

IN THEIR

OWN

Young Voices  
on Mental Health  
and the Future

WORDS

A NATIONAL POLL BY HOPELAB AND DATA FOR PROGRESS

HOPELAB

 DATA FOR *PROGRESS*

# Introduction

Recent years have been marked by increased attention to young people's mental health and well-being. Meanwhile, policymakers, educators, health care professionals, parents, and nonprofit leaders have worked to understand what may be contributing to worsening youth mental health and how to respond effectively. Social scientists have advanced theories about societal forces that may account for observed declines in young people's mental health over the past decade, including social media use,<sup>1</sup> heightened academic and extracurricular pressures,<sup>2</sup> economic insecurity,<sup>3</sup> and the lingering impacts of the pandemic.<sup>4</sup> While these theories have generated substantial attention and debate, most of this conversation has been shaped by adult experts, often without meaningful input from young people themselves.

Young people's lives are intimately impacted by rapidly changing technological, political, economic, and environmental forces. To understand how young people experience these changing conditions, we must start by listening to what they have to say. Many large national polls and surveys collect data on young people's perceptions of factors affecting their mental health and well-being. However, relatively few studies are co-created with young people or meaningfully involve them in shaping research questions, designing data collection tools, or interpreting findings. Even fewer focus on the perspectives and needs of young people who have historically faced the most significant systemic barriers to their well-being—especially Black, Brown, and Queer young people. This is a notable limitation, as excluding young people's voices risks overlooking important contextual, cultural, and experiential factors that shape young people's well-being.<sup>5</sup> Most existing survey research emphasizes what's going wrong

in young people's lives, focusing on stressors and risk factors, while giving relatively less attention to positive sources of support and hope for the future. To better respond to young people's mental health needs, we need to partner with them to learn about the challenges they face and the resources, relationships, and sources of optimism that sustain their well-being.

This new [poll](#), co-published by [Hopelab](#) and [Data for Progress](#), emerged from conversations and collaboration with 30 young people ages 13-24 across the United States. Based on their lived experiences, these young people helped us define and articulate a set of positive and negative drivers of their mental health and well-being. This poll, which surveyed 1,304 respondents ages 13–24, examines what young people believe is currently affecting their mental health and well-being, their hopes and fears about the future, and key sources of emotional and social support. Our methodological approach, detailed on page 24, is predicated on the belief that to effectively support young people's well-being, we need to deeply listen to their perspectives and experiences. It is grounded in the ethos of “nothing about us without us,” a phrase popularized by the disability rights movement, but more recently reinforced by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989),<sup>6</sup> which advocates for young people's right to be heard and have their views taken seriously within research, interventions, and policies that affect them.

<sup>1</sup> Haidt, J. (2024). *The anxious generation: How the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness*. Penguin Press

<sup>2</sup> Steare, T., Gutiérrez Muñoz, C., Sullivan, A., & Lewis, G. (2023). The association between academic pressure and adolescent mental health problems: A systematic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 339, 302–317. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2023.07.028>

<sup>3</sup> Golberstein, E., Gonzales, G., & Meara, E. (2019). How do economic downturns affect the mental health of children? Evidence from the National Health Interview Survey. *Health economics*, 28(8), 955–970. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.388>

<sup>4</sup> Samji, H., Wu, J., Ladak, A., Vossen, C., Stewart, E., Dove, N., Long, D., & Snell, G. (2022). Review: Mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and youth - a systematic review. *Child and adolescent mental health*, 27(2), 173–189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12501>

<sup>5</sup> McCabe, E., Rabi, S., Mendoza, J., Naqvi, S. F., Bajgain, K. T., Zwicker, J. D., & Santana, M. (2023). Youth engagement in mental health research: A systematic review. *Health Expectations*, 26(1), 30–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.13650>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Treaty Series, 1577, 3.

# Young People Generally *Perceive Themselves to Be Happy* and in Good Mental Health

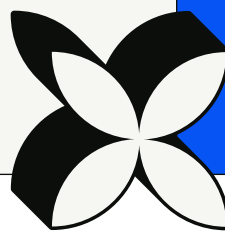
Despite the abundance of negative headlines regarding young people's mental health, most young people report themselves to be at least somewhat happy and in good or better mental health.

A majority of young people (61%) say they would consider themselves to be a "somewhat" or "very" happy person. A plurality (39%) of young people specifically say they consider themselves to be "somewhat happy."

**61%** say they consider themselves to be at least somewhat happy

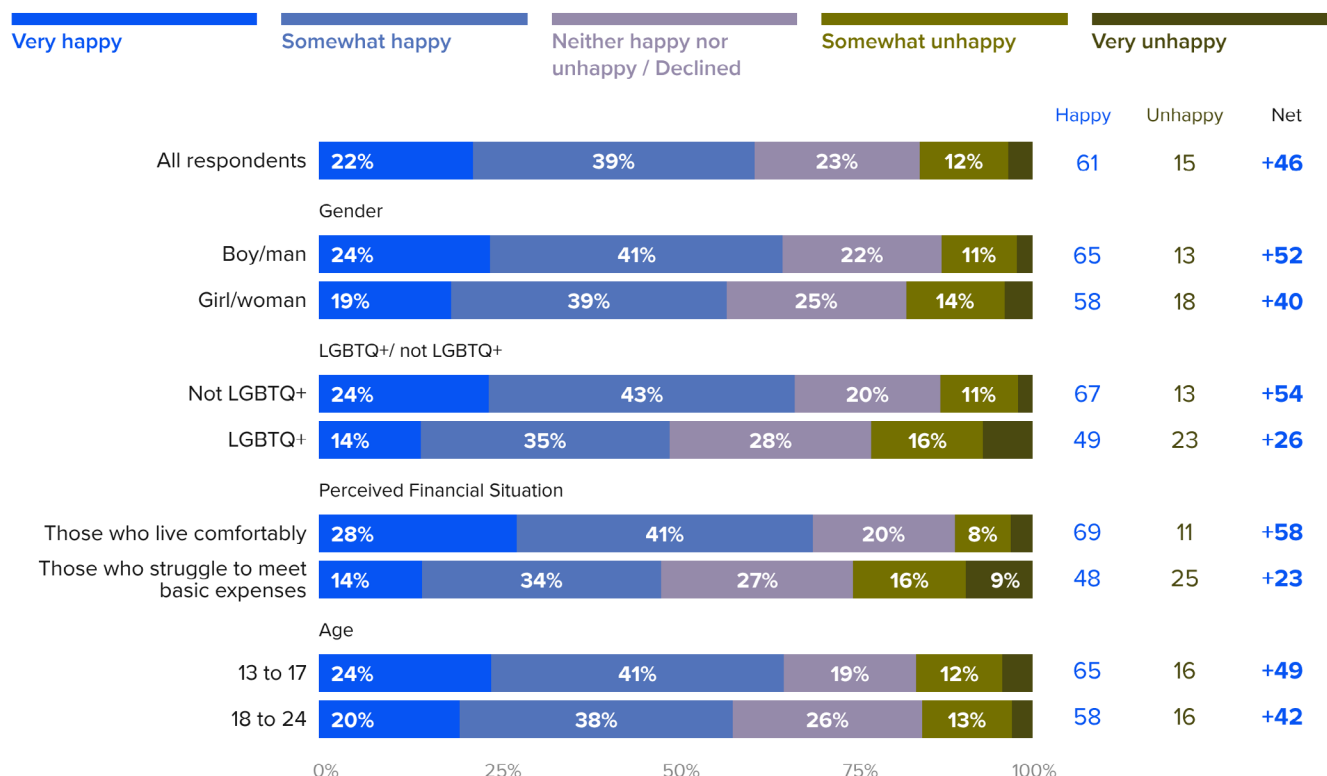
**55%** say their mental health is good, very good or excellent

LGBTQ+ young people say their mental health is poor at **NEARLY TRIPLE THE RATE** of young people who are not LGBTQ+



## A Majority of Young People Consider Themselves to be Happy

In general, I consider myself a \_\_\_\_\_ person.

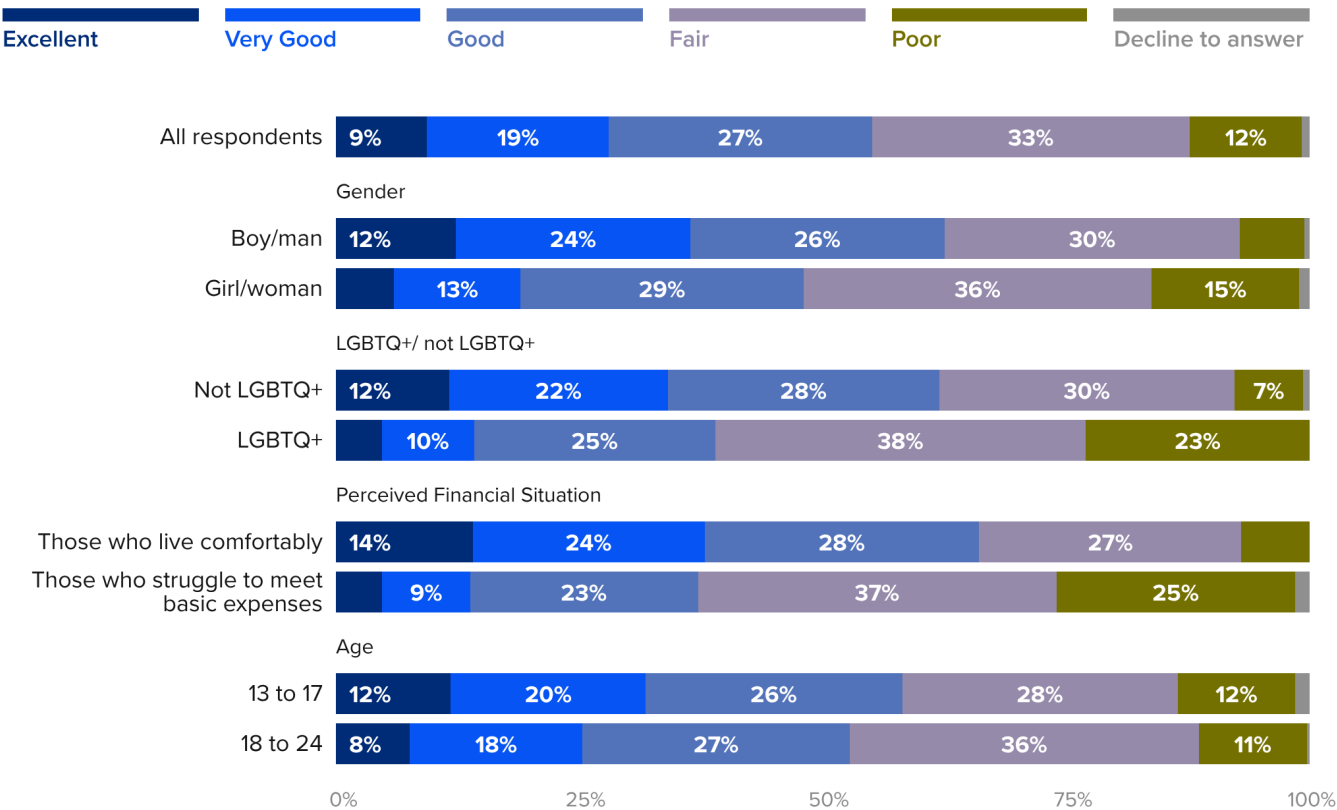


July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

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# Though Good Overall, Youth Mental Health Correlates Strongly With Income, LGBTQ+ Identity

In general, would you say your mental health is \_\_\_\_



July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

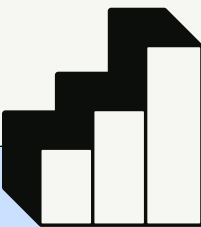
HOPELAB DATA FOR PROGRESS

Further, slightly more than half (55%) of young people surveyed say their mental health is “good,” “very good,” or “excellent,” while 45% of young people say their mental health is “fair” or “poor.”

However, these rates vary meaningfully among young people who face economic disadvantages and societal discrimination. For example, compared with young people who live comfortably, young people who don’t meet basic expenses or struggle to do so report poor mental health at more than triple the rate and say they are unhappy at more than double the rate.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, LGBTQ+ young people say their mental health is “poor” at nearly triple the rate of young people who are not LGBTQ+.<sup>8</sup>

While these topline findings indicate that most young people report good mental health and emotional well-being, they reiterate the importance of intersectionality in mental health research and interventions.



Young people who struggle to meet basic expenses report poor mental health at **MORE THAN TRIPLE THE RATE** of those who live comfortably

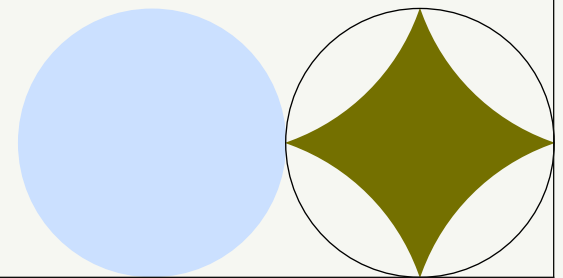
<sup>7</sup> ±7 MOE

<sup>8</sup> ±5 MOE



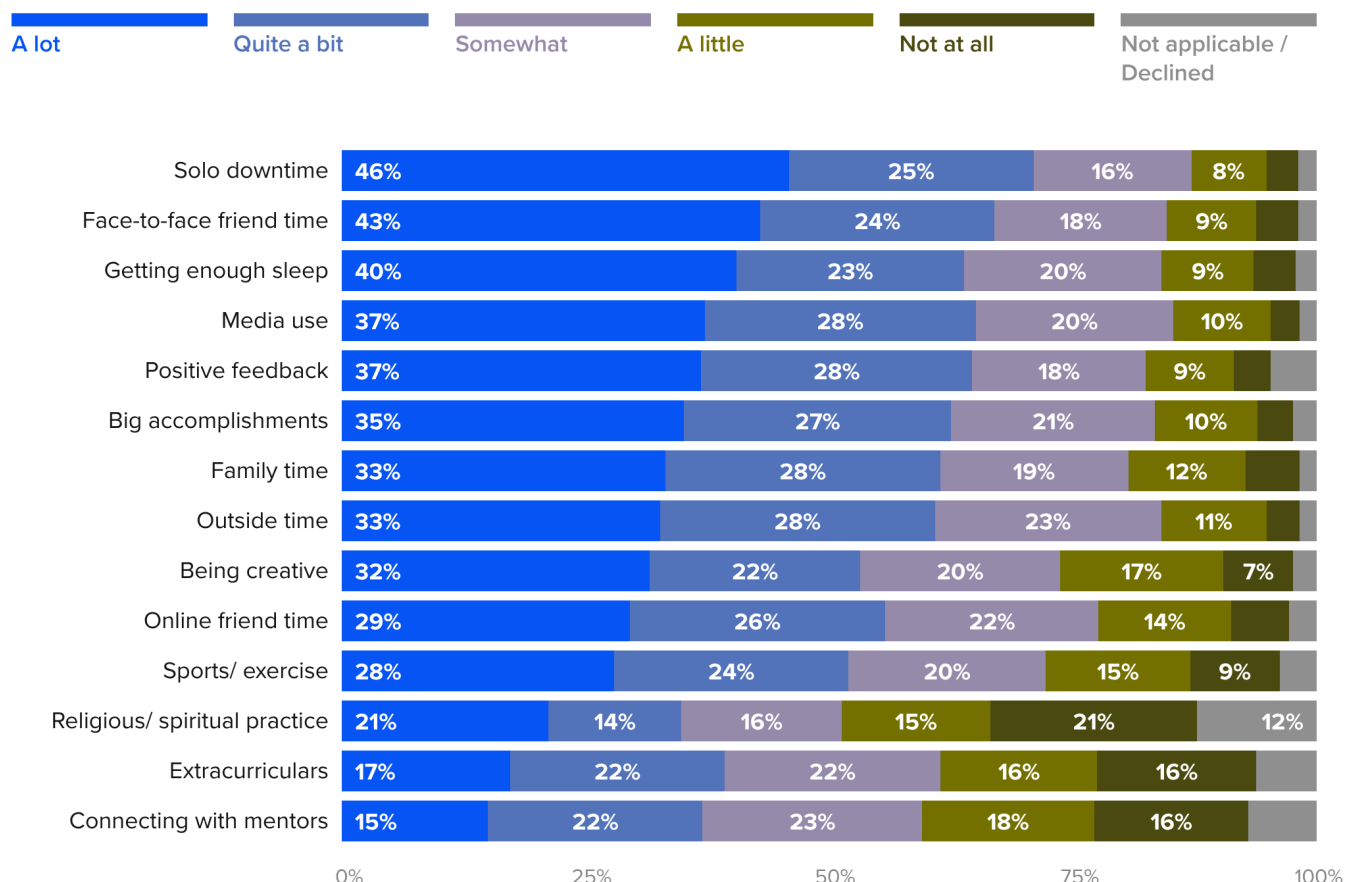
# *Top Activities That Support Young People's Well-being and Mental Health* Include Solo Downtime, Face-to-Face Time with Friends, Sleep, and Engaging With Media

Young people possess diverse and creative resources for supporting their mental health, including engaging with digital media. They also recognize the value of balancing time online with in-person socializing and getting enough sleep.



## Solo Downtime, Time With Friends, and Getting Enough Sleep Boost Young People's Mental Health

How much do the following activities support your well-being or mental health?



July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

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**The top six activities that young people say support their well-being or mental health are:**

- “Time to myself (i.e., solo downtime)”
- “Spending time with friends in person (i.e., face-to-face)”
- “Getting enough sleep”
- “Engaging with media I enjoy, like watching a show, using social media, reading for pleasure, or gaming”
- “Receiving a good grade or other positive feedback at school or at work”
- “Accomplishing something that took time and effort (e.g., a project at work, redecorating a room, etc.)”

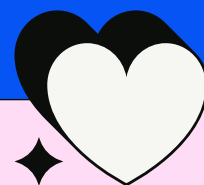
Young people were also asked, in an open-response question, “What’s the biggest thing helping your mental health right now?” Frequently mentioned topics included family relationships, time to oneself/free time, friendships and other significant relationships, creative pursuits, and self-affirmation, reinforcing the closed-ended data.

Some respondents described the importance of different relationships, while others pointed out hobbies or other leisure activities, and self-affirmation or self-care practices.

These findings demonstrate that young people appreciate a balance between time spent alone and with loved ones, as well as online and in-person activities.

*“Video chatting with my cousin every Wednesday night, she complains about how chaotic her college life is, making me feel growing up isn’t that scary.”*

**WHITE/LATINO, 10TH-GRADE BOY**



*“Just working on myself, having time to relax and just do fun stuff that makes me enjoy life”*

**BLACK, 7TH-GRADE GIRL**

*“Escaping reality by watching TV shows and movies. I find comfort in these things, and they make me happy.”*

**BLACK/LATINO MAN, 3RD-YEAR COLLEGE**



*“My girlfriend, because she provides me with comfort and joy”*

**AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE/LATINO MAN, 1ST-YEAR COLLEGE**

*“My love for dancing is helping my mental health at this moment.”*

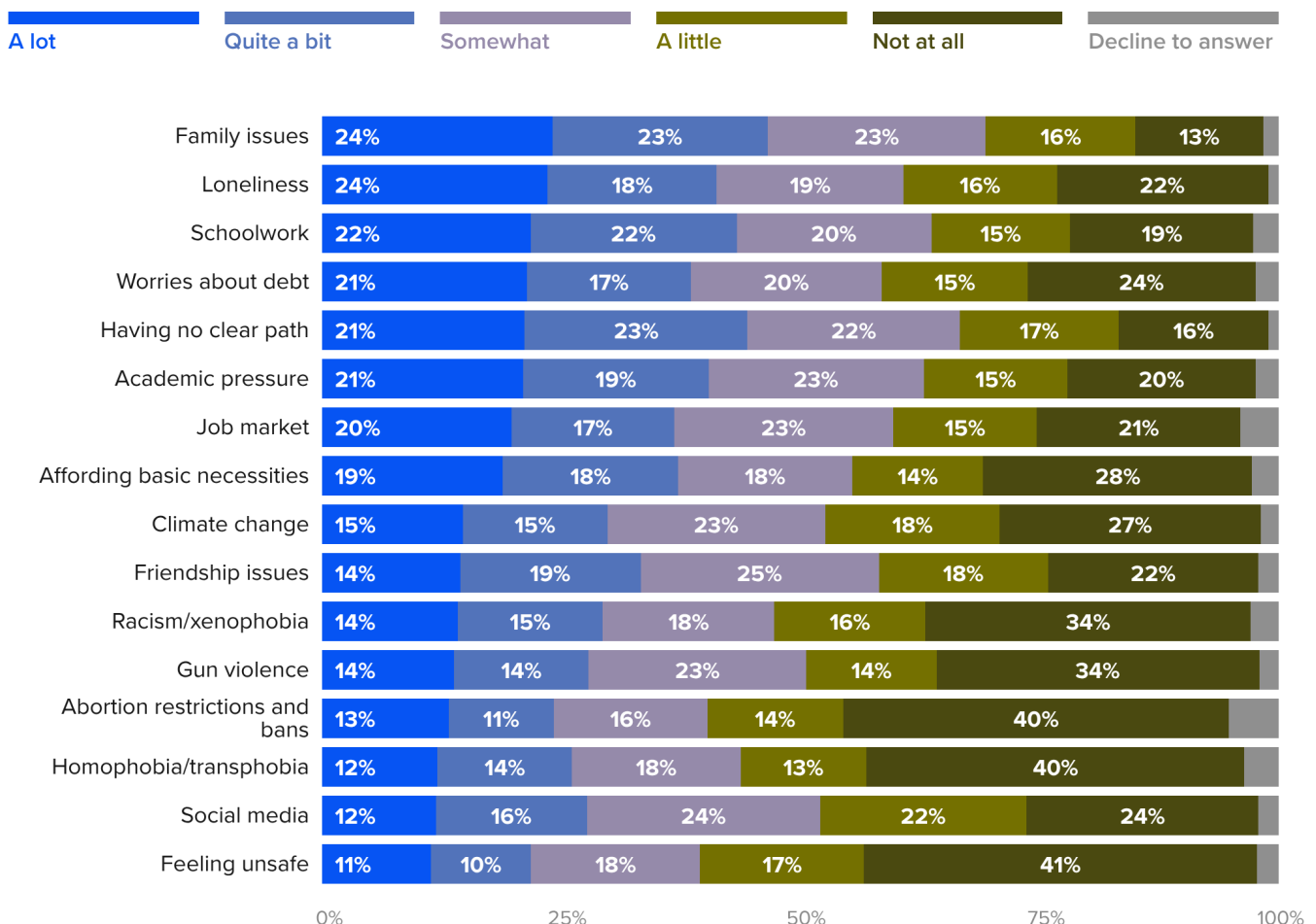
**BLACK, 8TH-GRADE GIRL**

# Top Issues That Negatively Affect Young People's Mental Health Include Family Problems, Schoolwork, Not Having a Clear Path in Life, and Loneliness

While it's promising that young people are aware of activities that support their mental health and well-being, too many young people still report poor outcomes. When asked which issues negatively affect their mental health, young people largely point to issues related to their family, friends, and school, as well as their current and future economic concerns. Some of these factors impact daily functioning for a substantial number of young people.

## Family Problems, Loneliness, and Schoolwork Are Drains on Youth Mental Health

How much do the following issues negatively affect your well-being or mental health right now?



July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

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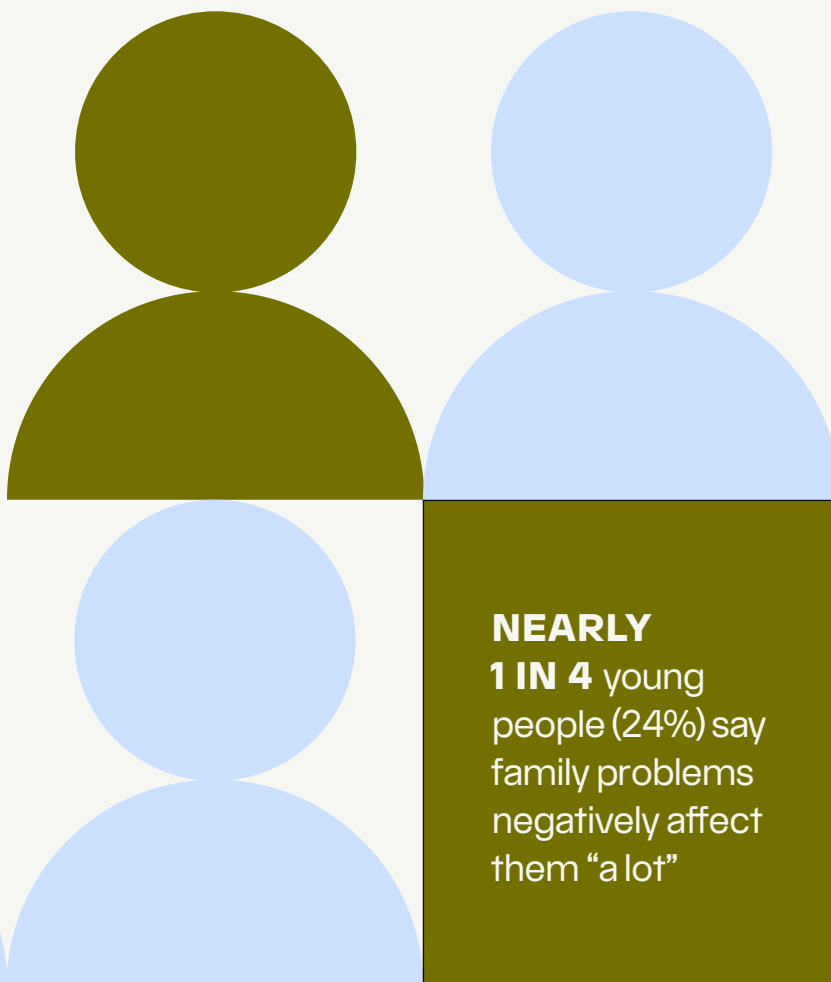
**At least 40% of young people say the following issues negatively affect their well-being or mental health “quite a bit” or “a lot” right now:**

- “Family expectations, pressures, or difficulties”
- “Feeling lonely or like I don’t have a solid group of friends”
- “Having too much or too difficult work or schoolwork”
- “Not having a clear path or plan for achieving my goals or aspirations”
- “Pressure to stand out or look exceptional through academics or extracurricular activities”



Notably, nearly 1 in 4 young people (24%) say family problems negatively affect their well-being or mental health “a lot” right now. This rate is even higher among young people who don’t meet basic expenses or struggle to do so (35%), those who rate their mental health as fair or poor (36%)<sup>9</sup>, LGBTQ+ young people (33%), and girls/women (31%)<sup>10</sup>.

In addition to family problems, young people who rate their mental health as either “fair” or “poor” also say that loneliness, schoolwork, academic pressure, and “not knowing how I’ll pay for college or career training/going into student debt” negatively affect their well-being or mental health.



<sup>9</sup> ±4 MOE

<sup>10</sup> ±4 MOE

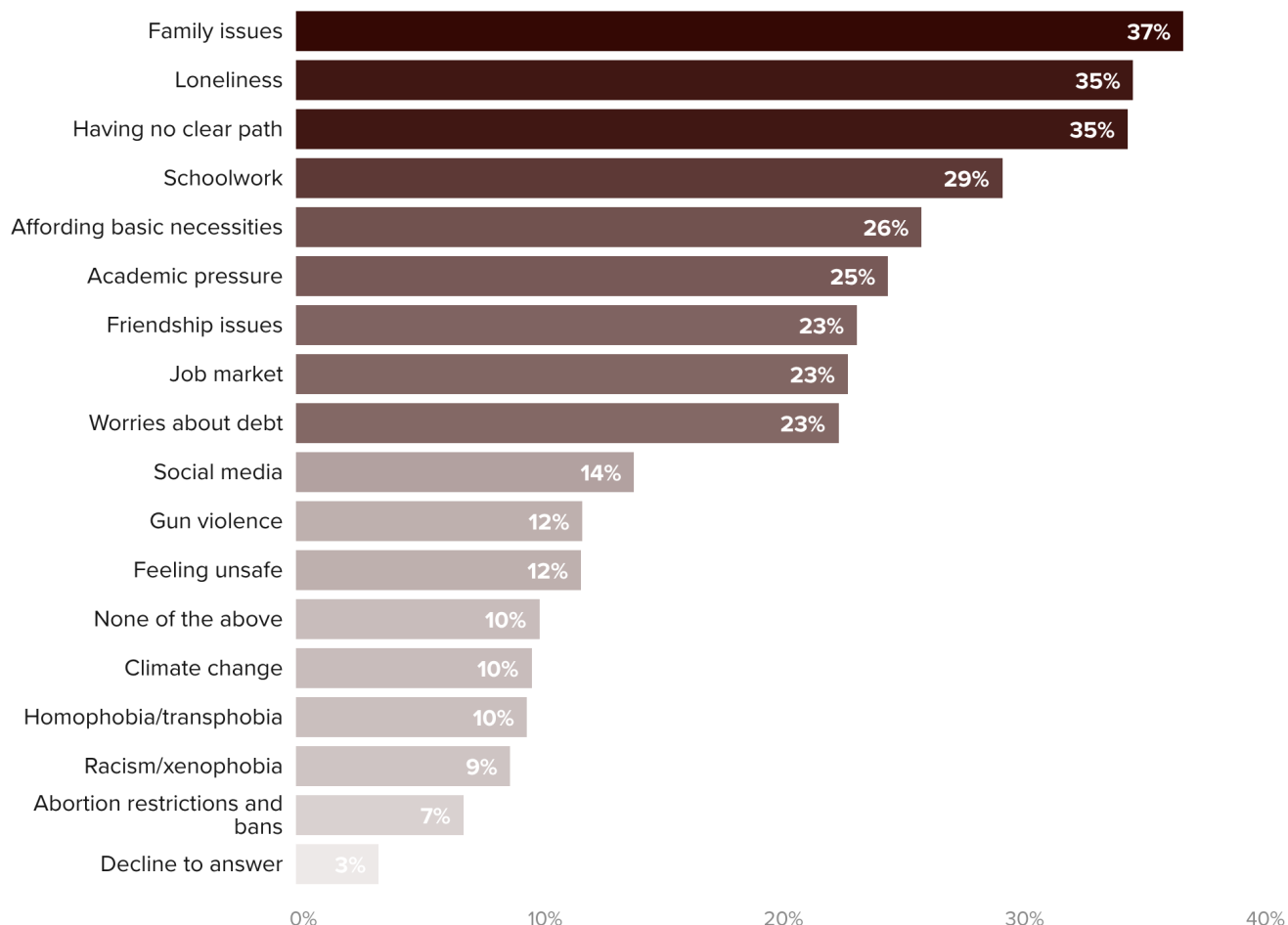
# Family Issues, Loneliness, and Lack of a Clear Path Are Also *Top Disrupters of Daily Functioning*

Alarming, more than 1 in 3 (37%) young people say family problems, having no clear path (35%), and loneliness (35%) impact their mental health or well-being to the point that it disrupts their daily life.

Once again, groups of young people who face structural barriers report disparate rates of negative mental health impacts.

## More Than 1 in 3 Young People Say Family Problems, Having No Clear Path, and Loneliness Impact Daily Life

Which of the following issues impact your mental health or well-being to the point that it disrupts your daily life?



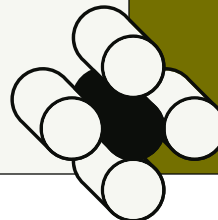
July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

**HOPE LAB** DATA FOR PROGRESS

In particular, LGBTQ+ young people report higher rates of negative mental health impact on nearly every issue tested, including those not explicitly linked to being LGBTQ+, like climate change. Unsurprisingly, young people who don't meet basic expenses or struggle to do so report higher rates of negative mental health impacts from financial stressors like affording basic necessities or wondering how they will pay for college or trade school without being burdened by debt, compared with young people who live comfortably and those whose needs are just met.

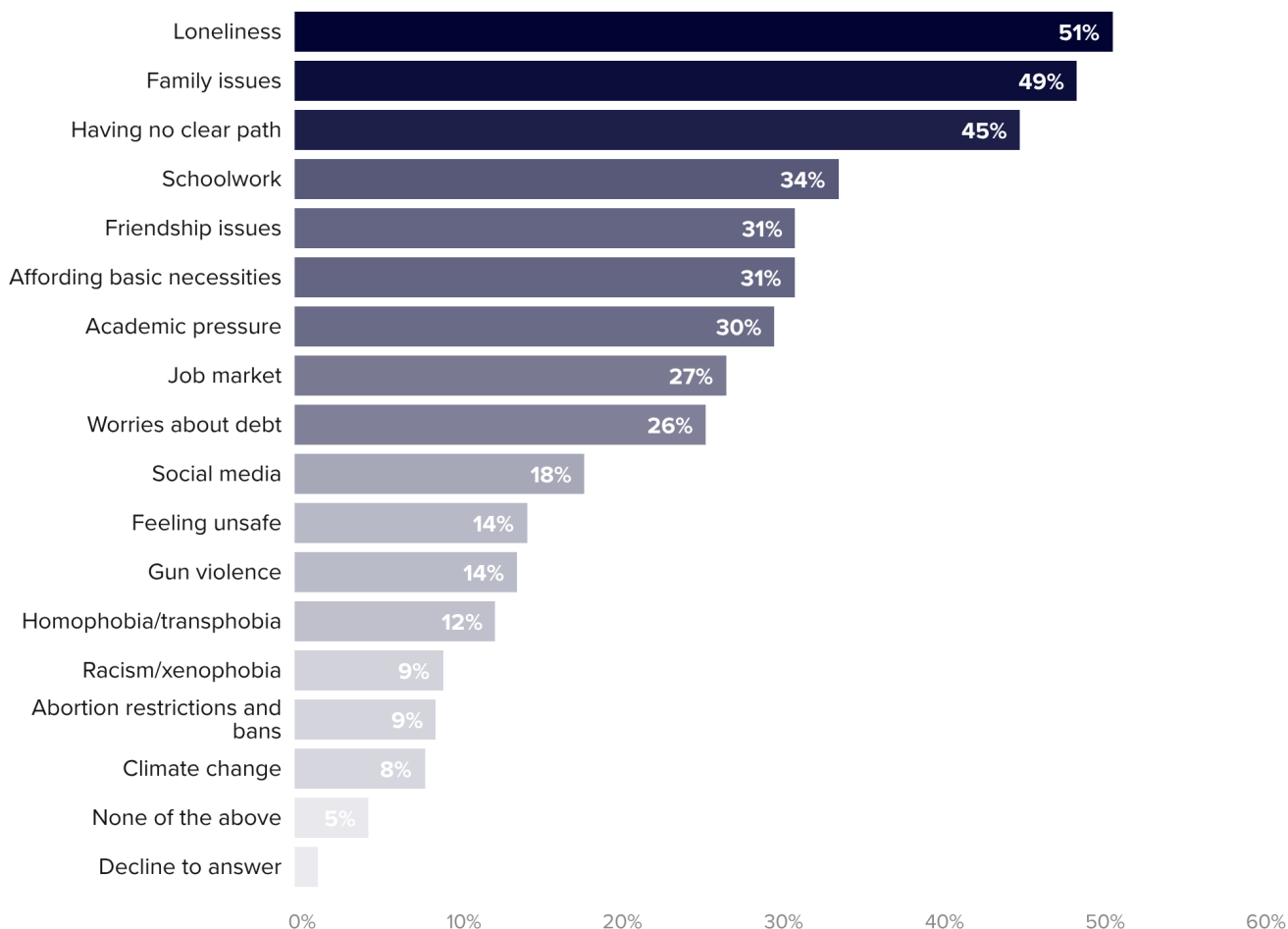
Additionally, rates of disrupted functioning due to factors such as loneliness, family issues, and the future were particularly elevated among young people reporting "fair" to "poor" mental health.

LGBTQ+ young people report higher rates of negative mental health **IMPACT ON NEARLY EVERY ISSUE TESTED**



## Young People With Fair or Poor Mental Health Worry About Loneliness, Family Issues, and Their Future

For those with fair or poor mental health, which of the following issues impact your mental health or well-being to the point that it disrupts your daily life? Please select all that apply.



July 8-19, 2025 survey of 577 respondents between ages 13 and 24 who report "fair" or "poor" mental health

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In a similar open-ended question, young people were asked: “What’s the biggest thing that’s making your mental health worse right now?” Common themes included finances and work, academic and other expectations in one’s life, family relationships, and political news and world events.

Notably, both the closed and open-ended data point toward key areas that young people identify as both helping and hurting their mental health — particularly relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners, as well as social media.

Respondents noted strained family relationships:

*“There’s a lot of tension at home, and it’s affecting me more than I’d like to admit.”*

WHITE MAN, 4TH-YEAR COLLEGE

*“My parents are getting divorced, but pretend everything’s fine. I have to be their therapist while drowning in my own pain.”*

WHITE, 8TH-GRADE BOY

*“My parents preventing me from reaching my future, the little amount of job opportunities.”*

WHITE/LATINO, 12TH-GRADE GIRL

Others focused on the pressures for the future:

*“Financial struggles and figuring out how I will afford school.”*

WHITE GIRL, 1ST-YEAR COLLEGE

*“I feel overwhelmed by constant overtime work and unrealistic project deadlines that leave no time for self-care.”*

WHITE/LATINO, 11TH-GRADE BOY

*“Not knowing if I’ll [finish] school and not making family proud.”*

BLACK/LATINO 10TH-GRADE GIRL

Some also focused on broader social, economic, and political issues affecting their mental health:

*“Gun violence and my friends I grew up with in jail or dying”*

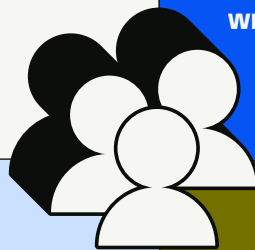
WHITE MAN, 1ST-YEAR COLLEGE

*“The economy, as well as the whole immigration system, our President has used to racially inhumanely revoke law-abiding citizens from their homes and families.”*

12TH-GRADE BOY, OTHER RACE

*“Everything to do with our capitalistic and classist system of governance.”*

MULTIRACIAL, NON-BINARY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE



# Young People Are Optimistic About Their Own Future, *But Not About the Future of Our Country or Planet*

When it comes to the future, young people are generally more optimistic about their own future than the future of our country or planet.

A majority of young people (57%) say they are optimistic about their own future, while a plurality say they are pessimistic about the future of the country (44%) and the future of the planet (43%).

However, young people's responses also reflect their considerable uncertainty about the future. More than 1 in 5 (24%) young people say they don't know whether they're optimistic or pessimistic about their own future, and around 1 in 4 say the same about the future of the country (28%) or the planet (27%).

Notably, boys/men<sup>11</sup> and straight, cisgender young people<sup>12</sup> are more optimistic about their own future, the country's future, and the planet's future than girls/women and LGBTQ+ young people, respectively.

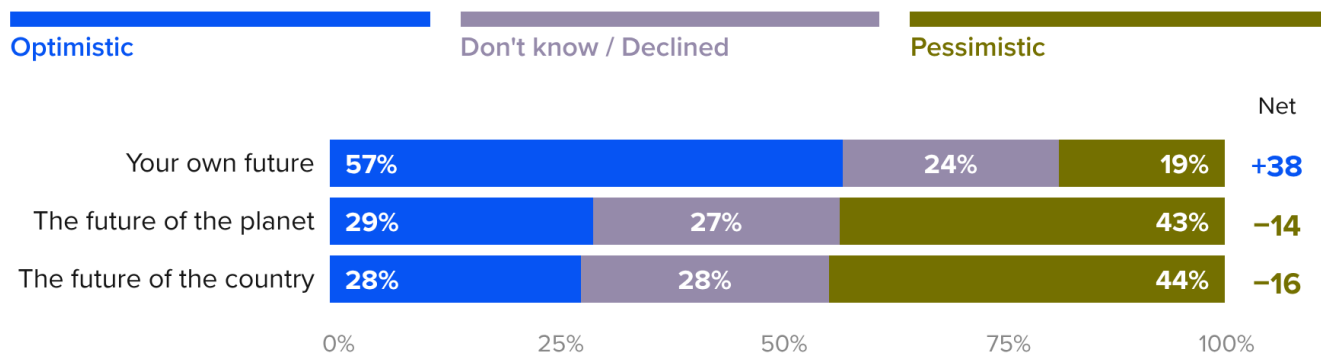
Those who don't meet basic expenses or struggle to do so are also less optimistic about their own future and the future of our country and planet than young people who live comfortably.



Boys/men and straight, cisgender young people are **MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE** than girls/women and LGBTQ+ young people

## A Majority of Young People Are Optimistic About Their Own Futures and More Pessimistic About the Country

In general, do you feel optimistic or pessimistic about each of the following?



July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

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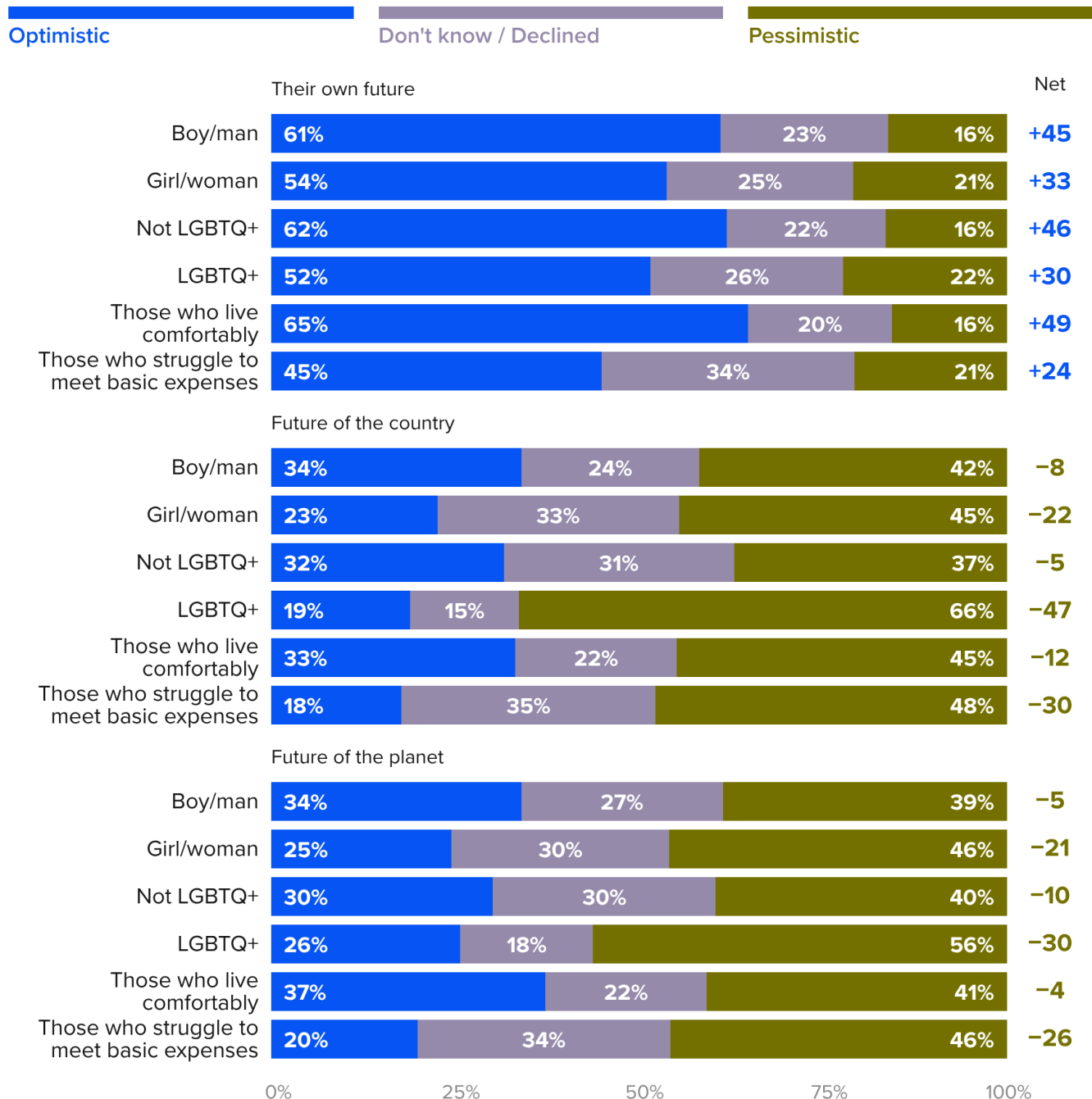
<sup>11</sup> ±4 MOE

<sup>12</sup> ±3 MOE



# Girls, LGBTQ+ Young People, and Those Struggling Financially Report Lower Rates of Optimism

In general, do you feel optimistic or pessimistic about each of the following?



July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

**HOPELAB** DATA FOR **PROGRESS**

ID: 660203

# Young People Want Stability in Their Futures and Are Moderately to Very Confident They'll Get It

When thinking further about their future, more than 60% of young people say the following things are “very important” to them: “be financially stable,” “live in a safe, clean, and healthy environment,” “be emotionally stable,” and “have enough free time to do things you enjoy (i.e., good work/life balance).”

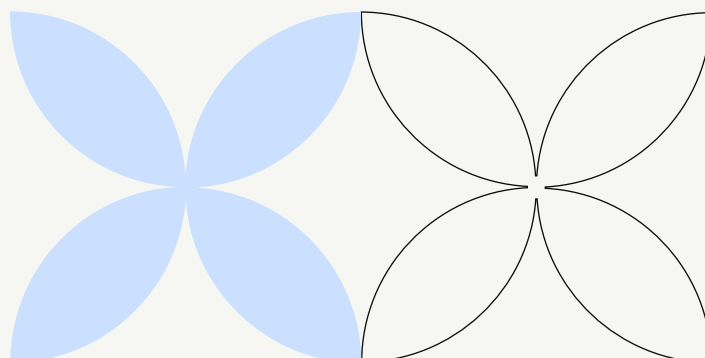
These top findings are consistent across demographic groups.

Encouragingly, a majority of young people are also confident that they will have these important sources of stability in the future.

However, the degree of young people’s confidence varies across different issues. For example, less than half of young people (49%) say they are confident that they will “be able to afford college or a vocational degree, and not be stressed by paying off student loans.” And while slightly more than half of young people are confident that they’ll “be able

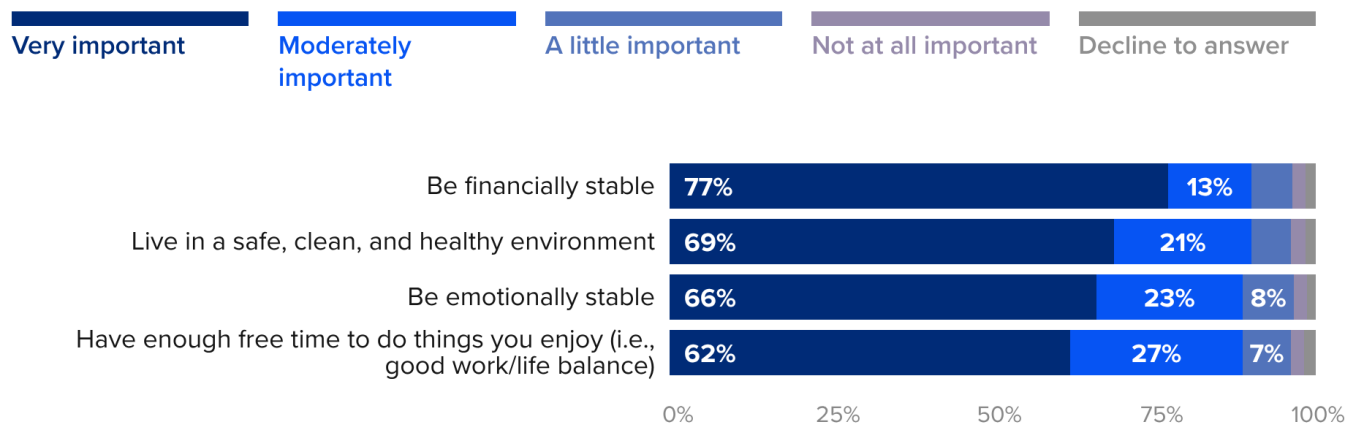
to buy a home” (56%) or “be able to afford to raise a child or children” (54%), the percentage of young people who are not confident they’ll be able to do these things in the future is higher for these issues compared with others.

Additionally, young people who rate their mental health negatively and those who don’t meet basic expenses or struggle to do so consistently report less confidence in achieving all of the important future life goals surveyed.



## A Majority of Young People Say Stability Is Very Important to Them

When you think about your future, how important is it to you to:

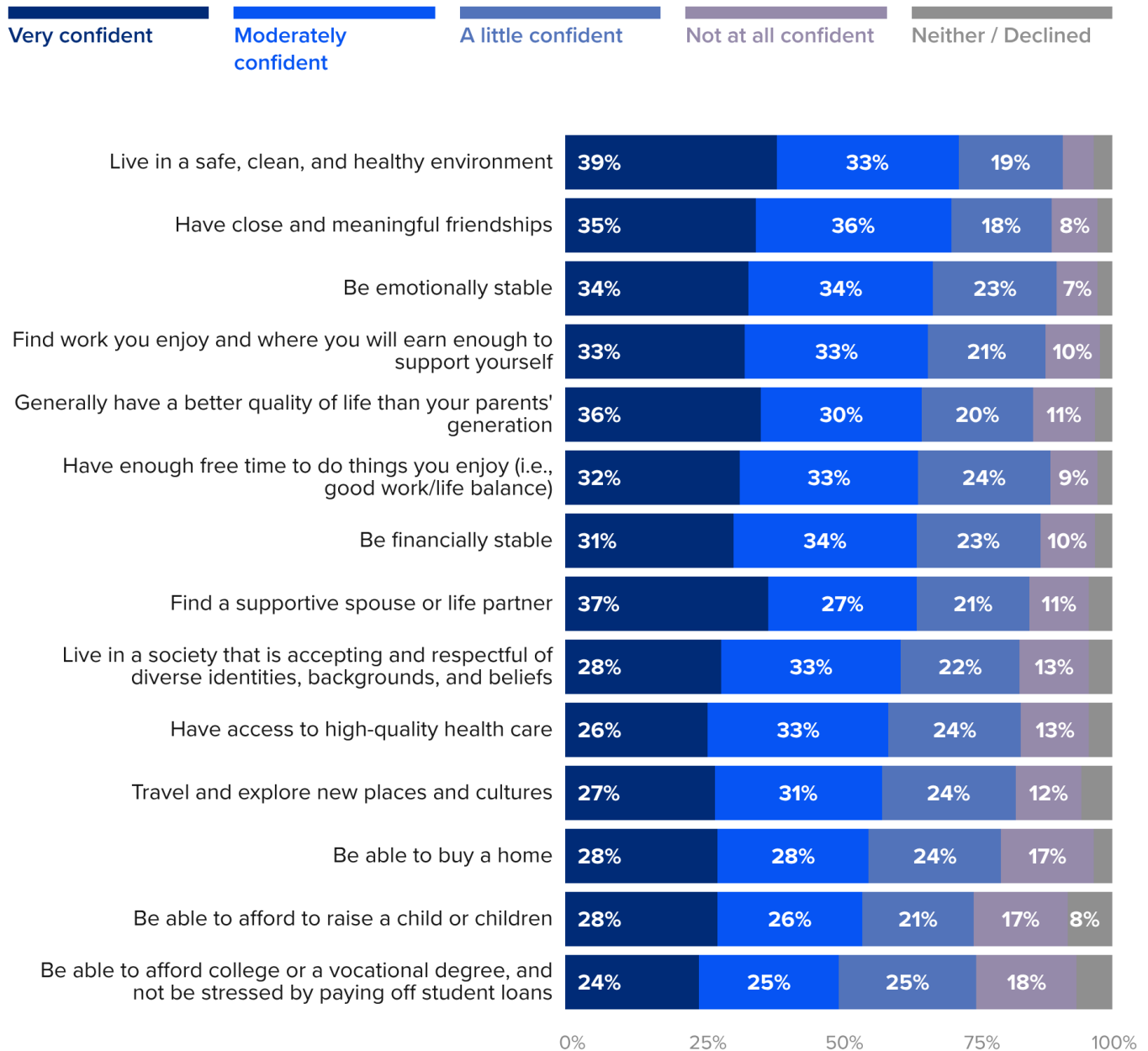


July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

**HOPELAB** DATA FOR PROGRESS

# Young People Report Mixed Confidence in Achieving Important Life Goals

When you think about your future, how confident are you that you'll:



July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

**HOPELAB** DATA FOR PROGRESS

ID: 660709

# *Young People Worry About* Various Issues Impacting Their Future Mental Health, Particularly *Losing Loved* *Ones, Sociopolitical Problems,* *and Economic Security*

The survey asked young people how worried they are that various issues might negatively impact their mental health or well-being in the future.

In response, a majority of young people (58%) say they are “very” or “extremely” worried that “losing the people they love most” will negatively impact their future mental health or well-being.

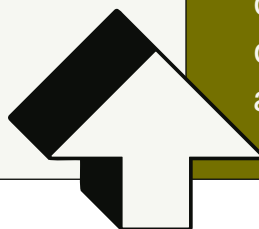
## **More than 1 in 3 young people also expressed worry about experiencing negative impacts from the following issues in the future:**

- “Struggling to pay for essentials like groceries, housing, or health care” (41%)
- “Multiple major problems — like climate change, political conflict, pandemics, etc. — all happening at once and making each other worse” (39%)
- “Threats to free speech or democracy” (38%)
- “Threats to the fair treatment or legal rights of U.S. immigrants” (38%)
- “Feeling like important milestones — like buying a house or parenthood — are out of reach financially” (37%)
- “Technology, like generative AI, taking jobs or otherwise undermining my well-being” (36%)

Across the board, LGBTQ+ young people and girls/women report higher levels of worry compared with straight, cisgender young people and boys/men, respectively.

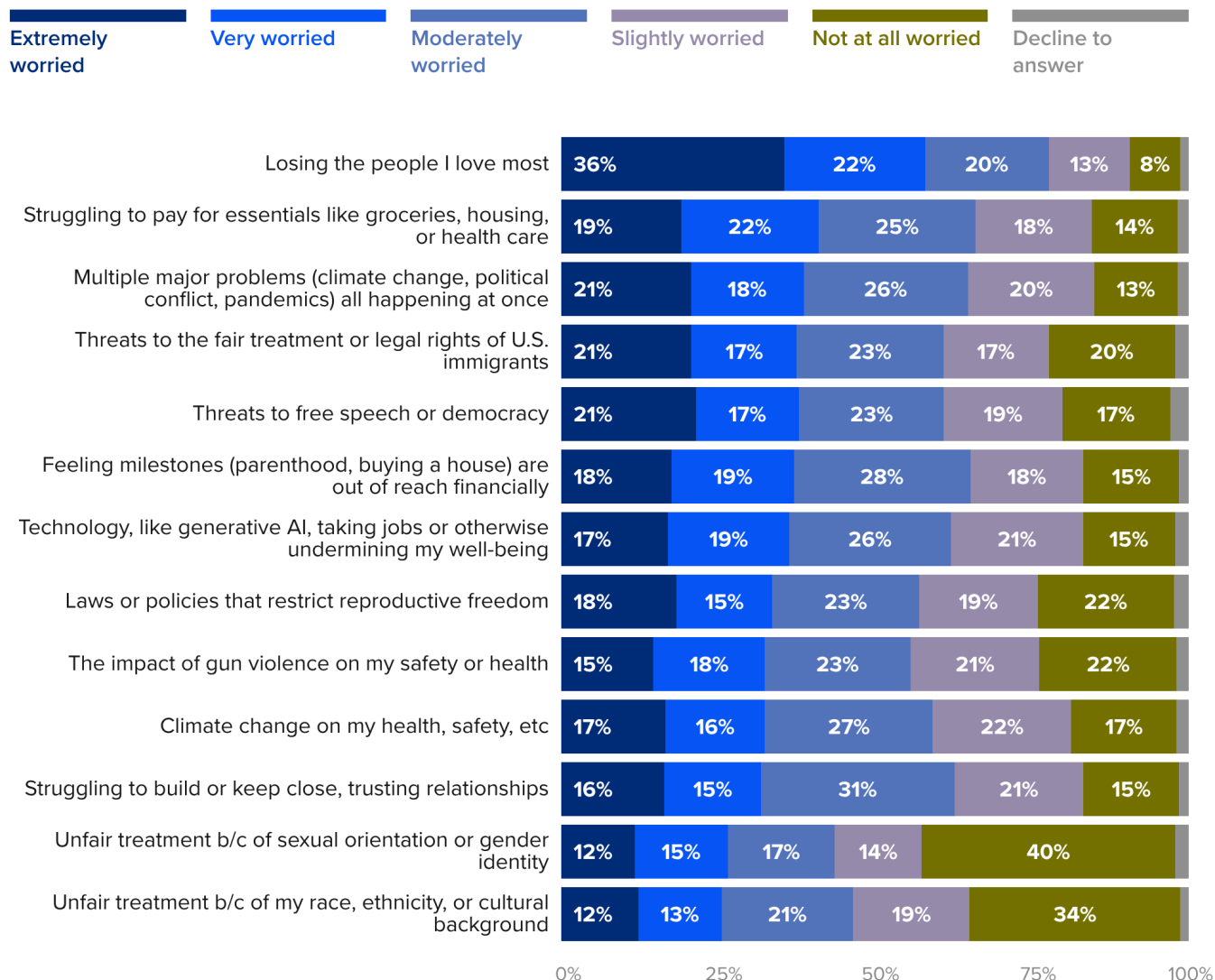
Additionally, a majority of young people who don't meet basic expenses or struggle to do so (57%) say they are "very" or "extremely" worried about the negative mental health impacts of being unable to pay for essentials in the future, compared with 36% of young people who live comfortably.

LGBTQ+ young people and girls/women **REPORT HIGHER LEVELS OF WORRY ABOUT EVERY ISSUE SURVEYED** compared with straight, cisgender young people and boys/men



## Young People Report Wide-Ranging Worries About the Future

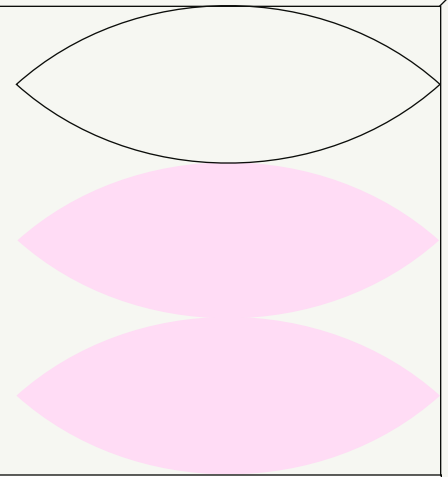
How worried are you that the following issues will negatively impact your FUTURE mental health or well-being?



July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

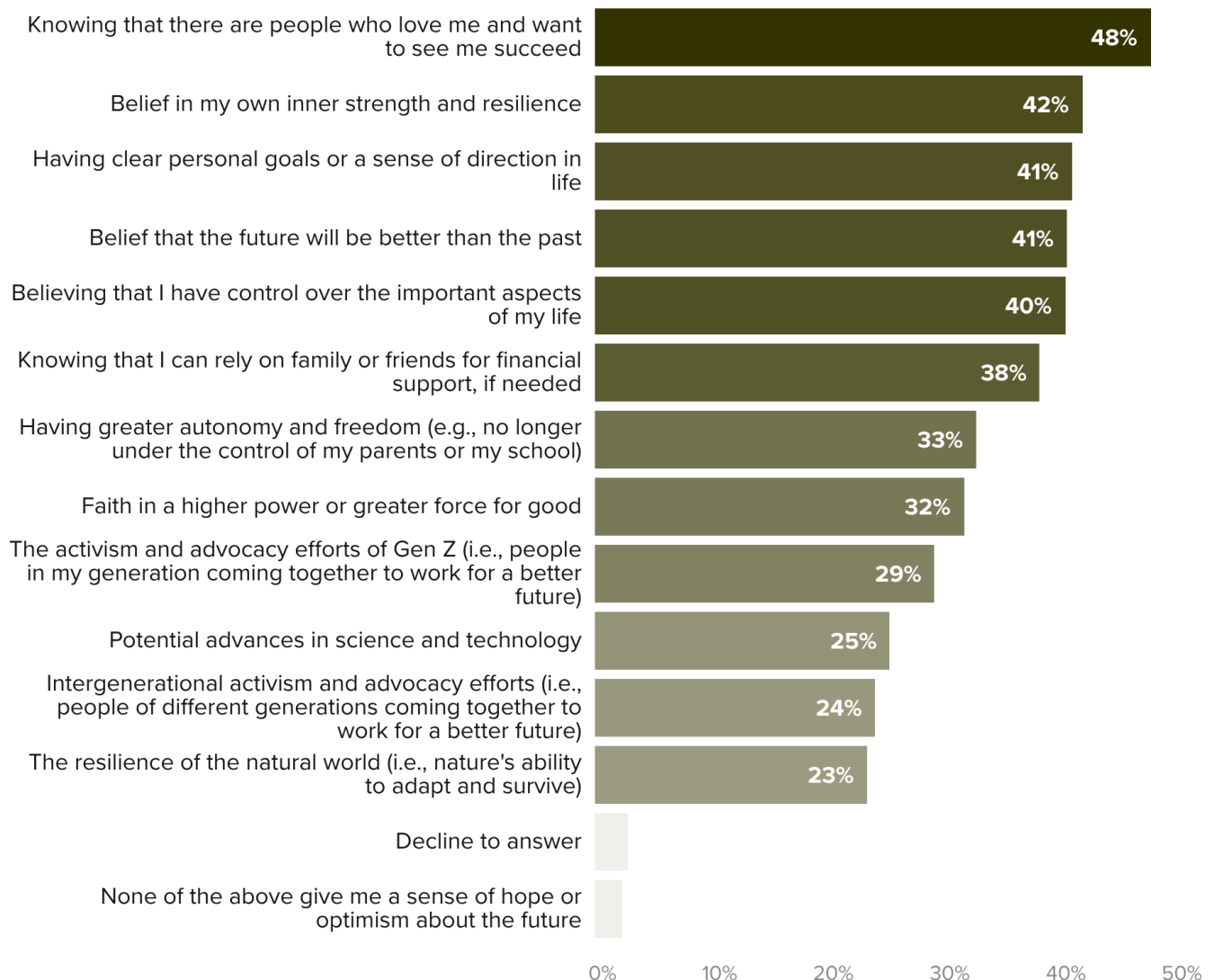
HOPE LAB DATA FOR PROGRESS

# *Almost All Young People Can Identify* a Source of Hope or Optimism for the Future



## Young People Report a Variety of Sources of Hope

When you think about the future, which of the following gives you a sense of hope or optimism? Select all that apply.



July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

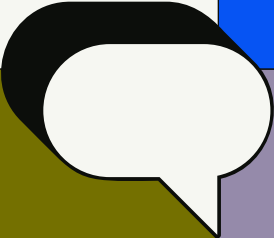
**HOPELAB** DATA FOR PROGRESS

Despite feeling ample uncertainty, worry, and pessimism about the future, almost all young people can point to something concrete that gives them a sense of hope or optimism.

The most commonly reported sources of hope and optimism include “knowing that there are people who love me and want to see me succeed” (48%), “belief in my own inner strength and resilience” (42%), “having clear personal goals or a sense of direction in life” (41%), “belief that the future will be better than the past” (41%), and “believing that I have control over the important aspects of my life” (40%).

When asked an open-ended question about “what brings you a sense of hope when you think about the future?” (asked to half of the sample,  $n = 618$ ), young people pointed to their future aspirations, and their families and communities, even despite expressing fear of the future in some instances.

Sample responses to the question “What brings you a sense of hope when you think about the future?” include:



*“What brings me a sense of hope when I think about the future is seeing how much people are capable of growing, changing, and helping each other. Even in hard times, I notice how families, friends, and even strangers come together to support one another, and that reminds me that good things are possible. I also feel hopeful knowing that I can keep working on myself, improving, learning, and becoming a better person ...”*

**BLACK/LATINO 12TH-GRADE MAN**

*“I think about the places I’ll be able to go in my career and how far my education will be able to support me.”*

**MULTIRACIAL/LATINO WOMAN, 4TH-YEAR COLLEGE**

*“The idea of a happy family, with kids raised better than I was, and me doing better mentally to make sure of that.”*

**MULTIRACIAL, 11TH-GRADE NONBINARY YOUNG PERSON**

*“Happiness and freedom in the sense that I can finally go experience and explore the true beauty of life and the world.”*

**WHITE, 10TH-GRADE BOY**

*“I’m scared for my future [...] but I want to have a successful future, I want my own house, own family, and car, and I wanna be financially stable.”*

**BLACK WOMAN, HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE**



# Young People Report Enough Support in Many Key Areas, but *Need More Support at School and Work*

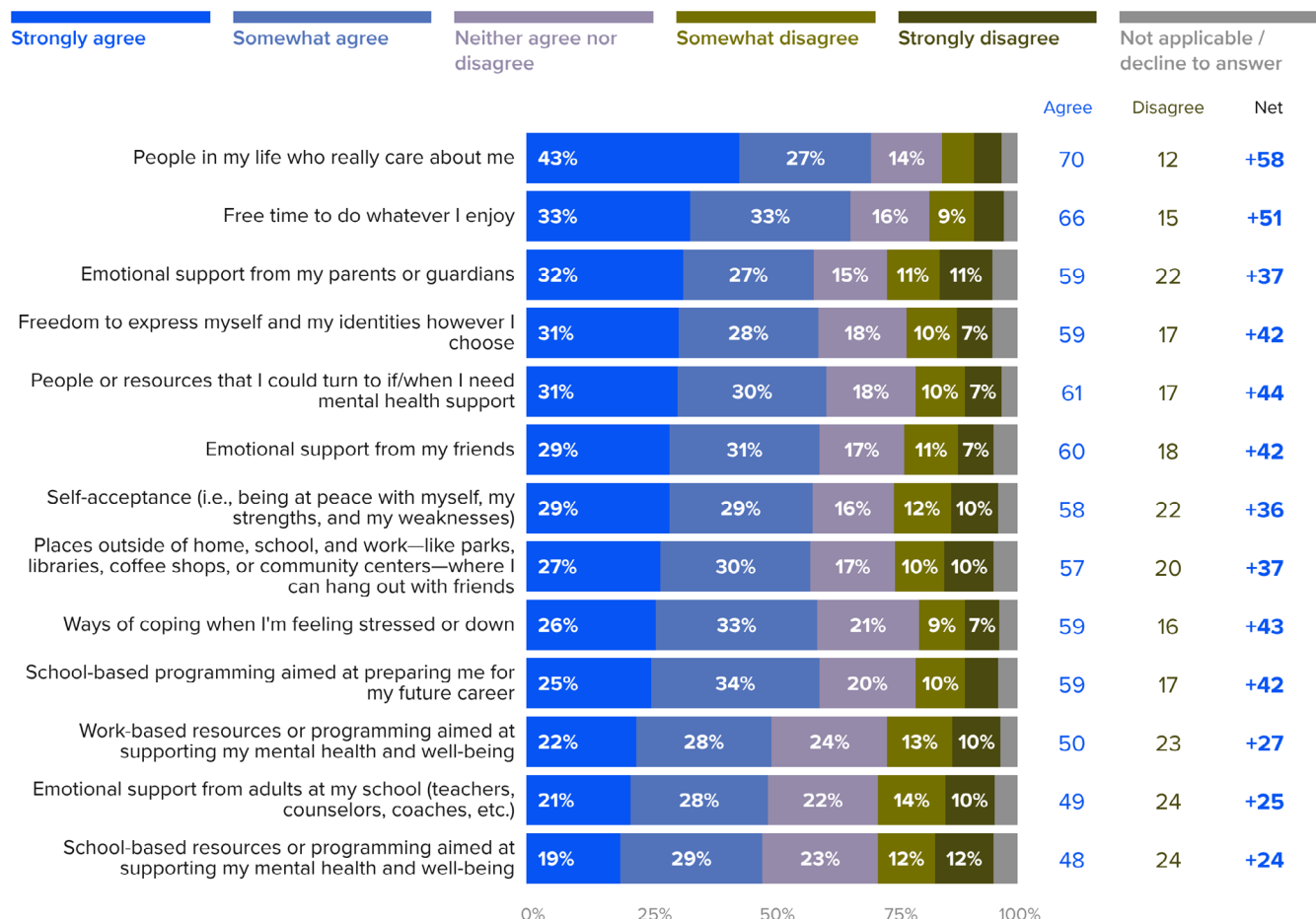
This survey's findings demonstrate that there are, fortunately, many areas where young people have enough support, but also areas where they want and need more. A majority of young people strongly or somewhat agree they have enough of the sources of support identified as important during survey co-creation, with more than 3 in 5 young people saying they have enough "people in my life who really care about me" (70%), "free time to do whatever I enjoy" (66%), "people or resources that I could turn to if/when I need mental health support" (61%), and "emotional support from my friends" (60%).

More than 40% of young people "strongly agree" that they feel they have enough people in their life who really care about them, while only 6% "strongly disagree."

## A Majority of Young People Agree That They Have Enough Sources of Support

Rate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

I feel that I have enough...



July 8-19, 2025 survey of 1,304 respondents between ages 13 and 24

HOPELAB DATA FOR PROGRESS



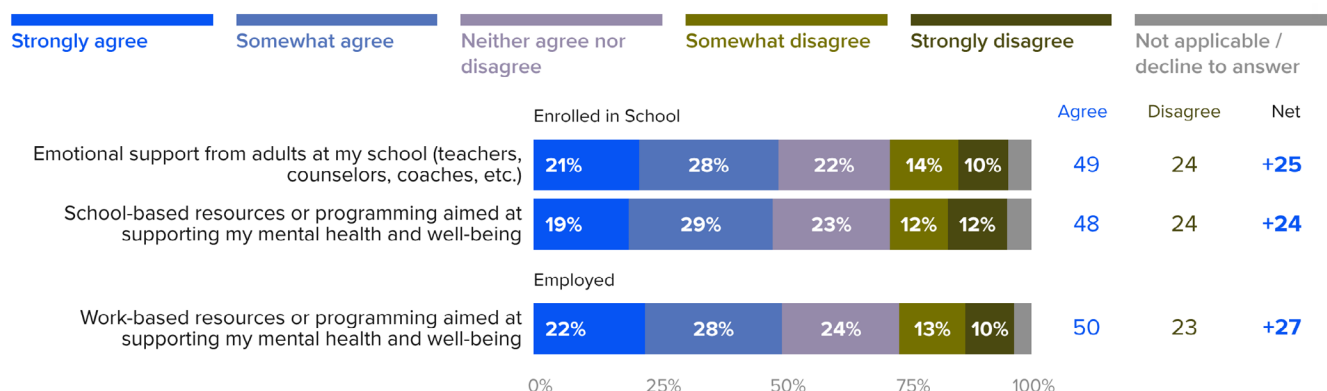
However, these data also highlight areas where young people want more support. Among respondents currently enrolled in school<sup>13</sup>, less than half agree that they have enough emotional support from adults at school (teachers, counselors, coaches, etc.) and

school-based resources or programming to support their mental health and well-being. In both cases, around 1 in 4 students (24%) disagree that they have enough of these school-based supports.

## Students and Employed Young People Report Lower Levels of Support From Their Schools and Places of Work

Rate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

I feel that I have enough...



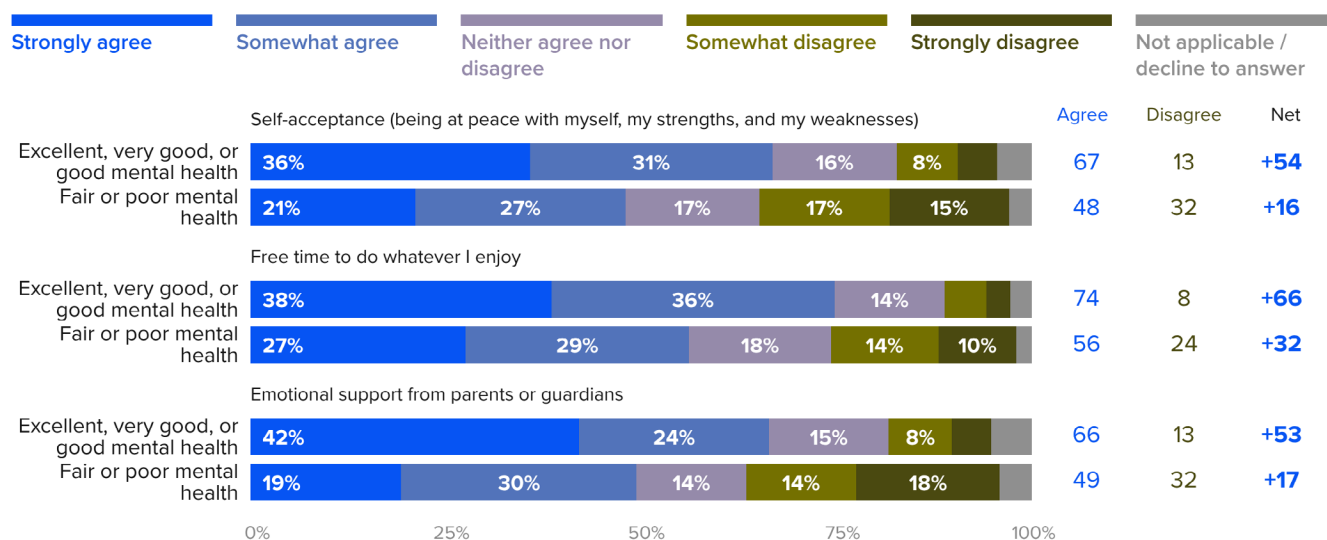
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## Young People With Fair or Poor Mental Health Report Lower Levels of Support

Rate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

I feel that I have enough...



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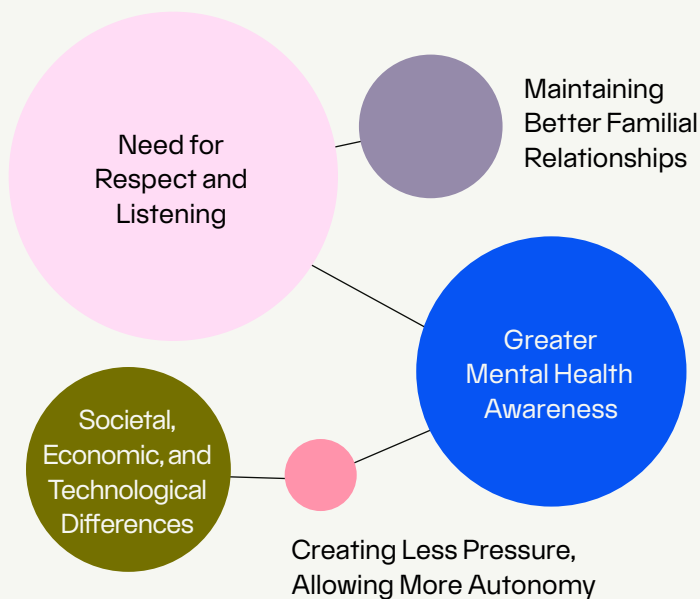
<sup>13</sup> n = 893, ±3 MOE

<sup>14</sup> n = 602, ±4 MOE

Furthermore, among respondents who are employed<sup>14</sup>, only half (50%) agree that they have enough “work-based resources or programming aimed at supporting my mental health and well-being,” while 23% disagree that they have enough of this.

Across the board, young people who rate their mental health as fair or poor report higher rates of disagreement about having enough of these sources of support. The areas where there are the biggest disparities between this group and young people who rate their mental health positively are having enough “self-acceptance (i.e., being at peace with myself, my strengths, and my weaknesses),” “emotional support from my parents or guardians,” and “free time to do whatever I enjoy.”

### What Young People Say They Wish Older Generations Knew



In one of the final open-ended questions, the survey asked half of the sample ( $n = 625$ ) the following question: “What are older generations missing when it comes to understanding and supporting young people’s mental health and well-being?” By far, the themes that stood out the most were the need for respect and older generations to listen — particularly as it relates to the new type of world young people live in — and the need for greater mental health awareness.

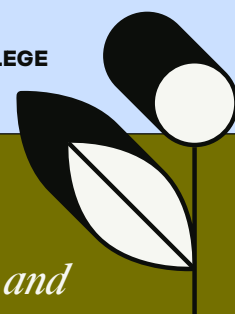
These direct insights from young people open the door for older generations to connect with, understand, and create conditions that better support young people’s thriving.

*“You can’t rely on ‘what worked for you’. We aren’t you. Approach the topic with your ‘listening ears on’...”*

**MULTIRACIAL/LATINO 10TH-GRADE GIRL**

*“The younger generation is not overreacting or becoming sensitized to daily stressors; we are just dealing with things they might not have had to deal with. We are conscious of global politics and national social dynamics, the bad job market, and some of us have familial problems which plague our mental health (e.g, acceptance of bisexual identity).”*

**MAN, OTHER RACE, SOME COLLEGE**



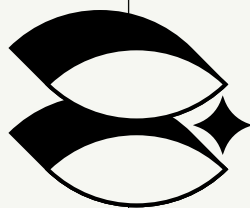
*“[N]ot fully grasp the impact of social media and online pressures on young people’s mental health. Issues like cyber-bullying, body image concerns.”*

**BLACK MAN, HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE**

*“The older generation [feels] as though just because we are fed, have a roof over our heads, and clothes on our body, our mental health doesn’t matter,”*

**WHITE GIRL, HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE**

# Conclusion



Shaped directly by young people's input, this survey illuminates key positive and negative drivers of their mental health and well-being. While previous survey research and ongoing media narratives around youth mental health tend to focus predominantly on negative trends, it's important to also underscore young people's sources of support, hope, and optimism.

A majority of young people perceive themselves to be at least somewhat happy and in good mental health. While young people are more pessimistic about the future of our country and planet, they are largely optimistic about their own futures, and broadly report having access to resources and activities that support their mental health. This polling suggests that many young people value balancing time online with face-to-face time with friends and getting sleep.

Still, too many young people report poor mental health and well-being, especially groups that face discrimination and economic disadvantages. Throughout the report, young people who don't meet basic expenses, or struggle to do so, report higher rates of key stressors and lower confidence that they'll have the resources and relationships they consider important to their future health and happiness. Consistent with existing literature, LGBTQ+ young people report higher rates of poor mental health and key risk factors such as loneliness and family problems. Girls/women also report lower rates of optimism for the future of our country and planet, and higher rates of worry across a variety of issues, compared with boys/men.

When it comes to mental health risk and protective factors, these findings emphasize the importance of family support. While some young people identify family relationships as a key source of support for their mental health and hope for the future, many other young people—in particular those with “fair” to “poor” mental health—say their family relationships are the biggest factor making their mental health worse and interfering with their daily functioning. Young people reporting “poor” mental health are also less likely to agree that they have enough emotional support from their parents and guardians, pointing to a need to support families in order to better support young people.

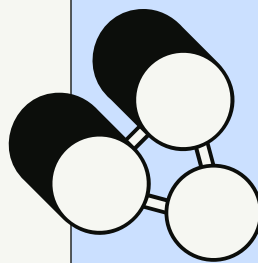
These findings also emphasize the importance of safety and stability to young people today. When young people reflect on their future goals and aspirations, they mostly want financial and emotional stability, as well as to live in a safe, clean, and healthy environment and to have enough time to do the things they enjoy. Thankfully, a majority of young people are at least moderately confident that they will have these things in the future. However, they are more divided and less confident about their future ability to afford higher education, student loans, raising children, and home ownership.

Far from being naively optimistic about the future, young people report valid worries and concerns about their future, the future of their country, and the world. Issues of particular concern include losing loved ones, affording essentials, navigating major global and political crises, and technological developments like AI.

Although young people report many instances of current anguish and future uncertainty, it's incredible that nearly every young person can offer a concrete sense of hope or optimism, and that a majority agree they have enough key sources of support.

This report's findings offer many sources of promise for youth mental health, while also emphasizing key disparities in experience and outlook, and specific demographic groups that are on the path toward worse mental health outcomes. Youth-serving organizations, schools, and work settings where young people spend most of their waking hours must identify gaps in support and help create tools, services, and spaces that young people need to thrive.

Helping young people thrive starts with holding space for their perspectives and ideas. When we asked young people what older generations are missing when it comes to supporting them, one theme rose to the top — the need for respect and listening. Mindful listening, collaboration, and co-creation with young people support the development of social connectedness, purpose, and agency, which are all related to better mental health. Active listening and collaboration can be applied across contexts, including at home, school, work, and civic life. Open and respectful listening to young people, especially those facing social barriers and economic disadvantages, enables us to create a future where all young people can thrive.



## Methodology

### Instrument Development

The Hopelab research team created the polling instrument using a youth-engaged research process that involved 30 young people from across the U.S. in a series of interviews and focus groups to identify and prioritize topics, and to create items that reflect the perspectives and priorities of young people ages 13 to 24. In the initial phase of poll co-creation, the research team engaged 18 young people in individual one-hour interviews regarding their perspective on factors influencing their current mental health and well-being, hopes and concerns about the future, and sources of emotional and social support.

Young people provided direct input on topics and questions to include in the poll, culminating in a first draft of the polling instrument. This first draft underwent a series of further iterative refinements with input from 12 additional young people who participated via three focus groups ( $n = 8$ ) and four individual interviews. This input was incorporated into the final polling instrument. Across interviews and focus groups, the research team intentionally engaged with young people with diverse identities, with a particular focus on LGBTQ+ ( $n = 15$ ), Black ( $n = 14$ ), and Latino young people ( $n = 4$ ). Using the standard IRB review process and providing all requested materials, the survey was submitted to the Advarra IRB for review and approval. Young people's participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. Parent/guardian consent was waived by the Advarra IRB due to the anonymous nature of the survey, minimal risk of the questions being asked, and inability to feasibly conduct the study with parental consent. No names or personal details were included to ensure confidentiality and privacy.

## Survey Procedure

From July 8 to 19, 2025, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,304 respondents between the ages of 13 and 24 using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of young people aged 13 to 24 by age, gender, education, race, geography, and sexual orientation. The survey was conducted in English.

The survey consisted of 13 questions, including a mix of closed- and open-ended questions, as well as a validity check and honesty check. Quota-based sampling was applied for recruitment; this approach ensured diverse representation across key demographics, including age, gender identity, and race/ethnicity. To qualify, participants first needed to enter demographic information about their age, and those who did not meet the study qualifications (young people aged 13 to 24) or identified as part of a quota group that had already been met were not recruited further.

The margin of error (MOE) associated with the sample size is  $\pm 3$  percentage points. Results for subgroups of the sample are subject to increased margins of error and are noted throughout the report as needed. Subgroups with an  $n$ -size less than 50 ( $<50$ ) are not shown on these cross-tabs. We did, however, take samples of these subgroups for representational and weighting purposes to accurately reflect the sample makeup. Some values may not add up to 100 due to rounding. For more information, please visit [dataforprogress.org/our-methodology](https://dataforprogress.org/our-methodology).

## Data Analyses

Data segmentation in this report focused on the following demographic categories:

- **Age** (teens aged 13 to 17 and young adults aged 18 to 24)
- **Race** (white, Black, Asian, multiracial, and other race/races)
- **Ethnicity** (Latino vs. not Latino)
- **Gender** (girl/woman and boy/man)<sup>15</sup>
- **LGBTQ+ identity status** (identifies as LGBTQ+ and does not identify as LGBTQ+)
- **Education level** and school enrollment status

The following categories were also created based on respondents' self-reported ratings:

- Perceived mental health rating (excellent, very good, and good vs. fair and poor)
- Perceived financial situation
  - Respondents who live comfortably (I have more than enough to live comfortably, or I have enough to live comfortably)
  - Respondents whose needs are just met (My needs are met with a little left, or I just meet basic expenses)
  - Respondents who don't meet basic expenses or struggle to do so (I struggle to meet basic expenses or I don't meet basic expenses)

Throughout the report, charts do not visualize percentages that are six percentage points or less. For full results, please refer to crosstabs available [here](#).

<sup>15</sup> Gender was captured using a question that asked, "How do you describe your gender?" with options of "boy/man," "girl/woman," and "nonbinary." The sample size for "nonbinary" was not sufficient for segmentation.

# Acknowledgments

We would like to extend deep gratitude to all of the young people who generously shared their time, expertise, and lived experiences to help shape this study. Their contributions, including shaping the survey's topics and design, and participating in the survey, were essential to this work.

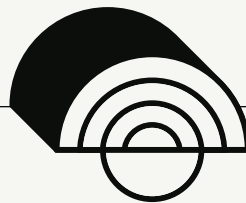
# About

Hopelab envisions a future where all young people have equitable opportunities to live joyful and purposeful lives. As a funder, connector, and science translator, Hopelab supports and builds equity-centered solutions for the mental health of Brown, Black, and Queer young people. For more information, visit [hopelab.org](https://hopelab.org).

Data for Progress is a progressive think tank and polling firm, which arms movements with data-driven tools to fight for a more equitable future. DFP provides polling, data-based messaging, and policy generation for the progressive movement, and advises campaigns and candidates with the tools they need to win. Learn more at [dataforprogress.org](https://dataforprogress.org) or follow DFP on X at @dataprogress.

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