

What is the Young Life and Times Survey?

All too often the opinions of young people are ignored when decisions are made about many of the issues involving them. Thus, the aim of the Young Life and Times survey is to record the views of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland, with a focus on community relations issues such as politics, sectarianism and education. By inviting respondents to suggest topics for the next year's survey, we make sure that the topics covered are relevant to the lives of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland today.

Links with other surveys

The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey records the attitudes and values of adults aged 18 years and over in Northern Ireland. This is an annual survey and began in 1998. The range of topics included in NILT varies each year, although many modules are repeated over time in order to monitor changing attitudes on specific social policy issues. In particular, questions on community relations and political attitudes are included each year in order to track attitude change on these issues taking place within the rapidly shifting social and political environment of Northern Ireland. Full details can be found on the website at www.ark.ac.uk/nilt

From 1998 to 2000, a Young Life and Times (YLT) survey ran alongside NILT. All 12-17 year olds living in the household of an adult NILT respondent were asked to partake in YLT, which took the form of a paper questionnaire. Questions mostly consisted of a subset of questions from the adult questionnaire. One of the main aims was to be able to analyse the attitudes of young people and compare them with the attitudes of their parents. However, in 2001, the survey team undertook a review of YLT due to the fact that the level of use of the young person's survey came nowhere near the level of use of the adult survey

Consultation with a variety of users from the academic and voluntary sectors, found that that:

- There was an extremely high level of interest in a young person's survey
- There was little interest in linking the attitudes of children to those of their parents.
- There was a concern that questions suitable for 17 year olds were not always suitable for 12 year olds (and vice-versa) and that this was restrictive.
- There was strong policy interest in the views of young people in the areas of community relations, political attitudes, education and employment.
- There was a concern that young people were not interviewed by young people and that the optimal survey design required this.
- There was a concern that the survey did not involve young people in the design of the questions.
- Interviewing young people in their own homes – often in front of their parents – was problematic.
- However interviewing young people in schools – often with peer effects – was equally problematic and had the additional coverage problems of children excluded from schools and low numbers of 16 and 17 year olds.

Based on the findings of the consultation exercise, the current methodology was designed to address as many of these issues as possible. The first Young Life and Times Survey using this methodology was undertaken in 2003.

Technical details of the 2005 survey

Sample

The survey sample was taken from the Child Benefit Register. Child Benefit is a benefit for people bringing up children and is paid for each child. Therefore, the Register contains information on all children for whom Child Benefit is claimed. This Register had previously been the responsibility of the Social Security Agency (SSA) of the Department for Social Development (DSD). However, while DSD still maintained the database, the responsibility for the payment of Child Benefit transferred to Inland Revenue. Thus, it was necessary to negotiate access to this Register from Inland Revenue, which involved an explanatory memorandum being prepared relating to the Tax Credits (Provision of Information (Evaluation and Statistical Studies) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2004.

All young people who celebrated their 16th birthday during February 2005 were invited to take part in the survey. Under data protection regulations the survey team could not contact these young people directly. Therefore, all documentation relating to the survey was processed by an independent research organisation, and included a cover letter prepared by DSD.

Advance letter

Fieldwork was undertaken in August – October 2005. A letter was posted out to all eligible 16 year olds, consisting of an initial letter from DSD, a letter from the project team a paper questionnaire and a pre-stamped return envelope.

The initial SSA letter was addressed to the relevant person and provided an introduction to the survey. It also explained the role of DSD in the project, and confirmed that the YLT project team did not have access to names and addresses of the young people in the sample. This letter contained a unique identifier (with a check letter) under the address, which was highlighted as “Your identification number”.

The letter from the university project team provided more information about the survey, including the aims of the project, the three possible methods of completing the questionnaire, and details of a prize draw of £500 for which all respondents completing the questionnaire were eligible.

Completing the questionnaire

The fieldwork period lasted from 22 August to 31 October 2005. Respondents were able to choose one of three methods for completing the questionnaire.

1. They could take part by phone, having quoted their identification number and check digit.
2. They could complete the questionnaire on-line – quoting their personal identifier to enter that part of the Young Life and Times website.
3. They could complete the paper questionnaire that was sent to them in the initial pack and post it back in the pre-stamped envelope.

After 1 week and after 4 weeks, reminder postcards and questionnaires were sent out to addressees who had not made contact of any kind.

Survey content

The main focus of the survey in 2005 was community relations. Other topics included:

- Education, including bullying
- Mental Health, including the 12 item General Health Questionnaire, and stress
- Social pressures, including smoking, drinking, drugs and sexual intercourse
- Attitudes to politics
- Background information

At the end of the 2004 survey, respondents were given the opportunity to identify questions they felt were suitable for inclusion in the 2005 survey. The range of topics included in the 2005 survey incorporate these suggestions.

Response rate

2049 questionnaires were sent out.

819 completed were received, representing a response rate of 40%. Table 1 shows that the most popular mode of completing the survey was paper (783 questionnaires or 95.6%). The next most popular mode was online (33 respondents or 4.0%), with only 5 respondents opting to complete the survey by phone.

Table 1: Mode of survey completion

| | n | % |
|-----------|-----|------|
| Paper | 783 | 95.6 |
| Online | 33 | 4.0 |
| Telephone | 5 | 0.6 |
| Total | 819 | 100 |

Getting the data

Tables of results from the 2005 survey were available on the YLT website within two months of the end of the fieldwork period. Users can also download the data in SPSS portable file format from the website to carry out their own statistical analyses. The YLT website is available at www.ark.ac.uk/ylt

Using the data

This documentation is intended to provide background information to the survey and to the survey and sampling methodologies. However, if you require any further technical information, please contact us (see contact details on page 5).

The data have been tested extensively, but if you find anything that looks like a mistake, please let us know as soon as you can. Please note that this data should not be weighted.

A helpline service is also available for anyone who has a query about the survey or the results (see contact details on page 5). Alternatively you can use the helpline section on the ylt website (www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/help/).

In order to maintain anonymity, the ethnicity (Q4) and religion (Q50) variables have been deleted from the data file. However, the RELIGCAT variable consists of the following categories: 'Catholic', 'Protestant' and 'No religion'. Due to the small number of cases, other categories are not included in this variable.

General Health Questionnaire

The 2005 survey includes the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), which is designed to identify short-term changes in mental health. The 12 items consist of the following questions:

| Question number | Variable name | Question text |
|-----------------|---------------|---|
| 32 | CONCENT | Have you recently been able to concentrate on whatever you are doing? |
| 33 | WORRY | Have you recently lost much sleep over worry? |
| 34 | USEFPART | Have you recently felt you are playing a useful part in things? |
| 35 | MAKEDEC | Have you recently felt capable of making decisions about things? |
| 36 | STRAIN | Have you recently felt under constant strain? |
| 37 | OVERCOME | Have you recently felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties? |
| 38 | ENJOYACT | Have you recently been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities? |
| 39 | FACEPROB | Have you recently been able to face up to your problems? |
| 40 | UHAPPY | Have you recently been feeling unhappy and depressed? |
| 41 | LOSECONF | Have you recently been losing confidence in yourself? |
| 42 | WORTHPER | Have you recently been thinking of yourself as a worthless person? |
| 43 | HAPPY | Have you recently been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered? |

The GHQ-12 can be analysed in various ways. The Young Life and Times website provides statistics based on two of these scoring methods. However, these are not included in the dataset to download.

Contact information

For all queries relating to the survey, please contact:

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