Upper Clutha Adult Survey

Path Wānaka

HELPING CAREGIVERS NAVIGATE WILDHOOD

August 2026

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Background and approach

Since 2016 Path Wānaka | Ara ki Wānaka (formerly the Wānaka Alcohol Group) has been researching and tracking the attitudes towards, and engagement with, harmful substances and the activities of youth living in the Upper Clutha.

Youth surveys have previously been conducted in 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2023.

The 2026 youth survey was a follow-up from those surveys and aims to understand current substance use and other behaviour (both online and offline) and provide the Upper Clutha community and Path Wānaka with information to support strategic activities for the next five years.

The 2026 youth study was an online survey, conducted in May. The survey was written by Tasman Research and Path Wānaka, with input from key stakeholders and based heavily on the 2023 survey.

This **adult survey** (parents and caregivers, June and July) complements the recent youth survey, showing the issues they face, as well as perceptions of what their children face.



It is the first time this adult survey has been conducted.

Because age is a key factor in many behaviours, we have weighted the adult survey to match the youth survey, in terms of the child being talked about.

(See the appendices for more information about this.)

For example, alcohol use is correlated with age. Without this, the extra people who are caregivers of children 12 years and younger in the 2026 adult survey would make it look like alcohol consumption had fallen – when it hasn't – purely due to the age difference in the sample.

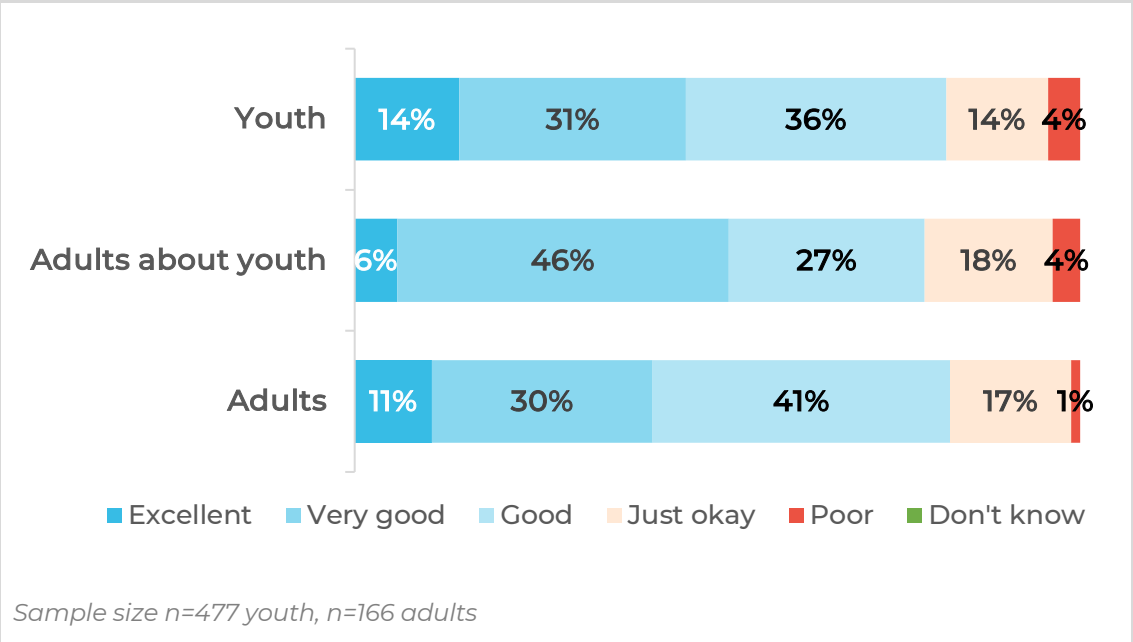
The present:

What it's like at the moment

Most youth (82%) say that things are going good or better at the moment, with 46%[1] very good or better.

It is interesting to note that adults rate things 'now' about the same for themselves as for their children (the top and bottom bars), but also that they think their children would rate it a little worse than the children actually do (the top and middle bars).

(Note that for privacy reasons, the surveys weren't "matched" parent-with-child, so we don't know what individual family dynamics are.)



Sample size n=477 youth, n=166 adults

[1] The apparent difference with the graph is due to rounding.

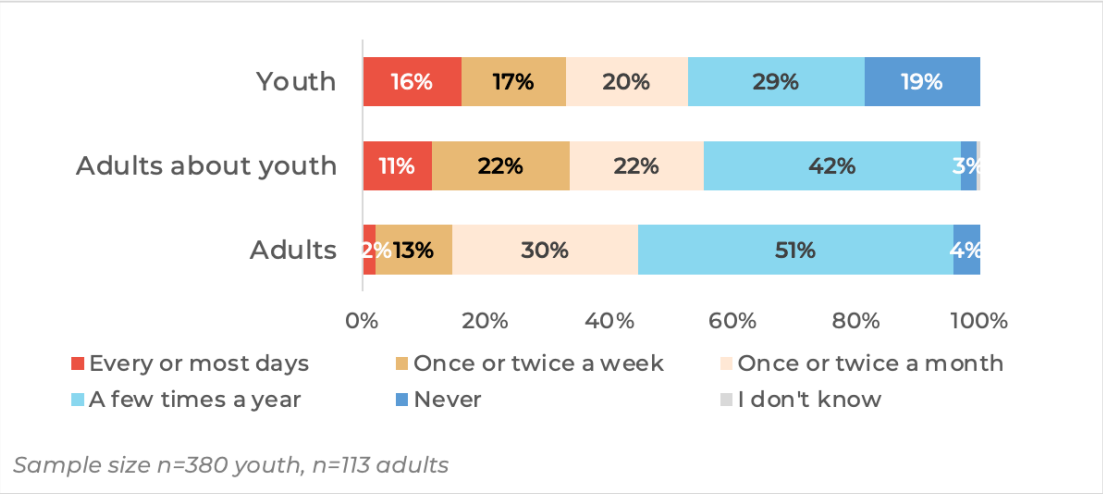
Feeling sad

One-sixth of youth "feel really sad or unhappy" at least once-a-week (16%), and one-in-three say that feel that they have these feelings at least once a week.

However, as almost half say 'never' or only a 'few times' a year, this represents vast difference in the spectrum of mental health of youth; some are sad almost every day and some say they never are.

We can see a significant difference between adults and youth (the top and bottom bars), but again adults seem to have a reasonable understanding of how often their child feels sad. (The middle bar.)

The question prefaced with *"sometimes life can be really difficult and make us feel sad or unhappy through no fault of their own"*.



Sample size n=380 youth, n=113 adults

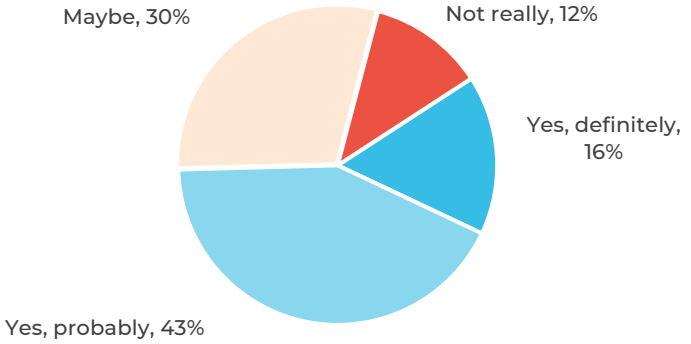
Note that some say they feel sad often, and yet say their life is very good or better. This may suggest some fragility.

For the youth analysis, a category of people with chronic or acute mental health issues was created. This was people who said that their life was 'just okay' or 'poor' now, or who said they felt '*really sad*' or '*unhappy*' most days. This was over 100 people. The term used for this group is "*people with mental health challenges*".

Getting help

Most parents think their children would know where to go for help if they needed it.

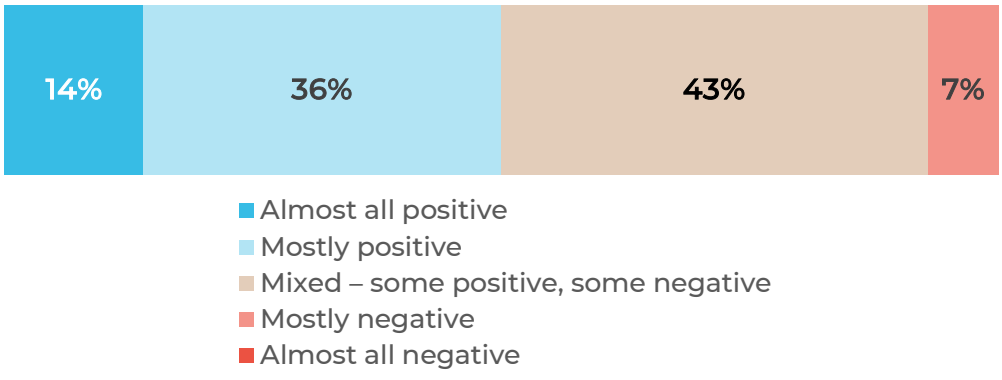
However, there is still a large proportion that only say 'maybe' or 'not really'.



Sample size n=112

Friends

Very few parents think their child's friends are mostly negative (and none said *all* negative) although almost half said mixed.



Sample size n=116

A sense of belonging [2]

We asked people what are things that make them, and their family feel like they "belong" and are "accepted", and what is it about these things that make you and your family feel like that.

Summary of Parents' Voices

Parents and caregivers described a sense of belonging as being built through meaningful friendships, family connections, shared experiences and active involvement in community life. Sports clubs, schools, cultural groups, volunteering, faith communities and outdoor activities provide important opportunities for families to connect, contribute and feel included.

For many, belonging is about more than simply knowing people. It comes from being personally welcomed, invited to participate, supported when needed and accepted without judgement. Families particularly value genuine relationships, shared values and the reassurance that others care about them and their children.

However, not all families experience this connection equally. Some parents described the challenges of establishing close friendships, particularly when new to Wānaka, raising young children, managing work commitments or living away from extended



[2] The gender and age are of the child, the ethnicity is of the parent.

family. Others highlighted feelings of isolation, exclusion, bullying and difficulties accessing support.

The over-arching message is clear: belonging grows when families feel welcomed, valued, supported and genuinely connected, not simply present in the community.

Five Key Themes Emerging from Parents' Responses

1. **Friendships and whānau are the foundation of belonging**. Trusted relationships provide emotional support, acceptance and a sense of security.
2. **Community participation creates connection.** Sport, schools, volunteering, cultural activities and shared interests help families build relationships and find their place.
3. **Inclusion requires genuine effort.** Personal invitations, friendly interactions, kindness and acceptance make families feel recognised and valued.
4. **Building connections can be challenging.** Newcomers, busy parents and families without extended support networks can experience loneliness despite living in an active community.
5. **Belonging means being accepted as you are.** Families value environments where differences are respected, children are included, and people can seek support without judgement.

What This Means for Path Wānaka

These responses reinforce the importance of creating opportunities for parents and whānau to connect beyond their children's activities. They also highlight the value of inclusive community programmes, parent networks, accessible support services and environments where families feel comfortable asking for help.

An important distinction from the survey: Families can be highly involved in community activities, yet still feel socially isolated. Participation alone does not guarantee belonging.

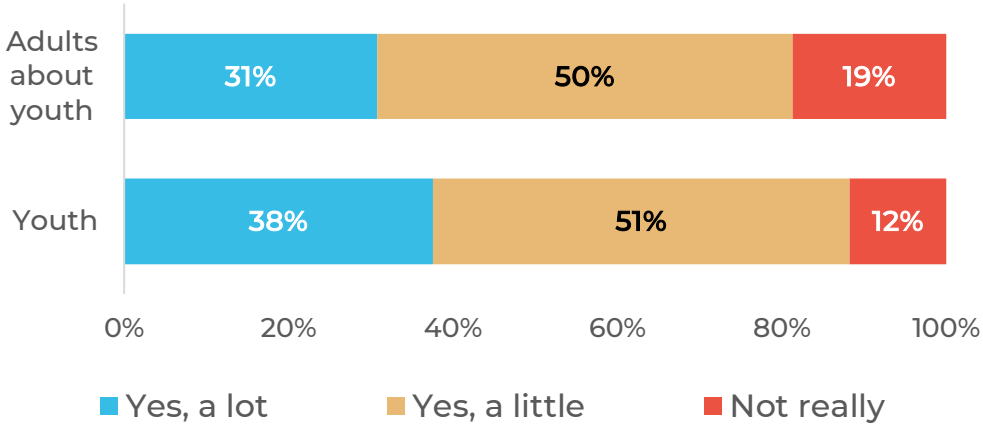
This is a valuable message for Path Wānaka's future programmes: strengthening meaningful relationships is just as important as increasing opportunities to participate.

The future

Support for plans

Youth seem to think they get a little more support for their plans for the future than adults think they do.

This is positive (it's better than the other way around), but there is room for improvement, with over half saying they only get "a little" or "not really" any.

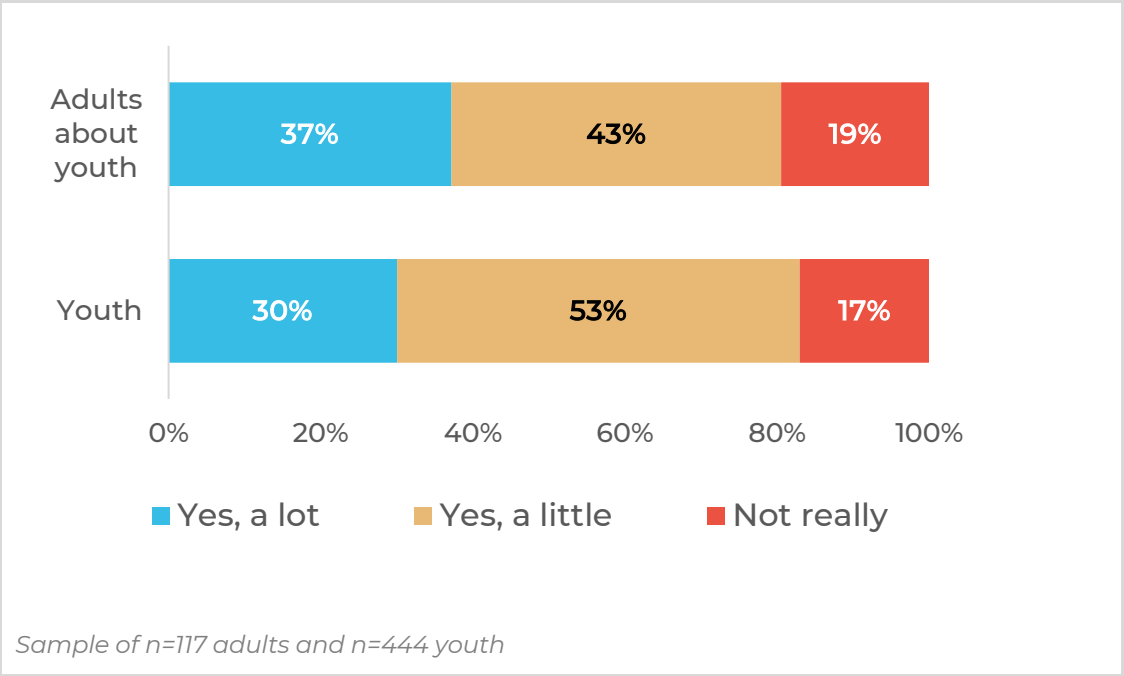


Sample of n=118 adults and n=442 youth

Opportunities to show skills and talents

On the other hand, youth are a little less likely to say that they get the opportunity to show their skills and talents.

This may be a chance to improve their self-esteem by giving them more opportunities.

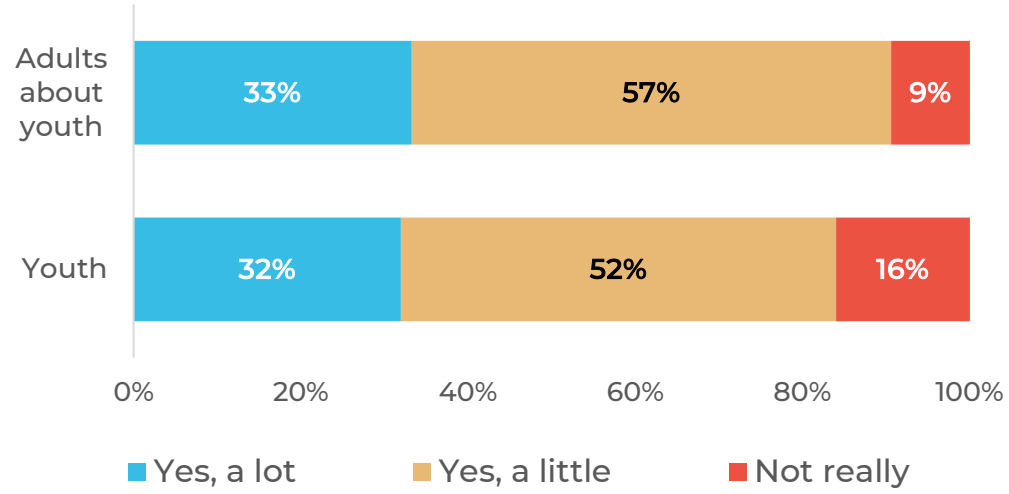


Sample of n=117 adults and n=444 youth

Future in New Zealand

Both adults and youth see a future for them in New Zealand, although with half saying only "a little". There is 'definitely' room for improvement.

While Path Wānaka may not be able to influence the NZ figure directly, they may be able indirectly, by influencing the Wānaka /Upper Clutha figure on the next page.

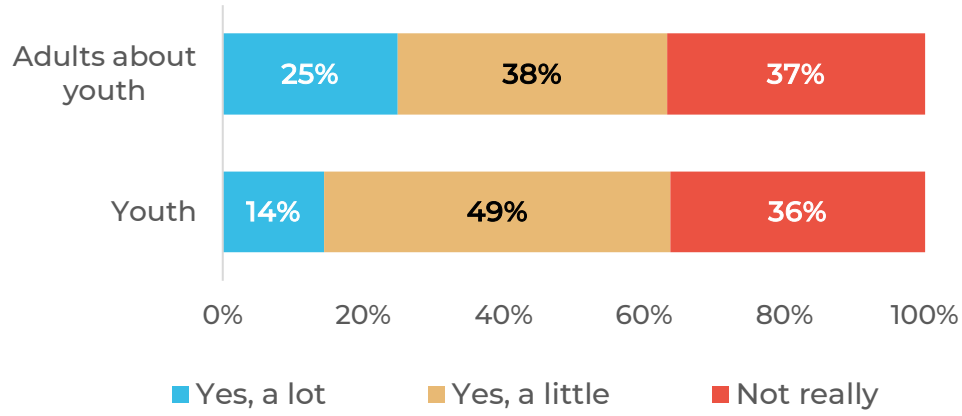


Sample of n=118 adults and n=441 youth

Future in Wānaka/Upper Clutha

When it comes to Wānaka/Upper Clutha, youth are less positive about a future there.

So, while they may see a future for themselves in New Zealand (84% at least a little), they are less sure about Wānaka/Upper Clutha (64%). And the "a lot" score drops from 32% to 14%.



Sample of n=118 adults and n=436 youth

Achievements [3]

We asked people what they were most proud of their children achieving, and who or what helped them get there.

Summary of Parents' Voices

Parents and caregivers expressed considerable pride in their children's achievements, but their responses reveal that success is measured by much more than academic results, sporting accomplishments or awards.

For many families, the greatest achievements are seeing their children grow into kind, respectful, resilient and confident young people. Parents particularly value emotional intelligence, empathy, independence, strong friendships and the courage to overcome challenges.

Academic progress, sporting success, creative pursuits and personal milestones are also celebrated, with parents recognising the important contributions of teachers, coaches, mentors, friends and whānau in helping their children thrive.

A particularly meaningful theme is the importance of perseverance and personal growth. Parents spoke proudly of children overcoming anxiety, navigating bullying, developing confidence, finding friendships and continuing through difficult circumstances. These achievements are often considered just as significant as formal recognition.

However, some parents also highlighted concerns about competitive pressures, unequal access to opportunities and the financial barriers that can prevent young people from pursuing their interests.

The over-arching message is clear: parents are proudest not simply of what their children achieve, but of who they are becoming, the challenges they overcome and the people who help them along the way.

[3] The gender and age are of the child, the ethnicity is of the parent.

Key Themes Emerging from Parents' Responses

1. Character matters more than recognition. Kindness, empathy, respect, honesty and consideration for others are among the qualities parents most celebrate.

2. Resilience and personal growth are significant achievements. Overcoming anxiety, bullying, setbacks and self-doubt represents important progress for families.

3. Achievement takes many forms. Academic learning, sport, music, creativity, friendships, employment and everyday personal milestones are all recognised and valued.

4. Success is supported by a community of people. Parents and whānau, teachers, coaches, mentors and friends play important roles in building children's confidence, skills and opportunities.

5. Every child deserves the opportunity to thrive. Parents value inclusive, affordable and accessible activities that recognise individual strengths rather than focusing solely on competition or high performance.

What This Means for Path Wānaka

These responses highlight the importance of supporting the whole young person, recognising that wellbeing, character development, resilience and belonging are fundamental parts of achievement.

For Path Wānaka and its community partners, the findings reinforce the value of programmes that strengthen parenting confidence, develop young people's emotional and social skills, encourage positive relationships and create opportunities for every child to discover their strengths. By Path Wānaka supporting families in strengthening relationships they help build a community where success is measured not only by achievement, but by wellbeing, character and connection.

Parents also highlight the importance of supporting the adults surrounding young people. They consistently acknowledged that teachers, coaches, mentors, volunteers and extended whānau contribute significantly to their children's development.

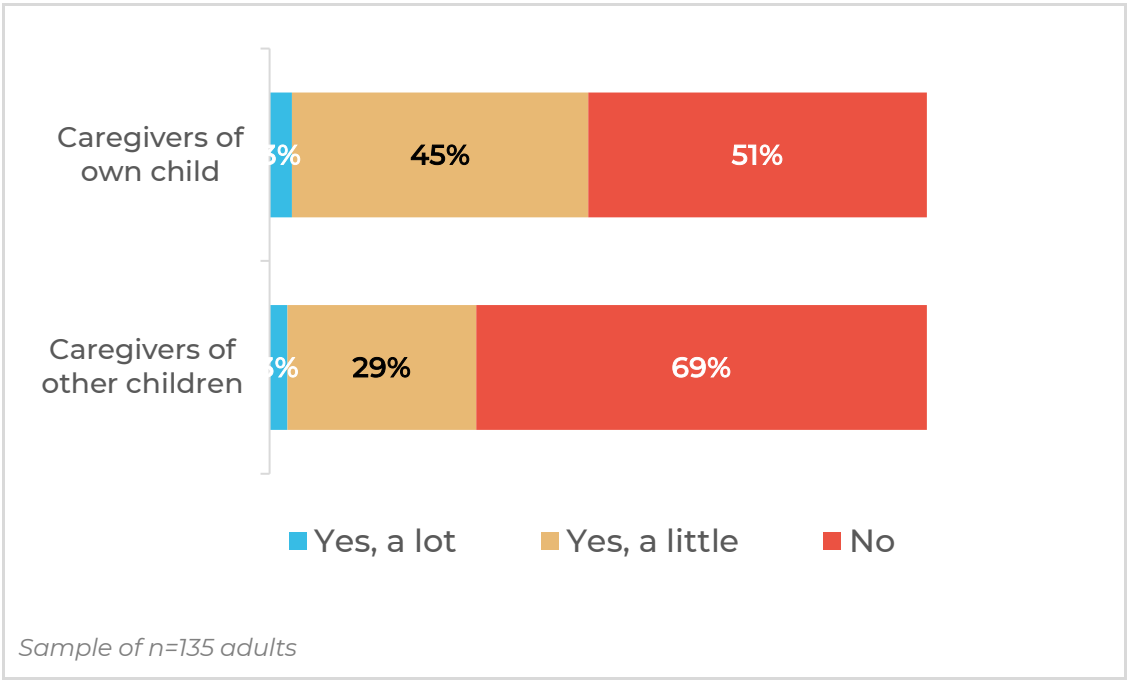
An important distinction from the survey: Parents do not define achievement solely through traditional measures of success. For some families, a child returning to school after experiencing anxiety, making a new friend, showing kindness or persevering through difficulty represents an extraordinary achievement.

Parenting

Conflicts with other caregivers

About half of caregivers come into conflict with others when it comes to raising their own child. This is most likely to be fellow caregivers (of their own child) or family members.

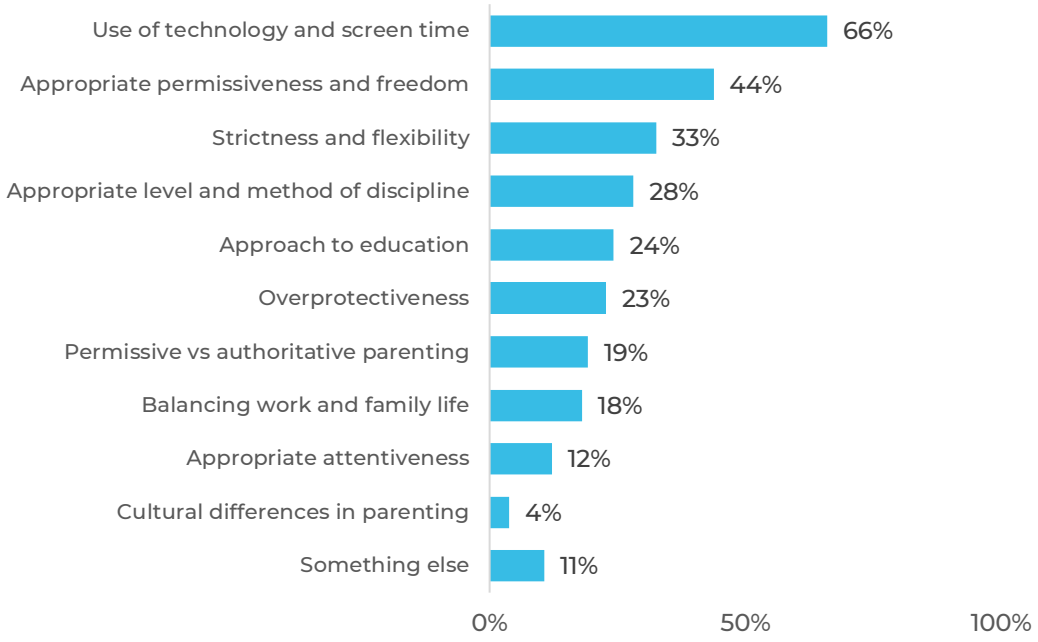
This is a lot lower (31%) when it comes to those raising other children (such as friends, classmates or teammates).



Sample of n=135 adults

Disagreements with other caregivers

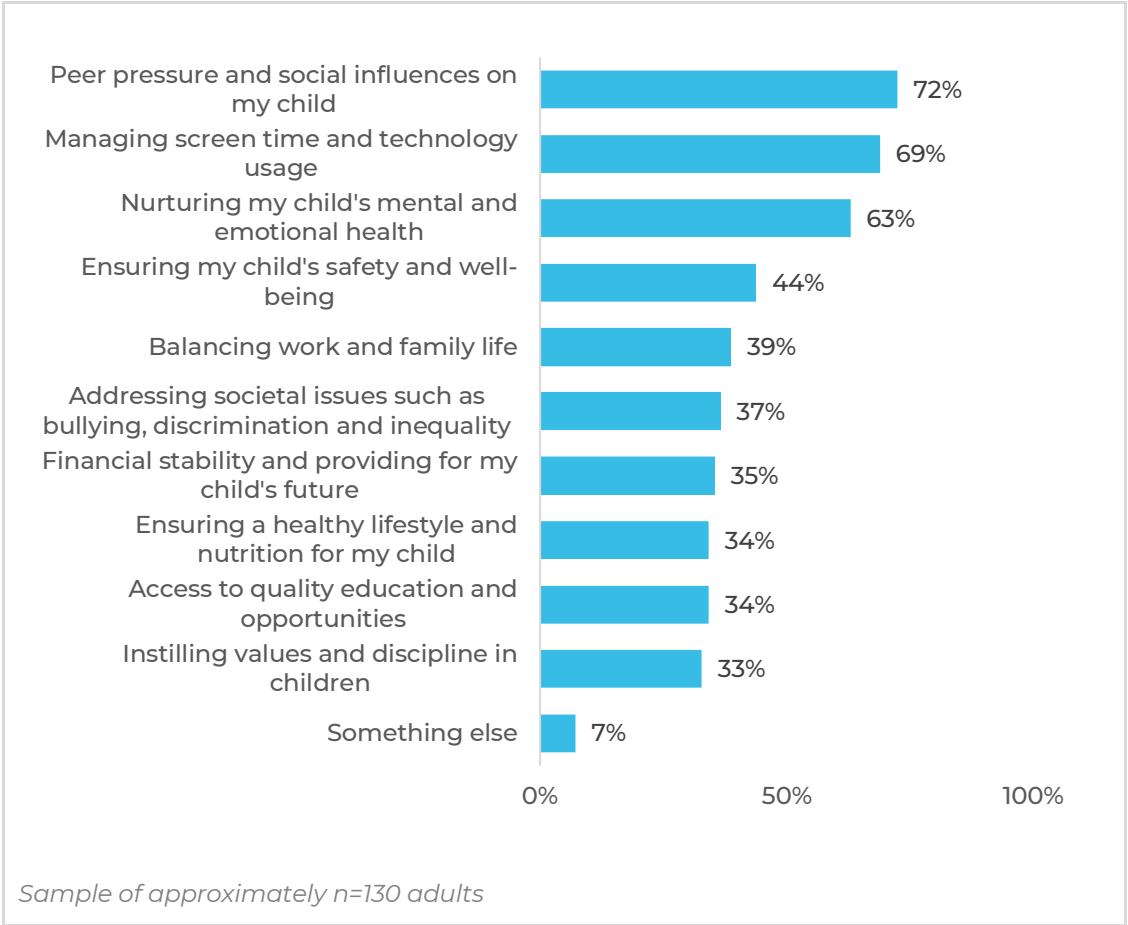
Screen-time (66%) stands out as a major source of disagreement with other caregivers.



Sample of approximately n=130 adults

Biggest concerns as a caregiver

Peer pressure and social influences (72%), **managing screen time and technology usage** (69%) and **nurturing their child's mental and emotional health** (63%) are the top three concerns caregivers have.

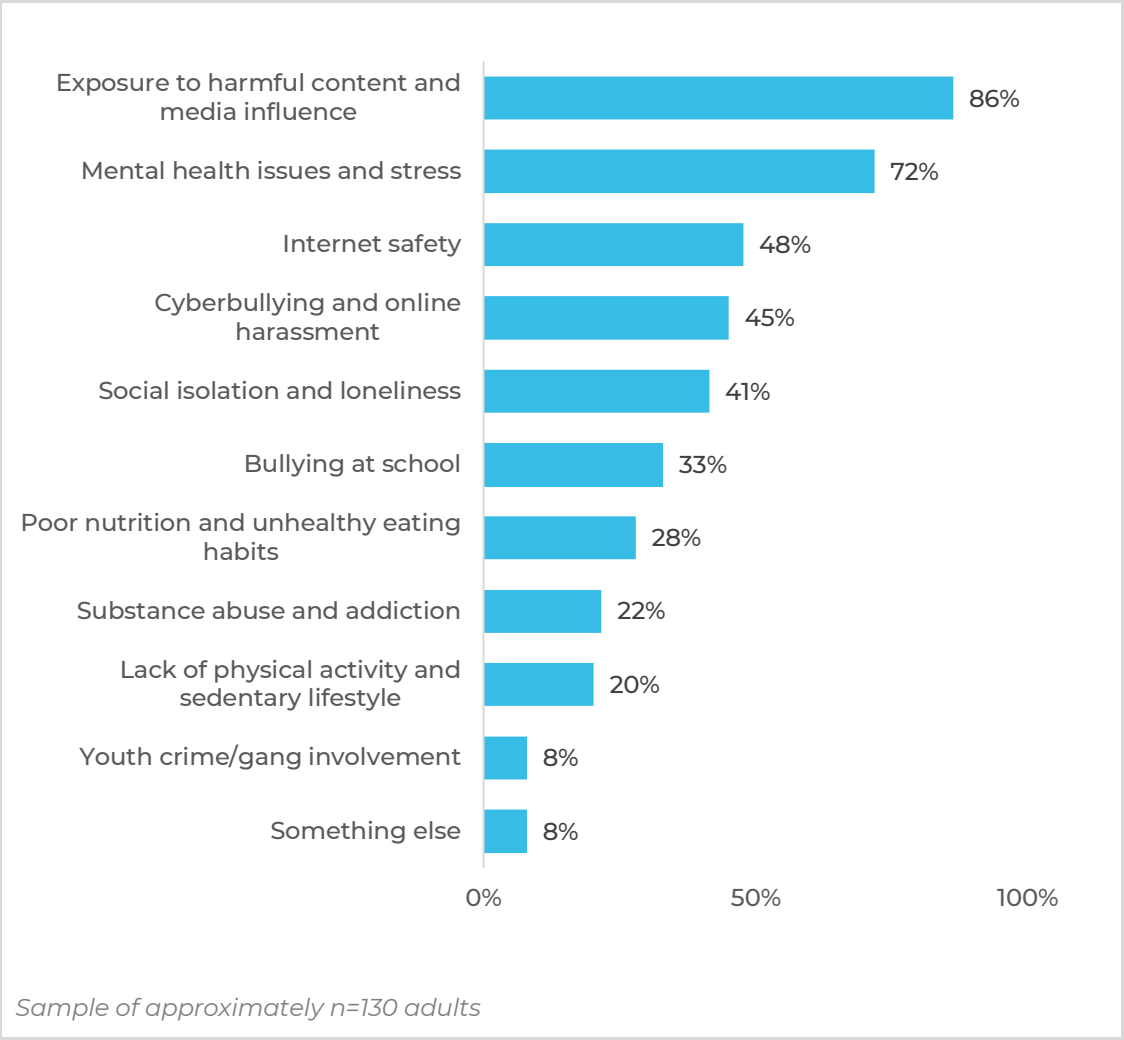


Sample of approximately n=130 adults

Dangers to youth today

Exposure to harmful content and media influence (86%) and **mental health issues and stress** (72%) are seen as the two biggest dangers to youth.

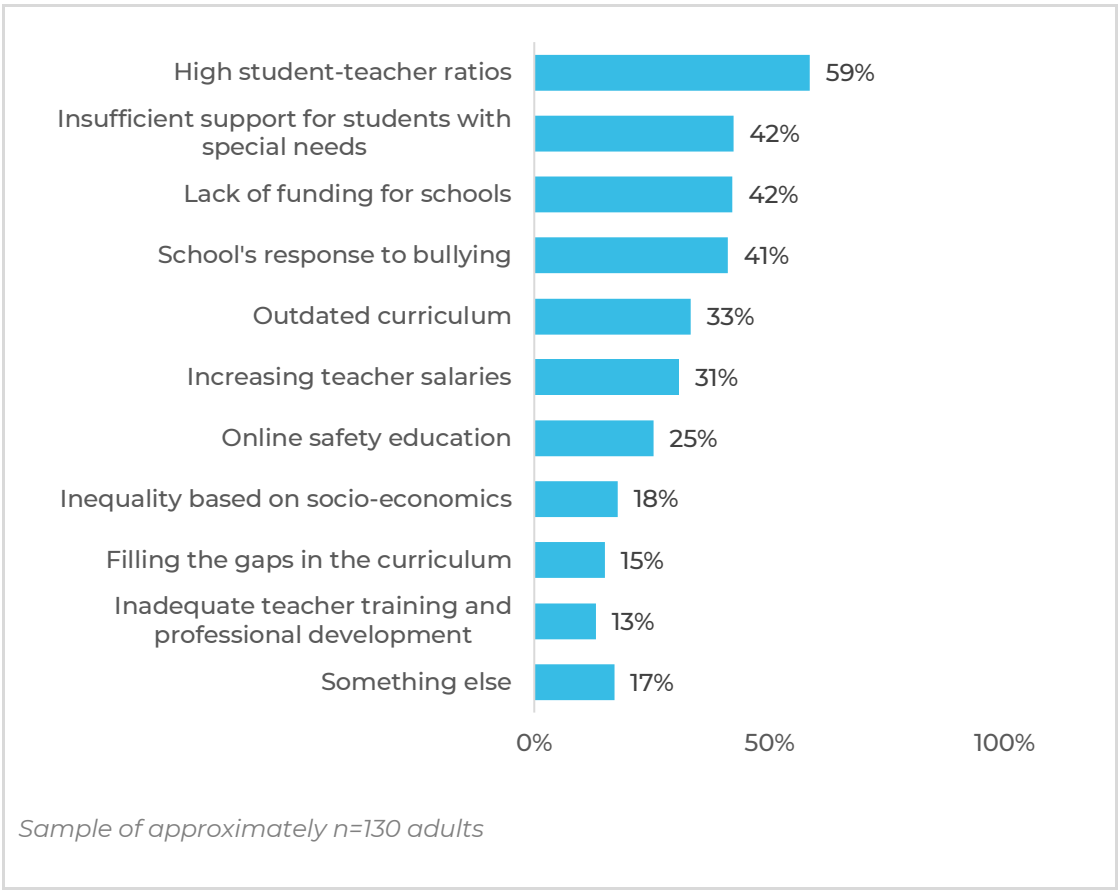
Internet safety and online bullying were third and fourth, but quite a long way behind the top two.



Sample of approximately n=130 adults

Improvements that could be made

The top four improvements that parents say could be made in schools are the **high student-teacher ratios** (59%), **insufficient support for students with special needs** (42%), **lack of funding for schools** (42%) and the school's **response to bullying** (41%).

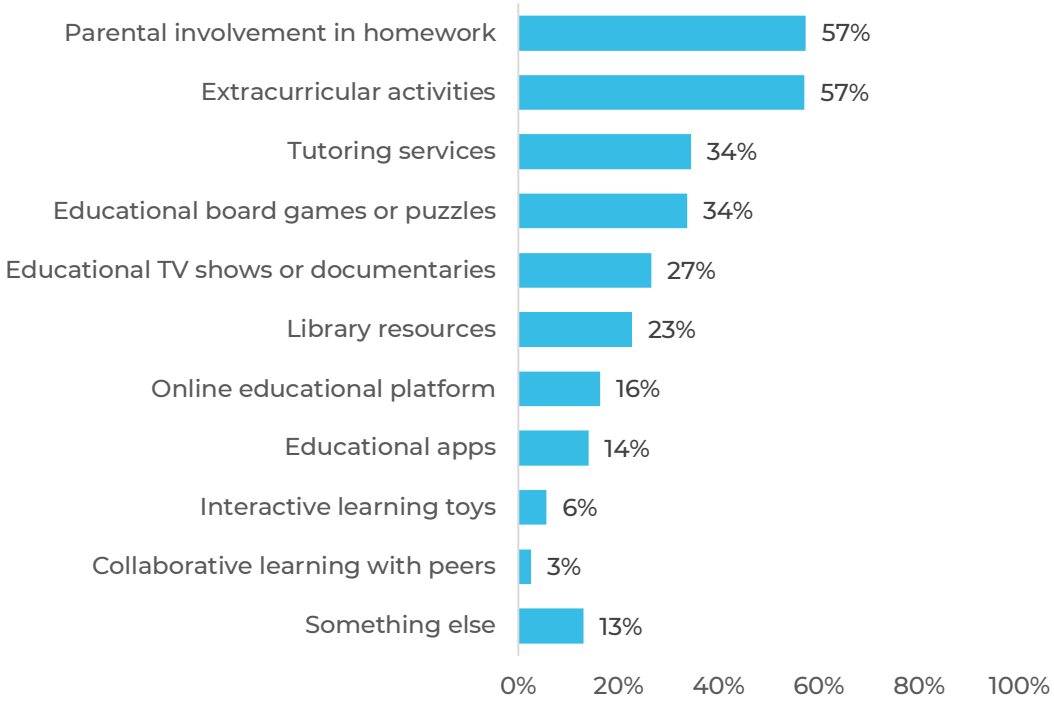


Sample of approximately n=130 adults

Tools used in parenting

The two main tools used in parenting are **getting involved in homework** and **extra-curricular activities**.

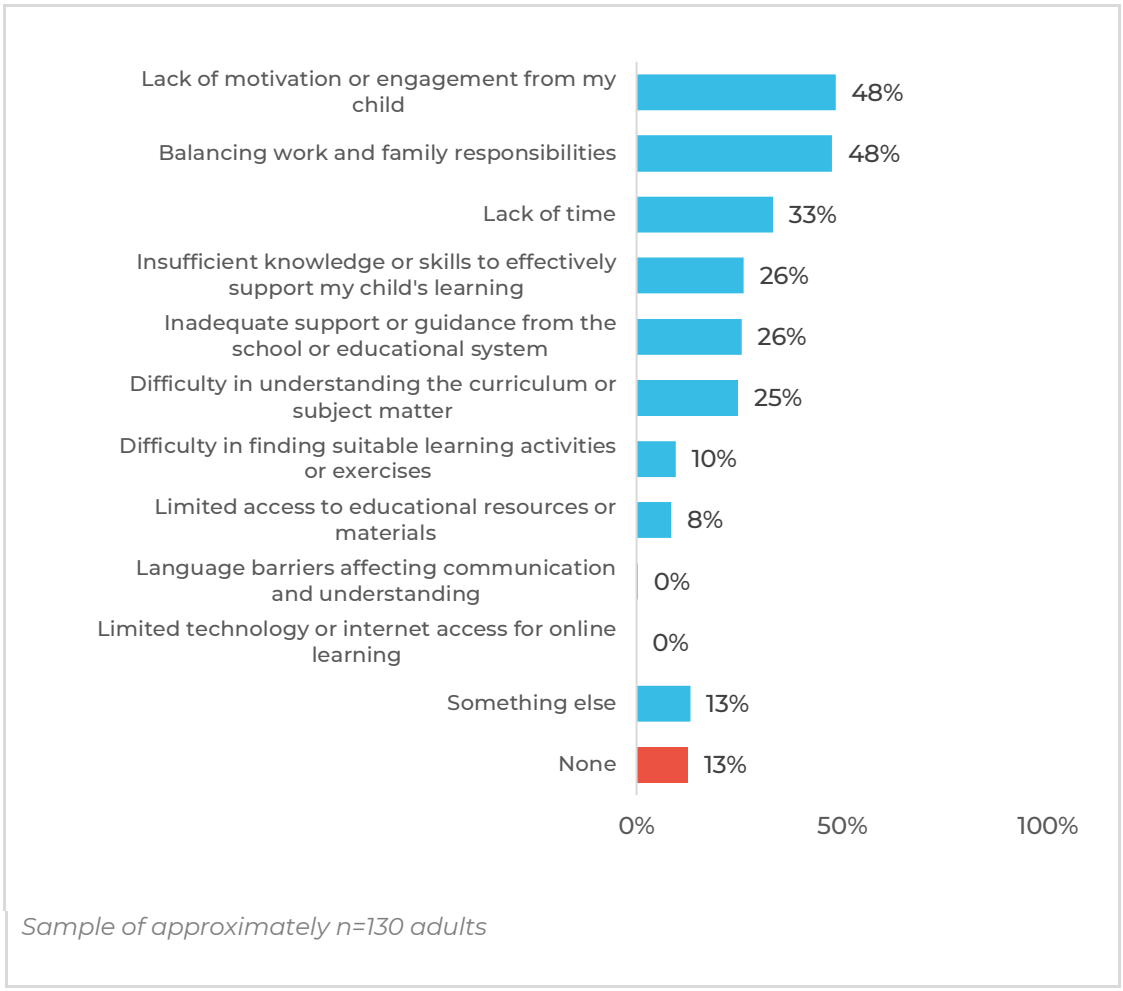
Tutoring is quite high, with one-third of parents using it.



Sample of approximately n=130 adults

Challenges to parenting

The two biggest challenges to parenting are **lack of motivation** from the child (48%) and **balancing work and family** responsibilities (48%).



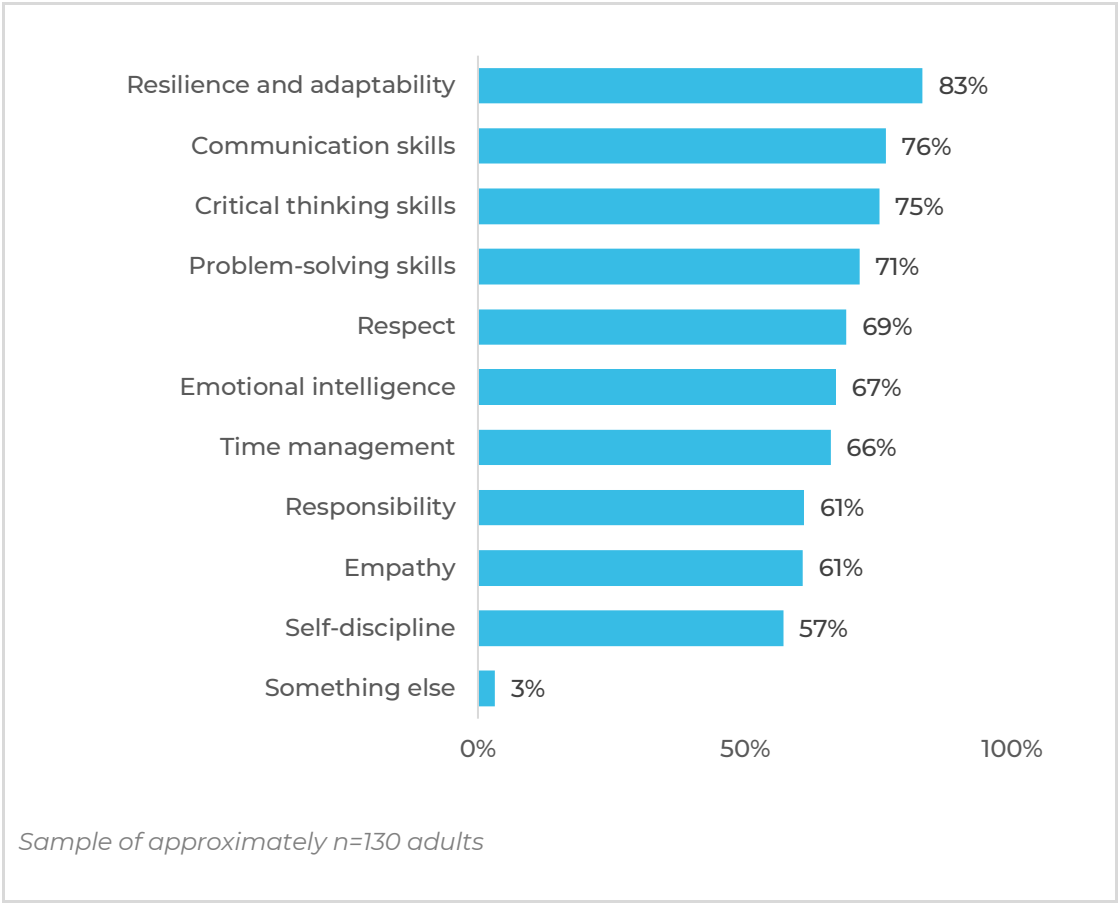
Sample of approximately n=130 adults

Desirable personal skills

Parents selected a lot of the options given. They selected an average of almost seven, compared to "challenges to parenting" of less than three.

This suggests that parents see a lot of these personal skills as not just desirable but essential in their child's development.

Resilience and adaptability (83%), **communication skills** (76%) and **critical-thinking skills** (75%) are the top three, but all the others have at least half of parents saying they were desirable.



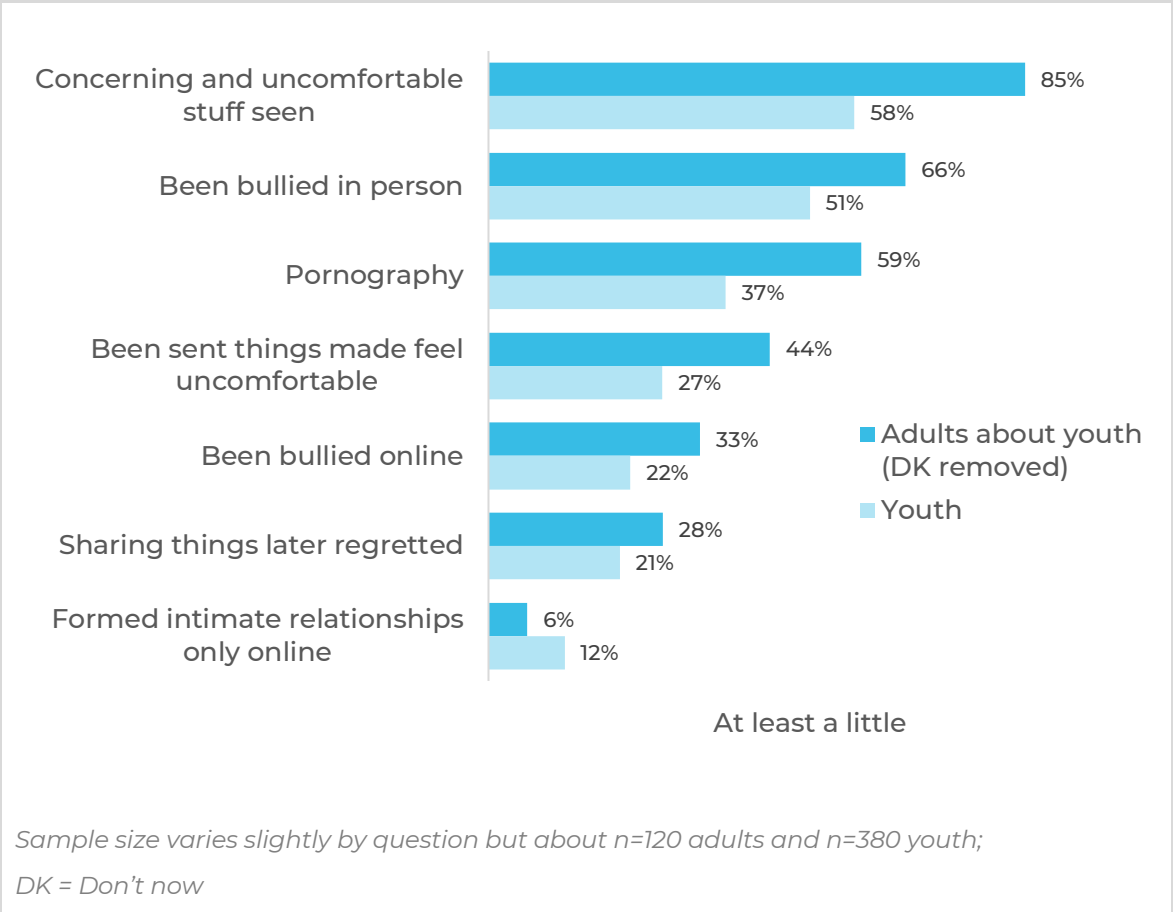
Sample of approximately n=130 adults

Online behaviour and experiences

Overall

Adults think youth have been more exposed to negative online experiences than they actually have. (The dark blue bars are bigger than the light blue bars.)

Either that, or the definitions vary between the two. (For example, what youth think is concerning or uncomfortable material, or what they consider bullying maybe be different than what their parents think.)



Sample size varies slightly by question but about n=120 adults and n=380 youth;

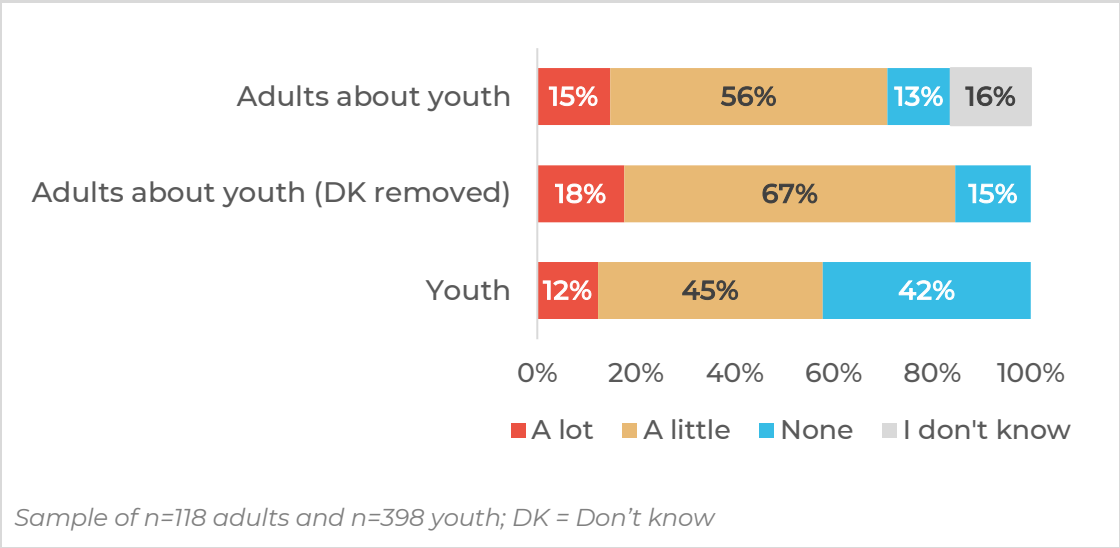
DK = Don't now

Exposure to concerning and uncomfortable stuff

Over two-thirds of parents think their children have been exposed to at least some concerning or uncomfortable stuff. About one-sixth don't know.

However fewer youth say they've seen that sort of material. Whether that's parents over-estimating what their children have seen, or children's definition being different, is hard to say. It could be some of both.

(The definition of what was concerning or uncomfortable was left to the parent. This was also left to the child in the youth survey.)



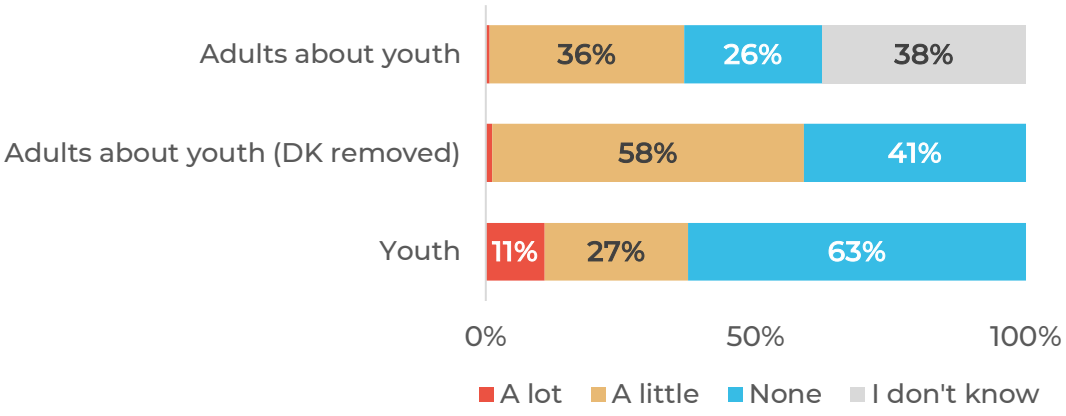
Sample of n=118 adults and n=398 youth; DK = Don't know

Pornography

Most parents think their children have seen at least a little pornography, but over a third don't know.

In reality however, youth say they have seen a lot less than their parents think. What is more of a concern, is that 11% say they have seen a lot – and parents don't realise that.

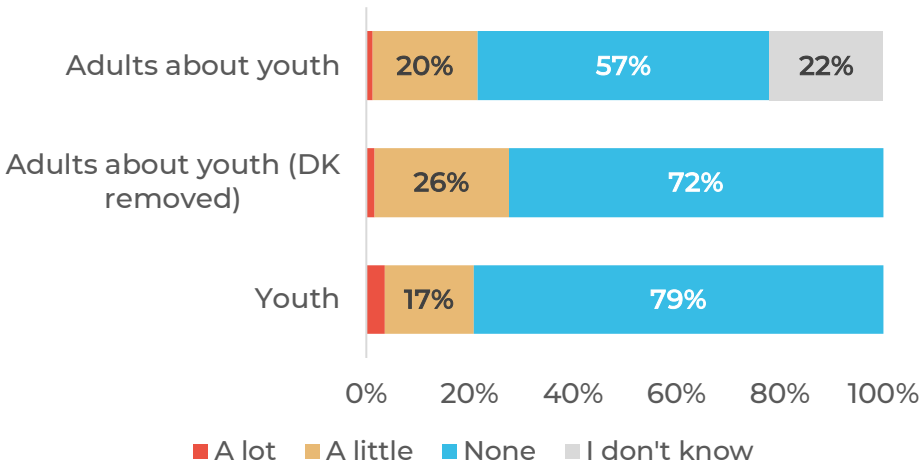
The definition of pornography was left to the respondent.



Sample of n=118 adults and n=395 youth; DK = Don't know

Shared information later regretted

Although nearly a quarter of parents don't know whether their children have shared information that they (the children) later regretted, for those parents who think they know, they seem to have a pretty-good understanding of the situation.



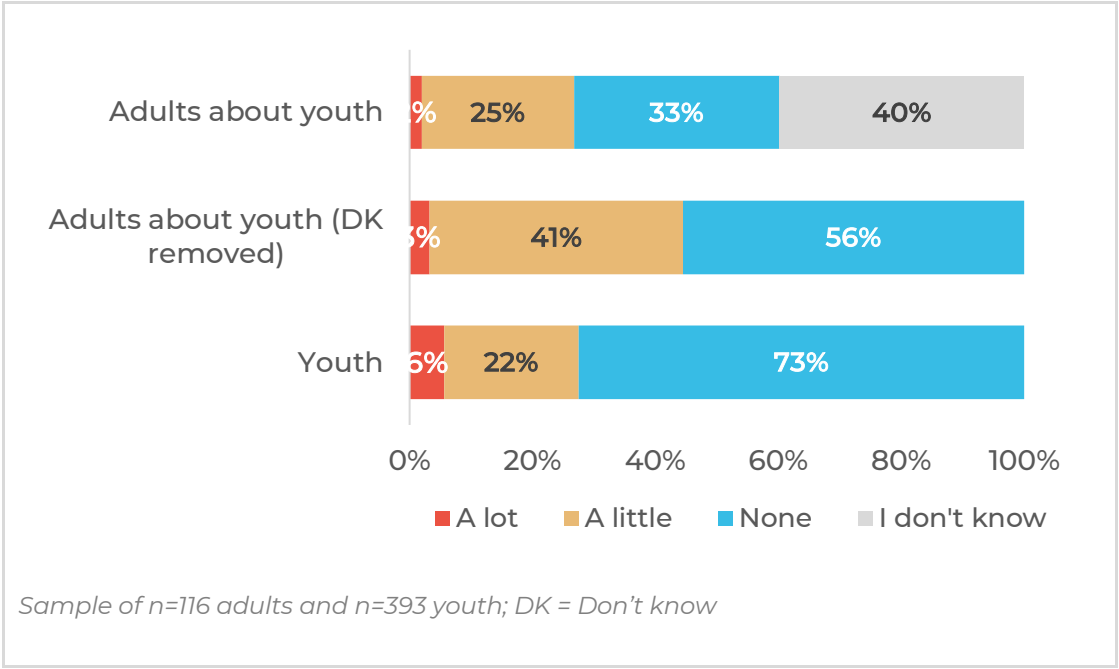
Sample of n=117 adults and n=395 youth; DK = Don't know

Sent uncomfortable things

Two-in-five parents don't know if their children have been sent things that made them feel uncomfortable.

However fewer youth say they've been sent that sort of material. Whether that's parents over-estimating what their children have seen, or children's definition being different, is hard to say.

(The definition of what was uncomfortable was left to the parent, as it was left to the child in the youth survey.)



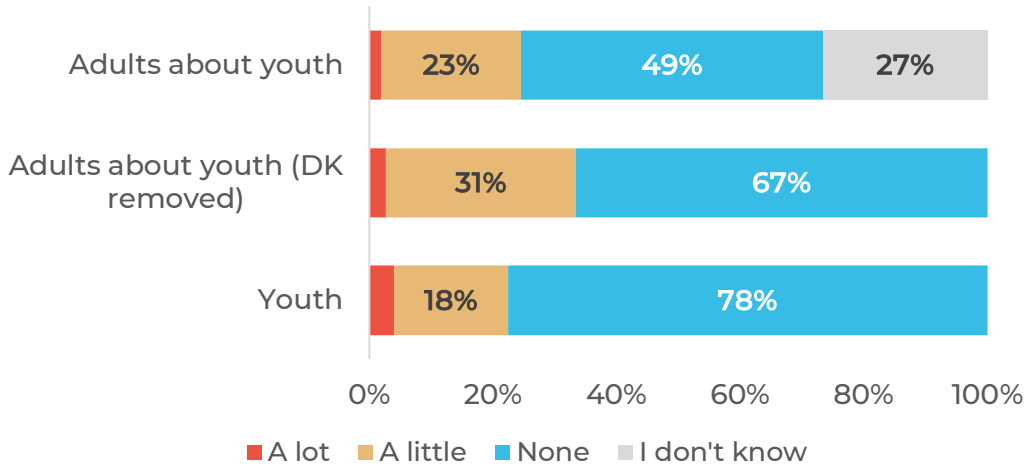
Sample of n=116 adults and n=393 youth; DK = Don't know

Bullied online

Only 22% of youth say they've ever been bullied online.

Just over a quarter (27%) of parents don't know whether they're child has been bullied online, which is probably due to the more "private" nature of the online space. (This is only 9% when it comes to being bullied in person.)

The adults-about-youth figure is higher than the youth figure (33% versus 22%) which could be that parents think the online space is worse than it is, or that they can recognise bullying when their child can't.

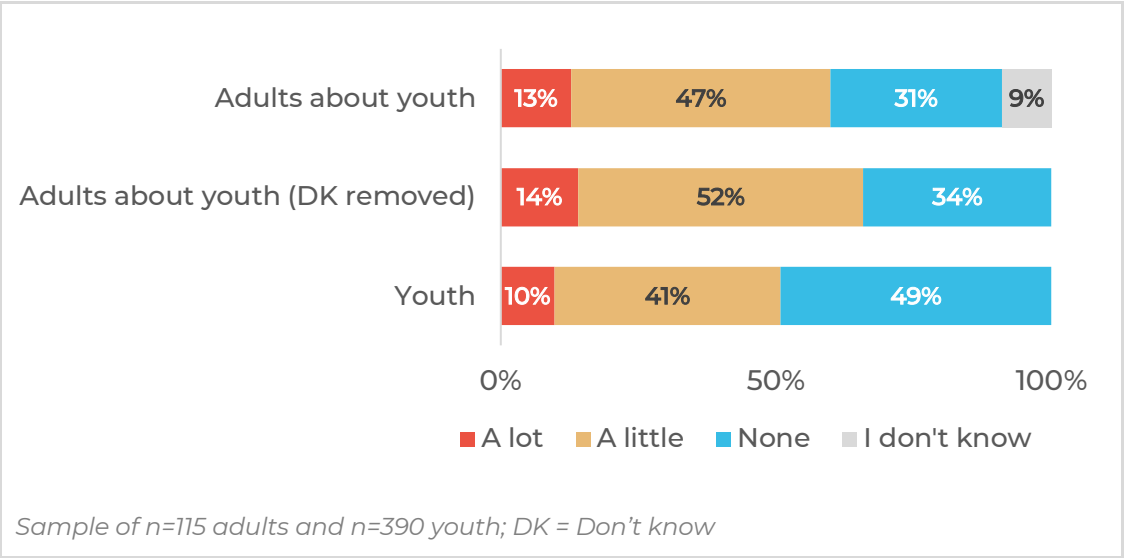


Sample of n=115 adults and n=397 youth; DK = Don't know

Bullied in person

Being bullied in person (as reported by youth) is much higher than being bullied online (51% ever versus 22% ever).

Like the bullied online result, parents are a little more sensitive than their children as to whether they've been bullied in-person, and given the "don't know" is only 9%, this may indicate youth may not recognise when they are being bullied. This is similar to the online result.

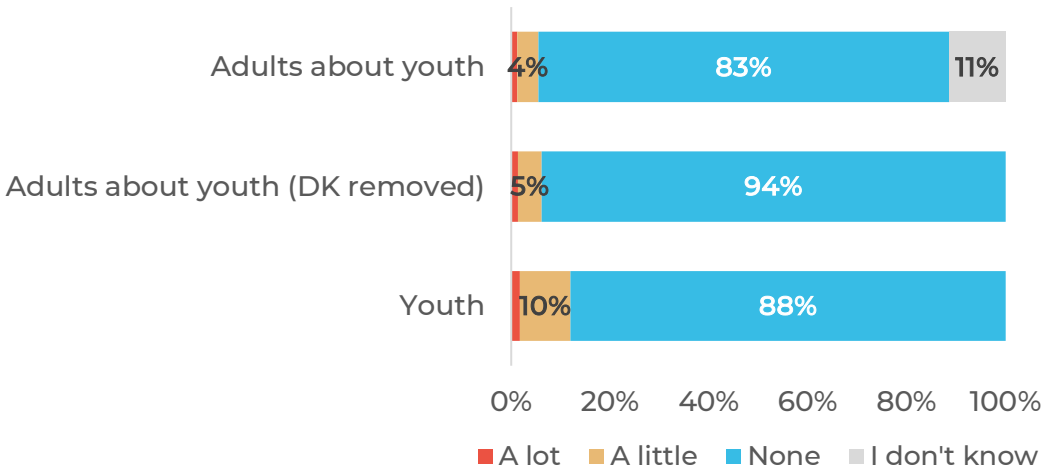


Sample of n=115 adults and n=390 youth; DK = Don't know

Intimate relationships online

Few youth have an intimate relationship online, but it's about double what parents think.

This suggests some level of secrecy.



Sample of n=116 adults and n=391 youth; DK = Don't know

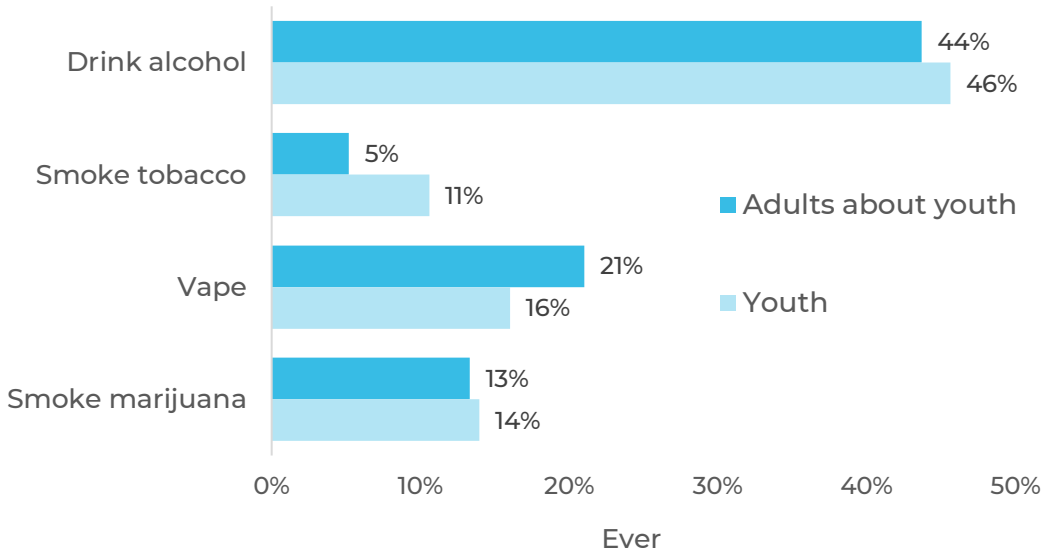
One point to note is that the youth 2026 figure of 12% for "ever" is down from the 2023 figure of 22%, suggesting youth may be more vigilant and cautious about this.

Substances

Overall

Parents seem to have a pretty-good idea about what substances their child has ever used. (The dark blue and light blue bars are close together.)

However, when asked about the frequency of use, parents may be under-estimating it in some cases by half.



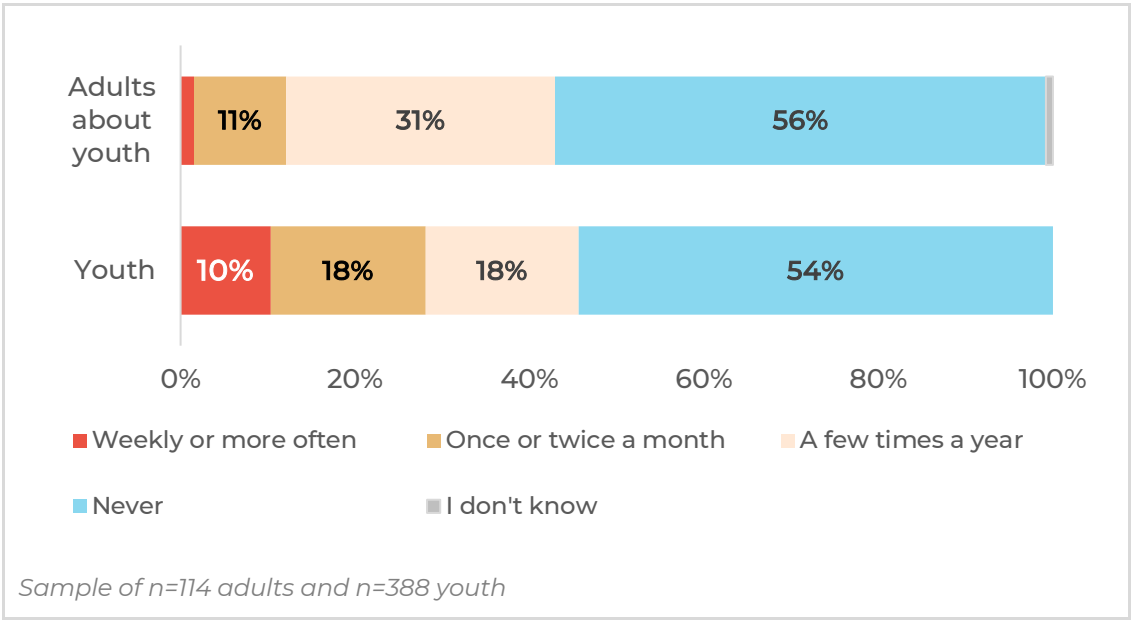
Sample varies by question, but about n=110 adults and n=380 youth

Alcohol

While parents get the “never used” figure about right (the light blue), they seem to be under-estimating the frequency.

Only 2% of adults think youths drink weekly or more often, but youths say it’s ten per cent. And monthly is 13% versus 28%.

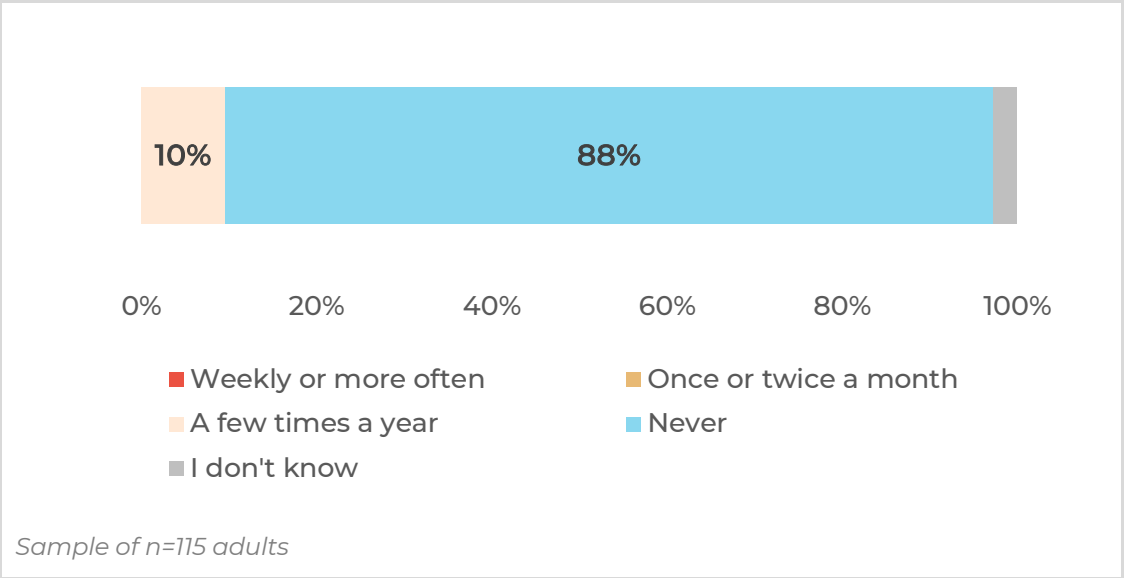
Using a weighted average, parents say it’s 0.9 times per month, but youth say it’s 1.8 – twice as often.



Sample of n=114 adults and n=388 youth

Trouble due to alcohol

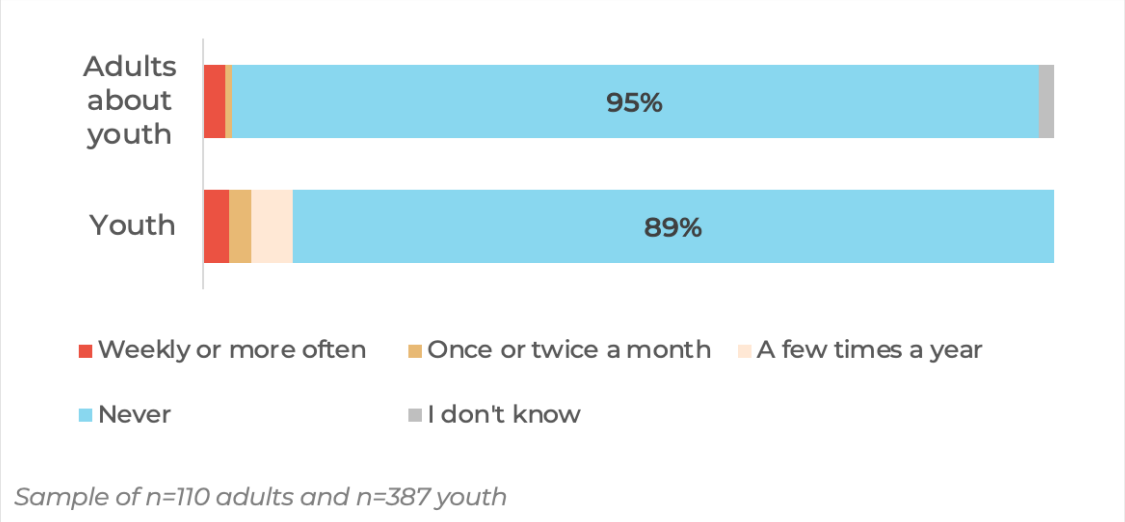
About 10% of parents think their children get in trouble (or do something the parent doesn't like) due to alcohol a few times a year, so parents don't see this as a big issue.



Sample of n=115 adults

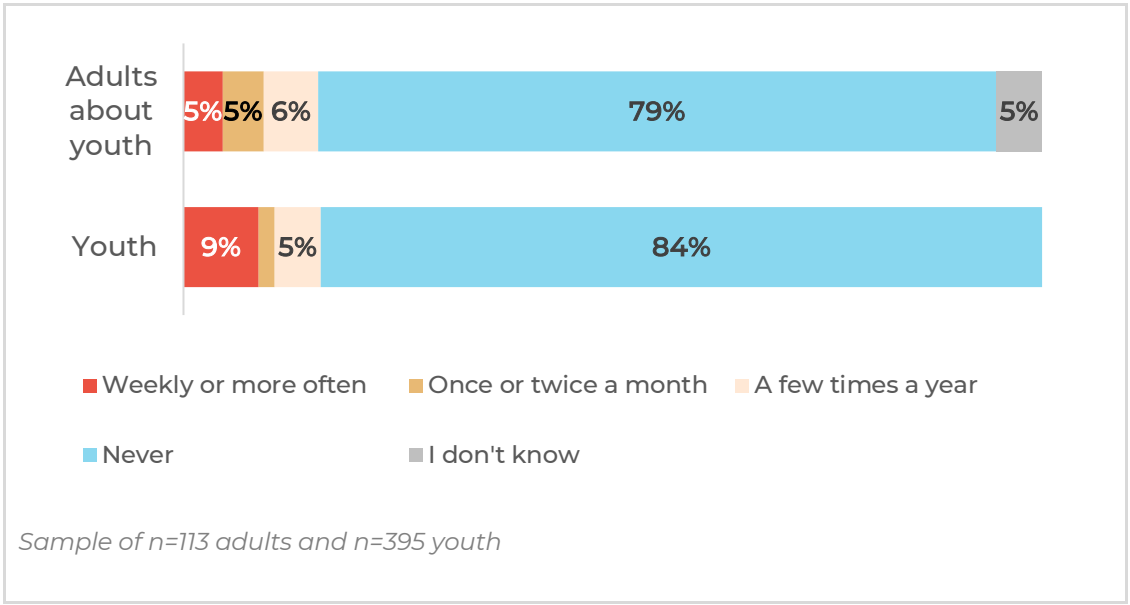
Cigarettes

Smoking tobacco appears to be less prevalent that vaping, but again adults are under-estimating the frequency.



Sample of n=110 adults and n=387 youth

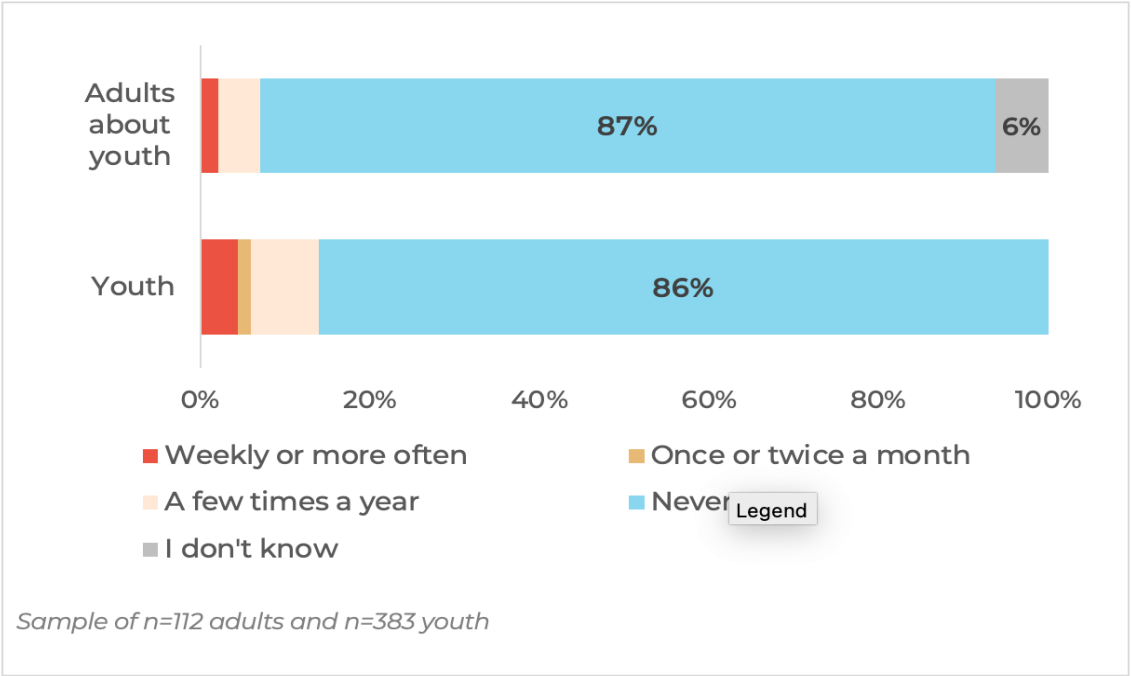
Vaping



Sample of n=113 adults and n=395 youth

Marijuana

While parents get the “ever used” about right, the frequency is about double what they think.

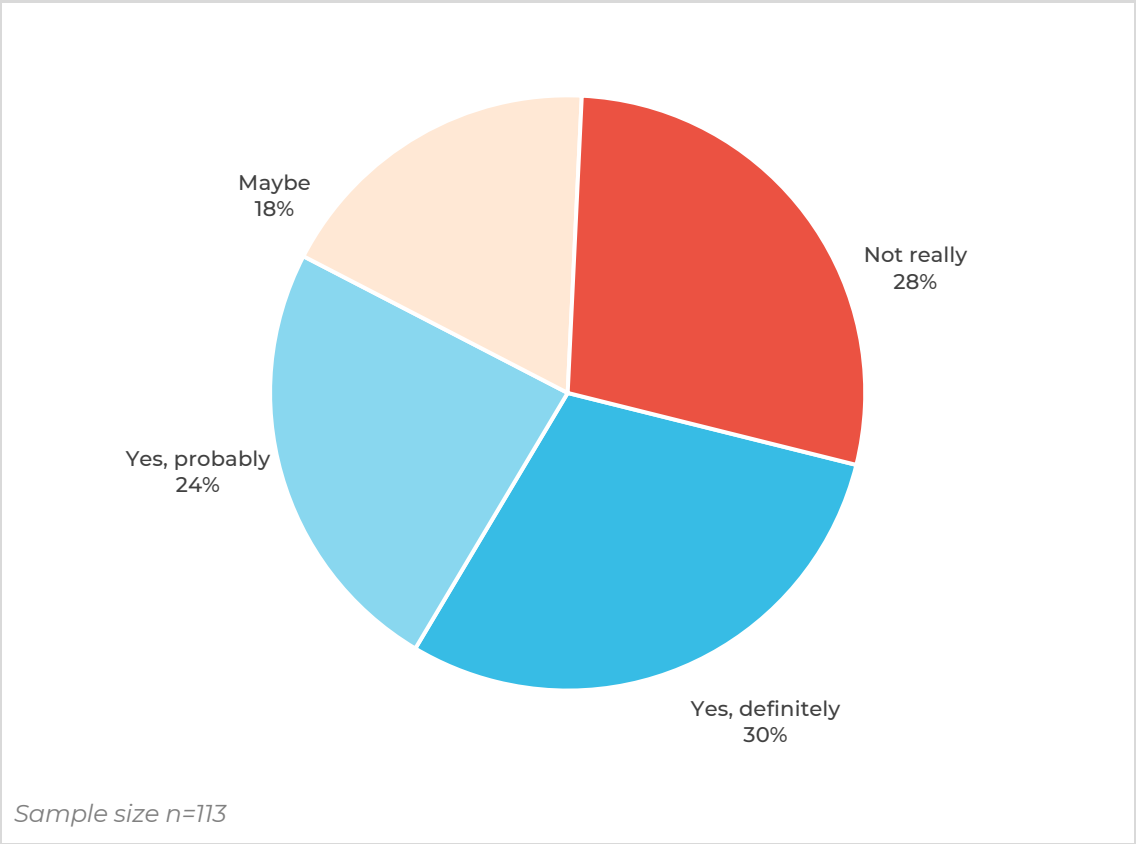


Sample of n=112 adults and n=383 youth

Interested in help for substances

Just over half of parents say they (or their children) would be interested in learning more about how to keep them safe from substance and alcohol harm.

This suggests an opportunity for Path Wānaka to help strengthen community safety around substance and alcohol harm.



Sample size n=113

Appendices

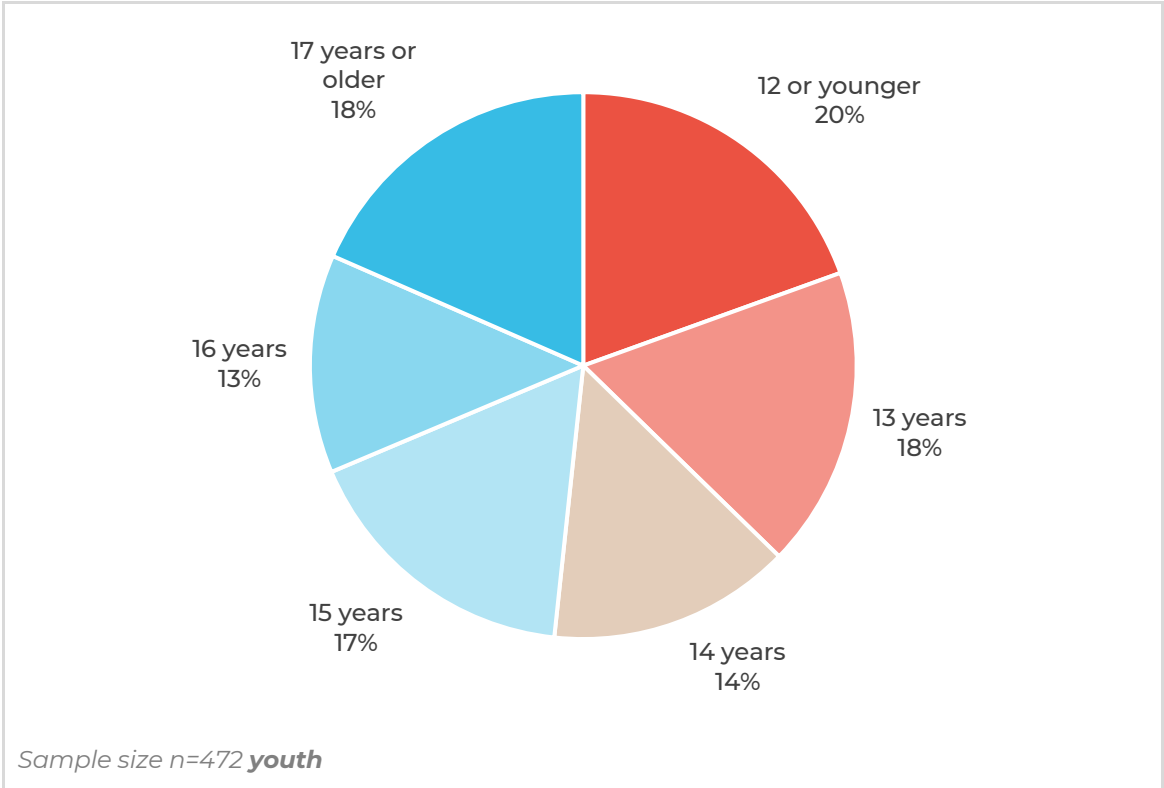
Sample

Age

The *2023 youth* survey was not well-balanced in terms of age. It had 52% aged 16 or over (the 2026 study had 31%), so the 2026 study is not directly comparable to that.

The main issue is that some of the behaviour, attitudes and experiences are strongly correlated to age. This can skew the overall results, but we have corrected the comparisons as best we could where it was relevant.

We decided not to weight the youth data, as the 2023 wasn't weighted, we had no access to it and would have made comparisons even more difficult.

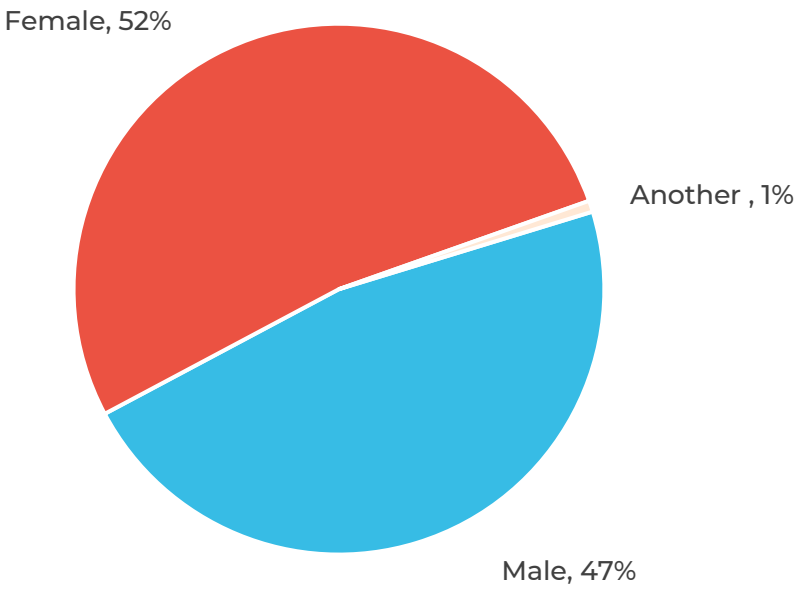


Sample size n=472 ***youth***

We would expect about one-sixth in each age group, slightly more in the "12 and younger" and "17 and older" categories, so this is a very good sample.

Gender of youth

The sample was well-balanced in terms of the gender of the youth in question.

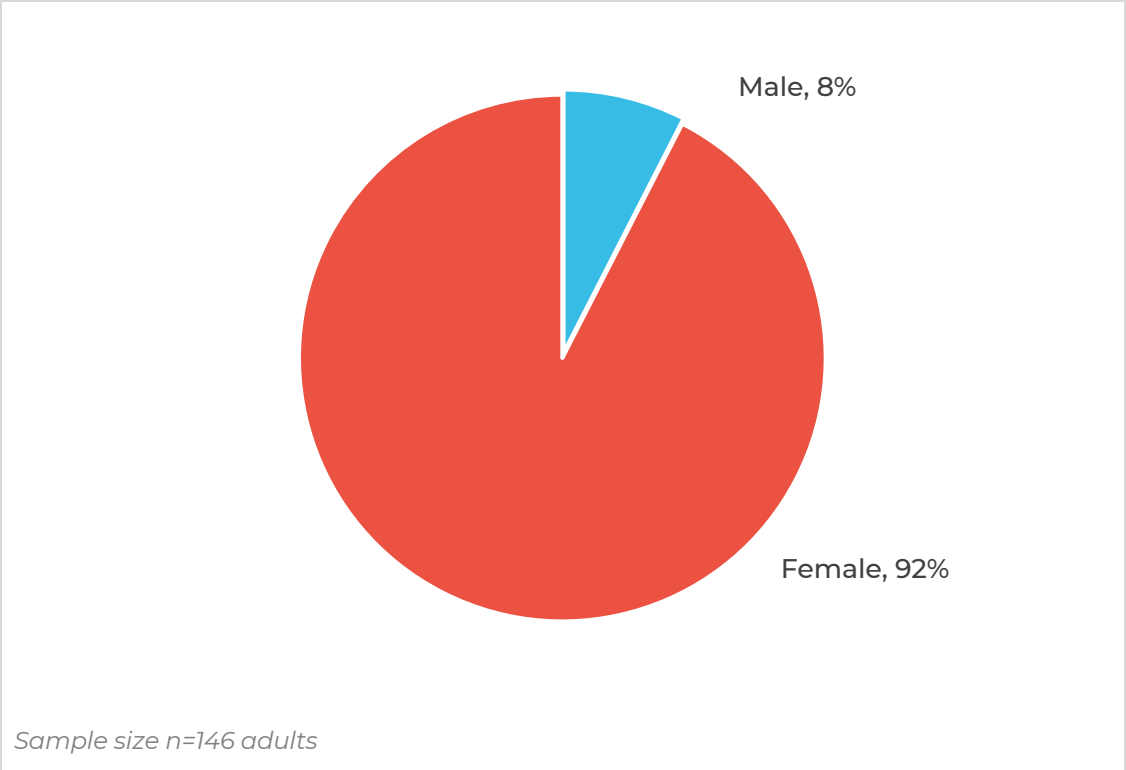


Sample size n=147 adults, responding about their child

The 2023 survey had 57% female responses, 39% male and 4% another answer. Both the 2026 youth and adult surveys are closer to the target population.

Gender of caregiver

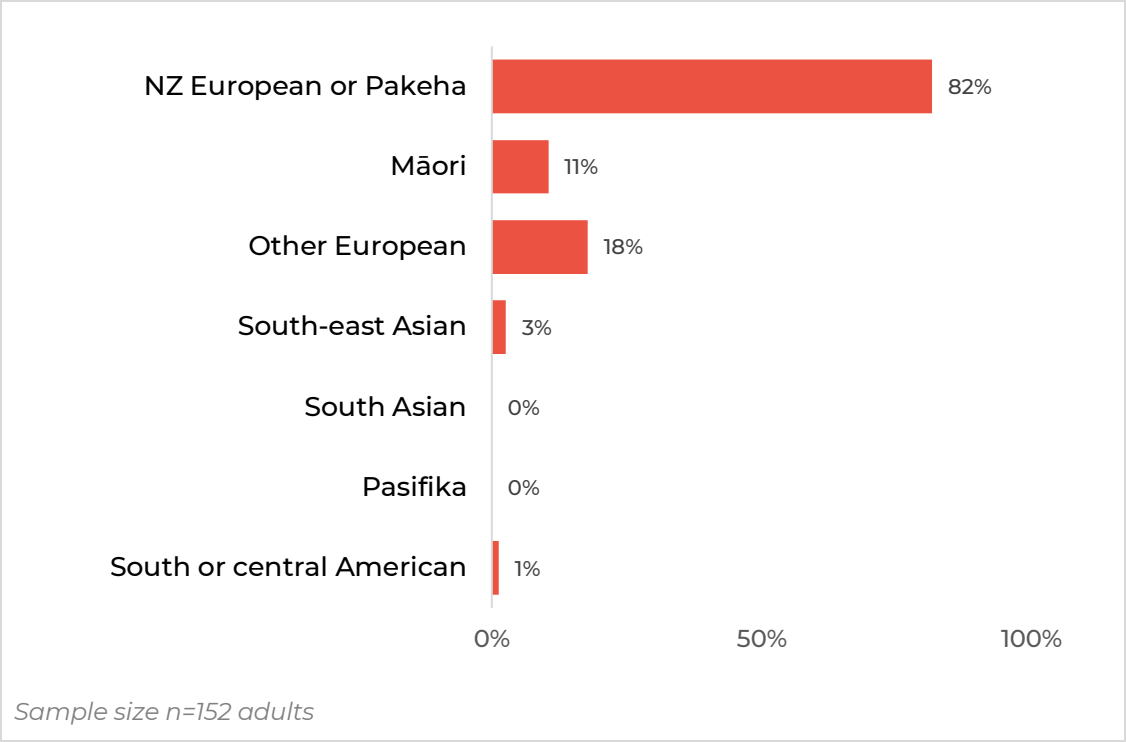
The survey was heavily skewed towards female caregivers, but the gender of the child was more evenly balanced.



Sample size n=146 adults

Ethnicity [4]

As someone may be more than one ethnicity, the graph adds to more than 100%. See the footnote below about the way Statistics New Zealand classifies ethnicity.

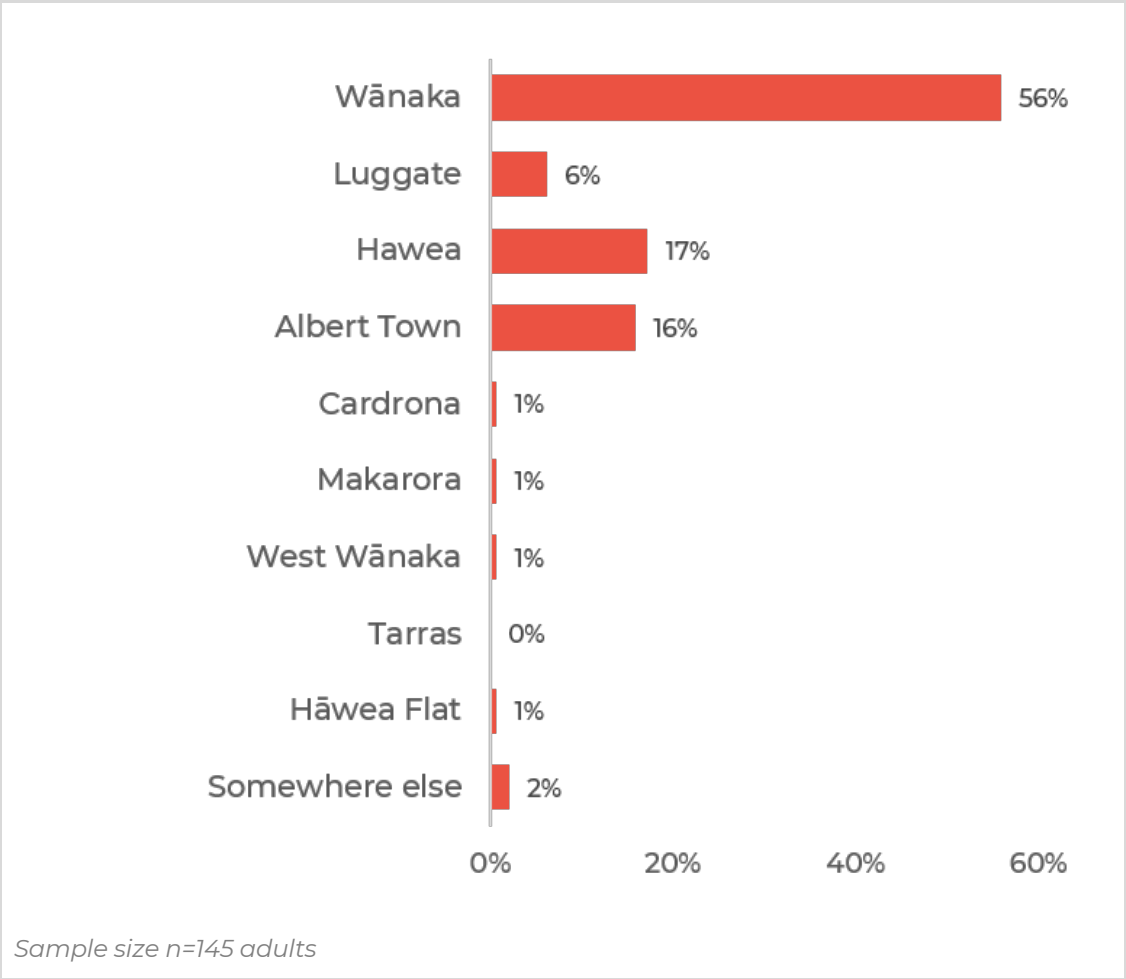


Sample size n=152 adults

The 2026 adult survey matches well with both the 2026 and 2023 youth studies.

[4] Note that Statistics New Zealand uses a mutually exclusive hierarchical classification for ethnicity. This says if someone is of Māori descent, they are classified as Māori – and nothing else. Then Pasifika, then Asian, then Indian, then "other" and finally someone is only classified as NZ European/Pākehā if they are *nothing else*. This study allowed people to identify as multiple ethnicities.

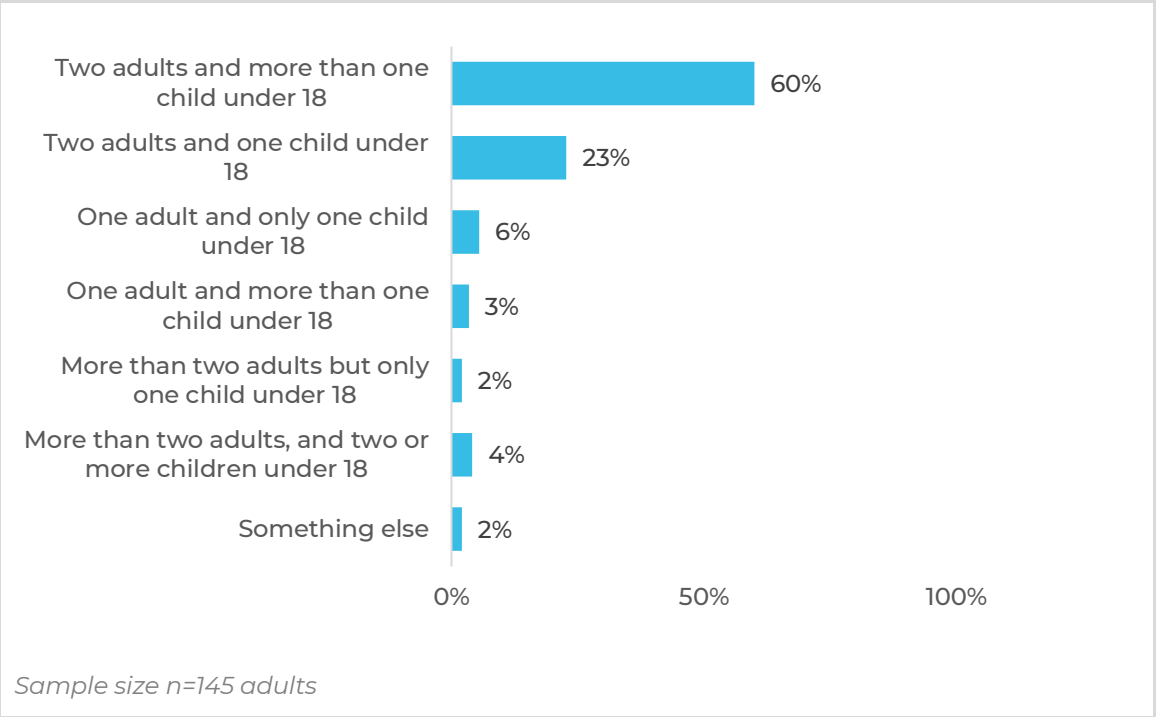
Location



Sample size n=145 adults

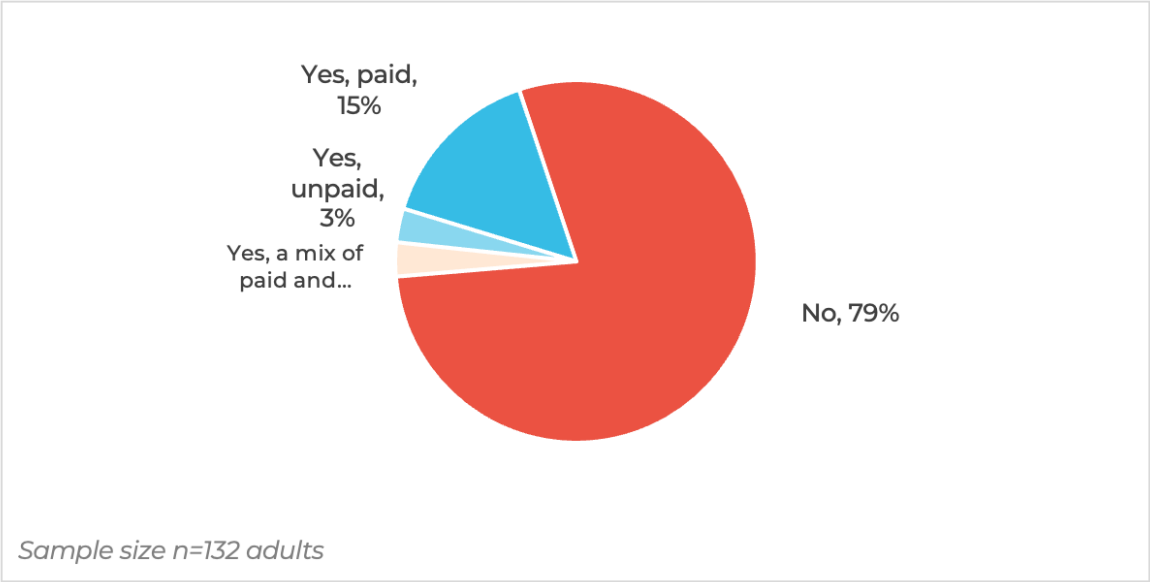
Somewhere else: Other locations included Queensberry and Christchurch.

Household



Sample size n=145 adults

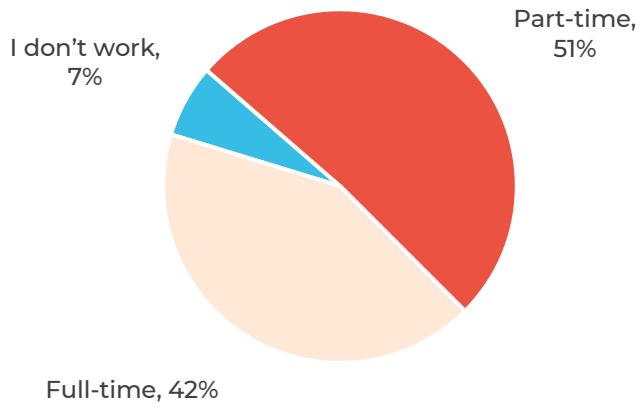
Childcare



Sample size n=132 adults

Working

Almost everyone surveyed is in paid employment, with about half part-time and half full-time.



Sample size n=135 adults

The 2026 Upper Clutha Parent and Caregiver Survey invited parents and caregivers of children aged 11–18 living in Wānaka and the wider Upper Clutha to share their experiences, concerns and perspectives on raising young people.

Its purpose was to identify parenting challenges, community strengths and support needs, helping Path Wānaka and its partners develop evidence-based programmes that better support local rangatahi and whānau.

The anonymous and confidential survey explored youth wellbeing, belonging, digital safety, substance use and parenting challenges. Questions about individual children referred to the child with the most recent birthday. Together with the Youth Survey, the findings provide valuable insights to guide Path Wānaka and its community partners

Sincere thanks to all whānau who participated. Your voices and insights are invaluable in helping shape a stronger, more connected and supportive community for our young people and their families.