

THE ENVIRONMENT AND WORLD EVENTS

Introduction

The Girls' Attitudes Survey was launched by Girlguiding UK in 2009, at the start of our Centenary year. We aim to canvass the opinions of girls and young women throughout the UK, to find out about what matters in their lives and how they see the world today. This major survey, now in its third year, explores girls' views on a range of issues of topical interest, enabling us to discover what motivates and inhibits them, and the ways in which they respond to the pressures of everyday life.

This year's survey continues to build on findings from previous years, tracking changes that have occurred over time and questioning more deeply into the same topic areas, as well as asking about the impact of recent events. The survey goes beyond Girlguiding UK's membership to cover all girls and young women, in a comprehensive overview that can contribute to external as well as internal policy.

All the results from the 2011 survey can be found on our interactive Girls' Attitudes Survey website, www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes. Visit the site to search the results by theme, region and age group, compare them with results from previous years, access individual data sets and download PDF versions of our reports.

Research findings

Awareness of global events

This survey was compiled at a time when a succession of global events, both natural and man-made, were hitting the headlines. Girls within guiding felt that this was a topic that merited further investigation.

Survey respondents were given a list of nine major events, from the oil leaks in the Gulf of Mexico in the summer of 2010 to the widening protests in the Middle East and North Africa. Most – 93 per cent – of the respondents were aware of at least one of these, and the average girl knew about between four and five events out of the nine.

Awareness increased with age, but even among the youngest girls (aged 7 to 10), more than eight out of ten knew of at least one of the events.

- Three in four knew about the war in Afghanistan (73 per cent), rising from 53 per cent of 7 to 10s to 88 per cent of those aged 16 to 21.
- Almost two in three knew about the protests in Egypt/Tunisia/Libya/Bahrain (64 per cent), the earthquake in New Zealand (63 per cent), and the student protests in London (61 per cent).
- Just over half were aware of the floods/cyclone in Australia (56 per cent) and the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico (52 per cent).
- Smaller numbers had heard about the bombing at Moscow Airport at the end of 2010 (31 per cent), the floods in South America (28 per cent), or the floods in the Philippines (25 per cent) – these latter two received far less coverage than the events

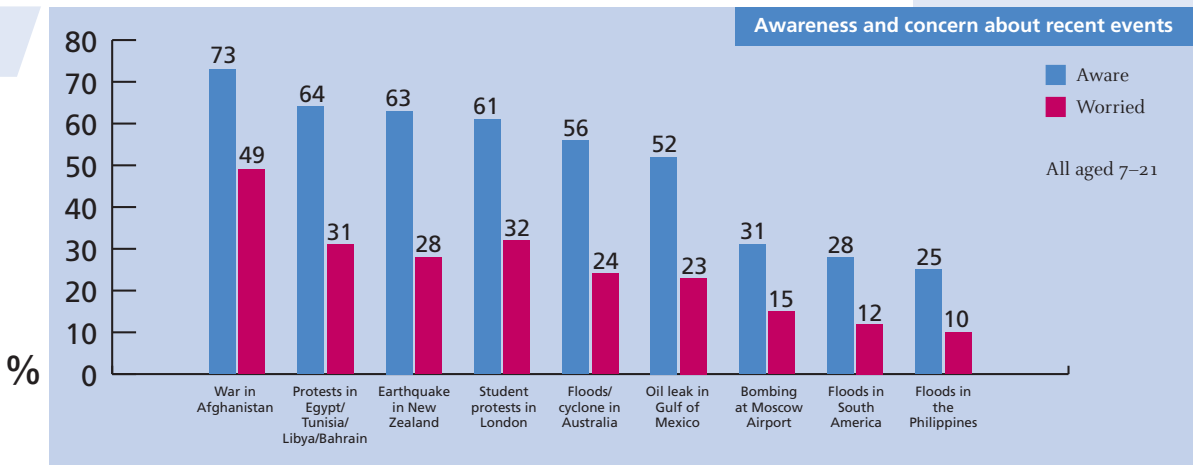


Girls' Attitudes

in Australia, despite the comparable devastation and, especially for South America, far greater loss of life.

■ The earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan were unfolding as fieldwork was taking place – one in seven girls mentioned these spontaneously.

While awareness was widespread, far fewer girls were actively worried about most of these events. The war in Afghanistan was the greatest concern, with half of all girls worried about this (49 per cent), but none of the other events touched more than one in three. Overall, girls were worried about an average of just over two out of the nine events.



Girls from the majority white community were slightly more likely to express awareness and concern about the war in Afghanistan, compared with those from ethnic minorities: 75 per cent aware, and 52 per cent worried, compared with 69 per cent and 45 per cent for black and minority ethnic (BME) girls.

Girls' thoughts about the environment and world events

Global warming and wider environmental concerns have been prominent in the news over the last year. The succession of climate-related disasters has made these issues increasingly relevant, and also underlined the way in which they are affecting parts of the world which have much in common with girls' own communities – for example Australia and New Zealand.

Two in three 7- to 21-year-olds agree that global warming is a very serious problem (67 per cent), with 13 per cent disagreeing – this shows a slight shift in opinion compared with a year ago, when 68 per cent agreed and 11 per cent disagreed.

The number who say that they are fed up with hearing about climate change and global warming has dropped this year, to 33 per cent (39 per cent of those aged 7 to 21 in 2010), while a growing number disagree (47 per cent, up from 40 per cent last year). It is those aged 11 to 16 who are the most disillusioned, with 42 per cent saying that they are fed up, compared with 40 per cent who disagree.

A growing number of those aged 11 to 21 now hold adults responsible for environmental damage. Over half (55 per cent) agree that 'I am angry that adults have damaged the environment, and our generation will have to deal with this', up from 38 per cent last year. The number who disagree has dropped to 30 per cent this year (43 per cent in 2010). Views are consistent across the age range.



Half of girls worry about the war in Afghanistan.

damage is already done (12 per cent), it is up to government or large organisations to act (10 per cent), there is no point in taking action (9 per cent), global warming is part of a natural cycle (8 per cent), they are too young to do anything (5 per cent) and it is not their fault (3 per cent).

Those who feel that there are steps that they could take talked about recycling (49 per cent), walking or using public transport rather than driving (47 per cent), and trying to use less electricity, eg by turning off lights and equipment (36 per cent) or generally saving energy (10 per cent). Others mentioned using less water (9 per cent). A minority talked about switching to renewable energy (8 per cent), or getting more informed and informing others (6 per cent).

Some talked more broadly about not littering (6 per cent) ... a general environmental action rather than one that specifically addresses global warming.

Conclusions

Recent global events have made a definite impact on girls; even among the youngest there is widespread awareness of political disturbances and environmental disasters. Significant minorities express concern about these events, especially where these touch them in some way, such as the war in Afghanistan with its regular toll of soldiers killed and families losing loved ones.

For older girls, the student protests that occurred during the spring had strong resonance, with many themselves concerned about the impact of cuts and university fee increases on their own education prospects.

Perhaps as a consequence of the succession of environmental disasters that played out over the winter of 2010/2011, girls are increasingly concerned about global warming. Growing anger at the damage done by previous generations is balanced by greater belief that their own efforts can help redress the balance, and a willingness to keep global warming on the agenda.

Girls are receptive to wider initiatives relating to fair trade and to workers' rights, with the majority opposed, at least in theory, to the idea of cheap clothes produced by exploited workers. Only a minority feel that too much fuss is made about where food comes from. Their limited spending power may make this a theoretical argument for many, but their attention has been engaged.

Some are frustrated by their powerlessness, and by the fact that governments and big business do not seem to be taking the necessary steps. The environment is not among the top causes that would inspire volunteering among girls, losing out to work with children, animals, and the elderly (see the 'Society, Culture and Community' report), but it nevertheless inspires more than one in four to volunteer.

The way forward

The action points listed below were suggested by Girlguiding UK's Guiding Advocates, a panel of young women aged between 15 and 24, who reviewed this year's survey findings. They carried out similar reviews of the 2009 and 2010 surveys, and helped to develop this year's questions.

- Many girls believe there is little benefit in doing things to protect the environment because one person cannot make a difference. Environmental organisations and government can motivate girls and young women by highlighting the difference that small actions can make, for example by demonstrating the energy saved in a single house by turning the heating down by one or two degrees.
- Increased reporting of environmental successes, however small, would combat the perception that there is nothing that can be done to protect the environment or that it is too late to make a difference.

•[The environment] is boring and I am not into that stuff because I am a girly girl not a scientist. •
[7-year-old]

- Girls' feelings of powerlessness as individuals to make a positive difference to the environment, and their frustration that government and businesses are not doing enough, suggest the need for legislation to compel those bodies that are capable of slowing the progress of climate change to do so.
- Many young people seem to be immune to messages about sustainability because they hear so much about it, particularly at school. Encouraging young people who feel strongly about this to spread the message to their peers could be more effective than relying on formal educational settings where messages are delivered by adults.
- Highlighting the economic benefits of conserving energy could encourage girls and young women to take action. Schemes where schools appoint pupils to be responsible for ensuring that appliances and lights are turned off at the end of each day, and use the money saved on electricity bills to buy something tangible that the pupils benefit from, could illustrate the benefits of conserving energy.

Methodology

Some 1,200 girls and young women aged between 7 and 21 took part in the 2011 Girls' Attitudes Survey. They were asked about their views on key social, political and economic issues, following on from previous Girls' Attitudes Surveys carried out in 2009 and 2010.

The survey covers five topic areas, originally proposed by girls within the guiding movement as areas that are important and interesting. Questions were designed to follow up views identified in the previous surveys, and explore these in greater depth.

- Education, training, skills and careers
- The environment and world events
- Family and relationships
- Health and well-being
- Society, culture and community

A panel of young women from within guiding works with the project team to develop the survey each year, and to comment on the findings. This year we also consulted pre-teen guiding members, who gave us valuable insights. The research itself represents all girls and young women across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and is not restricted to those involved in guiding.

The majority of interviews were completed online, with 7- to 16-year-olds doing this in school, while the older age group were interviewed via an online panel. Additional face-to-face interviews were carried out with young women who were not in education, employment, or training, to ensure that this potentially marginalised group was fully represented.

The questionnaire was adapted to be suitable for different age groups: 7 to 11, 11 to 16 and 16 to 21 years. Core questions were asked across the full age range, so that changes in attitudes as girls get older can be tracked.

Fieldwork took place during March and April 2011.



**'A personal effort
isn't going to change
anything. A
collective change is
needed.'**
(21-year-old)



COMPARISONS: 2009, 2010 AND 2011

Girls' engagement with the challenge of global warming has strengthened over the last year.

- Fewer are fed up with hearing about climate change and global warming, down from 39 per cent in 2010 to 33 per cent this year.
- A growing number hold adults responsible for environmental damage: 55 per cent of 11 to 21s are angry that adults have damaged the environment, and their generation will have to deal with this, up from 38 per cent last year.
- More girls disagree with the statement 'there's nothing I can do that will have any effect on global warming' – 64 per cent, up from 60 per cent last year.

17-19 Buckingham Palace Road
London SW1W 0PT Tel: 020 7834 6242
Email: girlsattitudes@girlguiding.org.uk

© The Guide Association 2011
Girlguiding UK is an operating name of The Guide Association.
Registered charity number 306016. Incorporated by Royal Charter.

For copies of these reports, please visit our website at
www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes, email girlsattitudes@girlguiding.org.uk
or call 020 7592 1733.

