 4: Hospitalisations per 100,000 for self-harm for 10-24-year-olds.⁸

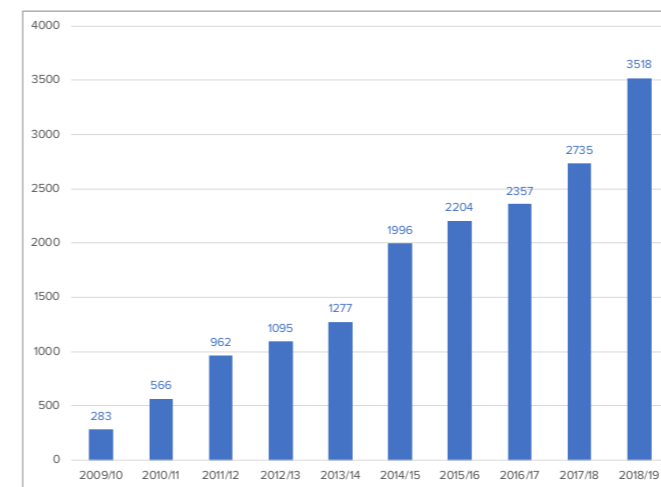


Figure 5: Number of referrals made by Childline for suicide concern.⁹

Childline has seen an increase in referrals and counselling sessions related to suicide concerns. While more girls seek support from Childline, the number of recorded suicides is higher among boys. Seeking support appears to help, with rates of suicide remaining fairly stable despite the increase in referrals and counselling sessions.

“ For the past few months, I've been feeling lonely and like I'm nothing. Most recently I've had really dark thoughts about suicide. I've been self-harming as a distraction as wherever I go it's always on mind...I act as happy when I'm around my mum – she seems to think I'm fine but I'm really dying inside. I feel like nobody understands and I don't know who to tell. I'm worried they'll laugh and won't believe me or say, 'you out of all people can't be feeling that!'”

A Childline caller age 15¹⁰

However, frontline services, including school nurses and local youth services, are struggling to cope with the increased demand for mental and physical health support. School nurse numbers have decreased, and youth organisations have had to cut services and faced closure despite a surge in demand.

“ I knew that I could always speak to a youth worker there whenever I was feeling troubled, which was quite a lot.”

19-year-old female, Leatherhead Youth Project¹¹

Overall, the well-being of young people has faced various challenges that the pandemic has exacerbated and revealed the need for greater and more accessible support.



IDENTITY, VALUES & BELIEFS

Very few young people identify as Christian, but many are still open to prayer and belief in God. They show little interest in party politics, but are conscious of the climate crisis, and engage with social/political causes online. Young people today are more fluid and diverse in their gender and sexual identity than previous generations, but also experience more bullying related to ethnicity, gender, disability and sexual orientation.

In the last decade young people have become less likely to describe themselves as heterosexual, and more likely to identify with a gender different to their sex at birth. The Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS), a specialised clinic for young people with gender identity difficulties, has seen a significant increase in referrals since 2015. Referrals have shifted from mostly birth-registered males seeking help at a younger age to more birth-registered females seeking help in their early teenage years.¹²

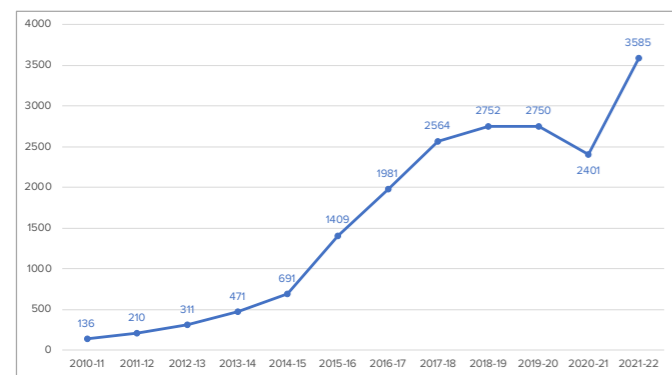


Figure 6: Number of referrals to the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS).¹³

Transgender young people experienced Covid restrictions negatively in a range of ways, including lack of social support, unsupportive families, and limited access to treatment.^{14,15} During the pandemic they reported worse mental health, higher levels of daily worry, and increased tension in their living situations

compared to their cisgender peers, making them more at risk of homelessness.¹⁶

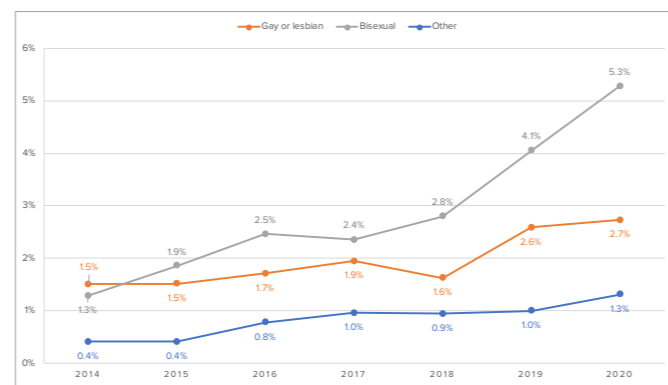


Figure 7: LGB+ identity in 16-24-year-olds.¹⁷

There has been an increase in the percentage of young people identifying as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB+) and those aged 16-24 were more likely to identify as LGB+ than any other age group in the 2021 census. This seems to be primarily driven by a rise in the percentage of young people identifying as bisexual.^{18,19} Sexual minority young people experienced lower levels of social support and were four times more likely to self-report poor health during the pandemic²⁰ compared with their heterosexual peers. They were also more likely to report severe psychological distress (30% compared with 14% heterosexual) and clinically significant anxiety symptoms (36% compared with 22%).

“The only reason I know my way around the LGBT community is due to the internet. A major area of education, LGBT history and culture and mental health is simply not being talked about to our younger people. Schools do not take it seriously and although they hang posters about LGBT awareness and society, teachers still do not understand calling someone a ‘faggot’ is hate.”

Non-binary young person, 16-17, West Midlands²¹

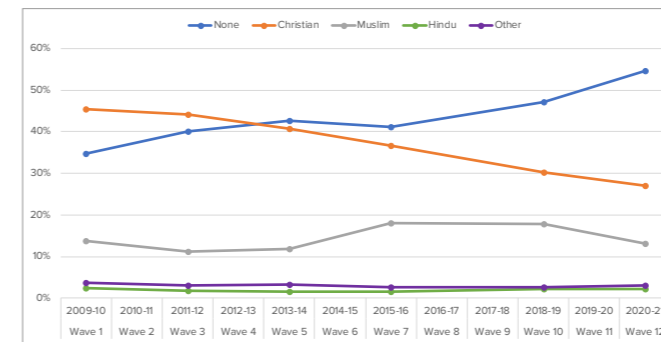


Figure 8: Religious affiliation of 10-15-year-olds.²²

Christianity has declined among young people, with a significant drop in those identifying as Christian or attending a church. However, beliefs, openness to faith, and prayer practice are more complex, with many young people still expressing belief in a higher power or supernatural being.²³

In one survey many young people who struggle to believe in God said this was because of the suffering, death and illness they saw in the world. Yet when asked which words might describe God's character, the top five were: powerful, kind, loving, caring and good. However, they were less positive about church. While 62% said they'd had contact with a church, only 8% viewed this contact positively. Contact was mostly through school visits and formal events, which were not seen as very engaging.



Figure 9: Percentage of young people age 10-15-years-old that believe the UK will be affected by climate change.²⁴



Young people in the UK are concerned about climate change but find it harder to make significant changes in their environmental behaviours. Guilt and anxiety related to climate change are prevalent, but young people often feel a lack of agency to make a meaningful impact and climate anxiety is affecting the daily lives of many.

“At 14 I started to learn more about climate change and what I found out made me terrified for my future,” Lily from Inverness says. “At first I didn’t know what to do because I felt so alone. I felt so helpless...I remember mentioning it to my friends, who said it’s OK, someone else will solve it. But nowhere near enough is being done when you look at the news.” She joined a protest in Inverness in 2019, and from there she says “I put my fear into action”. Lily recommends involvement. “Things will get better because you’ll learn to deal with it. It won’t disappear but if you can, reach out to groups that can help. Take your fear and turn it into action – that’s all we as young people can do.”²⁵

While young people are often considered progressive, some display an illiberal attitude toward those with differing views. A significant number agree that some people deserve to be "cancelled" and have little tolerance for opposing beliefs. Alongside this, specific forms of bullying, including sexual bullying, have increased, which may be due to greater awareness of these behaviours or because they're happening more. Sexual harassment in schools is particularly concerning issue, with harmful behaviours occurring frequently and some young people considering them normal.

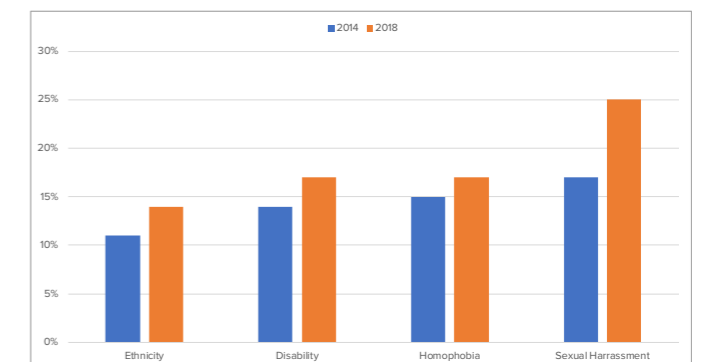


Figure 10: Percentage of young people who have experienced specific bullying "at least once or twice" in the past two months.²⁶

Compared to previous generations there is a fluidity experienced by young people with respect to identity, values and beliefs. However, this isn't creating the tolerant culture we perhaps might expect and young people face the challenge of creating cohesive communities in an increasingly uncertain world.

BEHAVIOURS & LIFESTYLE

Today's teenagers, nicknamed 'Generation Sensible', are less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, use illegal drugs or have sex at a young age – though many have started vaping. They are less likely to commit crime in general and less worried about being a victim of it. However, they face emerging risks when it comes to the online world where they are seeing pornography at a younger age and sending or receiving explicit messages is becoming normalised.

Teenagers today are less likely to have had sex at 16 than previous generations. The last 20 years have seen a significant decrease in under-18 pregnancy rates²⁷ and a more recent drop in rates of sexually transmitted infections, although these slightly increased again in 2022.²⁸

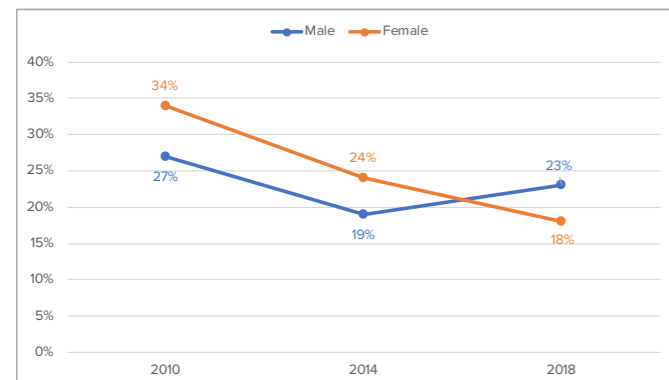


Figure 11: Percentage of 15-year-olds by gender who report having had sex.²⁹

Young people today are drinking alcohol less often than the previous generation, especially among 11-15-year-olds. The introduction of measures like Challenge 21 and Challenge 25, aimed at reducing sales to underage buyers, may have contributed to this decline. However, there is an increased risk as young people approach the legal drinking age, with higher rates seen in 15-year-olds.

Overall, fewer young people today are using drugs, with an overall decrease of 40% from 2001 to 2021. Reasons for the more recent rise and fall are unclear but may be due to increased accessibility through being online, and/or the development of the 'county lines' model of drug supply. The more recent decrease may be due to the pandemic or other factors such as improved policing and/or raised awareness of child criminal exploitation and county lines activity.

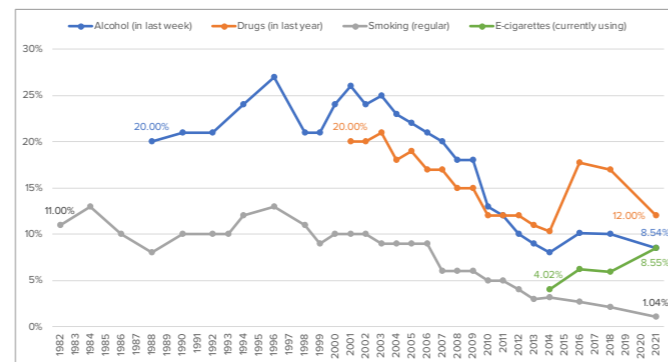


Figure 12: Percentage of 11-15-year-olds who report engaging in risky behaviours.³⁰

The number of young people who smoke regularly has also significantly declined since 1996; girls used to have higher smoking rates than boys, but since 2018, there has been similarity between genders. In contrast whilst the use of e-cigarettes among young people has been relatively low, there was a spike in usage from 2018 to 2021, especially among girls. Boys' usage remained relatively stable during that period. This will be a trend to watch as more recent data becomes available.

Overall crime rates for young people have decreased. However there has been a rise in knife crime, specifically. The vast majority of these offences are related to possession rather than threatening behaviour, which suggests young people are becoming more scared rather than more violent.³¹ This does appear to conflict with data showing that young people are generally becoming less worried about being a victim of crime.³² However, knife crime may be more localised to specific areas rather than being a widespread risk for young people across the UK.

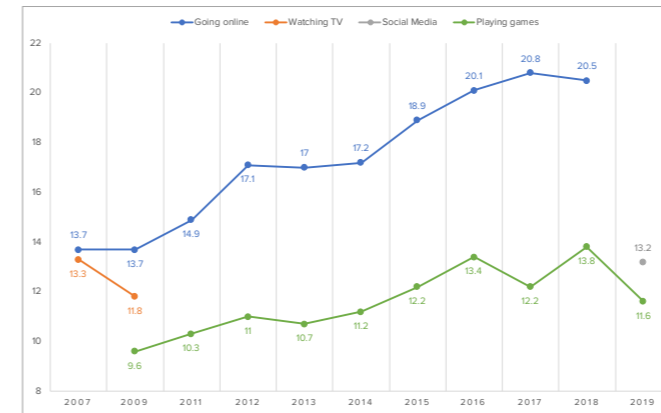


Figure 13: Mean weekly hours of media consumption.³³

Young people are clearly spending more time online, playing games, and using social media – primarily because of the expansion of the smart phone. The use of mobile phones to go online has steadily increased since 2010, with almost all 12-15-year-olds using them in 2021. The pandemic accelerated this further, with increases use of social media during lockdowns.

There is little clear evidence about the impact of these trends, but we shouldn't assume that more time online is always detrimental to friendships. Some research suggests that frequent online communication with existing friends is beneficial to young people's wellbeing.³⁴

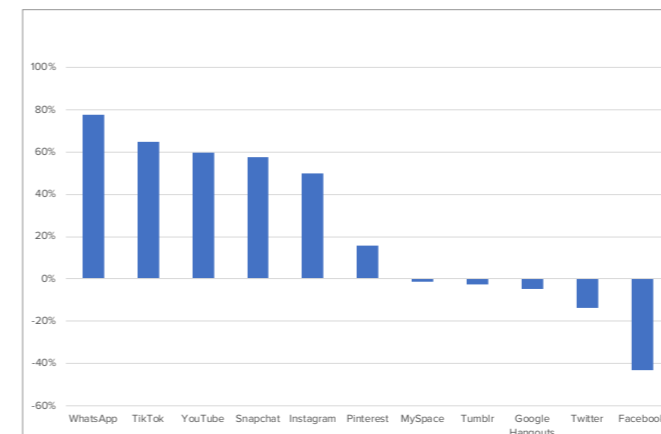


Figure 14: Changes in the percentage of young people using each app from 2014 to 2020.³⁵

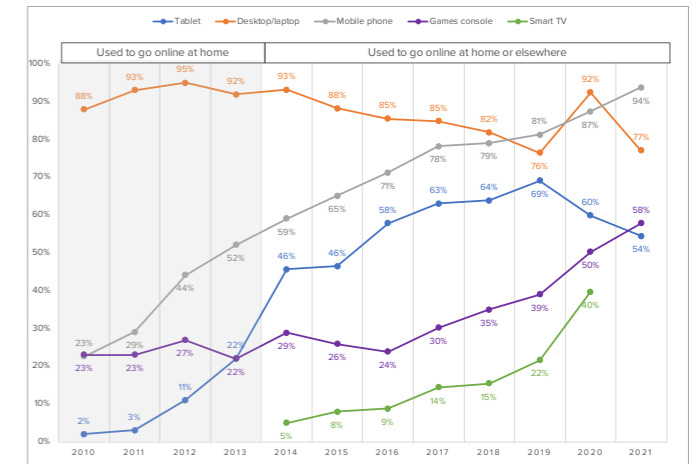


Figure 15: Devices used by 12-15-year-olds to go online.³⁶

Social media platforms have become more popular among young people, with almost 90% of 12-15-year-olds having a social media profile in 2019-2021. The most popular platforms for young people to have a profile on in 2020 were YouTube (86%), What's App (78%), Instagram (66%) and TikTok (65%). More recent data is not comparable due to variation in the questions asked. There are also differences between boys and girls in the apps they use, as well as in gaming preferences.

“ I used to post. When I first downloaded it, it was mortifying. About two years, I used to post photo dumps and stuff, just cringy things that I don't like any more, so I hid them. I've deleted those ones, but I have other ones that I post just straight into My Eyes Only.”
Taylor, 14³⁷

Young people today may appear to be engaging less often in risky behaviours than previous generations but it's worth remembering that they are the first generation to have a digital footprint from birth, and more data about them is being collected than ever before. This may have long-term consequences in adulthood, as their data profiles could impact their daily experiences, influenced by advancements in analytical techniques and artificial intelligence.



RELATIONSHIPS

Most young people still grow up in a household with two married parents, something that hasn't changed in the last decade. They are less likely to eat a family meal together each day but are more likely to talk to their parents about things that matter to them. Young people spend less time socialising in-person, less time engaged in play, more time with friends online and are less likely to have a steady boyfriend/girlfriend. Their satisfaction with friendships has declined and they are more likely to report feeling lonely sometimes.

Between 2006 and 2014, more young people reported feeling lonely on occasion. More recently, calls to Childline about loneliness by under-11s have risen by 71% in 5 years.³⁸ A survey by the Prince's Trust in 2022 revealed that 30% of young people felt they didn't know how to make new friends and had never felt more alone.³⁹

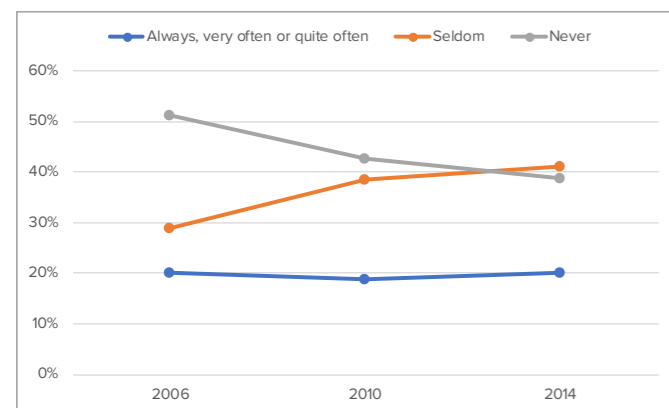


Figure 16: Percentage of young people aged 10-15-years-old who report being lonely.⁴⁰

“I think that sometimes it's good to be alone. You don't want to constantly be surrounded by people. But I think it should be a choice. You don't want to be alone without wanting to be. It's not a very nice feeling.”

Female, aged 13 years⁴¹

Since 2005, young people have been more likely to have frequent conversations with their parents about important things. Between 2005 and 2014 the number of 14/15-year-olds in England who talked "most days" about meaningful topics to their fathers increased by 16% and by 18% for mothers. Similar findings showed that the percentage of 13-year-olds in England reporting a positive relationship with their mother increased by 5% and with their father by 6% between 2004 and 2015. Other research supports these findings by suggesting that not only are young people talking to their parents more often, but they also find it easier to talk to their fathers, specifically.⁴² Spending more time with family and improving communication with parents were reported as positive impacts of the pandemic for some young people.⁴³

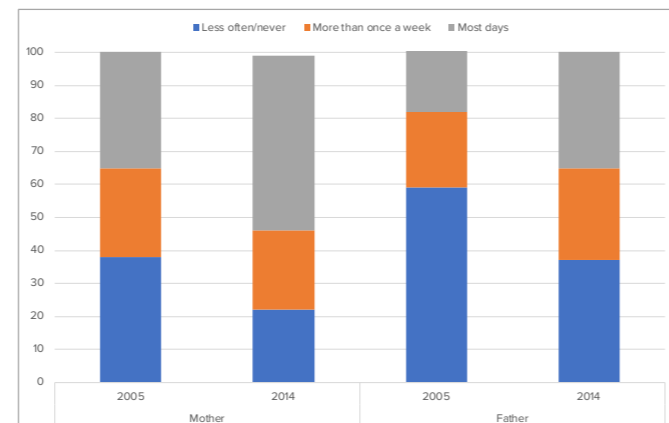


Figure 17: How often young people talk to their parents about things that matter to them.⁴⁴

While overall satisfaction with family has remained relatively stable, increasing numbers of young people have expressed unhappiness with their family relationships over the last few years, possibly the result of the intensity of lockdowns. LGBT+ young people were especially affected, as they are less likely to have strong relationships at home. Research conducted from December 2020 to January 2021 found that only 27% of LGBT+ young people described their relationship with their family as very close, compared to 50% of non-LGBT+ young people.

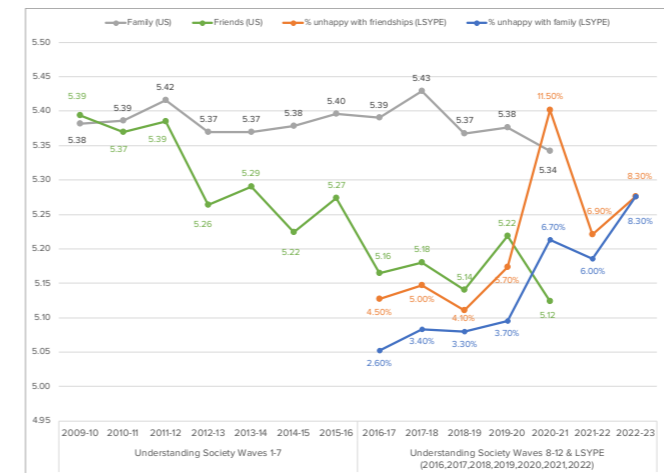


Figure 18: Average satisfaction score (out of 7) compared with % of young people who are unhappy with family and friend relationships. (US = Understanding Society survey, LSYPE = Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England Cohort 2).⁴⁵

When it comes to friendships, we notice a slightly different pattern. Over the past decade, the average rating that 10-15-year-olds gave to their friendships has decreased. There has also been a significant rise in the percentage of young people expressing low satisfaction with their friendships. In 2016, this was 4.5% and spiked to 11.5% in 2020. While dropping to 6.9% in 2021 it remains higher than pre-pandemic and was at 8.3% in 2022. Adolescence is a crucial stage for young people to learn and navigate peer relationships, so these changes in friendship satisfaction are important to pay attention to.

Young people are spending less time socialising in person, both with friends and family and increasingly conducting social relationships online. They are less likely to have a steady boyfriend or girlfriend, less likely to share a meal with family every day, don't go out as often in the late evening but are spending more time online with friends instead. Attendance at youth groups (both uniformed and non-uniformed) has also decreased. Whether this is due to closure of groups and youth centres following funding cuts or young peoples' choices not to attend we don't know.

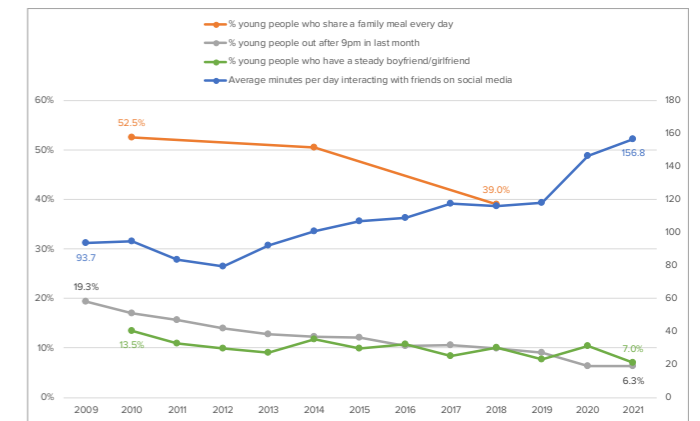


Figure 19: Changes in time young people spend socialising with family and friends.⁴⁶

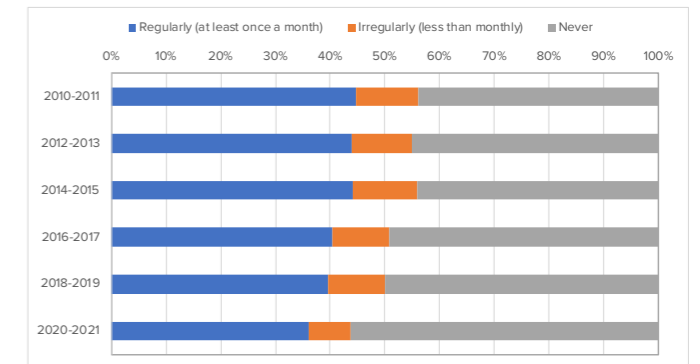


Figure 20: Frequency that young people attend a youth group or club (includes uniformed groups).⁴⁷

Over the past decade, there has been a shift in the social behaviours of young people, suggesting a move to conduct social relationships increasingly online rather than face to face. Alongside this we see that young people are less happy with their friendships and more recently also becoming less happy with family relationships. Despite this they do seem to be talking more frequently to their parents about the things they say are important to them.





EDUCATION & FUTURE

Young people are staying in education longer and think it's important to do well in their exams. But they are less satisfied with school than they used to be, and more likely to receive support for additional needs or attend out-of-school tutoring. They are just as likely to have a part-time job or learn to drive as previous generations, but are delaying other transitions to adulthood, like moving out of home.

Over the years, there has been a noticeable decline in how satisfied 10-15-year-olds feel about school. Similarly, their satisfaction with schoolwork has also taken a hit. While these may not seem like drastic changes, it's important to note that they represent a significant decrease compared to a decade ago.

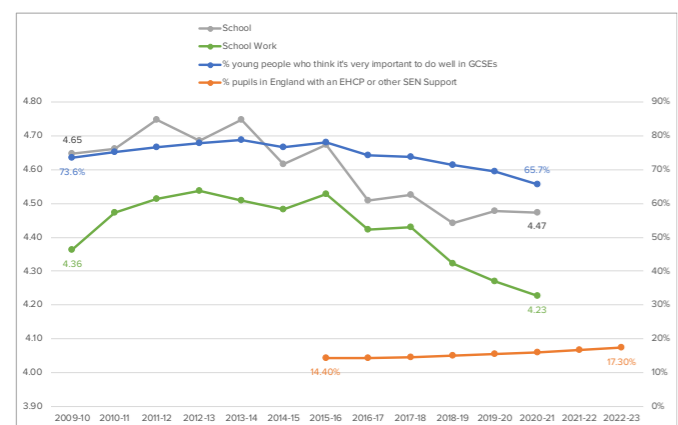


Figure 21: Young people's satisfaction with school and school work and attitude to doing well in GCSEs. ⁴⁸

The importance placed on doing well in exams has also seen a shift among 10-15-year-olds. In the past five years, there has been a decrease in the percentage of students who consider it "very important" to succeed in their GCSEs. On the other hand, the proportion of teenagers who view exam success as "important" increased from 20% to 28%, suggesting that whilst most still value success in exams, some now place slightly less emphasis on it.

There has also been an increase in the proportion of young people receiving SEN support at school. The increasing emphasis on higher education over the last two decades and the introduction of linear GCSE and A Level assessment in 2014 has likely influenced young people's attitudes toward schoolwork and the pressure they feel to perform well.

More recently, whilst most (81%) young people were happy to return to school after the pandemic significant numbers are still worried about catching up with schoolwork and the impact of Covid on their exams. ⁴⁹

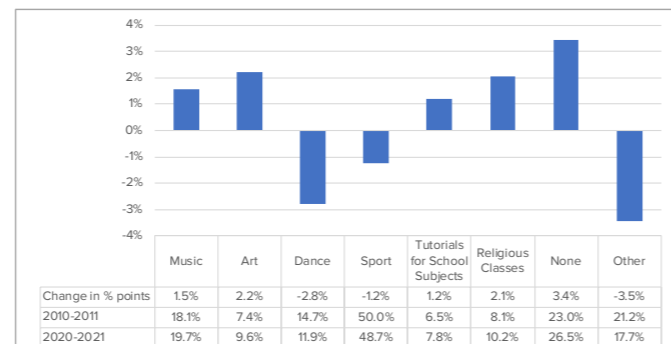


Figure 22: Change in the percentage of young people participating in out-of-school activities between 2010-11 to 2020-21. ⁵⁰

Participation in extracurricular activities has undergone changes as well. While sports continue to be the most popular after-school choice, there has been a decline in dance, sports, and other out-of-school activities. On the other hand, participation in music, art and religious classes has increased. Young people are also increasingly turning to tutoring for school subjects, indicating a desire for additional support outside the regular classroom setting.

Since the pandemic more young people are now participating in extracurricular activities. In May 2021, only 53% were involved, but by 2022, the rate increased to 83%. ⁵¹ This surge in participation after the pandemic may indicate a stronger desire among young people to get involved in activities after being restricted during lockdowns.



Figure 23: Percentage of 10-15-year-olds who have been in paid work in the last week. ⁵²

The employment landscape among young teenagers has shown some fluctuations. While the percentage of 10-15-year-olds involved in paid work was gradually decreasing from 2004-2008, it has been higher in the past decade. This may be due in part to the larger cohorts participating in the survey from 2009 onwards as the British Household Survey became part of the larger Understanding Society survey. The reasons behind the spike in 2013-14 are not clear.

The impact of the pandemic is evident in the drop observed in 2020, which disrupted many traditional avenues for employment. Unfortunately, recent data on employment rates among younger teenagers is not yet available, making it challenging to assess the post-pandemic scenario accurately.

The average age at which young people age 10-15-years-old report that they want to leave home has risen significantly since 2015 despite being relatively stable prior to this (aside from an unexplained dip in 2008). Whether this recent rise is due to changes in young people's expectations about what age they will be able to leave home and become independent or whether it's due to changes in their desire to do so we can't be sure. We don't have recent enough data to see what impact the pandemic has had on this average age. But we do know that whilst more young people aged 15-34-years-old were living at home in 2021 (42.3%) compared with 2019 (40.1%) this had dropped down again in 2022 to 40.4%. ⁵³

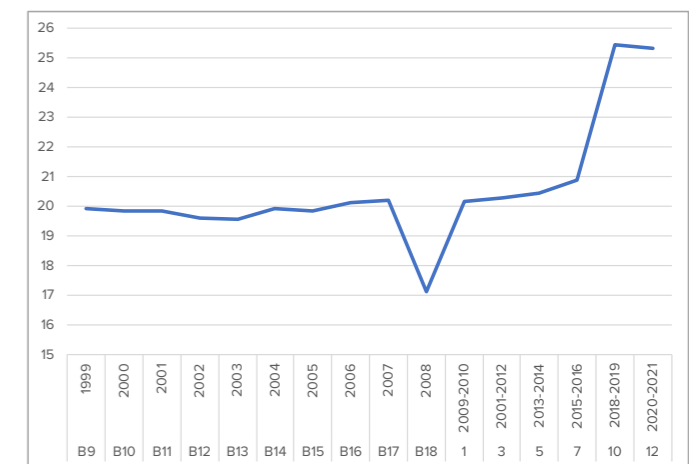


Figure 24: Mean age at which 10-15-year-olds say they want to leave home. ⁵⁴





IMPACT OF COVID-19

Since the earliest days of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been concern about its impact on young people. How would a generation cope, that was already struggling with loneliness and poor mental health? What would be the impact of school closures? Loss of social time? Digital exclusion?

Several studies have now been published that help us begin to answer these questions, and the results are predictably mixed. Both positive and negative impacts have been reported to date, and complexities in the data make simple explanations hard to find.

Between March 2020 and January 2022 young people and schools faced a variety of restrictions, from national lockdowns to mask wearing. Some of the effects of these experiences on young people have been due to the withdrawal or inaccessibility of services e.g. closure of youth facilities or delays in accessing treatment due to Covid restrictions and Covid-related absences. Others are related to the mental health impacts of experiencing lockdowns, isolation and uncertainty about the future.

The pandemic had a negative impact on several aspects of young people's health and wellbeing.

Obesity rates in younger children spiked and 16-18 year olds reported disruption to their quality of sleep. Young people were more likely than the general population to report having long Covid and were more likely to say it impacted on their daily activities.

Young people appeared to be slightly less physically active during the early stages of the pandemic, and while the amount of time they spend being active seems to have returned to pre-pandemic levels, they are also spending more time per day being physically inactive.

Young people's mental health has also been affected, with the pandemic exacerbating a pre-existing trend of rising rates. Some groups have been more vulnerable to the negative impacts on their mental health than others but there is also some data to suggest that for others there have been positive effects.

During the pandemic young people spent more time online and socialisation moved online but was often done in conjunction with other activities including gaming or using social media. More recently these patterns have changed again as content online becomes more 'professionalised' and young people become more self-conscious of what they post in the public domain.

During a period of not seeing people face to face, some young people appear to become more critical of their own appearance. While it is not clear exactly why this would be, it is possible that face-to-face interaction was replaced by greater social media use, which for some young people had a negative impact on their self-image.

There has been a significant rise in hospitalisations for eating disorders, delays in urgent treatment referrals and additional reports that frontline services are struggling to cope with the complexities of young people's post-pandemic needs.

More young people are now participating in extracurricular activities than before the pandemic. Despite an obvious decline during the pandemic with only 53% participating in at least one activity in May 2021 – 83% of young people were participating in 2022.⁵⁵ This compares to pre-pandemic rates that were fairly stable (average 79.7% 2010-2018)⁵⁶ and perhaps reflects a desire in more young people to engage with activities after experiencing lockdown restrictions. There has also been increase in the number of young people visiting more outside spaces in 2022 compared with 2021.

Youth services have traditionally provided a lifeline for many young people but funding cuts are resulting in a situation in which individuals are increasingly being left without local spaces where they can engage in positive activities that support their development, as youth services are forced to close their doors.

Variations in the data suggest that young people who were experiencing disadvantage before the pandemic were disproportionately negatively affected by it, whether that was due to lack of accessible safe spaces and relationships, increased barriers to learning during lockdowns or increased vulnerability to criminal exploitation and/or exclusion.

For young people for whom the pandemic had positive impacts examples given were young people feeling calmer, being happy to spend more time with their family, communication with parents improving and serving as a protective factor against anxiety.⁵⁷

It is too soon to know how the experience of living through a pandemic will ultimately shape this generation, or what the long-term impacts will be for different groups – especially in light of wider events and forces, like the Russian-Ukraine war and the 'Cost of Living Crisis'. But there is no denying that many young people face real and pressing needs as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key Opportunity: The Boys' Brigade has an opportunity to share and embody a vital message. To be present in those spaces where services have been cut, where young people face disadvantage, where waiting lists are too long and where uncertainty reigns. To bring a message that experiencing life in all its fullness is a reality that is open to all; that there are people willing to come alongside them, to invest themselves in relationships and genuinely care for them; that they are included, they are valued and they have something to offer each other and the world.



Download the full report

Scan the QR code or visit: boys-brigade.org.uk/youth-culture-and-trends





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