

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 on a range of issues such as community relations, health, 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 2008 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 in Northern Ireland (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).

In autumn 2007, two disks containing personal details of tens of thousands of Child Benefit recipients were lost by the UK government. Following this incident, regulations relating to sensitive and personal data were tightened by the Government.

As a result of the revised data security procedures, ARK was informed in May 2008 that we had to re-apply to access the Child Benefit dataset for the 2008 YLT survey. The application was submitted in May 2008 and was considered by respective units within Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and by the legal team of DSD. Permission to access the Child Benefit Data for the 2008 YLT survey was eventually granted by HMRC on 13th November 2008, with just one amendment to the existing statutory instrument. This amendment related to the way the data could be passed on and now required the address file of eligible respondents to be encrypted during transmission from DSD to the YLT research team. However, access was only permitted to the most recent data available to DSD, which was the October 2007 sweep of Child Benefit recipients.

In order to help account for the fact that the address file for the 2008 survey was outdated, and also to counteract sinking return rates experienced in previous YLT surveys, the YLT sample size was doubled. Thus, all young people who celebrated their 16th birthday during February and March 2008 were invited to take part in the survey.

Advance letter

Fieldwork was undertaken from December 2008 – January 2009. All administration of the mailout for the survey is undertaken by an independent research organisation, thus ensuring that the survey team do not have access to individual names and addresses. 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 return envelope with a FREEPOST address.

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 draw for five prizes of £100 for which all respondents completing the questionnaire were eligible.

Completing the questionnaire

The fieldwork period lasted from 8 December 2008 – 31 January 2009. Compared to previous YLT surveys, fieldwork was extended to acknowledge the fact that due to the reapplication process to access the Child Benefit data:

1. Field work took place much later in the year than in previous surveys and included the Christmas period, which ultimately led to delays in the delivery of mail. Furthermore, fieldwork had to be organised at very short notice, which held up the processing of the mailout.
2. The address file of potential respondents was out of date, so in some instances mail to respondents would have been re-directed or returned, if addresses had moved.

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 letter.
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 and post it back in the pre-stamped envelope.

Multiple responses from respondents (e.g. one online and one postal response) were prevented by daily recording of the receipt of completed questionnaires. Once a respondent had submitted an online questionnaire, his or her unique identifier was automatically disabled. In the unlikely case that a respondent would submit a questionnaire twice, regardless of the method of completion, the second questionnaire received would be disregarded. One such case occurred during the 2008 YLT survey

After approximately two weeks, a reminder letter with a second questionnaire was sent out to addressees who had not made contact of any kind.

Survey content

The 2008 survey entailed the questions on the following subject areas:

- Attitudes towards, and experiences of contact with, people from minority ethnic communities; (funded by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Government as part of a larger multi-methods project undertaken in conjunction with the National Children's Bureau);
- Self-injury (funded by the Nuffield Foundation's Small Grants Scheme);
- Community relations;
- Family;
- School bullying;
- Mental health, including the 12 item General Health Questionnaire;
- Influences and pressures;
- Background information.

At the end of the 2007 survey, respondents were given the opportunity to identify questions they felt were suitable for inclusion in the next Young Life and Times survey. The range of topics included in the 2008 survey incorporates these suggestions. In

addition, respondents to the 2008 survey were asked to give suggestions for future survey topics.

Response rate

4,154 names of eligible respondents were on the database of Child Benefit recipients received from HMRC/DSD. 66 questionnaires were returned because the addressee had moved or was unknown at the address. This leaves a sample of 4,088 eligible respondents.

941 completed questionnaires were received by the end of the fieldwork period, representing a response rate of 23%. Table 1 shows that the most popular mode of completing the survey was paper (597 questionnaires or 95%). The remaining 5% of respondents completed the survey online, with no respondents opting to complete the survey by phone.

Table 1: Mode of survey completion

	n	%
Paper	905	96.2
Online	36	3.8
Telephone	0	0
Total	941	100

Getting the data

Tables of results from the 2008 survey were made available on the YLT website. 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 6).

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 6). Alternatively you can use the helpline section on the ylt website (www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/help/).

In order to maintain anonymity, the ethnicity (Q5) and religion (Q76) variables have been deleted from the data file. Responses to the question: Q5 '*To which ethnic group do you consider you belong?*' have been recoded in the ETHNCAT variable. The full list of open responses to Q5 is available in the results section to the 2008 survey on the YLT website. The derived variable RELIGCAT 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. Open responses to other questions that may compromise the anonymity of respondents are also not made available as part of the downloadable data set, but will appear in the results section on the YLT website.

General Health Questionnaire

The 2008 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
43	CONCENT	Have you recently been able to concentrate on whatever you are doing?
44	WORRY	Have you recently lost much sleep over worry?
45	USEFPART	Have you recently felt you are playing a useful part in things?
46	MAKEDEC	Have you recently felt capable of making decisions about things?
47	STRAIN	Have you recently felt under constant strain?
48	OVERCOME	Have you recently felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?
49	ENJOYACT	Have you recently been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?
50	FACEPROB	Have you recently been able to face up to your problems?
51	UHAPPY	Have you recently been feeling unhappy and depressed?
52	LOSECONF	Have you recently been losing confidence in yourself?
53	WORTHPER	Have you recently been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?
54	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:

Dirk Schubotz
ARK
School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast
BT7 1NN
Tel: (028) 9097 3947
Email: d.schubotz@qub.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the support given by Department for Social Development and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in providing the sample.

We particularly appreciate the time and effort taken by all the 16 year olds who responded to the survey.

The Young Life and Times survey is a constituent part of ARK, a resource providing access to social and political information on Northern Ireland. ARK receives core-funding from the Economic and Social Research Council. The 2008 YLT survey was part-funded by a small grant from the Nuffield Foundation and by OFMDFM who provided funding for a joint project with the National Children's Bureau which incorporated a module in the 2008 YLT survey.