



YOUNG WOMEN

The real story



YOUNG
WOMEN'S
TRUST

A SOCIETY WHICH RESPECTS AND LISTENS TO YOUNG WOMEN IS A BETTER SOCIETY FOR ALL OF US.

We undertook extensive desk research to access a variety of published data sources as well as commissioning our own research to shine a light on young women's lives.

Community Research conducted ten focus groups between December 2012 and July 2013.

Populus Data Solutions conducted two polls – a poll of 1067 women aged 16-30 in England in December 2012 and a poll of 2010 members of the public in November 2013.

Acknowledgements:

Young Women's Trust would like to thank the following people for their involvement in this report: Dr Sarah Hutchinson, Jane Bigham, Jenny Simms, Steve Crabb, Lydia Morgan and all the young women who participated in our focus groups and have helped us launch Young Women's Trust.

**TEENS BEHAVING BADLY.
HOW BEING A FOOL
BECAME COOL**

**BINGE-DRINKING,
UNDERAGE SEX, DRUGS
AND EVEN THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE:**

Inside the secret life of teenage girls

**'Rude and
Aggressive'**

GIRLS ARE HARDER TO MANAGE THAN BOYS

**UK'S TEENAGE GIRLS ARE BIGGEST
BINGE DRINKERS IN EUROPE**

**Depression
doubles since
1970s as they
'try to have it all'**

*But, I know what scheming temptresses
girls of 15 can be - I was shameless"*

**YOUNG LACK THE GRIT
TO GET JOBS: TOO MANY
SCHOOL LEAVERS ARE
FIT FOR WORK, SAYS MINISTER**


**benefits for feckless under
25s as he declares war on
welfare culture**

**THE RISE OF
VIOLENT TEEN
GIRL MUGGERS**

**Multiple fathers
benefits on tap**

MEET THE TEEN MOTHER WITH TRIPLETS ON THE WAY

**en Girls
JUST WANT**



YOUNG FEMALE STEREOTYPED?

We think we know the story of young women. It's a story told through the pages of magazines and episodes of reality TV.

And it's a story of two halves. Either bad behaviour, benefits and babies. Or successful, salaried, sorted.

The real story is quite different.

When you're young and female in England and Wales, life isn't always easy and it definitely isn't always fun.

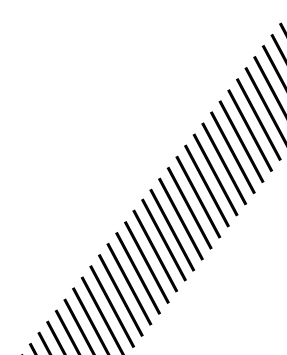
It can be a story of loneliness, isolation and fear. Thwarted ambitions, harmful relationships and emotional and financial insecurity.

And if you're a young woman who also happens to be poor, life can be even tougher.

Young Women's Trust wants to change the story of young women. Because what happens to them now impacts on their lives forever. And also because we all benefit if young women are emotionally resilient and financially independent.

This starts by gathering the facts, not the myths, on what it means to be a young woman in England and Wales today.

This report aims to do exactly that.



ONE IN THREE YOUNG WOMEN FEEL
THAT THEY ARE JUDGED UNFAIRLY
WHEN THEY ASK FOR HELP

40%

**SAID THEY
OFTEN FEEL
LONELY**

46%

**SAID THEY DID
NOT KNOW
WHO THEY
COULD TRUST**

36%

**SAID THAT THEY
OFTEN FELT THAT
THEY COULD
NOT COPE WITH
THEIR LIVES**

**ONE IN FOUR OF THE YOUNG
WOMEN WE POLLED FEEL
THEY HAVE NO ONE TO TURN
TO WHEN THEY CAN'T FIGURE
OUT THEIR PROBLEMS
BY THEMSELVES**

YOUNG UNEDUCATED UNMOTIVATED?

When it comes to education and careers, young women are thought to have never had it so good. On average, girls outperform boys at school and more of them go to university so it's assumed that young women can do and be exactly what they want if they choose to.

This story hides some uncomfortable truths.

First, not all young women do well at school. In 2012, 36% per cent of girls did not achieve 5 A*-C GCSEs, if you include English and Maths.¹ This is more than 100,000 girls who did not achieve the qualification level deemed necessary for further education, training or even starting employment.

It's perhaps not surprising then that there are half a million young women aged between 16-24 who are NEET (Not in Employment Education or Training)² – over 100,000 more than young men of the same age.

Second, although girls may, on average, achieve better grades than their male contemporaries, this is in subjects which ultimately lead to lower paid jobs.

Among those taking A Levels, boys outperform girls in what are known as 'facilitating subjects', e.g. Maths, Physics, Chemistry and Geography, which give more options at university level. As a result, women are more likely to graduate in subjects which lead to lower paid jobs than men.

This pattern is the same in training and apprenticeships. Young women tend to select, and are encouraged to pursue, apprenticeships in traditionally female and lower-paid roles – customer service, retail, health and social care, and hairdressing.

**36% OF THE YOUNG WOMEN
WE POLLED HAD NEVER
RECEIVED ANY CAREER ADVICE**

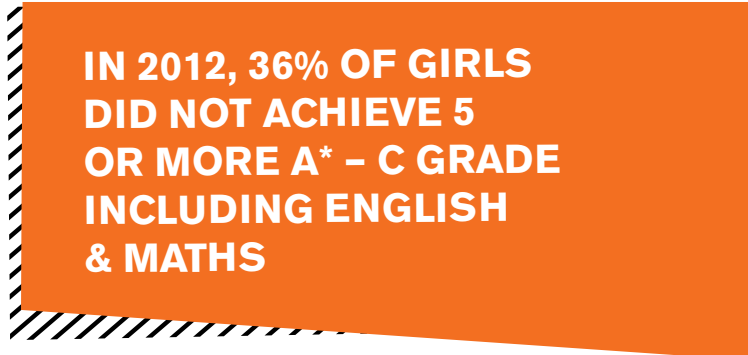


OVER A THIRD OF YOUNG WOMEN BELIEVE THAT WELL PAID APPRENTICESHIPS IN ENGINEERING AND BUILDING TRADES ARE ONLY FOR BOYS

Why is this? A range of reports show that many of these subject or training choices have been made as a result of poor or non-existent career advice. Young women receive gender-stereotyped advice and have not been made aware of the career consequences of subject choices or the pay associated with different roles.

It's not just at school where young girls and women's ambitions and career aspirations are formed. Ofsted found family and friends are also a particularly important source of information.³ As a result, 16-18 year old girls were typically thinking of careers very similar to their families – either parents or siblings – or taking work placements as a result of their family background and resources.

This is particularly concerning for young women with parents in low paid, temporary work or unemployment as it's hard to be what you cannot see. If you're a young woman whose mum owns a legal firm it's easy to see why your career opportunities will be very different to those whose mum cleans one.



IN 2012, 36% OF GIRLS DID NOT ACHIEVE 5 OR MORE A* – C GRADE INCLUDING ENGLISH & MATHS

What's more the opportunities to retrain or gain qualifications later in life, particularly over 25, are hampered by limited funding, lack of flexibility in courses or support for caring responsibilities.

The idea that there's a generation of young women who can have it all couldn't be more inaccurate.

¹ Summary: achievements at GCSE and equivalent for pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 by pupil characteristics (England), 24th January 2013, Department for Education

² NEET Statistics – quarterly brief – quarter 2, 2013, Department for Education

³ Going in the Right Direction: Careers Guidance in Schools from September 2012, Ofsted, September 2013

YOUNG UNEMPLOYED LAZY?

Young people in general are struggling to find employment right now. ONS figures released in October 2013 showed that 958,000 people aged 16-24 were unemployed – that’s around one in five young people.⁴ Unemployment is not an issue exclusive to young women. But we are concerned that young women are going to be hit harder – and for longer – by it.

Women’s overall employment rate in the UK is stalling. The ONS shows that between March and May 2013, the employment rate for women (aged 16-65) was 67%, compared to 76% for men (aged 16-64).⁵

And while competition for jobs is fierce across the board, those with fewer qualifications face far more competition than their better-qualified counterparts – recent evidence showed 45 applicants chasing every low skilled job compared with 29 applicants for every medium skilled and 10 applicants for every high skilled role.⁶

This isn’t a short-term problem.

14% of employers said they would not hire school leavers and 11% of employers said they would not hire someone if they have been long term unemployed.⁷

ALMOST HALF OF THE YOUNG WOMEN WE POLLED SAW WORK AS A MEANS TO AN END RATHER THAN SOMETHING THEY ENJOY DOING

There is much evidence to show how periods of unemployment can ‘scar’ young people for the rest of their lives – resulting in reduced wages throughout their lives and a greater chance of being unemployed again. There’s also growing evidence that moving in and out of short term, low skilled, low paid work can have exactly the same effect – precisely the type of work that young women with poor qualifications are most likely to get.

“IT’S HARD TO GET OUT OF BED IN THE MORNING WHEN THERE’S NOTHING TO GET UP FOR”

Sonia is 22 and lives in London. Her Dad passed away when she was 14 and shortly afterwards her mum kicked her out of the house.

For the last 6 years she has been living in hostels or staying on different friends’ floors or sofas. She describes this as “floating around”. This might sound like she’s quite happy-go-lucky. The reality is she is desperately unhappy and doesn’t know where she will be from one week to the next.

Despite her lack of stability, Sonia is determined to work hard – after leaving school she went to college and qualified as a nursery nurse but has since been unable to find a job. Any job.

Sonia has now been unemployed for 3 years and every time an application is rejected the harder things get for her. She finds it increasingly difficult to get out of bed in the morning when there is nothing to get up for.

When we asked her what she would like as a career she told us just how different her aspirations were now from when she first started college. Now all she wants is a job. She’s had to put aside her ambition of working with children.

Before she left Sonia said to us, “I really don’t know where I’ll be in 10 years’ time because it is difficult to see into the future if you are not really starting it now”.

OVER 60% OF YOUNG WOMEN REPORTED BEING WORRIED THAT THERE’S A GENERATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO MAY NEVER BE ABLE TO GET JOBS BECAUSE OF THE RECESSION

⁴ Labour Market Statistics October 2013, Office for National Statistics, Released 16th October 2013

⁵ Women in the Labour Market Office for National Statistics, 25th September 2013

⁶ Labour Market Outlook, Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD) May 2013

⁷ Ibid

YOUNG BROKE CARELESS?

Money – how much you earn and how much you do or don't have left at the end of the month – is an issue for most young women most of the time. 90% of young women admit to worrying about money. In our poll, 32% of young women report being in debt all of the time.

There are a number of factors at work here. The key one is how much money you earn in the first place. It's a fact that women in the UK still earn less than men. This is made worse by occupational segregation – certain jobs that tend to be done by men; certain jobs that tend to be done by women. Double the number of women work in low paid jobs compared to men: 2 million women compared to 1 million men.⁸

This makes depressing reading for anyone. But it's particularly worrying for young women with low or no qualifications. The pay difference between professional and low skilled women is 80% compared to 60% between men.⁹

44% OF THE YOUNG WOMEN WE POLLED SAID THAT THINKING ABOUT HOUSEHOLD FINANCES "FILLED THEM WITH DREAD"

And while many young women will experience debt, we are concerned that young women who are poor are more likely to stay in debt. This is in large part because they don't have the opportunities to address their debt early. They will not be earning sufficiently, if at all, and they lack a network of people who can help them. This compounds the problem and can lead to financial exclusion – a life limited by lack of access to credit or the other financial resources you need to get on in life.

⁸ Gender Pay Gaps, David Perfect, Equality and Human Rights Commission Briefing Paper 2 2011

⁹ Great expectations: exploring the promises of gender equality, Tess Lanning, Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) March 2013

“I’M LONELY AND RESENTFUL AND STRESSED”

Rekha is 21 and currently working in a temporary retail job. She would love to find a full time permanent role but no one offers her one. Instead, Rekha finds herself moving from employer to employer. It’s stressful and unsettling. But moving around has been a big part of Rekha’s life.

Three years ago her father was sent to prison. Her mum moved the family from Leicester down to London so that they could see him more easily, but this meant Rekha lost contact with most of her friends. Added to this, her mum didn’t have English as a first language or any qualifications, so Rekha became the main bread-winner.

Working to support her family gives Rekha little time to go out and meet new people. She feels lonely and resentful. What Rekha really wants to do is get back into education and join the police. Right now, that dream feels very far away.

**OVER A THIRD OF
YOUNG WOMEN
IN OUR POLL
SAID THEY DID
NOT BELIEVE
THAT THERE WILL
EVER BE EQUAL
PAY FOR WOMEN**

**OVER HALF OF THE
YOUNG WOMEN WE
POLLED STRUGGLED
TO MAKE THEIR MONEY
LAST UNTIL THE END
OF THE MONTH**

YOUNG PREGNANT IRRESPONSIBLE?

The image of the young mum is perhaps the one that enjoys most attention in the public eye. Pregnant young women are seen as stupid and feckless or lacking in self-respect. Poor young women are seen as getting pregnant to get a home and state benefits.

The reality is that young women are acutely aware that motherhood is an additional financial burden for them as well as a major barrier to them improving their education or finding anything but low paid work. Young women are under no illusion, they know motherhood is not an easy route to anything.

What's more, the myths around young mothers mask important facts. Firstly, although the UK has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in Europe, the numbers are dropping – in 2011 the rate of conceptions amongst women under 19 was the lowest ever recorded.¹⁰ Secondly, conceptions amongst women under 18 make up just 3% of all conceptions in the UK.

And while the public believe that 15% of girls under the age of 16 get pregnant in Britain each year, the actual figure is 0.6 percent.¹¹

It's not young motherhood in itself that's the problem. It's the fact that for many young women it shapes their lives in a negative way. Lack of support and funding creates barriers to them accessing the education and career opportunities many of them so desperately want. Instead of motherhood being part of their life story, it becomes their whole story.

THE PUBLIC BELIEVES THAT 15% OF GIRLS UNDER THE AGE OF 16 GET PREGNANT IN BRITAIN EACH YEAR – THE ACTUAL FIGURE IS AROUND 0.6 PERCENT

¹⁰ Conception rates in England and Wales 2011, Office for National Statistics, 26th February 2013

¹¹ Perceptions are not reality: the top ten we get wrong Ipsos MORI, 9 July 2013

“THE MOMENT YOU HAVE TO GO INTO THE JOB CENTRE IT MAKES YOU FEEL SO SMALL”

Kelly is 23 and is 7 months pregnant. She fears she will never be able to get a job for 4 or 5 years – childcare is too expensive and she wouldn't earn enough money to cover their rent, bills and food.

The sad fact is Kelly would love to have a job. She's particularly interested in a career in social work. She finds being unemployed depressing and stressful saying: “the moment you have to go into the job centre it makes you feel so small. I am not proud of having to go in there. I feel ashamed. I feel low. I have lost my self-esteem”.

Kelly left school at 14 and was later diagnosed with dyslexia. At 19 she enrolled in a Level 1 college course to help her gain some qualifications and find a job. But despite her best efforts, Kelly has now been unemployed for 2 years.

When we asked Kelly where she wanted to be in 10 years' time her ambitions were not for herself but for her unborn child. All she wants is for her child to go to school, go to college and get a job. To not have the life she has had.

45% OF THE YOUNG WOMEN WE POLLED THOUGHT THAT SOCIETY DOESN'T GIVE YOUNG MOTHERS THE RECOGNITION THEY DESERVE

YOUNG UNHAPPY WHINGERS?

Contrary to the public image of young women having a good time and an easy life, many young women today are having an extremely difficult time. There is a shockingly high level of young women suffering with low self-confidence and self-worth. Many are also struggling with mental health issues.

In our poll, 17% of young women said that they had been diagnosed with a serious mental health problem. That's nearly 1 in 5.

We have good reason to be concerned about young women's mental health. Research shows that women are two and a half times more likely than men to need treatment for depression and anxiety¹² and that three quarters of mental disorders start before the age of 25.¹³

And if you are poor, the risks are greater – the poorest in our society are twice as likely to experience a mental health problem as those on average income.¹⁴ This is compounded by the fact that many young women who are poor lack the support network that's proven to protect and enhance mental health.

Getting support remains a challenge. 52% of the young women we polled say they didn't like to ask for help when they have a problem. Even if they do want help it is very difficult for them to access it – the organisation Mind estimates that 1 in 5 people are waiting over a year to access psychological therapies such as CBT and counselling.¹⁵

**ONE IN FOUR YOUNG
WOMEN IN OUR POLL SAID
THEY HAD BEEN IN AN
ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP**

77% OF YOUNG WOMEN BELIEVE THAT IF YOU ARE A WOMAN PEOPLE JUDGE YOU BY YOUR LOOKS

But it is not only diagnosable conditions that cause distress and interfere with life. High numbers of young women are struggling with many difficult feelings and emotions – over half the young women we polled said they lacked self-confidence. 59% of them had suffered from stress and 54% report lacking self-esteem.

These feelings get in the way of young women coping with the challenges that life throws at them and reduce their emotional resilience. Our concern is that, as a result, many young women are at serious risk of mental health problems which could blight the rest of their lives.

30%

OF THE YOUNG WOMEN WE POLLED HAD SELF-HARMED

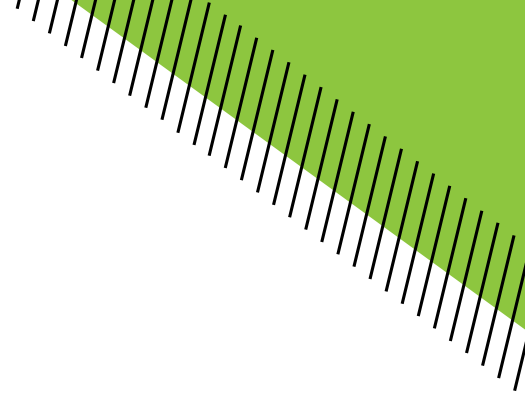
PEOPLE WITHOUT A DEGREE ARE ALMOST TWICE AS LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION AS THOSE WITH A DEGREE (MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION)

¹² Women and Mental Health Factsheet, Mental Health Foundation website

¹³ We need to talk: getting the right therapy at the right time published by the We Need to Talk coalition of mental health charities

¹⁴ The Fundamental Facts: The latest facts and figures from the Mental Health Foundation, Mental Health Foundation 2007

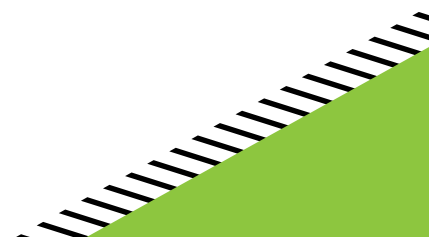
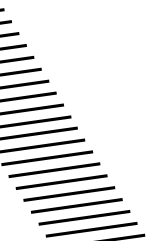
¹⁵ Getting the right therapy at the right time, Mind 2010




TRUST

YOUNG

WOMEN





This report was intended to give the real story of what it means to be a young woman in England and Wales today. It shows that despite the popular notion that young women can have it all – and if they don't it's down to their own laziness or lack of ambition – 21st century equality is still a very long way off. And if you're a young woman who also happens to be poor, that equality is even further away.

There is an urgent need to reduce the numbers of young women caught in the vicious cycle of poverty. We also need to prevent the number of young women facing a lifetime of disadvantage – financial, social and emotional – from growing year by year.

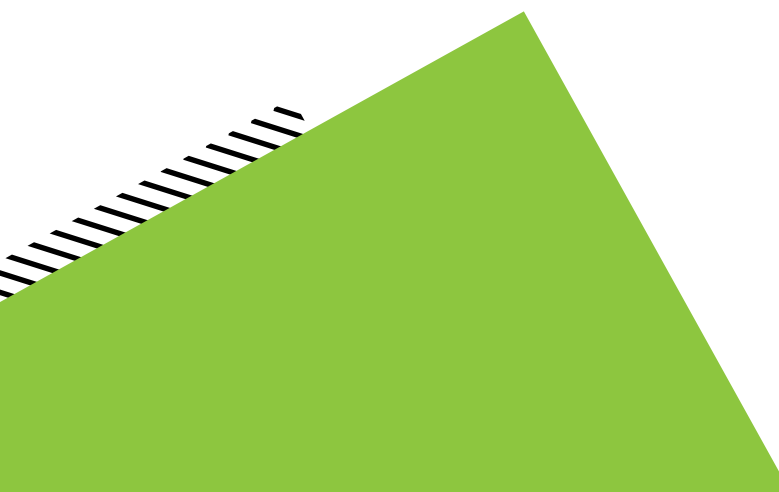
It's a story that will be surprising to all but young women themselves.

Young women are painfully aware of what people think of them and the hurdles they have to overcome so that they can participate fully in society.

They know that if they are poor or in debt this is unlikely to change. They know that poor qualifications seriously limit what they can do and where they can go in their lives. They know that even if they get a job, the work they do and the way they will be treated will likely be unfair and low paid. And many are desperate for support with their emotional and mental health.

Young women want to be independent and they want to use their skills and talents. It's not young women that need to change. It's the attitudes and understanding of those around them.

Society needs to listen to young women, understand the issues they are facing, find ways of giving more of them a chance and, having done so, it needs to trust young women.





YOUNG WOMEN'S TRUST

Young Women's Trust is a charity with a proud history and a new focus.

Evolving from YWCA England & Wales which was formed over 150 years ago, we aim to build on the original aims of our founders and create a society which respects and listens to young women.

Young Women's Trust published this report because we are concerned that young women are ignored, overlooked and stereotyped by politicians, policy makers, influencers and ultimately the public.

We want to change this.



Our aim

Young Women's Trust is determined to make a difference to the lives of young women.

Working with young women in England and Wales we aim to:

- **Demonstrate the reality of young women's lives**
- **Show what works to make a difference**
- **Develop and test new ways of supporting young women**
- **Find and promote good practice and good policy**
- **Gather the views and voices of young women and support them in being heard where it matters**

What we will do

We want to create change through influencing and campaigning, supporting young women and, crucially, involving more young women in the debate and decision making around the key issues that affect them. This includes:

- **Hosting a public inquiry looking at how to reduce the long term impact of poor qualifications**
- **Publishing a young women's manifesto ahead of the General Election**
- **Testing and piloting online and helpline coaching**
- **Establishing YWT advisory groups to seek young women's views on all planned activities.**

What can you do?

We can't change the story of young women alone. We need your support to:

- **Help Young Women's Trust to build an accurate, up to date picture of young women's lives today: whoever you are we want to hear from you.**
- **Support Young Women's Trust practically and financially, so young women have the opportunities they want and deserve, and so that society trusts and respects young women.**
- **Contact us at info@youngwomenstrust.org or visit www.youngwomenstrust.org**



**YOUNG
WOMEN'S
TRUST**

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