



Young Life and Times (YLT) Survey

Summary of Results

2023



Background

Every year, ARK, a joint initiative between Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, invites 16-year-olds from across Northern Ireland to take part in the YLT survey to share their views on school, politics, community relations and other social issues. Due to the large number of questions YLT 2023 was a 'split survey'. This meant that there were two versions of the survey - some questions were asked in both and some in one or the other.

This document provides a summary of some key findings from the 2023 survey. Detailed results for all YLT surveys (2003-2023), as well as topical Research Updates, are freely available on the YLT website at www.ark.ac.uk/ylt.

The 2023 YLT survey was part-funded by the Executive Office, the Department of Justice, the Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion, the NSPCC and Sport NI.

Who took part in the 2023 YLT survey?

Everybody living in Northern Ireland who celebrated their 16th birthday between January and March 2023 was invited to take part in the survey.

Of the 2,065 16-year-olds who took part in YLT:

- 55% were female, 42% were male and 3% had another gender identity.
- 20% said they lived in a big city or its outskirts, 42% a small city or town and 37% a village or in the countryside.
- 49% attended a grammar school, 43% a secondary school, 9% a formally integrated school (planned integrated school), and 3% another type of school.
- 77% lived with both parents, 16% lived only with their mother, 2% lived only with their father and 5% lived with their mother some time and father some time.
- 19% of respondents said they had a long-standing physical, mental, or developmental/sensory health condition. For 20% of these respondents this health condition limited their ability to carry out day-to-day activities 'a lot'.
- 60% regarded themselves as belonging to a particular religion - 36% Catholic, 19% Protestant, while 6% belonged to another religion. 40% of respondents indicated that they belonged to no religion.
- 32% of respondents said their families were financially either well-off or very well-off, 50% described them as average, and 11% said their families were not well-off or not at all well-off.
- When asked about the current cost-of-living crisis, 63% said their families had enough money for both ordinary things and special things. 30% said their families had enough money for ordinary things but not for some special things, three percent said they had not enough money for ordinary or special things. Most often there was not enough money for holidays and short trips, new and expensive clothes and eating out/going out.



Boyfriends and girlfriends

The majority of males (85%) and females (67%) had been sexually attracted only to people of the opposite sex, but 11% of males and 27% of females had been sexually attracted to a person of the same sex at least once.

42% of 16-year-olds said they never had a boyfriend or girlfriend; 36% said they had a girlfriend or boyfriend in the past, but not now, and 21% said they currently had a girlfriend or boyfriend. Nearly half (46%) of those who currently, or in the past, had a boyfriend or girlfriend met them in school; 21% met them

when out with friends, 18% said they met them through social media and 15% met them elsewhere.

Figure 1 shows that a large majority of 16-year-olds shared the same ethnic background (74%), national identity (63%) and religious background (59%) with their current or last boyfriend or girlfriend. About four in ten respondents thought their boyfriend/girlfriend had the same family-financial background as them. 12% of 16-year-olds said that their boyfriend or girlfriend had the same sex as they had.

Figure 1:
My current or last boyfriend/girlfriend has the same... (%)

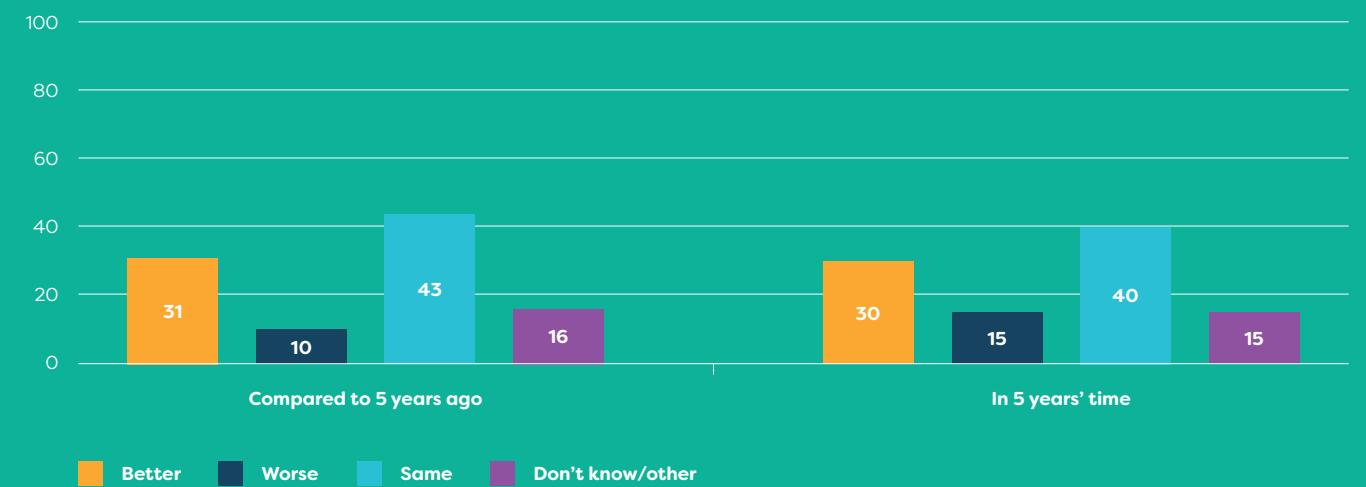


Good relations and attitudes to minority ethnic groups

Three quarters of respondents (75%) thought that religion would always make a difference to how people in Northern Ireland feel about each other. Figure 2 shows that about one in three respondents thought community relations were better than 5 years ago whilst one in ten

thought they were worse. However, the largest proportion thought relations were about the same. When asked what they thought relations would be like in 5 years' time the proportions were similar.

Figure 2:
Are community relations better or worse now than 5 years ago and in 5 years' time? (%)



Only 19% of 16-year-olds agreed or strongly agreed that Northern Ireland is a place where people respect each other, 43% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 35% neither agreed nor disagreed. Nevertheless, 64% of respondents said that they definitely or probably had a sense of belonging to Northern Ireland; one quarter (25%) said they definitely or probably had no such sense of belonging.

41% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that Northern Ireland is a society that welcomes refugees escaping persecution. 63% strongly agreed or agreed that it is our duty to provide protection to refugees escaping persecution. 78% agreed or strongly agreed that people fleeing the war in Ukraine should be allowed to come to Northern Ireland.

Three quarters (75%) of respondents felt they were 'not at all prejudiced' towards people from minority ethnic communities. However, 33% agreed or strongly agreed that refugees and asylum seekers are not respected in Northern Ireland.

Table 1 indicates that 49% of respondents agreed on the positive impact of minority ethnic groups' cultures and traditions on Northern Ireland's richness and diversity.

Table 1:
Respondents who strongly agree or agree that the culture and traditions of the Catholic, Protestant and minority ethnic communities add to the richness and diversity of NI society (By religion)

	%			
	Catholic	Protestant	No religion	All
Catholic community	68	25	43	48
Protestant community	30	49	34	36
Minority ethnic communities	54	36	52	49



Community safety and attitudes to paramilitaries

87% of YLT respondents said they felt safe or very safe in the area where they lived. Males were more likely than females to state that they felt 'very safe' (55% compared to 40%). However, just a quarter (25%) of respondents who identified as non-binary, and just under one third (32%) who said they had been sexually attracted to someone of the same sex said they felt 'very safe' in the area where they lived.

Respondents who lived in rural areas were much more likely (62%) to say that they felt 'very safe' in their area than respondents from urban areas (39%) or those who lived in a small town or city (34%). Those who lived in rural areas were also much more likely to agree or strongly agree that there was a strong sense of community (66% compared to 43% of those living in urban areas or small towns).

38% of respondents who lived in cities or towns agreed or strongly agreed that there was a lot of crime, drugs, and anti-social behaviour among young people in their areas, compared to just 15% living in rural communities.

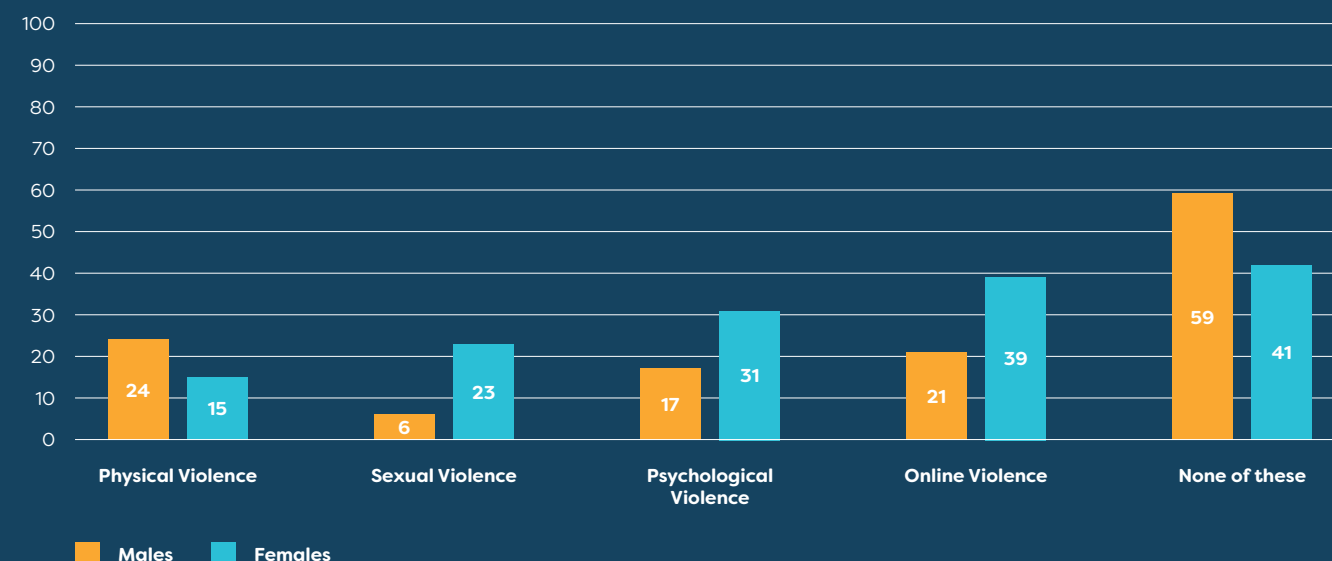
19% of respondents living in big cities, compared to just 6% of respondents in rural neighbourhoods agreed or strongly agreed that paramilitaries had a controlling influence in their area. 51% of respondents living in rural settings disagreed or strongly disagreed that young people were being influenced too much by paramilitary groups, compared to 38% who lived in large cities.

Gender-based violence

Based on a definition provided, Figure 3 shows the proportion of males and females who reported that they had experienced different types of gender-based violence in the last year. Males were more likely to report having experienced physical violence, but all the

other forms of violence were more likely to be reported by female respondents. 59% of males said they had never experienced any type of violence, compared to 42% of females and 10% of respondents who did not identify as either male or female.

Figure 3: Respondents who had personally experienced in the last year (by gender) (%)



76% of respondents said they were likely to intervene if they saw a girl being touched, hugged, or kissed against her wishes. 72% said they were likely to intervene if a girl they know was being harassed on social media, and 65% said they were likely to intervene if they witnessed someone verbally assaulting a girl.

YLT asked 16-year-olds who they would report gender-based violence experiences to if they

were personally a victim. Respondents were most likely to say they would report this to a family member (61%), a close friend (47%), the police (27%) or a teacher or other staff member in school (21%). One in five 16-year-olds said they would either not be comfortable reporting this (14%) or that they did not know who they would report it to (6%).

Mental health

Figure 4 shows that male respondents assessed their mental health more positively than females, and that the proportion of females assessing their mental health and wellbeing as 'fair' or 'poor' was significantly higher than among males. Almost half of the males (49%) said their mental health and wellbeing was 'excellent' or 'very good', compared to fewer than one in three females (31%).

Figure 4: In general, how would you describe your mental health and wellbeing? By gender (%)

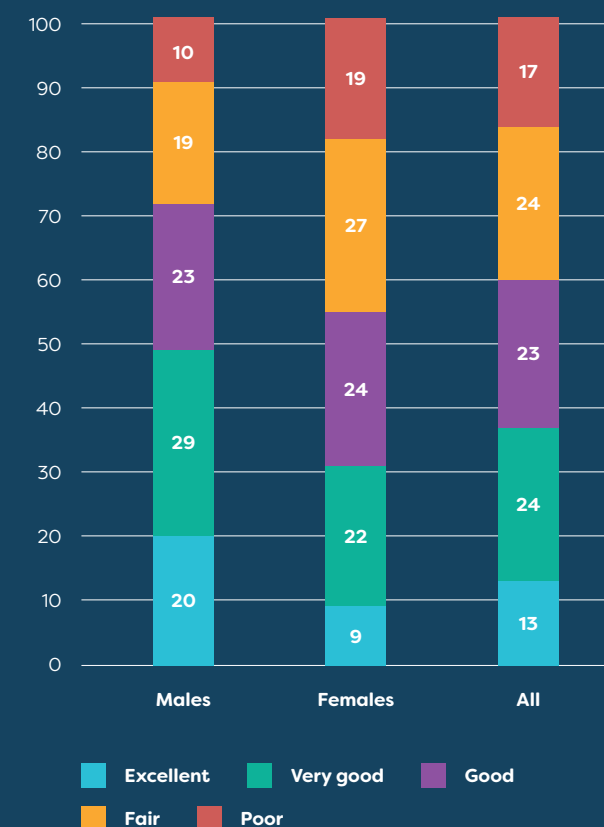


Table 2 shows that the largest stressor for both females and males was pressure to do well in school with eight in ten 16-year-olds saying that this made them worried or stressed. This was followed by problems and arguments with friends and peers (44%), with their family (40%),

and families having financial worries (25%). Females were more likely to feel stressed or worried about these things. Males were more than six times more likely than females to say that they never got stressed or worried.

Table 2:
Which of these things make you feel worried or stressed (%) (by gender)

	Male	Female	All
Being under pressure to do well at school	71	87	80
Problems or arguments with friends and peers	30	54	44
Problems or arguments with my family	30	46	40
My parent(s) being worried about not having enough money	18	29	25
Pressure to wear the latest trends in clothing/makeup/sports gear	12	27	20
Not having safe places to hang out with friends	9	15	14
Pressure to get likes/positive comments on social media	4	18	12
Having to provide care for a family member	6	8	7
Not getting help with my disability/learning needs	5	9	8
Being sent unsuitable pictures/messages online	4	10	8
Something else	7	8	8
I never feel worried or stressed	13	2	6

Respondents were asked who they would turn to for support if they wanted to talk about their worries. 67% of respondents would choose to talk to their friends, while 59% said they would talk to their parents or carers. 36% said they would talk to a sibling or other family member. 17% said they would talk to a teacher or other

staff member at school. Other sources of support were only mentioned by a very small number of 16-year-olds. 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that, if they were worried or stressed, spending time with their friends could make them feel better.

Sport and physical activity

Respondents were asked what kind of sports or physical activities they undertook in a normal week. Table 3 shows that about seven in ten 16-year-olds did PE in school. While 49% took

part in organised sport outside school, this was much more likely to be the case for males (60%) than females (43%).

Table 3:
Proportion of respondents who undertook different types of physical activities in a normal week. By gender (%)

	Male	Female	All
Do PE in school	70	72	71
Take part in sports in a sports club, organised activity, or a gym outside school	60	43	49
Walk or cycle to school, college or work	34	31	33
Take part in outdoor adventure activities e.g. canoeing, mountain biking, climbing	13	12	12
Undertake any other physical activity in your spare time	27	28	29

The recommended level of physical activity is 60mins per day or more. Figure 5 shows that only about 8% of YLT respondents reached this level, with males (11%) being more likely to do so than females (6%).

Figure 5:
Number of times in a week respondents spend at least 60 minutes playing sports or doing some physical activity (%)

- Never
- Once a week
- 2-3 days a week
- 4-6 times a week
- 7 times a week
- More often

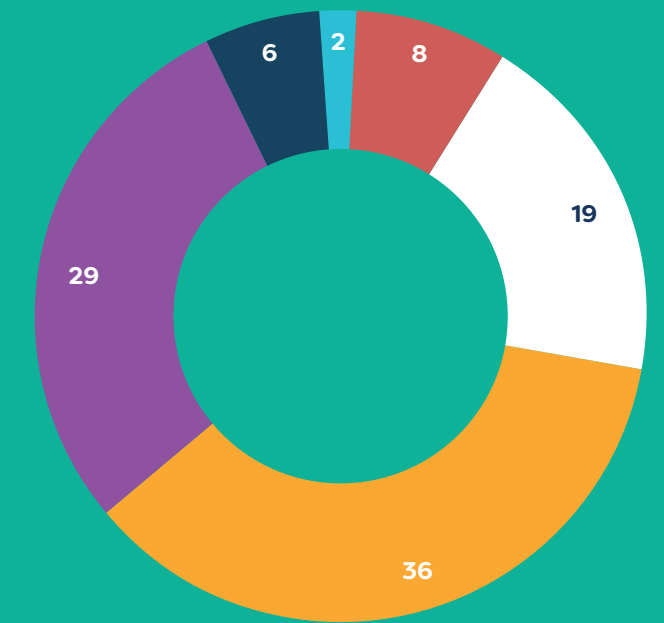
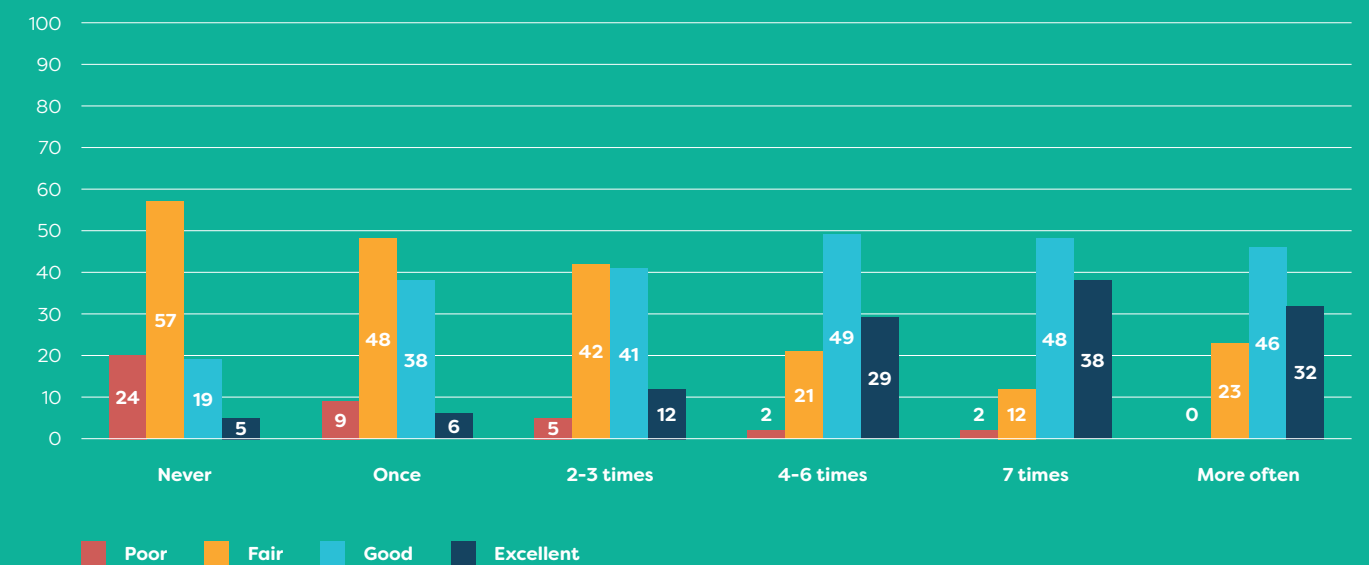


Figure 6 shows the strong relationship between the level of physical activity undertaken and how 16-year-olds assessed their own general health. The figure shows that over three quarters of those who exercised at least 4 times a week or more assessed their general health as being good or excellent. In turn, 77% of those who never or just once a week exercised the recommended 60 minutes said that their

health was either poor or fair. Among those who exercised the recommended 60 minutes seven times a week, this proportion was only 14%.

71% of respondents believed that engaging in sport and physical activity would contribute to improving their physical health a lot, and 61% think sport and physical activity are beneficial for their mental health.

Figure 6:
Self-assessed general health of 16-year-olds by number of times during the week they are physically active for at least 60 minutes (%)



Almost seven in ten respondents (69%) said they would like to do either 'a lot of more' (25%) or 'a little more' (44%) sports or physical activity. 57% of respondents expressed that not having

enough time was the reason that prevented them from taking part in sports and physical activity more often.

**For further information
about YLT, please contact:**

Prof Dr Dirk Schubotz, YLT Director

ARK, School of Social Sciences,
Education and Social Work
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast BT7 1NN

t. 028 90 973947

e. d.schubotz@qub.ac.uk

www.ark.ac.uk/ylt

