

National

Not yobs but loving, maligned boys - survey finds

Research shows teenagers feel wrongly demonised

Better in Kazakhstan, says higher education minister

Simon Hattenstone

The news may come as a shock to those who believe Britain is a broken society menaced by hoodie-wearing yobs, but research commissioned by the Guardian shows that the vast majority of teenage boys are ambitious, career-minded, home-loving and, above all, happy.

A survey of 1,000 teenage boys in the UK showed that 88% of them believed their career prospects were good, and 88% regarded themselves as ambitious; 87% were happy in their family lives, 87% were happy in their social lives, and 81% were happy in their school or work lives.

The survey comes after a fortnight in which leading politicians from both major parties have pledged to crack down on the behaviour of teenage boys. At the Labour party conference Gordon Brown promised more asbos and tougher action on "teenage tearaways turning town centres into no-go areas".

This week, the shadow home secretary, Chris Grayling, told the Conservative conference how the Tories would clamp down on antisocial behaviour. "We'll start with the problem of 14-year-olds hanging around with bottles of super-strength beers or ciders."

In the survey, conducted by Echo, 78% of teenage boys said adults had a higher opinion of teenage girls than boys. An Echo survey earlier this year, commis-

sioned by Women in Journalism, examined the language used to describe teenage boys in the media. The most common word was "yobs" (which appeared 591 times over a year), followed by thugs (254 times), sick (119), feral (96) and hoodie (60). More than 60% of the stories about teenage boys concerned crime, and 90% of these showed them in a bad light. Boys interviewed by the Guardian for a report in today's Weekend magazine said they felt demonised by press and politicians.

The survey found 57% spent an average of at least an hour a day social networking on the internet. Half spent at least an hour a day surfing for news, 33% spent at least an hour online gaming, 21% watching YouTube, and 10% trading online.

The most worrying data was found in the virtual world: 21% spend an average of at least three hours a day social networking online, and 10% spent at least five hours. Some 21% had experienced cyber bullying; and 55% said they had been exposed to inappropriate online content.

David Lammy, the minister of state for higher education, said: "Teenage boys are cruelly caricatured in our national public life. I've visited many more children's playgrounds for five-year-olds than astro-turf football pitches, skateboard parks and serious activity for young people. Why are there more golf courses in Britain per square metre than playing fields?"

"Believe me, in China or India or Kazakhstan, the way they think of their young people, the resources they put into their young people ... we have to do the same in this country. Talking down teenagers is talking down the future of our country, and particularly at this time of economic downturn we have to resist that."

Weekend magazine, cover story »

I am happy at home/with my family
87% of teenage boys agree



I am happy with my social life/friends
87% of teenage boys agree



I am ambitious about my future career
88% of teenage boys agree



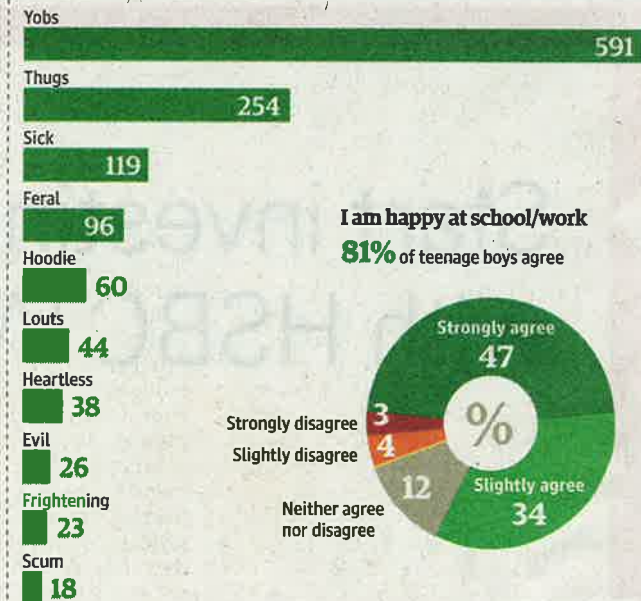
I believe my careers prospects are good
88% of teenage boys agree



Key: Slightly disagree, Strongly disagree, Neither agree nor disagree

Terms used in stories about teenage boys

Top descriptions of teenage boys by volume



I am happy at school/work
81% of teenage boys agree

