

RECORDING SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND INFORMING SOCIAL POLICY IN NORTHERN IRELAND:

**KEY FINDINGS
FROM 20 YEARS
OF ARK'S
LIFE AND TIMES
SURVEYS**



NOVEMBER 2018

FOREWORD

FOR ALL OF US WHO BELIEVE that participative democracy is not just about elections but a constant process, the ARK surveys are a valuable source of information. Legislators and policy makers have to work in partnership with and take into account the views of people, which must be a key component to decision making processes. This anniversary analysis of views across ARK's surveys provides a remarkable overview of the attitudes of a representative sample of the people of Northern Ireland. It identifies the issues that unite all ages as well as the places where there are differences. The surveys act as a barometer for a number of social issues and particularly our peace process.

Children and young people's right to be heard is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Kids' Life and Times and Young Life and Times surveys are an important process that contributes to the realisation of that right. As Commissioner for Children and Young People a core aspect of my role is to understand the views and experiences of children and young people, and therefore a highlight of my working year is the publication of the Kids' Life and Times and the Young Life and Times surveys every May. They provide my office with a good overview of what our 10, 11 and 16 years olds are thinking and are a benchmark for future work. By highlighting the depth of their views ARK has gone some way to ensure that children and young people are viewed as active participants in our society rather than passive recipients of services.

As with the annual surveys I have found this report to be compelling and wish to congratulate the whole of the ARK team for a job very well done and wish them all the best of luck for the next 20 years which I am certainly looking forward to.



Koulla Yiasouma
Northern Ireland Commissioner
for Children and Young People

SECTION 1

BACKGROUND TO THE SURVEYS

OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS, ARK's Life and Times survey series has provided independent and robust evidence about how people in Northern Ireland think about key social issues.

The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in 1998 is, while imperfect, seen as marking the end of 30 years of sustained conflict in Northern Ireland and the ushering in of a new era of government and governance. The devolution of most areas of Social Policy to the new Northern Ireland Assembly created a need for evidence-based data that would be accessible to policymakers and others, including lobbyists and NGOs, involved in formulating and influencing policy. To address this need, the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey was launched in the autumn of 1998. Its mission, then as now, is to annually monitor the attitudes and behaviour of people in Northern Ireland across a wide variety of Social Policy issues in order to provide a time-series and a public record of how these develop. The ethos of NILT is that all data are freely available to academics, students, media, voluntary and community sectors, policymakers, politicians- in fact, to anyone interested in how people in Northern Ireland think.

The survey is a direct descendent of the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes (NISA) survey which ran from 1989 to 1996. NISA was a sister survey to the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey and, by running the same modules as BSA, it provided a time-series of social attitudes allowing comparisons with Britain. NILT carries on the tradition of a time-series with many questions being repeated each year or on a regular basis. Moreover, as several of these questions were previously asked in NISA, data spanning over 30 years are available on some topics. However, NILT's main focus is on Social Policy issues affecting Northern Ireland.

Where and when possible, NILT participates in the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), whereby the same module of questions is asked in more than 40 countries worldwide (<http://www.issp.org>). This provides invaluable opportunities for comparisons across countries, and across time. We also collaborate directly with colleagues in the British Social Attitudes survey and in the Republic of Ireland, thus allowing for cross-national comparisons.

In 2003 the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey was set up in order to record the views of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland. Given that people in this age group are free to leave school, will soon be eligible to vote, and many work and pay taxes, it is important that politicians, policymakers and the general public are aware of how they feel about the key social issues affecting their lives. YLT is the longest running

annual large-scale cross-sectional survey of young people in Britain or Ireland. Five years later, to address the contradiction between the growing interest in children's rights and needs, yet the relative absence of channels whereby children could express their views, the Kids' Life and Times (KLT) survey was introduced. The timing was directly relevant to Northern Ireland as important educational changes were taking place at the time yet the voices of children were missing from public debate. KLT elicits the views of Primary 7 aged children (10-11 years old), a particularly important and insightful group as they prepare to transition from primary to secondary-level education.

The NILT, YLT and KLT surveys are all key constituents of ARK (<http://www.ark.ac.uk>). ARK is Northern Ireland's Social Policy hub, and is based across Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University. The ARK surveys are widely used by academics, researchers, politicians, policymakers and journalists interested in understanding more about patterns in public attitudes and behaviour over time within Northern Ireland. In particular, the Northern Ireland Executive, local councils and other organisations use the results as outcome indicators for key policies. One crucial feature of the surveys is their independence. The surveys do not receive any core funding. Instead, funding for the survey modules is obtained from a range of organisations, with the understanding that all survey data are publicly available.

The three attitudes surveys are now firmly established as independent and robust measures that provide a vital record of how people of all ages in Northern Ireland think about important social and political issues. In 2018 each survey celebrates a significant anniversary: NILT has been running for 20 years; YLT for 15 years; and KLT for 10 years. To mark these anniversaries, this booklet focuses on a selection of findings from the three surveys, drawing upon published research by the ARK team in collaboration with academic and practitioner experts.

The ARK survey team comprises:

Paula Devine
Ann Marie Gray
Katrina Lloyd
Mike McCool
Martina McKnight
Gillian Robinson
Dirk Schubotz

We would like to thank all the people and organisations who have supported the surveys throughout the past 20 years, including:

All our funders
Our colleagues at Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University
Practitioner and policy experts in NGOs, government and other organisations
Former ARK colleagues, especially Lizanne Dowds
All respondents who have generously given their time

SECTION 2

CONTENT AND TOPICS

The Life and Times surveys explore the wide range of topics that affect the lives of people of all ages living in Northern Ireland

The three ARK surveys are run on a modular format with each module focusing on a key social or political issue. While the range of topics included in the surveys varies each year, some modules are repeated frequently and others, for example the module on Political Attitudes and Community Relations, are included every year. Each survey also contains a comprehensive background section recording a range of socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the respondents.

An important aspect of the surveys is that topics or individual questions are regularly asked in more than one survey, thus allowing comparison across age groups.

Detailed below are examples of the topics addressed in the surveys and the frequency of their inclusion.

NILT EVERY YEAR

Community relations
 Minority ethnic groups
 Political attitudes

REGULAR TIME SERIES

Ageing and ageism (2003, 2008, 2014, 2017)
 Gender and family roles (1998, 2002, 2005)
 Informal/family carers (2006, 2010, 2015)
 Religious observance (1998, 2004, 2008)

ONE OFF

Autism (2012)
 Complementary Medicine (2005)
 Attitudes to armed forces (2017)

YLT EVERY YEAR

Community relations and cross community contact
 Family
 Identity
 Minority ethnic groups

REGULAR TIME SERIES

Mental Health (2008, 2009, 2013)
 Pressures and influences (2004, 2005, 2007, 2008)
 Bullying (2005, 2008, 2014, 2017)
 Shared Education (2012, 2014, 2015, 2017)

ONE OFF

Autism (2014)
 Environment and global issues (2006)
 Sexual health (2011)

KLT EVERY YEAR

Bullying
 School
 Wellbeing (Kidscreen)

REGULAR TIME SERIES

Childcare (2009, 2013)
 Technology (2009, 2013)

ONE OFF

Appearance (2009)
 Minimum age of criminal responsibility (2016)
 Nature (2014)
 Nutrition (2013)

Questions and topics in more than one survey:

Community relations (NILT and YLT every year)
 Minority ethnic groups (NILT and YLT every year)
 Family carers (NILT, YLT and KLT)
 Autism (NILT, YLT, KLT)

KEY FACT

**In total 87,237 adults, young people and children have taken part in the surveys:
 27,489 people have taken part in NILT since 1998
 15,837 young people have taken part in YLY since 2003
 43,911 children have taken part in KLT since 2008**

SECTION 3

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

WHEN THE BELFAST/GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED in April 1998, there was a sense that Northern Ireland was entering a more peaceful and shared society. Since then, numerous strategies to promote and embed good community relations have been introduced. While initially targeting the Protestant and Catholic communities, these strategies have become more inclusive as Northern Irish society has become more diverse. While the ARK surveys collect attitudinal data that reflect this growing diversity, this section focuses on relations between the ‘two main communities’ noted above. The survey data in this respect, particularly the time-series data, provide a useful barometer of how, or if, attitudes in this respect are changing.

Since its inception, NILT has recorded respondents’ perceptions of relationships between the Catholic and Protestant communities and, as several of these questions were previously asked in the NISA survey, there is now an important time-series of data available from 1989. One such question asks respondents if they feel community relations have improved or not in the preceding five years. In 1989, only one fifth of NISA respondents felt that relations between Protestants and Catholics were better than in the preceding five years. As Figure 1 shows, perceptions of community relations have improved since then; in 2017, 49 per cent of NILT respondents thought that relations were better than in the previous five years. However, despite this overall trend, the figure for 2017 is 10 percentage points lower than in 2016.

Providing comparable data from different perspectives is a particular strength of the ARK surveys, and the question on community relations referred to above is also included in YLT. While data from the YLT survey show the same trend as NILT, young people’s attitudes have generally been more negative than those of adults. While perceptions of community relations in the two surveys were similar from 2012-2014, the results since then point to young people being less positive than adults.

However, perhaps unsurprisingly in a society transitioning from over 30 years of conflict, the development of positive relationships has been neither steady nor consistent. Rather, as Figure 1 shows, there are peaks and troughs reflecting the impact, positive and negative, of contemporary events. While the positivity associated with the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994, and the restoration of devolution in 2007 is clearly evident, so too is the influence of more negative events on respondents’ perceptions. In 2001, relations between the two communities were very strained during the Holy Cross School dispute where sectarian protests, which were often violent, prevented children walking to school; in 2012 and 2013 significant civil unrest and rioting occurred in response to restrictions on the flying of the Union Flag from Belfast City Hall; while in January 2017, devolved government in

Northern Ireland collapsed - a situation that has, at the time of writing, yet to be resolved.

It is important to highlight that each year only a small proportion of respondents feel that community relations are worse when compared to five years before; in NILT, for example, no more than 12 per cent each year think this, while at least 30 per cent think there has been no change. However, one notable exception was in 2002, when nearly one quarter of respondents (23%) thought that community relations were worse. It is very likely that the long running nature of the Holy Cross dispute and the publicity it garnered in national and local media contributed to this increased negativity. Nevertheless, these time-series data reveal the progress made in a long-term political process, as substantial incidents and events lose their significance over time and general trends become more visible.

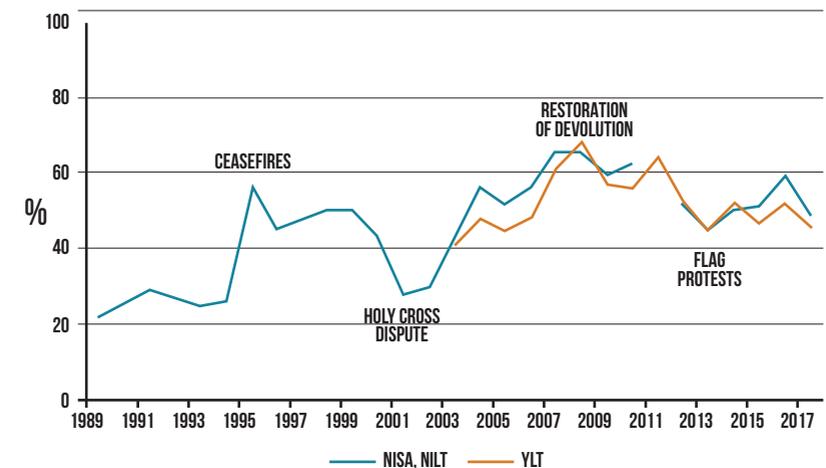


Figure 1: Proportions of adults (NISA, NILT) and 16 year olds (YLT) believing that relations between Protestants and Catholics are better now than 5 years ago (%)

While Northern Ireland has seen many positive changes, not least of which is the decrease in sustained violence, many inter-community structural and symbolic divisions remain and segregation reflecting religious affiliation is evident in housing and education. For example, within the education system in Northern Ireland, 367 out of 805 primary schools are within the Catholic Maintained sector, as are 91 out of 332 post-primary schools (Department of Education, 2017). Importantly, NILT and YLT since their inception have been monitoring levels of support for mixed-religion environments such as, workplaces, neighbourhoods and schools, as these provide vital indicators of how society may, or may not, be changing.

NILT and YLT respondents have continually been most supportive of mixed-religious workplaces, with at least three quarters of respondents expressing a preference for

this. While support for mixed-religious neighbourhoods is also high, support for mixed-religious schools remains persistently lower. Analyses of these results by the religious affiliation of the respondents are insightful. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those respondents who do not align themselves with any religion are most supportive of mixed environments. Whilst Protestant and Catholic respondents share similar views in relation to mixed housing and workplaces, Catholics are less supportive of mixed-religious schools than Protestant respondents, perhaps reflecting the distinct role, socially, historically and culturally, that Catholic education has played in Northern Ireland. However, over all three scenarios (neighbourhood, workplace and school) YLT respondents are less supportive of mixed-religion environments.

Challenging sectarian attitudes and practices and promoting positive community relations are central to numerous government strategies in Northern Ireland. The findings from the NILT and YLT surveys are important tools in assessing the efficacy of these strategies over time and from different perspectives. Indeed, recent public and policy debates about attitudes to community relations and sharing have increasingly raised concerns about the negative or ambivalent views of young people reflected in our survey data. It is vital, therefore, that we continue to monitor public attitudes and perceptions, especially among those who, while not indicating that they think things are getting worse, do not feel they are improving.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Department of Education (2017) Annual enrolments at grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland 2017/18: basic provisional statistics, Statistical Bulletin 9/2017, Bangor: Department of Education

Schubotz, Dirk (2017) Taking Stock. Attitudes to community relations and a shared future among the first post-conflict generation in Northern Ireland, ARK Research Update 111

KEY FACT

In 2017, 49% of NILT respondents thought that relations were better than in previous five years, compared with 22% in 1989.

In 2017, 46% of YLT respondents thought that relations were better than in the previous five years, compared with 41% in 2003.

SECTION 4

ABORTION

IN NORTHERN IRELAND ABORTION IS ILLEGAL in all but the most exceptional of circumstances, namely if a woman’s life is at risk or there is risk to her mental or physical health that is long term or permanent. Pressure for reform of abortion law in Northern Ireland has gathered pace in recent years and ARK has contributed to the debate by providing survey evidence of public attitudes. In 2016 NILT conducted the most comprehensive survey of public attitudes to abortion ever undertaken in Northern Ireland.

In 2016 respondents to the NILT survey were asked a wide range of questions about their views on abortion and abortion law. As Figure 2 shows, there is strong support for the legalisation of abortion where the life of a woman is at risk, where there is a serious threat to her mental or physical health, in cases of fatal or serious foetal abnormality and where a pregnancy is a result of rape or incest. There is less support where a woman does not want more children and also opposition to abortion being allowed due to low income or job loss. However, most respondents (63%) said that “it is a woman’s right to choose whether or not to have an abortion”.

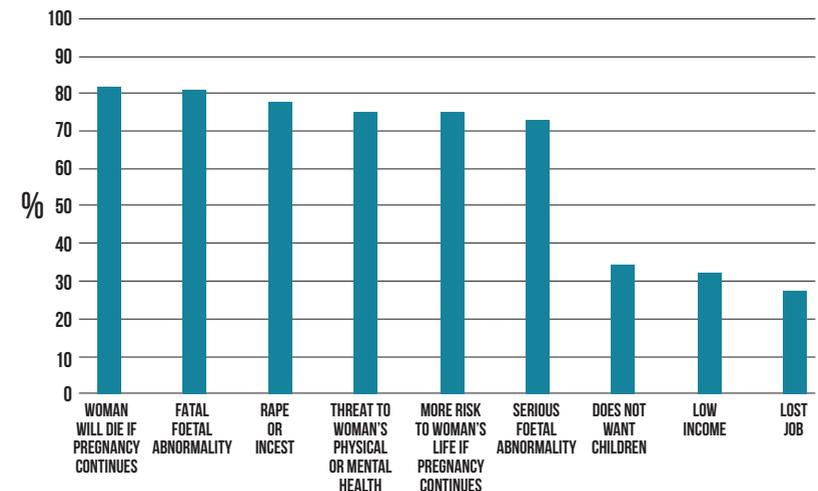


Figure 2: Views on whether abortion should be legal or allowed in specific circumstances (NILT, 2016)

A small number of questions about abortion were included in previous NILT (1998, 2004 and 2008) surveys and in the NISA (1990) surveys and, while the wording of the questions is rather different, they do allow for some comparisons to be made. Going back to the earliest of these in 1990, the majority of those surveyed thought that abortion should be legal when there is a strong chance of a defect in the baby (62%), where pregnancy is a result of rape (73%) and where a woman's health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy (79%).

Comparison with NILT data suggests that support for abortion in some cases had increased. In the three earlier surveys (1998, 2004 and 2008) around half of respondents thought it was not at all or only sometimes wrong to have an abortion if there was a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby. However, by 2016, over 80 per cent of respondents thought that the law should definitely or probably allow abortion where a foetus had a fatal abnormality and 73 per cent where the foetus had a serious abnormality.

One constant finding is the association between religious faith and attitudes to abortion. Responses in all four NILT surveys show Catholic respondents as less accepting of abortion than Protestants with the strongest support for abortion expressed by those of no religion. But even in this respect there are indications of changing attitudes. For example, whereas in 1990 only 29 per cent of Catholics compared to 80 per cent of Protestants thought that the law should allow abortion where there is a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby, in 2016, 72 per cent of Catholics said that abortion should be legal in cases of fatal foetal abnormality and 62 per cent in cases of serious foetal abnormality (compared to 84% and 76% respectively for Protestants).

Analysis by political party affiliation showed that supporters of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland were most likely to support legalisation of abortion, followed by Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) supporters (Gray, Horgan and Devine, 2018). The views of the supporters of the two nationalist parties, Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and Sinn Féin (SF), were quite similar and these respondents were least likely to say that abortion should definitely be legal in the scenarios presented in Figure 2. The explicit stance of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is that it will not support any change in the law in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, there is a higher level of support for reform of abortion law among DUP supporters taking part in the 2016 survey than among SF or SDLP supporters. Indeed, in six out of the nine scenarios shown in Figure 2, a majority of DUP supporters believe abortion should definitely or probably be legal.

Overall, the NILT findings show that abortion legislation is out of step with public attitudes. They also indicate that the views of some political parties are not aligned with those of their supporters, with 2016 NILT findings showing support for reform across supporters of all main political parties. In cases of fatal or serious foetal abnormality, where the life or health of the woman is at risk and in cases of rape or incest the overwhelming majority of supporters of each of the main parties said that abortion should definitely or probably be legal.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Gray, Ann Marie (2017) Attitudes to abortion in Northern Ireland, ARK Research Update 115

Gray, Ann Marie, Horgan, Goretti and Devine, Paula Do social attitudes to abortion suggest political parties in Northern Ireland are out of step with their supporters?, ARK Feature 7

KEY FACT

There is public support for reform of abortion law in Northern Ireland. In 2016, 63 per cent said that “It is a woman’s right to choose whether or not to have an abortion”.

SECTION 5

SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

THE BENEFITS OF BEING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE and/or participating regularly in sport, including better physical and mental health, increased self-esteem and wellbeing are uncontested. However, participation in sport reduces with age and evidence shows that ‘at all of the major transition points from primary school to secondary school, from GCSEs to A Levels and from secondary to tertiary education young people tend to drop out of sport’ (Schubotz, 2016). A key aim of national sports strategies is, therefore, to encourage a lifelong enjoyment of and participation in sport and physical activity. Taking steps to achieve these goals requires a greater understanding of participation and activity levels and the barriers and inducements that impact on individuals becoming and remaining physically active.

In 2013, NILT included a range of questions about sport. While just under one half of respondents (47%) felt that their experience of sport at school had led a lifelong love of sport, gender differences were evident with 59 per cent of males compared to 37 per cent of females reporting this. When asked how often they had taken part in sport and exercise of any kind in the twelve months preceding the survey around one half of respondents said ‘not at all’. Findings showed that respondents’ participation in sport declined with age; while four-fifths of those aged 18-24 were physically active to

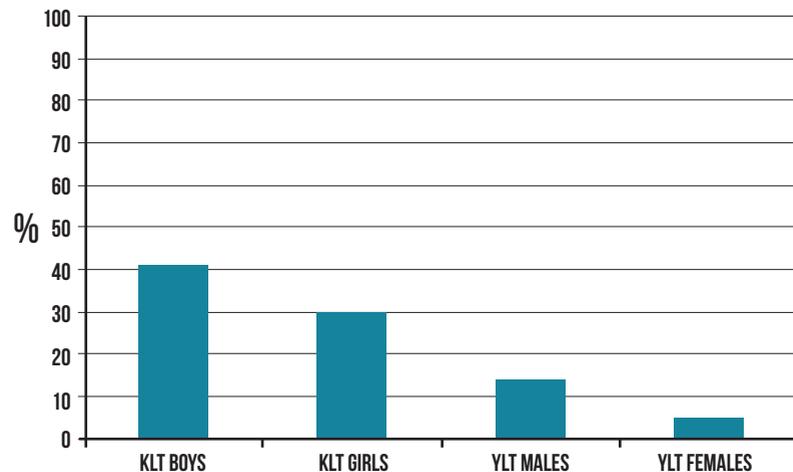


Figure 3: % achieving recommended physical activity target (YLT and KLT, 2016)

some degree, by the age of 45 this had decreased to around half of respondents and had fallen to one quarter for those aged 65+. When asked what had discouraged them from being more active during their lifetime, the most frequently-identified reasons were lack of interest, lack of time and cost. Cost was a bigger issue for respondents in the youngest age group (18-24 years) than for other age groups, while lack of interest increased with age.

In 2016, questions on sport and physical activity were included in both YLT and KLT (repeating questions that had previously been asked in 2015). While 60 minutes every day represents the government’s physical activity target for young people under 18 years of age fewer than one in ten (9%) YLT respondents reached this target in a normal week. However, the younger KLT respondents were much more likely to do so- 35 per cent achieving this. As Figure 3 shows, for those reaching this target gender differences were evident with males being more likely to do so than females.

The 2016 YLT and KLT surveys also explored the factors that encouraged children and young people to take part in sport and physical activity. Respondents were offered a set of potential reasons and asked to rank each according to importance. In 2016, around nine out of ten respondents felt that ‘being fit and healthy’ was the main reason for being active, followed closely by ‘having fun and meeting friends’ and ‘gaining new skills’. ‘Competing with others’ was the least important, particularly for YLT respondents with only 42 per cent of sixteen year olds selecting this. While analysis showed that competition was more important to males than females, follow-up discussions suggested that it was not competition per se that females found unpopular but rather rivalry between teams, their preference being the setting of individual or group goals

In terms of what prohibited respondents from being more involved in sports or physical activity the key factor was lack of time, especially for YLT respondents with around two-thirds reporting this. The importance of lack of time as a barrier to being active or engaging with sport was reinforced in discussions, again particularly by YLT respondents. They noted that as they progressed through school, academic subjects took precedence over physical education classes; yet, given the demands of homework and part-time work, if opportunities to be active were not readily or regularly available in school, time to engage in them outside school was limited. The importance of being active for good mental as well as physical health was emphasised by both YLT and KLT respondents.

The NILT data show that experiences, both positive and negative, of sport and physical activity in school impact future attitudes to sport and physical activity. The YLT and KLT data provide important insights into the factors that might motivate or discourage children and young people from being active. Given the acknowledged importance of exercise to both physical and mental wellbeing, these data suggest that a more balanced approach to the school curriculum, with physical activities being regarded as equally important as academic subjects, could positively influence future life outcomes. The survey data also contribute to the body of evidence that governments

can use to examine why and if exercise targets are being met or not and, in turn, can help inform future strategies.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Kelly, Grace and Schubotz, Dirk (2017) Exploring attitudes to and experiences of sport and physical activity among children and young people in Northern Ireland, A mixed methods project, ARK Research Report, April 2017

Schubotz, Dirk (2016) Young people and sport in Northern Ireland, Belfast: SportNI

Schubotz, Dirk, Lloyd, Katrina and McKnight Martina (2016) A question of sport, ARK Research Update 107

KEY FACT:

Only 9% of YLT respondents and 36% of KLT respondents reached the required daily 60 minutes of the physical activity target set by government.

SECTION 6

AGEING AND AGEISM

REFLECTING GENERAL GLOBAL PATTERNS, the population of Northern Ireland is ageing, and between 2006 and 2016 the number of people aged 85 and over rose by 35 per cent (NISRA, 2017). In response, a number of strategies and policies have been introduced, including the establishment in 2011 of the post of Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, and the publication by the Northern Ireland Executive of the Active Ageing Strategy 2016-21. The focus of the latter is to enable people to enjoy longer, healthier, active lives and transform attitudes towards older people and ageing by placing an emphasis on rights, value and contribution rather than needs, cost and burden. Thus, ARK’s surveys have explored whether Northern Ireland is a good place to grow old, and attitudes to older people and ageing.

Respondents to the NILT surveys have had mixed opinions about whether older people are, on the whole, treated better or worse than people in the general population because of their age. Figure 4 indicates a continuous decline, from 48 per cent in 2003 to 34 per cent in 2017, in the proportion of respondents thinking that older people are treated worse than the general population. However, while the percentage of respondents who feel that older people are treated better than others has increased since 2003 (11%), it still remains a small minority in 2017 (17%). When responses are analysed by age group notable differences are evident across all four surveys, with those aged 45-54 years being most likely to think that older people are treated worse.

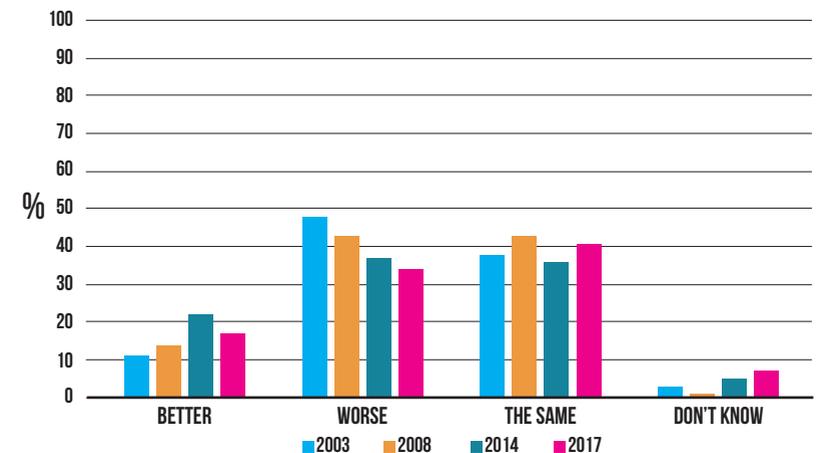


Figure 4: Do you think that older people are, on the whole, treated better or worse than people in the general population in this country because of their age? (NILT)

Between 2003 and 2017, there was a fall in the proportion of respondents saying that they are treated with less respect as they get older (from 36% to 18%). This is not to say that a higher percentage of respondents felt they were treated with more respect; in fact, the figure in 2017 (23%) was very similar to 2003 (24%). Rather there was a rise in the proportion of respondents feeling that they are treated with the same respect as they get older (37% in 2003, rising to 56% in 2017).

In 2017, there continued to be a strong sense among NILT respondents that ‘society does not recognise the contribution that many older people are still able to make’, with seven out of ten agreeing with this statement to some extent. However, this is lower than in previous years: 2003 (86%); 2008 (92%); 2014 (75%).

A particular strength of the Life and Times surveys is that they elicit the opinions of adults, young people and children and that the same or similar questions can be asked in one or more surveys. In 2014, some questions on older people and respect were included in both NILT and KLT with some interesting results; not least that the age at which someone is perceived as being ‘older’ is correlated with the age of the observer. The mean age at which KLT respondents (children) thought of someone as old was 54 years, whilst among NILT respondents (adults) the mean age was 69 years.

A slight majority (53%) of people taking part in the 2014 NILT survey thought that older people are admired and respected by young people, double the proportion feeling this in 2003 (27%). Again, opinions varied according to age. In 2014, whilst 70 per cent of 18-24 years olds agreed with this statement to some degree, only 55 per cent of those aged 65 years or over thought this, with those aged 35-54 years being least likely to agree (47%). In contrast, a large majority (77%) of 10-11 year olds taking part in KLT agreed that older people are admired and respected by young people.

In each year that the question was asked (2003, 2008, 2014, 2017) at least four in ten NILT respondents felt that older people are not willing to listen to young people’s views. However, only 16% of respondents to the 2014 KLT survey thought this.

Building an age-friendly society requires attitudinal and structural change. The Life and Times findings suggest some positive movement in public attitudes towards older people, and their contribution to society. However, older people are still facing barriers to accessing a healthy, happy and productive old age due to failures in adapting existing services. Thus it is imperative that politicians and policymakers have access to data that enables them to anticipate and respond to the needs of future generations and maintain and encourage high levels of inter-generational solidarity. In this way, underpinned by supportive pensions, and health and social care, Northern Ireland will be a good place in which to grow old.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Devine, Paula and Carney, Gemma M (2015) Is Northern Ireland a good place to grow old?, ARK Research Update 100

Devine, Paula and Carney, Gemma M (2015) What do children think about old age?, ARK Research Update 101

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency [NISRA] (2017) Estimates of the population aged 85 and over, Northern Ireland, 2016 (and revised 2001-2015), Belfast: NISRA

KEY FACT
72% of NILT respondents in 2017 felt that that society does not recognise the contribution that many older people are still able to make.

SECTION 7

SAME-SEX EQUALITY

LEGISLATION RELATING TO SAME-SEX EQUALITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND has lagged behind that of other regions of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland is the only place on the islands of Britain and Ireland where same-sex couples do not have the legal right to marry. Proposals to allow for marriage between same-sex couples have been hotly debated for a number of years, within the Northern Ireland Assembly, the courts, and the media. While a Draft Sexual Orientation Strategy was published over 10 years ago, a final strategy has not been introduced. Given that at the time of publication of this report the Northern Ireland Assembly has not been functioning since January 2017, this inertia in policy and legislation looks set to remain. Within such a legislative vacuum, it is crucially important that public attitudes on these issues are recorded.

The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey has frequently included questions on same-sex equality. One key finding is that attitudes towards sexual relations between adults of the same sex have changed dramatically. Figure 5 shows that while a majority of respondents in 1998 (58%) thought that these sexual relations were always wrong, by 2013 this view had fallen to 27 per cent. Conversely, the proportion thinking that sex between adults of the same sex was not wrong at all rose from 15 per cent to 43 per cent.

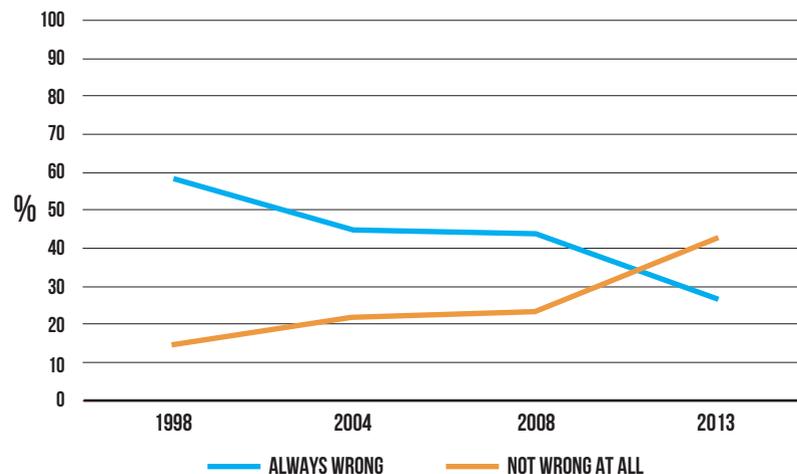


Figure 5: Perception of sexual relations between adults of the same sex (NILT)

As this question was asked as part of the 1998 and 2008 International Social Survey Programme module on religious observance some interesting comparative data are available. What emerges is that despite the changing attitudes detailed in Figure 5, Northern Ireland remains more conservative than its nearest neighbours- the Republic of Ireland and Britain. In 2008, 44 per cent of NILT respondents thought that same-sex relations were always wrong, compared with 25 per cent in the Republic of Ireland and 27 per cent in Britain.

In 2013, the year when questions on this subject were last asked in NILT, there was general support for lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) equality among respondents: 56 per cent felt that more should definitely or probably be done to promote equality for LGB people in our society. A similar proportion (58%) felt that equality for lesbian and gay people should be taught in schools in the same way as equality for other social groups.

In the same survey, around six in ten respondents (59%) thought that marriages between same-sex couples should be recognised by law and accorded the same rights as 'traditional marriages'. Support for same-sex marriage was higher among women; respondents aged less than 65 years; those with no religious affiliation; and those who personally know someone who is lesbian or gay.

Overall, the NILT findings show that public awareness and perceptions of LGB inequality has increased over time. Moreover, the data suggest a significant level of public support for lesbian and gay equality, which is not matched by current legislation. These questions will be repeated in future surveys, thus ensuring that the ARK surveys continue to be key in monitoring attitudes and contributing to an important and complex debate where Northern Ireland is currently legally, if not socially, out of step with its nearest neighbours.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Carr, Nicola, Devine, Paula, McAlister, Siobhán and Neill, Gail (2015) Public attitudes towards LGB equality, ARK Research Update 106

KEY FACT

59% of NILT respondents in 2013 supported same-sex marriage.

SECTION 8

RACIAL PREJUDICE

FOR MANY YEARS IMMIGRATION INTO NORTHERN IRELAND was limited. However for a number of reasons, including the political and policy developments of the mid to late 1990s that led to a more peaceful society and EU enlargement in 2004, Northern Ireland society has become more ethnically diverse. While peaking in 2006-7, it is estimated that between 2000 and 2014 almost 175,000 long-term international migrants came to live in Northern Ireland (Russell, 2016). How accepting or welcoming is Northern Ireland to them?

Finding a comprehensive measure of prejudice is difficult. Collating statistical trends on racist incidents and offences is one element but these should be complemented with attitudinal data. Thus the NILT and YLT surveys have consistently included questions about general and self-reported levels of acceptance of ethnic minority groups in Northern Ireland.

Findings from NILT consistently show that the majority of respondents feel that racial prejudice is prevalent in Northern Ireland. Figure 6 shows the proportion of respondents thinking that there is ‘a lot’ of prejudice, which was highest in 2006 (50%) and lowest in 2013 (26%). Mirroring this is a fall in the proportion of respondents thinking that there is more racial prejudice compared to the preceding five years: 49 per cent in 2016 compared to 68 per cent in 2005. There has also been a decrease in

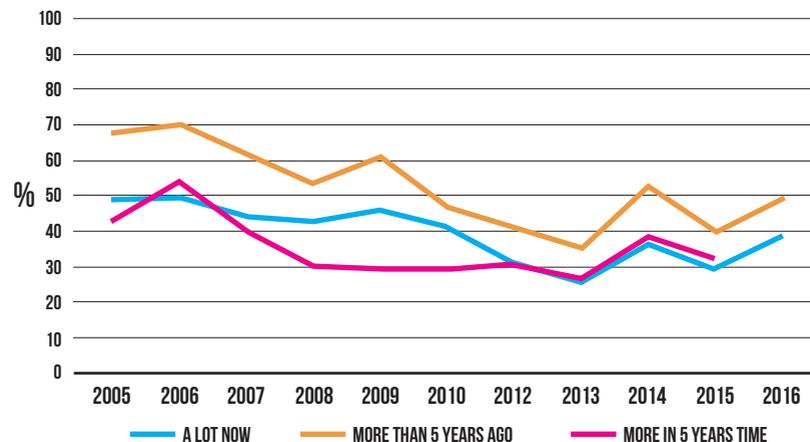


Figure 6: Perceived prejudice against people from minority ethnic communities (NILT)

the proportion thinking that there will be more racial prejudice in the future: 32 per cent in 2015 (the last time the question was asked), compared to 43 per cent in 2005.

Despite the majority perceiving that there is racial prejudice in Northern Ireland, levels of self-reported prejudice are low. Each year since 2005, when the question was first asked, a majority of NILT respondents have described themselves as ‘not prejudiced at all’ against people of minority ethnic communities; the figure in 2017 (79%) is the highest recorded. One striking trend is that a higher proportion of Protestant respondents describe themselves as prejudiced, compared to Catholic respondents. This gap was highest in 2008 and 2010 (18 percentage points) and was at its lowest in 2016 (8 percentage points). Levels of self-reported prejudice are similar amongst the 16 year olds taking part in YLT, but with little difference being evident between Catholic and Protestant respondents.

Findings from NILT and YLT show that respondents feel positively about people from a different ethnic group to themselves. In 2017, 77 per cent of NILT respondents and 51 per cent of YLT respondents say ‘very’ or ‘quite’ favourable. However, this is not to say that YLT respondents feel unfavourable – instead, 38 per cent say that they are neither favourable nor unfavourable.

Since 2005, NILT has explored respondents’ willingness to accept members of the following communities: Irish Travellers, Eastern Europeans, people from other minority ethnic communities and Muslims in different types of relationships, including as a local resident, a colleague, a close friend or a relative by marriage. Across all years, Irish Travellers and Muslims have been least welcome compared to notably higher acceptance ratings for Eastern Europeans and other minority ethnic groups, such as, Chinese or Asian. For example, while in 2017 around three quarters of respondents said they would be happy to accept Eastern Europeans (74%) as a colleague only 61 per cent reported this in relation to Irish Travellers. Another consistent finding is that levels of acceptance vary by context, with respondents being very accepting of people from these groups as tourists but less accepting as a relative by marriage.

Reflecting policy responses to global events, three questions were introduced in NILT and YLT in 2017. For two of these questions, attitudes in both surveys were very similar. Just over half of respondents agreed that Syrian refugees should be allowed to come to Northern Ireland and six out of ten respondents felt that it was their duty to provide protection to refugees. Catholic respondents in both surveys were more likely to support these statements than Protestants. However, in terms of Northern Ireland being a society that welcomed refugees escaping persecution the perceptions of the respondents in each survey were markedly different. While over half (52%) of NILT respondents agreed that Northern Ireland was welcoming to refugees, only one quarter of YLT respondents felt this.

The survey findings present a mixed picture. While findings from NILT indicate that perceptions of prejudice in Northern Ireland remain high, the majority of both NILT and YLT respondents describe themselves as not at all prejudiced. Within the context

of an increasingly diverse society and stated government policies to embed good relations and create a more cohesive society in Northern Ireland, the Life and Times surveys provide essential data that allow for comparison over time, provide age sensitive perspectives and address new issues as they arise.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Michael, Lucy (2017) Racism and intolerance towards minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland, ARK Research Update 112

Russell, Raymond (2016) International migration in NI: an update, Belfast: Northern Ireland Research and Information Service

KEY FACT

In 2016, 39% of NILT respondents felt that there was a lot of racial prejudice in Northern Ireland. At the same time, three quarters of people said that they are not prejudiced against people from minority ethnic communities.

SECTION 9

CHILDREN’S RIGHTS AND VIEWS

SINCE ARK’S INCEPTION, the rights of children and young people have been at the forefront of its work. During the same period, a diverse policy making infrastructure supporting children’s right to be heard in matters that affect them has been put in place. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) came into force in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1992. In Northern Ireland, 2003 saw the establishment of the Office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), with the ten year Strategy for Children and Young People being initiated in 2006. In 2004, the UK-wide UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools award, which encourages schools to foster children’s participation in decision making from an early age, was introduced. While these measures are to be welcomed, have they impacted on children and young people’s understanding of their rights? To what extent has children and young people’s potential to influence the decisions that affect them increased?

Issues concerning children’s and young people’s rights have regularly been included and revisited in YLT and KLT and an examination of the data allows us to track knowledge of various aspects of rights over time. As the UNCRC underpins these rights, YLT and KLT have regularly included a question to gauge respondents’ awareness of the Convention. As detailed in Table 1, YLT respondents’ knowledge of the UNCRC has risen from 28 per cent in 2007 to almost half (49%) in 2014. However,

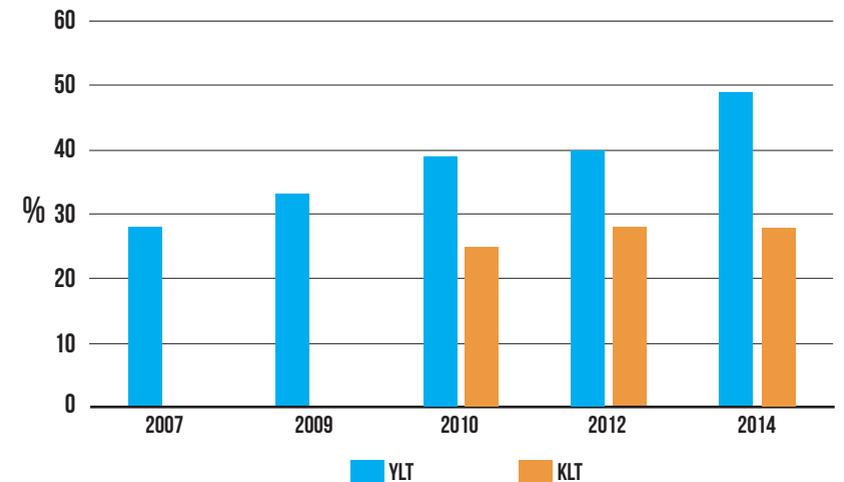


Figure 7: Respondents who had heard of the UNCRC by year of survey

among KLT respondents there has been little change and in 2014 only 28 per cent said they had heard of it. Recording of such data is not merely interesting it is vitally important as it is a requirement of the UNCRC that governments should make the Convention known to all children.

It is equally important to assess young people’s awareness of the rights that are enshrined within the Convention, and to this end a question was included in YLT in 2007 and 2009. As Table 1 shows, few respondents in each year felt that they did not have any rights. It is encouraging that the vast majority of respondents knew that at a general level they had rights, albeit that only a small proportion of young people taking part in the surveys indicated that they detailed knowledge of these. Nonetheless, the percentage of YLT respondents who said that they could list a few had increased from 41 per cent in 2007 to 51 per cent in 2009. This subject was also explored in KLT and, in 2010, the majority of those respondents also knew that they had rights, although a smaller percentage (38%) said that they could list a few.

Table 1: Which statement below best describes what you know about the rights of children and young people living in Northern Ireland?

	% YLT 2007	% YLT 2009
We don’t have rights	6	3
We have rights, but I don’t know anything about them	49	40
We have rights, and I could list a few	41	51
We have rights, and I know a great deal about them	4	6

In summary, there is clear evidence that some progress has been made in relation to children and young people’s understanding of their rights. However, much remains to be done if children and young people are to move from the margins to the centre of the decision making processes that affect them as espoused by the UNCRC. How far there is to go is evident in the most recent 2017 YLT survey which found that only about one in ten 16 year olds felt that they had any influence in local decisions where they lived, with only seven per cent feeling their voices were heard when it came to decisions being made about what happens in Northern Ireland.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Schubotz, Dirk and Lloyd, Katrina (2018) Addressing children’s rights via ARK, ARK Feature 6

KEY FACT

In 2014, 49% of YLT respondents, but only 28% of KLT respondents, had heard of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

SECTION 10

SOCIAL CARE – WHO PAYS?

IN NORTHERN IRELAND HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SERVICES are structurally integrated. However, entitlement and access to each differs significantly. While there is universal access to health care, entitlement to social care services is more complex. The latter requires an assessment of need carried by the Health and Social Care Trust. If a person requires long term residential or nursing care, an assessment of income and assets is also conducted to determine if they will have to contribute to the cost of their care and how much that contribution should be. In a climate where care demands are growing yet resources are constrained, the social care system is under extreme pressure. If, in the future, the public are to get the care they require delivered in ways appropriate to individual needs and circumstances it is imperative that they can contribute to debates and policy decisions. Understanding how the system works, thinking about personal care preferences and planning accordingly is, therefore, very important and in 2010 and 2015 NILT explored these issues.

NILT data reveal that there has been little change in public attitudes towards the provision and funding of social care between 2010 and 2015. During this period three major reviews of the health and social care system were undertaken, each focusing to a greater extent on changes to health services while acknowledging the importance of social care to transformation of the system.

The data suggest that the public is not making plans for the future. Closely reflecting the 2010 findings, in 2015 half of NILT respondents said that they had not thought about, or made any plans for, how they might fund any of their future care and support needs. While 20 per cent said they had thought about it, they had not done anything specific to address future needs; indeed, only 17% had made any provision, for example, saving money or buying property. A small proportion (5%) expected their family to help fund their care, while 8% felt there was nothing they could do.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, respondents aged 18-24 were least prepared: three quarters of this age group have made no plans for funding future care. However, respondents with the highest annual household incomes (£46,800 or more per year) were most likely to be saving for it. The proportion saying that they have not really thought about it was similar across all income groups.

The widely acknowledged funding gap facing social care service providers across the UK has led to calls for radical change to the system. Among NILT respondents in 2015, across all income groups, there is strong support for social care to be funded through a special tax collected over everyone’s lifetime to ensure that care, when needed, would

be provided free at the point of use (64%). This may in part reflect the unpopularity of a particularly controversial aspect of the social care system, namely, the means testing of residential and nursing home care which may mean a person having to use their savings or sell their home to pay for their care. Three quarters of respondents in the 2010 and 2015 surveys thought that it was unfair to expect everyone to pay for their care even if this meant selling their home.

Most care is provided to people in their own homes rather than in residential settings, and the NILT data shows that this is where the majority of people would prefer to receive care. In 2015 NILT respondents aged 50 years and over were asked what they would prefer if they needed increasing amounts of help with personal care such as washing or dressing. Eighty four per cent preferred to stay at home, with care assistants (33%), their own children (28%) or other family members or friends (23%) helping them (see Table 2); only 10 per cent said that they would prefer to move to a nursing home. These findings reflect the general pattern in 2010.

Interestingly, given changes in work patterns and family structures, the majority of respondents who preferred their care to be provided by family or friends (69%) were sure that those carers would be able to care for them. However, despite their preference, 14 per cent said that they felt family and friends would not be able to provide this care, while a further 17 per cent did not know if this would be the case. There was also a strong sense from three quarters of respondents that their family and friends should be paid by government for providing this care.

Table 2: Future care preferences of those aged 50 years or over (NILT, 2015)

	%
I would prefer care assistants coming to my home to help me	33
I would prefer my own children to help me	28
I would prefer other family members or friends to help me	23
I would prefer to move to a nursing home and have the help there	10
Other	1
I don't know	4

In each of the jurisdictions across the United Kingdom, policymakers have recognised the need for reform of the social care system to ensure its sustainability. In Northern Ireland, the NILT findings provide an important insight into the views of the public, and indicate support for a more universal approach to social care provision.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Gray, Ann Marie and Devine, Paula (2017) No change: Northern Ireland attitudes and social care policy, ARK Research Update 114

KEY FACT

63% of NILT respondents in 2015 supported the idea of a special tax collected over everyone's lifetime to ensure care when needed would be provided free at the point of use.

SECTION 11

MAPPING THE FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

SPEAKING ABOUT THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY, its founding Director Professor Sir Roger Jowell said 'Public attitudes matter in democratic societies. They reflect what citizens believe, want, fear and prefer. They are difficult to measure, are often unexpressed, and cannot be inferred from electoral choices alone...'. We have seen how important this is in Northern Ireland where independent and robust survey data has been vitally important to the development and monitoring of Social Policy. The surveys have recorded public opinion on contentious and contested issues and at times have shown how the views of the public are at odds with those of elected politicians.

When we first worked with the British Social Attitudes team to establish the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes survey in 1989 it was to ensure that public attitudes in the region would be measured and would feed into the policy making process. We could never have imagined then that it would develop into the bespoke Northern Ireland Life and Times survey in 1998 and spawn the Young Life and Times survey and Kids' Life and Times survey – all celebrating significant anniversaries in 2018! Reflecting on the previous 20 years will help us map our future research agenda.

Reviewing the selected findings in this booklet reminds us that the survey topics are varied and have been included for different reasons. Core topics such as attitudes to good relations and minority ethnic groups have been monitored annually and provide a unique time series over the period of Northern Ireland's peace process and transition since the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Given the ongoing importance of these issues and that some questions within these modules are used as monitoring indicators for government it is hoped that this important strand of research will continue.

A second research area will develop our existing work on children and young people and, in particular, focus on children's rights, education, citizenship and wellbeing. Complementing this focus will be continued work on ageing and lifecourse – it is hoped to rerun modules on pensions, develop modules on retirement and continue to monitor attitudes to age and ageing, social care, and dementia.

Health and wellbeing is a further research area across all the surveys and this will continue with research into lifestyle, technology-assisted care, diet and exercise.

Of course, a key strength of the surveys is that they are flexible and can respond to issues as they arise. Over the last two years this approach has resulted in the inclusion of questions on Brexit and, in 2017, a module on public attitudes to armed forces veterans, the first time this issue had been researched in Northern Ireland.

We hope that the surveys will continue into the future providing important evidence of public opinion in Northern Ireland across all age groups and contributing to public, policy and academic debates.

SECTION 12

TECHNICAL AND ONLINE RESOURCES

A KEY ETHOS OF THE THREE ARK SURVEYS is that they provide a free and easily accessible record of public opinion; as such, questionnaires and survey results are available online within six months after the end of fieldwork. All material and results are available at the following websites:

Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt>

Young Life and Times (YLT) survey: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt>

Kids' Life and Times (KLT) survey: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/klt>

For each survey frequencies are made available for every question, as well as a breakdown by other demographic variables:

NILT: cross-tabulations by age (6 age groups), sex (male/female) and religious affiliation (Catholic, Protestant, no religion)

YLT: cross-tabulations by male/female and religious affiliation

KLT: cross-tabulations by male/female

Technical notes including information on the relevant sampling frames, sampling method and response rates are also available, as are links to all relevant publications (including Research Updates and research reports).

DATASETS

For researchers who wish to run their own analysis, datasets are available in SPSS format. We also deposit the survey datasets and documentation with the UK Data Service (<https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/>)

Datasets in Excel format are also available on Detail Data portal (<http://data.nicva.org/>)

As well as providing important evidence for research and policy, the Life and Times surveys are used extensively in the teaching of quantitative methods. A series of teaching datasets based on NILT and YLT have been designed to provide 'real life' data for students to explore. Each dataset contains the full number of respondents as in the original datasets, although the number of variables has been reduced, and each has accompanying background notes and instructions. These resources can be used on courses teaching quantitative statistical analysis in the Social Sciences. More information is available at <http://www.ark.ac.uk/teaching>

The websites also provide contact information for the survey teams who are happy to answer any queries about the surveys.

KEY PUBLICATIONS

Research updates

Since 1998, ARK has published over 120 Research Updates. These are short reports, and mostly focus on key findings from ARK surveys. These are available on the ARK website.

Books

Schubotz, Dirk and Devine, Paula (eds.) (2014) Not so different. Teenage attitudes across a decade of change in Northern Ireland, Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing

Schubotz, Dirk and Devine, Paula (eds.) (2008) Young people in post-conflict Northern Ireland. The past cannot be changed, but the future can be developed, Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing

Lloyd, Katrina, Devine, Paula, Gray, Ann Marie and Heenan, Deirdre (eds) (2004) Social attitudes in Northern Ireland: the 9th report, London: Pluto Press

Gray, Ann Marie, Lloyd, Katrina, Devine, Paula, Robinson, Gillian and Heenan, Deirdre (eds) (2002) Social Attitudes in Northern Ireland: the 8th report, London: Pluto Press

Data from the surveys have also been used in an extensive range of seminars, reports, occasional papers, journal articles and policy briefs – check out the ARK website for full details (<http://www.ark.ac.uk>)

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