About the survey

For 10 years the Girl Guides organisation in the UK has been conducting annual surveys of girls and young women. The surveys explore changes in the girls’ attitudes and behaviour over time. You can download a copy of: We See the Big Picture Girls’ Attitudes Survey 2018 here: www.tinyurl.com/yamkkfmk.

Researching young children has some obvious practical and ethical difficulties. You may want to draw up a list of these now.

Girl Guides commissions CHILDWISE, a specialist in research with children, to conduct the survey each year. A total of 1,903 girls and young women aged between 7 and 21 took part in the latest 2018 survey, drawn from all parts of the UK. Most interviews were completed online, with 7- to 16-year-olds doing theirs in school. The older age group was interviewed through an online panel. Additional face-to-face interviews were carried out with those not in education, employment or training (NEET), to ensure this group was involved. How representative do you think this survey might be? What would you do differently?

Longitudinal results

Session

The survey throws up some interesting longitudinal findings — though you may think the age range used is rather wide for some of them. For example, the data in Figure 1 could suggest that young females’ experience of sexism may be increasing over time. But what is actually going on here? Is this a measure of increasing awareness of sexism rather than real change?

Family tasks

Interesting, too, is evidence of changing expectations among younger girls about who does what about the house and in relation to family tasks (see Figure 2). In all cases, girls today seem to assume rather less gendered approaches to household duties — though 30% still see childcare as a woman’s job and 46% identify women as having the main responsibility for housework, compared for just 9% for males. And this is in a period in which most women in Britain are also in paid employment.

Happiness

Finally, the survey asks about relative happiness, again comparing responses over time (see Figure 3). ‘Happiness’ is, of course, an especially slippery thing to measure, not least because it is so subjective. What does the concept even mean? What is ‘quite happy’ for some might be ‘very happy’ for others. Moreover, precisely when you complete the interview or survey may strongly shape your response — we all have good or bad days, after all. Nevertheless, these data do seem to suggest that unhappiness is increasing among young people, especially those aged 17–21 years. You may have some ideas why.