

CHANGING THE FUTURE

Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland



REPORT 1:
HAPPINESS

unicef 

CHANGE THE FUTURE

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

Nelson Mandela.

UNICEF is a global organisation, working in more than 190 countries to help build a world in which children’s rights are respected, their needs are provided for, and they have a voice in shaping the world around them. We believe in changing the world for children in Ireland too. UNICEF advocates for all young people to ensure that they have every opportunity to grow, develop and contribute to our society. We are working to ensure that young people in Ireland are heard and that their rights are realised.

This is why we believe the *Change the Future: Experiencing Youth in Contemporary Ireland* Report Series is vitally important – because it is founded exclusively and completely on the views of young people. Change the Future is about the voice of young people living in Ireland, telling us their story, in their words.

This Research Project was coordinated by UNICEF Ireland.

The research, data and findings reported in *Change the Future: Experiencing Youth in Contemporary Ireland. Happiness, Bullying and the Recession* was completed and compiled by MCCP in December 2010. Further details of the methodology and background to the Report are available through the offices of UNICEF Ireland: www.unicef.ie Any part of the Report may be freely reproduced using the following citation or reference: UNICEF Ireland, *Change the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland. Happiness, Bullying and the Recession*, January 2011. The views expressed in this Report represent those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy or views of UNICEF.



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Nelson Mandela is right when he says that the way in which we treat our children says so much of us as a society and determines the future our country will have.

Yet, how much do we know about how young people feel and what is important to them?

In UNICEF Ireland we have felt for a long time that there is a shortage of primary research on the lives of young people living in Ireland. Having issued several reports on the impact of policy decisions taken from secondary data, we decided it was time to ask young people themselves how they view their lives, what challenges they face and what is their reality.

Being young is always complicated and turning into an adult can be a very difficult time in anyone’s life.

All young people have challenges to face, sometimes in schools or at home, sometimes with families or friends, sometimes feeling ignored, isolated, misunderstood or unappreciated. Managing all these pressures can be tough.

We know that the internet provides a unique space for young people to chat with friends, socialise and create unique dialogues. We therefore felt it would be the perfect space for young people to speak about their lives anonymously, safely and honestly.

The result is a Series of Reports entitled: *Changing the Future: Experiencing Youth in Contemporary Ireland*. This series explores a diverse range of issues that affect young people across the country, every day.

Over the course of the series, UNICEF will explore issues around adolescent happiness and well-being, the way that young people view the current economic recession and the effects that it is having at home. The series looks at sexual health, sexuality and sexual behaviour – crucial issues in childhood and adolescence. *Change the Future* looks at children’s mental health and the different social, psychological and emotional impacts and effects, as well as the ways that children cope with mental health problems.

The series of reports also ask questions about the prevalence and nature of childhood and adolescent drug and alcohol abuse, how widespread it is and what factors are significant from the perspective of the young people who took part.

Real courage involves standing out from the crowd, raising your voice and calling attention to the challenges that you face. We are extremely grateful to all of the young people who took part in this research, and in so doing, took their chance to *Change the Future*.

At an economically turbulent time in Ireland it is crucial for any government to remember that how they treat children, the most vulnerable part of society, is how they will be remembered in history. It’s time we all started listening to young people. *Change the Future* is about young people having their say.

Melanie Verwoerd

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Executive Director, UNICEF Ireland.



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CHANGE THE FUTURE

“Listening to adolescents is the only way we will understand what they expect from us. Their hopes and dreams are still very much alive. It is up to us to enable adolescents to reach their full potential.”

Her Royal Highness Princess Mathilde of Belgium.

Why now?

In recent times, the Irish State has undergone seismic shifts in economic and social policy, which are so far-reaching that it is reasonable to suggest that all Irish citizens, young and old, have been directly affected by them. The nature of some of these shifts has raised serious concerns about some of the more vulnerable groups within Irish society, and *Change the Future* is an effort to make sure that the experiences of young people living in Ireland remain at the forefront of the decisions that shape these changes, as they unfold around us. UNICEF Ireland designed a course of research that explicitly and exclusively asked young people to tell us their stories; to paint a picture of the challenges that arise as they negotiate their transition into adulthood, within contemporary Irish society.

In the National Children’s Strategy 2000-2010, the Government of Ireland committed to three National Goals for children. These three goals were:

- that children would have a voice in matters which affect them and their views would be given due weight in accordance with their age;
- that their lives would be better understood, and will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services; and finally;
- that they would receive quality supports and services to promote all. These goals represent worthwhile and commendable aims.

However, the picture that emerges from UNICEF Ireland’s research suggests that our society is some distance from achieving these goals.

What’s the point?

The *Change the Future* series aims to engage young people directly and forthrightly about the issues that affect their day-to-day lives in contemporary Ireland. The series has asked young people to be forthcoming and honest about a wide variety of such issues.

As a result, the series of reports will explore a wide range of adolescent perspectives including, bullying and happiness, the effects of the recession, mental health, depression and suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, sex, sexuality and sexual health. By exploring these and other subjects, *Change the Future* paints a unique picture of what it means to be young in Ireland today.

The purpose of this report is to introduce some of the crucial and timely themes of the research. UNICEF Ireland asked young people living in Ireland to define their own sense of happiness and the sources in society from where that sense is derived, as well as asking questions related to bullying and the affects of the economic recession. The results of these enquiries suggest that it is imperative that Irish people and governmental policy place children’s rights at the top of the agenda and ensure that we develop a world fit for children, and one which takes heed of those young people’s concerns as a matter of urgency.

UNICEF Ireland believes it is of critical importance at this crucial juncture in Irish society that we collectively shine the light of understanding upon the lives of Ireland’s younger citizens and listen to their voices.

Why ask young people?

UNICEF Ireland strongly believes it is vital that Ireland the State; its’ people and its’ agencies, legislate, plan and implement policies that are related to young people, with the best interests of these young people at their core.

If we are to promote the ideal of children’s rights within our society then we must assert the importance and indivisibility of those rights at every given opportunity. The right of children to participate is enshrined within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and it is for that reason that UNICEF Ireland engaged young people directly in the *Change the Future* Report series.

If we are to successfully promote the right of young people to express their views then we must find engaging, safe and appropriate ‘spaces’ in which young people can speak out, and we must do everything we can to make sure that they are listened to.

What UNICEF Ireland decided to do

UNICEF Ireland realised that, if *Change the Future* was going to be as meaningful as we wanted it to be, then we had to ensure that it was a project in which young people not just participated, but were the central characters. We asked ourselves some important questions to help make sure that *Change the Future* used its best resource – the young people who were willing to take part in it, to its maximum potential.

UNICEF Ireland, and our research partners, developed an online survey method to gather the data that forms the basis of the *Change the Future: Experiencing Youth in Contemporary Ireland* series of reports. This online questionnaire was entirely anonymous and the data set of individual responses was purposefully separated from any means that could link it to an individual, or be used to trace the respondent.

We also convened a series of youth forums which came together over a series of five meetings to design, discuss, reform and review the survey and the research. These youth forums provided a way for us to make sure that the research achieved the goals that we had set out for the participation of young people throughout it.

We ensured it would be equitable

Real participation is inclusive, it does not discriminate. UNICEF Ireland had to find a way for the research to be as open and broad as possible so that any young person living in Ireland could take part. Equity has its’ own value, as a tenet of a rights based approach, apart from being right in principle, it is right in practice. *Change the Future* sought to gain understanding about the experience of childhood in Ireland. In order to do that, the research had to be open to all the young people who chose to reveal something of that experience to be valid.

The youth forum agreed that the research had to be as open as it could to make sure that all young people’s views and experiences were included.

- UNICEF Ireland defines “childhood” and “children” as between 0 and 18 years of age, the definition of the child employed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- the research sample size was 508 respondents;
- the research includes respondents from all four Provinces – Leinster, Munster, Ulster and Connaught;
- the results include male and female respondents;
- the research featured the responses of young people aged 16 to 20 years;

Because the research was online and there was no limit set on the number of respondents, the survey was open to any young person who was old enough and that wished to take part.

CHANGE THE FUTURE

UNICEF ensured that access to the research was as equitable as it could be, without compromising the other principles upon which the youth forum agreed.

We ensured that it used youth-friendly language

Real participation requires that young people understand the tone and the language being used, and that they feel competent and comfortable in the medium of communication. UNICEF Ireland put a lot of energy into finding a tone and “feel” for *Change the Future* that engaged young people in a manner with which they were comfortable. The language we used was language that young people living in Ireland understand.

The youth forums provided us with great assistance in getting the tone of the research right.

- *The survey used youth-friendly language;*
- *the survey also used appropriate language that did not treat any of the themes of the research lightly;*
- *the tone and text of the survey was agreed between UNICEF Ireland and the youth forum over a series of five workshops.*

Working with the youth forum to decide the tone, UNICEF Ireland was well informed by young people – what they responded positively to, and what they thought was patronising or condescending. We used those insights to set the tone, and write the survey ensuring that it was engaging, but also appropriate.

We ensured it would be voluntary and safe

Real participation should be something that a young person wants to do, not something that they are compelled to. If *Change the Future* was going to involve young people in a real way then it had to be something that young people would take part in because they wanted to, not because they were told to by their parents, their teachers, their friends or UNICEF!

Participation in *Change the Future* was 100% voluntary - all 508 participants took part online, of their own free will. UNICEF Ireland, the youth forum and our research partners, developed an online survey method to gather the data that forms the basis of the *Change the Future: Experiencing Youth in Contemporary Ireland* series of reports. This online questionnaire was entirely anonymous and the data set of individual responses was purposefully separated from any means that could link it to an individual, or be used to trace the respondent. The sample was self-selecting, that means that the respondents who completed the research did so without UNICEF Ireland specifically choosing them. They took part because they chose to.

The ‘Truth Locker’ research method and standard was used and was designed to reassure those answering questions on the Internet that their responses would be entirely anonymous and that they personally could not and would not, be identified as part of the research or with technical information such as IP address or location information from smart-phones.

- *All information gathered on the pages of the survey website remains confidential.*
- *No information gathered will be shared with any other party.*
- *No IP addresses or other technical information was captured by our software or within the research.*

- *No contact information that could identify any respondent for this survey - including emails, phone numbers, pictures, videos, sound files or names and addresses or other information was gathered by this research.*
- *The only demographic information gathered was: age, sex and county of residence. This is not considered sufficient to identify the location or identity of any respondent and ensures that respondents can give full and frank replies to questions without any worry of being identified at a later date by any individual, group or body.*

Real participation takes all necessary and possible steps to ensure that the participants are at all times safe. One of the most important issues in terms of safety in *Change the Future* was the anonymity of the participants.

That is why UNICEF Ireland designed the Truth Locker, and so ensured that the complete anonymity and confidence of every participant was assured throughout. The research was designed with the highest standards of child protection at its core.

We ensured it mattered to young people

Real participation happens when the theme or issue is important to young people, and what could be more relevant or important to young people than their view of the world, and their role in it? *Change the Future* was research that dealt exclusively with young people’s perspectives on their issues, nothing else.

If the issues that are addressed within the Report and across the *Change the Future* Series were interesting and important to young people, then the research is a legitimate expression of those young peoples’ well-being. UNICEF Ireland believes that the issues explored are, in fact, immensely relevant if we are to understand what contemporary childhood in Ireland involves.

As UNICEF Ireland designed the survey, we worked closely with the youth forum to agree on the themes that mattered to young people in Ireland. By discussing the project with the youth forum we learned what mattered to young people, and what they wanted to tell us about their lives. One of the most important concerns that emerged from the forum was that there was space in the survey for young people to tell us things in their own words.

- *Questions were both prompted and unprompted, allowing for both qualitative and quantitative results to emerge from the data collected.*
- *The survey asked the participants to tell us “in their own words” as often as possible.*
- *Throughout this Report, we have presented those responses exactly as they were told to us by the young people themselves.*

The findings of this report give a unique and important insight into contemporary issues that face young people in Ireland. Serious issues are raised, serious concerns brought to light, respondents hopes, dreams, doubts, fears and aspirations are the focus of the report series.

If *Change the Future* is to make a difference and fulfil its purpose then there is a responsibility to us all – policymakers, parents, communities and, ultimately Ireland itself, to learn from it.

HAPPINESS

What did we find?

The *Change the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Happiness Report* covers a broad range of issues, and a broad perspective of young people living in Ireland's views.

While each of these issues is significant by itself, it is by putting them together that the clearest picture emerges, and in presenting the research findings; that is what this report attempts to achieve.

We have included some of the comments of the young people themselves to ensure that their voices are heard, loudest and clearest.

The first question that UNICEF asked in *Change the Future* and the one that seems the most important was to ask Ireland's young people if they were happy. For those that were happy; themes that emerged centred on sociability, friends and family, relationships and pastimes.

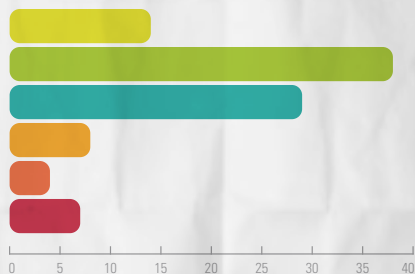
For those that were unhappy; the principal issues were loneliness, isolation and bullying. The only theme that was universally reported was an acute awareness of the current economic recession, and the affect that it is having on young people living in Ireland.

Once you have asked a young person if they are happy, whatever the answer, the next set of questions becomes clear. So *Change the Future* began.

Happiness: Are young Irish People Happy?

We all go through times when we feel happier than others, but UNICEF wanted to get a picture of the overall view of young people at the time they chose to take part in our research.

In general, how happy or unhappy would you say you were at the moment?



- 14% Very happy
- 38% Quite happy
- 29% OK
- 8% It varies day to day
- 4% Not happy
- 7% Very unhappy at the moment

"Gigging concerts are when I'm most happy and care free"

Close to 1 in 5 young Irish people report being unhappy, to some degree.

While the majority of young people responded that they were, in general, very happy quite happy or OK, there was still a significant amount who reported that their mood varied day-to-day, that they were not happy or that they were very unhappy at the moment. In fact 19% (or close to one in every five) young Irish people reported their prevailing mood in neutral or negative terms.

Within this 19%, there was some variance according to the age of the respondents, but generally as young people approach the age of 19 years, a greater proportion report unhappiness before the proportion drops again at 20. Also, there was not a great difference in the numbers of boys, as opposed to girls who reported their feelings in these negative terms.

Of those 'not happy' or 'very unhappy':

Age	%
16	2
17	15
18	18
19	22
20	4

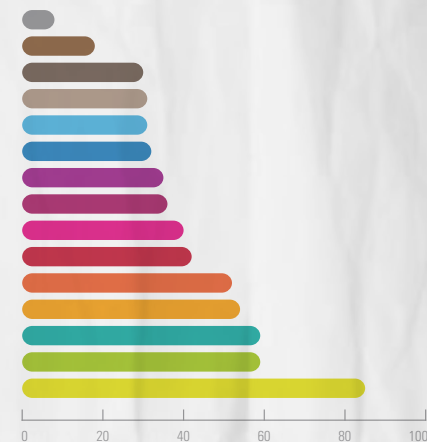
Happiness: What makes young Irish People Happy?

While it's important to know if young people are happy, it's even more important to know what makes them happy. When we asked the respondents, a clear picture emerged. By far the greatest number of respondents answered that being with friends made them happiest – 85% of all young people.

Another 54% responded that being with their families made them happiest, and a further 40% responded that being with their partners was a large factor in their happiness.

There were some distinct activities that were reported as making young people happiest- 59% reported playing music, 42% reported exercising and 30% reported learning and studying, but clearly young people place huge emphasis on their external-interpersonal relationships as factors that affect their happiness.

What kinds of things make you happy?



- 8% Taking drugs
- 18% Painting
- 30% Learning and studying
- 31% Having sex
- 31% Going to the pub
- 32% Playing sport
- 35% Going drinking
- 36% Dancing
- 40% Being with my partner
- 42% Exercising
- 52% Taking part in my pastime
- 54% Being with family
- 59% Going on holidays
- 59% Playing music
- 85% Being with my friends

"Gigs and concerts with friends"

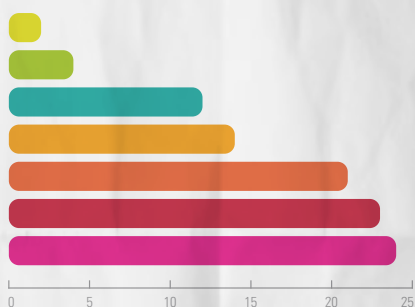
Young Irish people derive most happiness from their interpersonal relationships.

BULLYING

Happiness: Does Religion affect young people's happiness?

We asked how large a role religion played in young people happiness, how they perceived religion and how important a role it plays in young peoples' lives.

What phrase would best describe your religion?



- 2% I have alternative spiritual interests
- 4% None of these
- 12% I am religious and go to religious gatherings
- 14% I used to go but not so much anymore
- 21% I'm spiritual but not religious
- 23% I am religious but don't go to church regularly
- 24% I'm not religious

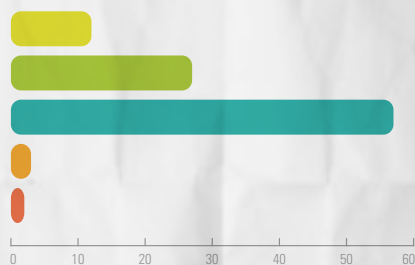
"I used to be religious... but after everything that came out about the church and stuff I find it hard to believe in God"

More young Irish people describe themselves as spiritual, rather than religious.

Only 12% of young Irish people report that they attend religious gatherings regularly, while 24% report that they are not religious or spiritual at all.

Only 12% of Irish children report that they are religious and go to religious gatherings.

Does your religion or spirituality bring you happiness?



- 12% Yes lots
- 27% Yes some
- 57% Makes me neither happy nor unhappy
- 3% No it makes me unhappy
- 2% No it makes me very unhappy

The vast majority of young Irish people report that religion does not affect their happiness.

The key findings across these themes form a body of evidence which suggests that a large number of Ireland's young people identify themselves as unhappy now, or as variable from day to day.

This may not come as a shock to us, we can all identify with feeling up and down, but what is striking is the number of young people who define themselves in these terms. If it is clear that happiness is directly influenced to a degree greater than anything else, by external relationships, then the importance for young people to develop and maintain these relationships becomes evident.

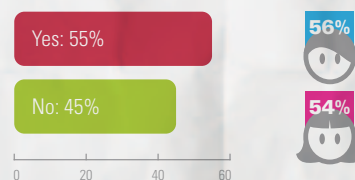
Additional resources and expertise need to be allocated to develop a comprehensive programme of policy development and service delivery for adolescent and child well-being that addresses the mental, physical and emotional needs in line with the "whole child" perspective, outlined within the National Children's Strategy 2000-2010.

Bullying: How prevalent is bullying amongst young Irish People?

If, as it seems, young people in Ireland get the most happiness from the relationships they share with other people, then what are the effects of being excluded from those relationships?

Adolescence is, of course, a time when bullying is more prevalent than in later life, but we wanted to ask young people about the prevalence, and the forms that bullying now adopts.

Have you ever been bullied?



"Did not fit in not good enough for friends or to be with other people too"

More than half of young people in Ireland report that they have been bullied.

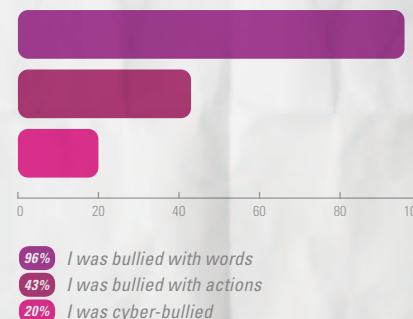
"I was too frightened of further rejection"

"I felt awkward and unsafe"

Bullying: What types of bullying are going on?

Bullying can take on a variety of forms and stem from a variety of sources, but all these different forms can be equally upsetting and cause equal distress and hurt to the person who is on the receiving end, and sometimes even to the bully themselves.

Have you been bullied with words, actions or cyber bullied?



While the vast majority of young people who report being bullied; report being bullied with words, a large proportion also claim that the bullying involves actions.

BULLYING

"Took away all of my self-esteem and made me feel isolated from other students"

With 96% of all the respondents reporting that they had been bullied reporting that this bullying was in the form of words; a further 43% reported that the bullying took a physical form with actions.

There was a clear divide in terms of gender, and the form of bullying that was reported, but bullying seems to be equally prevalent across the regions, with no large variances or distinctions between the provinces.

	Female	Male
Words	95%	98%
Actions	39%	50%
Cyber-bullying	17%	24%

Region	%
Dublin	54
Rest of Leinster	58
Munster	52
Connaught	57
Ulster	43

Boys are significantly more likely to be bullied with actions than girls, while girls are bullied with words much more than by actions or by "cyber-bullying"

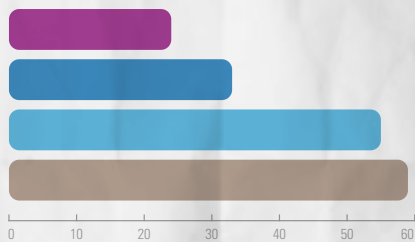
Young Irish people derive the most happiness from the interpersonal relationships that define their development, yet more than half of the respondents claim that they have been bullied. Ireland's youth are being exposed to a variety of forms of bullying – both physical and emotional, with alarming regularity and intensity.

If we are to look deeper into the exact forms that this bullying takes, then it becomes clear how hurtful and upsetting being bullied can be for young people, and how much damage being bullied can do when young people are reaching out - in need of acceptance and friendship, to grow and develop.

Bullying: What sort of things are we actually talking about?

Young people have made the broad distinction between being bullied with words, and being bullied with actions, but when we look at each in turn we can see the different types of things that are implied – the different ways that bullying is happening.

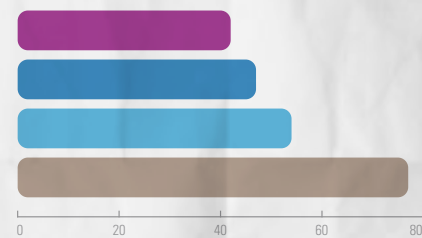
How were you bullied with actions?



- 24% I was beaten up
- 33% I was attacked
- 55% They threw things at me
- 59% Someone took my things

"I wasn't strong enough to stick up for myself at the time"

How were you bullied with words?

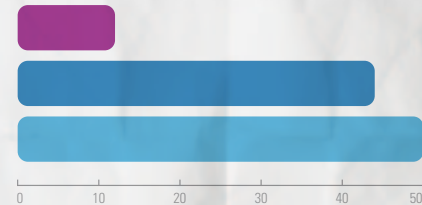


- 42% I was psychologically bullied
- 47% I was jeered
- 54% I was ignored/isolated
- 77% I was teased

"I think I was bullying myself too. I isolated myself"

Cyber-bullying too, happens in a variety of different ways, and it is clear that there are distinctions in the ways that boys are cyber-bullied as opposed to the ways that girls are subjected to cyber-bullying.

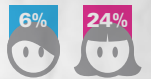
How were you cyber-bullied?



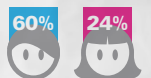
- 12% I had pictures of me shared on mobiles
- 44% Other
- 50% I had messages about me shared on mobile phones

"It made me feel self-conscious but I picked myself up and got over it"

Sharing of messages more common amongst girls

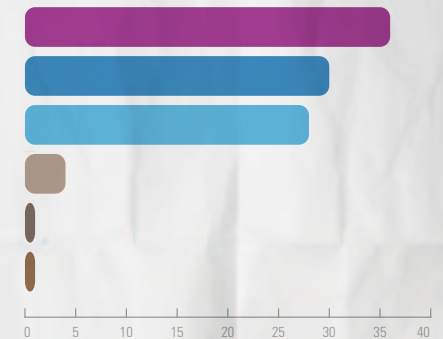


Sharing of pictures more common amongst boys



While it is true that most young people go through the experience of being teased at some stage, when we ask young people to explain the severity of that teasing a sense of how upsetting it can be emerges.

How serious was the teasing?



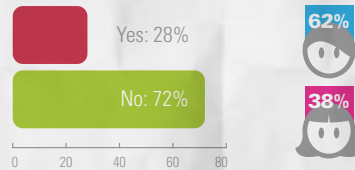
- 36% It was just name calling
- 30% It was ongoing teasing and jeering
- 28% I was isolated by a gang. I was miserable
- 4% I left school as a result
- 1% I left work as a result
- 1% I left home as a result

BULLYING

"I felt like I lost myself my identity. I didn't know who I was anymore. I felt like I was the only one going through this experience and I was confused as to why it was happening to me"

Significant proportions (28%) of young Irish people are teased to the extent that they describe being isolated and miserable.

Have you ever been accused of bullying?



"I never really bullied anyone seriously just having a laugh in school. like everyone does"

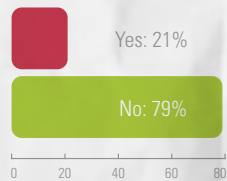
Many more young Irish people admit to being accused of bullying someone else, than admit to actual bullying themselves.

When we gave the young people the chance to tell us why they bullied their peers, they responded by explaining how bullying someone else helped them fit in, or feel that they fitted in.

"It made me feel better. If I was getting bullied and then I bullied someone else it made me feel... normal? Does that make sense? It made me feel like I fit in with everyone else"

"I was quite young at the time. I did not know what I was doing was considered bullying until I was older. At that age it was picking on someone was an easy way to bond and make friends with others. I know better now"

Have you ever bullied anyone else?

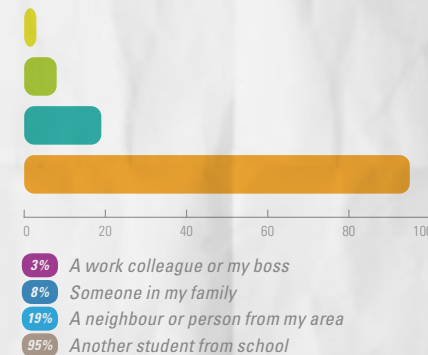


Only one in five young people responded that they had bullied someone else, however a greater proportion, close to one in three, reported that they had been accused of bullying by someone else. The overwhelming majority of those who reported that they had been accused of bullying someone else were boys.

Bullying: How do young people know the bullies?

The vast majority of young people who responded that they had been bullied, reported that this bullying was perpetrated by another student from school, suggesting that the school environment is the prevalent setting in which bullying takes place.

Who bullied you?



More than half of Irish young people claim that they have been bullied, and that they have been bullied in a variety of ways. While in one sense we are all familiar with the feeling of being isolated, or excluded, the prevalence of bullying that these findings point to amongst young people living in Ireland suggest that they are perhaps more vulnerable and regularly exposed to bullying than we might have believed.

Bullying can adopt many forms, and can assume different levels of severity, but when young people report the experience in terms such as these, then there is an imperative to take notice and to take action.

"I felt like I must have done something really bad to deserve it, like it was all my fault"

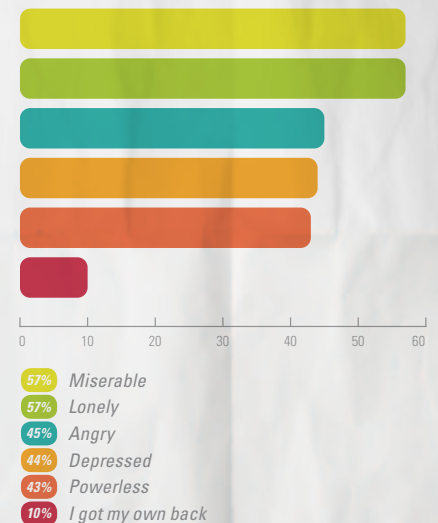
95% of young people who report being bullied identify the bully as another student from school.

"Physically sick terrified suicidal"

Bullying: How does it make young people feel?

Bullying, therefore, can be understood as widespread among young Irish people, prevalent in school halls as well as communities and neighbourhoods. But what are the effects of bullying on young peoples' self-esteem and happiness?

How did it make you feel to be bullied?



RECESSION

"I felt misunderstood as I was more mature than the person bullying me and I believe that is why I was bullied"

"Took away all of my self-esteem and made me feel isolated from other students"

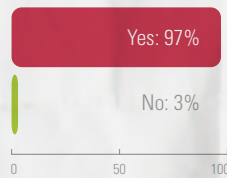
"I was young so I felt distraught but my mum and dad helped me to see that bullies are cowards who feel insecure in themselves"

The effects of this bullying are evidently leading to feelings of isolation and exclusion amongst Ireland's young people. The burden of shame placed upon young people who are regularly "left-out" leaves an ugly and uncomfortable mark on their minds and, in many cases, their bodies.

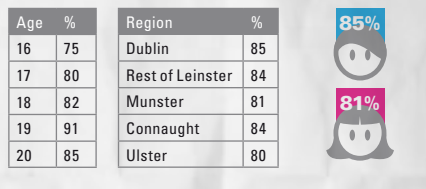
Recession: Are young people aware of the economic recession?

In terms of the current economic recession, the results of the research unsurprisingly shows 97%, the overwhelming majority, of respondents reporting that they have heard information about the recession and are aware of it. Worryingly though, 83% of respondents report "a direct effect at home due to the recession".

Have you heard any information about the current economic recession in Ireland?

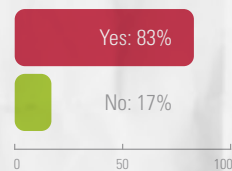


The overwhelming majority of young people in Ireland are aware of the current recession.



Being aware of the recession and seeing the effects of it are two different things, but when we went on to ask young people if they were being affected at home, once again the great majority reported that they were seeing those effects directly.

Has there been a direct effect at home due to the recession?

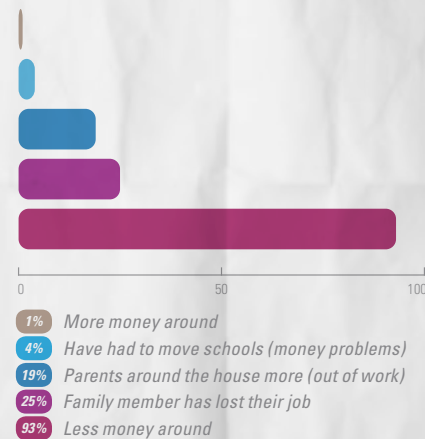


The overwhelming majority of young people in Ireland report direct effects at home due to the recession.

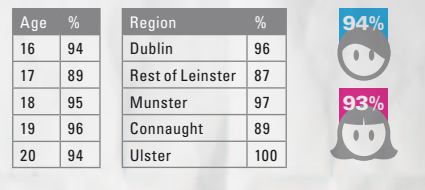
What then are the effects that young people are experiencing at home?

93% of children reporting less money around, 25% report a family member losing their job, and a further 19% reporting parents are around the house more.

What has changed at home because of the recession?



"Less money around"



The recession itself will undoubtedly come to have indirect effects on young people as budgetary constraints will place strain on services. It is important to acknowledge that it is already having direct and significant effects on young people's day to day lives, and these effects are being recognised and noticed by themselves.

How good do you feel about money issues in say the next year or two?



"I'm unhappy about the current economic state of the country! – and don't know if I will ever get a job!!"

Only 37% of Irish youth expect money issues to improve over the next two years.

Overall, there is a three way split in the views of young people in terms of the future and the recession. 25% expect things to stay the same, while 34% expect things to get worse and 37% believe things will slowly improve.

So while there is universality in young peoples' awareness of the recession, there is also apparent disparity in their expectations for the future.

It is apparent that while some young people are reporting direct and challenging affects today, a significant proportion also believe that things are more likely to get worse in the future.

SUMMARY

Concluding Summary:

What are young people telling us?

Overall, we can see a picture emerge from the stories that we have heard of what life for young people living in Ireland today is like.

The majority of young people living in Ireland report that they are happy. However, with 19% of young people reporting that they are not happy, or that they are very unhappy, UNICEF Ireland believes it is important for us to acknowledge this significant number of young people for whom being young in Ireland is significantly more challenging, and less positive an experience.

It is clear from young people's responses that the factors that affect their happiness most directly are those related to the interpersonal relationships that they form throughout their childhood and adolescence. Relationships that develop between peers, friends and family members are evidently the principal influences in young people's happiness. It is therefore crucial that we continue to create safe and accessible spaces in which these relationships can flourish, and that we make every effort to protect these crucial environments in which young people can express themselves and develop into confident, fulfilled and happy young adults.

Furthermore, it seems that traditional sources of happiness and identity amongst young people, such as the role of religion in their lives, can now be understood as increasingly irrelevant to young people's overall levels of happiness. Such a conclusion points, once more, to the real need to ensure that we provide young people with alternative spaces in which to grow and develop to their full potential.

Worryingly, it seems that the issue of bullying is alarmingly prevalent amongst young people living in Ireland, and is playing a very significant role in defining the difficult transition from youth into adulthood. Cyber-bullying is taking place amongst young people in Ireland but it is only affecting one-in-five young people who report that they have been bullied. In reality, the vast majority of bullying is adopting more traditional forms – words and actions. Cyber-bullying is important, and equally damaging to young people than these other forms, but we must keep it within the overall context and not allow cyber-bullying to become the only focus of our attention as we address this most harmful and hurtful practice.

Disturbingly, the great majority of young people who report that they have been bullied, irrespective of the form that bullying has taken, associate it with schoolmates. We need to acknowledge that bullying amongst young people in Ireland's schools is immensely prevalent, and is adopting conventional forms such as teasing, jeering, isolation and physical assault, as well as newer forms facilitated by young people's widespread access to new forms of communication technology.

We also need to acknowledge the role that gender is playing in terms of bullying. 62% of boys report that they have been accused of bullying, while only 38% of girls report the same, whilst a more significant proportion of boys report being bullied by words, actions and cyber-bullying than do girls. In terms of cyber-bullying, four times more girls report that they have had text messages shared about them than boys.

The ways in which we seek to address bullying, and its' effects, must take these gender disparities into account if they are to prove successful and significant. To ignore the role that gender plays in bullying will seriously jeopardise our collective efforts to overcome it.

What is most important, however, is the evidence that bullying adopts a variety of serious and harmful forms. We need to be increasingly aware of the extent of the problem, and the very serious effect that it is having on thousands of young people. Bullying is stunting the emotional, physical and mental development of many young people all across Ireland right now. We must find additional and inventive ways and means to prevent it, and to support the young people who are being subjected to it.

It is most timely for us all to realise that children and young people too, are aware of the economic recession and are being directly affected by it in a variety of ways. While almost all of the participants are aware of the economic recession, they are unsure as to the effects that it will have on them in the future, uncertainty which compounds an already difficult part of their lives. We must take notice of young people's valid concerns about the future, but also the fact young people are already reporting the direct effects of the recession on their lives today. The way that the recession is being framed in public life and media is undoubtedly feeding into these concerns over the future. UNICEF Ireland calls on all figures in public life to reflect about the discourse in which they engage, and the manner in which that discourse comes to bear on young people's hopes and fears for the future.

Over the coming months, UNICEF Ireland will release a series of reports that will offer a unique insight into the views of young people living in Ireland and the issues that affect them. UNICEF Ireland will present similar reports that address; mental health and well-being, young people's experiences of drugs and alcohol, and young people's understanding and perspectives in terms of sexual health, sexual behaviour and sexuality. These are issues that demand real attention and focus. Over the course of this report series UNICEF Ireland hopes to present a truly holistic representation of what growing up in contemporary Ireland is like.

UNICEF Ireland is very proud to be able to present the views of young people through this series, and thank them for being so candid and brave in telling us their stories. We hope that they realise how important it was that they told us what their lives are like, the challenges they face and their thoughts about the future.

By contributing to *Change the Future*, they partook in their right to participation – a right that UNICEF will continue to promote, in Ireland and throughout the world.

The responsibility now passes from them to the rest of society – to listen to these views and make sure that we use them – to make Ireland a better place to be young, and to make being young in Ireland better.

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