

## **MORI Youth Survey 2008** young people in mainstream education



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The YJB would like to thank Anabelle Phillips, Helen Powell, Fiona Anderson and Amanda Popiel of Ipsos MORI for their work in compiling and writing the results of the full 2008 survey on which this summary is based.

© YJB 2009

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be photocopied, recorded or otherwise reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means without prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN: 978-1-906139-57-5

Cover photo posed by models



Youth Justice Board  
Bwrdd Cyfiawnder Ieuencid

# A summary of findings from the MORI Youth Survey 2008 among young people in mainstream education

---

## BACKGROUND

This is a summary of the key findings from the 2008 MORI Youth Survey of young people in mainstream education, carried out for the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) by Ipsos MORI. In total, 4,750 pupils aged 11 to 16 took part in the study. The research was conducted between 21 January and 11 April 2008.

## OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the research is to examine experience of crime, both as offender and victim, among 11–16-year-old young people in mainstream education. It also set out to measure what has changed for young people in England and Wales since the 2005 and 2004 Youth Surveys and, where applicable, to compare findings with the Youth Surveys Ipsos MORI has conducted annually for the YJB from 1999. In particular, the 2008 research looked at:

- the levels of offending among young people, the types of crimes committed and the circumstances in which the crimes take place
- the consequences of offending, reoffending and the deterrents to doing so
- the consequences of being caught committing a crime
- the carriage of weapons and the circumstances in which they are used by young people
- young people's concerns about their own safety, their experiences of being a victim of crime and the circumstances in which the incidents took place
- young people's experience of groups, and how this affects offending behaviour
- the levels of, and reasons for, truancy among young people
- the prevalence of alcohol and drug-taking among young people.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Self-completion questionnaires were completed by young people during interviewer-supervised, classroom-based sessions at 194 schools across England and Wales.

## **OFFENDING PATTERNS**

The majority of young people (68%) in mainstream education say that they had not committed a criminal offence in the 12 months prior to taking part in the 2008 Youth Survey. While 23% say they have offended, this represents a significant decrease from 2005 (27%) and 2004 (26%).

Year-on-year, the Youth Survey findings show that in the main, young people who have offended are committing low-level crime, the most common offence being travelling on a bus, train or tube without paying a fare (committed by 53% of pupils who self-report offending). When similar types of offences are grouped together, the categories with the highest proportion of young people self-reporting offending of this type are anti-social behaviour and theft/stealing (79% and 71%, respectively).

A higher proportion of boys admit to having committed an offence (27%) than girls, with the number of female offenders declining since 2005 (18% in 2008, compared to 21% in 2005).

Consistent with previous survey findings, offending levels appear to peak at the ages of 15–16. However, overall there has been a slight upward shift in the age that young people commit their first offence. They are now more likely to be between 12 and 13 years old, compared to 11 and 12 years old as seen in 2005. Consistent with previous years though, boys are typically younger when they first offend; nearly half (44%) of those who report offending say they first did so before the age of 12, compared with just over a quarter of girls (26%).

In line with previous years, young people who report offending are most likely to commit a criminal offence with their friends (64%) rather than on their own (20%). Only a very few commit offences with their siblings (2%) or someone else (2%).

**“The majority of young people in mainstream education say that they had not committed a criminal offence in the 12 months prior to taking part in the survey”**

When asked which of a range of circumstances related to offence/s committed in the past 12 months, young people most commonly cite boredom (25%), in line with the 2005 and 2004 surveys.<sup>1</sup> There have been increases in those citing being drunk or drinking alcohol (20% in 2008 versus 16% in 2005) or peer pressure (18% in 2008 versus 14% in 2005) as reasons for committing an offence in the last year.

**WHAT OFFENCES ARE YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTING?**

In line with the findings from the 2004 Youth Survey, the most common offences committed by young people in 2008 are:

- fare dodging (53%, compared with 56% in 2005 and 50% in 2004)
- stealing from shops (45%, an increase from 40% in 2005 and 35% in 2004)
- hurting someone who did not subsequently need medical attention (42%, compared with 46% in 2005 and 43% in 2004)
- damaging someone else’s property (39% versus 37% in 2005, and 34% in 2004)
- graffiti (33%, compared with 36% in 2005 and 35% in 2004)
- stolen anything in school (33%, an increase from 30% in 2005 and 29% in 2004).

Although boys report being the main culprits of threatening or assaulting behaviour overall (61% compared with 53%), it is girls who are significantly more likely to threaten others specifically through voicemail or text message (26% compared to 19%), while boys admit to more physical threats and abuse.

---

<sup>1</sup> In previous surveys this question has been in a different place in the questionnaire and has the following wording: “Which of the following, if any, applied to you when you committed the offence/s in the last year?” This means the results are not directly comparable.

The 2008 Youth Survey is the first time young people were asked if they have used mobile phones in committing offences:

- one in five young people (22%) have sent a voicemail or text message to someone on their mobile phone in order to scare, harass or threaten them
- one in six young people (16%) have used a mobile phone to video or photograph someone while they were being assaulted ('happy slapping').

The number of times young people in mainstream education who self-report committing an offence appears to be tailing off since its peak in 2004, despite the range of offences having slightly increased; young people who offend committed an average of 18 offences in 2008, as was the case in 2005, compared to 19 in 2004. The proportion of young people in 2008 who say they have committed five or more offences shows a significant rise from 2004 (from 41% in 2004 to 45% in 2005, and finally, to 46% in 2008) and continues the trend which has been developing since 2002.

Overall, 83% of pupils aged 15–16 who say they have offended admit anti-social behaviour offences (compared to 77% by 11–14-year-olds). In addition, a greater proportion of older pupils admit to committing drug offences, compared to 11–14-year-olds (33% versus 16%, respectively). Conversely though, 62% of 11–14-year-olds admit to committing threatening or assaulting behaviour (compared to 52% of 15–16-year-olds) and 73% of younger pupils admit to committing theft or stealing offences, compared to 66% of 15–16-year-olds.

## **LEVELS OF DETECTION**

Half of all young people (49%) who admit offending in the last year say that they were caught by the police for at least one offence; a significant increase from 2005 (29%) and 2004 (26%).

Since 2000 there has been a steady decline in the numbers claiming that being caught would stop them (either a great deal or a fair amount) from committing future offences. One-quarter of young people (26%) in 2008 state that being caught for an offence has not deterred them at all from committing future offences. Overall the main deterrents helping to stop young people committing crime remain consistent with previous years – worry about how their parents will react and fear of being caught.

Detection rates appear to vary by region, but it is notable that detection rates have risen in all regions since 2005. The North East and South West remain in the top three regions with the highest rates of detections, but the considerable increase in detections in the West Midlands since 2005 means that it is now the region where the most offenders are caught, despite having lower levels of offending compared to other areas. Around half of young people in Yorkshire and Humber (55%), Wales (52%) and East Midlands (52%) do not get caught, despite having relatively high rates of offending.

### **CONSEQUENCES OF BEING CAUGHT**

The types of disposals young people who admit offending typically receive are:

- Final Warning (32% compared to 36% in 2005)
- being made to apologise to the victim (25% versus 27% in 2005)
- reprimands (19%, down from 28% in 2005)
- contacted by a youth offending team (YOT) (8% versus 14% in 2005).

### **NUMBERS REOFFENDING AFTER BEING CAUGHT**

More than six out of 10 young people (65%) claim to have committed other offences after being caught, compared to 62% in 2005. Similar to previous years, the less serious offences such as fare dodging and shoplifting remain some of the most common offences committed by young people who reoffend, although there has been a rise in offences such as damaging something belonging to someone else and threatening or assaulting others.

Eight out of 10 young people (80%) who have played truant 10 or more times have reoffended since being caught, compared to 68% of those who have played truant one to nine times, and 53% of those who have never played truant.

For those who did not commit further offences, the main reasons given were because they knew they had been wrong (31%) and they did not want to get caught by the police again (31%).

### **PREVALENCE OF WEAPON CARRYING**

Young people were shown a list of potential weapons, such as penknives and BB guns, and asked whether they had carried one in the last year. The findings show that nearly half (47%) have not carried any of the weapons listed. The two most common weapons

young people report carrying a penknife (17%) and a BB gun (15%), although these have both seen a significant decrease since 2005 (penknife 24%, BB gun 21%). The proportions carrying a flick knife (6%) and kitchen knife (4%) have remained stable since 2004.

The most common reason given by young people for carrying a knife is for use in sports or similar activities (32%). However, 30% say they carried a knife for protection and 11% in case they got into a fight. The most common use suggested among those who have carried a gun was for hobbies, activities and sports (39%).

Boys are predominantly more likely to admit to carrying a knife or gun than girls are. Almost half of boys (45%) say they have carried a knife or gun, compared with 16% of girls.

There is evidence to show that whether or not a young person has committed a criminal offence is linked to whether or not they also carry a weapon. More than half of young people (57%) who admit to having committed a criminal offence report carrying a weapon, compared to only one in five young people (21%) who have not committed a crime. Young people who have been the victim of an offence themselves are also more likely to carry a weapon. Two out of five young people who have been a victim of an offence (40%) claim to have carried a weapon, compared to just under one in five (19%) of those who have not.

Regional differences between the proportions of young people who have carried a weapon also exist. More than one in three young people in Wales (35%) and the North East (35%) report to have carried a weapon, while Yorkshire and Humber has the lowest proportion of young people who admit to having carried a knife or gun (26%). The regions with the highest incidence of penknife carrying are the South West (21%) and Wales (20%), whereas BB gun use is most prevalent in the North East (18%), South East (17%) and South West (17%).

## **GROUP MEMBERSHIP**

Four out of five (82%) young people consider themselves to be part of a group<sup>2</sup>, while only 12% say they are not. The most commonly cited characteristics of a group were having a name (15%) or territory (10%), while the least commonly cited characteristics were having a set of rules (5%) or clothing associated with the group (5%).

---

2 In the context of the survey, a 'group' refers to three or more people.

Overall, more than half of young people who consider themselves to be part of a group think that their group views criminal behaviour as unacceptable (55%). This compares with one in five (19%) who claim their group feel crime is sometimes acceptable, and only 3% saying it is always acceptable.

When asked about the behaviour of their group in the previous 12 months, over half say their group had hung around in public spaces (57%). Nearly one in six refers to their group threatening others, creating graffiti, or breaking and damaging things (all 17%). In relation to more serious offending, 13% of young people say their group has used force or violence against other people and 9% report their group having carried knives.

Just over one-third of young people (34%) who claim to be part of a group also report personally carrying a knife, compared to only 15% of those who are not in a group. Furthermore, the proportion carrying a knife increases to 56% for those whose group views criminality as acceptable compared to 25% that do not.

## **EXPERIENCE OF CRIME**

Overall, young people's level of concern about being a victim of crime has declined compared to previous years. In particular, there has been a significant decline in the overall concern about physical assault and theft between 2008 and 2005. Similar to previous years, girls tend to be more worried about physical assault, theft, bullying and racism than boys, despite less commonly being a victim of crime.

Over the last 12 months, around half of young people (51%) have been the victim of an offence, which is in line with previous years (50% in 2005 and 49% in 2004). However, the numbers who have been a victim where the perpetrator was under the age of 18 has decreased to 69% in 2008 from 74% respectively for 2005 and 2004, as has the number of young people who have been victimised by a group under the age of 18. This decline is reflected across the offences listed, apart from being racially abused, which increased slightly in 2008.

Young people speak of predominantly being victimised in school, although many also experience similar offences in the area where they live. Overall, levels of victimisation in these locations have declined since 2005 and 2004, with the exception of mobile phone theft.

### **ARE YOUNG PEOPLE DRINKING AND TAKING DRUGS?**

Three out of five (59%) young people in mainstream education admit to having tried alcohol at least once in their lives and 37% said they had drunk alcohol in the past month (a significant decrease from 2005 and 2004). The numbers admitting to smoking tobacco (11%) and cannabis (5%) in the last month is relatively constant, and those using Class A substances remains very low.

Half (52%) of young people said there were people they could go to who could sell or give them drugs, and of these, 28% said it would be from those mostly under 18 years old.

The findings demonstrate a clear link between offending behaviour and alcohol and drug use. A significantly higher proportion of young people who have committed an offence say that they have taken a substance (86%) than those who have not committed an offence (51%). This applies to all substances, including alcohol (84% versus 50%), tobacco (48% versus 9%), cannabis (31% versus 3%) and higher classification drugs.

### **PREVALENCE OF TRUANCY**

Truancy levels among young people have remained relatively constant. One-quarter of young people in mainstream education (24%) say that since starting school they have played truant, compared with three out of five (63%) who say they have never done so.

The survey findings suggest that young people who have committed a crime in the last 12 months are more likely to have played truant (50%) than young people who have not offended (15%).

**“those using Class A substances remains very low”**

The full report on which this summary is based is available on the Youth Justice Board website.

Further copies of this summary can be obtained from:

Telephone 0870 120 7400  
or Facsimile 0870 120 7401

Stock code  
B414



Youth Justice Board  
Bwrdd Cyfiawnder Ieuenctid

**Youth Justice Board for England and Wales**

**[www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk)**

ISBN: 978-1-906139-57-5