

**RESEARCH CENTRE**



# **Young Women's Missing Data and Voices**

**April 2021**



**Research Centre Associates who contributed to this report include:**

Kirsty Chan, Dionne Boateng, Madiha Ahmed, Iulia Dumitras, Freya Pulham-Binch, Louise Goodwin, Sophie Collerton and Mattea Sykes.

**Research lead:** Esther Sample.

**Research support:** Emily Bruce.

# INTRODUCTION

---

There are 5.4 million young women aged 18–30 in the UK, but too often, women or ‘young people’ are treated as homogenous groups by researchers and policymakers, with the assumption of a single experience.

- This one size-fits all approach means there are, in effect, millions of young women not being seen or heard by policymakers.
- Factors such as ethnicity, disability and location also create distinct experiences of discrimination and inequality for young women and affect access to economic justice.
- Because there is lack of official quantitative data on young women, and qualitative and peer research is rarely taken into account, national policies and services are created that do not meet young women’s needs.

Our Picking up the Pieces Report, published in November 2020, highlighted that the coronavirus pandemic and resulting economic downturn exacerbated the existing inequalities young women faced with catastrophic consequences. Young women are disproportionately likely to work in sectors that have shutdown<sup>1</sup> and are more likely to have unpaid caring responsibilities than their male peers. Effects highlighted in our research included losing income and being pushed into poverty, with many reporting skipping meals and accessing benefits and food banks for the first time, with devastating impacts on mental health.

***51% of HR Managers said that their organisation did not collect data on redundancies for young women or any other protected characteristics***

In the process of conducting this research, we found that official data on young women during this ongoing crisis was rarely available, apart from a small number of exceptions explored in this report. Some official data on women has been published, and some data on ‘young people’, but very seldom the two combined. The government continues to make decisions and new policies aiming for social and economic recovery, without considering the unique needs of young women from different backgrounds and communities. While such data gaps are not new, the pandemic has exposed these issues especially vividly.

---

<sup>1</sup> The IFS found that 36% of young women worked in sectors that have shut down [www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14791](http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14791)

Employers are also not monitoring the impact of the pandemic on young women and are not mandated to do so by government. Mandatory gender gap reporting has been suspended until October 2021, and data is not routinely being collected by employers on redundancies and furlough by protected characteristics. In our 2021 survey of HR managers, 51% said that their organisation did not collect data on redundancies for young women or any other protected characteristics.<sup>2</sup> 20% of female HR managers and 8% of male HR managers admitted their organisation does not take gender pay gap reporting seriously, and 48% said their organisation did not take any proactive measures to reduce its gender pay gap over the last year.<sup>3</sup>

There is a data gap for young women at all levels, from employers and services on the ground to local and national government statistics. Our Research Centre for Young Women's Economic Justice aims to address this gap by working with a diverse group of young women (our Research Centre Associates) to conduct and share intersectional and peer research that highlights what life is really like for young women struggling on low or no pay in the UK, and campaign for better official data on young women.

This short report presents our audit of available official data, the gaps we found, and what young women have to say on these topics.



2 558 managers answered this question, 324 were not aware whether this was collected or not.

3 324 female managers and 384 male managers answered this question and 62 female and 92 male answered don't know or not applicable. On proactive measures 574 managers answered this question, 288 did not know.

## Why is the Research Centre needed?



*“We have been furloughed, made redundant, become caregivers, are we going to be seen?”*

*“How are we supposed to recover from COVID-19 as a society when young women are not being represented? We need to know how it has affected young women’s employment, mental health, to identify barriers and create sustainable inclusive solutions.”*

*“I do not think the voices of young women like me are listened to by government when they make policies.”*

*“I feel that my experience isn’t being taken into consideration. Young women with disabilities or long term health conditions have no representation. There’s no data, no statistics, no working group. How do we even begin to address barriers in society?”*

*“Young women were more likely to be key workers or work in industries most affected by the pandemic but we are not seen. Where is all the data?”*

*“Where’s the data on how the pandemic has affected Young Women? Have we been thought about?”*

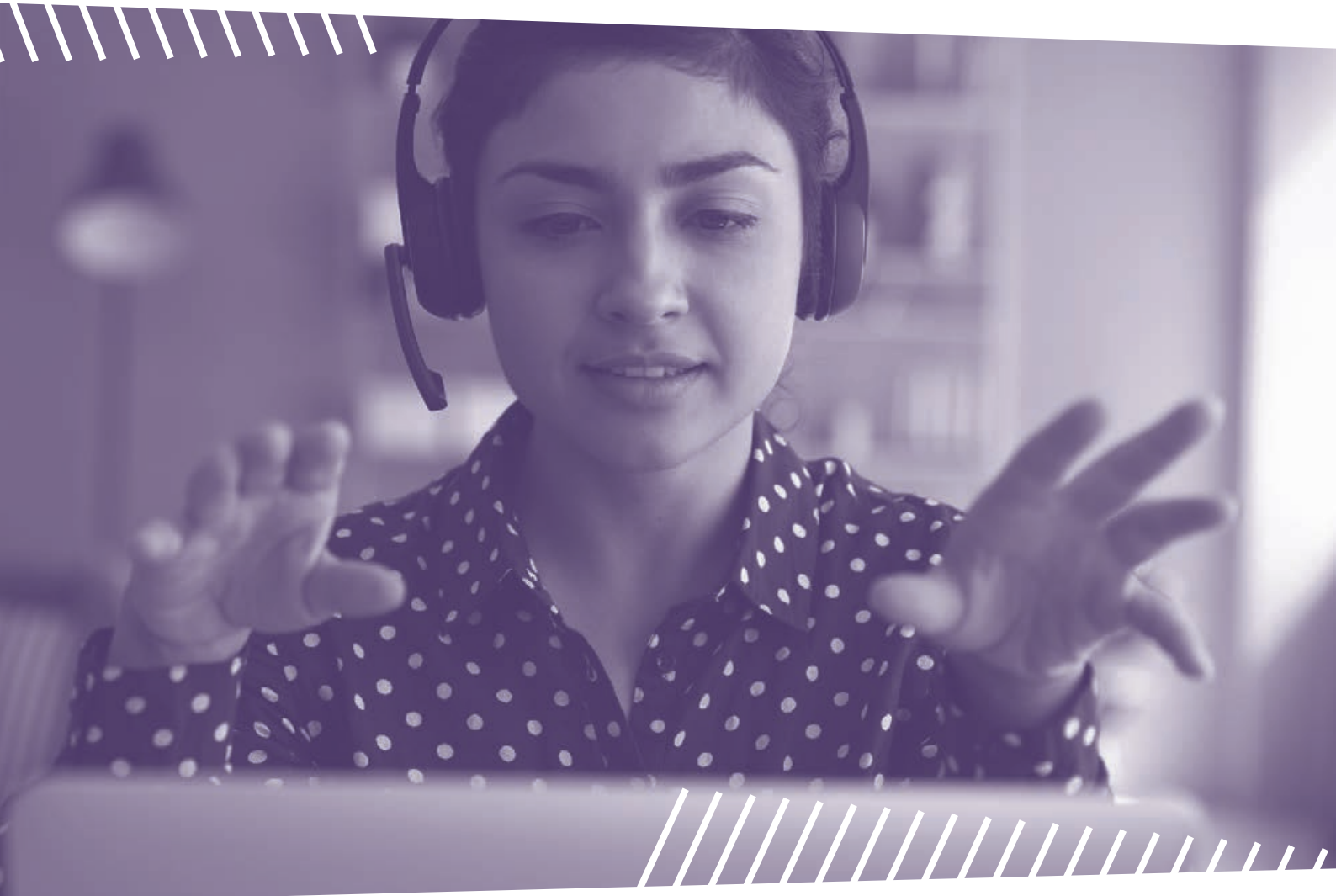
**Research Centre Associates**

## THE MISSING DATA

---

**In an audit of publicly available datasets relevant to young women’s economic justice, the only datasets we found with a breakdown for young women are outlined below, alongside observations of what they show.**

None of these data sets were available for young women and broken down by other protected characteristics, so we are unable to distinguish the specific needs of young women facing different forms of intersectional discrimination. Regional data was also extremely limited, as was data on how particular experiences such as abuse, housing insecurity, or having been in the care or criminal justice system may impact young women and their access to economic justice. Young women’s voices and research throughout highlights what the data doesn’t show.



# 1. YOUNG WOMEN IN WORK

---

The official Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is one of the only datasets to include a breakdown for young women, and it shows every year that the gender gap in earnings starts at the beginning of young women's careers. In 2020, women aged 18–21 earned 31% less than young men of the same age and 19% less in the 22–29 age group.<sup>4</sup> The grouping of 22–29 year-olds is broad and unfortunately does not allow us to see the gender gap for under 25s.

Official Gender Pay Gap data is useful to look at gaps in particular sectors and companies (restricted to those with more than 250 employees), however currently the requirement for employers to report on this has been suspended. This urgently needs to be reinstated with breakdowns for young women and other protected characteristics.

Department for Education data adds some insight into young women's earnings and shows that the sexism and discrimination young women face at the very beginning of their careers can shut them out of high paying roles. The latest data shows fewer young women than young men are starting apprenticeships overall and are less likely to be in those that offer the best pay and progression such as engineering and construction apprenticeships.<sup>5</sup>

Young women can expect to earn an average of £8,000 less than a young man five years after completing their apprenticeship. For those who are able to access higher education, men earn more than women within five years of completing their degree across all subjects. This is particularly pronounced in architecture and computer science, with male graduates earning £4,500 more a year than women with the same qualifications.<sup>6</sup>

***Young women can expect to earn an average of £8,000 less than a young man five years after completing their apprenticeship***

---

4 Calculations based on gross annual pay for all employees. This is different from the gender pay gap, officially calculated as the difference of hourly pay for women and men working full-time. Source: ONS (2020) Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 201, Age Group Table 6.7a Annual Pay, Gross 2020 (all employees) <http://bit.ly/32J2hWd>

5 1,069,680 young women aged 19–24 had started an apprenticeship compared to 1,415,030 young men 19–24 by quarter 3 2019/20 [www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships#apprenticeship-and-traineeships-current-data](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships#apprenticeship-and-traineeships-current-data)

6 WBG and YWT calculations from Department for Education (24 October 2019) Further Education outcome-based success measures <http://bit.ly/2uMkW7b>

The limited data available does not include the differences in income for different groups of young women, for instance those with children who have lost income due to taking on additional childcare during the pandemic, or who face discrimination based on ethnicity or disability. There is no official data on issues that young women disproportionately face in the workplace, such as pregnancy and maternity discrimination and sexual harassment.

### **What the official data does not show**

### **Our Picking up the Pieces report found that:**

- In October 2020, an estimated 1.5 million young women had lost income since the coronavirus pandemic began and 750,000 had been made to come to work despite concerns about their safety.
- 41% of Black young women said they had been discriminated against when in, or looking for, work because of their ethnicity, as did 28% of Asian young women and 22% of Mixed Ethnicity young women.





## Our Research Centre Associates told us:



*“Young women are active members of society and deserve respect! We want to know where we stand on the gender pay gap, how many of us experience sexual harassment at work, how many of us experience racial discrimination and how many of us who are disabled are given fair chances.”*

*“Young women are being taken advantage of and it’s not recorded. For many it’s their first job and hierarchies are strict, and we aren’t told about employment rights. Poor working conditions are normalised and many are freely taken advantage of. It becomes a cycle because we are so disposable in unstable lower income work – someone else can just take our jobs if we don’t like it.”*

*“Young women were more likely to be key workers or work in industries most affected by the pandemic but we are not seen. Where is all the data?”*

*“There is not enough data on why Black young women are one of the lowest paid ethnic groups.”*

*“Why is a Black young woman paid less than a White young woman? Why is a young woman paid less than a young man? We want answers.”*

*“There is no data on the impact of women’s specific health issues at work i.e. PMS, endometriosis – I feel ignored.”*

*“We know that many young women experience sexual harassment at work – why is there no data on this?”*

*“The government should try and find out why so many young women don’t feel comfortable reporting sexual harassment or harassment within work. Who is a safe person for them to report this to? Fear of further trauma, unfair dismissal and/or further harassment is real. Sometimes we feel as if there is no other option but to just ‘move on’ without justice.”*

## 2. YOUNG WOMEN NOT IN WORK OR TRAINING

Young women are more likely to be classed as ‘economically inactive’ than young men. This is defined as unable to start work immediately, often due to caring responsibilities, health issues or a lack of available opportunities. From the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Labour Force Survey, in July–September 2020 211,000 18–24 year old young women were classed as economically inactive compared to 168,000 young men.<sup>7</sup>

Our research estimated a value to the economy of young women’s unpaid work of at least £140 billion. They should therefore not be defined as economically ‘inactive’.<sup>8</sup> ONS data shows that women shoulder 60% more unpaid work than men, unfortunately this data is not available for young women specifically.<sup>9</sup>

Official unemployment data shows that young women’s unemployment has been particularly high during each lockdown period and is higher overall than in 2019. For example there were 183,000 unemployed young women January–March 2020 and this went up to 207,000 in Mar–May 2020 with the first lockdown.<sup>10</sup> This was the only dataset we found with a regional breakdown for young women.<sup>11</sup>

***Young women’s unemployment has been particularly high during each lockdown period and is higher overall than in 2019***

There is some limited data on Jobseekers Allowance which shows the number of young women 18–24 who have been claiming this for less than 3 months increased after the first lockdown. It went from 600 in February to 1,200 in March, 5,500 in April then 5,900 in May 2020.<sup>12</sup>

We were however unable to find publicly available data on Universal Credit, Carers or Disability Allowance for young women (available for women and young people separately). As Universal Credit is based on one claim per household, this makes young women more dependent on partners or family members for their eligibility for

<sup>7</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/unemployment/datasets/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneetable1](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/unemployment/datasets/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneetable1)

<sup>8</sup> [www.youngwomenstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Valuing-young-womens-unpaid-work.pdf](https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Valuing-young-womens-unpaid-work.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldertheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldertheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10)

<sup>10</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/educationalstatusandlabourmarketstatusforpeopleagedfrom16to24seasonallyadjusteda06sa](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/educationalstatusandlabourmarketstatusforpeopleagedfrom16to24seasonallyadjusteda06sa)

<sup>11</sup> See our [data library](#) to explore.

<sup>12</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/outofworkbenefits/datasets/jobseekersallowancebyageanddurationben03](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/outofworkbenefits/datasets/jobseekersallowancebyageanddurationben03) (not designated as national statistics)

benefits, more at risk of economic abuse, and even harder to distinguish in the data. Knowing that a claim is from a male or 'female-headed' household does not allow analysis of young women's financial situation within that household.

### **What the official data does not show**

### **Our Picking up the Pieces report found that:**

- 69% of young women claiming Universal Credit since March 2020 reported they had done so for the first time.
- Young women with a disability or long-term health condition were more likely to say they were struggling to make cash last until the end of the month (44% compared to 27%) than young women without.



## Our Research Centre Associates told us:



*“How can the government make the benefits system accessible to young women if they don’t have data on the barriers they face?”*

*“Only young women were made redundant at my old company and no one asked them why, is the government going to?”*

*“Just giving a number of how many young women are ‘economically inactive’ is just not enough. How many have young children? How many are carers? Are they inactive? How many are disabled and not given a fair chance? How many were made redundant as opposed to their male counterparts? How many have reported sexual harassment at work and not taken seriously? We need comprehensive data.”*

*“Not being able to have income means some young women have to stay in abusive relationships to meet their basic needs. It’s devastating for our self-confidence and mental health.”*

*“There is a lack of empathy and understanding about the mental toll of being out of work for extended periods of time. This could be due to career breaks because of children or other caring responsibilities or mental health problems. There is no support to help tackle the mental barriers preventing young women from getting back into work – it can feel like an impossible task.”*

*“We know that people with disabilities and health conditions have a much lower employment rate. If young women are also struggling to find employment then how are the young women with disabilities coping?”*

### 3. THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS

Our research has shown that the economic and wider impact of coronavirus on young women is not being sufficiently measured in official data.

Data is now available on the Furlough and Self Employment Income Support Scheme following a request by Women's Budget Group. They found that the 'gender furlough gap' (the proportion of women compared to men) is higher for younger women than older women: women aged 18-24 were 53.1% of those furloughed in this age group, compared with 51.5% in the 45-64 age group.<sup>13</sup>

From national data, we can see that there have been 616 deaths of women aged 15-44 years in England and Wales that have been officially registered as due to Coronavirus from 28 December 2019 to 26 March 2021.<sup>14</sup> This age bracket is unfortunately too wide to pull out specifics for young women.

*Women aged 18-24 were 53.1% of those furloughed in this age group*



<sup>13</sup> [wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/hmrc-data-prompts-concern-of-gender-furlough-gap/](https://www.wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/hmrc-data-prompts-concern-of-gender-furlough-gap/)

<sup>14</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsregisteredweeklyinenglandandwalesprovisional/weekending26march2021](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsregisteredweeklyinenglandandwalesprovisional/weekending26march2021)

The ONS suggest that adults who were aged 16 to 39 years old, female, unable to afford an unexpected expense or disabled were the most likely to experience some form of depression during the pandemic.<sup>15</sup> The published dataset does not however allow us to see the data for women and young people combined.

Official statistics show that suicides of girls and young women have doubled in the last 7 years.<sup>16</sup> However health datasets do not allow us to examine this in more detail or show devastating impact coronavirus has had on mental health of young women.

Greater insights on young women's mental health can be found from the NHS 'Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey' however this was most recently completed in 2014. It shows for instance that almost a quarter of girls and young women experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>17</sup>



<sup>15</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/june2020](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/june2020)

<sup>16</sup> Office for National Statistics (2020), Suicides in England and Wales.

<sup>17</sup> NHS, Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey: Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2014) cited in Agenda, Struggling Alone (2020) [weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Struggling-Alone-3.pdf](https://weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Struggling-Alone-3.pdf)

## What the official data doesn't show

### Our recent Lockdown one year on report found that:

- 83% of young women said that their mental health had suffered, and more than half (55%) said they had experienced depression in the last year.
- 86% of young women said they felt that the government response to the pandemic had made things worse for people like them.

### Our Research Centre Associates told us:



*“Where’s the data on how the pandemic has affected Young Women? Have we been thought about?”*

*“How are we supposed to recover from COVID-19 as a society when young women are not being represented? We need to know how it has affected young women’s employment, mental health, to identify barriers and create sustainable inclusive solutions.”*

*“The first thing that happened in March 2020 for me was to have my mental health support stopped. A year later I’m still waiting for them to call me back in. How many of us are suffering in silence?”*

*“We have been furloughed, made redundant, become caregivers, are we going to be seen?”*

*“During the first lockdown why were mainly female owned businesses such as hairdressers and nail salons not allowed to open, but barbershops which are mostly owned by men allowed to open?”*

*“Why are young women being furloughed more than young men? This perpetuates gender imbalance in the workplace. Not being able to work affects your income, career opportunities, mental health from isolation and losing a sense of purpose.”*

## CONCLUSION

---

A lack of focus on the different experiences of young women in relation to economic justice means that policy responses lack the necessary sophistication to meet the unique needs of young women and the additional barriers they face. To fully understand the experiences of all young women we need additional data, and existing data should also be analysed and published in a way that allows for a better understanding of the experiences of young women and distinct groups of young women.

This could also be improved by better linkages between datasets, data sharing between public services and join up with academic and sector-based research. Qualitative and peer research can provide honest insights into the lives of diverse young women that official quantitative data is unable to show, and should therefore be taken into account in policy making processes, rather than all too often being overlooked.

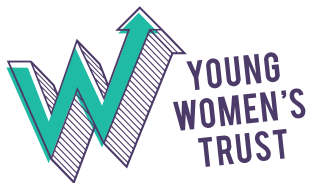




## RECOMMENDATIONS

---

- Gender pay gap reporting should be reinstated urgently. Pay gap reporting should also include other protected characteristics beyond sex, and include intersections between characteristics as much as possible, including for young women.
- Better linkages between datasets and data sharing between public services are needed to allow for more comparative data on young women.
- The voices of young women should be taken into account in policy making including via qualitative and peer-research from charities and academia.
- More intersectional official data needs to be gathered on young women and existing data should also be analysed and published in a way that allows for better understanding of the experiences of distinct groups of young women.
- Census data from 2021 needs thorough intersectional analysis on the lives of young women. The census should not end after this year (as some suggest) and this unique and most comprehensive 10 yearly data set should continue.
- Equality impact assessments which explore intersectional discrimination need to be conducted for all policymaking and made publicly available.
- The government's Inclusive Data Taskforce and proposed Equalities Hub must include a focus on young women. This should include setting up a panel of young women with lived experience of living on low or no pay to advise on their work.



**RESEARCH CENTRE**



**Young Women's Trust**  
**Unit D, 15-18 White Lion Street**  
**London N1 9PD**

**[info@youngwomenstrust.org](mailto:info@youngwomenstrust.org)**  
**[youngwomenstrust.org](http://youngwomenstrust.org)**

** [@ywtrust](https://twitter.com/ywtrust)**

** [youngwomenstrust](https://www.facebook.com/youngwomenstrust)**

** [@youngwomenstrust](https://www.instagram.com/youngwomenstrust)**

Young Women's Trust is the operating name of YWCA England & Wales.  
Registered charity number 217868. Company number 137113.