Insight
Youth Loneliness

Contents

Youth Loneliness Survey

1. Executive Summary

In 2018, Young Scot will be working with the Co-op foundation on a project aiming to reduce the impact of youth loneliness. Ahead of this project, Young Scot were asked to do some research to gain a baseline understanding of what loneliness represents for young people across Scotland.

Young Scot created an online survey to gather insight into young people's thoughts and experiences of loneliness. The activity was hosted on the Young Scot Rewards platform between 26th August and 2nd November 2016 using Young Scot's preferred third-party tool Survey Gizmo. The survey received 997 fully completed responses.

Youth Loneliness Survey

» Almost all (98%) of respondents associate the term "loneliness" with being physically or mentally isolated from others. Respondents also said that loneliness can come as a result of actions by others, is associated with certain emotions such as sadness and anger and can be perceived differently by different individuals.

» Just over a third (34%) stated that they feel lonely either *most of the time* or *more than half of the time.* Almost half (49%) of respondents stated that they *occasionally* feel lonely.

» Almost half (46%) of respondents think that other people's actions is what makes young people feel lonely. Other reasons included isolation, individual experience, pressure, changes, society, and experiencing certain emotions.

» A quarter of respondents identified a specific time when they feel lonely, with most identifying the evening, night time or when tired. Other times when respondents were likely to feel lonely are when they are isolated, as a result of others' actions, a specific place (e.g. school, college or uni), when they are going through something personal, social situations, when they are feeling certain emotions, and during new experiences.

» When respondents were asked to share a time that they felt really lonely, 36% stated that they felt that way due to the impact of other people's actions. Other themes within responses were isolation, individual experience, changes, related to a specific place, related to a specific time, and when they are feeling under pressure.

» Almost half (47%) of respondents stated that they *don't think [using social media] makes a difference* to feelings of loneliness. Twenty-seven percent selected that it makes them feel *more lonely*, while 26% selected *less lonely.*

» When asked to describe their experiences with social media, 36% described a negative experience, while 35% described a positive experience. Other responses were around the themes of social media not making a difference to feelings of loneliness, use can make you feel more or less lonely dependent on situation, and social media provides a temporary positive experience.

» When asked how young people could overcome loneliness, half of the responses (49%) were regarding seeking some form of support from others. Other themes included individuals making physical changes, new experiences, making changes to mental state, use of social media or the internet, wider societal changes and

the difficulty with overcoming loneliness.

›› When asked what support should be available in the future to make young people feel less lonely, 36% suggested a variety of people/organisations that young people can turn to. Other themes included improving access to services and social space, options for communication, education and raising awareness of loneliness, societal change, connecting lonely people with the right peers, and individual enrichment.

Important Notes

Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Responses

Responses to qualitative questions have undergone thematic analysis using NVivo software. Themes were generated using the Autocoded Themes feature. Each response was individually read and coded into themes, with new themes being created as required. Once the analysis of each question was complete, similar themes were then grouped into overarching themes.

Double categorisation

In some cases, a response met the criteria of more than one node. All answers have been coded into as many themes as relevant, meaning some answers span several themes. This means that the quantified results from qualitative questions may not always add up to 100%.

Non-pertinent responses

Some responses have been labelled as 'non-pertinent'. These were typed responses that were deemed either overly explicit or not understandable.
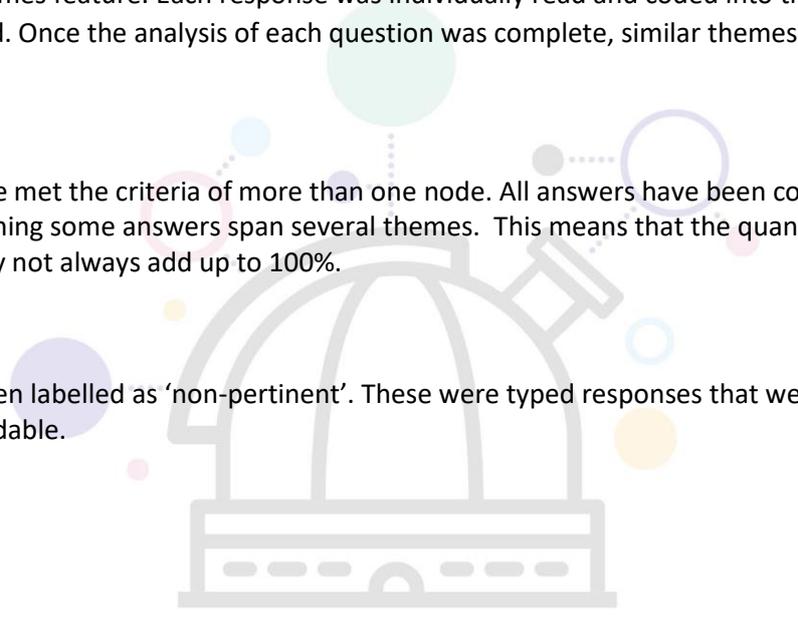
2. Youth Loneliness Survey Responses

There were 997 completed responses to the survey.

2.1 What does loneliness mean to you?

"Loneliness is not being able to find support, to find an escape, in/with others. It is being isolated, even if in a room full of people or with a phone full of numbers."

There were 915 typed responses to this question.

Responses were categorised into five key themes:

1. Isolation
2. Impact of others
3. Emotions
4. Individual experience

Twenty-one people typed a variation of *Nothing* or *I don't know*. Sixty responses were categorised as *Other* as they were not in line with the other themes.

Nine responses to this question were excluded from thematic analysis as they were considered to be 'non-pertinent'. These responses are not included in the report but are available in the Appendices.
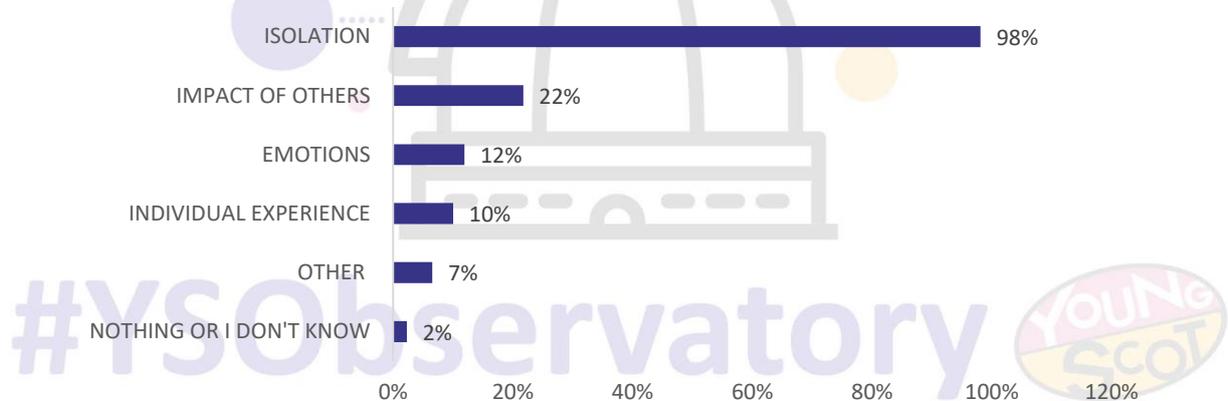
2.1.1 Isolation

Almost all respondents (898) made reference to isolation creating loneliness, mainly not being able to connect with others. There were also distinctions made between being alone (physical isolation) and feeling alone while being surrounded by people (mental isolation). Seven responses stated that loneliness meant being unable to connect with their peers specifically.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
ISOLATION	LACK OF CONTACT OR CONNECTION WITH OTHERS	457
	MENTAL ISOLATION	237
	PHYSICAL ISOLATION	197
	LACK OF CONNECTION WITH PEERS	7

2.1.2 Impact of others

Just under two hundred respondents (199) stated that they viewed loneliness as a result of others, either indirectly (through lack of support) or directly (through exclusion).

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
IMPACT OF OTHERS	LACK OF SUPPORT FROM OTHERS	113
	EXCLUSION BY OTHERS	86

2.1.3 Emotions

Just over a hundred respondents specified a particular emotion/feeling that they associate with loneliness.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
EMOTIONS	SADNESS	60
	EMPTINESS	27
	HOPELESSNESS	12
	FEELING TRAPPED	10

2.1.4 Individual experience

A tenth of respondents referenced how loneliness can be perceived by the individual. Most stated that loneliness comes from feeling different from or not understood by others. Seven respondents described a specific experience from their lives.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE	DIFFERENT OR NOT UNDERSTOOD	40
	MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES	37
	PERSONAL EXPERIENCE	7
	LACK OF PURPOSE	4
	SOCIAL MEDIA OR INTERNET	4

2.1.5 Other

Sixty responses were categorised as *Other*. This category includes the secondary themes describing the positives of being alone, loneliness can come as a product of not having someone to care for, and loneliness affects everyone in different ways. Thirty-six responses were completely separate from all other themes.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
OTHER	OTHER	36
	POSITIVE ASPECTS OF BEING ALONE	15
	BEING UNABLE TO CARE FOR OTHERS	5
	LONELINESS AFFECTS EVERYONE DIFFERENTLY	4

2.2 How often do you feel lonely?

Just over a third (34%) stated that they feel lonely either *most of the time* or *more than half of the time.* Almost half (49%) of respondents stated that they *occasionally* feel lonely.

5%	17%	17%	49%	12%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%   90%   100%

■ All of the time ■ Most of the time ■ More than half of the time ■ Occasionally ■ Never
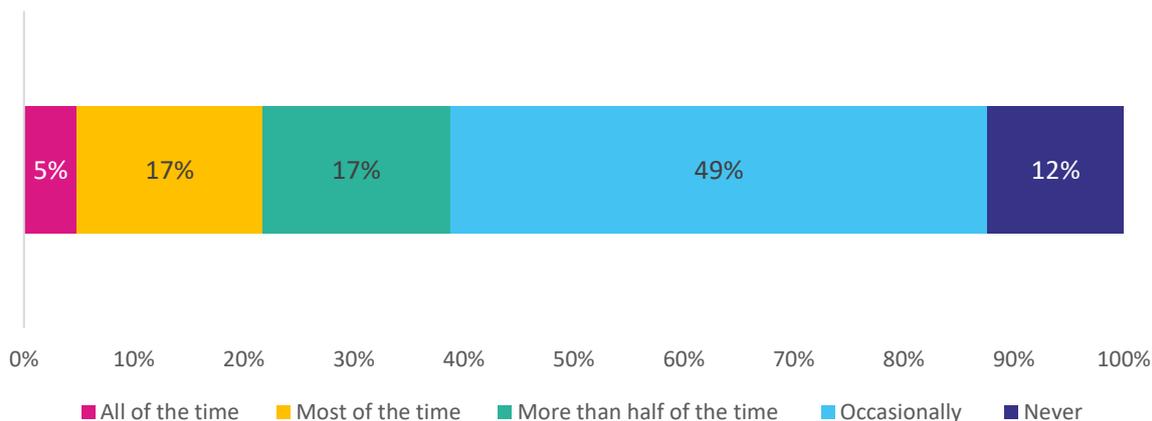
2.3 What do you think makes young people feel lonely?

> *"When they feel as though no one is like them and they are different to their peers, they haven't made friends or fit in as well as others might. When they've been excluded from a friend group, or when they don't feel listened to."*

There were 871 typed responses to this question.

Responses were categorised into seven key themes:

1. Impact of others
2. Isolation
3. Individual experience
4. Pressure
5. Changes
6. Society
7. Emotions

Eleven people typed a variation of *Nothing* or *I don't know*. Sixty-one responses were categorised as *Other* as they were not in line with the other themes.

Seven responses to this question were excluded from thematic analysis as they were considered to be 'non-pertinent'. These responses are not included in the report but are available in the Appendices.

IMPACT OF OTHERS	46%
ISOLATION	43%
INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE	38%
PRESSURE	12%
CHANGES	10%
OTHER	7%
SOCIETY	6%
NOTHING OR I DON'T KNOW	1%
EMOTIONS	1%
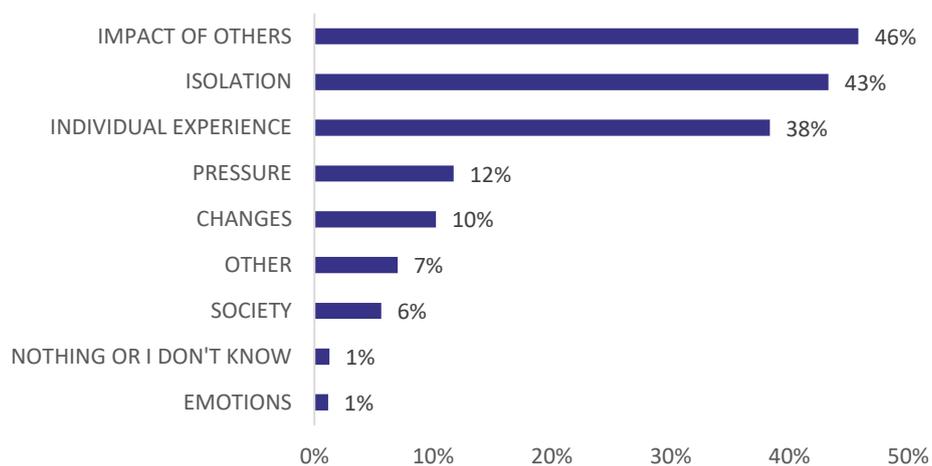
2.3.1 Impact of others

Just under four hundred respondents (399) stated that young people may feel loneliness as a result of others, either indirectly (through lack of support) or directly (through exclusion). Bullying, discrimination of others and a lack of trust were also identified.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
IMPACT OF OTHERS	EXCLUSION BY OTHERS	163
	BULLYING	111
	LACK OF SUPPORT FROM OTHERS	85
	LACK OF TRUST IN OTHERS	29
	DISCRIMINATION	11

2.3.2 Isolation

Over two fifths of respondents (377) made reference to isolation creating loneliness, mainly not being able to connect with others. There were also distinctions made between being alone (physical isolation) and feeling alone while being surrounded by people (mental isolation). Twenty responses mentioned a lack of space to socialise or meet new people.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
ISOLATION	LACK OF CONTACT OR CONNECTION WITH OTHERS	225
	PHYSICAL ISOLATION	81
	MENTAL ISOLATION	42
	LACK OF SOCIAL SPACE	20
	NOT IN A RELATIONSHIP	9

2.3.3 Individual experience

Over three hundred respondents (334) referred to how young people may feel loneliness due to individual experience. Most stated that social media/the internet may make young people feel lonely. Four individuals described a specific experience from their lives.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE	SOCIAL MEDIA/INTERNET	95
	DIFFERENT/NOT UNDERSTOOD	86
	DIFFICULTY COMMUNICATING WITH OTHERS	62
	DOMESTIC ISSUES	52
	MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES	22
	GRIEF	10
	SPECIFIC EXPERIENCE	4
	LACK OF PURPOSE	2
	HEALTH	1

2.3.4 Pressure

Just over one hundred (102) respondents stated that young people may feel lonely when they experience a form of pressure, mainly from schoolwork.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
PRESSURE	SCHOOL PRESSURE	48
	PEER PRESSURE	46
	FINANCIAL PRESSURE	8

2.3.5 Changes

A tenth of respondents stated that young people may feel lonely during times of change. These include life transitions (e.g. moving schools) as well as changes in existing relationships. Shifting hormones during teenage years was also mentioned.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
CHANGES	LIFE TRANSITIONS	41
	BREAKDOWN OF FRIENDSHIP	31
	HORMONES	9
	BREAKDOWN OF RELATIONSHIP	8

2.3.6 Society

Just under 50 respondents (49) said that young people may feel lonely due to societal issues or pressures. Sixteen respondents highlighted that adults may not take young people's problems seriously, which could lead to feelings of loneliness.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
SOCIETY	SOCIETY	33
	ADULTS NOT TAKING SERIOUSLY	16

2.3.7 Emotions

Ten respondents identified that young people may feel lonely when they are experiencing *boredom* or *sadness.*

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
EMOTIONS	BOREDOM	7
	SADNESS	3

2.3.8 Other

Fifty-five responses were categorised as *Other* as they were not in line with the other themes.. Six individuals stated that loneliness *affects everyone differently* and therefore young people may feel lonely at different times.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
OTHER	OTHER	55
	AFFECTS EVERYONE DIFFERENTLY	6

2.4 When are you most likely to feel lonely?

> *"I am most likely to feel lonely when it is late at night and about to go to sleep; it's where your imagination can run wild and sometimes tell you all the bad things about yourself/tell you how you don't fit in etc."*

There were 868 typed responses to this question.

Responses were categorised into eight key themes:

1. Specific time
2. Isolation
3. Impact of others
4. Specific place
5. Individual experience
6. Social situations
7. Emotions
8. New experiences

Twenty-six people typed a variation of *Never* or *I don't know*. Seventy-seven responses were categorised as *Other* as they were not in line with the other themes.

Thirteen responses to this question were excluded from thematic analysis as they were considered to be 'non-pertinent'. These responses are not included in the report but are available in the Appendices.
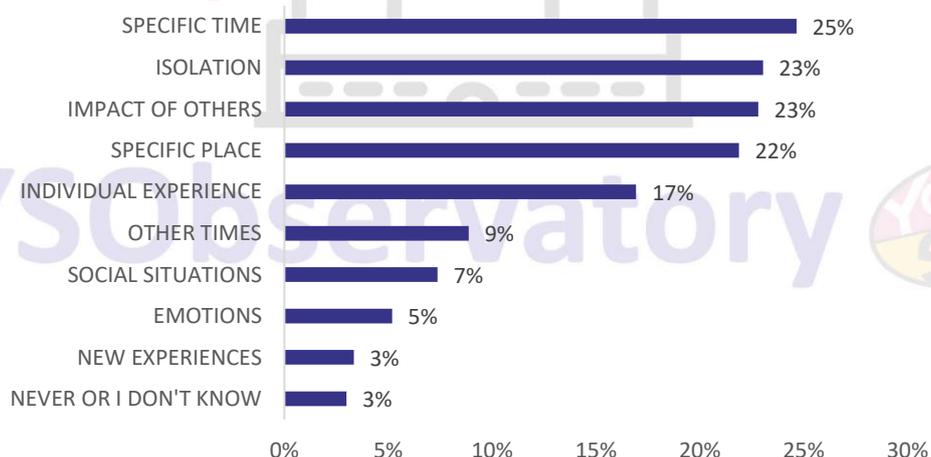
2.4.1 Specific time

A quarter of respondents identified certain times when they are most likely to feel lonely. Almost a hundred stated that this happens when they are alone at night. Weekends and holidays were also common answers (62 responses).

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
SPECIFIC TIME	EVENING, NIGHT OR WHEN TIRED	95
	WEEKENDS	36
	SCHOOL, COLLEGE OR UNI HOLIDAYS	26
	STUDYING OR EXAM TIME	25
	SPECIAL OCCASIONS	4
	WINTER	2

2.4.2 Isolation

Two hundred respondents stated that they feel lonely when they are physically isolated from others or unable to contact them.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
ISOLATION	ALONE OR NOTHING TO DO	114
	FRIENDS ARE NOT AROUND	54
	FAMILY IS NOT AROUND	19
	TRAVELLING ALONE	8
	NO ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA OR INTERNET	3
	NOT IN A RELATIONSHIP	2

2.4.3 Impact of others

Almost 200 respondents (198) described feeling lonely as a result of others. This was mainly down to exclusion, either in general or by their friends.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
IMPACT OF OTHERS	EXCLUSION BY OTHERS	56
	NOT INVITED BY FRIENDS	44
	ARGUMENT WITH FRIENDS	37
	LACK OF SUPPORT FROM OTHERS	22
	ARGUMENT WITH FAMILY	19
	BULLIED	14
	BEING JUDGED BY OTHERS	4
	BREAKDOWN OF RELATIONSHIP	2

2.4.4 Specific place

Almost 200 respondents (190) identified a specific place that they feel lonely. Although most stated school, college or university, almost 80 respondents said they felt lonely while at home.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
SPECIFIC PLACE	SCHOOL, COLLEGE OR UNI	112
	HOME	78

2.4.5 Individual experience

Almost 150 respondents (147) described a particular experience that led them to feeling lonely. Sixty-six respondents described difficulty with talking to others, either feeling unable to or that they have nothing in common. Stressful situations and issues with mental health were described by 36 respondents. Seven respondents stated that they feel lonely when using social media or the internet.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE	UNABLE TO TALK TO ANYONE	57
	STRESSFUL SITUATIONS	47
	MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES	27
	NOTHING IN COMMON WITH OTHERS	9
	SOCIAL MEDIA OR INTERNET	7

2.4.6 Social situations

Sixty-four respondents described a variety of social situations where they feel lonely.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
SOCIAL SITUATIONS	GROUP SITUATIONS	48
	MEETING NEW PEOPLE	6
	GENERAL SOCIAL SITUATIONS	5
	SOCIAL EVENTS	5

2.4.7 Emotions

Forty-five respondents specified a particular emotion/feeling that they associate with loneliness.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
EMOTIONS	SADNESS	33
	GRIEF	8
	ANGER	4

2.4.8 New experiences

Twenty-nine respondents stated that they feel lonely when going through a new experience.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
NEW EXPERIENCES	NEW ENVIRONMENT	14
	LIFE TRANSITIONS	10
	TRYING SOMETHING NEW	5

2.4.9 Other times

Almost a tenth of respondents described other times when the experience loneliness, with 20 stating that a variety of situations can cause it. Seven respondents said they feel lonely everyday or most of the time.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
OTHER TIMES	OTHER	50
	VARIETY OF SITUATIONS	20
	EVERYDAY OR MOST OF THE TIME	7

2.5 Tell us about when you have felt really lonely, and why you think you felt that way?

"When I have felt excluded by my friends."

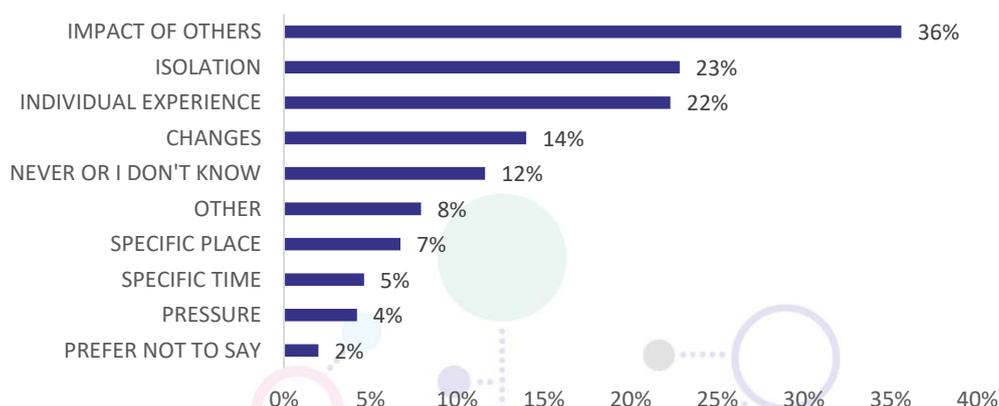There were 758 typed responses to this question.

Responses were categorised into seven key themes:

1. Impact of others

2. Isolation

3. Individual experience

4. Changes

5. Specific place

6. Specific time

7. Pressure

Eighty-eight people typed a variation of *Never* or *I don't know*. Fifteen respondents said that they preferred not to answer the question. Fifty-seven responses were categorised as *Other* as they were not in line with the other themes..

Twenty-seven responses to this question were excluded from thematic analysis as they were considered to be 'non-pertinent'. These responses are not included in the report but are available in the Appendices.

Category	Percentage
IMPACT OF OTHERS	36%
ISOLATION	23%
INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE	22%
CHANGES	14%
NEVER OR I DON'T KNOW	12%
OTHER	8%
SPECIFIC PLACE	7%
SPECIFIC TIME	5%
PRESSURE	4%
PREFER NOT TO SAY	2%

2.5.1 Impact of others
Over a third of respondents (270) described a time that they felt lonely as a result of other people.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
IMPACT OF OTHERS	EXCLUSION BY OTHERS	81
	LACK OF SUPPORT FROM OTHERS	58
	ARGUMENT OR BREAKDOWN OF FRIENDSHIP	56
	BULLIED	30
	ARGUMENT OR BREAKDOWN OF FAMILY	25
	BEING JUDGED BY OTHERS	17
	ROMANTIC REJECTION	3

2.5.2 Isolation
Almost a quarter of respondents (173) described a time that they felt lonely as a result of being alone or unable to contact other people.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
ISOLATION	NOT INVITED BY/NOT ABLE TO JOIN FRIENDS	45
	UNABLE TO TALK TO ANYONE	45
	FRIENDS ARE NOT AROUND	30
	ALONE OR NOTHING TO DO	26
	FAMILY IS NOT AROUND	11
	LIVING ALONE	6
	NOT IN A RELATIONSHIP	5
	NO ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA OR INTERNET	3
	TRAVELLING ALONE	2

2.5.3 Individual experience
Just over a fifth of respondents (169) described a time that they felt lonely due to individual experiences or perceptions. Issues with health both mental and physical were raised by 76 respondents. Seventy-one respondents

stated that they found it difficult to connect with others, either because they did not feel understood or felt they had nothing in common.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE	MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES	61
	NOT UNDERSTOOD BY OTHERS	54
	NOTHING IN COMMON WITH OTHERS	17
	HEALTH PROBLEMS OR ILLNESS	15
	SOCIAL MEDIA OR INTERNET	10
	ISSUES AROUND SEXUALITY OR GENDER	7
	SADNESS	5

2.5.4 Changes

Just over a hundred respondents (106) stated that they felt lonely due to a time of change in their life. Forty responses were in reference to changing schools or starting university. Twenty-two respondents said they felt lonely during the breakdown of a relationship and 25 said bereavement of some form.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
CHANGES	SCHOOL TRANSITIONS	23
	BREAKDOWN OF RELATIONSHIP	22
	BEREAVEMENT (FAMILY)	20
	NEW ENVIRONMENT	19
	STARTING UNI	17
	BEREAVEMENT (OTHER)	5

2.5.5 Specific place

Fifty-one respondents identified a specific place that they feel lonely. Although most stated school, college or uni, 13 respondents said they felt lonely while at home.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
SPECIFIC PLACE	SCHOOL, COLLEGE OR UNI	38
	HOME	13

2.5.6 Specific time

A quarter of respondents identified certain times when they are most likely to feel lonely. Weekends and holidays were also common answers (62 responses).

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
SPECIFIC TIME	EVENING, NIGHT OR WHEN TIRED	21
	SCHOOL, COLLEGE OR UNI HOLIDAYS	12
	UNABLE TO GO TO SCHOOL	2

2.5.7 Pressure

Thirty-two respondents stated that they feel lonely when they experience a form of pressure.

| Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
PRESSURE	STUDYING OR EXAM TIME	16
	STRESSFUL SITUATIONS	14
	PEER PRESSURE	2

2.5.8 Other

Three respondents said that they felt lonely everyday or most of the time. Fifty-seven responses were categorised as *Other* as they did not fit the above themes.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
OTHER	OTHER	57
	EVERYDAY OR MOST OF THE TIME	3

2.6 Does using social media the majority of the time make you feel…?

Almost half (47%) of respondents stated that they *don't think [using social media] makes a difference*. Twenty-seven percent selected that it makes them feel *more lonely*, while 26% selected *less lonely.*

- I don't think it makes a difference ■ More lonely ■ Less lonely
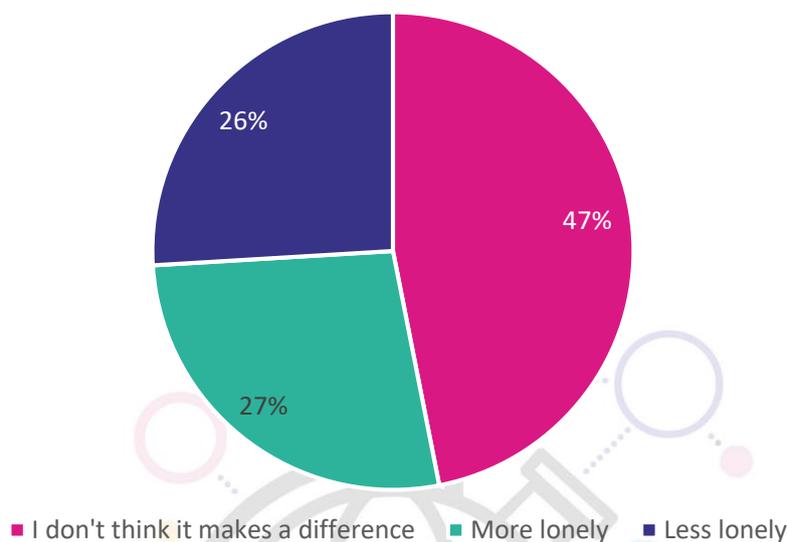
2.7 Tell us about your experience here….

"Social media portrays people's lives as much much better and shinier than they are in reality, making "ordinary" people feel inadequate. Or, perhaps, seeing your "friends" interact with their friends, but not with you."

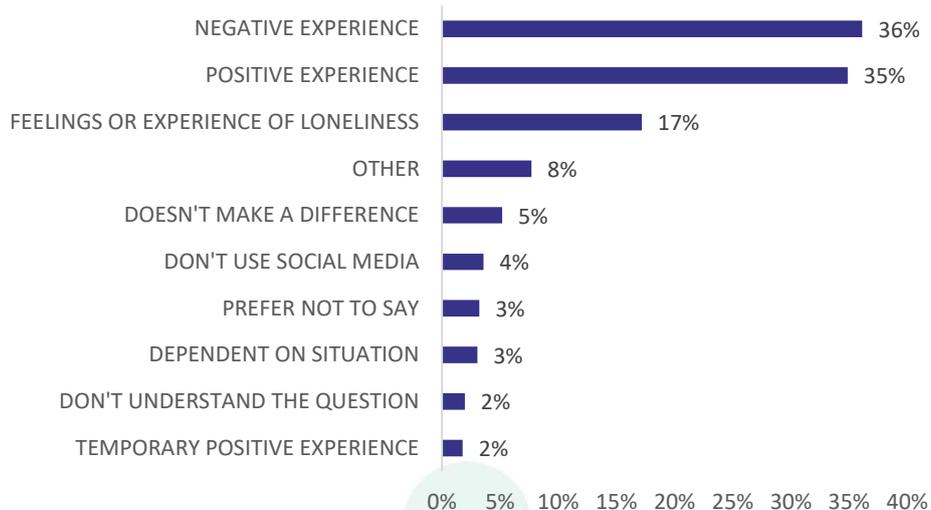There were 559 typed responses to this question.

Responses were categorised into seven key themes:

1. Negative experience
2. Positive experience
3. Doesn't make a difference
4. Dependent on situation
5. Temporary positive experience

Twenty people stated that they *Don't use social media*. Thirty-four people typed a variation of *Nothing* or *I don't know*. Eighteen respondents said that they preferred not to answer the question. Forty-three responses were categorised as *Other* as they were not in line with the other themes..

Ninety-six respondents answered the question in terms of their experience of loneliness rather than social media, and eleven respondents did not understand the question. This may have been due to the wording of the question being quite open.

Thirty-one responses to this question were excluded from thematic analysis as they were considered to be 'non-pertinent'. These responses are not included in the report but are available in the Appendices.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE — 36%
POSITIVE EXPERIENCE — 35%
FEELINGS OR EXPERIENCE OF LONELINESS — 17%
OTHER — 8%
DOESN'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE — 5%
DON'T USE SOCIAL MEDIA — 4%
PREFER NOT TO SAY — 3%
DEPENDENT ON SITUATION — 3%
DON'T UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION — 2%
TEMPORARY POSITIVE EXPERIENCE — 2%

2.7.1 Negative experience

Just over 200 respondents (202) described a negative experience associated with using social media, with 32 stating that using social media makes them feel more lonely. The main reason that respondents have negative experiences is that social media makes them feel excluded by others as they see pictures and events that have happened without them. Thirty-four respondents said that they feel they have an inadequate social life as a result of comparison to others on social media. However, 14 respondents stated that online lives can be fake representation, and 23 respondents think that using social media does not replace real life interactions.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE	EXCLUDED BY OTHERS	74
	INADEQUATE SOCIAL LIFE	34
	FEEL MORE LONELY	32
	NOT AS GOOD AS REAL LIFE INTERACTION	23
	ONLINE LIVES ARE FAKE	14
	COMPETITION	4
	CYBER BULLYING	4
	GENERAL BAD EXPERIENCE	4
	DIFFICULT USING SOCIAL MEDIA	3
	HARDER TO BE HONEST AND OPEN	2
	MEANINGS ARE MISCONSTRUED	2
	PRESSURE TO SHARE	2
	RUDE IF SOCIALISING	2
	SEEING COUPLES ONLINE	2

2.7.2 Positive experience

Almost 200 respondents (195) described a positive experience associated with using social media, with 29 stating that using social media makes them feel less lonely. The main reason that respondents have positive experiences is that social media allows them to keep in contact with friends and family. Social media is also thought to allow people to make new friends as they can contact people with similar interests and experiences from all over the world.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
POSITIVE EXPERIENCE	KEEPING IN CONTACT	48
	GENERAL GOOD EXPERIENCE	39
	LESS LONELY	29
	MEET NEW FRIENDS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD	28
	BRINGS SIMILAR PEOPLE TOGETHER	25
	ALWAYS SOMEONE AVAILABLE TO TALK	14
	EASIER TO BE HONEST AND OPEN	6
	HELPS ARRANGE PLANS	4
	ONLINE FRIENDS HELP OFFLINE SITUATIONS	2

2.7.3 Doesn't make a difference
Twenty-nine respondents thought that social media use does not impact feelings of loneliness.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
DOESN'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE	DOESN'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE	29

2.7.4 Dependent on situation
Seventeen respondents stated that social media can make you feel either more lonely or less lonely dependent on the scenario.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
DEPENDENT ON SITUATION	DEPENDENT ON SITUATION	17

2.7.5 Temporary positive experience
Ten respondents stated that social media can impact them positively, but this effect is only temporary.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
TEMPORARY POSITIVE EXPERIENCE	TEMPORARY POSITIVE EXPERIENCE	10

2.7.6 Other
Forty-three responses were categorised as *Other* as they did not fit the above themes.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
OTHER	OTHER	43

2.8 How can young people overcome loneliness?

"Seeking help, not just professional help but going out of their way to talk to someone i.e. a relative or a friend, or even a stranger you don't know. More often than not people will be there for you to sit and listen and help you overcome your issues."

There were 780 typed responses to this question.

Responses were categorised into seven key themes:

1. Seek support
2. Physical changes
3. New experiences

4. Mental changes

5. Social media or internet

6. Wider changes

7. Difficult to overcome

Fifty-six people typed a variation of *Nothing* or *I don't know*. Sixty-four responses were categorised as *Other* as they were not in line with the other themes..

Thirteen responses to this question were excluded from thematic analysis as they were considered to be 'non-pertinent'. These responses are not included in the report but are available in the Appendices.
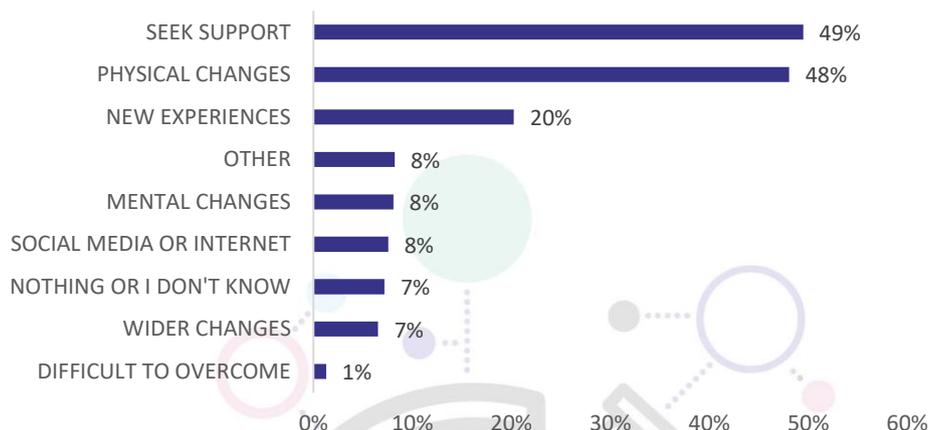
2.8.1 Seek support

Almost half of respondents (386) suggested that seeking support from others will help overcome loneliness. Most said this generally, while 173 respondents identified someone more specific.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
SEEK SUPPORT	TALKING TO OTHERS ABOUT PROBLEMS	213
	TALK TO FRIENDS	84
	TALK TO FAMILY	69
	TALK TO TEACHERS	15
	TALK TO OLDER PEOPLE	5

2.8.2 Physical changes

Almost half of respondents (375) suggested physical changes that young people can make to overcome loneliness, either by socialising with the right people, changing their environment or being more productive.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
PHYSICAL CHANGES	SOCIALISE WITH OTHERS	230
	BEING OUTSIDE OR GOING OUT MORE	48
	MEET PEOPLE WITH SIMILAR INTERESTS	48
	KEEP PRODUCTIVE	37
	CHANGE WHO THEY SOCIALISE WITH	12

2.8.3 New experiences

A fifth of respondents (158) suggested that young people should involve themselves in new experiences to overcome loneliness.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
NEW EXPERIENCES	JOIN CLUBS OR GROUPS	129
	TRY NEW THINGS	12
	VOLUNTEERING	11
	CREATIVE EXPRESSION	6

2.8.4 Mental changes

Almost a tenth of respondents (63) suggested changes that young people can make to their mental state in order to overcome loneliness.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
MENTAL CHANGES	SELF ACCEPTANCE	28
	POSITIVE THOUGHTS	13
	RECOGNISE THAT PEOPLE CARE	9
	RECOGNISE THAT ALONE TIME CAN BE POSITIVE	8
	SEEK MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT	5

2.8.5 Social media or internet

Fifty-nine respondents suggested changing social media use to help overcome loneliness, either negatively (i.e. restricting use) or positively (i.e. reaching out online).

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
SOCIAL MEDIA OR INTERNET	SOCIAL MEDIA OR INTERNET USE (NEGATIVE)	36
	SOCIAL MEDIA OR INTERNET USE (POSITIVE)	23

2.8.6 Wider changes

Fifty-one respondents suggested changes that could be made by the wider world that would help young people overcome loneliness.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
WIDER CHANGES	INCLUSION BY OTHERS	36
	SOCIETAL CHANGE	8
	BETTER ACCESS TO SOCIAL SPACE	7

2.8.7 Difficult to overcome

Ten respondents stated that overcoming loneliness would be difficult for young people.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
DIFFICULT TO OVERCOME	LONELINESS DIFFERS FOR EVERYONE	4
	EXTREME NEGATIVE RESPONSE	4
	LONELINESS IS DIFFICULT TO OVERCOME	2

2.8.8 Other

Other suggestions included getting a pet or interacting with animals and turning to religion. Four people described a personal experience that helped them with loneliness. Fifty-one responses were categorised as *Other* as they did not fit any of the above themes.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
OTHER	OTHER	51
	GET A PET	6
	PERSONAL EXPERIENCE	4
	RELIGION	3

2.9 In the future, what support should be available to young people have to help them feel less lonely?

> *"Somewhere you can go to meet other young people and teens who feel the same way that way you will have something to bond over."*

There were 717 typed responses to this question.

Responses were categorised into seven key themes:

1. Who to turn to
2. Improve access
3. Options for communication
4. Education/promotion
5. Societal change
6. Audience
7. Individual enrichment

Sixty-five people typed a variation of *Nothing* or *I don't know*. Ninety-nine responses were categorised as *Other* as they were not in line with the other themes..

Seventeen responses to this question were excluded from thematic analysis as they were considered to be 'non-pertinent'. These responses are not included in the report but are available in the Appendices.
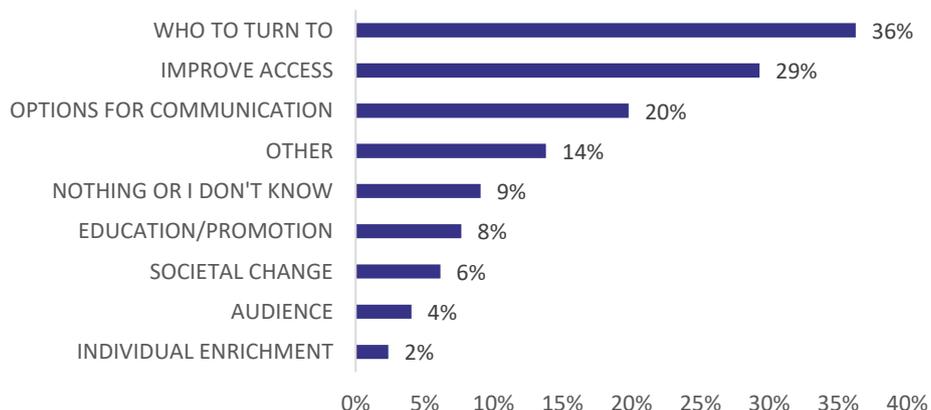
2.9.1 Who to turn to

Over a third of respondents (260) described *who* young people should turn to for support. Nine respondents named a specific support group that they had heard of.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
WHO TO TURN TO	SUPPORT GROUPS	97
	SUPPORT IN SCHOOL, COLLEGE OR UNI	71
	SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP	37
	BEFRIENDING SERVICE	24
	SUPPORT FROM FAMILY	14
	SPECIFIC SUPPORT GROUP	9
	SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS	8

2.9.2 Improve access

Over 200 respondents (210) stated that access to certain forms of support will need to be improved in the future. Access to space for young people to socialise was the most popular suggestion. Seventeen respondents stated that access to mental health services also needs improvement.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
IMPROVE ACCESS	ACCESS TO SOCIAL SPACE	169
	CREATE SOCIAL EVENTS	20
	IMPROVE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES	17
	ACCESS TO LITERATURE	3
	IMPROVE ANTI-BULLYING SUPPORT	1

2.9.3 Options for communication

A fifth of respondents (142) suggested ways in which young people may receive support in the future.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
OPTIONS FOR COMMUNICATION	ONLINE CHATROOM/FORUM	67
	PHONE LINE	53
	USE SOCIAL MEDIA IN A POSITIVE WAY	7
	TEXT SERVICE	6
	ADVICE WEBSITE	6
	RESTRICT SOCIAL MEDIA	3

2.9.4 Education/promotion

Almost a tenth of respondents (55) stated that there should be greater education around loneliness and awareness of services that can help. Seven respondents highlighted a need for education around social media or internet safety.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
EDUCATION/ PROMOTION	EDUCATION IN SCHOOL, COLLEGE OR UNI	25
	PROMOTION OF SERVICES	9
	TRAINING FOR PROFESSIONALS	8
	EDUCATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA/INTERNET SAFETY	7
	TEACH COPING MECHANISMS	6

2.9.5 Societal change

Forty-four respondents identified that societal change would create greater support for loneliness in the future, particularly by removing stigma or creating an understanding around the topic.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
SOCIETAL CHANGE	REMOVE STIGMA OR CREATE UNDERSTANDING	30
	SOCIETAL CHANGE	10
	STOP FORCED INTERACTION	4

2.9.6 Audience

Twenty-nine respondents highlighted that the types of young people that need support will need to be taken into account. The main suggestion within this theme is that support should aim to bring together similar groups of people.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
AUDIENCE	SIMILAR PEOPLE	26
	FOCUS ON INTROVERTS	3

2.9.7 Individual enrichment

Seventeen respondents stated that support for loneliness should start with individual change.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
INDIVIDUAL ENRICHMENT	BUILD SELF CONFIDENCE	8
	OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT	5
	CHANGE SOCIAL CIRCLE	2
	FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL HOBBIES	2

2.9.8 Other

Five respondents stated that support for feeling lonely would be different for everyone. Four respondents said that any support would help, and one respondent mentioned religion. Eighty-eight responses were categorised as *Other* as they did not fit any of the above themes.

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Number of responses
OTHER	OTHER	88
	DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE	5
	ANYTHING	4
	RELIGION	1

3. Summary of Findings

Throughout the entire survey, a number of key themes were identified consistently across several questions. Respondents primarily associated loneliness with isolation, with recognition that this can be mental as well as physical – people can feel lonely even if they are surrounded by others. Exclusion by others was also a recurring theme, which can be exacerbated by seeing other people's lives on social media.

The questions surrounding the impact of social media on loneliness produced mixed responses. There is a difference between how respondents answered the quantitative versus qualitative question, with more people describing a negative experience (36%) compared to the amount who selected that social media made them feel *more lonely* (27%). Responses state that the way that young people use social media can make them feel differently (i.e. organising social events is a positive use, while using other people's online lives as a comparison is negative).

The link between feelings of loneliness and mental health is very strong throughout the responses. Responses to six out of seven qualitative questions were regarding mental health issues or access to mental health support. Several other themes relate to events that can impact your mental health and in turn heighten feelings of loneliness (e.g. school pressure, stressful situations, life transitions and changes).

In terms of specific places where young people can feel lonely, school, college or university were referenced in a total of 150 responses across the entire survey. In contrast, young people stated that they either feel lonely at home, (91 mentions across the survey) or during holidays (38 mentions across the survey). This suggests that while some respondents feel uncomfortable when at school, college or university, others view them as a place to socialise with friends. There is a call from some respondents for educational institutions to play a greater role in tackling loneliness, either through education (25 total mentions) or support (77 total mentions).

For the respondents surveyed, the most common suggestion from young people to overcome loneliness was to seek some form of support. When asked for suggestions of support, the most common responses were access to social space, support groups, support in school, college or university, online chat room/forum and phone line. While the first three suggestions are related to finding support by sharing experiences in person, the final two propose anonymous support. A need for societal change was also highlighted by 44 respondents, with multiple references to stigma surrounding loneliness.
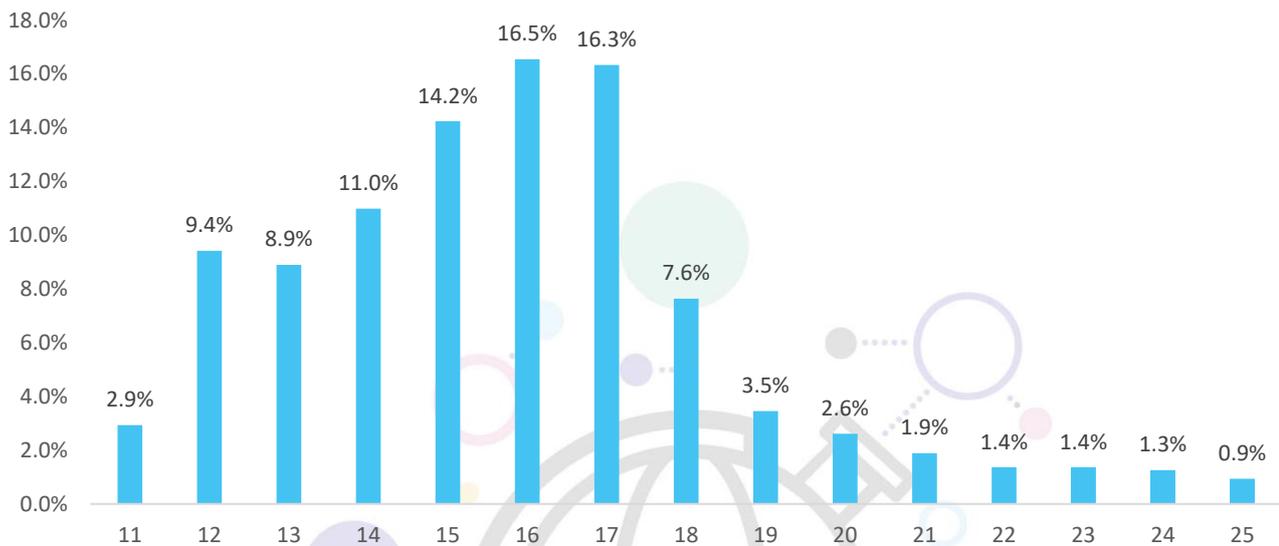
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4. Demographics

4.1 Demographics: Gender

Sixty-nine percent of respondents in the survey identified as *female* and 26% identified as *male*. Of the remaining four percent, 19 respondents selected *other* and 21 respondents selected *prefer not to say.*
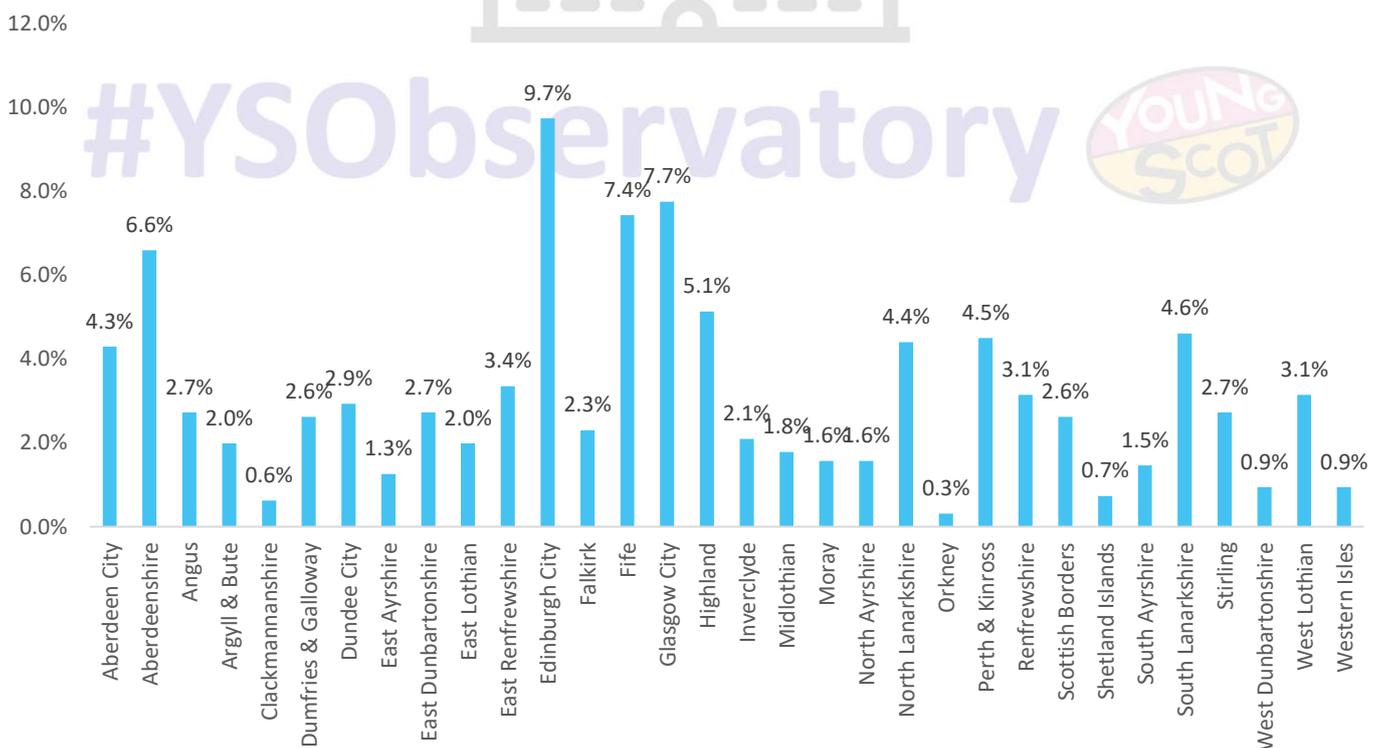
4.2 Demographics: How old are you?

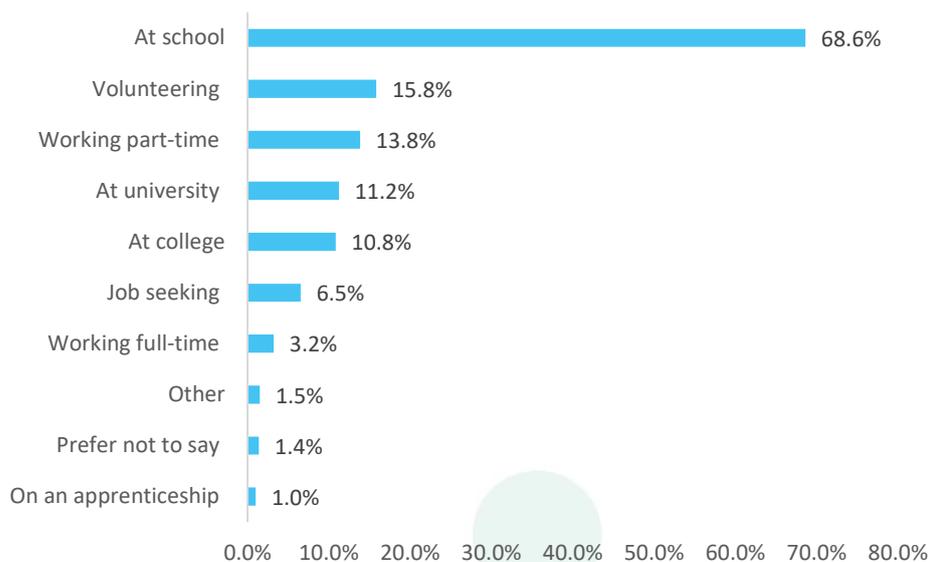Most survey respondents were in their mid- to late teens (15-17 years old).

4.3 Demographics: What Local Authority do you live in?

There was representation across all 32 Local Authorities from survey respondents. The largest number of respondents were from Edinburgh (93).

4.4 Demographics: Are you…?

The majority of survey respondents (684) are currently at school.

At school	68.6%
Volunteering	15.8%
Working part-time	13.8%
At university	11.2%
At college	10.8%
Job seeking	6.5%
Working full-time	3.2%
Other	1.5%
Prefer not to say	1.4%
On an apprenticeship	1.0%

0.0% 10.0% 20.0% 30.0% 40.0% 50.0% 60.0% 70.0% 80.0%

4.5 Demographics: Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Eighty-one percent of respondents in the survey answered this question with *No* and 13% selected *Yes.* Sixty-two respondents selected *prefer not to say*.
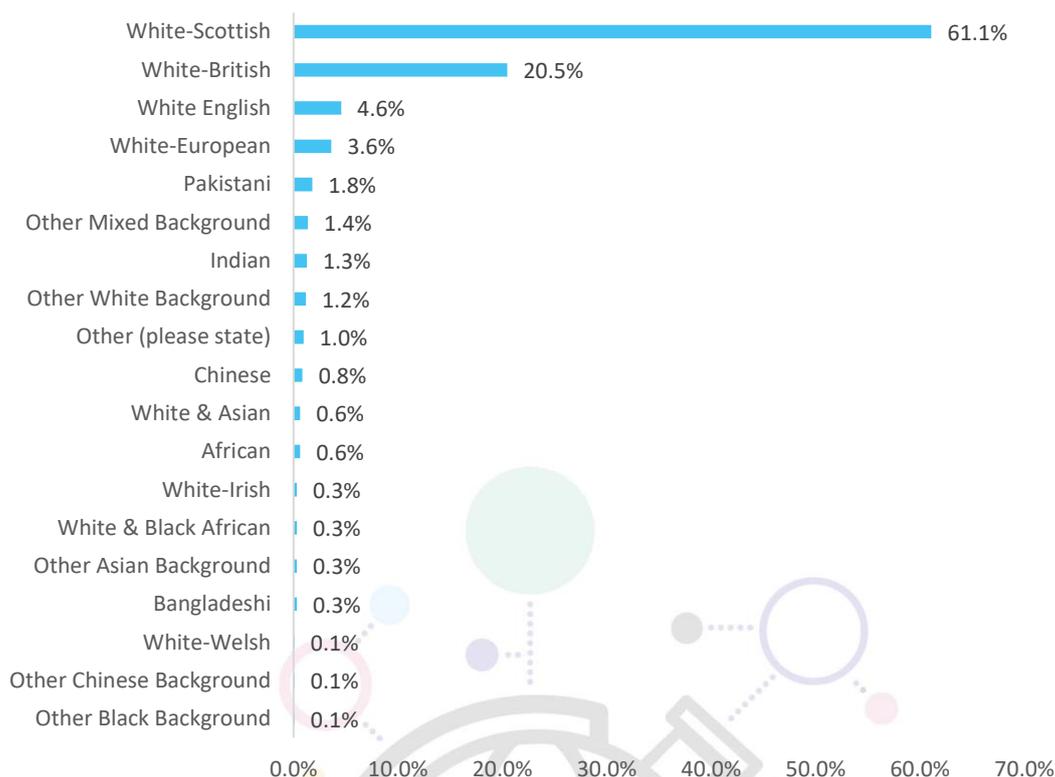
4.6 Demographics: How do you define your sexuality?

The majority of respondents (72%) defined their sexuality as *Straight*.
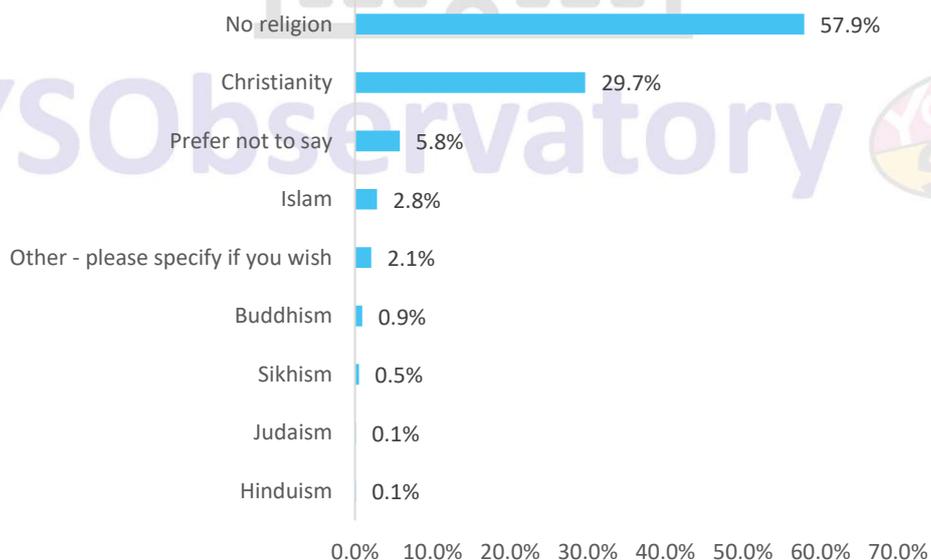
- Straight
- Bisexual
- Prefer not to say
- A-sexual
- Other
- Gay
- Lesbian

2.7% 2.9% 2.3% 2.2%

7.1%

11.0%

71.7%
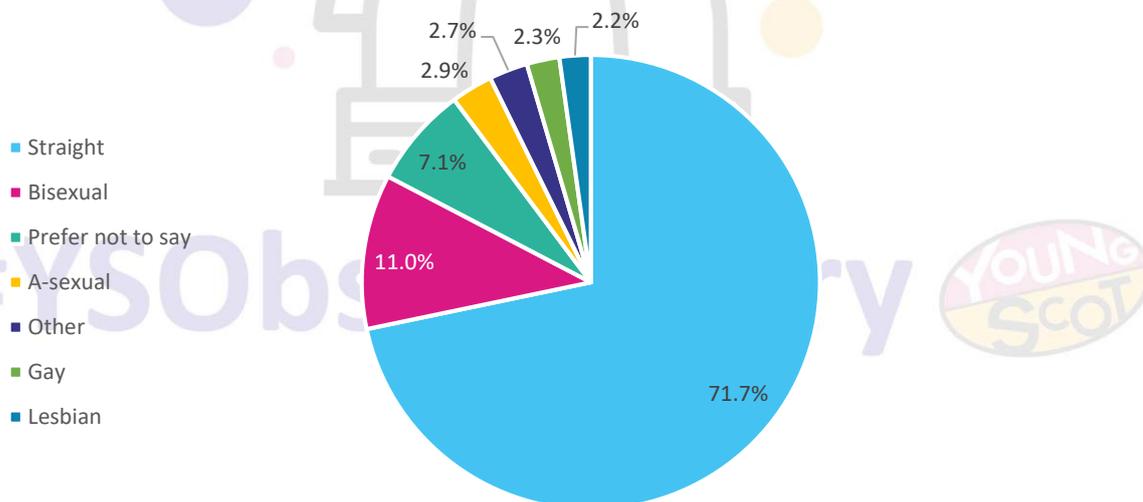
4.7 Demographics: What is your ethnic group?

The majority of respondents (61%) defined their ethnic group as *White-Scottish.*

Ethnic group	Percentage
White-Scottish	61.1%
White-British	20.5%
White English	4.6%
White-European	3.6%
Pakistani	1.8%
Other Mixed Background	1.4%
Indian	1.3%
Other White Background	1.2%
Other (please state)	1.0%
Chinese	0.8%
White & Asian	0.6%
African	0.6%
White-Irish	0.3%
White & Black African	0.3%
Other Asian Background	0.3%
Bangladeshi	0.3%
White-Welsh	0.1%
Other Chinese Background	0.1%
Other Black Background	0.1%

4.8 Demographics: What is your religion?

The majority of respondents (58%) stated that they have no religion.

Religion	Percentage
No religion	57.9%
Christianity	29.7%
Prefer not to say	5.8%
Islam	2.8%
Other - please specify if you wish	2.1%
Buddhism	0.9%
Sikhism	0.5%
Judaism	0.1%
Hinduism	0.1%

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