



Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Young People into 2019

A report about a million young people aged 8-15

7

Nick Opie, Jim Podbery, Angela Balding
and David Regis

SHEU

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Screenshots from coverage of young people’s mental health stories, Autumn 2019.

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Summary

This report summarises recent findings from large samples of young people surveyed in schools from local authorities across England between 1997 and 2018, with an in-depth analysis of the samples from 2017-18. The pupils were from Year 4 (8-9yo), Year 6 (10-11yo), Year 8 (12-13yo) and Year 10 (14-15yo).

Headline Findings

- Boys had significantly higher self-esteem than girls; this difference becomes more marked as children get older. 32% of boys in Year 4 had high self-esteem in 2018; this compares with 28% of girls in Year 4, 47% of boys in Year 10, and 29% of girls in Year 10. Scores for primary pupils are higher than ever.
- Pupils report decreasing levels of satisfaction as they get older, with the gap for girls widening more than for boys (74% of boys/75% of girls in Year 4 drops in Year 10 to 62% and 48%, respectively).
- Girls worry significantly more than boys, particularly as age increases. The biggest differences are for issues including school-work, family and the way they look.
- Family was the most common source of support or information for most topics.
- When young people have a problem or feel stressed, they often listen to music, but also report talking to family and thinking on their own. 6% of older females report self-harm when stressed.
- Boys feel more at ease when meeting people of their own age than girls.
- The oldest girls (Year 10, 14-15yo) score less well than all other groups for self-esteem, resilience, worrying (for any topic and multiple topics), satisfaction with life and social confidence; girls' scores on well-being scales are not much difference to those of those of boys of the same age.

Trends

- Worrying about school-work increased among all groups since 2002, especially among 14-15yo girls.
- Self-esteem seems stable or improving in the primary phase, but self-esteem among 14-15 yo girls has declined in the last decade.
- Satisfaction with life has declined among secondary-age pupils since 2013, and especially among the 14-15yo girls.

Annual cycles

- Over the course of the school year, from September to July, there appears to be an overall fall in self-esteem of secondary pupils from Sept-Feb, a rise in fear of bullying Sept-July, and a rise in worry about schoolwork Sept-July. (These changes are not age-related, as we can see Y10 pupils' self-esteem is not lower than that in Y8, while their fear of bullying is lower.)

Associations

- Lower self-esteem is associated with less happiness with their weight, with lower likelihood of exercising, of eating a 'proper' breakfast (of a drink and something substantial to eat), a lower likelihood of getting 8 hours' sleep, and is strongly associated with the experience of and fear of bullying.
- Looking at computer games, media and Internet use, the highest levels of use are associated with lower self-esteem and wellbeing, while there is some evidence that moderate levels of phone and Internet use are linked with the highest levels of wellbeing. High levels of homework are also associated with poorer wellbeing.
- Low self-esteem is associated with increased use of cannabis, while high self-esteem is linked with lower use. We have previously reported this type of association for alcohol.

Trends in associations

- High self-esteem was formerly associated with increased use of alcohol and cannabis, but in the last decade low self-esteem has been associated with increased use of both substances, while high self-esteem is linked with lower use – the reverse of the previous pattern.

Graphical summary



47% of boys and 29% of girls in Year 10 (aged 14-15y) have high self-esteem scores.



Pupils' self-esteem seems to decline through the school year (and recover over the Summer), while concerns about schoolwork and bullying rise over the year

More primary pupils score high for self-esteem, but more Year 10 (14-15yo) girls score low now than 10 years ago



Satisfaction with life declines as young people get older



Girls worry more than do boys



The source of support most often reported for most issues is family.

The most common worries for young people are school, and their appearance



The older females who are online the most report the poorest wellbeing, but that might not be cause and effect



Most pupils respond constructively to having worries or problems, but 6% of 14-15yo females report self-harm



Positive wellbeing measures are linked with each other; they are also linked with more positive lifestyle choices (although they haven't always been)

Part 1: Introduction

Concern about emotional wellbeing and the evidence

We know there is much concern about young people's emotional wellbeing.

For example, we can see the headlines from the Telegraph in July 2015, given opposite:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/11751377/Mental-health-of-pupils-a-top-concern-for-head-teachers.html>

However, solid data justifying these concerns are hard to find in the UK.

The Daily Telegraph

Mental health of pupils a 'top concern' for head teachers

Two-thirds of school leaders are worried about pupils' mental health

For example, there is a robust series of results from NHS Digital showing the prevalence of any emotional, behavioural or hyperactivity disorder among 5-15 year-olds, which has exactly three data points: 1999=9.7%, 2004=10.1%, and 2017=11.2%. The small rise is accounted for by a rise in emotional disorders from 4.3% in 1999 to 5.8% in 2017. This rise is of importance, but it is hard to account for what is sometimes described as a generational shift in mental health problems.

(<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2017/2017>)

A review by Pitchforth and colleagues looking at some other sources of robust evidence from surveys of young people concluded:

- “a striking increase in the reported prevalence of long-standing mental health conditions since 1995” (from about 1% in England in 1995 to 5% in 2014)
- “no consistent increase in reported psychological distress among CYP over the last two decades”, when measured using scores in validated questionnaires
- “some evidence of worsening trends in psychological distress and well-being of young adults in recent years” (since 2011).

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291718001757>

This provides both support and confusion for our thoughts about young people's emotional wellbeing.

The Pitchforth paper looked at national surveys, but there is a lot of variation under the surface, we expect. For example, Geulayov and colleagues in 2016 reported on trends in non-fatal self-harm in three centres in England, 2000–2012 (<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/4/e010538.long>). Among males since 2008, reports in Manchester went up, while in Oxford, if anything, they went down.

This, we hope, shows the value of local data, such as that provided by our surveys. You would draw very different conclusions about the changes in self-harm prevalence among males if you were in Manchester or Oxford.

The consequences of poor emotional wellbeing

Poor emotional wellbeing is a problem in itself, and, we suspect, may lead to more serious mental health problems.

Health educators are also interested in emotional wellbeing as a factor in risky behaviours; we will see some of this evidence later. Why is poor emotional wellbeing associated with risky behaviours? Perhaps unhappiness leads young people to suppress negative emotions through substance use, or instead it could make young people more vulnerable to peer influence. (Or, both poor emotional wellbeing and risky behaviour are connected only through a third factor like poverty.) We will return to this issue in the last section.

■ The Schools Health Education Unit

SHEU provides a range of services to those involved in the planning, providing and commissioning of local health and education programmes. The Schools Health Education Unit is part of SHEU and is involved in the collection of robust baseline data about young people's health-related behaviour.

The Questionnaire

Most of the work is through surveys in schools using the Health-Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ), which has been evolving and developing since 1977.

The primary and secondary versions of the HRBQ have been used in 14,894 separate school surveys, some schools repeating surveys of their pupils on many occasions, and nearly two million pupils (1,893,677) between the ages of 9 and 16+ have taken part in the surveys from across the UK.

Pupils complete an anonymous questionnaire with teacher supervision and support, mostly online but also sometimes using paper booklets. Schools receive a report comparing their results with the overall local findings. Local authorities usually commission the surveys, and the Council will receive a report of the aggregate findings and other analysis.

The resulting baseline data identify and confirm priorities for health needs assessment, intervention programmes, and health education planning. Behaviour changes can also be monitored over time and compared with local and national trends.

Repeated use of the HRBQ allows intervention programmes to be monitored and evaluated.

Please contact us if you would like to know more about our work, or if you are interested in carrying out a survey of the young people in your locality.



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The SHEU databanks

This continuous survey activity builds up large data sets going back many years. These are unique in being very large, deep and long-standing. The 'opportunity' nature of the samples, and the local variability of wording and context, make them less easy to work with than is ideal, but they are a rich resource for research. We have confidence that our data sets can reflect the levels and trends in behaviours going on nationally. The detailed evidence for this conclusion is presented in our annual reports, the most recent of which is *Young People into 2019*¹ (Balding and Regis, 2019).

Some questions are asked in only one or a few parts of the country. Findings limited to one or a few areas of the country are marked in tone, the same as this paragraph.

¹ Balding AD and Regis D (2019). *Young People into 2019*. Exeter: SHEU. <http://sheu.org.uk/content/young-people-2019>

The *No Worries?* report

In 1998, we produced a report (*No Worries?*²) looking into the worries and concerns that affect young teenagers in our society. In the two decades since publication, we have seen an increase in awareness of mental health as well as the introduction and spread of social media and smartphones, with little currently known about the affects these could have on the emotional health and wellbeing of the people using them.

The key findings from the 1998 report were:

- It is normal for all people to worry at some point in their life; the issue is identifying when worrying becomes a problem, and how to manage our worries better.
- The main worries for young people were: the way they look; friends; family and drugs.
- The most common worry among 12-15yo females was how they look (58% - the next highest worry was "family problems" at 46%).
- 63% of Year 10 females said they would like to lose weight.

As the title of the 1998 report suggests, much of the content focuses on worrying, particularly links between worries and responses to other questions.

For example, it was found that people who worry more were also:

- More likely to have used drugs
- More likely to have low self-esteem
- More likely to feel uneasy when seeing their GP
- More likely to report having accidents
- More likely to consider their health when choosing what to eat
- Less likely to have adults they can trust
- Less likely to live with their mother and father together

These findings are largely duplicated in this report (see Appendix), but we have been able to extend our analysis in a number of ways.

² Balding JW, Regis D and Wise A (1998). *No Worries? Young people and mental health*. Schools Health Education Unit, 61pp.

■ Sample

The source of the findings in this report is the archive of aggregate survey data from our work for local authorities over the last few years, although on occasion we reached back to 2002 or even earlier. This is for the most part the same sample as we used for our recent report about young people carrying weapons. The composition of the published 2017/18 samples was as below:

Overall numbers in the 2017/18 sample

	2017/18
Schools	2,110
Primary pupils	84,060
Secondary pupils	100,477
Year 4	34,052
Year 6	50,008
Year 8	53,077
Year 10	47,400
All pupils	184,537

The English regions represented in the 2017/18 data, showing the percentages of schools

	% of schools
East of England	25%
South West (England)	17%
London	11%
South East (England)	11%
North East (England)	9%
West Midlands (England)	9%
North West (England)	5%
East Midlands (England)	1%
Overseas	1%

School parameters from the 2017/18 sample

	% of schools		% of schools
Type of school*		School catchment*	
Academy	39%	Urban city and town	39%
Community School	32%	Rural town and fringe	12%
Voluntary-aided School	12%	Rural village	10%
Voluntary-controlled School	9%	Rural hamlet and isolated dwellings	4%
Foundation School	5%	Postcode in NI/Channel	1%
Independent School	1%	Is/loM (pseudo)	1%
Free School	1%	Rural town and fringe in a sparse setting	1%
Other type of institution	1%	Rural village in a sparse setting	1%
Gender of school population*		Rural hamlet and isolated dwellings in a sparse setting	0%
Boys	1%		
Girls	1%		
Mixed	98%		
Percentage of ethnic-minority children in the school**		Percentage of children in the school qualifying for a free meal*	
0 to 1	11%	0-1.99%	5%
2 to 5	9%	2-5.99%	20%
6 to 10	18%	6-10.99%	24%
11 to 15	14%	11-15%	16%
16 to 20	12%	16-20%	11%
21 to 30	13%	21-30%	13%
31 to 40	7%	31-40%	5%
41 to 50	4%	41-50%	3%
51+	13%	>50%	2%

0% indicates a figure closer to zero than one; blanks are really empty.

Sources
* DfE 'Get information about schools' website https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk
** SHEU

Table 1. Characteristics of schools 2017/18 from the SHEU databanks.

The 2017/18 sample used in this report has been augmented with additional samples from the same period.

In many cases in the analysis below, we reach back into the previous decade of reports. All the sample sizes are appended and the full descriptions of each sample is to be found in the respective annual reports.

■ Available questions

We have asked various questions relating to emotional health and wellbeing throughout the past four decades of developing the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire, with some remaining unchanged for much of that time.

Topic	Longevity	Uptake
Self-esteem	Pre-2002 - 2018	Near-universal
Satisfaction	Pre-2002 - 2018	Common
Wellbeing scales	2014-2018	Common
Worries	Pre-2002 - 2018	Near-universal
Support	Pre-2002 - 2018	Waning
Problem-solving	Pre-2002 - 2018	Common
Resilience	2016-2018	Common
Social confidence	Pre-2002 - 2018	Waning
Bullying	Pre-2002 - 2018	Near-universal

Table 2. Key topics related to emotional health and wellbeing in SHEU questionnaires, 2002-2018

Part 2: Headline statistics

Self-esteem

One of the more commonly used questions in that time asks pupils how they feel about a range of statements, from which we are able to produce a composite self-esteem score out of 18. The items are based on the work of Denis Lawrence. This question will form the basis of some of the findings in the report as it represents a summary of responses to a number of related aspects of EHWB. In addition, questions relating to satisfaction with life and worrying about different issues will be looked at.

1 Please think about each of the following statements.

Please tick ONE answer on each line ✓

	Disagree	Not sure	Agree
“I feel happy talking to other pupils at school.”	0 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>
“There are lots of things about myself that I would like to change.”	0 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>
“When I have something to say in front of teachers in class, I usually feel uneasy.”	0 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>
“I often fall out with other pupils at school.”	0 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>
“I often feel lonely at school.”	0 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>
“I think other pupils usually say nasty things about me.”	0 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>
“When I want to tell a teacher something, I usually feel shy.”	0 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>
“I often have to find new friends because my old ones are with somebody else.”	0 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>
“I usually feel foolish when I have to talk to my parents/carers”	0 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>

Statements used in the questionnaire to calculate the self-esteem score.

The spread of scores are grouped into four bands, as below:

	Year 4		Year 6		Year 8		Year 10		All
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Values 0-4 (low)	4%	6%	4%	5%	3%	7%	3%	7%	5%
Values 5-9 (med-low)	21%	25%	15%	21%	15%	22%	14%	24%	20%
Values 10-14 (med-high)	42%	41%	37%	38%	37%	40%	35%	41%	39%
Values 15-18 (high)	32%	28%	44%	36%	45%	31%	47%	28%	36%
Valid N	%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N	9764	9802	13732	13334	13562	14015	11676	11998	100259

Table 3. Percentage of pupils scoring in different brackets of self-esteem from a selection of districts across England, by year and sex, 2017-2018. (N = 100,259)

...And this may be easier to interpret if shown as a chart, shown below.

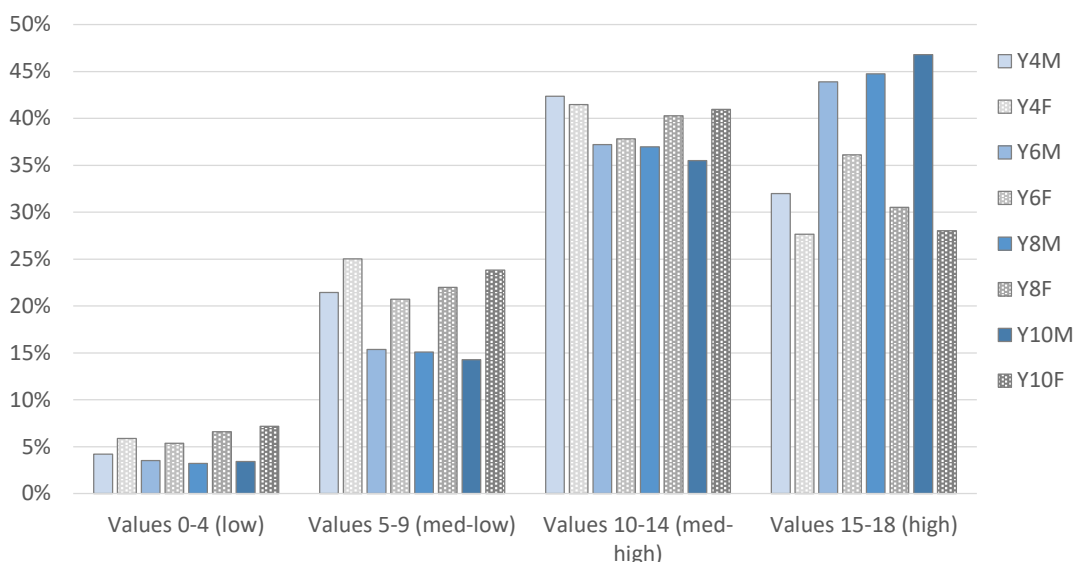


Chart 1. Percentage of pupils scoring in different brackets of self-esteem from a selection of districts across England, by year and sex, 2017-2018. (N = 100,259),

If we look at the bracket of ‘high’ scores on the right of the chart, boys in each year group score higher than do girls of the same age. Also, there is a suggestion that the proportion of girls scoring high for self-esteem declines as they get older from Y6 (36%) to Y10 (28%), while that of boys may be increasing, so that the gap between boys and girls is highest in Year 10.

Overall levels of satisfaction

We often include in the questionnaires a widely-used question about general satisfaction with life. Some local authorities have amended it to refer to how happy pupils are, as satisfaction is rather an adult word.

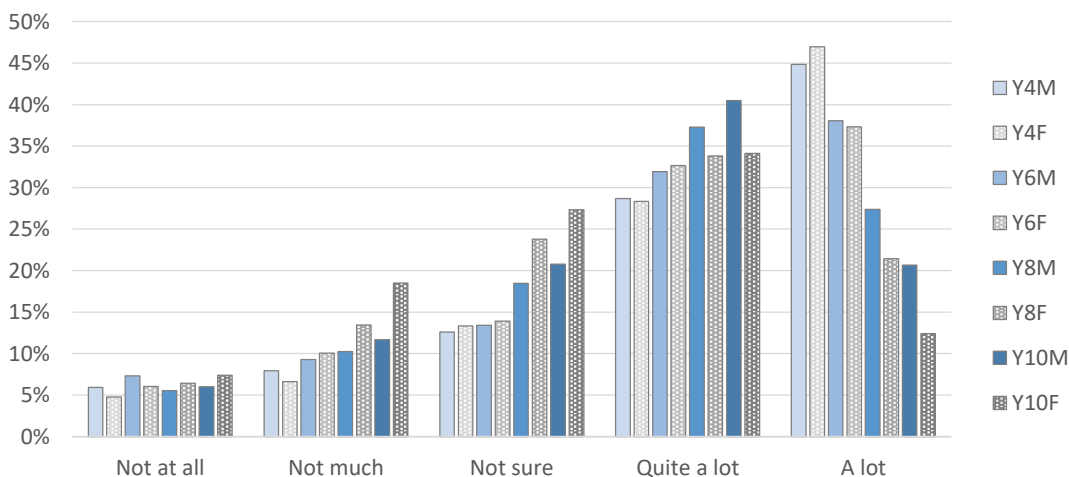


Chart 4. Percentage of pupils responding to a question asking how satisfied or happy they are with their life at the moment (2017-2018, N=74,447).

The most common response from Year 4 pupils (10-11yo) is to say they are ‘a lot’ satisfied (or happy) with their life. When looking at the top category of the above chart, we can see that the proportions expressing the most satisfaction with life decrease with age. Additionally, there is little difference between males and females at primary age; however, in secondary schools, males are more likely to respond positively than

females (when looking at the two most positive categories for Year 10 pupils, we see 61% of boys and only 46% of girls).

When we refer to pupils who are “satisfied with life” in the rest of this report, we are referring to pupils answering in the top two categories above (“quite a lot” or “a lot”).

■ Worries

The list of worries started with the six most common issues found in interview and other exploratory work in the 1970s:

School-work
Family problems
Your health
Friends
Money problems
The way you look

The list has grown since, and has had many local amendments and additions.

Item	Number of questionnaires using in 2018
School-work/homework	35
The way you look	35
Family problems	32
Your health	29
Money problems	26
Crime	25
Puberty and growing up	22
SATs/tests/exams	21
Being bullied	19
Problems with friends	19
The environment	15
Relationships with friends	15
Relationships with boyfriends/girlfriends	12
Your career	9
Thinking you are gay, lesbian or bisexual	8

Table 4. Number of questionnaires used by local authorities including different topics in the ‘worry’ question, 2017-2018, sorted by number.

Less widely used items included: *Becoming a parent before I'm ready, Being fashionable, Being hungry, Being separated from parents/carers, Bereavement, loss and separation, Climate change, Drugs, Exams and tests, Exams and tests, Gambling, Gangs and violence, HIV/AIDS, Home life, Keeping safe at home, Keeping safe on the Internet, Keeping safe online, Keeping safe outside, Mental health of someone in your family, Moving on to secondary school, My gender identity (male/female/transgender), Relationships between children and parents/carers in your family, Relationships between parents/carers in your family, Sexually transmitted infections, Social media e.g. Instagram, Snapchat etc. (keeping up, looking good, getting likes, friends, followers etc.), The future, Violence, Wars and terrorism, What other people think of you, World events, Your diet, Your height, Your mental health, Your physical health, Your safety, Your weight*

Results from the most commonly used items, looking at those who responded at least ‘Quite a lot’ to a question similar or identical to ‘How much do you worry about each of these issues?’, are shown in the next table.

		School-work	Your health	Family	Friends	Money	The way you look	Being bullied	Valid responses
Year 4	Male	28%	30%	35%	29%	22%	19%	28%	10,363
	Female	23%	27%	35%	36%	18%	21%	33%	10,256
Year 6	Male	18%	20%	27%	20%	15%	15%	19%	15,226
	Female	17%	20%	28%	29%	13%	23%	25%	14,825
Year 8	Male	20%	22%	24%	22%	16%	19%	14%	18,083
	Female	29%	28%	29%	37%	19%	43%	22%	18,584
Year 10	Male	27%	22%	21%	20%	16%	22%	9%	16,543
	Female	52%	32%	34%	36%	24%	54%	15%	16,756

Table 5. Percentages of pupils reporting worrying at least 'quite a lot' from a selection of districts across England, by year and sex, 2017-2018. (N=on table)

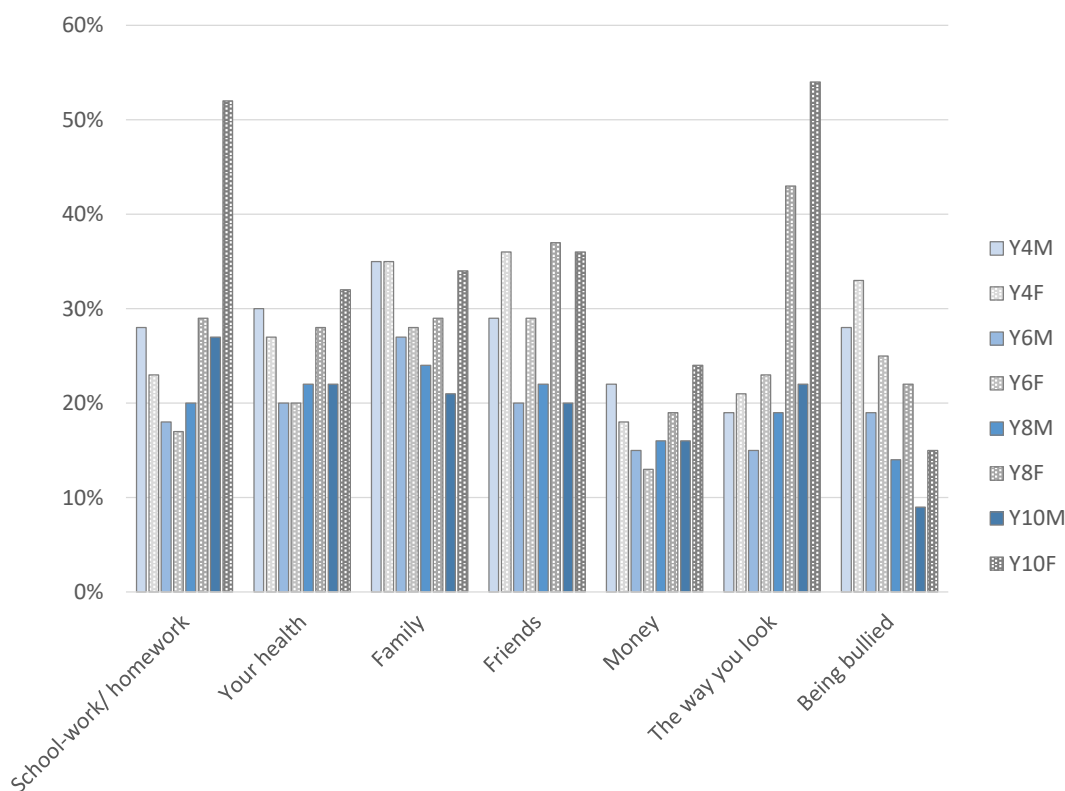


Chart 2. Percentages of pupils reporting worrying at least 'quite a lot' from a selection of districts across England, by year and sex, 2017-2018. (N=see table)

The reports of worrying at least 'quite a lot' about the list of most common worries are generally in the 15-30% range or so, but secondary girls, particularly those in Year 10, score 30% or more for several items. Worry about school/homework exceeds 50% for Year 10 females, while worry about appearance exceeds 40% for both Year 8 and Year 10 females (for Y10 males, the figures for both worries were over 20%).

Support

We asked about sources of support for an overlapping list of concerns. The question asked in different surveys was similar or identical to: 'If you wanted help about any of these issues, who or where would you first turn for information or support?'

	My family	School teachers or tutors	Friends	Youth worker	Social Media/ Internet	School Nurse	Other nurse or doctor	Nowhere / Keep it to myself	Other	N
School-work problems/exams/tests	47	27	13	0	5	0	0	7	1	9524
Health	68	1	5	0	4	2	9	10	1	9523
Careers	65	18	6	1	7	0	0	3	1	15939
Problems with friends	43	5	36	0	1	0	0	14	1	9507
Parents/carers not getting on with each other/divorce	30	7	31	0	1	0	0	24	5	9442
Problems between children and parents/carers in your family	32	8	29		1	0	1	22	6	6876
Feeling sad or upset a lot of the time	47	2	23		2	0	1	22	2	6919
Sex and relationships	40	3	33	1	6	1	2	13	1	20191
Drugs	50	6	20	1	7	1	4	9	1	15845
Healthy eating	66	4	6	0	11	1	5	6	1	15959
Helping and volunteering	56	17	10		6		1	4	5	2546
Money problems	74	1	6		1	0	0	16	2	6929
The way you look	39	1	28	0	3	0	1	28	1	9462

Table 6. Percentages of pupils reporting sources of support from a selection of districts across England, by year and sex, 2017-2018 (Ns on table).

The sample sizes wobble as not all items were offered in all areas.

Family were the most common sources of support for nearly all of the concerns. Friends were the most common choice for problems about friends (tone); someone at school featured more commonly for school-related problems; and a health-care professional turned up as a more common supporter for a health problem. 'Keep it to myself' was an option offered by only some local authorities; where we have confidence in the results, it is most often reported for 'the way you look'.

■ Problem-solving

In many areas, we ask pupils a question similar or identical to ‘When you have a problem or feel stressed, what do you do about it?’. Different areas have used different items in a list and different response options. Where we have a yes/no options, we’ve selected the ‘yes’ option for reporting below; where we have ‘no/sometimes/yes’, we have again chosen ‘yes’; where we have ‘never/sometimes/often/very often’ we have chosen ‘often’ and ‘very often’; where we have ‘never/rarely/sometimes/often/always’ we have chosen ‘often’ and ‘always’ as the criteria for a positive response.

We have sorted the possible responses in descending order, by the frequency of response of the older pupils. The most common positive response for primary school pupils was ‘talk to someone’, while the most common response for secondary school pupils was ‘listen to music’.

	Y4 M	Y4 F	Y6 M	Y6 F	Y8 M	Y8 F	Y10 M	Y10 F
Listen to music	35	39	35	41	42	58	52	69
Think about it on my own	30	31	30	31	38	43	45	49
Rest or sleep more	24	19	17	14	28	29	31	39
Talk to someone about it	48	51	44	49	47	48	35	37
Keep busy socialising e.g. go out with friends	23	18	30	26	38	37	39	37
Keep busy with other things	31	26	28	28	27	31	29	30
Eat more generally	20	14	13	11	13	20	18	30
Do nothing	13	9	13	10	17	16	20	22
Play computer games	48	21	48	16	54	20	53	14
Chat about it on the Internet	13	8	5	2	5	5	6	6
Smoke a cigarette	.	.	.	.	1	1	4	6
Cut or hurt myself	.	.	.	.	3	6	3	6
Have an alcoholic drink	.	.	.	.	2	1	4	5
Other	8	9	6	8	4	5	3	4

Table 7. Percentage of pupils reporting responses (yes/usually/often/always) to problems from a selection of districts across England, by year and sex, 2017-2018. (N = 78,013)

When you have a problem, you may have two problems: dealing with the problem, and dealing with your emotions. We class responses into two groups: problem-focussed and emotion-focussed. **Problem-focussed responses** are among the most common responses and are shown in tone above; the most common problem-focussed response among primary school pupils was ‘talk to someone’, while for secondary school pupils it was ‘Think about it on my own’. At least 6% of year 10 females report self-harm; we have excluded on the table those who report ‘sometimes’.

Wellbeing scales

Mental and emotional wellbeing is a concept that is challenging to quantify, and to compare between individuals or groups within the population. A number of survey tools have been developed for this purpose and two have been included as part of our surveys, both widely used and recognised to be reliable for the age-groups in question. They are similar in construction and purpose, designed and validated for their target populations. A series of questions are used to derive a mental wellbeing score for the respondent, and enables their mental wellbeing to be compared to others, or a change over time to be assessed. Neither survey tool is a clinical screening device, although lower scores may indicate poor mental health and correlate with other tools designed for that purpose.

Table 8. Wellbeing scale items

Primary schools

Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale (SCWBS)

The Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale was developed by the Stirling Council Educational Psychology Service (UK) as a holistic, positively-worded measure of emotional and psychological well-being in children aged eight to 15 years. It was designed by Ian Liddle and Greg Carter for Stirling and Clackmannanshire Councils and was published in 2010.

The survey tool requires respondents to report how frequently they have felt the following in the previous two weeks, and scores the responses:

- I think good things will happen in my life
 - I have always told the truth*
 - I've been able to make choices easily
 - I can find lots of fun things to do
 - I feel that I am good at some things
 - I think lots of people care about me
 - I like everyone I have met *
 - I think there are many things I can be proud of
 - I've been feeling calm
 - I've been in a good mood
 - I enjoy what each new day brings
 - I've been getting on well with people
 - I always share my sweets*
 - I've been cheerful about things
 - I've been feeling relaxed
- * Social desirability items

Secondary schools

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale was developed by colleagues at the Universities of Warwick and Edinburgh³ as a holistic, positively-worded measure of emotional and psychological well-being for adults. The full version has been tested and authorised for use with school pupils as young as 13.

The survey tool requires respondents to report how frequently they have felt the following in the previous two weeks, and scores the responses:

- I've been feeling optimistic about the future
- I've been feeling useful
- I've been feeling relaxed
- I've been feeling interested in other people
- I've had energy to spare
- I've been dealing with problems well
- I've been thinking clearly
- I've been feeling good about myself
- I've been feeling close to other people
- I've been feeling confident
- I've been able to make up my own mind about things
- I've been feeling loved
- I've been interested in new things
- I've been feeling cheerful

³ Tennant, R Hiller, L Fishwick, R Platt, S Joseph, S Weich, S ... & Stewart-Brown, S (2007). 'The Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale (WEMWBS): development and UK validation.' *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 5(1), p.63

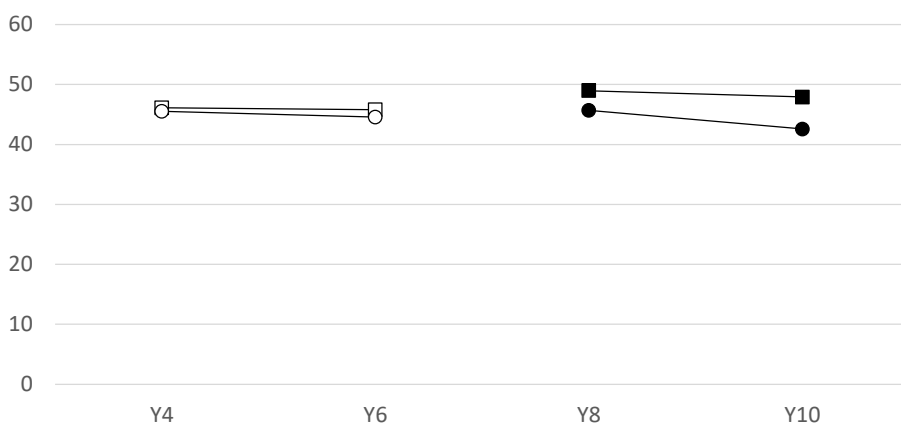


Chart 3. Pupils' mean wellbeing scores (SCWBS (white markers) and WEMWBS (solid markers)) from a selection of districts across England, by year and sex, 2017-2018. SCWBS N = 13,207 (6 LAs); WEMWBS N = 13,222 (6 LAs).

The scores from SCWBS and from WEMWBS across the years are roughly similar, and there are not large differences between males and females at each age, although in Year 10 we see more of a contrast between males and females, which echoes the differences we see in self-esteem and other measures.

Resilience

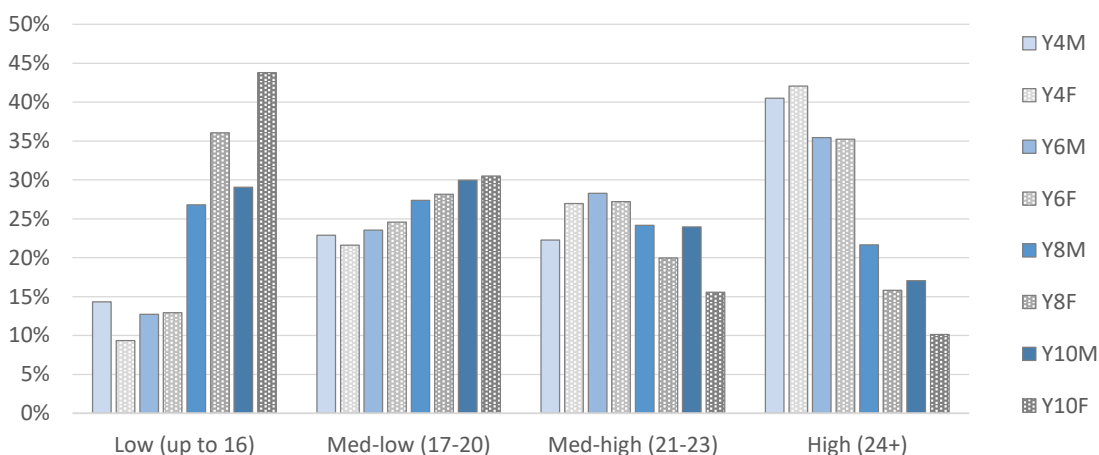


Chart 4. Percentage of pupils scoring in each bracket of resilience scores from a selection of districts across England, by year and sex, 2017-2018. (N = 71,776)

We have a set of statements about response to challenges from which we derive a resilience score. The questions are similar or identical to ‘What happens if you don't succeed at something?’ and ‘What happens if something goes wrong?’.

The most common band of scores attained among primary-age pupils is the high one, with over 35% getting a score of 24 or more. But, just as for several other wellbeing measures, we see a decline in the proportion of older pupils scoring in the highest brackets, and we also see males scoring higher than females among secondary school pupils. So, while 11% of primary females score in the low band, over 40% of the Year 10 females score in this band.

Social confidence

We asked secondary pupils in a few areas, *How do you feel when meeting people of your own age for the first time?*

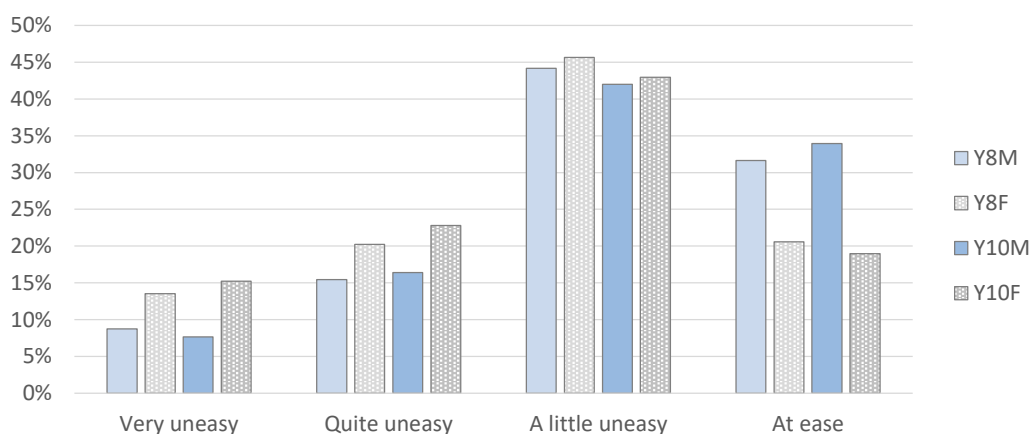


Table 9. Pupils reporting social confidence with peers from a selection of districts across England, by year and sex, 2017-2018. (N=18,656)

The most common response is ‘A little uneasy’. Males are more likely than females to say ‘at ease’, while females more often than males report greater levels of unease.

Summary: Age and sex differences

We can pull together a chart summarising differences by age and sex:

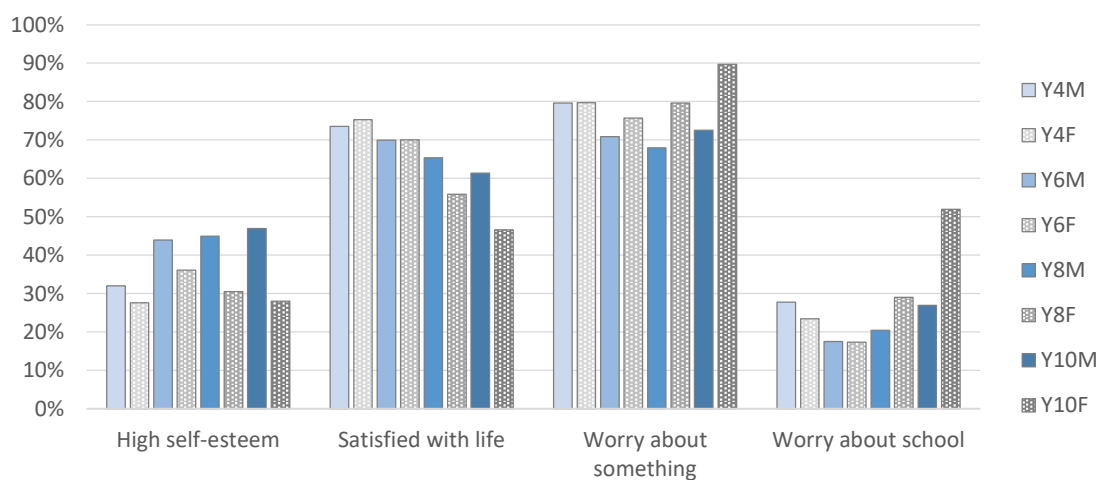


Chart 5. Percentage of pupils responding to different common questions about emotional health and wellbeing (2017-2018, N=97,883; 71,976; 120,720; 120,636).

Gender differences across all of the above topics become more apparent as age increases. The proportion scoring highest for self-esteem increases in males as they get older, whereas for females it peaks in Year 6. Worries are at their lowest among Year 6 pupils; however, they increase in secondary school, more so for girls, especially in Year 10 when they were almost twice as likely to worry about school-work than boys (52% vs. 27%).

Part 3: Background differences

■ Ethnicity

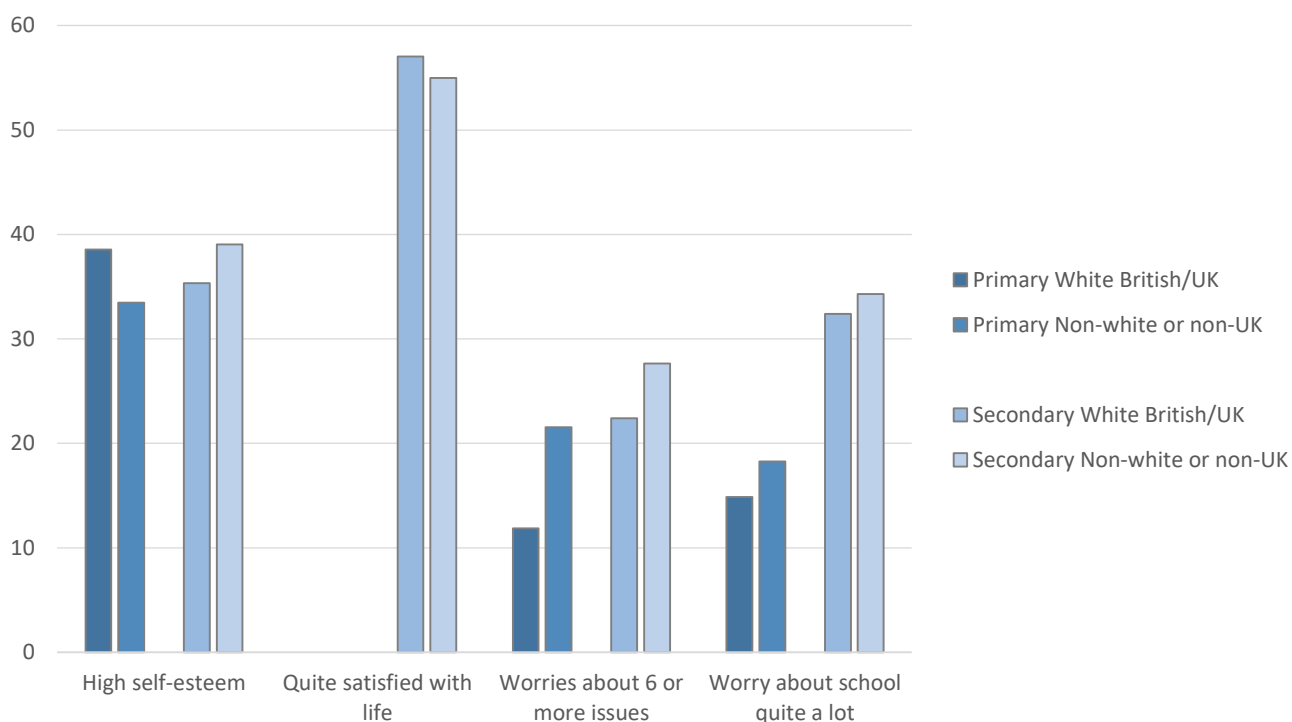


Chart 6. Percentage of pupils responding to four wellbeing questions by ethnic group - from a range of areas across England over the period 2017-2018 (N=85,165; 66,796; 60,699; 92,341).

At primary age, Minority Ethnic pupils (not White-British or not White-UK, depending on the questionnaire) achieve high scores self-esteem less often than their White peers; however, this is reversed at secondary age, where if anything they score high more often. Satisfaction levels were similar in the two broad ethnic groups in each phase, but the pattern of difference was reversed: higher for minority ethnic pupils in the primary phase, lower in the secondary.

Primary pupils from Minority Ethnic groups were more likely to report worrying about at least one issue ‘quite a lot’ than were those from White UK backgrounds. We can see this for worrying about school in particular.

■ Adults at home

We ask about parents at home in most surveys, and for this analysis we grouped responses as:
Both parents / Single parent / Parent + partner / Children in care

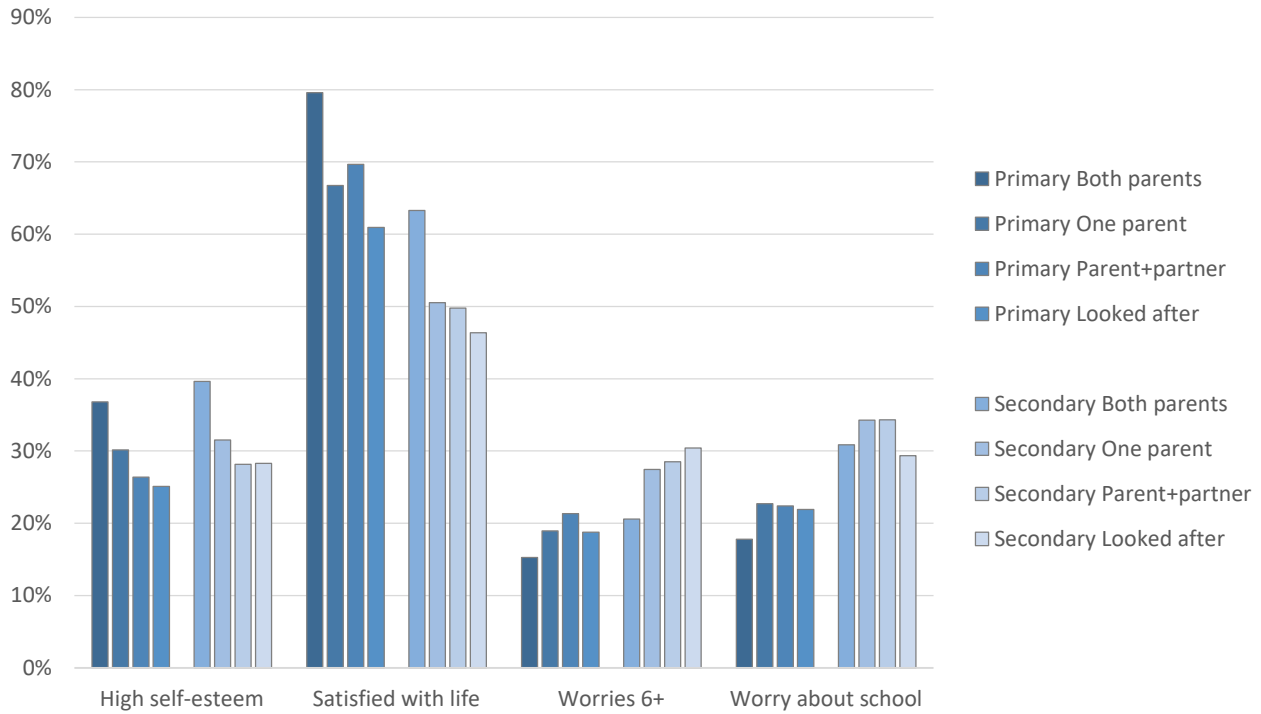


Chart 7. Percentage of pupils responding to four wellbeing questions by adults at home - from a range of areas across England over the period 2017-2018 (N=62,192; 56,826; 34,611; 64,856).

Part 4: Trends

We can draw on many years' accumulated results from the longer-standing questions, and investigate if there are any notable trends in the responses of young people.

Trends in self-esteem

We have responses to the self-esteem scale from over a million young people aged 8-15. In recent years, we can see a bit of an up-and-down pattern appearing in the figures. This 'rollercoaster' arises from a regional effect: in even-numbered years, we receive a large sample from one local authority whose pupils report lower self-esteem on average than do those from authorities surveying in odd-numbered years. These effects have been reduced by using a 2-year combined figure where possible.

High self-esteem

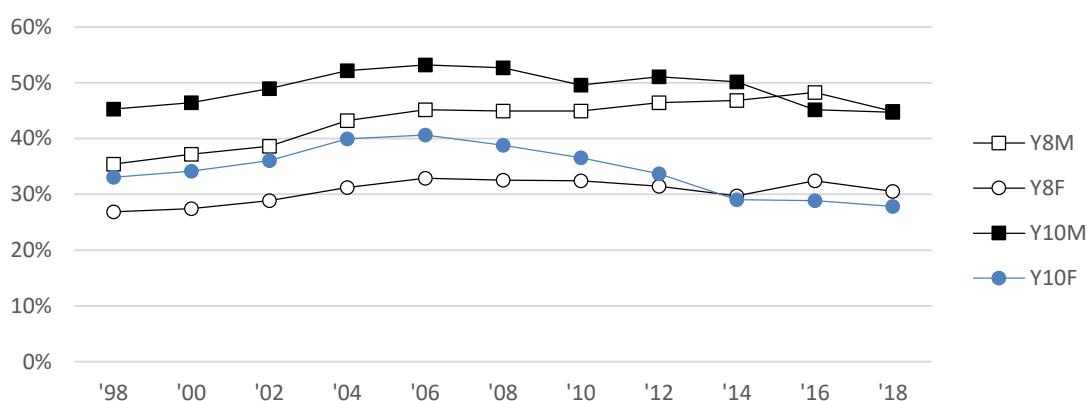


Chart 8. Percentage of secondary pupils in the highest bracket of self-esteem from a selection of districts across England, 1999-2018, two-year combined figures (N=762,658)

There is a general rise in the proportion of secondary pupils scoring in the highest brackets of self-esteem score from 1997 to about 2007, but since 2008 the rise has halted among most groups, and, among the older females, has declined. The 14-15y females (blue) have become the group scoring lowest in recent years. More generally, the gap between Y8 and Y10 pupils has narrowed.

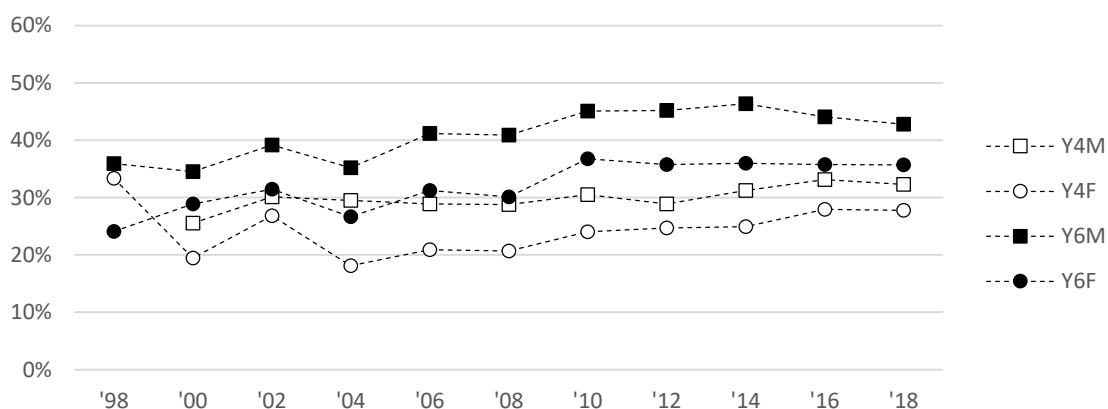


Chart 9. Percentage of primary pupils in the highest bracket of self-esteem from a selection of districts across England, 1999-2018, two-year combined figures. (N=344,145)

Figures in recent years for primary school pupils scoring in the highest bracket of self-esteem scores have been among the highest we have recorded. There is no clear decline in any group of primary school pupils in recent years.

Low self-esteem

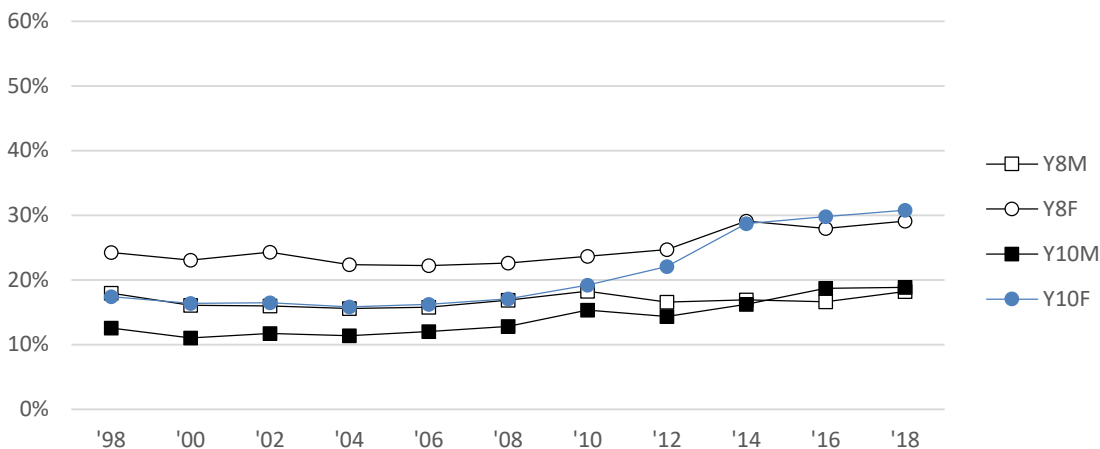


Chart 10. Percentage of secondary pupils in the lowest brackets of self-esteem from a selection of districts across England, 1999-2018, two-year combined figures. (N=762,658)

There is a complementary rise in the proportion of secondary pupils scoring in the lowest brackets of self-esteem scores in recent years, and this is most marked among the older females (blue), who have become the group most likely to score low in self-esteem, although, again, the gap between Y8 and Y10 is narrow or absent.

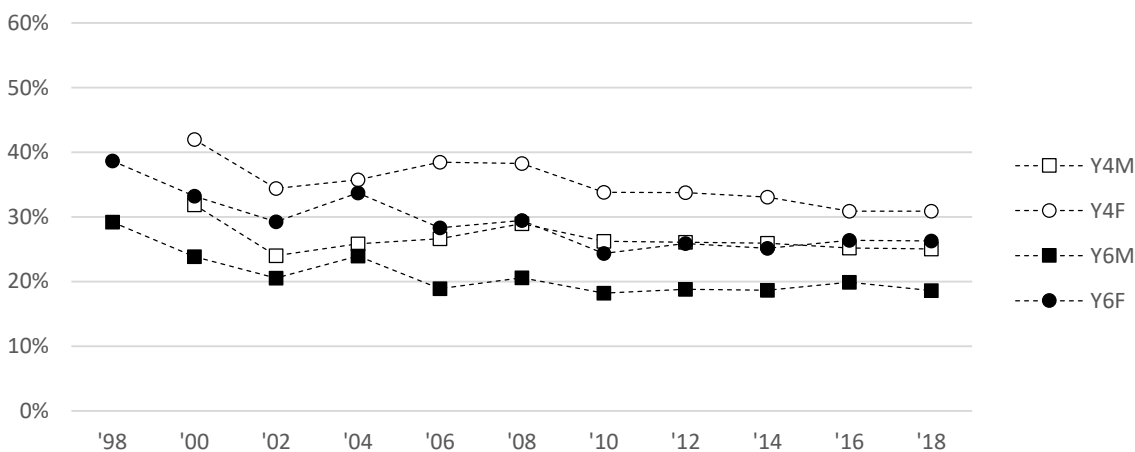


Chart 11. Percentage of primary pupils in the lowest bracket of self-esteem from a selection of districts across England, 1999-2018, two-year combined figures. (N=344,145)

Among primary school pupils, the proportions scoring in the lowest brackets of self-esteem scores have been generally flat in recent years.

The apparent rise in older females scoring in the lower brackets of self-esteem is obscured to some extent by the regional rollercoaster. We can try to account for this by looking at a single local authority. Some local authorities survey with us very regularly and with large samples. The findings from one such series are shown below.

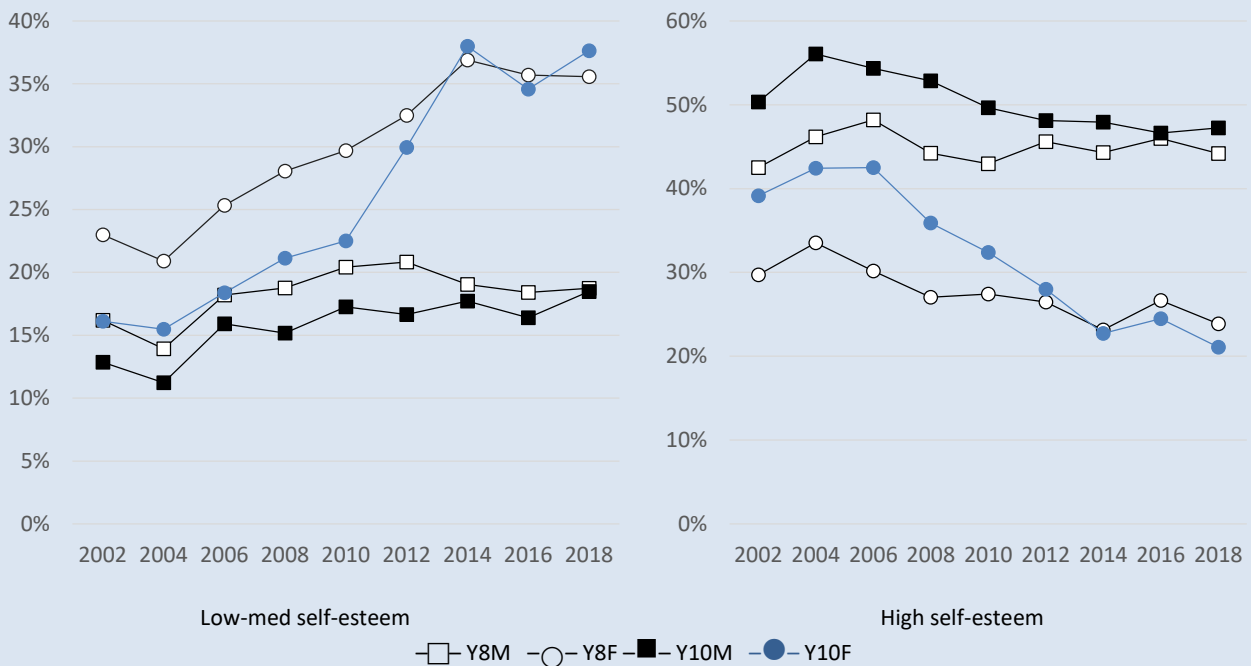


Chart 12. Pupils in the lower and high brackets of self-esteem from one local authority in England, 2002-2018. (N=73,859)

We see in this local authority a distinct rise in the proportion of older females scoring low-med for self-esteem, and a concomitant fall in those scoring high (tone). There is a similar but more modest rise in the proportion of Y8 females (12-13y) scoring low-med for self-esteem, and a fall for those scoring high.

Trends in worries

In a similar way to other questions, we can track changes over the years in worries. We show below those Year 10 students who worry at least ‘quite a lot’ about school work. Sometimes Councils have added a prompt about “School work”, and/or “Exams/tests”, but these have been excluded from the chart below, which we have worked hard on to make sure we are comparing like with like in successive years, but to make handling missing values consistent, figures are recorded at a higher level than we have previously shown.

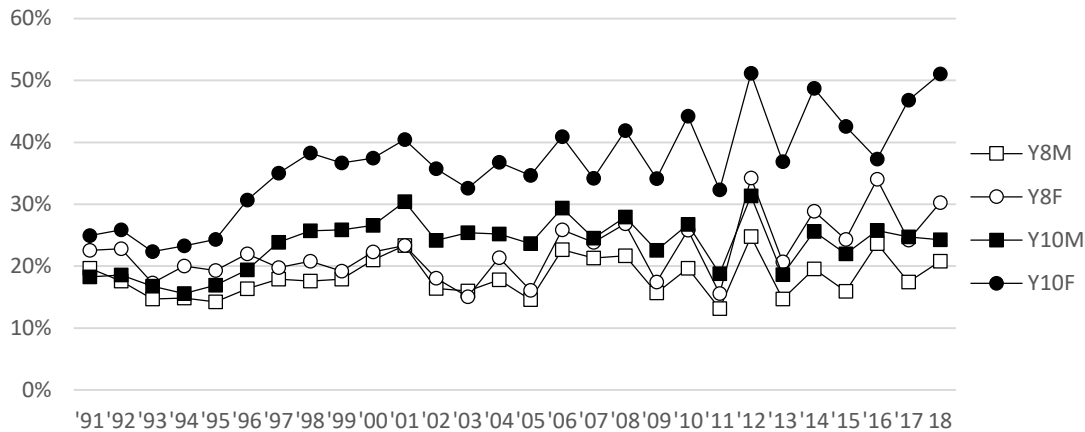


Chart 13. Percentage of secondary pupils reporting that they worry about school work at least ‘quite a lot’, by sex, 1991-2018 (N= 719,035)

There is a marked rise in worry about school after the early 1990s, especially among Year 10 females. This followed the first ‘school league tables’ in 1992. Whatever trend is going on since is obscured by an up-and-down pattern in the last decade or two. We can smooth out this regional rollercoaster by combining the figures from successive years, as in the next chart.

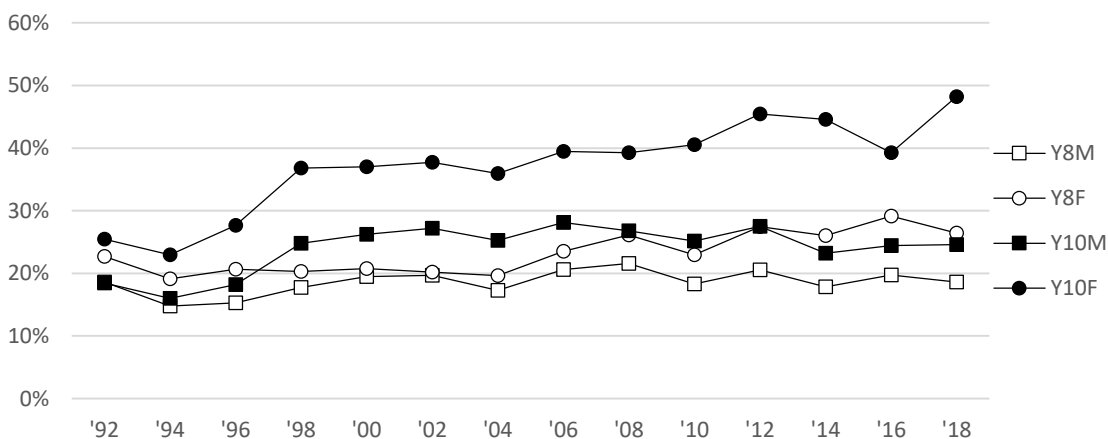


Chart 14. Percentage of young people reporting that they worry about school at least ‘quite a lot’, by sex, 1991-2018 (N= 719,035)

This shows a definite increase among Year 10 females since 2003, beyond the surge in the 1990s. Year 8 females have moved to become the second most worried group. By contrast, worry among Y10 males is lower now than at its peak in 2012.

Another check on the assumption that worry about school has been increasing can be made by examining trends in just one local authority which has surveyed regularly with SHEU and with large samples, as below.

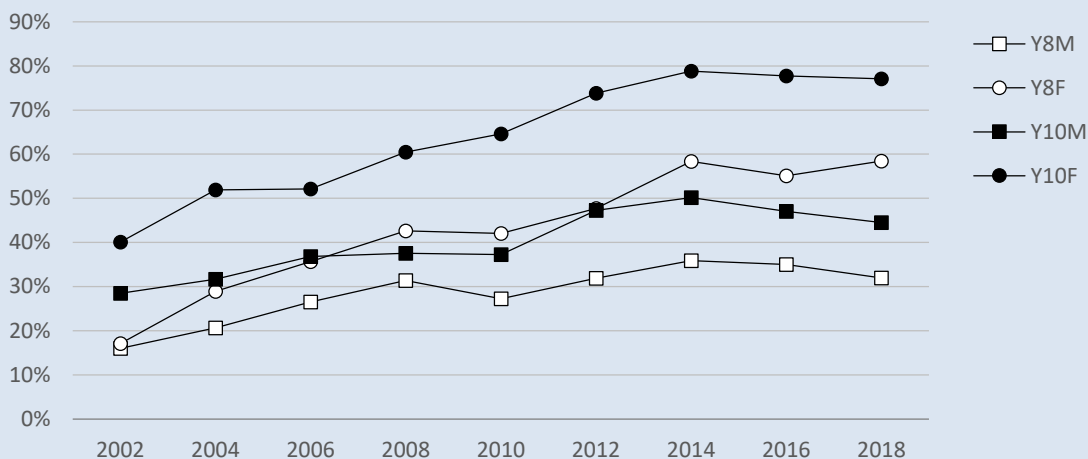


Chart 15. Percentage of young people in one local authority worrying at least 'quite a lot' about school, by year and sex, 2002-2018 (N= 75,333)

The same conclusion of a general rise in young people’s worry about school and a more marked rise among older females is supported by this chart. However, this Council added ‘exams/tests’ to ‘school work’ on the question.

Are the prompts about “exams/tests” producing the increase in worry about school? We don’t (always) see a ‘step’ in the trend in this area when such a prompt is added, and we can see increases when the wording is left alone:

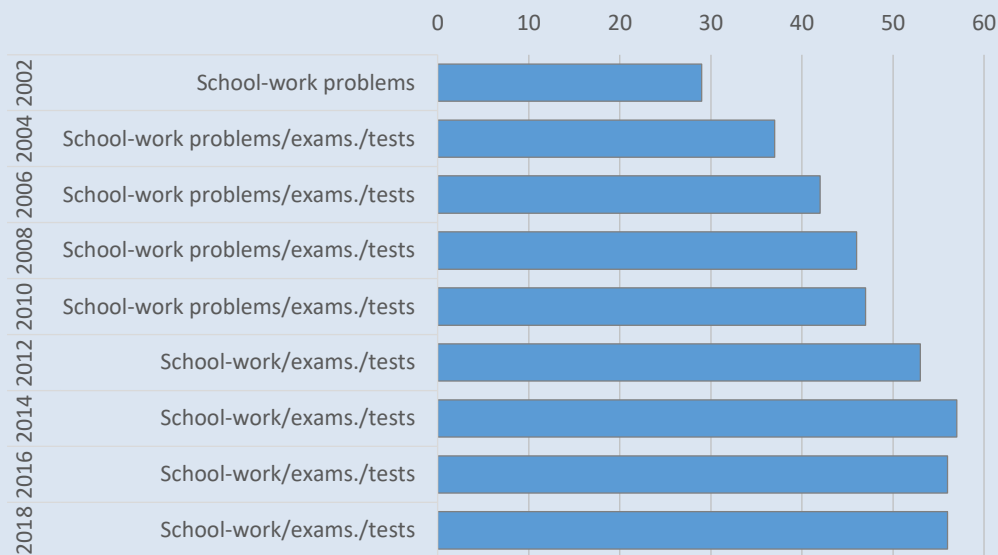


Chart 16. Percentage of young people in one area reporting that they worry about at least 'quite a lot', by sex, 2002-2018 (N= 75,333)

Nonetheless, any Council areas which added the ‘exams/tests’ prompt have been excluded from the overall trends charts previously shown.

In some areas, 'Exams./tests' has become a separate item:

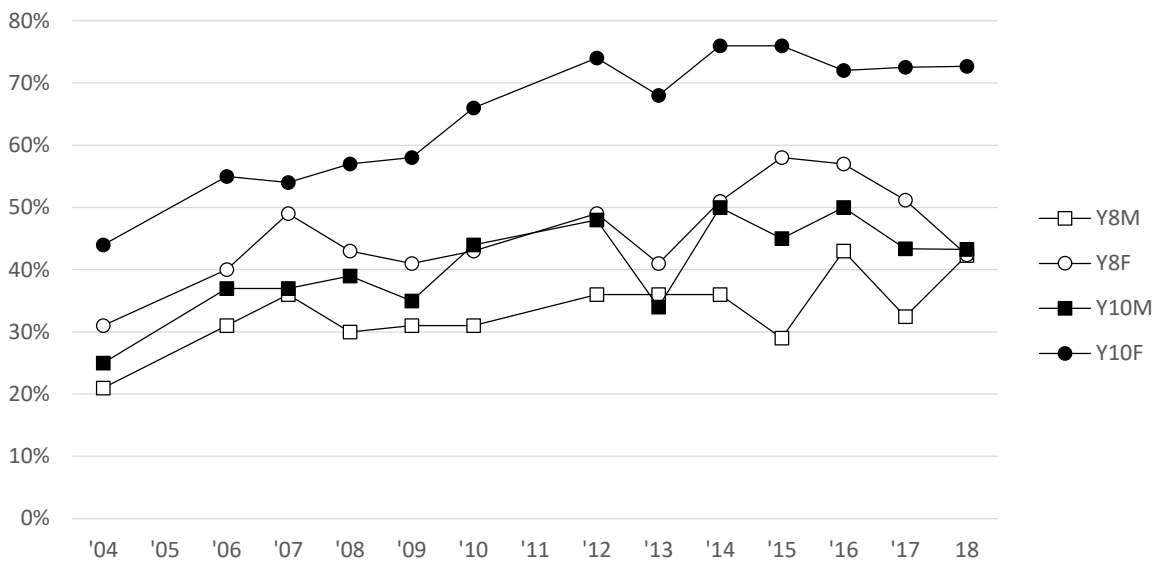


Chart 17. Percentage of young people reporting that they worry about Exams/Tests at least 'quite a lot', by sex, 2000-2018 (N= 375,717)

This increase is more or less parallel to the increase in worries about school in general.

While we see a rise in worries about school, there is no general rise in worries – for example, worries about appearance are, while often high, lower now than previous decades:

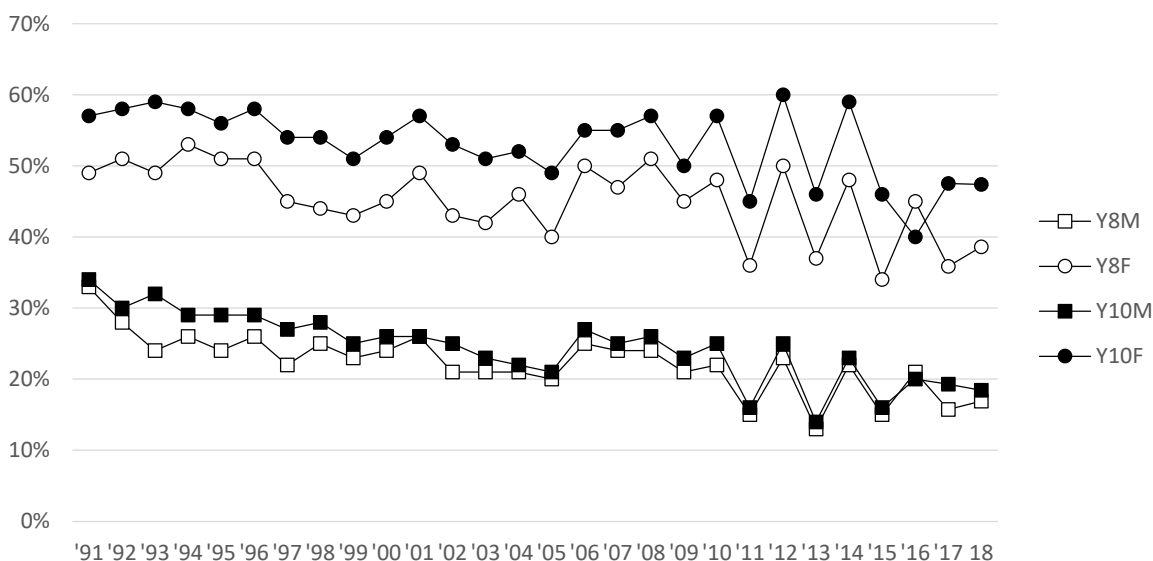


Chart 18. Percentage of young people reporting that they worry about 'the way you look' at least 'quite a lot', by sex, 2000-2018 (N= 375,717)

Trends in satisfaction

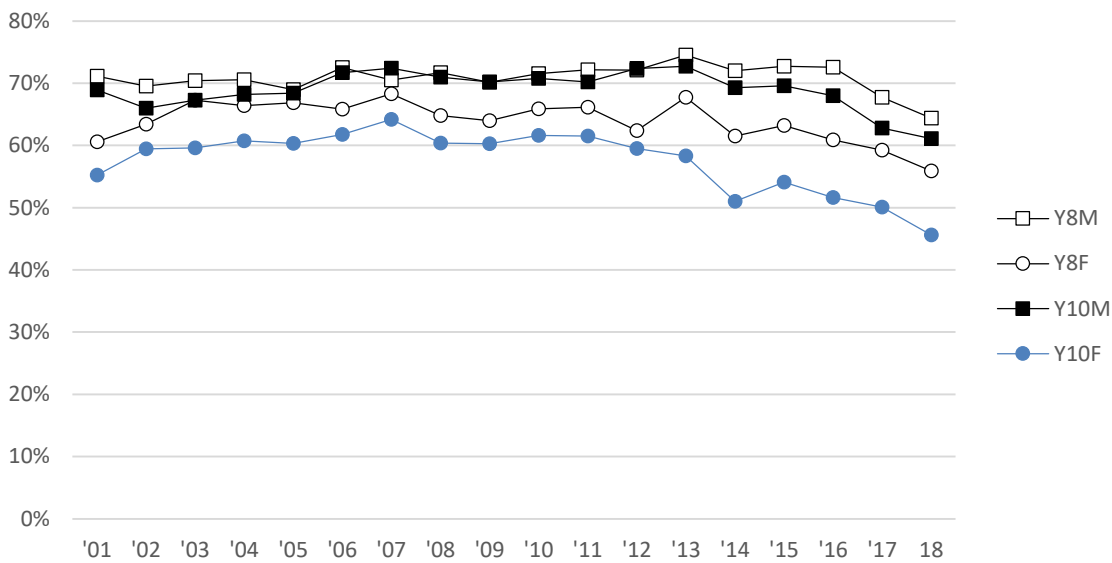


Chart 19. Percentage of young people who are at least quite satisfied with life, by year and sex, 2002-2018 (N= 533,865).

Young people’s satisfaction with life is at least ‘quite satisfied’ for most pupils, and has stayed quite stable over most of the period in question, although there has been a recent decline. There is no discontinuity in 2008 as with self-esteem; rather, the figures start coming down since 2013, and, as for other questions, this decline is more marked in the older females (blue).

Part 5: Relationships between emotional wellbeing and other lifestyle questions

Physical activity

It is recommended that young people complete a total of an hour’s moderate exercise every day. As well as being an important support for physical health, exercise is believed to be good for mental health.

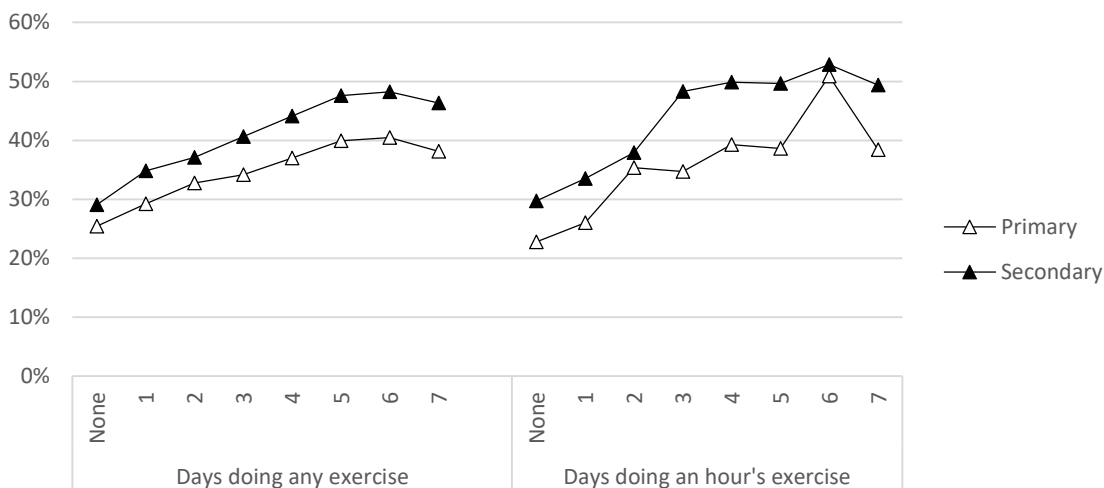


Chart 20. Pupils scoring high for self-esteem group by number of days exercising (a) at all, (b) for an hour or more 2017-2018, by phase (N=23,326; N=8,345).

Generally, more days of exercise are associated with higher proportions scoring high for self-esteem, in both primary and secondary phases, and whether we insist on doing an hour or more. The young people who report exercising every day as recommended are less likely to have high self-esteem than those taking one day off, and who report exercising on 6 days.

Eating a ‘conventional’ breakfast

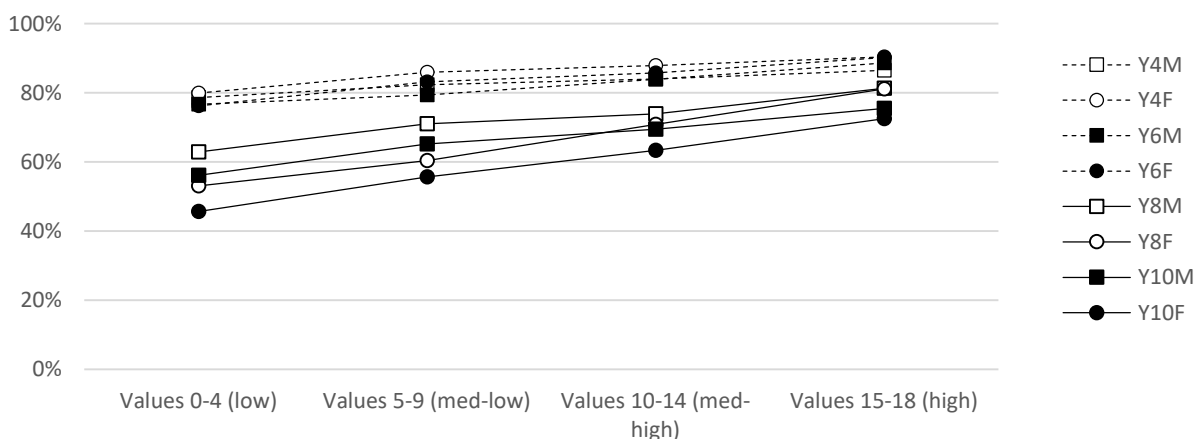


Chart 21. Pupils in each self-esteem group who ate a ‘conventional’ breakfast on the day surveyed (e.g. cereal, toast or bread, cooked breakfast etc.), 2017-2018 (N=93,358).

The link between self-esteem and eating a conventional breakfast is more apparent in secondary pupils than it is for primary. At secondary age, pupils with low self-esteem were less likely to eat a normal breakfast (52%) than those with high self-esteem (78%); in primary pupils this difference is smaller (78% vs. 89%) but still significant.

■ Feeling happy with weight

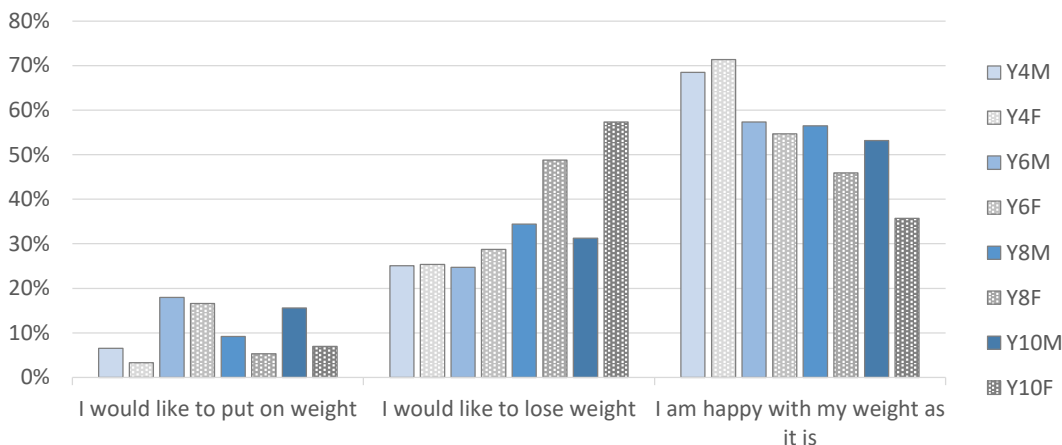


Chart 22. Pupils' feelings about their weight, from a selection of districts across England, by age and sex, 2017-2018 (N=130,494).

As age increases, happiness with weight significantly decreases (right-hand set of columns) – especially for girls. We see two columns in the centre above the rest, from secondary-age females wanting to lose weight. We then looked at the relationship between happiness with weight and self-esteem and fear of bullying.

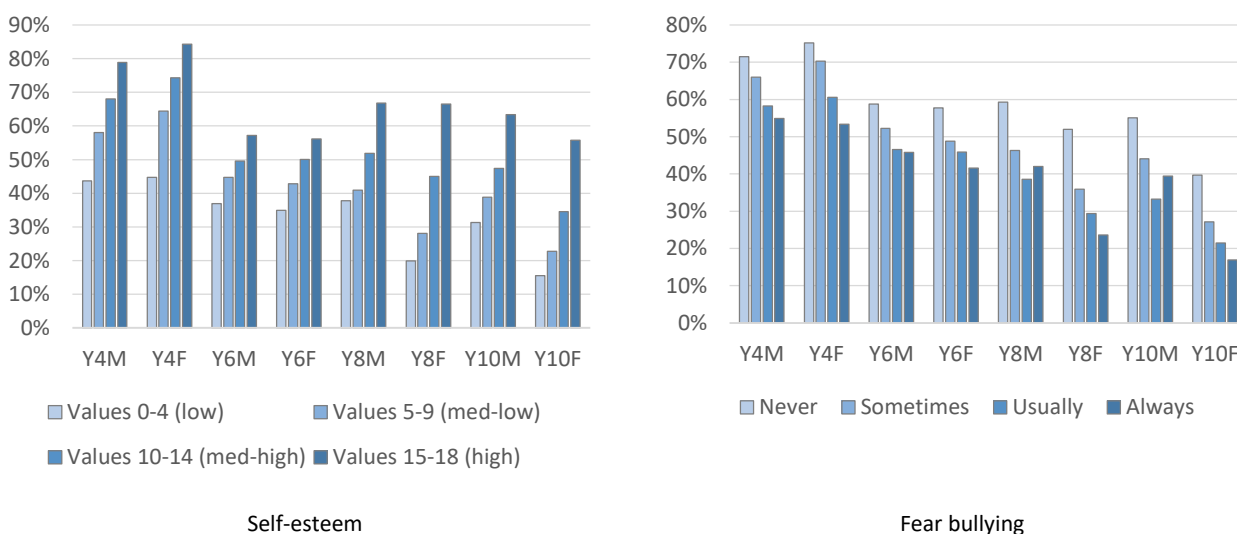


Chart 23. Pupils who feel happy with their weight as it is, breakdowns by pupils with high self-esteem and those who might fear going to school because of bullying, from a selection of districts across England, by age and sex, 2017-2018 (N=79,063; 112,736).

When we look at whether the pupils who said they fear going to school because of bullying (right), pupils in all groups are more likely to report less satisfaction with their weight as they report more fear of bullying, with the sloping shape of the chart remaining the same as for all pupils.

When we look at pupils with different self-esteem scores, we see another consistent set of sloping charts, with happiness with weight increasing with self-esteem score (left). Year 10 girls are more likely to report wanting to change their weight than their male counterparts, but this difference is smallest for pupils with high self-esteem.

■ Relationships between emotional wellbeing and sleep

Getting at least 8 hours' sleep last night

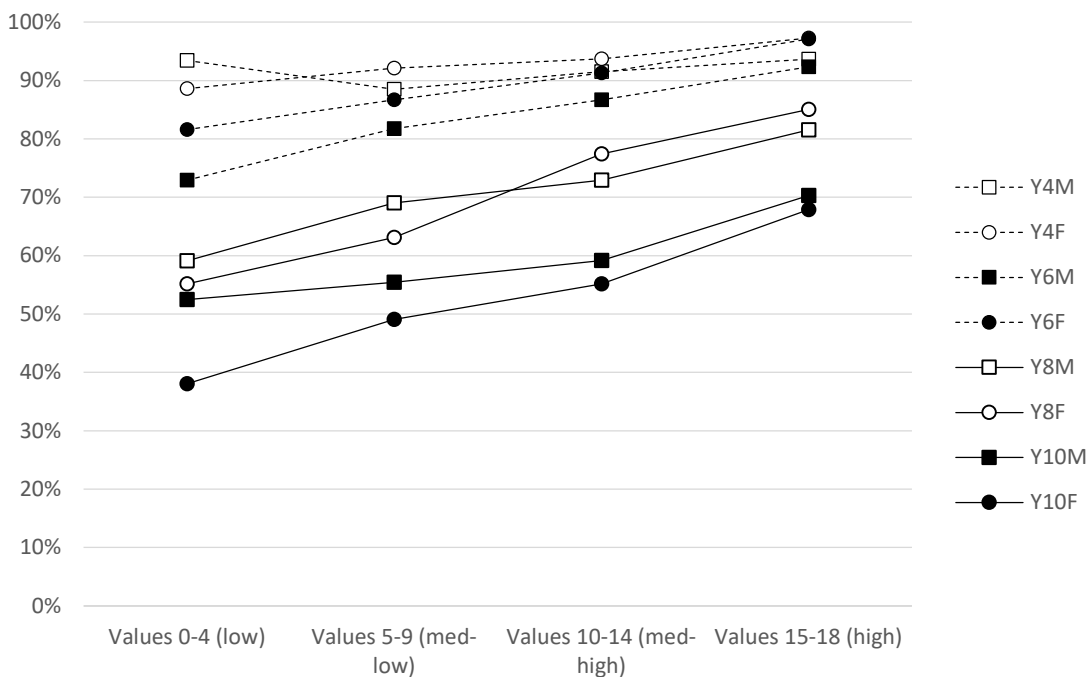


Chart 24. Pupils in each self-esteem group who got at least 8 hours' sleep the night before the survey, 2017-2018 (N=24,604).

There is a steady rise in the proportion of pupils getting at least 8 hours' sleep on the night before the survey, as self-esteem scores increased, for all groups examined. We may be tempted to speculate about cause and effect, but there is nothing here to decide matters. It's also interesting to look at esteem by amount of sleep – looking down the other end of the telescope from the chart above.

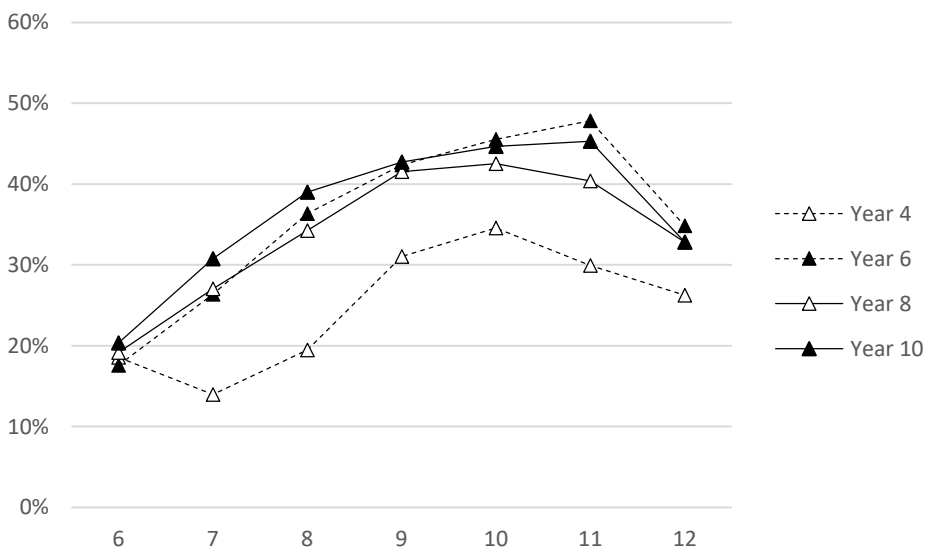


Chart 25. Pupils in the high self-esteem group by hours of sleep last night, by year, 2002-2018 (N=24,604).

There is a definite peak of high self-esteem for each year group; it sits between 10-11 hours without a clear trend.

Screen use and sleep

Leaving emotional wellbeing to one side for the moment, we can also try to link sleep with ‘phone and/or Internet use, which are plausibly directly related – perhaps time spent using the ‘phone at night replaces some of the time that would have been spent sleep, and/or makes getting to sleep more difficult.

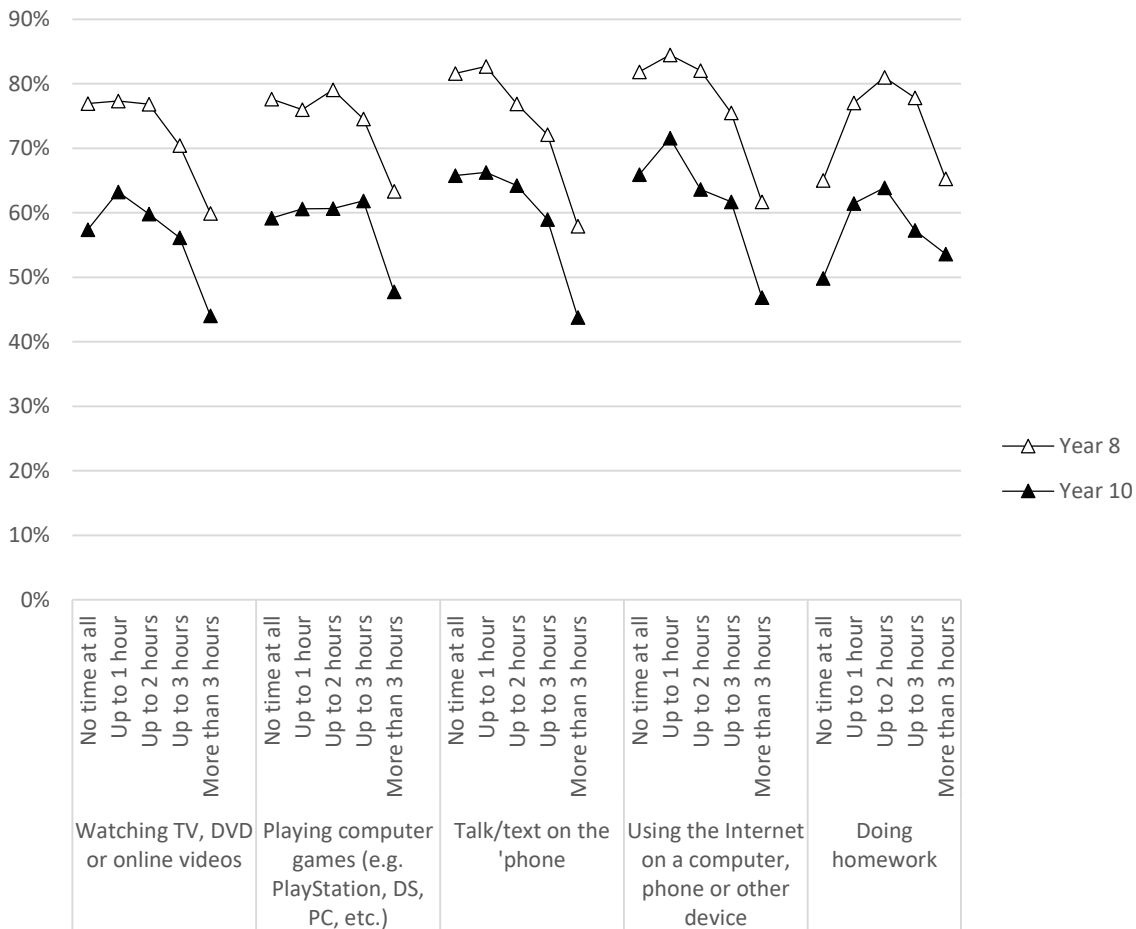


Chart 26. Pupils getting at least 8 hours of sleep last night, by hours spent using screens or phones or doing homework on the evening before the survey, Years 8 and 10 only, 2017-2018 (N= 14,334; 11,113; 5,637; 5,070; 13,865).

At first glance, more time spent doing any of these things on the evening before the survey is associated with a lower report of getting 8h+ of sleep last night.

A casual reading of these charts might suggest that screens are bad for sleep. However, the actual shape of the curves is not always straight, but more often rounded, which suggests a more complex relationship. The last item on the chart is ‘homework’, which most people would be less quick to malign as an activity than computer games.

Moreover, we also quickly found that amount of sleep is strongly related to many other questions in the surveys, including skipping lunch, which are not so easily thought of in terms of having a causal effect on sleep.

Getting enough sleep

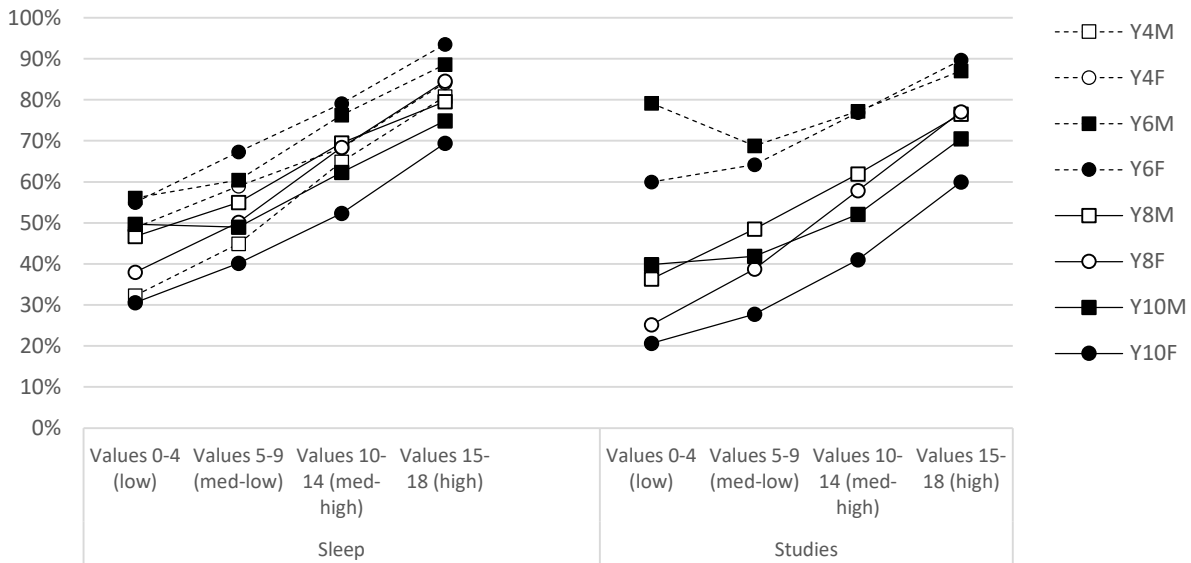


Chart 27. Pupils in each self-esteem group who said they get enough sleep for health or study, by age and sex, 2017-2018 (N=23,609; N=14,307).

Pupils are consistently more likely to say they get enough sleep for their health than for their studies, as the lines on the left chart sit higher on the vertical axis than those on the right.

The very consistent upwards slopes show that confidence in getting enough sleep increases with self-esteem score, in nearly all groups.

■ Relationships between emotional wellbeing and bullying

Bullying

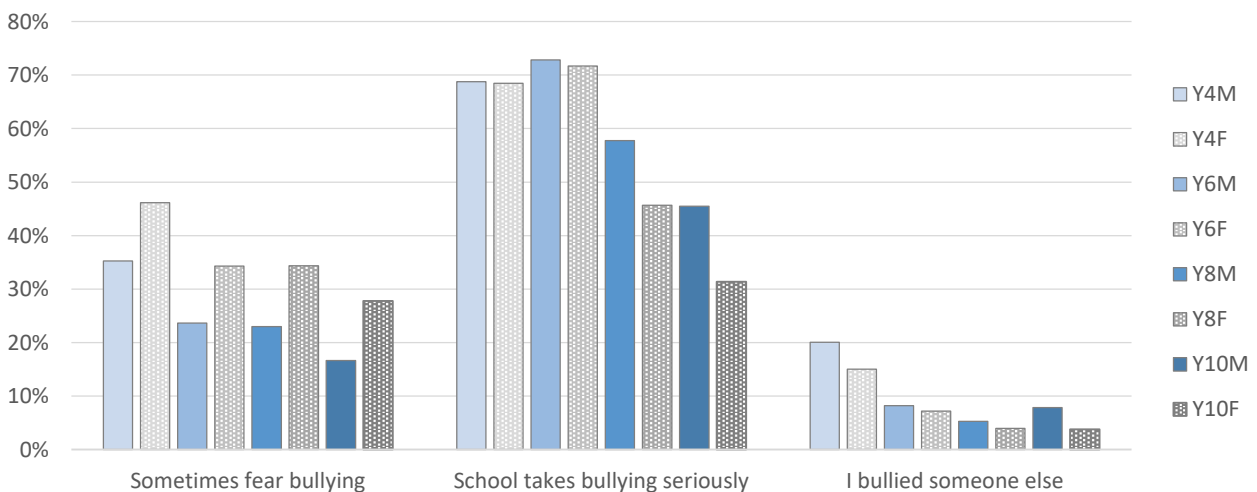


Chart 28. Responses to questions about bullying from a selection of districts across England, by year and sex. 2017-2018 (N= 133,477; 65,780; 38,061).

Girls of all ages are more likely to at least 'sometimes' fear going to school because of bullying; at secondary school, girls are less likely to feel that their school takes bullying seriously. Overall, pupils are less likely to fear going to school as they get older and less likely to think their school takes bullying seriously. The

proportion of pupils responding that they bullied someone else at school decreases as pupils progress through primary school before levelling out, with the exception of a jump for Year 10 males.

Self-esteem and feeling afraid of going to school because of bullying

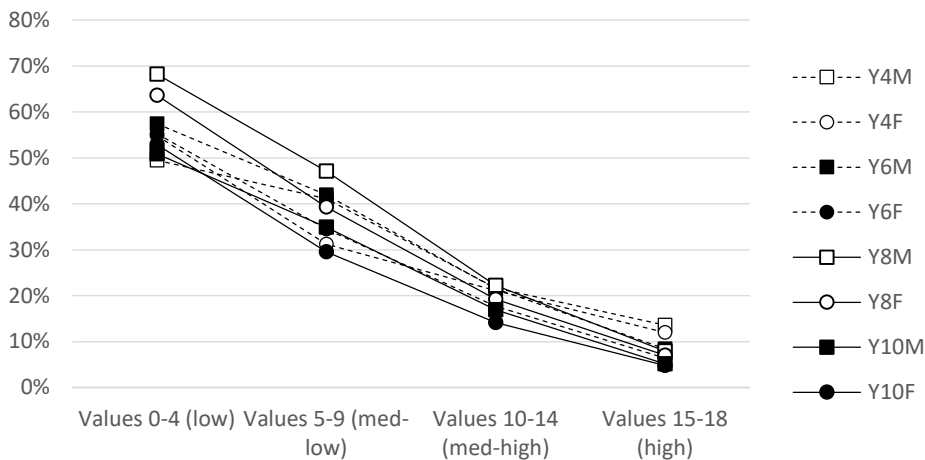


Chart 29. Pupils in each self-esteem group who said they fear going to school because of bullying at least ‘sometimes’, by year and sex, 2017-2018 (N=89,690).

The relationship between self-esteem and fear of going to school because of bullying is consistent regardless of age or gender. Few pupils of primary or secondary age with high self-esteem said they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ fear going to school because of bullying, but pupils of all ages with low self-esteem are dramatically more likely to report fears of bullying – in the small low self-esteem group, reports can approach 70%.

Of course, it is hard to determine whether a pupil’s fear of going to school (or experience of bullying) causes their self-esteem to drop, or if a pupil who already has low self-esteem is seen as an easier and more vulnerable target for bullies; maybe there is also a difference in the way pupils see what is and is not ‘bullying’.

Self-esteem and bullying

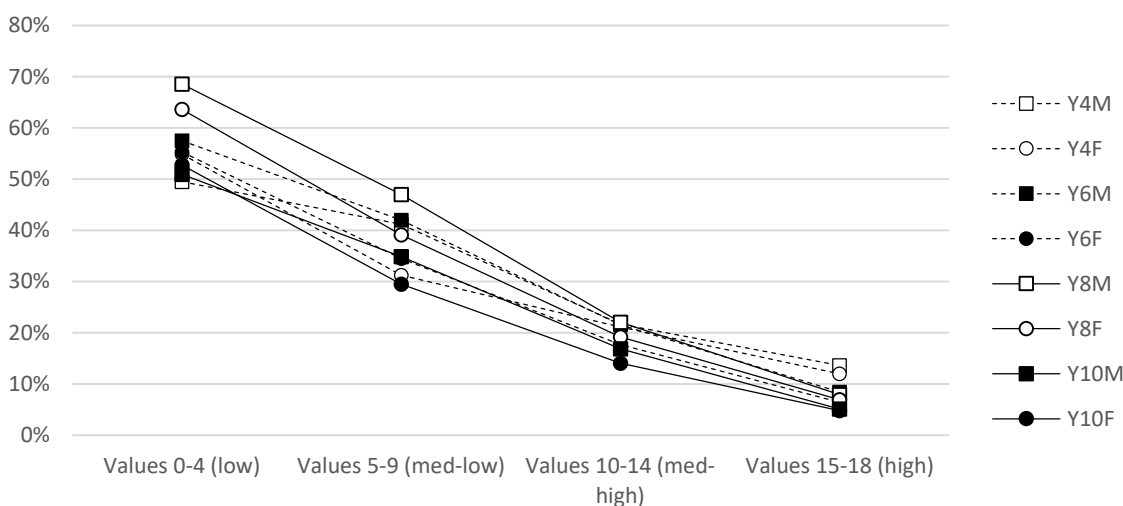


Chart 30. Pupils in each self-esteem group who said they had been bullied at or near school in the last year, by year and sex, 2017-2018 (N=42,522).

We can show the same pattern with actual reports of bullying, not just fear of bullying. The contrasts between the two ends of the range of self-esteem scores are stark.

Relationships between emotional wellbeing and Internet use

When we first saw a fall in the wellbeing of female teenagers, we wondered if the rise in social media could be to blame. We have looked at this several times over the last few years, and our most recent analysis is shown below, for two measures of emotional wellbeing and three questions about media use, for Year 10 females in one local authority.

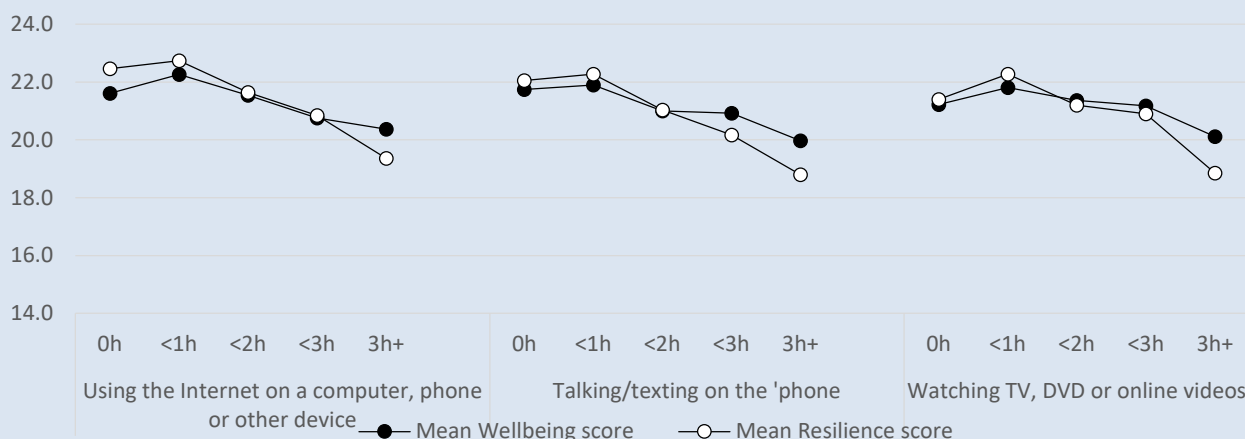


Chart 31. Mean wellbeing (SWEMWBS) and resilience scores of Year 10 pupils from one local authority, by hours spent last night using the Internet or a 'phone or watching screens (N=7,144).

A casual reading of these findings might suggest that the more device use there is, the poorer the emotional wellbeing of these young people. If we also suspect that online bullying, fear of missing out, and the sometimes uncomfortable nature of screened material are not good for wellbeing, then this also offers us a plausible direction of cause and effect.

However, a closer reading of the figures shows that the highest average wellbeing scores (using a short wellbeing scale, SWEMWBS⁴) and resilience scores are seen for those spending modest amounts of time online. This has been dubbed the 'Goldilocks' effect⁵: intermediate values score best.

We also want to hesitate about the direction of cause and effect: perhaps lots of device use leads to low wellbeing (a) (or perhaps positive wellbeing suppresses device use), or instead poorer wellbeing promotes more device use (b), or indeed some other factor like poverty results in changes in both wellbeing and behaviour (c), without them being directly related.

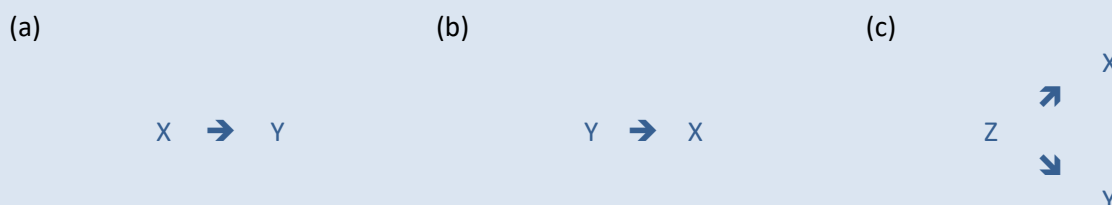


Chart 32. Possible patterns of cause and effect: (a) direct, (b) reversed, (c) confounded.

We have repeated this style of analysis for the larger databank sample:

⁴ Stewart-Brown, S *et al.* (2009). Internal construct validity of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS): a Rasch analysis using data from the Scottish Health Education Population Survey. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 7,15

⁵ Regis, D (2019). Goldilocks is online. *Education and Health*, 37(2),43-45.

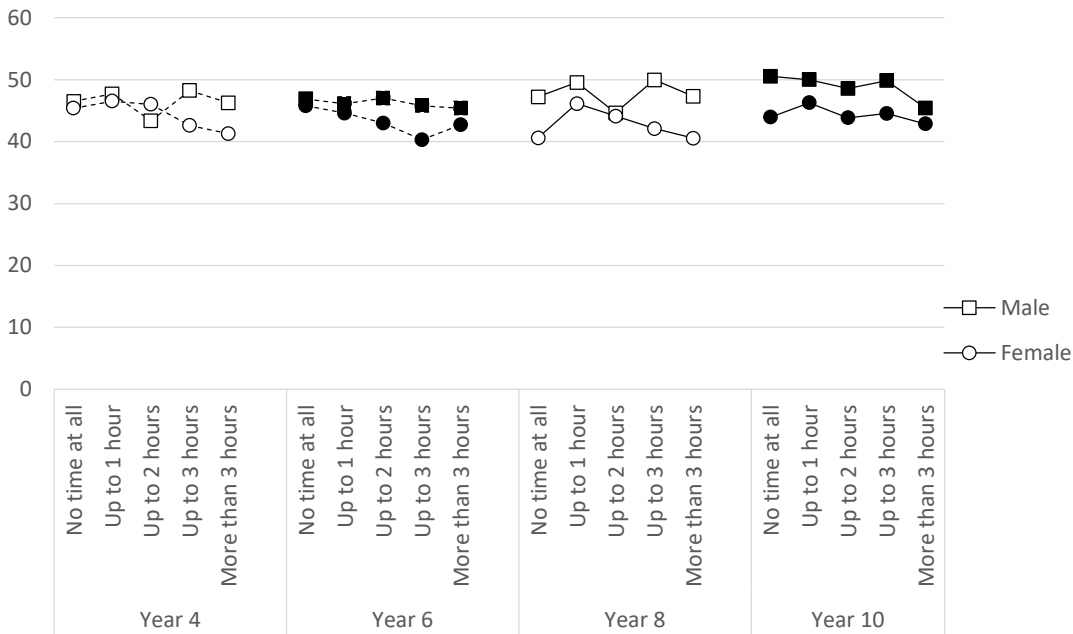


Chart 33. Mean wellbeing scores (SCWBS/WEMWBS), by hours spent last night Using the Internet on a computer, phone or other device, by year and sex (N=3,387, N=981).

Although the available databank is larger, few authorities have been using the SCWBS/WEMWBS scales as well as the Internet question, so the actual sample is smaller. We are not sure much can be seen in these results.

We can turn to self-esteem for our wellbeing measure, and to watching videos for our behavioural measure:

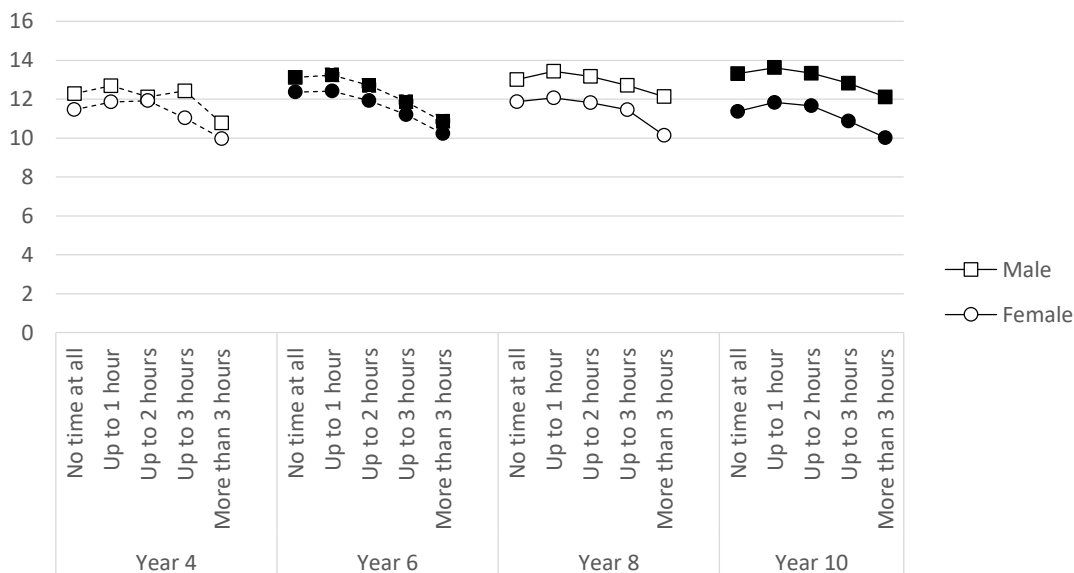


Chart 34. Mean esteem scores, by hours spent last night Watching TV, DVD or online videos, by year and sex (N=23,928).

For watching TV/videos, among secondary school pupils, we can see something of the same humped ‘Goldilocks’ curve, with lower esteem more apparent with higher use, but the highest scores are for modest use. None of these differences are large.

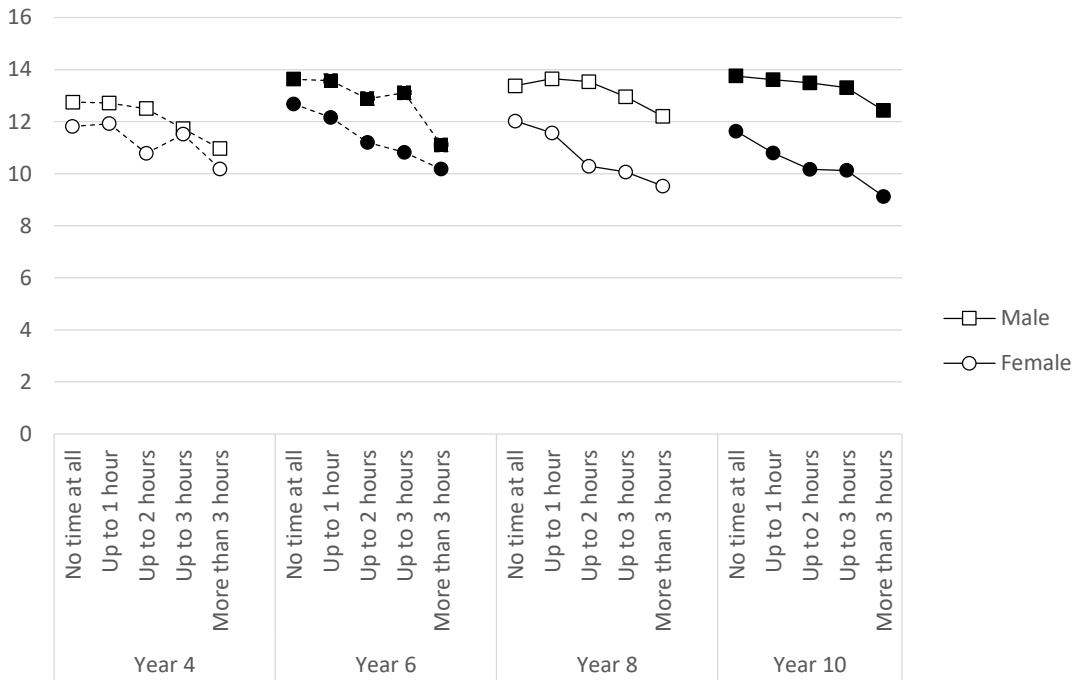


Chart 35. Mean esteem scores, by hours spent last night playing computer games, by year and sex (N=23,212).

For playing computer games, only among Year 8 males is there anything of a ‘Goldilocks’ curve, while for other groups there is a much more linear relationship: with more hours of computer games played last night, we see lower self-esteem scores.

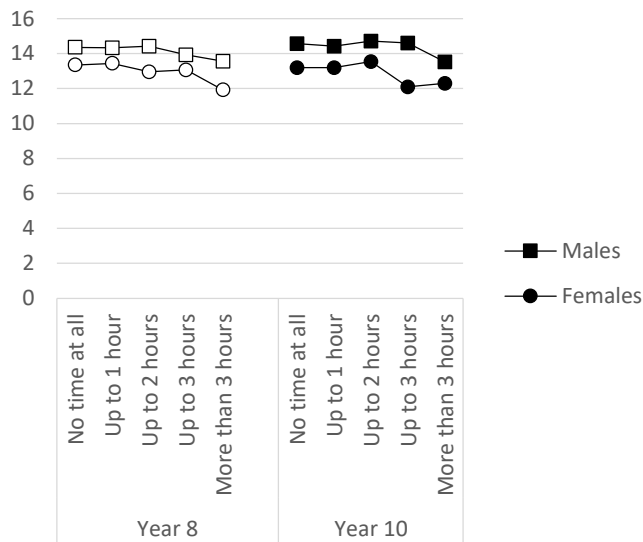


Chart 36. Mean esteem scores, by hours spent last night Using the Internet on a computer, phone or other device, by year and sex (N=4,214).

For Internet use and esteem scores, we see again lower esteem scores with more than 2 hours of use, although the differences are not large.

For a last clue, we also looked at homework, another activity for which we often collect a report of the hours spent on the evening before the survey.

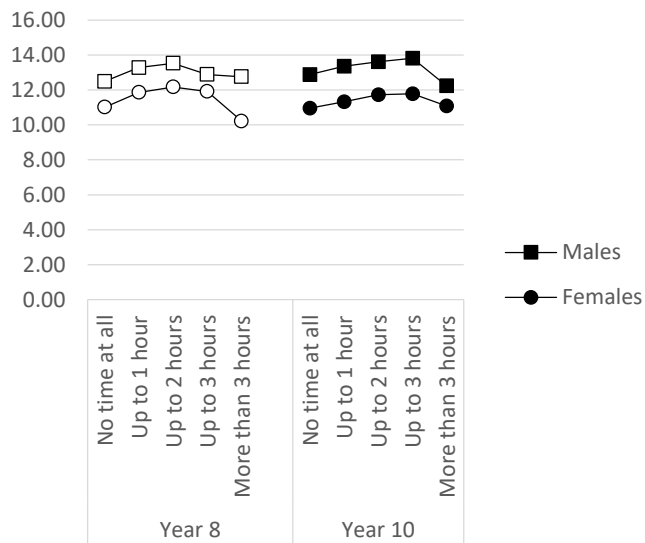


Chart 37. Mean esteem scores, by hours spent last night doing homework, by year and sex (N=23,909).

Among secondary school pupils, we see once more a ‘humped’ Goldilocks relationship, where more than two hours in Y8 or three hours in Y10 is less than optimal for self-esteem.

What can we conclude from this multiplicity of charts?

1. Higher levels of use of TV/phones/games/Internet are all linked to poorer emotional wellbeing in secondary pupils
2. But we do not yet understand what the direction of cause and effect might be
3. And the relationships are not simple, rather are often U-shaped
4. Excess homework seems no less toxic to self-esteem than screen time.

We might add that the difference in wellbeing between the highest and lowest users is not huge – we see many larger effects in the rest of the report.

Relationships between emotional wellbeing and risky behaviours

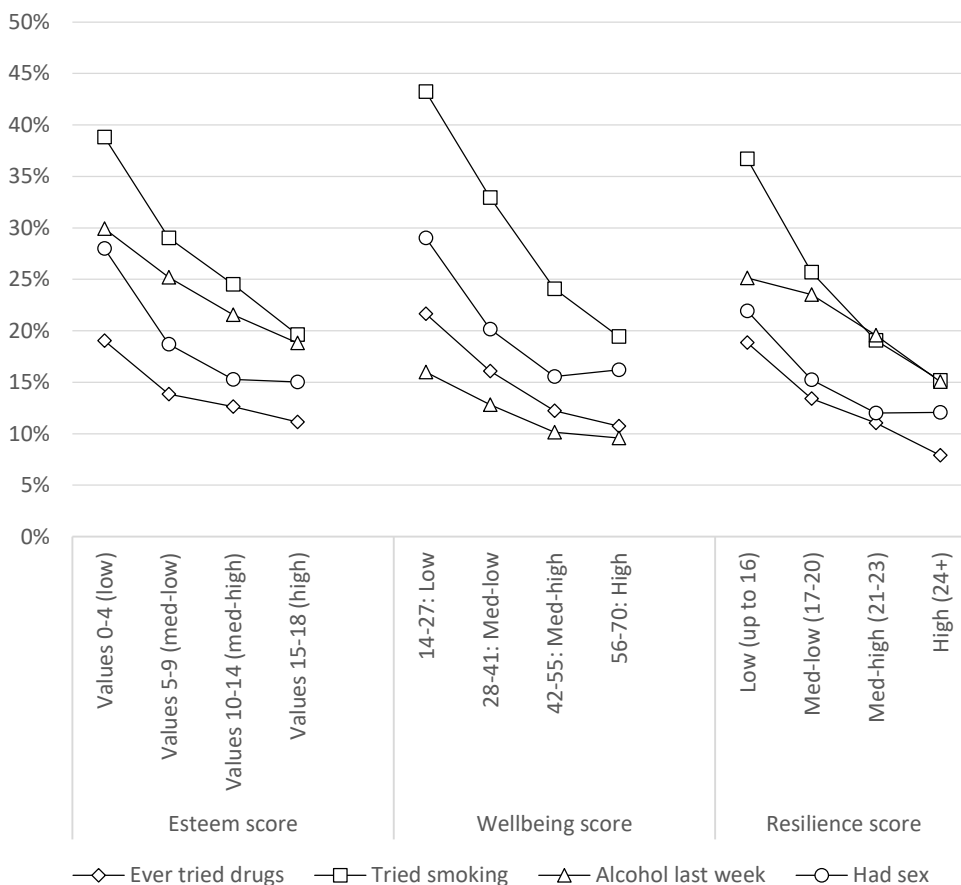


Chart 38. Year 10 pupils in each group of wellbeing measures who reported risky behaviours, 2017-2018.

The sample sizes for this multiple analysis are as follows:

	N	Drugs	Smoking	Alcohol	Sex
Esteem		22,350	22,296	15,635	10,637
SWEMWBS		9,752	10,406	4,317	5,987
Resilience		23,379	20,756	11,491	16,995

We have shown on the chart above the proportions of year 10 pupils reporting various risky behaviours (ever tried drugs, ever tried smoking, drinking alcohol last week, and having had sex), by their scores on three wellbeing measures (self-esteem, SWEMWBS, resilience score). These reports generally decline from left to right.

Positive wellbeing looks like a protective factor for risky behaviours in our data sets, as has often been reported in the recent literature⁶, although, as usual, other processes of cause and effect can be going on. We have more to say about this in the next section!

⁶ O’Connell, M. E., Boat, T., & Warner, K. E. (2009). *Preventing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among young people: Progress and possibilities*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (2009). *Risk and protective factors for mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders across the life cycle*.

Part 6: Trends in relationships between questions

We can see from the last analysis in the previous Part 5 that positive wellbeing looks like a protective factor for risky behaviours. However, that hasn't always been the case. If we divide the Year 10 sample by bracket of esteem scores and look at their reports of cannabis tries, for the decade of the 1990s, the group most often reporting experimenting with cannabis was the high-self-esteem group. For the last decade, the group most often reporting experimenting with cannabis was the low-self-esteem group.

	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Values 0-4 (low)	1	3	2	3	5	9	8	7	9	12	9	14	10	8	11	14	15	16	16	12	10	11	12	9	17	13	7	10	12	8	8	8
Values 5-9 (med-low)	2	1	3	4	6	9	8	8	12	12	9	11	10	10	13	15	11	16	12	11	11	10	9	9	8	11	8	7	7	6	6	6
Values 10-14 (med-high)	2	2	4	5	8	10	11	11	15	17	12	14	13	12	15	16	14	18	12	11	12	10	8	8	8	11	8	7	7	6	6	6
Values 15-18 (high)	2	2	5	6	10	14	16	15	21	23	16	17	15	15	20	18	16	20	14	13	13	12	9	9	8	12	7	6	6	5	6	6

Table 10. Pupils in each self-esteem group who said they had tried cannabis, Year 10 pupils only, 1987-2018, (N= 567,367).

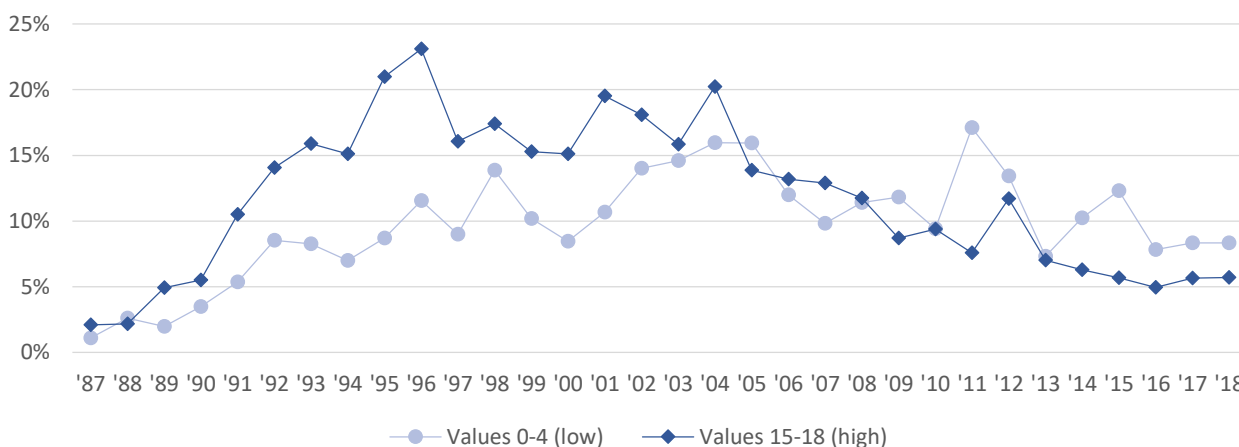


Chart 39. Pupils in each self-esteem group who said they had tried cannabis, Year 10 only, 1987-2018, (N= 567,367).

We can see this on the chart: the highest point on the chart is from the high-self-esteem group (◆) in 1996; the high self-esteem line lies clearly above the others for this period of time, then sinks relative to the others until it is the lowest line. By contrast, the line for the low-self-esteem group (●) climbs above the other lines during the last decade. We can show a similar pattern of these groups swapping places for alcohol⁷, and we can show the same swap in a data series from one local authority.

What could be going on here? In the 1990s, we used to explain the higher reports of substance use among the high-self-esteem group by supposing that this group is perhaps more outgoing, and so more likely to encounter alcohol and cannabis in social situations and be more confident in using them. We can also see on the chart that cannabis tries were quite common in the 1990s, while current reports are rather lower; this is also true for alcohol use. So perhaps, since high self-esteem is fostered by being in a social group which approves of and supports your actions, then, as alcohol and cannabis use has declined, we see higher self-esteem scores among those displaying this now normal and desirable non-use.

⁷ Regis, D. (2017). Trends and research in young people's alcohol and substance use. *Education and Health* 35(1), 3-5.

Part 7: Annual cycles

The very large and long-standing data collection exercise that arises from the work of SHEU enables some unique analysis to be done. Most longitudinal or cross-sectional surveys will represent young people from only one part of the calendar year, but we run surveys in each school term, and have information throughout the year. This allows us to track changes in the annual cycle for young people's attitudes and behaviours.

It's hard to tell exactly when pupils complete questionnaires on paper – there can be a delay between surveys being conducted in a school and their arrival in our office. But online, the computer creates a record at the time of completion, and so we have dates for all questionnaires completed online. All the analysis below in this Part is for online questionnaires only.

■ Annual cycle in self-esteem

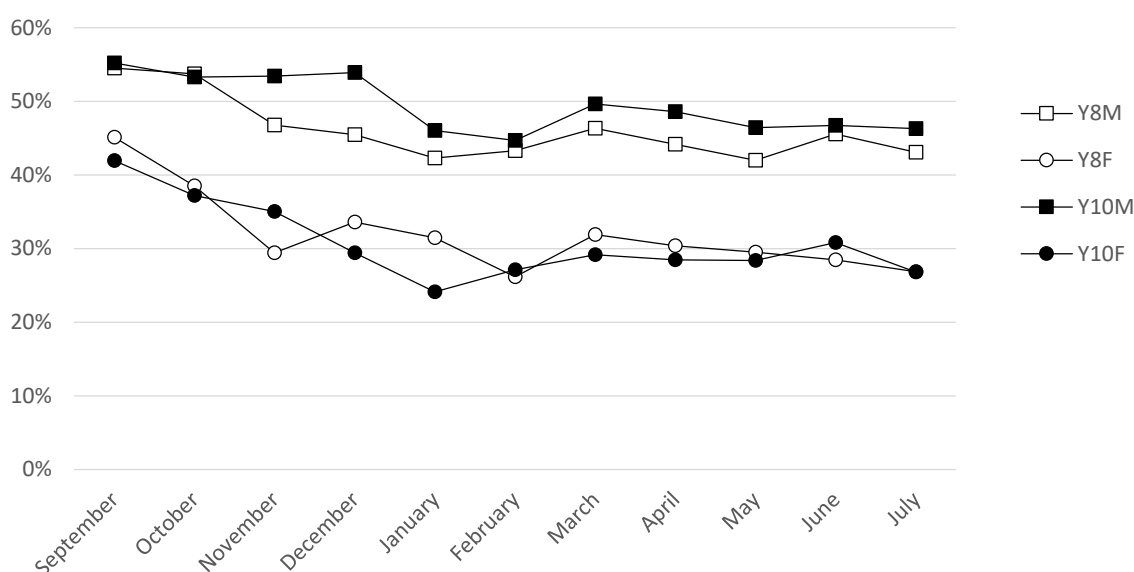


Chart 40. Percentage of young people scoring in the high brackets of self-esteem scores, by year and sex and month of completion, 2001-2018 (N= 110,511).

Over the last two decades, the proportion of secondary pupils scoring in the high bracket of self-esteem scores was highest in September, and the figure for each month then declines until February. There is a bump upwards in March (Spring? the clocks going forward?), but figures then seem to decline again towards the Summer. This pattern seems to apply to Year 8 and Year 10, and to males and females in each year group, and the differences over the seasons are statistically significant.

This is not an age-related decline, as the September Year 10 figures for males and females are similar to the September Year 8 figures; any decline by July seems to have recovered by September the following year, and we might guess that Year 9 pupils show just the same pattern. This strongly implies that the Summer holiday is good for young people's self-esteem; going to school, not so much.

This could be an artefact of other secular changes – for example, if pupils' self-esteem is declining over the last two decades, and if surveys get done later in the year over the same period, then we might see the same pattern. But we checked by looking at the larger single-year samples, and see very much the same pattern, although the month-by-month 'wobble' is greater. We have also done our best to rule out deprivation as a confounding factor to this pattern.

This does raise the question: can we discover what might lie behind this cycle?

■ Annual cycle in fear of bullying

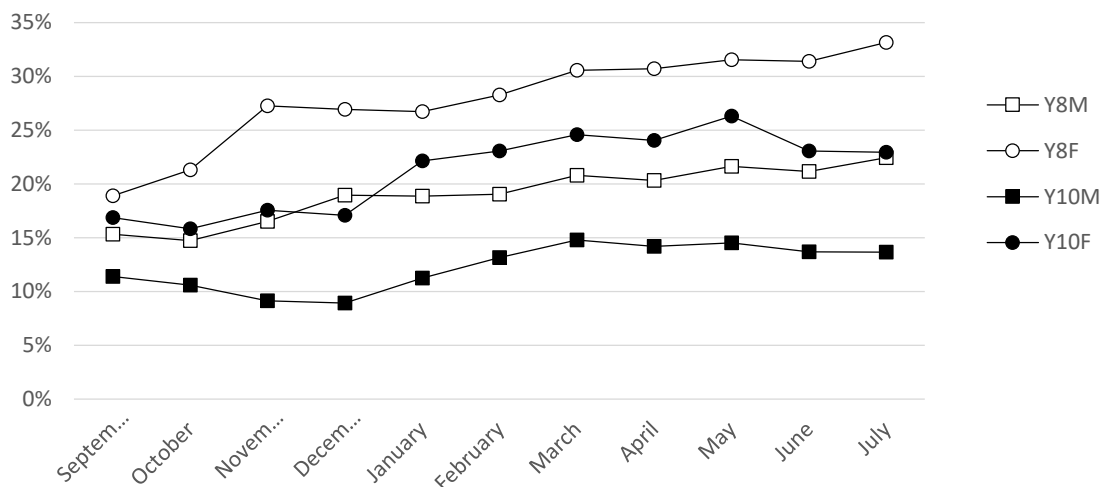


Chart 41. Percentage of young people at least 'sometimes' afraid to go to school because of bullying, by year and sex and month of completion, 2001-2018 (N=62,754)

Worry about bullying climbs throughout the school year, but seems it must drop over the Summer for us to see a decline from Year 8 to Year 10.

We know fear of bullying is associated with lower self-esteem, so whatever causal relationship is going on there may also account for the changes in fear of bullying and self-esteem that we see across the school year.

■ Annual cycle in worry about school

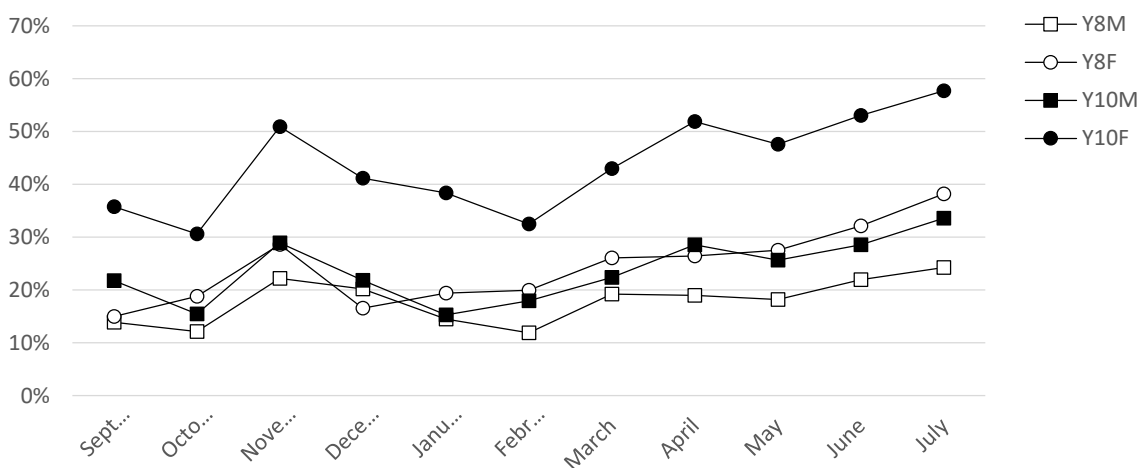


Chart 42. Percentage of young people worrying at least 'quite a lot' about school, by year and sex and month of completion, 2001-2018 (N= 380,219)

Worry about school (or school/exams/tests) generally seems to climb during the year approaching the end-of-year exams, but there is a notable peak in November, after half-term, that we find hard to account for.

Part 8: Conclusions

We believe there is much support in our data for the widely-held belief that young people’s **emotional wellbeing has declined in recent years**, as seen in results for self-esteem, satisfaction, and worries.

This decline is found in secondary school pupils rather than primary school pupils, and most strongly in **Year 10 females** (14-15yo).

There may be some important **consequences** of poor emotional wellbeing, as it is associated with greater levels of risky behaviour and lower levels of health-promoting behaviour, including more **skipping meals**, lower levels of **exercise**, less time **asleep**, and higher levels of substance use and bullying. Directions of cause and effect are not shown, but poor emotional wellbeing is an outcome of **importance in itself**, whatever effect it may be producing in other behaviours.

There are many links between poor emotional wellbeing and various aspects of **screen time**, but these are not large enough to account for the trends and patterns that we see, and neither is the relationship straightforward.

We have reported here for the first time a **decline in self-esteem during the school year**, from September to February, while fear of bullying and worry about schoolwork both increase during the school year. The last is perhaps an acceptable consequence of end-of-year exams, but the other findings are more surprising and unwelcome.



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Please contact us if you would like to know more about our work, or if you are interested in carrying out a survey of the young people in your locality.

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Appendices

■ Appendix: Sample sizes

Table 11. Complete sample sizes in each annual data set, SHEU 2000-2018

Sample / Yr.	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Schools	389	334	499	196	452	310	787	526	1,100	783	1,199	579	507	619	1,070	1,097	1,038	1,199	963
Primary pupils	23,988	14,157	13,859	8,158	17,309	13,978	37,874	16,061	39,882	24,854	38,417	28,083	41,569	35,727	54,705	60,488	53,864	62,870	46,032
Secondary pupils	30,276	11,575	29,190	10,804	32,973	23,954	53,557	29,400	66,352	39,343	76,583	25,965	52,059	22,513	55,987	47,635	61,026	68,090	49,722
All pupils	54,264	25,732	43,049	18,962	50,282	37,932	91,431	45,461	106,234	64,650	115,000	54,058	93,628	58,242	110,692	108,123	114,930	134,216	105,308
Selected ages																			
Y4 M 8-9 y																9,940	7,693	10,299	6,569
Y4 F 8-9 y																9,683	7,590	10,363	6,370
Y6 M 10-11 y	6,511	3,367	4,067	2,422	4,947	3,373	10,339	4,549	11,363	6,491	13,373	6,470	11,091	6,068	12,644	11,768	11,824	11,824	9,808
Y6 F 10-11 y	6,391	3,425	3,938	2,300	4,870	3,336	9,910	4,348	10,952	6,215	12,970	6,321	10,823	5,746	12,506	11,380	11,700	11,700	9,972
Y8 M 12-13 y	7,180	2,553	7,075	3,101	7,553	3,028	11,682	4,464	14,211	6,842	14,273	4,662	11,078	4,605	13,515	9,999	14,459	13,653	10,074
Y8 F 12-13 y	7,548	2,249	7,057	2,891	7,427	2,664	11,933	4,646	15,133	7,253	14,819	4,750	10,754	5,041	13,770	10,683	14,927	13,608	10,135
Y10 M 14-15 y	7,034	2,219	7,533	2,474	8,782	2,691	11,987	6,762	14,079	8,067	13,790	4,487	12,308	4,412	12,909	7,867	11,900	12,513	8,694
Y10 F 14-15 y	7,409	2,088	7,480	2,448	9,220	2,651	12,644	7,393	14,810	8,168	14,499	4,664	12,540	4,838	13,107	8,900	12,100	12,360	8,404
Total	42,073	15,901	37,150	15,636	42,799	17,743	68,494	32,162	80,548	43,014	83,724	31,354	68,594	30,710	78,451	80,220	92,193	100,976	71,368

■ Appendix: Replication of 1998 findings

We can confirm some of the associations first found in 1998

For example, it is found that people who worry more are also:

- More likely to have used drugs
- More likely to have low self-esteem
- More likely to feel uneasy when seeing their GP
- More likely to report having accidents
- More likely to consider their health when choosing what to eat
- Less likely to have adults they can trust
- Less likely to live with their mother and father together

These findings are largely duplicated in this report, but we have been able to extend our analysis in a number of ways, as reported above.

For example, it is found that people who worry more are also:	1998	2018
• More likely to have used drugs	✓	✓
• More likely to have low self-esteem	✓	✓
• More likely to feel uneasy when seeing their GP	✓	✓
• More likely to report having accidents	✓	
• More likely to consider their health when choosing what to eat	✓	✓
• Less likely to have adults they can trust	✓	✓
• Less likely to live with their mother and father together	✓	✓

We haven't reported all the 2018 replication analysis in the current report, as it doesn't really advance our understanding, but we have given it on our website: www.sheu.org.uk/content/page/no-worries-2019

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