



Sexting, tattoos, and missing out on real life experiences because of social media pressure: UK-wide survey reveals teen girl regrets

- More than 4 in 10 teenage girls (13-16 year olds) have missed out on real life experiences because of social media
- 1 in 6 teenage girls have shared sexually explicit material about themselves
- 15% of teenage girls have taken anti-depressants because of stress and anxiety
- BAME girls sexting, going further in sexual relationships than they are comfortable with, and using anti-depressants in greater numbers than their white peers

More than 4 in 10 (42%) teenage girls (13 to 16 year olds) have missed out on real life experiences because of time spent on social media, of whom more than four fifths (85%) said they regretted it, according to a new nationwide survey commissioned by UIO, a podcast to help teenage girls navigate the transition to womanhood by providing insight and debate on the issues and pressures they face growing up.

UIO is releasing this data to support its brand-new campaign, Wait awhile, urging girls to be girls during their transitional years and avoid rushing into things under pressure that they may regret.

The independent survey, undertaken by Survation, compared the teen behaviour and regrets of girls aged 13 to 16 with women 50 and over to highlight the change in peer pressure over time. The findings paint a picture of girls in the UK growing up too fast because of the pressures of modern day living and having regrets.

Sonja Lewis, Founder of UIO, a podcast that explores issues and pressures facing teen girls said:

"This is the hidden story of our times. Girls are suffering new pressures, many of these but not all, are online. These pressures include sexting, getting tattoos and using social media over real-life experiences. For BAME girls, the pressure-cooker of youth is felt more, resulting in them succumbing to these pressures in greater numbers than their white peers. What is so concerning is how many girls regret doing these things. Girls are being denied their teen years, instead being parachuted into womanhood prematurely because of the pressures of modern-day life."

The survey found 1 in 6 (16%) teenage girls have shared sexually explicit material about themselves, a fivefold increase from women 50 and over when they were teenagers. 4 in 5 (79%) teenage girls who had shared sexually explicit material about themselves said they regretted it.

Online peer pressure has become a growing phenomenon that has led to sexting, tattoos, and social media use at the expense of real-life experiences. In each of these cases around a quarter of respondents attributed pressure from online friends to their actions.

Worryingly, these modern pressures and regrets correspond with a sharp rise in anti-depressant use among 13 to 16 year olds. 15% of teenage girls have taken antidepressants because of stress and anxiety they were facing, double the number of women 50 and over when they were teenagers.

For BAME girls, the survey showed the pressures are accentuated, leading them to do things like sext, use social media over real-life experiences, and go further in sexual relationships than they are comfortable with at a higher rate than their white counterparts.

Half (50%) of BAME girls said that they'd missed out on real life experiences because of time they spend on social media compared to 40% of white girls. While 1 in 5 (22%) BAME girls have shared sexually explicit material about themselves compared with 14% of white girls. These increased pressures felt by BAME girls also corresponded with a higher proportion of BAME girls having taken antidepressants. 1 in 5 (19%) BAME girls have taken antidepressants compared to 14% of white girls.



The outcomes of the survey also show:

- Nearly 1 in 10 (8%) 13 to 16 year olds have permanently changed their appearance by getting tattoos. Of those, over half (57%) said they regretted it.
- 6% of 13 to 16 year olds have permanently changed their appearance by getting cosmetic surgery for non-medical reasons
- 1 in 6 (16%) 13 to 16 year olds have gone further in a sexual relationship than they were comfortable with.

In addition, the survey found that there has been a big shift in racial intermixing between the generations. Teenage girls are much more likely to spend time outside of school with people who belong to other cultures, religions and races than women 50 and over. Almost three quarters (72%) of teenage girls spend time with people from another race, culture or religion outside school or home compared to less than half of women 50 and over.

Kicking the **Wait awhile** campaign off, Sonja Lewis, Founder of UIO said:

"We are kickstarting this campaign to encourage girls to stop, think and wait awhile before they rush into doing things that they might later regret. Although it might seem like a simple message, in the age of MeToo, the knock-on effects are grave. Young girls face problems with mental and physical health – from depression, to anorexia, to self-harm.

"For BAME teen girls these pressures are compounded, and we need to look at why that is. It is an uncomfortable truth that BAME girls are hyper-sexualised. This is an age-old form of racial stereotyping – for too long we have turned a blind eye. Now is the time to see it for what it is and give all girls the space to be girls with no regrets."

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

About UIO and Sonja Lewis:

- Sonja Lewis is a former journalist, author and social commentator on issues affecting young girls and women. She previously worked for the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, Girl Scouts of the USA and the American Red Cross.
- UIO is a podcast set up by Lewis to help teenage girls navigate the transition to womanhood by providing insight and debate on the issues and pressures they face growing up.
- UIO is releasing this data to support its brand-new campaign, Wait awhile, urging girls to be girls during their transitional years and avoid rushing into things under pressure that they may regret. UIO podcast: <https://soundcloud.com/youinsideout/sets/uio-you-inside-out>

About the polling:

- Survation conducted a representative online survey of 1,259 women aged 50+ living in the UK between the 10th October - 15th December 2018 and a representative online survey of 1,266 girls aged between 13 and 16 living in the UK, between the 31st October- 27th November 2018.
- Data was weighted by age and region to the profile of the population sampled. Targets for the weighted data were derived from Office for National Statistics Census Data.
- Survation is an independent polling and market research company. It is a member of the British Polling Council and a Market Research Society company partner and abides by their rules.