

## SOCIETY, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

### 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](http://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

#### How happy are you most of the time?

Most girls and young women (89 per cent) are happy most of the time, including one in three who are very happy (35 per cent). But there is a minority, especially among the older girls, whose lives are not happy (8 per cent), and this rises to 14 per cent of girls from black and minority ethnic groups (BME). As girls grow up, they are less likely to consider themselves very happy – more than half of the youngest girls, aged 7 to 8, are very happy (59 per cent), compared with just 19 per cent of those aged over 16.

#### What makes you happy?

Two things are central to girls' happiness – friends and family. More than three in five say that friends make them happy (62 per cent), while 37 per cent are happy because of their family, with a further 9 per cent (mainly older) mentioning their partner or boyfriend, and 4 per cent (especially younger girls) their mum or dad.

#### What makes you unhappy?

School, college or university tops the list of things that make girls unhappy, cited by one in ten girls overall, and by 24 per cent of those who are not happy. Girls at secondary school are the most likely to mention school. One in ten of those who are unhappy say that this is because they have no job (11 per cent) or because of money worries (10 per cent) – both reasons are most common among the oldest girls.



# Girls' Attitudes

One in ten of those who are not happy say that this is because they have no friends (10 per cent), 8 per cent refer to family concerns, and 7 per cent to friends' behaviour. This last is most common among girls at primary school. At secondary school, the main causes of unhappiness are school itself and family. Older girls are most affected by lack of jobs, problems at college or university, and financial insecurity.

## Volunteering

Just over half of those aged 11 to 21 are involved in volunteering (55 per cent). One in five volunteers regularly (20 per cent), 29 per cent carry out informal voluntary activities, and one in six occasionally volunteers (16 per cent). Just 7 per cent are involved in local democracy. Volunteering is higher in rural areas, and among those from good or outstanding schools. Among 16- to 21-year-olds, just 35 per cent of those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) volunteer.

## Favourite causes

By far the most popular cause, especially for younger girls, is working with young children – 62 per cent would like to volunteer here. Almost half would most like to work with animals (44 per cent), 33 per cent favour helping the elderly, and others chose helping disabled people (29 per cent) or the environment (27 per cent).

Girls are positive about the idea of universal volunteering. Almost two in three agree that 'society would be better if everyone was made to volunteer their time' (62 per cent), with 19 per cent agreeing strongly and few disagreeing (11 per cent). Among 16 to 21s, those still in education are more likely to support universal volunteering (68 per cent) than those who are working or NEET (59 per cent).

## What makes girls volunteer?

Those who already volunteer do so because they care about the cause (74 per cent), but also because it is something to put on their CV, or a chance to earn a certificate or award (66 per cent). Almost half are motivated by feeling part of their local community (45 per cent), or are keen to gain university or education credits (44 per cent).

More than half of those who do not volunteer would consider doing it for something to put on their CV or a chance to earn an award (57 per cent), or if it was a cause they cared about (53 per cent). Next in terms of motivation is payment for their time (44 per cent). While just 15 per cent would be drawn to a cause that is supported by a famous person they admire, this rises to 24 per cent of 11 to 16s.

## Speaking up about a cause

Seven out of ten girls aged 11 to 21 have made their views known about an issue that they care about (70 per cent). Half (49 per cent) have supported a Facebook campaign or Twitter feed, while 39 per cent have signed a petition. Smaller numbers have spoken up about a cause (28 per cent), posted online, blogged or tweeted in support (27 per cent), taken part in a protest, demonstration or march (14 per cent), or written to their local councillor or MP (9 per cent) or local media (5 per cent).

Just 16 per cent of those who have spoken up feel that it made a difference, compared to 30 per cent who thought there was no effect. Half (48 per cent) were unsure either way.

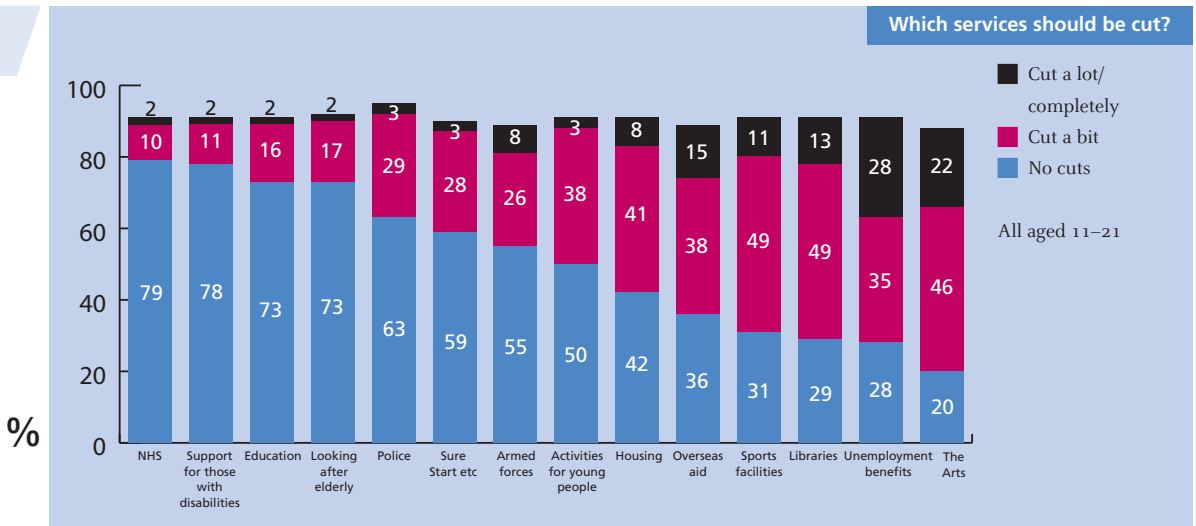
## Government spending

To explore girls' views on the current government spending cuts, we asked them to say, from a list of 14 spending areas, whether each should be cut at all, and if so how deeply. Strongest support was shown for the NHS, care for people with disabilities, care for the elderly and education.

Over half of girls aged 11 to 21 are involved in volunteering.



Seventy per cent of girls have made their views known about a cause they believe in.



Older girls are more willing to see cuts made – a third (35 per cent) of 16 to 21s think that unemployment benefits should be cut a lot or completely, compared with 20 per cent of 11 to 16s, and 21 per cent support major cuts in overseas aid (8 per cent of 11 to 16s). Girls from ethnic minorities are more opposed to cuts in unemployment benefit (41 per cent compared with 25 per cent of white girls), overseas aid (40 per cent vs 34 per cent), sports facilities (37 per cent vs 29 per cent) and libraries (36 per cent vs 27 per cent), while white girls feel more protective of the NHS (82 per cent compared with 72 per cent of BME girls), the police (65 per cent vs 52 per cent), and the armed forces (58 per cent vs 39 per cent). There are also clear differences between those from urban and rural areas, with rural girls generally more likely to advocate cuts.

**Two thirds of girls support universal volunteering.**

## Girls' views on government spending

Almost half think that the government spends on the wrong things (48 per cent), while a similar number believe that the spending cuts are unfair and will harm vulnerable people (45 per cent). But 29 per cent believe that cutting benefits will encourage people to take responsibility for their own lives, and that government spending is too high (28 per cent).

Among those aged 16 to 21, when having a job and paying income tax are real or imminent concerns, just 14 per cent say that they would be willing to pay more tax if this meant better services for everyone.

## Involvement with the local community

Over half of girls and young women know many of their neighbours by name (53 per cent), and 36 per cent have done something to help a neighbour in the last year. Three in five feel safe in their local area (60 per cent, up slightly from 56 per cent last year), half think that this country is a good place to live and grow up (47 per cent), and 29 per cent feel that they are part of their local community.

## Involvement in guiding

Almost half of all girls are or have been involved in guiding (48 per cent): 37 per cent are or have been Brownies, 21 per cent Rainbows, and 15 per cent Guides. Involvement is lower for those from ethnic minorities, 26 per cent of whom are or have been guiding members, compared with 53 per cent of girls from white backgrounds. Among 16- to 21-year-olds, 37 per cent of those who are NEET have been involved in guiding (compared with 52 per cent for those who are still in education or are working).



## Role models

Girls look to their immediate circle for role models – 29 per cent of girls across the age range choose mum. A further 11 per cent say that they most look up to their parents, and 4 per cent name dad. Also mentioned are sisters (6 per cent), friends (5 per cent), family as a whole (5 per cent) and teacher or lecturer (4 per cent).

A minority mention well-known figures, mainly singers or actors – Cheryl Cole tops this list at 4 per cent. In a follow-up question, girls were asked to choose role models from a list of well-known women. Top choices for all bar the oldest group are primarily celebrities – Cheryl Cole, Emma Watson, Lady Gaga, Fearne Cotton; and, for the youngest, TV characters Hannah Montana and Tracy Beaker.



Girls give a variety of reasons for their choice of role model. The youngest in particular mention the fact that someone is pretty and has nice clothes and hair; they are also impressed by a successful singing or acting career. But others, especially as they get older, are inspired by those who show dedication to a cause or ambition, have won through against difficulties or work to help others.

## How girls/young women are portrayed in the media

Girls are becoming increasingly disillusioned about the media's portrayal of women. Over half of those aged 11 to 21 disagree with the statement that 'girls and young women are portrayed fairly in the media' (55 per cent, increasing to 69 per cent of older girls), while just 23 per cent are in agreement. Last year, views were split, with 27 per cent agreeing and the same number disagreeing, while almost half were unsure.

Almost all feel that TV and magazines focus too much on what women look like instead of what they achieve (90 per cent), and 82 per cent think that there's a lot of pressure on girls to wear the latest fashions and have the latest gadgets. Again, the older girls hold these views most strongly.

On the wider role of women in society, 72 per cent feel that 'we need more women in parliament and in business', while just over half believe that women have to work much harder than men to succeed (57 per cent, rising to 70 per cent of those from ethnic minorities), that there aren't enough female role models (55 per cent), and that women do not have the same chances as men (53 per cent).

## Conclusions

Family and friends are central to girls' lives, and they are also involved with their neighbours and the wider community, informally or through organised volunteering. Role models are drawn from those closest to them, but girls also admire high-profile women who are successful and show determination and courage.

Mum is the top role model for 29 per cent of girls.

# Girls' Attitudes

Levels of happiness have not changed over the last year, and most girls are generally happy. Friends and family are the main factors that make them happy, but a lack of friends, or their attitudes and behaviour, often causes unhappiness. School is the major source of unhappiness for those at secondary level, while for young women, it is money worries and the lack of a job. The current economic climate and the pressure on girls to do well from an ever-younger age may increase these worries in the future.

Volunteering is increasingly on the agenda, with young people encouraged to broaden their experience and build cohesion through volunteering. Over half of all girls from age 11 upwards are already active as volunteers. While many are motivated by specific causes, others are volunteering because it builds their CV and experience. Only the youngest are inspired by celebrity involvement.

Most have also supported a cause in some way, mainly by signing a petition or joining a Facebook group. High levels of this kind of involvement show that girls are keen to contribute to society, although they may lack the time and know-how to be proactive in their support.

They feel strongly about the planned government spending cuts, with most opposed to cuts to the NHS, education, and support for those with disabilities and the elderly. But they are surprisingly willing to condone cuts to services that potentially affect themselves – the arts, libraries and sports facilities, unemployment benefits and housing, and also overseas aid.

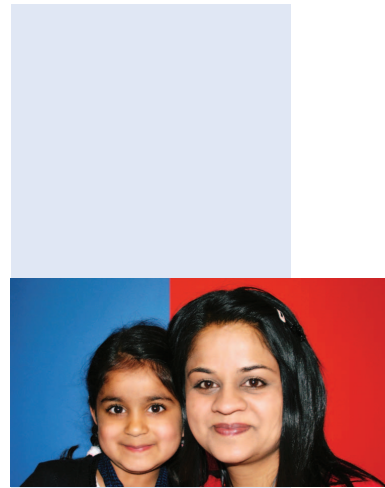
There is much discussion of the need for strong role models to encourage girls to aspire and achieve, but our research increasingly underlines the fact that mums, sisters, friends and wider family have the greatest influence. When girls are asked to select high-profile women who are good role models, Cheryl Cole tops the list. Actor Emma Watson scores well with older girls for her determination to continue her education. Sportswomen Jessica Ennis and Beth Tweddle are admired for their skills and dedication, and TV personality Fearne Cotton for her support for good causes.

Overall girls are not impressed with the way that the media portrays women, focusing too much on appearances and pressuring girls to keep up with the latest trends. They strongly feel that there should be more women in business and in parliament.

## 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.

- Girls and young women need flexible volunteering opportunities so that they can fit volunteering into their busy lives. More could also be done to make young people aware of how they will benefit from being a volunteer.
- Enabling young people to take part in community work through their school would introduce volunteering to those who don't already do it, as well as creating a stronger feeling of belonging in their local area.
- More emphasis needs to be placed on female role models who have achieved in their chosen field. Featuring these women more prominently in the media and in resources used in schools would encourage girls to aim high.
- The media also needs to improve its portrayal of girls and young women today, to reflect their varied experiences and interests rather than relying on gender-based stereotypes or simply focusing on appearance.
- This year's research shows that, in addition to making friends and having new experiences, girls in guiding are also less likely to be NEET. Promoting the long-term benefits of guiding to parents and girls will encourage more young women to join Girlguiding UK, where they will gain confidence and skills.



**'My friends are always there for me and that's what gives me the extra push in life.'**  
(14-year-old)

## 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.

## COMPARISONS: 2009, 2010 AND 2011

- Nine in ten girls are happy most of the time (89 per cent), including 35 per cent who are very happy: little change from last year, when 87 per cent felt happy most of the time and 34 per cent very happy, but still below two years ago, when 41 per cent of girls said that they were very happy.
- Fewer girls and young women know many of their neighbours by name (53 per cent, down from 57 per cent last year).
- More girls say they feel safe in their local area (60 per cent, up from 56 per cent last year).
- More girls do not think that girls and young women are portrayed fairly in the media (55 per cent, up from just 27 per cent last year).

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57 per cent of girls believe that women have to work much harder than men to succeed.

