

GoWell is a collaborative partnership between the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, the University of Glasgow and the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, sponsored by Glasgow Housing Association, the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

**Who says
teenagers
are a serious
problem?**

**GoWell's findings
on householder
perceptions of youth
related problems
in deprived areas
of Glasgow**

February 2010

GoWell is a planned ten-year research and learning programme that aims to investigate the impact of investment in housing, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. It commenced in February 2006 and has a number of different research components. This paper is part of a series of Briefing Papers which the GoWell team has developed in order to summarise key findings and policy and practice recommendations from the research. Further information on the GoWell Programme and the full series of Briefing Papers is available from the GoWell website at: www.gowellonline.com



INTRODUCTION

Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, is receiving significant investment in regeneration aimed at improving and transforming disadvantaged homes, neighbourhoods and communities. GoWell is a research and learning programme that aims to investigate the impact of investment in Glasgow's regeneration on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities over a ten-year period¹.

In 2006 GoWell researchers surveyed 6,008 adult householders (aged 16 years or over) in 14 relatively deprived Glasgow neighbourhoods to obtain an initial picture of what people thought about their homes, neighbourhoods and communities¹.

One of the findings that stood out was that just over half the householders we spoke to perceived teenagers hanging around the street to be a problem in their local area.

It was the kind of finding that could attract headlines – but we know that many people are critical of headlines that encourage negative stereotyping of young people. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008) described a 'general climate of intolerance and negative public attitudes toward children, especially adolescents' in the UK². Nonetheless, policies associated with anti-social behaviour often focus on young people: for example the most recent Scottish Government Framework on preventing anti-social behaviour makes over 100 references to young people³.

We have therefore produced a briefing paper to consider the findings in more detail (this is only the first part of a much larger programme of analysis into the issue).



MEASURING PROBLEMS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

As part of a 40 minute interview covering a whole range of topics, we presented GoWell participants with a list of 17 issues and asked 'For each of the following statements, could you tell me whether you think that each of these is a serious problem, a slight problem or not a problem in your local neighbourhood?'

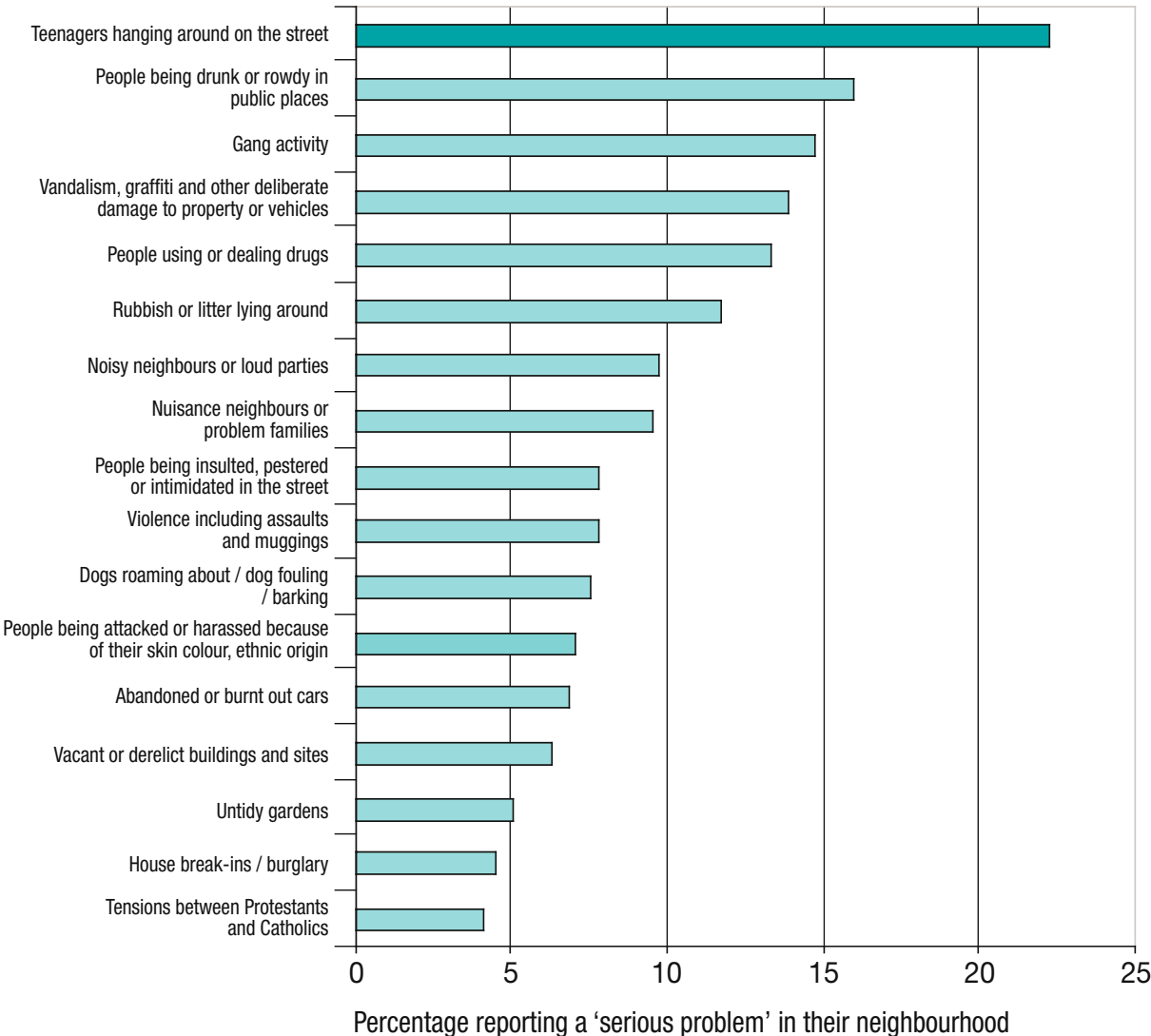
ⁱ This is the first (i.e. baseline) of four survey waves: GoWell is a multi-methods study that includes repeat-cross-sectional, longitudinal, qualitative and ecological components.



In the questionnaire, 'teenagers hanging around on the street' was the tenth item on that list. Figure 1 shows that it was the most frequently cited neighbourhood problem:

- 22% of participants described it as a serious problem in their neighbourhood.
- A further 32% described the issue as a slight problem.
- 46% of the participants said that teenagers hanging around was not a problem in their neighbourhood.

Figure 1: GoWell's list of neighbourhood issues, and the percentage of householders who described them as 'a serious problem' in their local neighbourhood.



Data source: survey of 6,008 adult householders in deprived areas of Glasgow (GoWell, 2006)¹.



HOW DO THE GOWELL FINDINGS COMPARE WITH OTHER SURVEYS?

Short answer: GoWell's findings are broadly comparable to those obtained from a number of other surveys, given the differences in sample populations and measures.

'Teenagers hanging around' topped a similar British Crime Survey poll of neighbourhood problems for four consecutive years³. A typical example: the British Crime Survey 2007/08 found that 31% of respondents reported 'teenagers hanging around' to be a big or very big problem in their area. In the most deprived English wards (i.e. those wards most comparable to GoWell in terms of relative deprivation) the figure was significantly higher at 47%⁴.

The Scottish Crime Survey 2002 found that 43% of respondents said young people hanging around was a very or fairly big problem (second only to drink/drugs 44%)⁵. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 2004, found that the two most frequently mentioned problems perceived to be affecting people's local areas were 'lack of opportunities for children and young people', 37%, and 'young people hanging around the streets', 36%⁶⁻⁷.

In 2004, the Office of National Statistics asked a UK population sample of 1,678 adults 'What is the worst form of anti-social behaviour in your local area?' This was an open question with no prompts. The surveyors categorised responses as either 'litter/rubbish'; 'vandalism/graffiti'; 'begging'; 'drug use/dealing'; 'noisy neighbours'; 'rowdy teenagers on the street'; 'people drunk/drinking in public places'; 'abandoned/burnt-out vehicles'; 'other'; 'none' or 'don't know'. Responses categorised as 'rowdy teenagers on the street' occurred most frequently (27% of respondents)⁸.

Some studies have asked respondents if they have personally experienced anti-social behaviour. However, the findings on experience vary greatly across the different surveys. Less than one-in-twenty tenants from Glasgow's largest social rented landlord (Glasgow Housing Association) reported youths hanging around to be a problem that they had personally experienced in the previous 12 months⁹⁻¹⁰. One-in-seven of a Scottish national population sample reported being personally affected a great deal or quite a lot by young people being noisy in the street⁶. One-in-four British Crime Survey respondents said they personally witnessed young people behaving anti-socially in their neighbourhood on a weekly basis (compared to one-in-three who identified youth anti-social behaviour as a neighbourhood problem)⁴. Generally, experience is reported less than perceptions of neighbourhood problems, but people who do report direct experience are also more likely to say that they think anti-social behaviour is a neighbourhood problem.



WHAT ARE RESIDENTS CONCERNED ABOUT?

Presumably, we have all ‘hung around the street’ for one reason or another without expecting to become an anti-social behaviour statistic. What is it about teenagers hanging around that really worries some people? How might the GoWell data help answer that question?

One thing we can do is look at the people who cite this problem and then see what other issues they are particularly likely to report being troubled by.

We have done this. We found that seven of the neighbourhood problems on our list have particularly strong associations with perceptions that teenagers hanging around are a serious neighbourhood problem. By ‘strong associations’ we mean statistically significant after adjusting for other perceived neighbourhood problems (see statistical note). The remaining eight issues are also often a concern, but the association is weaker.

Table 1 presents the seven neighbourhood problems that tend to co-occur with concerns about teenagers. We see that people who worry about gang activity in their neighbourhood have extremely high odds of also reporting that teenagers hanging around are a serious problem.

Concern about drunken or rowdy behaviour in public spaces, problem families/ neighbours, vandalism, and litter were also associated with reporting a serious problem with teenagers. Weaker, but still significant associations were found for perceiving serious problems with racial intimidation (one-in-seven participants were born outside the UK and/or from a minority ethnic group), and vacant or derelict building sites (a common problem in some regeneration areas that may add to feelings of insecurity).

Table 1: People who think that the following neighbourhood issues are a serious problem in their local area are also likely to describe ‘teenagers hanging around the street’ as a serious neighbourhood problemⁱⁱ

	Odds Ratio
1. Gang activity	7.8
2. People being drunk or rowdy in public places	3.6
3. Nuisance neighbours or problem families	3.6
4. Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles	2.8
5. Rubbish or litter lying around	2.0
6. People being attacked or harassed because of their skin colour, ethnic origin	1.7
7. Vacant or derelict buildings and sites	1.5

What are the ‘odds ratios’ telling us?

In this Table the odds ratios indicate how strongly the listed neighbourhood problems were associated with perceived problems with teenagers. For example, the odds of citing teenagers as a serious problem were nearly eight times greater amongst participants who were seriously concerned about gangs, compared to participants who were not so concerned about gangs.



WHO IS WORRIED?

Around half the GoWell participants thought teenagers were a problem in their area, but less than a quarter (22%) described them as a ‘serious’ problem. Understanding which social sub-groups are most likely (or, by deduction, less likely) to find teenagers problematic may help us target activities to improve social cohesion between our generations in disadvantaged areas. So who are these 22%?

We looked at a whole range of participants’ individual characteristics – like gender, age, education, ethnicity and health status. We also looked at characteristics of each participant’s household – such as employment, car-ownership, financial problems, living with children and housing tenure (rented or owned home). Finally we looked at measures of exposure to the neighbourhood – length of residence, contact with neighbours, use of local amenities and whether residents regularly walked around their neighbourhood.

ⁱⁱ Statistical note: we have only listed those problems that were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) following a stepwise logistic regression analysis of all the neighbourhood problems, controlled for individual and area characteristics. Reference categories = not a serious problem.



In Table 2 we have identified and ranked individual characteristics that were most strongly associated with residents’ likelihood of viewing teenagers to be a serious neighbourhood problem. We found that the key characteristics were age, lack of social support, neighbourhood exposure, health service use, financial problems, and living with children.

Table 2: Who thinks teenagers hanging around is a serious problem? (characteristics ranked by strength of association: strongest first).ⁱⁱⁱ

Rank	Predictors	Who thinks teenagers are a serious problem?
1.	Age (youth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Younger adults (perceptions of teenage problems decrease with age).
2.	Social support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who have no-one to offer support in a crisis
3.	Neighbourhood exposure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who report at least weekly contact with neighbours • People who walk around their neighbourhood at least weekly
4.	Health problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who saw their GP for anxiety or depression at least once last year • People who regularly saw their GP for any reason last year (e.g. more than 6 times)
5.	Financial problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who say they sometimes have problems paying bills
6.	Live with children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who live with children under 16 years old (i.e. parents - in most cases)

As Table 2 shows, age – or rather ‘youthfulness’ – tops the list. Perceptions that teenagers in the area are a serious problem occurred most frequently within the youngest age bracket of survey participants (16 to 24 year olds). Perceptions were less frequent in each successive age category, so that the most elderly participants (aged over 64 years) were less than half as likely to say that teenagers hanging around were a serious problem compared to the 16 to 24 year olds.

In future work, we will try and establish the cause of this inverse association. For example, do young adults have different reasons for worrying about teenagers hanging around than elderly people? Do older people simply tend to have a more tolerant view of the young? Or are they more likely to live in neighbourhoods where there are less young people (our analysis attempts to take into account area effects but perhaps this needs exploring further)?

ⁱⁱⁱ Statistical note: odds ratios range from 1.2 (live with children) to 2.3 (age = 16 to 24 years); P<0.05. The reference categories are GP visits = no visits last year; age >64 years old; bills = no problems; contact neighbours and walk <weekly; length of residence <1 year; qualifications <1 ‘O’ grade (C pass) or equivalent. Findings are adjusted for various self-reported environmental factors: a forthcoming publication will discuss these in more detail.

The need to consider causal pathways also applies to the other associations we have identified. For example, are regular health service users more likely to worry about teenagers (perhaps because they feel vulnerable), or does worrying about neighbourhood problems exacerbate ill health?

Questions of cause and effect are difficult to answer from a single survey. One of our next steps is therefore to extend our analysis to include longitudinal data (from subsequent GoWell surveys) and look at responses from focus groups on young people.



ARE THE GOWELL FINDINGS SURPRISING?

GoWell focuses on very deprived areas – unlike the national surveys we talked about earlier in this report, which tended to take a broader look at whole populations. Deprived areas can often contain highly atypical communities. For example, some of GoWell's communities include unusually high concentrations of young people, large families and asylum seekers – compared to national norms¹¹.

So if GoWell's communities often differ from national norms, should we be surprised if GoWell's findings were very similar to those of the national surveys or very different?

The British Crime Survey found that perceiving teenagers hanging around to be a problem was more prevalent for certain types of people: i.e. younger adults, people with longstanding illness, social rented tenants, people without educational qualifications, the unemployed, long term residents and victims of crime⁴. The fit with GoWell's findings is therefore not exact (not surprising, as the surveys were not identical) but there are some common themes: e.g. youth, ill health and, to a lesser extent, socio-economic disadvantage. More recently, the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey also found that 18-29 year olds were more likely than older adults to say anti-social behaviour was a problem in their local area – although that survey did not focus specifically on youth-related anti-social behaviour¹².

What is surprising is how far the research findings seem to differ from some popular stereotypes. For example, when we initially presented stakeholders with figures about perceptions of teenagers being a problem, feedback from local community groups often included a variant on the view that we 'probably over-sampled old people who rarely left their house.'

We now know that it was in fact the younger adults (including some who were still teenagers themselves) who were the most likely to perceive teenagers as a problem. Similarly, parents and other adults who had children living at home were also more



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likely to perceive teenagers as a problem. The same applies to those residents who regularly got out and about around their neighbourhood and interacted with others from their community.

It seems fair to say that perceiving teenagers hanging around the street to be a serious neighbourhood problem is not a symptom of residents' social distance from that particular group or from the community in general. On the contrary, it is predicted by their social proximity to young people and greater exposure to the neighbourhood.



HAVE WE FOUND A 'GENERAL CLIMATE OF INTOLERANCE'² TOWARDS ADOLESCENTS?

It is not that simple. Nearly half of those surveyed said that teenagers hanging around were not a problem in their neighbourhood. Even if we focus on the 22% who said teenagers were a serious problem, we must note that the survey did not give participants the chance to say whether they thought the problem relates to a minority or the majority of local teenagers. So it is possible that participants could be making negative comments about a few, rather than all, teenagers.

We would caution against using the term 'intolerance' in this context unless the term can be defined more precisely and in a way that is empirically justified. After all, young people, people who have children, and financially disadvantaged residents of deprived neighbourhoods are amongst those particularly *likely* to describe (at least some) local teenagers as a serious problem. These findings do not readily fit explanations for perceptions of youth anti-social behaviour that emphasise inter-generational intolerance (i.e. the old 'vilifying' the young), a general dislike of children, or social class prejudice (i.e. more advantaged residents negatively stereotyping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds).

Furthermore, some of the GoWell participants seem to take the view that young people in their area are themselves disadvantaged by poor services and amenities. We asked about local youth and leisure services, children's play areas, parks and schools and found that participants who rated these services as poor were more likely to perceive problems with teenagers compared to participants who did not rate them as poor (by a ratio of around 3:2). These associations were weaker than those presented in Tables 1 and 2 but they do suggest that a substantial number of the residents who think some young people present problems were also looking for an improvement in what the local area has to offer this group.



CONCLUSION

What did we know before?

English, Scottish and UK surveys of perceived anti-social behaviour have found that teenagers hanging round is the most, or one of the most, frequently cited neighbourhood problems – particularly in deprived areas and amongst younger adults. Even a survey that used unprompted questions has found that this is perceived to be a problem.

What have we looked at here?

Unlike the national surveys, we have focused all our analysis on relatively deprived communities – by surveying around 6,000 householders from 14 areas undergoing regeneration in Glasgow.

What did we not look at?

Issues that we have **not** presented findings on include (a) the incidence or prevalence of anti-social behaviour, (b) whether adults think the perceived problem is caused by a minority or majority of teenagers, (c) the views of residents under 16 years of age, (d) whether trends have changed over time, (e) causal direction, and (f) the effects of regeneration. These are all issues that we intend to tackle in future research.

What did we find?

Teenagers hanging around the street are perceived to be a serious neighbourhood problem by nearly one-in-four adults – particularly young adults and residents who have health issues, financial problems, or who have characteristics that suggest familiarity with young people and greater exposure to the community in general. Residents who are concerned about local gangs, drunken and rowdy behaviour, problem families, vandalism, litter, racism and derelict buildings are also particularly more likely to perceive teenagers as a problem in their neighbourhood. A substantial minority of residents also believe that local services for children and young people are poor in these disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

How might we interpret the findings?

The findings are consistent with the view that concern about teenagers hanging around is not simply an abstract perception (fed by the media for example), but is rooted in direct exposure to young people and the neighbourhood. Further services might be part of the solution: a current policy response is that of enhanced community policing, and future waves of GoWell will enable us to assess the impact of that on these perceptions. However, other approaches to enhance community cohesion should also be considered – hopefully informed by a better understanding of what people are concerned about, and where social divisions are most likely to exist.



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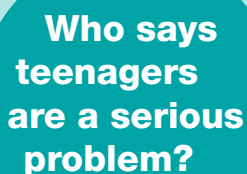
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