

BE REAL
BODY CONFIDENCE FOR EVERYONE



In Your Face

Executive Summary

A report investigating young people's experiences of appearance-based bullying.

February 2018

In partnership with

YMCA

Dove
self-esteem
project



Executive summary

The relationship many young people have with their appearance is a negative one. It is a relationship that is powered by constant comparisons with others, self-doubt, and in some cases, crippling insecurities.

For many, this relationship is reinforced by an explicit barrage of messages, comments and even physical attacks, which tell them their appearance is not good enough and is deemed in some way unacceptable by those around them.

It is clear comments and criticisms of young people's appearance have become part of everyday life. However, while largely expected by young people, such criticisms should not be accepted.

As such, *'In Your Face'* seeks to challenge the norms by allowing young people the space to discuss their views and experiences to reveal the real impact of appearance-based bullying on the lives of individuals in the UK, and to create practical solutions that can be implemented to tackle the problem.

Bullying around appearance is an inevitable evil for young people

- ▶ More than half of young people (55%) have been bullied about their appearance.
- ▶ Two fifths of these (40%) experienced this bullying at least once a week.
- ▶ For most people experiencing this bullying (54%), this starts by the age of ten years-old.

Although young people get bullied for a range of things, size and weight remain the focus

- ▶ Being considered as overweight was the most common reason why young people (14%) reported being bullied about their appearance.
- ▶ In addition to weight, people's body shapes were also a primary focus of the bullying with 12% of young people having been bullied for it.
- ▶ More than one in 10 young people (12%) reported being bullied for not wearing the latest trends or brands, and 6% reported being bullied for wearing clothes deemed inappropriate to their peers.

While social media adds a new dimension to bullying, traditional forms still prevail

- ▶ Nearly nine in 10 of those who had been bullied about their appearance (87%) experienced verbal abuse.
- ▶ Of those young people who had experienced bullying based on their appearance, more than one quarter (26%) were cyberbullied.
- ▶ Four in five young people (80%) who had experienced bullying related to their appearance did so in school or college.
- ▶ More than half of young people who had experienced this bullying saying it had come from either their acquaintances or peers (53%) or their friends (51%).

The most significant impact this bullying has on young people is on their mental wellbeing

- ▶ More than half of young people (53%) who had experienced appearance-based bullying said they became anxious and a quarter (29%) said they became depressed as a result.
- ▶ Three fifths of young people (60%) took action to change their appearance as a result of the bullying they received. The most prominent focus being to change their size and body shape, with almost a quarter (24%) of young people dieting and nearly a fifth (19%) doing more exercise.

Despite the impact of the bullying, young people are suffering in silence

- ▶ One in five young people (20%) who experienced this bullying did not speak to anyone about it. When they did, parents and carers (58%) were the groups they turned to most often.
- ▶ More than one in five (22%) of those who did not speak about the bullying said it was because they did not think they would be taken seriously.

The causes of appearance-based bullying are multifaceted

- ▶ More than half of young people (53%) believed people bully others about how they look because they have insecurities about themselves and their own appearance.
- ▶ More than a third of young people (37%) believed appearance-based bullying was caused by the pressures put on young people to look a certain way.

Interventions and actions targeted at young people must be rooted in their experiences and opinions. Accordingly, to bring about this change, this research is calling for:

- ▶ **Lessons on bullying, body image and sexual harassment to be made a compulsory part of the school curriculum.**
- ▶ **More robust measures to be taken to tackle sexual harassment in schools.**
- ▶ **Lessons on bullying to be provided by external experts in the form of interactive workshops.**
- ▶ **Young people to be empowered to challenge bullying and speak about their experiences of it and body image anxiety.**
- ▶ **School policies to be enacted in full and for suitable punishments to be enforced for bullying.**
- ▶ **Whole-school approaches to promote body confidence and diversity.**
- ▶ **All schools and organisations working with young people to have anonymous reporting systems.**
- ▶ **Greater clarity and advertising processes for reporting bullying on social media.**
- ▶ **Targeted anti-bullying and body positive advertising on social media.**
- ▶ **More prominent links to helplines and online resources for those in need on social media platforms.**

The *Be Real Campaign* is a UK-wide campaign to change attitudes towards body image. This research was undertaken by YMCA on behalf of the *Be Real Campaign*. The quantitative fieldwork for this research was conducted by YouthSights, a specialist youth research agency. The quantitative sample consisted of 1,006 young people aged between 11 and 16 years-old from across the UK. To supplement this, YMCA also undertook qualitative research in the form of focus groups held in 12 different locations in the UK, with young people aged between 11 and 16 years-old.



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