

# THE STORY

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STATISTICS, TRENDS AND RESEARCH FOR YOUTH WORK



VOL. 4

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THE  
YOUTHSCAPE  
CENTRE FOR  
**RESEARCH**

# WELCOME TO VOLUME 4 OF THE STORY!

In each issue of *The Story* we bring you the latest research related to young people and Christian youth work. We hope that in the coming pages you will find statistics, research and trends which are not only fascinating and challenging, but which will inform your work with young people.

In this edition we highlight Hope Together's *Talking Jesus* research, which surveyed 11-18 year-olds about their faith, with comment and reflection from the Youthscape team. We also include some radical research from Iceland, YfC's Gen Z findings and everything you need to know about social media. Plus, our very own biscuit-related spurious correlation to lighten the tone!

Happy reading!

**Phoebe Hill**  
Head of research, Youthscape

## News from the Youthscape Centre for Research

To sign up for future editions of **THE STORY**, and to receive printed versions, visit [youthscape.co.uk/research](http://youthscape.co.uk/research)

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### Research Gathering

In October 2017 we will be hosting the second gathering of our Youth Work Research Learning Community. If you are currently involved in research related to young people or Christian youth work, and would like to be part of it, email: [research@youthscape.co.uk](mailto:research@youthscape.co.uk)

## NEW IDEAS

### The Icelandic behavioural model

**Iceland boasts the cleanest-living teenagers in Europe, but 20 years ago it was a different story. How have they brought about this monumental shift in youth culture?**

A yearly survey carried out by the government in all Icelandic schools revealed that in 1998, **42%** of Icelandic teens had been drunk in the previous month. In 2016, this figure was down to **5%**. Similarly, the percentage of those using cannabis fell from **17%** to **7%**, and those smoking cigarettes fell from **23%** to just **3%**. So what changed for these teenagers?

In the late 90s, Iceland rolled out a radical new approach to prevention based on the work of Harvey Milkman. Milkman, a scientific researcher in the States, was exploring why people start using drugs. Through his research, he found that particular sorts of people were predisposed to becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol, those he called 'active confronters'. They were on the threshold of abuse before ever getting near to drugs, Milkman found, as they were seeking outlets and activities that altered their brain chemistry. Speaking to *The Independent*, Milkman explains: 'People can get addicted to drink, cars, money, sex, calories, cocaine – whatever. The idea of behavioural addiction became our trademark.' This discovery led to the radical new model: 'Why not orchestrate a social movement around natural highs: around people getting high on their own brain chemistry – because it seems obvious to me that people want to change their consciousness – without the deleterious effects of drugs?'

Based on Milkman's research, a new national programme – called **Youth in Iceland** – was launched. Laws around alcohol and drugs were changed, parents were encouraged to spend quality time with their children, and state funding

was increased for organised sport, music, art, dance and other clubs. These activities gave young people alternative ways to feel good and achieve 'natural highs', rather than using alcohol and drugs. In 2017, many teenagers are participating in these clubs after school instead of engaging with other risk taking behaviours.

#### What can we learn from this study?

The key question is: would this apply in the UK? Emma Young, writing for *The Independent*, says: 'Across Europe, rates of teen alcohol and drug use have generally improved over the past 20 years, though nowhere as dramatically as in Iceland, and the reasons for improvements are not necessarily linked to strategies that foster teen wellbeing. In the UK, for example, the fact that teens are now spending more time at home interacting online rather than in person could be one of the major reasons for the drop in alcohol consumption.'

Improvements in drug and alcohol taking behaviours do not, therefore, necessarily mean an increase in overall wellbeing. A 2015 government report in the UK revealed that although figures of drug and alcohol use among young people were declining, the numbers of young people self-harming and with eating disorders were on the increase; the study concluded that young people were still engaging with risk taking behaviours, but of a different type.

Saying this, Iceland remains consistently high in worldwide wellbeing rankings (see, for example, the Unicef child wellbeing ranking), suggesting that overall wellbeing among young people in the country is high.

To read about the Youth in Iceland project for yourself, visit [www.rannsoknir.is/en/youth-in-iceland/](http://www.rannsoknir.is/en/youth-in-iceland/)

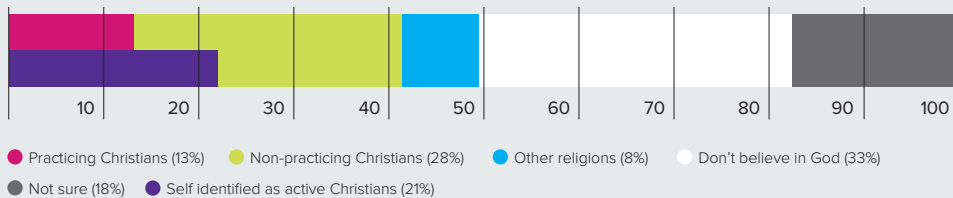
## NEW RESEARCH

### Talking Jesus

The *Talking Jesus* research, released by Hope Together, uncovered some surprising statistics about young people in the UK. But what are we to make of the findings? Youthscape's **Martin Saunders** and **Rachel Gardner** share their thoughts.

#### The Research: In Brief

Comres surveyed a representative sample of 2000 11-18 year-olds in the UK. Of the young people sampled, **13%** were 'practicing Christians' (attend church once a month, and read the Bible and pray once a week), with **21%** self-identifying as 'active Christians'. This statistic was reported in the National Press and Christian media outlets,



given the high percentage of young people identifying as Christian and practicing Christian. The research also found that **37%** of the young people believed in the resurrection, and that 1 in 6 of the non-Christians sampled would be interested in knowing more about Jesus.

The full report is available at [hopetogether.org.uk](http://hopetogether.org.uk)



**COMMENT:**  
**Martin Saunders**  
Deputy CEO of  
Youthscape

It would be fair to say that this research raised a few eyebrows, both within the youth ministry community and way beyond it. Even the team that commissioned it have admitted their surprise at the sheer number of young people who were apparently prepared to identify either as Christians or Jesus-followers. My instinctive reaction was a little ungracious: it seems absolutely clear to me that **13%** of young people are not practicing Christians, and that even more

on top of that are not 'active followers of Jesus'. If they were, surely our youth groups and our churches would be overflowing, rather than shrinking. Once you do the maths in a particular town – even in the more 'Bible belt' areas of the UK – the figures just don't tally with the churches' experience on the ground.

On reflection though, I wonder if the research could possibly be indicating a phenomenon that those of us in the more evangelical wings of the Church hadn't really anticipated. What if there's a whole huge group of young people who feel a connection to Jesus, but not to the Church. What if all those school assemblies and cultural mentions of Jesus haven't gone unnoticed, it's just that teenagers aren't choosing

to process them through us? It could be that this research has inadvertently uncovered a large group of young people who wouldn't show up on our usual radars, but are privately, deeply connected to Jesus. If that's the case – and it's a big 'if' – then there are some profound implications for youth ministry, perhaps most prominently including an imperative to get out of our buildings and start meeting young people's spiritual needs where they're at, including school.

That said, perhaps the most obvious reading of this research is that the young people surveyed simply misunderstood the question. Perhaps instead the results reveal the last gasps of Christian nominalism among young people. Even so, those interviewed still showed a surprising and encouraging receptivity to Christian evangelism.

It might be imperfect, but the *Talking Jesus* research has certainly got people talking about reaching teenagers again, and if it manages to restore a little bit of confidence in the Church's ability to do so, then it's certainly not without merit. The lingering question remains though: what are those top line figures really telling us?



**COMMENT:**  
**Rachel Gardner**  
Relationships Lead at  
Youthscape

Tonight I found myself sobbing over the washing-up because during the day my husband led two 19 year-old guys to Jesus. They literally prayed the prayer in the park. He didn't know them from before, he just connected with them and asked 'do you ever pray?' and it went from there. Quickly. Into a place of honesty and decision. My husband came home a bit sun-scorched and totally bowled over.

What was that? What happens now? (Don't worry, that's in hand!) In my line work, it's often comments about sex that raise eyebrows, so I've

quite enjoyed the hubbub generated around whether young people telling us via a survey that they're serious about following Jesus is really that, or something else. And what might that something else be?

I think it matters hugely that we have a Church-wide conversation about how we talk with teens about Jesus, because I'm not sure we're doing it all that much, and deep down this feels like a sadness, an ache. As questioning as we may be about the results, it tells us that young people are more hungry than we think, whatever state that hunger takes (a little peckish for a taste of faith or totally famished for a total life transformation). And we've got to stop believing the negative hype that young people are so secularised that the divine isn't ever on their radar.

I defer to my learned friends to explore the role of gathering and interpreting evidence from surveys, but as a youth worker it's made me re-think some of the assumptions I'm making about all the young people I'm working with. Am I holding back from sharing Jesus with the girl's in gangs because I'm seeking to honour the space we're creating, knowing full well that Jesus is present and doesn't need to be name dropped to be powerful? Or because I'm terrified of losing funding or sounding stupid? Am I right in assuming that the Hindu non-binary young person in my drop-in isn't interested in one of our late night worship events at church?

Rico Tice talks about how in every relationship with someone we're seeking to draw closer to Jesus, there comes a painful point of decision. The response will either be hunger or hostility. I wonder if in youth ministry we've lost confidence in how we would handle either. After all, it's not just our young people who don't do uncomfortable well.

Research plays an important part in sharpening our focus and shaping our strategies. I hope this piece of research inspires us to take more risks in talking Jesus with this generation. However. Wherever. Whenever.

# BIG PICTURE

## Youth Culture

In the Autumn of 2016, British Youth for Christ commissioned DJS to survey 1001 young people across England, Scotland and Wales on current youth culture. Here were some of the key findings.

### CULTURE

Which activities do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

- Watching YouTube Videos: **81%**
- TV & Films: **77%**
- Using social media: **74%**
- Spending time with friends: **73%**
- Gaming: **61%**
- Sports and exercise: **51%**
- Reading: **49%**
- Music: **46%**
- Shopping online: **40%**
- Shopping in physical shops: **35%**
- Dance: **18%**
- Craft: **17%**
- Creating videos / photography: **17%**
- Drama: **16%**
- Vlogging / blogging: **13%**

Which of the following is your favourite place to spend your free time?

- Outside with friends: **32%**
- Home with friends: **31%**
- On the internet: **24%**
- Club, activity or group not related to school: **6%**
- Other: **3%**
- Club, activity or group related to school: **2%**
- Youth club: **2%**

### INFLUENCES

What are the top 3 people / things that make you feel good about yourself? (percentage of times mentioned in the top three)

- Friends: **93%**
- Family: **92%**
- Music: **26%**

What are the top 3 people / things that make you feel bad about yourself? (percentage of times mentioned in the top three)

- Social media: **67%**
- Friends: **41%**
- YouTubers: **40%**

### PRIORITIES

How important are the following things to you?

- Making my family proud of me: **82%**
- Feeling that I have achieved something that matters: **76%**
- Becoming a better person: **65%**
- Becoming successful: **64%**
- Helping others: **64%**
- Money: **62%**
- Wanting to make a difference in the world: **51%**
- Adventure: **41%**
- Being well known: **24%**
- My faith / religion: **19%**
- Risk: **18%**
- Other: **6%**

In your own life, what are the top 3 things you are most worried about? (percentage of times mentioned in the top three)

- School and exams: **54%**
- Appearance: **33%**
- What other people think of me: **30%**

What are the top 3 things you are most worried about in the world? (percentage of times mentioned in the top three)

- War and terrorism: **51%**
- Poverty: **38%**
- Racism: **24%**

### RELIGION & FAITH

Which, of the following, if any, do you believe in? (Able to select more than one, 7% prefer not to say)

- Don't believe in either: **47%**
- Believe in a God: **32%**
- Believe in ghosts and spirits: **22%**

What might make you think about God & spirituality?

- I don't think about God and spirituality: **35%**
- Thinking about life: **24%**
- When others talk about their experiences of God: **22%**
- Kind gestures by other people: **18%**
- People I know: **17%**
- Experiences had by other people: **17%**
- Answered prayer: **15%**
- When things don't turn out really well: **15%**

Who or what influences the way you think about faith / religion?

\*based on respondents who believe in a God

- Family: **73%**
- Teachers: **36%**
- Friends: **36%**
- TV and the media: **23%**
- The News: **21%**
- Information or videos online: **11%**
- Celebrities: **9%**
- Youth workers: **9%**

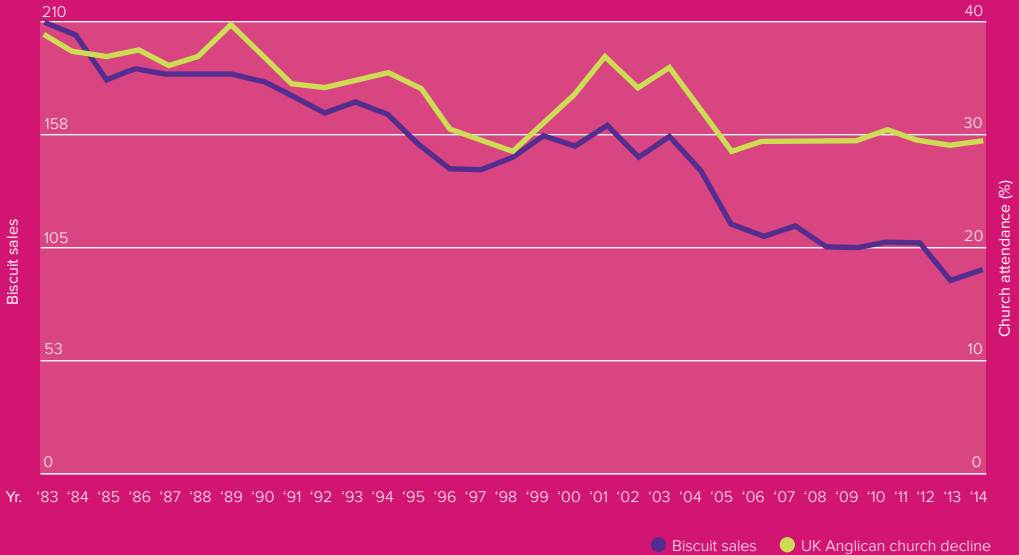
For the full report, visit [yfc.uk/rethinkingculture](http://yfc.uk/rethinkingculture). For further reflection on the findings from the Gen Z report, read our blogs at [youthscape.co.uk/research/genz](http://youthscape.co.uk/research/genz)

# YOUTH WORK DIAGRAMS

## Spurious Correlations

Our research elves have been scouring the archives for spurious correlations between random data sets. We've found the following correlation between Church decline and biscuit sale decline... Coincidence? We think not!

UK Anglican Church Decline vs. UK Biscuit Sale Decline



For more #youthworkdiagrams follow us on Twitter @YWresearch



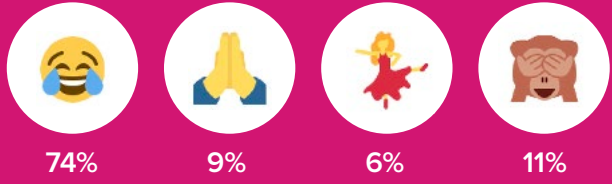
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### TWITTER POLL

We are big emoji fans. Nothing says uncontrollable laughter like a round yellow face crying tears or a celebration like a flamenco dancing lady in a red dress. So we decided to ask the youth work community: what's your favourite emoji? Here were the findings of this (very serious and important) research:



So now we know! Follow @ywresearch for more fun Twitter polls.

# EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT... SOCIAL MEDIA

**12** is the average age when young people first get a phone.

(Think with Google: 'Generation z: New insights into the mobile-first mindset of teens')

**26%** of young people are creating secondary social media profiles, that often made private, that allows them to be free to post their 'real life'.

(Voxburner Youth Trends Report 2017)

**43%** of young people feel their social profiles are not an authentic version of their life and personality.

(Voxburner Youth Trends Report 2017)

'Our generation is taking way too many selfies and staying up all night watching videos. Some of my friends only sleep for three hours, and they still go to school the next day. I kind of think it's normal because I do that too sometimes.' **Andrea, 14**

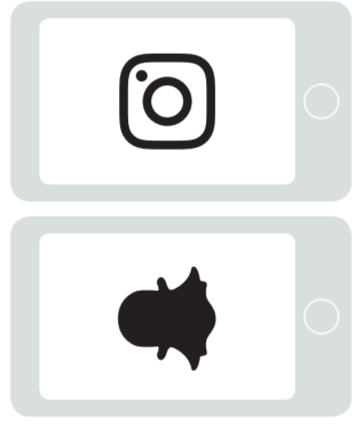
(Think with Google: 'Generation z: New insights into the mobile-first mindset of teens')

**38%** say that texting is the preferred way to contact other teens, even more than in-person. **3 in 10** teens say they text with people who they are physically with at the time.

(Think with Google: 'Generation z: New insights into the mobile-first mindset of teens')

**1 IN 5** young people regularly wake up in the night to send or check messages on social media. This night-time activity is making teenagers three times more likely to feel constantly tired at school than their peers who do not log on at night, and could be affecting their happiness and wellbeing.

(Sally Power, Chris Taylor, Kim Horton. 'Sleepless in school? The social dimensions of young people's bedtime rest and routines'. Journal of Youth Studies, 2017: 1)



**Snapchat and Instagram are the 'coolest' platforms.**

(Think with Google: 'It's Lit: A guide to what teens think is cool', 13-17 year-olds)

**71%** of 10 to 16-year-olds who use social media believe it makes people think about how they look all of the time, and **44%** said selfies make people less likely to be happy with the way they look.

(YouGov research for the #MyTrueSelfie campaign, July 2017)

**72%** of young people have less than **5 hours** of digital down-time a week.

(Voxburner Youth Trends report 2016)

**65%** of young people wish they spent less time looking at screens.

(Voxburner Youth Trends report 2016)

**4,063** young people had counselling sessions with Childline about loneliness last year (2016/17). Childline counsellors were told that young people compare themselves to others on social media, making them feel 'ugly' and 'unpopular'. Others may feel lonely if they're struggling to fit in after moving house or schools, falling out with friends or losing someone close to them.

(NSPCC)

**18.6%** of churches often talk about social media with young people, while **33.2%** never do.

(Losing Heart, 'Youthscape 2016')

Social media by gender breakdown:

	Male	Female
Snapchat	46.6%	66.7%
Twitter	35.9%	34.9%
Facebook	57.6%	47.7%
Instagram	51.9%	67.9%
Google+	44.0%	40.3%
Pinterest	9.0%	45.4%

(Think with Google: 'It's Lit: A guide to what teens think is cool', 13-17 year-olds)

**42%** of young people have been cyberbullied on Instagram, compared to **37%** on Facebook, and **31%** on Snapchat.

(Survey of 10,000 young people conducted by Ditch The Label, July 2017)

Google maps	77%
Instagram	71%
Facebook messenger	68%
Whatsapp	61%
Snapchat	60%
Pinterest	56%
Candy Crush	49%
Angry Birds	48%
Sound Cloud	47%
Student BeansID	43%

(Youth 100, Voxburner 2016)

**4/5** of the most popular forms of social media harm young people's mental health, with Instagram being the most damaging. The health groups behind the study accused Instagram of deepening young people's feelings of inadequacy and anxiety.

(The Young Health Movement & Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH), May 2017)



**67%** of young people said that social media was the main negative influence in their lives.

(Gen Z report, YIC)

In 2015, the Office for National Statistics found that children who spend **3 hours or more** per day on social media sites are more than twice as likely to suffer from poor mental health.

(ONS)

**94%** of young people said they checked social media daily.

(Gen Z report, YIC)

"There are only two types of social media anyone my age uses: **Snapchat** and **Instagram**. Snapchat is for giving everyone a constant insight into your life, without it being as annoying as posting loads of videos and photos onto Instagram (Snapchat posts disappear). Instagram is basically the same thing, except your uploads are more spaced out. The only people I know who use **Facebook** are my parents; mostly it's a place where people dump their non-Instagram-worthy pictures every couple of months." **Lucia, 16**

(Voxburner Youth Trends Report 2017)

**83%** of young people in **Christian youth groups** wanted to talk about social media in their group.

(Losing Heart, 'Youthscape 2016')

**1/4** of young people (24%) have taken more than **10 selfies** to get the right one, while **1 in 10** young people have altered their appearance because of a selfie they have taken.

(YouGov research for the #MyTrueSelfie campaign, July 2017)