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# Public Attitudes to Young People in Scotland



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS



# **PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND**

**Children and Families Analysis**

**November 2017**

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## Key findings

This survey of adults in Scotland asked respondents a number of questions about different characteristics of Young People (aged 13-19). The following key findings emerged:

- For most questions, more people held positive attitudes towards young people than held negative attitudes, although a substantial minority held negative attitudes in all cases.
- There was substantial variation between questions. The areas where young people were perceived most positively were being trustworthy (41 per cent of respondents agreed, 12 per cent disagreed), and helping others (40 per cent agreed, 17 per cent disagreed).
- The areas where they were perceived most negatively were communication skills (39 per cent agreed that YP lack these, 31 per cent disagreed) and taking responsibility for their own actions (35 per cent disagreed, 26 per cent agreed).
- Positive attitudes were more likely to be held by people who had a relationship with a young person; came from the professional occupational groups; lived in the least deprived SIMD quintile; and women.
- The relationship between attitudes and age was complex. Those in the 18-24 age group were most positive, while those in the 25 to 49 group were most negative. For some questions, those in the oldest age group (65 plus) were as positive as those in the youngest.

## **Introduction**

This note presents survey findings on attitudes towards young people among adults in Scotland. The aim of the research was to better understand the prevalence of positive and negative attitudes, as well as how they are distributed among different population groups.

## **Background**

International comparative evidence on wellbeing shows that Scotland performs well for younger children, but its relative performance declines substantially during adolescence. Its ranking slips from near the top for 11 year olds to near the bottom for 15 year olds across 42 OECD countries. Of particular concern are issues around relationships, mental health and pressures of life, bullying, drug use, activity levels and inequalities.

One of the drivers of negative wellbeing in adolescence according to evidence is young people's perceptions of themselves. They feel that they are often perceived negatively and not valued by their families and society, and this, in turn, negatively impacts upon their self-perception and confidence and acts as a barrier to positive outcomes. This is recognised by policy actions seeking to increase positive attitudes towards young people and to enhance young people's engagement in decision making.

## **Methods**

All figures are from Progressive Partnership Ltd. Total sample size was 1,027. Fieldwork was undertaken between 14th and 17th March 2017. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Scottish adults (aged 18+).

## **Perceptions of Characteristics of Young People**

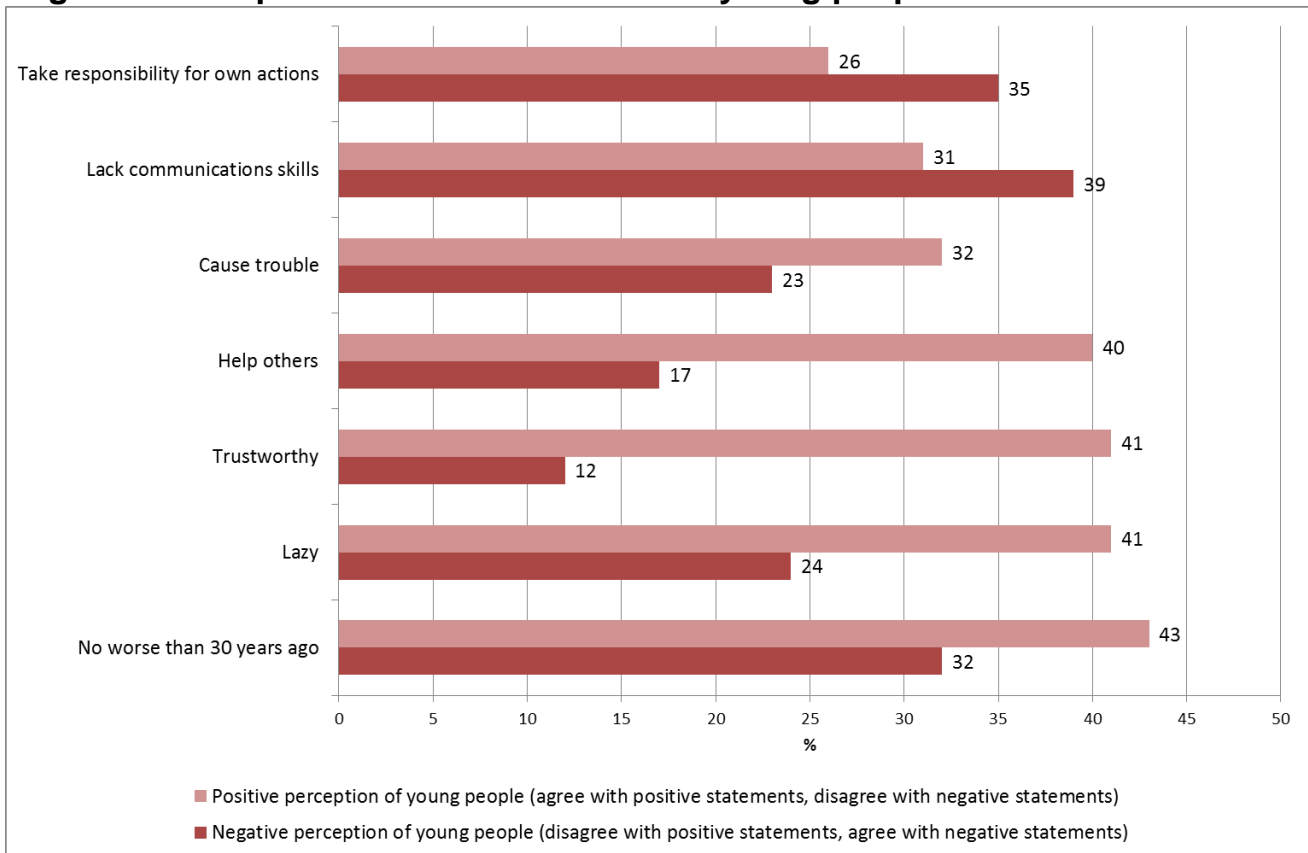
Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a number of statements about young people (defined as aged 13 to 19). Some statements were worded positively and some negatively. Figure 1 presents findings. The findings show a mixed picture of views of young people.

For five of the statements, the balance of opinion was positive:

- 43% of respondents agreed that 'The behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago', while 32% disagreed.
- 41% of respondents disagreed that 'Young people are lazy', while 24% agreed.
- 41% of respondents agreed that 'Young people are trustworthy', while just 12% disagreed.
- 40% of respondents agreed that 'Young people help others in need', while 17% disagreed.

- 32% of respondents disagreed that ‘Young people cause trouble in their local area’, while 23% agreed.

**Figure 1 Perceptions of characteristics of young people**



For the remaining two statements, the balance of opinion was negative:

- 39% of respondents agreed that ‘Young people lack communications skills’, while 31% disagreed.
- 35% of respondents disagreed that ‘Young people take responsibility for their own actions’, while 26% agreed.

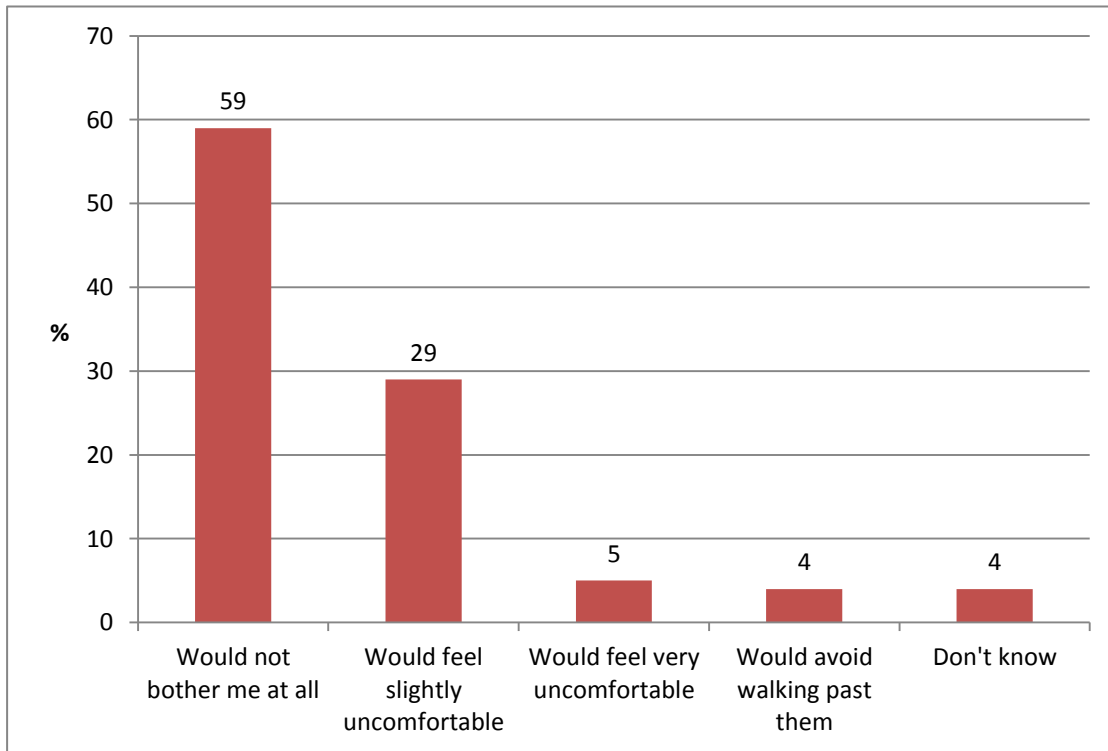
Survey respondents were also asked how they would react in a situation where they had to walk past a group of 16 or 17 year olds to get to a shop. Figure 2 presents findings.

Almost 6 in ten (59%) stated that this would not bother them at all, while almost 3 in ten (29%) said it would make them slightly uncomfortable. Very few said it would make them very uncomfortable (5%) or that they would avoid walking past them (4%).

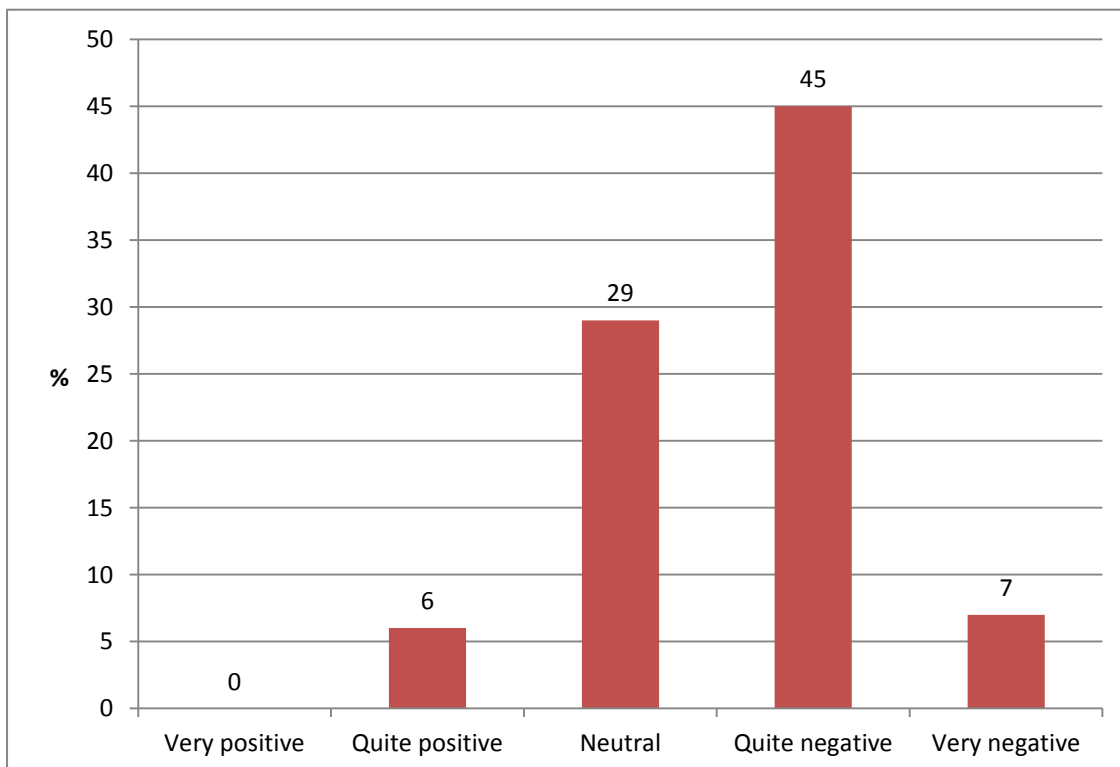
Finally, respondents were asked about their perception of how the TV programmes, newspapers and social media portray young people. Figure 3 presents findings.

There was a strong perception that the media portrays young people in a negative light. Over half (52%) felt that portrayals were negative, while only 6% felt they were positive. Figure 3 presents findings.

**Figure 2 Reaction to a group of young people**



**Figure 3 Perceptions of media portrayal of young people**



## **Differences between population groups**

The following overall trends emerged in how different sub groups viewed young people:

### **Relationship with young people**

- People who said they knew a young person held consistently more positive attitudes of young people, although no pattern was found by what the respondents relationship to the young people they know was.

### **Social class, SIMD and household income**

- Respondents from the higher social classes (ABC1) held more positive attitudes to young people than those from the C2DE group.
- Attitudes were most positive in the least deprived SIMD areas on all questions.
- For most questions, attitudes improved as area deprivation decreased but this wasn't a consistent relationship for all questions.
- Generally, attitudes were more positive among the highest income households, although variation by this variable wasn't always statistically significant and the relationship wasn't always consistent.

### **Age**

- Respondents aged 18 to 24 held the most positive attitudes about young people for all questions except the responsibility question, where age was not a statistically significant factor.
- However, the relationship between age and attitudes is not straightforward, and the 25 to 49 age group was the most negative about young people for most questions.
- For some questions, attitudes among the oldest (65 plus) age group were as positive as those among the youngest age group.
- Related to age, full time students consistently had most positive attitudes about young people for all questions except the responsibility one.

### **Gender**

- Women were generally more positive about young people, although the difference was generally not large and not present for all questions.

### **Voting behaviour**

- Having voted Remain in the EU referendum was one of the strongest predictors of positive attitudes to young people, with Leave voters consistently holding substantially more negative attitudes.

No pattern was found by Scottish region; area type (urban-rural); household size; and marital status. The Black and Ethnic Minority population is too small to report reliably.



Patterns for the question about walking past a group of young people were slightly different:

- The likelihood of feeling confident consistently increased with age, with the oldest age group the most likely to say that it wouldn't bother them.
- There was also a consistent relationship with rurality, with those in remote and very remote rural most likely to say that the group would not bother them.
- Those saying it would not bother them were also more likely to be female; to know a young person; to be retired; and to have higher household incomes.
- Interestingly, no difference was found between SIMD quintiles.

There was less variation between population subgroups in the questions about media portrayals of young people. Respondents aged 18-24; in occupational group ABC1; students; and those who know a young person were most likely to describe the portrayal as negative.

A detailed analysis of findings by sub groups is provided in Annex A.

## **Socio-demographic characteristics of people with negative attitudes**

Analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics those people who held negative attitudes towards young people showed that this group was most likely to be male; aged 25-49; in occupational group C2DE; and economically inactive or unemployed. There was variation between the 7 questions, but these factors held among most of the questions.

Details of this analysis are provided in Annex B.

## Annex A – Detailed survey findings

Only statistically significant and meaningful sub group differences are reported.

### Q1: Young people are trustworthy

- **41% agreed and 12% disagreed that young people are trustworthy. Within that, few people agreed or disagreed strongly.**
- People aged 18-24 and over 65 were most likely to agree that young people are trustworthy (49% and 50%), while those aged 25-49 were least likely to agree (32%).
- However, 18-24 year olds were also most likely to disagree that young people are trustworthy (17%).
- People who personally knew a young person were substantially more likely to agree that young people are trustworthy (47%) than those who didn't know anyone (30%).
- Higher occupational grades (ABC1) were substantially more likely to agree that young people are trustworthy than lower social grades (C2DE) (47% vs. 34%) and were also less likely to disagree (9% vs. 15%).
- Attitudes improved as area deprivation increased – 33% in the lowest SIMD quintile agreed that young people are trustworthy, compared to 46% in the highest quintile.
- Attitudes improved with household income, with those with an income of under 20K least likely to agree that young people are trustworthy (37%) and those with over 60K most likely to agree (54%).
- Full time students (54%) and retired people (50%) were most likely to agree that young people are trustworthy. This is consistent with age findings.
- People who voted Remain in the EU referendum were substantially more likely to agree (48%) than Leave voters (34%).
- People who voted Liberal Democrat in the last UK general election were more likely to agree that young people are trustworthy (55%) than those who voted for other parties (43-44%).

### Q2: Young people are lazy

- **24% agreed and 41% disagreed that young people are lazy. Within that, few people agreed or disagreed strongly.**
- People aged 25-49 were more likely to agree that young people are lazy (38%) than other age groups (19-20%).
- 25-49 year olds were also least likely to disagree that young people are lazy (32%), while 18-24 (59%) and 65+ (51%) most likely to disagree.

- People who knew a young person more likely to disagree that young people are lazy (45%) than those didn't (34%).
- People within the ABC1 occupational grades were both more likely to disagree that young people are lazy than those in C2DE groups (46% vs 36%) and less likely to agree (21% vs 26%).
- Attitudes towards young people on this question improved consistently as area deprivation decreased – people in the most deprived SIMD quintile were almost twice as likely to agree that young people are lazy (27%) as those in the least deprived quintile (15%). They were also less likely to disagree (37% in SIMD 1 compared to 49% in SIMD 5).
- Agreement that young people are lazy increased as household incomes increased, from 40% in households earning under 20K to 49% in households earning over 60K.
- Full time students were the most likely to disagree that young people are lazy (58%).
- People who voted Remain in the EU referendum were substantially less likely to agree (18%) and more likely to disagree (47%) than those that voted Leave (33% agree; 35% disagree).
- People who voted Liberal Democrat in the last UK general election substantially more positive about young people on this question - 10% agreed that young people are lazy compared to 22%-25% among those that voted for other parties.

### **Q3: Young people take responsibility for their own actions**

- **26% agreed and 35% disagreed that young people take responsibility for their own actions. Within that, few people agreed or disagreed strongly.**
- People who knew a young person were more likely to agree that young people take responsibility for their own actions (29%) than those who didn't (20%).
- People in the least deprived SIMD quintile were the most likely to disagree that young people take responsibility for their own actions (27%), although the relationship between area deprivation and attitudes was not consistent, with disagreement being highest (39%) in both the most deprived and second least deprived quintiles.
- Attitudes were most positive in the highest household income group, with 37% of those in the 60K+ income group agreeing that young people take responsibility for their own actions. However, agreement was lowest in the 20-39K group with 26%.
- People who voted Remain in the EU referendum were substantially more likely to agree that young people take responsibility for their own actions

(31%) and less likely to disagree (29%) than those that voted Leave (21% agree; 50% disagree).

- In a reverse from patterns in previous questions, people who voted Liberal Democrat in the last UK general election substantially less positive about young people on this question - 14% agreed that young people take responsibility for their own actions, compared to 23-29% in other voter groups.
- There was less variation in this question than others. Differences in attitudes between age, household income and occupational groups were not statistically significant, and there were no meaningful differences by employment status.

#### **Q4: Young people lack communication skills**

- **39% agreed and 31% disagreed that young people lack communication skills. Within that, few people agreed or disagreed strongly.**
- Women were more likely to agree that young people lack communication skills (36%) than men (42%).
- 18-24 year olds were substantially less likely to agree that young people lack communication skills (26%) compared to other age groups (40-41%), and were also most likely to disagree (53%). 25-49 year olds were least likely to disagree that young people lack communication skills (26%).
- People who knew a young person were more likely to disagree that young people lack communication skills (36%) than those that did not (25%).
- The higher (ABC1) occupational groups were less likely to agree (36%) and more likely to disagree that young people lack communication skills (37%) than the lower (C2DE) groups (43% agree; 26% disagree).
- People in the least deprived SIMD quintile were less likely to agree that young people lack communication skills (29%) than those in other quintiles (37-46%).
- Full time students were least likely to agree that young people lack communication skills (23%) and most likely to disagree (54%).
- People who voted Remain in the EU referendum were substantially less likely to agree that young people lack communication skills (33%) and more likely to disagree (39%) than those that voted Leave (51% agree; 24% disagree).

#### **Q5: Young people help others in need**

- **40% agreed and 17% disagreed that young people help others in need. Within that, few people agreed or disagreed strongly.**
- Women were more likely to agree that young people help others in need (44%) than men (36%).

- 18-24 year olds were most likely to agree that young people help others in need (58%), while 25-49 year olds were the least likely to (33%).
- People who knew a young person were more likely to agree that young people help others in need (44%) than those who did not (31%).
- People in higher (ABC1) occupational groups were more likely to agree that young people help others in need (45%) than those in lower (C2DE) groups (34%).
- People in the least deprived SIMD quintile were most likely to agree that young people help others in need (51%) but there was no consistent pattern for other quintiles. The lowest level of agreement was in the middle quintile (33%).
- There was no consistent pattern for household income. Respondents in the 20-40K and the 60K+ groups were most likely to agree that young people help others in need (46%), and people in the 40-60K group were least likely to disagree (10% vs 17-20% in others).
- Full time students were the most likely employment group to agree that young people help others in need (59%).
- People who voted Remain in the EU referendum were substantially more likely to agree that young people help others in need (46%) than those that voted Leave (31%).

#### **Q6: Young people cause trouble in their local area**

- **23% agreed and 32% disagreed that young people cause trouble in their local area. Within that, few people agreed or disagreed strongly.**
- Men were more likely to agree that young people cause trouble in their local area (27%) than women (19%).
- 18-24 year olds were least likely to agree that young people cause trouble in their local area (15%), while 25-49 year olds were most likely to agree (25%). 18-24 year olds were also twice as likely to disagree (54%) as those in the 25-49 (27%) and 50-64 (26%) age groups.
- Respondents who knew a young person were more likely to disagree that young people cause trouble in their local area (36%) than those who were not (23%).
- People in higher (ABC1) occupational groups were less likely to agree that young people cause trouble in their local area (19%) than those in lower (C2DE) groups (27%), and more likely to disagree (37% vs 26%).
- The percentage who disagreed with the statement increased as area deprivation decreased. 22% of people in SIMD 1 disagreed that young people cause trouble in their local area, compared to 42% in SIMD 5.
- Students were least likely to agree that young people cause trouble in their local area (14%) and most likely to disagree (55%).

- People who voted Remain in the EU referendum were substantially less likely to agree (21%) and more likely to disagree (38%) that young people cause trouble in their local area than those that voted Leave (28% agree; 25% disagree).
- People who voted Lib Dem in the last general election were more likely to disagree that young people cause trouble in their local area (44%) than people who voted for other parties (31-34%).
- Differences by household income were not statistically significant.

**Q7: The behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago**

- **43% agreed and 32% disagreed that the behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago**
- In contrast to other questions, men were more positive about young people on this question. Men were more likely to agree that the behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago (50%) than women (38%) and less likely to disagree (28% vs 37%).
- 18-24 year olds were substantially more likely to agree that the behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago (60% vs 39-45% for other age groups) and less likely to disagree (18% vs 31-38%).
- Those who said they know young people were more likely to agree that the behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago (47%) than those who did not (39%).
- People in higher (ABC1) occupational groups were more likely to agree that the behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago (49%) than those in the lower (C2DE) groups (38%).
- Agreement that the behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago was highest in least deprived quintile (52%), and lowest in most deprived (36%), but there was not a consistent relationship in the middle quintiles.
- Students were most likely to agree (62%) that the behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago and least likely to disagree (16%).
- People who voted Remain in the EU referendum were substantially more likely to agree (49%) that the behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago than those that voted Leave (39%).
- People who voted Conservative in the last general election were more likely to disagree that the behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago (41%) than those who voted for other parties (29-34%).

## Q8: Walking past group of 16 or 17 year olds

- **59% said it would not bother them at all.**
- **29% said they would feel slightly worried.**
- **5% said they would feel very worried.**
- **4% said they would avoid walking past them.**
- Women were less likely to say that walking past a group of 16 or 17 year olds would not bother them (54%) than men (64%).
- Confidence increases with age – 53% of 18-24 year olds said that that walking past a group of 16 or 17 year olds would not bother them, compared to 67% of over 65s.
- People who know a young person were more likely to say that that walking past a group of 16 or 17 year olds would not bother them (63%) than those that do not (52%).
- Confidence increased as rurality increased, with people in remote and very remote rural areas most likely to say that walking past a group of 16 or 17 year olds would not bother them (73% and 75%), compared to 59% in large urban areas.
- The percentage saying that walking past a group of 16 or 17 year olds would not bother them was higher in the 40-60K and 60K+ household income brackets (66-69%) compared to the lower income groups (59-60%).
- Consistent with age, retired people were more likely to say that walking past a group of 16 or 17 year olds would not bother them (67%) than other employment groups.
- Contrary to what might be expected, there was no difference by SIMD.

## Q9: Perceptions of the media portrayal of young people

- **6% thought the media portrayal of young people was positive, 52% thought it was negative.**
- 18-24 year olds were substantially more likely to say that the media portray young people in a negative light.
- People who know a young person were also more likely to perceive the media portrayal as negative (56%) than those who do not (42%).
- People in higher (ABC1) occupational groups were more likely to perceive the media portrayal as negative (55%) than those in the lower (C2DE) groups (49%).
- Students were substantially more likely to describe the media portrayal as negative (75%) than other employment status groups (39-53%).

## **Annex B – The socio-demographic characteristics of people with negative attitudes**

### **Q1: Young people are trustworthy**

- 59% of those who disagreed that young people are trustworthy were male, compared to 47% of those agreeing.
- 46% of those who disagreed that young people are trustworthy were aged 25-49, compared to 33% among those who agreed.
- 61% of those who disagreed that young people are trustworthy were in the C2DE occupational group, compared to 40% among those who agreed.
- 22% of those who disagreed that young people are trustworthy were inactive or unemployed, compared to 13% among those who agreed.
- 39% of those who disagreed that young people are trustworthy were never married, compared to 30% among those who agreed.

### **Q2: Young people are lazy**

- 49% of those who agreed that young people are lazy were aged 25-49, compared to 32% among those who disagreed.
- 41% of those who agreed that young people are lazy were working full time, compared to 31% among those who disagreed.
- 59% of those who agreed that young people are lazy were married, in a civil partnership or living as married, compared to 49% among those who disagreed.

### **Q3: Young people take responsibility for their own actions**

- 52% of those who disagreed that young people take responsibility for their own actions were in the C2DE occupational group, compared to 43% among those who agreed.

### **Q4: Young people lack communication skills**

- 52% of those who agreed that young people lack communication skills were male, compared to 45% of those agreeing.
- 43% of those who agreed that young people lack communication skills were aged 25-49, compared to 34% of those agreeing.
- 53% of those who agreed that young people lack communication skills were in the C2DE occupational group, compared to 40% of those agreeing.
- 21% of those who agreed that young people lack communication skills were inactive or unemployed, compared to 11% of those agreeing.



#### **Q5: Young people help others in need**

- 64% of those who disagreed that young people help others in need were male, compared to 43% of those agreeing.
- 50% of those who disagreed that young people help others in need were aged 25-49, compared to 34% of those agreeing.
- 36% of those who disagreed that young people help others in need had household incomes under £20K, compared to 27% of those agreeing.
- 58% of those who disagreed that young people help others in need were in the C2DE occupational group, compared to 41% of those agreeing.
- 24% of those who disagreed that young people help others in need were economically inactive or unemployed, compared to 12% of those agreeing.

#### **Q6: Young people cause trouble in their local area**

- 57% of those who agreed that young people cause trouble in their local area were male, compared to 46% of those agreeing.
- 34% of those who agreed that young people cause trouble in their local area were aged 25-49, compared to 34% of those agreeing.
- 61% of those who agreed that young people cause trouble in their local area were in the C2DE occupational group, compared to 42% of those agreeing.
- 23% of those who agreed that young people cause trouble in their local area were economically inactive or unemployed, compared to 13% of those agreeing.
- 59% of those who agreed that young people cause trouble in their local area were married, in a civil partnership or living as married, compared to 49% of those agreeing.

#### **Q7: The behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago**

- 51% of those who disagreed that the behaviour of young people today is no worse than it was 30 years ago were in the C2DE occupational group, compared to 42% of those agreeing.

### **How to access background or source data**

The data collected for this social research publication:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact **socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk** for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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