



MINISTRY OF
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO TAIOHI

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Ten Going On Sixteen: A profile of young New Zealanders in the transition years

From data collected by Victoria University's Youth Connectedness Project 2006-2008



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Ministry of Youth Development
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Acknowledgements

The data in this report is drawn from Victoria University of Wellington's research project: *Adolescent Wellbeing and Connectedness to School, Family, Peers, and Community over Time*. The lead researchers for that project were Dr Paul Jose and Dr Jan Pryor from the Roy McKenzie Centre for Family Studies, Victoria University of Wellington.

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Foreword

Over the three years between 2006 and 2008, researchers at Victoria University followed three cohorts (ages 10,12 and 14 in 2006) of 1800 New Zealand young people, surveying their relationships with families, friends, schools and communities, and assessing their responses to various measures of health and wellbeing.

The research was designed to test the hypothesis that “connectedness” – to family, peers, school and community – is predictive of subsequent health and wellbeing of young people. The hypothesis was confirmed, with “connectedness to family and school” most strongly predictive of subsequent happiness, self worth, good physical and mental health, educational achievement and a strong sense of identity.

Over the course of the research, the researchers surveyed the views of the young participants on a wide range of topics, from their experiences of peer pressure through to their views about the future. Their responses provide a rich picture of the lives of this generation of young New Zealanders, as they navigate the challenging years of early adolescence and deal with the often conflicting pressures placed on them by family, friends and the wider community.

The Youth Connectedness Project was the first research project to include the 10 to 12 age group in a comprehensive survey. The inclusion of this younger group along with their older counterparts enables us to see more clearly the differences in attitudes and experiences between younger and older adolescents as well as between the sexes.

The Ministry of Youth Development has taken a closer look at some of the data from the original survey and the findings are the subject of this current report.

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The challenging years of early adolescence

Recent advances in neuroscience and endocrinology have highlighted both the vulnerability and the potential of the early adolescent years.

Between the ages of eight and 16, young people deal with a cascade of changes - beginning with the onset of puberty and continuing as they cope with changing bodies, emotional swings, expanding brain power and the influences and pressures that come from peers and the world outside the family.

Some researchers talk about this progression as mastering the “tasks” of adolescence: getting to grips with physical and sexual maturation; developing more complex ways of thinking, achieving emotional independence, building an individual identity, and learning to relate differently to peers and parents¹.

Others emphasise the vital role played by families and the community at large in promoting resiliency and helping young people to build their strengths in the “seven Cs”²:

- Confidence
- Competence
- Connectedness
- Character
- Contribution
- Coping
- Control

Whatever the approach, researchers agree that this period in young people’s development is one of the most critical of all developmental stages. During this time the adolescent brain undergoes a radical reshaping: it’s the time when life events have a strong influence on neurobiological development. This has implications for the learning and the behaviour that young people engage in during this period. It highlights the susceptibility of young people to the negative effects of alcohol and other risky lifestyle choices that are ‘rites of passage’ during this stage of development. But just as importantly, it reinforces the power that positive role models, authoritative parenting and inspirational teaching can have to transform a young person’s life.

How these influences are impacting on this cohort of New Zealand adolescents is seen in some of the data reported in the following sections.

¹ McLaren K. 2002. Youth Development: A Literature Review. Ministry of Youth Affairs, Wellington

² Ginsburg K. 2007. A parent’s guide to building resilience in children and teens. American Academy of Paediatrics

Themes emerging from the data

The relative unhappiness of girls

On nearly every measure of wellbeing, from physical and emotional health through to relationships with parents and friends, satisfaction with life and confidence about the future, girls on average score lower than boys.

From the early teenage years, girls have a more negative view of themselves and of life generally than boys.

This reflects a significant change that occurs among girls after the age of 12. Up until then, girls are doing well. Ten year old girls have good relationships with their parents, they resist peer pressure, they do very well at school, teachers respect them, they feel healthy and have lots of energy, they are happy with how they look, almost none smoke or drink, they take action to solve problems that arise, they are happy with their lives and are reasonably confident about the future.

From about 12 onwards, though, this high level of positivity declines quite rapidly. Given that the average age that girls have their first period is 12-13, the explanation is likely to lie in the interaction between pubertal stage and social and cultural expectations³. The onset of puberty has already been linked to increase in depression⁴ and increased rates of self harm among adolescent girls. In societies where expectations of girls are high, the levels of stress and anxiety among young women seem also to be higher.

The relative steadiness of boys

In contrast to girls, boys maintain a more even keel through adolescence, never quite experiencing the highs of the younger girls, or the lows of the older girls.

Boys find it easy to talk to their parents and maintain a high level of confidence in them throughout adolescence. They very rarely fight with their friends. At school, the majority say they are doing well, and while their confidence drops a little during the high school years, older boys are more likely than older girls to say they are doing well. Boys feel healthier and more energetic than girls, particularly in late adolescence. They are less likely to feel sad or get upset by things. (Younger boys are an exception to this general finding). They are happy with how they look and this barely changes through adolescence. A high proportion say

³ Patton G C, Viner, R. 2007. Pubertal Transitions in Health. *The Lancet* 369 1130-1139

⁴ Wade TJ, Cairney J Pevalin DJ. 2002. Emergence of gender differences in depression during adolescence *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 41: 190-198

they are happy with their lives and this varies only very slightly with age. Boys are more optimistic about the future than girls, although this optimism declines a little with age.

Sadness among younger boys

In contrast to the older boys, a significant minority (around 20%) of the youngest boys in the survey say they feel sad or lonely a lot of the time.

Ten year old boys are more likely than their older counterparts to say they get upset by things that don't usually upset them and to keep feeling bad even when others try to cheer them up. They are also more likely to say they avoid dealing with their problems at this age.

Given that this is an age and stage when young people are generally happiest with their life, it is a concern that some are feeling persistently miserable.

The explanation may lie in the importance that boys of this age attach to their family. Ten year old boys are far more likely than girls of this age to say their family matters most to them. For girls at this age, friends are as important as family. If the family breaks up, or if there is some crisis in the family, it may be that boys of this age are most affected.

Description of the Youth Connectedness study's methodology

Victoria University's study of the relationship between "connectedness" to family, school and community and young people's health and wellbeing began in 2006 and followed approximately 1800 students over three years. The student sample was interviewed three times – in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

Where the students were from

Three cohorts of similar size were drawn from students in Years 6, 8 and 10 in a cross section of schools, predominantly in the lower North Island. All school deciles were represented in the sample, the average being 5.5. Students in rural schools were slightly under-represented.

Gender

52 per cent of the sample was female and 48 per cent was male.

Ethnicity

New Zealand European students represented 50 per cent of the sample. Maori students were oversampled, representing 30 per cent of the sample. "Other" ethnicities made up 20 per cent of the sample.

Age

In 2006, the students were aged 10/11 (Year 6); 12/13 (Year 8) and 14/15 (Year 10). The study re-interviewed each student over the following two years.

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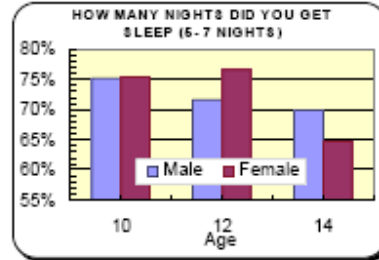
How this report has treated the data

This report analyses student responses to selected questions by age, gender and by time period.

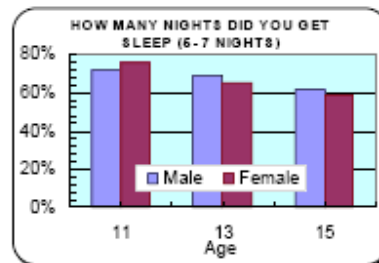
The responses are presented by time period in colour coded tables and graphs. In this way, the differences can be seen between the age groups at each time period and between individuals over each of the time periods. An example of the approach can be seen below:

IN THE LAST WEEK, ON HOW MANY NIGHTS DID YOU GET ATLEAST 8 HOURS OF SLEEP (5-7 nights)

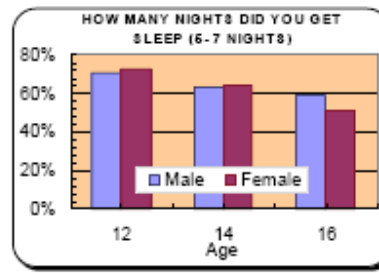
TIME PERIOD - 1	Gender	Age			Total
		10	12	14	
	Male	5-7 nights	164	136	97
Total		218	190	139	838
Percentage		75.2%	71.6%	69.8%	72.4%
Female	5-7 nights	177	140	127	646
	Total	235	183	196	908
	Percentage	75.3%	76.5%	64.8%	71.1%



TIME PERIOD - 2	Gender	Age			Total
		11	13	15	
	Male	5-7 nights	193	161	112
Total		269	234	181	837
Percentage		71.7%	68.8%	61.9%	68.5%
Female	5-7 nights	210	154	147	603
	Total	279	235	251	909
	Percentage	75.3%	65.5%	58.6%	66.3%



TIME PERIOD - 3	Gender	Age			Total
		12	14	16	
	Male	5-7 nights	189	150	108
Total		267	236	183	840
Percentage		70.8%	63.6%	59.0%	66.3%
Female	5-7 nights	205	151	128	569
	Total	283	235	252	914
	Percentage	72.4%	64.3%	50.8%	62.3%



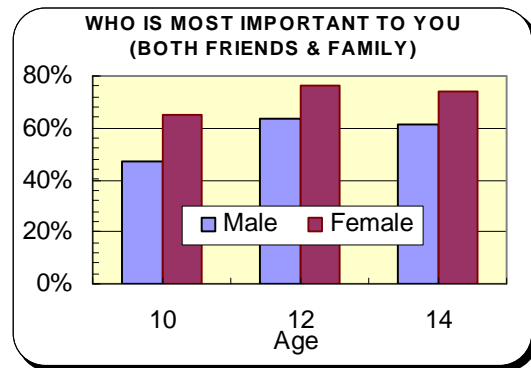
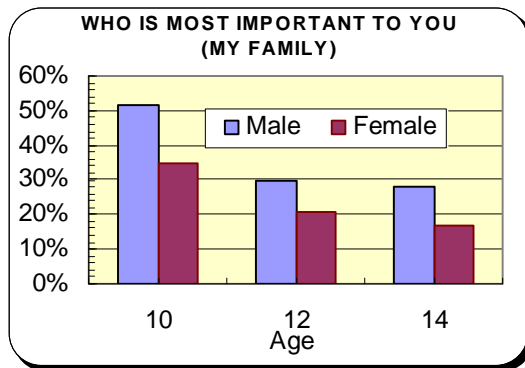
For inclusion in the text, we have selected the graphs that best illustrate the trends or differences between the sexes or between the age groups. Sometimes they are from a particular time period. Occasionally we show the three time periods to illustrate changing responses as the cohort gets older.

The complete set of tables and graphs are included in the Appendix.

1. Family Relationships

Who is most important: family or friends?

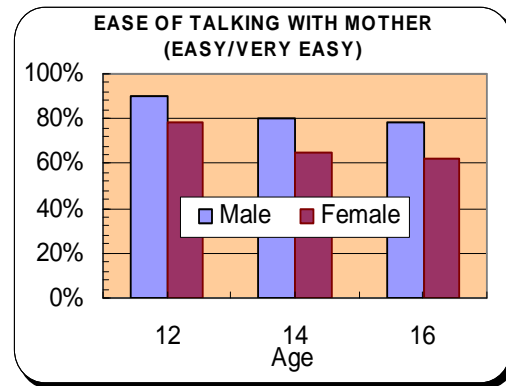
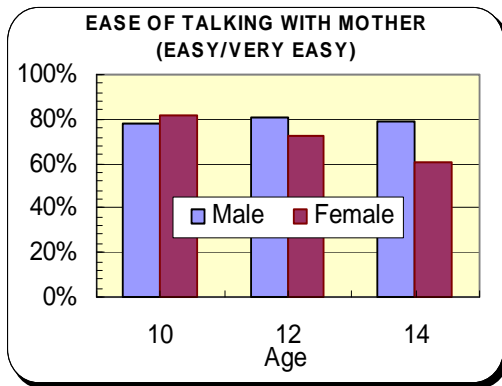
- Family and friends vie for attention and loyalty during the teenage years, but for the majority of teens in this survey, each is equally important.
- At age 10, just over 50% of boys and 30% of girls say that family is most important. Most girls at this age rate family and friends as equally important.



- For all young people, the importance of friends increases over the years from 10 to 16.
- From age 12 onwards, a significant majority of young people rate friends and family as equally important.
- A small minority rate friends as most important - just 5 per cent at age 12 and around 15 per cent at age 16.

Talking to mother and father

- Boys and girls find it easier to talk to their mothers than their fathers.
- At ages 10 and 11, around 80 per cent of boys and girls say they find it easy to talk to their mothers.
- But at ages 14 and 15, the number of girls finding it easy to talk to their mothers drops considerably.



- In contrast, boys at each age say they find it easy to talk to their mothers.
- At age 10, around 70 per cent of girls and boys say they find it easy to talk to their fathers, but after that age, both boys and girls find it harder.

Talking with step parents

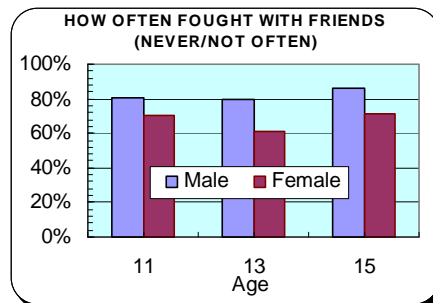
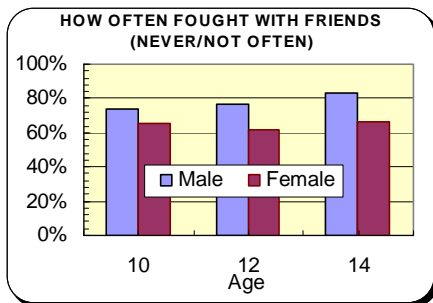
- The young people living in blended families said that it's harder to talk to step parents than their own parents.
- Girls find it slightly easier than boys to talk to their stepmothers. Just over half of the boys and girls responding to this question said it was easy to talk to their stepmothers.
- Boys find it easier than girls to talk to their stepfathers. Around half of the boys, compared with only a third of the girls said they found it easy to talk with their stepfathers.

Confidence in parents and their ability to help

- Boys and girls have high confidence in their mother's ability to help and this remains pretty constant at each age. Eighty per cent of the young people say they are very confident or quite confident in their mother's ability to help.
- Girls' confidence in their mothers drops a little around age 14.
- Boys are pretty confident that their fathers can help.
- Girls are less confident in their fathers than boys and this confidence drops further between ages 12 and 14.

2. Relationships with friends

- Most young people maintain good relationships with their friends. Most say they don't fight with their friends and if they do, most can make it up again.
- Boys are less likely to fight with their friends than girls. Around 80 per cent of boys in the survey say that they "never, almost never, or don't often," fight with their friends.
- While a majority of girls (around 65 per cent) don't fight with their friends, more girls than boys say they have problems with friendships.

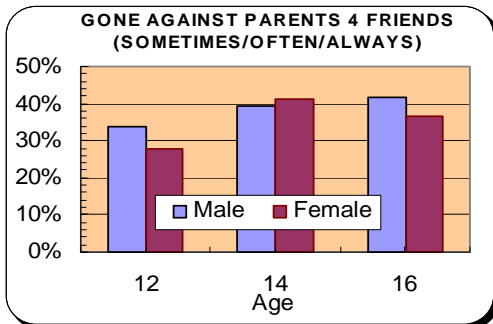


- Most difficulties with friendships seem to occur for girls around ages 12 - 13. For boys and girls, relationships with friends tend to get better with age.
- When friends fall out, girls are slightly more likely than boys to say that they can make it up again (63 per cent compared to 60 per cent).

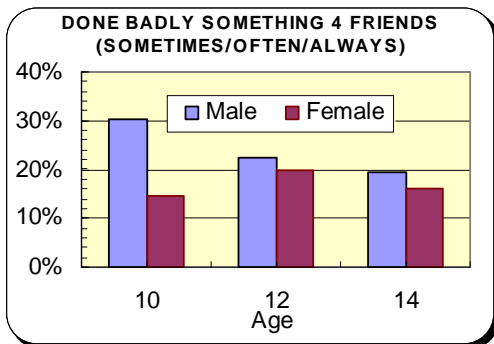
Peer pressure

- Over half of the young people surveyed say they have given in to peer pressure at some point.
- Girls in their mid teens are more likely to succumb to peer pressure than younger or older girls.
- Boys are slightly more likely than girls overall to capitulate to peer pressure.

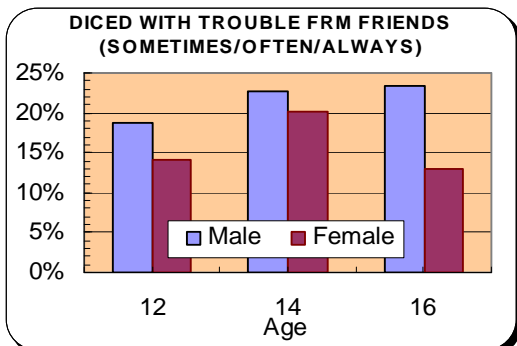
- Peer pressure manifests itself in different ways. Between a third and a half of young people say that they sometimes or often go against their parents' wishes in order to please their friends.



- Some deliberately do badly at something to please friends. Around 20 per cent of boys and around 17 per cent of girls say they have done this sometimes or often. Older teens are less likely than young teens to do badly at something in order to please friends

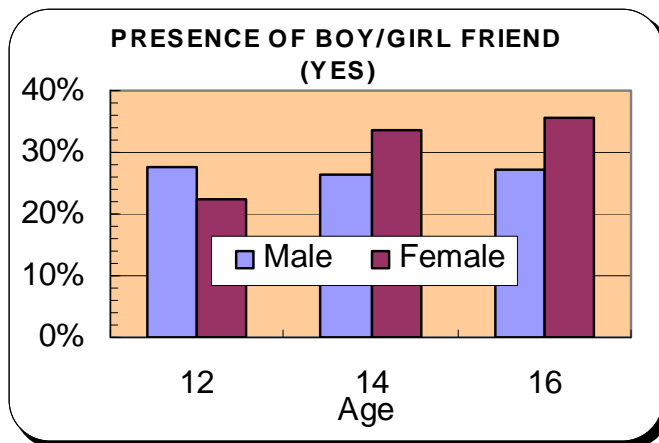


- Some report “dicing with trouble” under pressure from friends. Around 25 per cent of boys and 20 per cent of girls say they sometimes or often do this.



Boyfriends and girlfriends

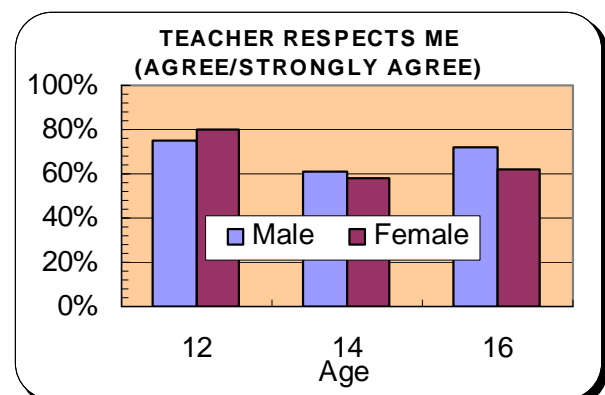
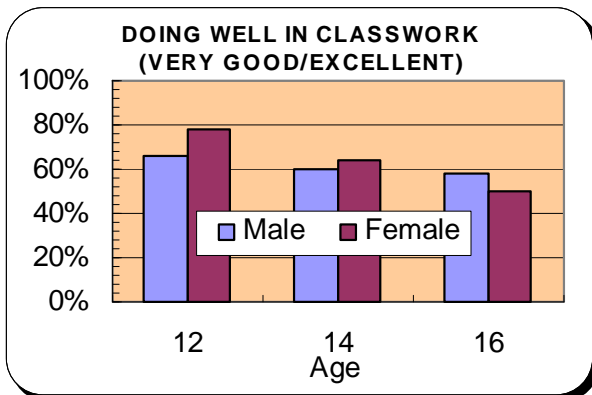
- Most young people taking part in this project said they didn't have a regular boyfriend or girlfriend.
- In the younger age groups, boys are more likely than girls to say they have a girlfriend. Over a quarter of 10 year old boys, but less than 20 percent of 10 year old girls admit to having a boyfriend.
- The picture changes as they get older. From 14 onwards, girls are more likely than boys to say they have a boyfriend.
- At age 16, 27 per cent of boys have a girlfriend and 36 per cent of girls have a boyfriend.



3. What's going on at school?

“How well are you doing in class work?”

- At ages 10 and 12, a high percentage of young people (60 – 80 per cent) say they are doing very good or excellent work.
- Girls in particular are doing well. Around 80 per cent of them say they're doing great work.
- For girls, however, the picture begins to change at around age 13. At age 14, their confidence in their performance drops considerably, with fewer saying they are doing good or excellent work. Boys on the other hand stay pretty steady, with only a slight drop off in the proportion saying they are doing really well.
- By 16, boys are significantly more likely than girls to be saying that they are doing very good or excellent work.



Do teachers have respect for you as a student?

- “Respect for students” and “doing well in class work” appear to be closely associated.
- Around 80 per cent of girls at ages 10 and 12 say their teacher respects them compared to 60 per cent of boys at this age.
- From age 13 on, girls are less likely to say that their teacher respects them.

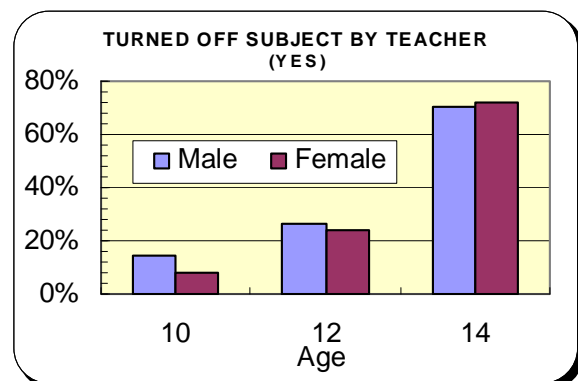
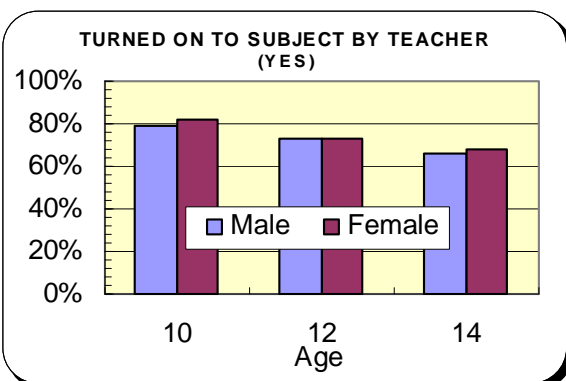
- By age 15, boys are more likely than girls to say their teacher has respect for them.

Trusted with responsibility

- Most young people say the adults in their school trust them with responsibility.
- Girls in the younger age groups report higher rates of trust than boys and this difference persists over time.

Turned on (or off) a subject by a teacher

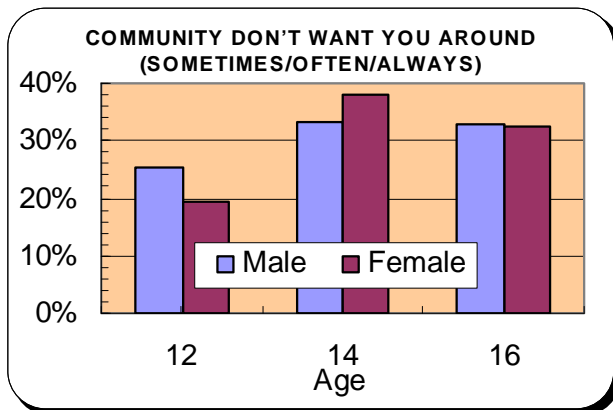
- Great teachers outnumber the not-so-great according to the young people in this survey, particularly at the primary and intermediate level.
- Almost three quarters say they had been turned on to a subject by a teacher over the past year, with under a half saying they had been turned off a subject.
- The younger group – the 10 and 12 year olds – are most likely to say they had been turned on to a subject. Up to 80 per cent of 10 year olds say they had been inspired into learning by a particular teacher. Very few 10 year olds (11 per cent) say they had been turned off a subject.
- At ages 13 and 14, though, the numbers saying they have been turned off a subject rise dramatically. 55 per cent of boys and 60 per cent of girls of this age say a teacher has turned them off a subject.
- At 16, students are just as likely to be turned on as turned off, with around 70 per cent saying they had been turned on and just over 60 per cent saying they had been turned off.



4. Community relationships

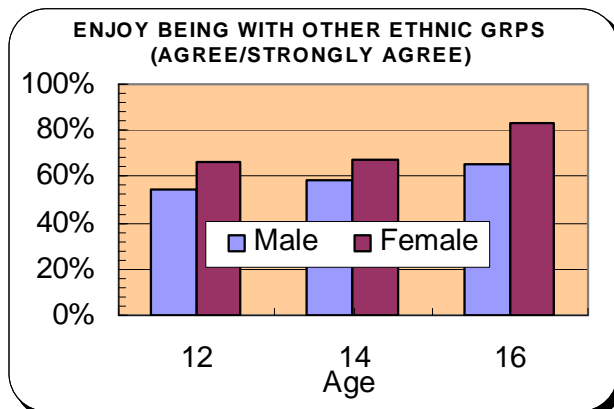
Community attitudes to young people

- For the most part, young people in the survey don't get a sense that adults in the community are hostile towards them.
- However a significant percentage of boys and older girls (around 30 per cent) say that adults don't seem to want them around.



Relationships with other ethnic groups

- The majority (over 60 per cent) of young people enjoy being with other ethnic groups.
- For boys, that stays pretty constant over time.
- Girls appear to be more comfortable with other ethnic groups than boys, and this appreciation grows as the girls get older. Over 80 per cent of girls at age 16 say they enjoy being with other ethnic groups compared to just over 60 per cent of boys.



5. State of health

How healthy?

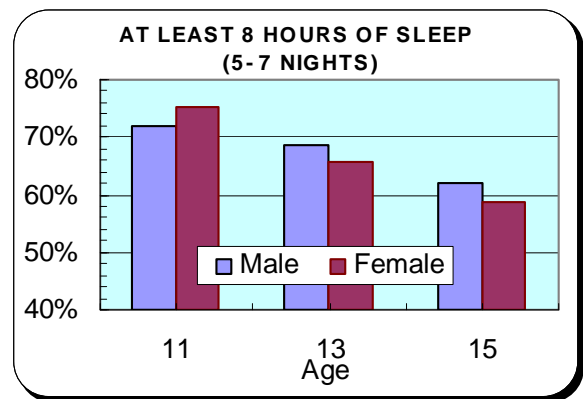
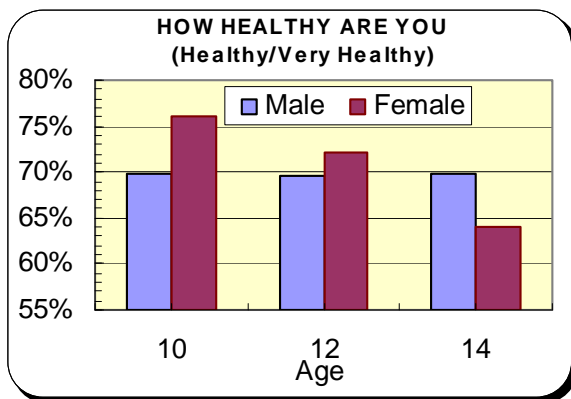
- Younger girls are more likely to say they are healthy than boys of the same age, but this changes over time.
- From age 13 onwards, girls tend to feel progressively less healthy.
- Boys, however, don't change too much in how they report their health. Around 70 per cent of boys in this sample say they are healthy or very healthy, and this doesn't change between the ages of 10 and 16.

How energetic?

- Boys and girls in the younger age groups are more likely than those in the older age groups to say they feel full of energy all or most of the time.
- Around 75 per cent of 10 to 12 year olds say they feel full of energy.
- At ages 15 and 16, just over 60 per cent of boys and 50 per cent of girls report feeling full of energy.

How much sleep?

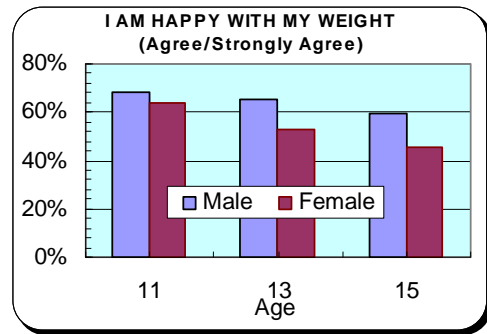
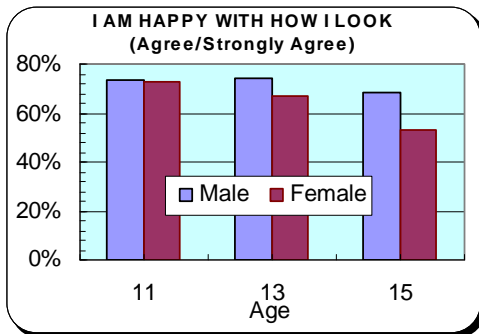
- 10 to 12 year olds get more sleep than their older counterparts, with the amount declining as they get older.



6. Body image

“I’m happy with the way I look”

- At age ten, boys and girls are very happy about the way they look. Around 80 per cent agree or strongly agree with this statement.
- After age ten, this confidence declines markedly among girls and to a lesser extent among boys.
- Just over half the girls at 15 and 16 are happy with the way they look.



Happy with weight?

- Around 66 per cent of the boys in the survey say they are happy with their weight.
- Around 50 per cent of girls in the survey say they are happy with their weight.
- Ten year olds are happier about their weight than 14 year olds and 14 year olds are happier about their weight than 16 year olds.
- The boys in the survey appear to feel happier about their weight over the three year survey period.
- The girls, on the other hand, are less happy with their weight over the three years of the survey.

Happy with height?

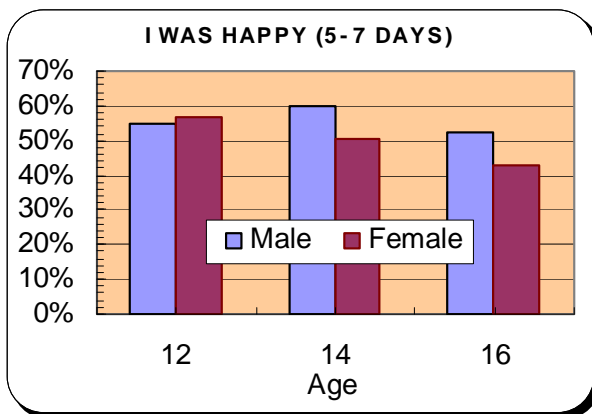
- Most young people report being happy with their height.

- Almost 80 per cent of boys and just over 70 per cent of girls say they are happy with how tall they are.

7. Emotional wellbeing

Feeling happy

- Around half of the young people in the survey say they were happy on most days.
- Around ages 10 and 11, girls seem to be happier than boys.
- By age 16 the position is reversed, with boys reporting higher levels of happiness than girls.



Feeling sad

- A small number - around six per cent - of the young people in the survey said they felt sad on most days. There was no difference between boys and girls on this measure.
- But when the young people who said that they felt sad about half the time (three days a week or more) are included, the proportion rises to around 17 per cent.
- At age 10, quite high numbers (20 per cent) of boys and girls report feeling sad quite a lot of the time.
- By age 13, the pattern has changed considerably. The number of girls who report feeling sad rises to around 30 per cent, while the number of

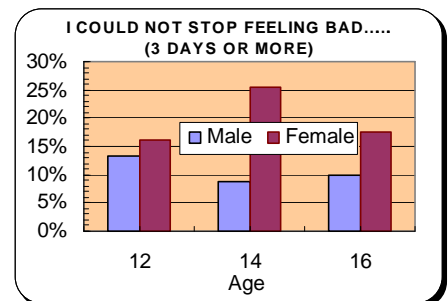
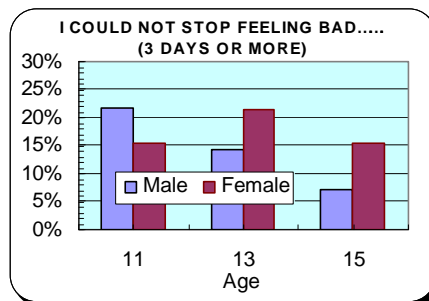
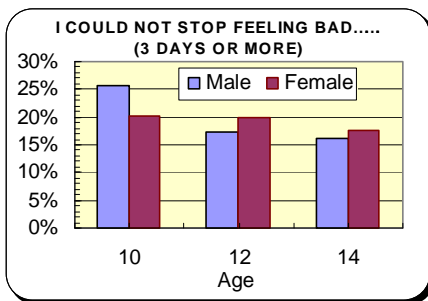
boys who report feeling sad falls to around 12 per cent. This pattern remains much the same up to age 16.

Feeling lonely

- The youngest boys – the ten year olds – were most likely to say they felt lonely quite a lot of the time. 22% said they felt lonely on 3 days or more a week.
- In the older age groups, girls seem to be lonelier than boys.

“I couldn’t stop feeling bad”

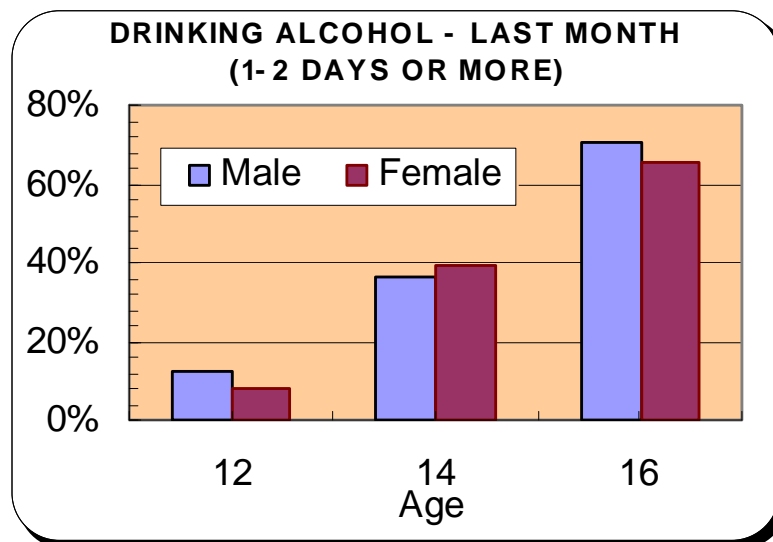
- Once again, it is the youngest boys who are most likely to say they couldn’t stop feeling bad.



8. Risky behaviour

Drinking

- Drinking becomes a normal behaviour for young people between the ages of 10 and 16.
- Between the ages of 12 and 14, the percentage of boys who say they drink alcohol on one or two days a month or more doubles - from 16 per cent at age 12 to 35 per cent at age 14. For girls the increase is even higher, from 13 per cent at age 12 to 44 per cent at age 14.
- At age 14, more girls than boys report drinking, but by age 16, the boys have caught up.
- At age 15, over half of the young people in the survey say that they drink alcohol on one or two days a month or more.
- At age 16, 71 per cent of boys and 66 per cent of girls say they drink alcohol one or two days a month or more.
- Around three per cent of the young people in this survey are 'serious' drinkers, drinking on ten days a month or more.

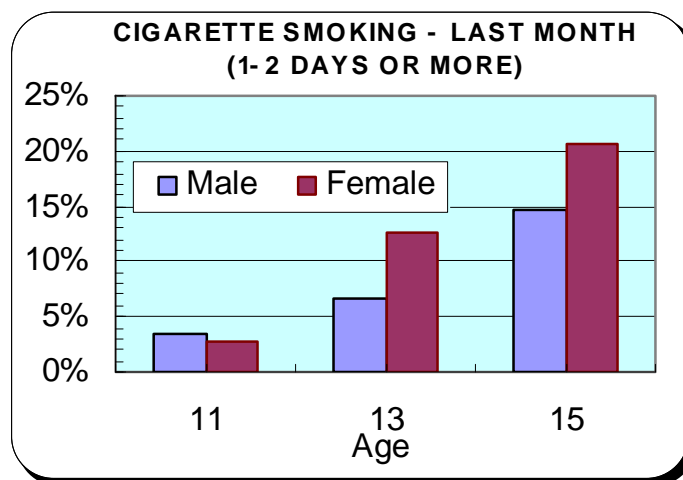


Smoking

- A minority of young people in this survey say they smoke. However, between the ages of 12 and 16 the number of young people who say they smoke goes up from around five per cent to around 25 per cent.
- At age 12, five per cent or less say they smoke one or two days a month or more.
- At age 14, twice as many girls than boys smoke (20 per cent of girls compared to 10 per cent of boys).
- At age 16, 22 per cent of boys and 27 per cent of girls say they smoke one or two days a month or more.
- Around five per cent of the young people are 'serious' smokers, smoking on 10 days a month or more.

Use of marijuana and other drugs

- 12 per cent of 16 year olds say they have smoked marijuana in the last month.



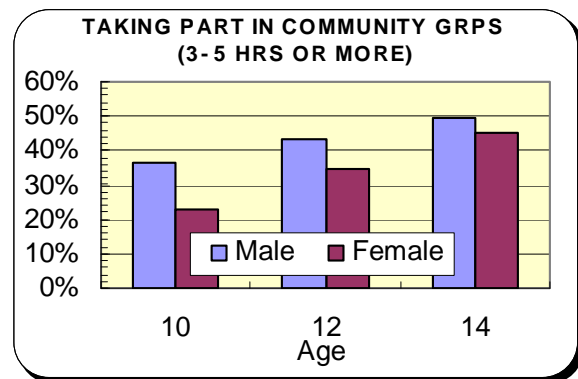
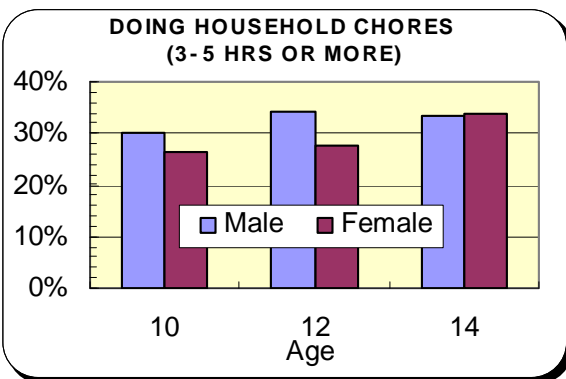
10. Time use

Household chores

- A quarter to a third of young people spend between 3-5 hours a week or more doing household chores.
- Boys are slightly more likely than girls to report doing chores.
- Older children are more likely to report doing chores than younger children.

Sport, cultural and community activities

- A third to a half of young people spend between three to five hours a week or more taking part in organised activities including sport, scouting, girl guides, music and ballet classes.
- As they get older, more young people get involved in extracurricular activities. At age ten around a third of young people are involved. By age 16, almost half have some involvement.
- More boys than girls take part in these out-of-school activities.

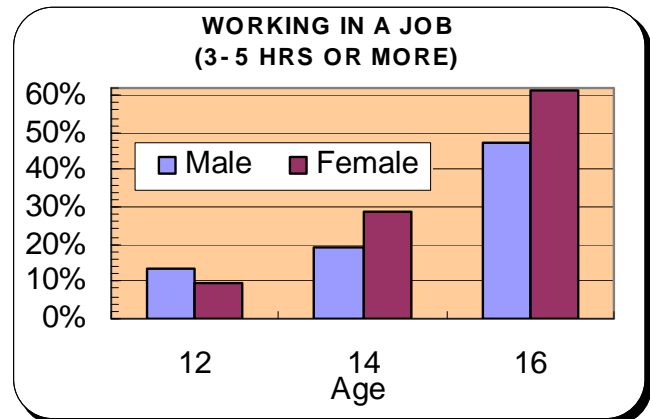
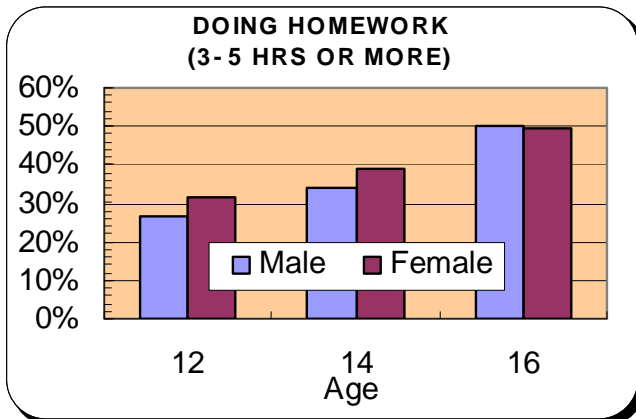


Homework

- Homework takes up more and more time as young people progress through the school system.
- At age 10, around 20% of young people are spending three to five hours a week or more on homework.
- At age 15, over 50% are reporting spending this much time on homework.
- There is little difference between boys and girls in time spent on homework.

Working in a job

- Older teens are more likely to have a job than younger teens.
- Between the ages of 10 and 12, boys are twice as likely to have a job as girls, but the numbers are still low (around 15 per cent of boys and 8 per cent of girls)
- From the age of 14, many more girls report having jobs, and by the ages of 15 and 16, the number of girls with jobs (50 – 60 per cent) exceeds boys by a considerable margin.



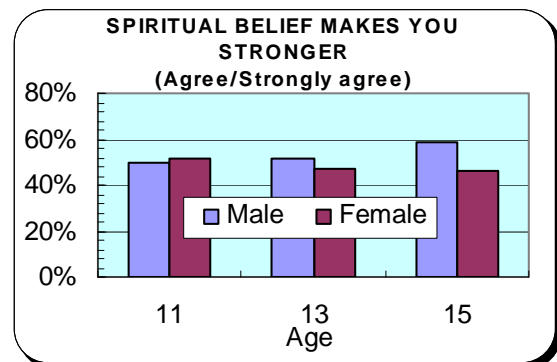
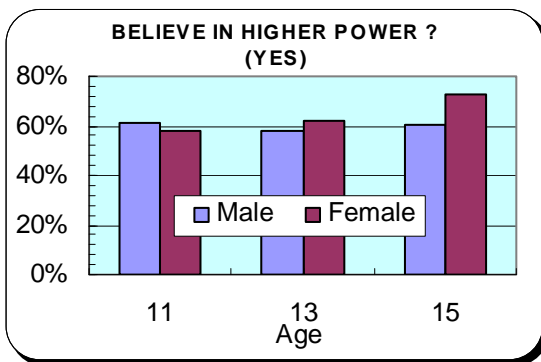
9. Spirituality

Belief in a higher power

- Around 60 per cent of young people say they believe in a higher power.
- More girls than boys are inclined to this belief and are more likely to express this belief as they get older

Value of spiritual beliefs

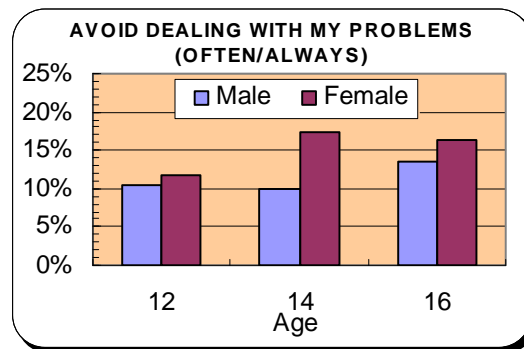
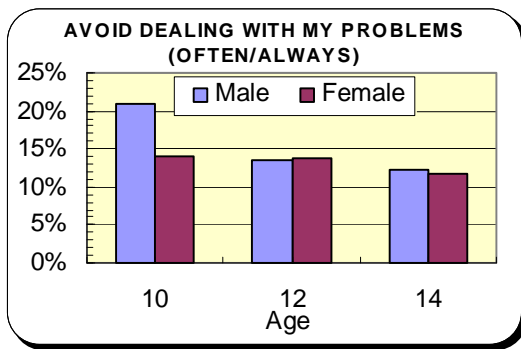
- About half of the young people agreed with the statement that “spiritual beliefs make you stronger”.



11. Self efficacy

Dealing with problems

- In early adolescence, girls are more likely than boys to say they take action to solve any problems that arise. Around 50 per cent of girls at ages 10 and 12 say they often or always do something to solve a problem - compared to just over 40 per cent of boys.
- Boys at this age are more likely to say they often avoid dealing with their problems.
- However, from age 13 on, girls are more likely than boys to say they avoid dealing with problems.



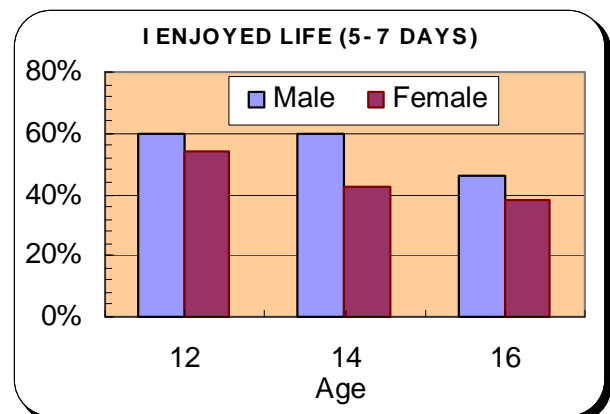
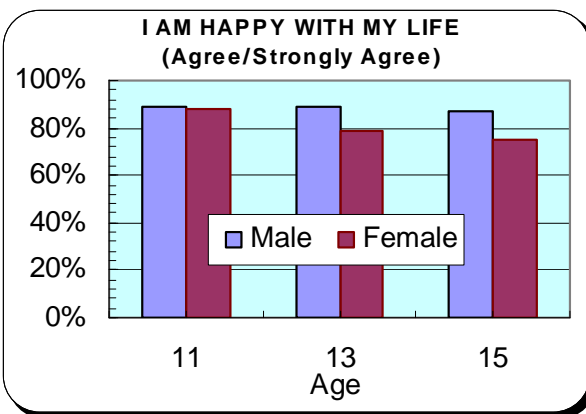
12. Attitude to life

“I enjoy life”

- At age 10, over 60 per cent of girls and boys say they enjoy life most days.
- However at ages 15 and 16, ‘enjoyment of life’ declines considerably, with just over a third of the girls and just under half of the boys saying they enjoy life most days.
- The gap between girls’ and boys’ enjoyment of life grows as they get older. Boys enjoy life more than girls in the late teen years.

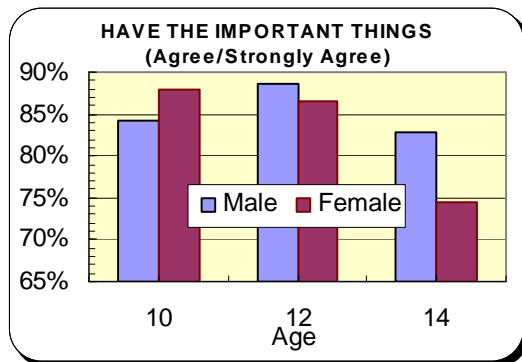
“I’m happy with my life”

- A very high proportion of the young people in the survey say they are happy with their life.
- Almost 90 per cent of 10 to 12 year olds say they are happy with their life.
- Girls are less happy with their life than boys and the happiness gap between girls and boys is widest between the ages of 14 and 15. At these ages, 89 per cent of boys are happy with their life, compared to 75 per cent of girls.



Have the important things in life

- A very high proportion - over 80 per cent - of the young people in the survey agree that, so far, they have the important things they want in life.
- Girls around the ages of 14 to 15 are least likely to agree; their satisfaction rate drops to around 70 per cent in these years.



The future: how does it look?

- A significant proportion of young people in this survey report feeling not very positive about the future.
- Only a third of the young people in the survey felt hopeful about the future most of the time. A third are hopeful about it some of the time and another third almost never feel hopeful about the future.
- Boys are slightly more hopeful than girls.
- Both boys and girls are more positive about the future at the younger ages. 10 year olds are twice as hopeful as 16 year olds.

