
Youth Taskforce study of perceptions in Youth Crime Action Plan areas

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The Aim of the Study

The Youth Taskforce in the Department for Education commissioned this piece of work to explore the views of residents within Youth Crime Action Plan (YCAP) areas to understand more about perceptions regarding young people and crime, anti-social behaviour and alcohol use/misuse and efforts to tackle these problems. The research activities commissioned were:

- I. A quantitative (baseline) survey conducted using random location in-home interviewing, with 2783 interviews being conducted in total across the 69 YCAP areas
- II. A three stage qualitative exercise (including an explorative pre-task, collaborative clinics and an online activity board) with 60 young people aged 14-19 from YCAP areas in five regions

The intention of the study was to look beyond the official crime statistics and understand more about the views of communities in the areas where youth crime and anti-social behaviour has been a significant local issue (and subsequently where YCAP has been targeted).

Executive Summary

Quantitative Research

Awareness

- Around half of people surveyed were aware of initiatives to reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) in their area, and awareness was higher in more deprived areas.
 - Those with teenage children were more aware than others
- Around half of people surveyed were specifically aware of increased police presence, but only one in five were aware of police confiscating alcohol from young people, and fewer than one in ten were aware of increased youth worker presence or young people doing visible community service
 - Those in more deprived areas were more aware

- One in four were aware of increased facilities/activities outside of school for young people in the area, but fewer than one in ten were aware of an increase specifically on Friday or Saturday nights

Perceptions of change in youth crime and ASB

- There was no clear majority view on changes in local youth crime and ASB levels – nearly half said that the situation had not changed over the last 12 months.
 - The proportions saying it had gone up a little or down a little were each 15%. The only difference was that more said it had gone up a lot than said it had gone down a lot (11% and 4%)
 - Black and Asian respondents were more likely than White respondents to say it had gone down
- Perceptions of changes in the levels of public drinking by young people were similar to those regarding changes in youth crime and ASB – although youth drinking was seen a little more often as having gone up
- For the most part, those who thought youth crime and ASB had gone up also felt the same about youth public drinking, but the correlation was by no means complete

Prevalence of specific aspects of ASB in local area

- Noisy neighbours and abandoned cars were clearly seen as the least significant problems – fewer than one in five thought either was a very or fairly serious problem
- Teenagers hanging around and litter were seen as the biggest problems, with over half of respondents saying that they were very or fairly big problems
- Those who thought teenagers hanging around was a problem were most likely to have seen them swearing, being loud or noisy, drinking alcohol, being a general nuisance and littering
- Around a third of respondents think that teenagers hanging around is, of itself, antisocial behaviour. Older people are much more likely to think this
- Only a quarter of respondents were worried about their own personal safety when they saw teenagers hanging around during the daytime, but almost a half were after dark (over a half if we include those who never go out after dark)
- The two most common causes cited by respondents for crime/ASB by young people were a lack of things for them to do and poor parenting

Dealing with the problem

- While overall agreement that the police and local agencies were dealing with the problems of youth crime and ASB was high, it was noticeable that strong agreement was not high.
 - Women, those with teenage children, and Black and Asian respondents were more likely to agree that the police and local agencies were dealing with the problems of youth crime and ASB
- *Providing more activities for young people, confiscating alcohol, and making it harder for them to buy alcohol* were all seen as good ideas, the last one particularly so, with three in four saying it was a very good idea
- Respondents were fairly evenly split over whether parents took enough responsibility for their children – 39% said they did and 45% said that they didn't
- Over half agreed that most teenagers are responsible and well-behaved, while only a third disagreed

Qualitative Research

Young people, Crime and Anti Social behaviour

Across the research, young people identified three categories of negative behaviours that they felt were associated with their age group: nuisance behaviour, antisocial behaviour (ASB) and crime.

- Nuisance behaviour was thought to be less serious than ASB and without a specific intention to affect other people. Often nuisance behaviour was not seen as problematic. However, it was acknowledged that given an alternative interpretation, it could seem intimidating. Many young people admitted that they took part in what might be defined as nuisance behaviour.
- ASB was not easily defined, with activities and behaviours dependent on individuals' intention and the interpretation of others. Few participants deliberately engaged in ASB, but the majority were aware that their actions could be interpreted as such when socialising in large groups or on the street. Therefore, many young people felt misunderstood by adults and authority.
- Crime was considered to include more serious types of ASB and other behaviours which broke the law. Young people felt that crime was mostly committed by those older than themselves and as a result, young people distanced themselves from individuals who committed crime.

Young People's Knowledge of and Involvement in Crime and ASB

Who is involved?

Participants were aware of numerous media reports associating teenagers with ASB in particular and subsequently regarded it as primarily a youth problem. Due to this association, ASB was seen as an immediate issue that touched their lives.

When depicting young people who might be involved in crime and ASB, the research participants described young people who were different to themselves. However, when discussing what they did in their spare time, many participants recognised that their behaviour could perhaps be interpreted as ASB. Young people involved in crime and ASB were said to be most likely to be living in a 'rough' area without positive adult role models at home.

Why do young people engage in crime and ASB?

The young people that took part in the research felt that crime and ASB were more likely to happen during the evenings, weekends and school holidays when young people have more spare time. The main causes of crime and ASB amongst young people were considered to be:

- Lack of suitable facilities leading to boredom
- Experimental activities such as drinking alcohol leading to uncharacteristic behaviour

Young people had a carefree attitude to alcohol. Although they acknowledged the link between alcohol and crime and ASB, they did not feel that their experimentation with alcohol would have any long term consequences.

When talking about alcohol mis/use, young people tended to think about the consequences to themselves rather than the local area. However, it was recognised that young people were more likely to commit crime and ASB when they had been drinking.

How to tackle crime, antisocial behaviour and alcohol misuse

Young people in the research sample discussed a number of the YCAP initiatives. Awareness of initiatives was relatively high across the participants. However, many young people felt that the initiatives had limited impact on crime and ASB in their local area. It was recognised that a range of measures were required to tackle crime and ASB, including disciplinary and supportive approaches. Young people spoke of how they were able to avoid 'being caught' by the police/PCSOs and would regroup in different locations to avoid contact with the authorities.

Most young people were able to access alcohol and participants knew of local off licences that would sell them alcohol. Participants also spoke about avoiding large supermarket chains where legal age laws were more likely to be enforced.

Young people called for government to look at the causes of crime and anti-social behaviour, particularly boredom, which was seen as the primary cause. Although not an alternative to using other measures, the provision of suitable facilities that fitted the needs of young people, especially those aged between 14-16 years old, was seen as a way to tackle the boredom that leads to crime and ASB.

Additional Information

The full report (DCSF) can be accessed at www.education.gov.uk/research

Further information about this research can be obtained from Jodie Smith,
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This research report was written before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.