

Youth19 – Youth Voice Brief

About Youth19

In 2019, researchers from four universities collaborated on the Youth19 Rangatahi Smart Survey. We surveyed over 7,700 NZ adolescents (years 9–13) in 52 Auckland, Northland and Waikato schools. It is the latest in the Youth2000 survey series, with previous surveys carried out in 2001, 2007 and 2012. In total, over 36,000 young people have been involved.

Youth19 is a representative, high-quality, ethical study about the wellbeing of rangatahi/youth. Schools were randomly selected in each region and then students were randomly selected from each school roll. Consenting students completed the survey anonymously in English or te reo Māori. For more information and findings see: www.youth19.ac.nz

Youth voice

For the first time in a Youth2000 survey, Youth19 included open text questions inviting students to express their own views on key issues. In this brief we summarise their responses to questions about the biggest problems for young people today and about what should be changed to support young people in New Zealand better.

These questions were clearly marked as optional, and over 2700 students responded. Response rates are provided on the back page. Researchers coded and analysed students' responses independently, and identified key themes that were common across different ages, genders, ethnicities and school deciles. This brief summarises the strongest and most prevalent themes.

Students were asked:

Q1 “What do you think are the biggest problems for young people today?”

Q2 “What do you think should be changed to support young people in New Zealand better?”



Q1 “What do you think are the biggest problems for young people today?”

Mental health & pressure

Concerns about emotional and mental health were by far the most common response to this question. Many young people described feeling under pressure due to high expectations from parents, teachers, peers and society in general. A sense of not measuring up, or not fitting in, was widespread, and some said bullying was a major issue.

Some framed issues as ‘problems of living’ whereas others used clinical terms like mental health, depression, anxiety or suicide to describe the biggest problems for young people today. Lack of support to address emotional and mental health issues was seen as a problem by many. The theme of mental health and pressure was connected to other key themes. For example, social media can help young people feel connected, but young people said it can also add to high expectations and stress. Similarly, worries about the future were linked to feelings of distress.

“Expectations. The expectation to be the best at all times... all of this pressure effects kids greatly.”

– European female, decile 7, age 15

“Loss of motivation, self confidence, belief that they are worthy of good things (e.g. support, happiness, etc.) Self worth.”

– Asian female, decile 7, age 14

“Not knowing how to ask people for help with their mental state, and not knowing how to deal with it themselves”

– Māori male, decile 3, age 16

**Mental health
and pressure**

**Social media
and tech**

**Bleak futures,
climate change**

Risky choices



What do high school students say are the biggest problems for young people today?

In 2019, researchers surveyed 7700 year 9-13 students in 52 Auckland, Northland and Waikato schools. This is the latest survey in the Youth2000 series.

www.youth19.ac.nz



Bleak futures, climate change

Many students saw the future as bleak and felt that their generation was inheriting a broken world. Climate change was a strong theme, along with lack of job opportunities and social problems including racism, homophobia and religious bigotry. Some expressed a sense of facing a hostile world with insufficient adult support. Others felt older generations had created a mess and were leaving it to young people to find solutions.



"The climate and how polluted the environment is... you can't really be happy if the environment is sad"

– Pacific female, decile 1, age 15

"Scared the earth will not last"

– European female, decile 9, age 14

"Not many opportunities for jobs"

– Māori male, decile 1, age <13

"Lack of guidance and support in their decisions for the future"

– Asian female, decile 7, age 16

Social media & tech

Many participants identified social media and technology as a big problem for young people. Some saw digital addictions and over-use as problematic in themselves. Others felt screen time interfered with their sleep, or crowded out other things like exercising and spending time with friends and family. Young people also said social media contributed to impossible expectations and emotional distress. Many described comparing themselves to others, leading to a lack of self-acceptance, or lack of acceptance from others.

Risky choices

Many young people had concerns about easy access to drugs, alcohol and pornography, and some were also concerned about smoking and vaping. Some students described peer pressure to engage in sex and substance use in order to be accepted. Lack of quality teaching about sexuality, consent and safe sex was also a theme.

Our findings show a large decline over the past 20 years in the proportion of students smoking, drinking, taking drugs or being sexually active. It is concerning that, despite declines, substance use and peer pressure remain major issues in young people's lives.

"We are caught in our screens too much instead of realising how much bad and good are surrounding us... Because of us being glued and addicted to our devices"

– Māori male, decile 5, age 16

"The fact that since we spend so much of our time online we constantly compare ourselves to others. We feel that we need to look a certain way or act a specific way, to gain acceptance from others"

– Asian female, decile 9, age 15

"The culture of drinking to get drunk and seeing alcohol and drugs as the only way to have a good time"

– European male, decile 4, age >17

"Easy access to pornography and drugs"

– Asian male, decile 5, age 16



Q2 “What do you think should be changed to support young people in New Zealand better?”

Listen. To. Us.

Young people want adults to listen to them, to try to understand their point of view and to involve them in decisions affecting their future. They want to be heard and taken seriously at home, at school and across the country. There were strong requests for young people's views to be sought, valued and acted upon.

Support us

Many students highlighted the need for social, emotional and practical support. This included 'low key' informal support at school, with family and friends, as well as mentoring and role models to provide a 'bridge to the future' – others who understood and had been there, showing the way. They want adults to reach out to young people, rather than relying on the young person to always ask for help. Many talked about need for accessible early intervention services for mental health problems.

"A way for our voice to be heard and accepted"

– Māori female, decile 10, age 14

"Having young people involved in more important decisions to do with both the present and the future."

– European female, decile 6, age 15

"Assuring them... it's okay & normal to not feel good, to not feel okay, to not feel happy sometimes... and that there are people who are there to help, listen & understand them"

– Māori female, decile 4, age >17

"Surround them with people that will help them with their future"

– Pacific male, decile 7, age 16

YOUTH19
A Youth2000 Survey

Save Our Future!

Update School

What should be changed to better support young people in New Zealand?

Listen. To. Us.

Connection and Fun

Support Us

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Save our future!

Young people want action for a brighter future including:

- Action to address climate change and other urgent environmental issues.
- Action on economic issues such as affordable housing, cheaper tertiary education and more job opportunities for young people.
- Elimination of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and the creation of a more accepting society.



Update school

School is an important part of young people's lives. Many students wanted to see schools modernised to better meet current needs, in particular:

- More opportunities to learn relevant skills for life, e.g. financial literacy, tax returns, listening skills, relationship skills, health, stress management, how to manage emotions, job seeking skills.
- Making school less stressful, e.g. by reducing pressure and assessments, and placing more emphasis on authentic learning.

Connection & fun

Young people want to connect with others and do fun stuff, but need opportunities and structures that support this. For example, ideas for overcoming isolation and connecting with others included:

- Events, activities, and groups to support students to make friends
- Affordable transport so that young people can get around, meet friends & engage in their communities
- Opportunities for self-development & community contribution
- More sports facilities.

"Adults should take a stand for what is right for the society and planet and not make young people feel like they are doing all the work"

– Pacific female, decile 2, age 16

"Make NZ a more affordable place to live... I think the main challenge is the cost of living"

– Asian female, decile 7, age 16

"More groups for gender or sexually diverse individuals"

– European, identifies another way, decile 6, age 14

"Better acceptance; if people were eager to accept & learn about cultures etc it would be easier to trust"

– Māori female, decile 2, age 15

"Less pressure from school system, it is too focused on achieving and passing assignments rather than learning"

– Māori male, decile 7, age 15

"Learning how to be an adult... taxes, how to get a job, renting"

– Asian female, decile 7, age <17

"Group activities for students at school to make them feel comfortable"

– Pacific female, decile 1, age 15

"More events and outings to get people to socialise and meet each other instead of being stuck inside on our phones and gaming platforms"

– European male, decile 9, age 16



Summary

Young people's views and suggestions were diverse. This brief provides a high level summary of some of the themes that were common across students of different ages, ethnicities, school deciles, genders and identities. These youth voices help us to understand what is going on for young people, and add richness to the quantitative findings of the Youth19 survey. They also provide an important call to action: for adults to listen, to be supportive, to create the conditions for young people to connect with one another and to have positive futures, and to ensure school is engaging and providing the knowledge and skills that young people need and want.



Table 1: Question response rate, by sex, school decile & ethnicity

	Q1 Biggest problem		Q2 Solutions	
	Number	%	Number	%
Total	2,763	36%	1579	21%
Female	1515	37%	836	20%
Male	1226	35%	727	21%
Another gender	22	38%	16	28%
Low decile school (1-3)	533	34%	303	20%
Mid decile school (4-7)	1021	32%	570	18%
High decile school (8-10)	1198	42%	699	24%
Asian	657	37%	361	20%
European	1107	36%	639	21%
Māori	476	31%	285	19%
Pacific	382	40%	213	23%
Other ethnicity	136	35%	78	20%

For more Youth19 results check out www.youth19.ac.nz

Citation: Fleming, T.¹, Ball, J.², Kang, K.³, Sutcliffe, K.¹, Lambert, M.², Peiris-John, R.³, & Clark, T.³ (2020). Youth19: Youth Voice Brief. The Youth19 Research Group, Wellington.

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The Youth19 Rangatahi Smart Survey is a collaboration between two Health Research Council projects:
Clark, T.C., Le Grice, J., Shepherd, M., Groot, S., & Lewycka, S. (2017). Harnessing the spark of life: Maximising whānau contributors to rangatahi wellbeing. Health Research Council of New Zealand Project Grant (HRC ref: 17/315).
Fleming, T., Peiris-John, R., Crengle, S., & Parry, D. (2018). Integrating survey and intervention research for youth health gains. Health Research Council of New Zealand Project Grant (HRC ref: 18/473).

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