

## Self-injury and emotional health

38% of YLT respondents said they got stressed often or very often. By far the greatest stress factor was school. The most likely people that respondents said they were able turn to when they are upset or bothered were a friend (84%) or their mother (77%).

**Figure 2: Who that respondents say they are able to talk to when they are upset or bothered (%).**



Over one quarter (26%) of respondents said that at some point in the past they had serious personal, emotional or mental health problems. Only one third of these respondents had sought professional help on that occasion.

14% of respondents said that they had at some point in the past seriously thought about taking an overdose or harming themselves. 10% of respondents said that they had done so at least once in the past 12 months. The most likely reason given by these young people for this was that they 'wanted to punish themselves'.

64% of all YLT respondents felt that young people who injure themselves could be prevented from doing so. 83% agreed that these people feel 'hurt inside' whereas only 19% thought that people who harm themselves are mentally ill. 40% of respondents felt that these young people injured themselves in order to get attention.

## Background of the YLT Survey

All too often the opinions of young people are ignored when decisions are made about many of the issues involving them.

Every year the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey invites 16-year olds from all parts of Northern Ireland to tell us about their experiences of school, and their views on politics, sectarianism and other social issues. In 2008, 941 young people responded.

This leaflet provides a summary of key findings of the 2008 YLT survey.

More detailed results on specific issues as well as Research Updates are freely available on the YLT website at [www.ark.ac.uk/ylt](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt).

Many participants of the survey suggested a range of subjects that could be asked in future. Some of these questions will be included in the 2009 YLT survey.

Comments on the YLT survey are welcome any time and can be submitted via the YLT website.

ARK is a joint resource between Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster.

For further information contact:

### Dirk Schubotz

ARK, School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work  
Queen's University  
Belfast BT7 1NN  
Tel: 028 90 973 947  
[d.schubotz@qub.ac.uk](mailto:d.schubotz@qub.ac.uk)  
[www.ark.ac.uk/ylt](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt)

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2008 Young Life  
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## Summary of Results



Photo by Shannan Heaney, winner of 2008 YLT photo competition

'I think we should be taught in school more about why migrant workers come here, so we can see that they are not that different from someone who has always lived in Northern Ireland. I also think that the language barrier contributes greatly to the segregation.'

'Adults don't understand that people in our age bracket have a lot of things to worry about or feel miserable for. For example exams, future, pregnancy, teachers, boys/girls, friends, school life, a sick parent or relative and the list goes on. It isn't because people are mentally ill that they would want to self-harm. It's a permanent fix for a temporary problem, to some a moment of madness. Thinking about it and doing it are very different'.

## Who took part in the 2008 YLT survey?

All young people living in Northern Ireland who celebrated their 16th birthday in February and March 2008 were invited to take part in the survey. Of the 941 16-year olds that responded:

- 39% were male and 61% were female.
- 20% said they lived in a big city or its outskirts, 40% lived in a small town and 38% lived in a village or in the countryside.
- 49% attended a grammar school, 41% attended a secondary school, 5% attended a planned integrated school and 4% attended some other type of school.
- 78% lived with both their parents, 17% lived only with their mother and 2% lived only with their father. 2% lived with their mother some time and their father some time.
- 10% of respondents said they had a long-standing illness or a disability.
- 46% of respondents said they wanted to leave Northern Ireland, but half of these (51%) said they would come back to live.
- 9% of respondents said they looked after someone who was living in the same home as they did, and 16% had caring responsibilities for someone not living with them.
- 73% regarded themselves as belonging to a particular religion, 16% said they did not.
- 8% of males and 10% of females had been sexually attracted to a person of the same sex at least once.
- Over one quarter (24%) of respondents said their families were financially either very well-off or well-off. 16% said their families were not at all well-off or not well-off. The majority (56%) of respondents described their family's financial situation as average.

## Health-related pressures and activities

Respondents were asked if they had ever felt pressurised to smoke, drink alcohol, take drugs, have sexual intercourse or lose weight and where this pressure came from. **Table 1** shows the proportion of respondents that experienced such pressures.

**Table 1: Respondents, by gender, saying they have felt pressure to do the following things**

	%	
	Males	Females
Take illegal drugs	11	9
Smoke cigarettes	23	24
Drink alcohol	33	32
Use solvents to get high	6	5
Have sexual intercourse	7	13
Lose weight	12	39

The main sources of the pressure to engage in any of the above activities came from friends and peers. However, the media was identified as the main source of pressure to lose weight.

**Table 2** shows the proportion of respondents who said they had never smoked, used drugs, had sex or had lost weight on purpose.

**Table 2: Respondents, by gender, saying they have NEVER done the following**

	%	
	Males	Females
Used illegal drugs	83	87
Smoked tobacco	66	57
Drink alcohol	25	24
Use solvents to get high	95	96
Have sexual intercourse	80	76
Stopped eating in order to lose weight	90	54

Statistically, males and females were equally likely to have done any of the above things, the exceptions being stopping eating in order to lose weight and smoking tobacco, which females were significantly more likely to have done.

## Attitudes to minority ethnic groups

Around three quarters (76%) of YLT respondents reported that they had had contact with people from minority ethnic groups. This contact was most likely through other students in school (80% saying this), going out (27%) and part-time jobs (25%).

21% of respondents never met or played sports with people from other ethnic backgrounds and 38% of respondents said that all their friends had the same ethnic background as they had themselves. As **Figure 1** shows, pupils attending planned integrated schools were least likely to have friends from their own ethnic background only.

**Figure 1: Proportion of respondents' friends with same ethnic origin. By type of school attended (%).**



Overall, 7% of respondents said they felt unfavourable towards minority ethnic groups, whilst 36% felt favourable and half (50%) felt neither way.

Those who said that the media was the main influence on their views were most likely to feel unfavourably (12%). This negative influence by the media was noticed by many respondents. As one respondent put it:

**'Migrant workers and minority ethnic groups are painted negatively by the press and media. It seems to me that only negative things like crime reach the news and newspapers. Positive things like different music or food being introduced into Northern Ireland are never shown much appreciation.'**