

Health and Social Care Committee

Inquiry into new psychoactive substances (“legal highs”)

Summary of new psychoactive substances (“legal highs”) inquiry survey

Background

This document provides a summary of responses received to the new psychoactive substances (“legal highs”) inquiry survey conducted by the Outreach team.

This survey was open for consultation and responses between 21 July and 12 September 2014.

Methodology

As part of the Health and Social Care Committee Inquiry into new psychoactive substances (“legal highs”) the Outreach Team conducted a survey in both online and paper-based formats. Participants were asked a range of questions relating to the safety of legal highs, how much they know about them and their awareness of the help and support available to people who have taken legal highs.

One survey was created with the aim of targeting the general public as a whole.

Awareness Raising

In order to promote awareness of the survey and attract participants the Outreach Team contacted a broad-range of organisations. Those contacted were able to raise awareness using a range of methods including – placing articles on websites; signposting on social media including Facebook and twitter; and emailing participants directly.

The surveys were also promoted by Assembly staff with relevant groups visiting the Senedd and receiving education visits, and during the Assembly’s presence at summer shows.

A breakdown of all the organisations contacted, in addition to social media monitoring, can be found in Annex A. Annex B provides further statistical analysis based on age, gender and locality.

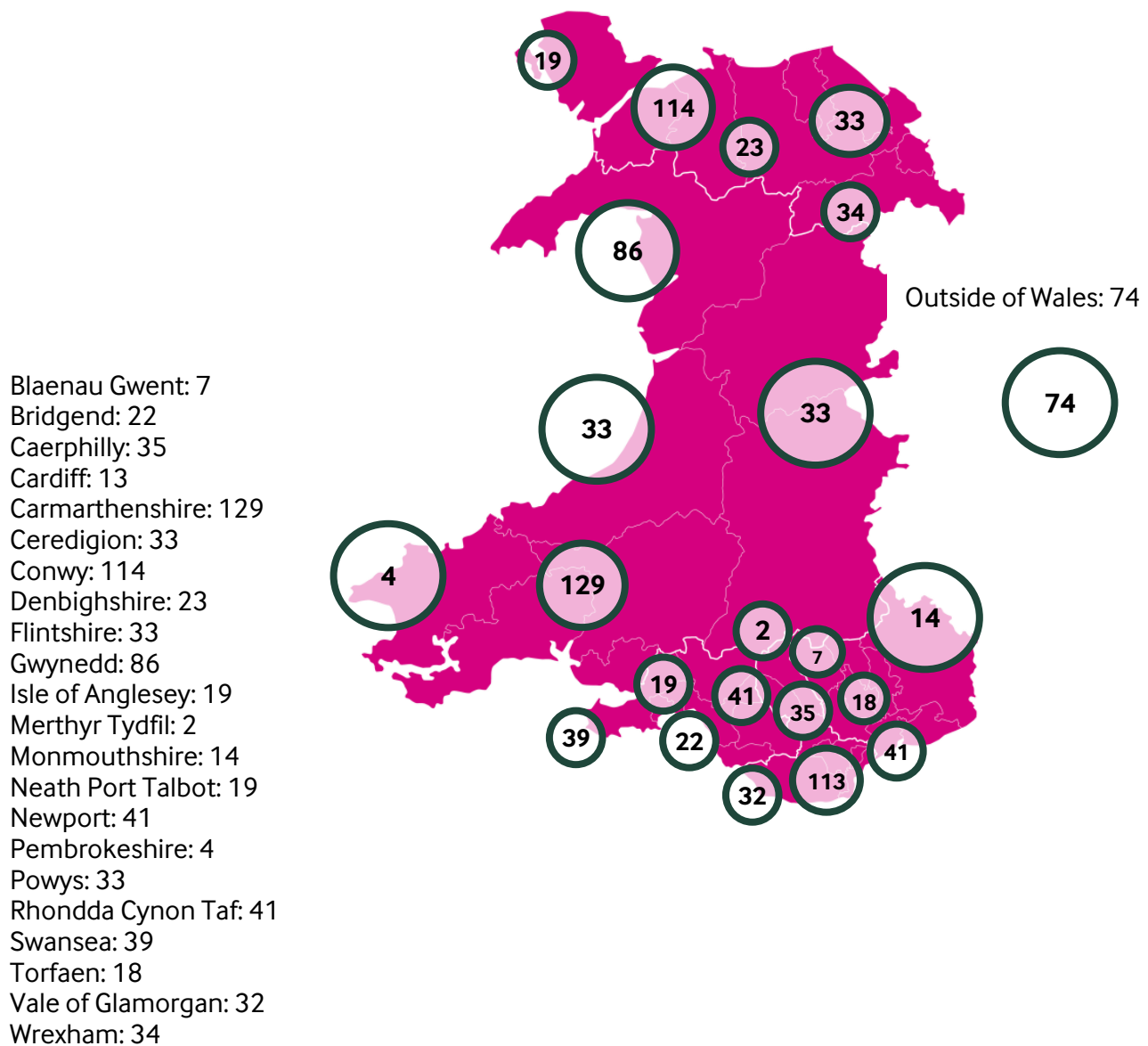
Key Statistics

1,072 Total number of survey responses received

Geographical Summary of Responses

Number of survey responses broken down by local authority area

Total: 965



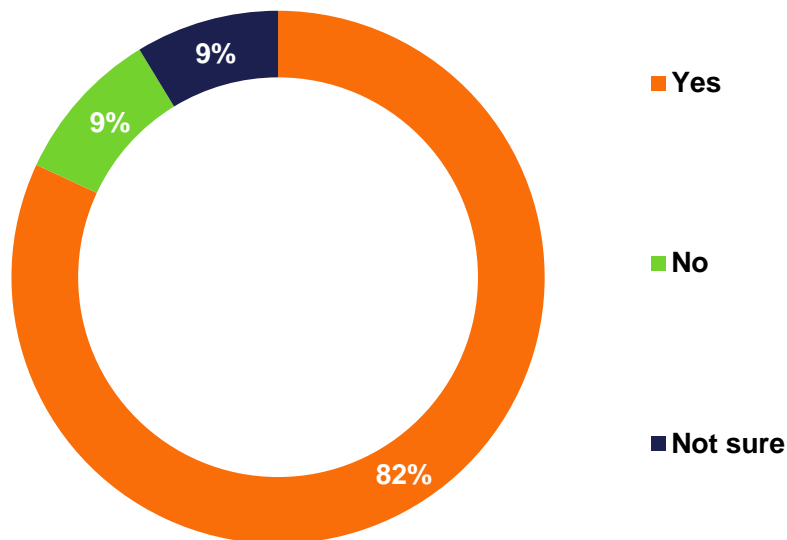
Summary of Responses

Question 1 – New psychoactive substances – more commonly known as “legal highs” – are substances which have been created to copy the effects of illegal drugs. Because they are newly created, they are not automatically controlled under the laws that apply to illegal drugs. Slang names for legal highs include: Pandora’s Box, Magic Dragon, Monkey Dust, Plant Food, Bath Salts and Exodus Damnation.

Before reading the information above, did you know what a legal high was?

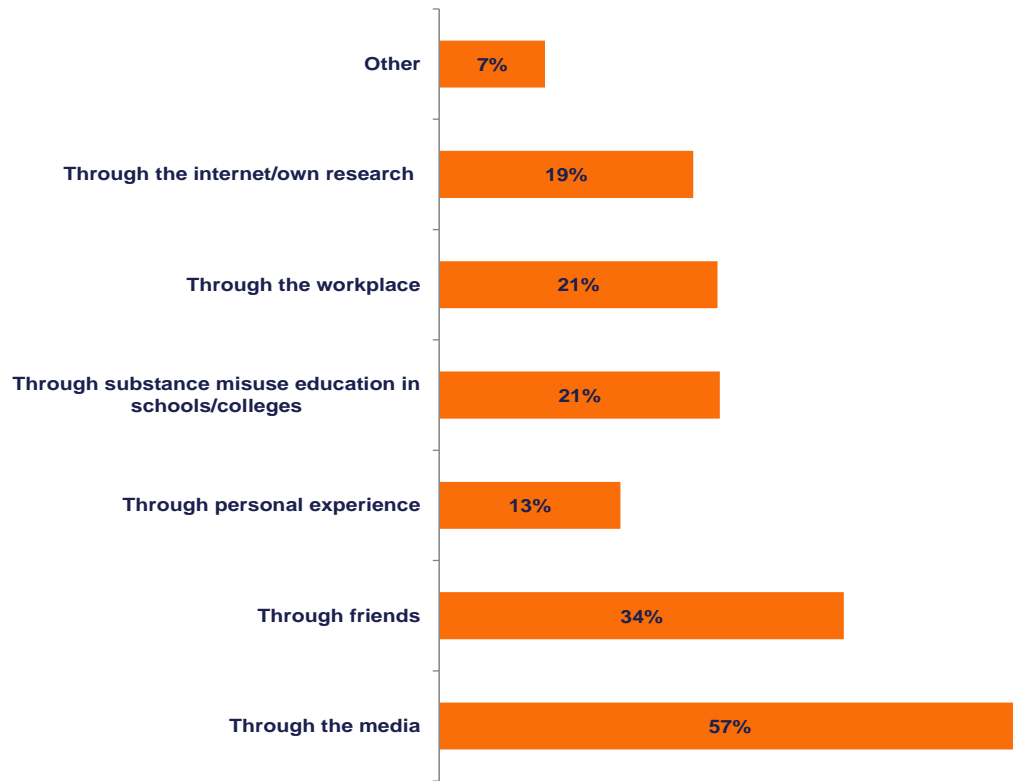
Total number of responses: 1,057

- Yes: **81.92% (866)**
- No: **9.36% (99)**
- Not sure: **8.70% (92)**



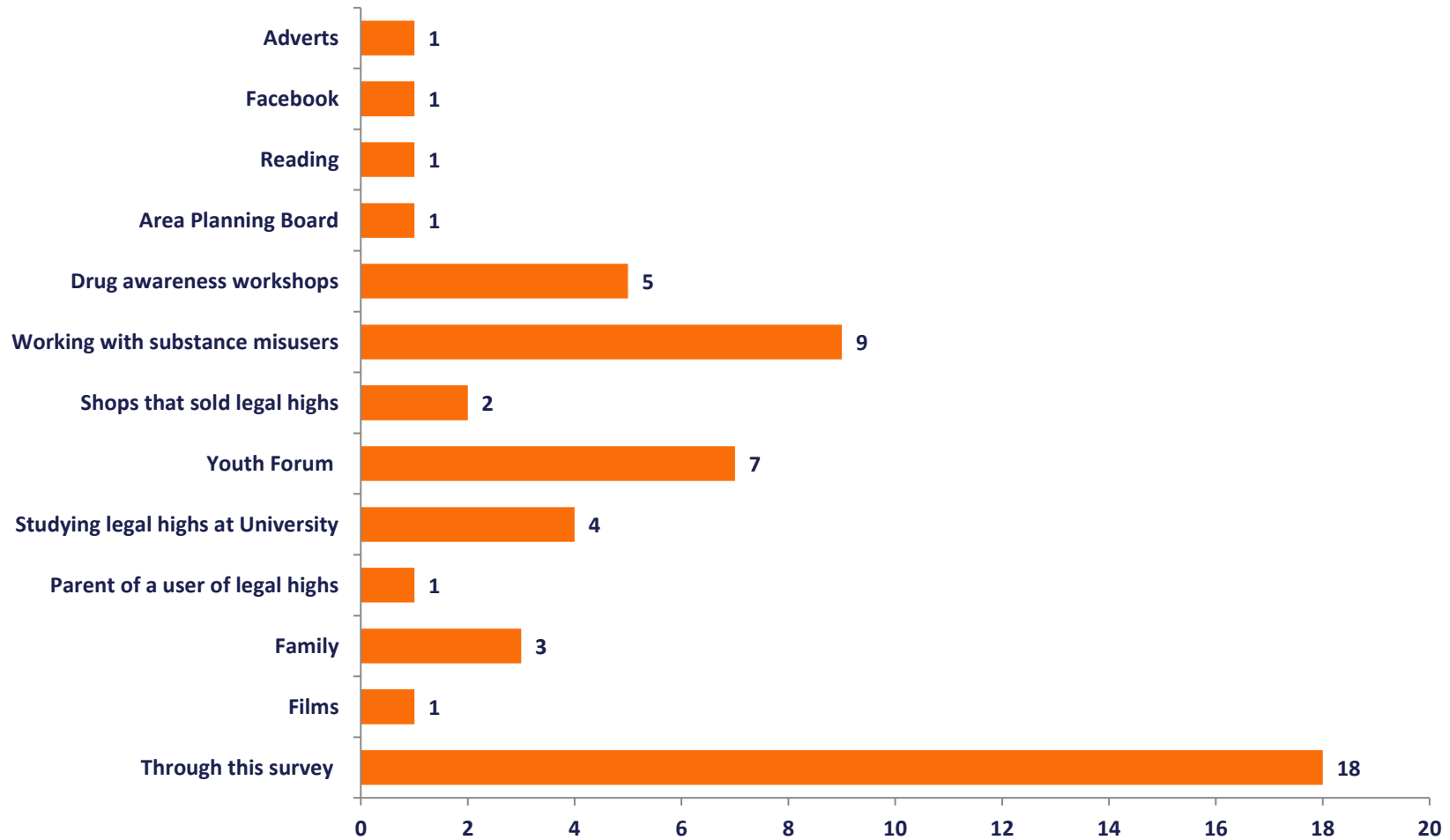
Question 2 – Where did you learn about legal highs? (Please tick all that apply)

Total number of responses: 1,004



- Through the media: **56.87% (571)**
- Through friends: **33.76% (339)**
- Through personal experience: **12.75% (128)**
- Through substance misuse education in schools/colleges: **21.22% (213)**
- Through the workplace: **21.02% (211)**
- Through the internet/own research: **18.82% (189)**
- Other: **7.07% (71)**

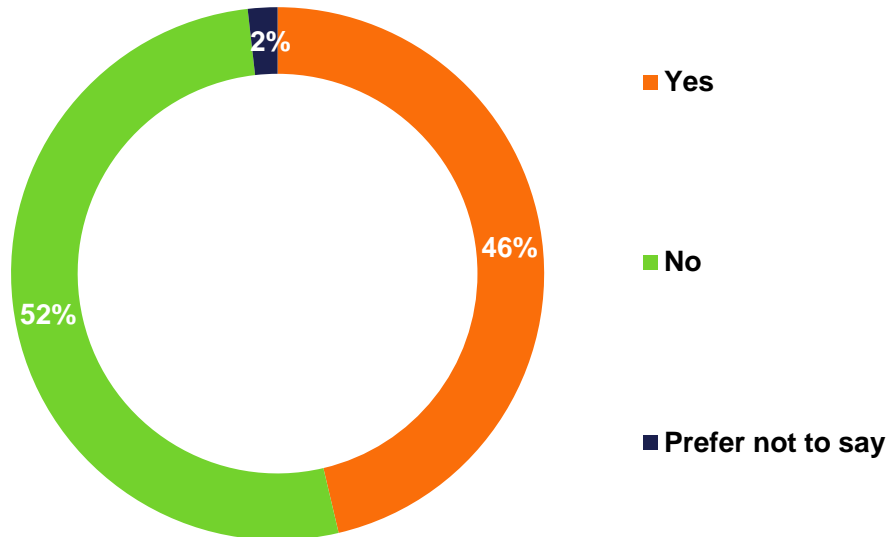
Comments – Other



Question 3 – Have you, or anyone you know, ever been offered legal highs?

Total number of responses: 1,060

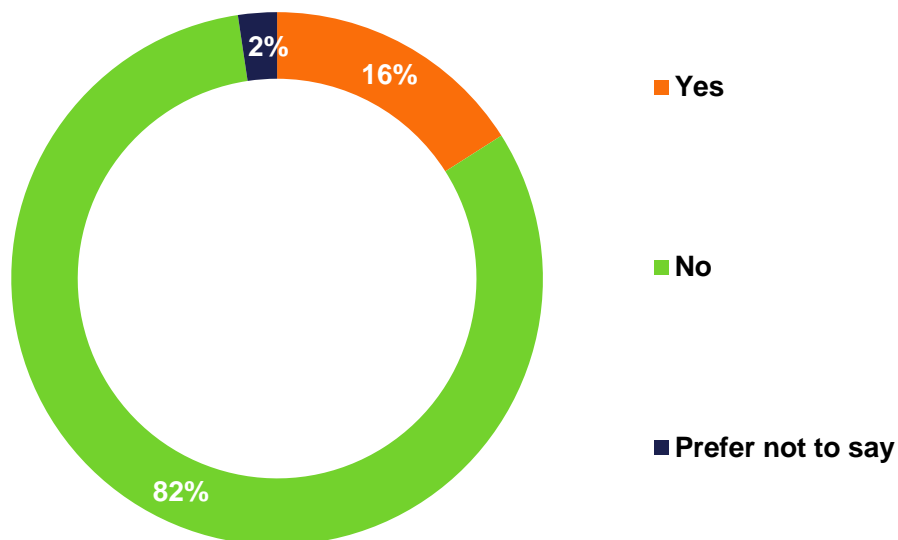
- Yes: **46.32% (491)**
- No: **51.88% (550)**
- Prefer not to say: **1.79% (19)**



Question 4 – Have you ever taken a legal high?

Total number of responses: 1,057

- Yes: **15.99% (169)**
- No: **81.65% (863)**
- Prefer not to say: **2.36% (25)**

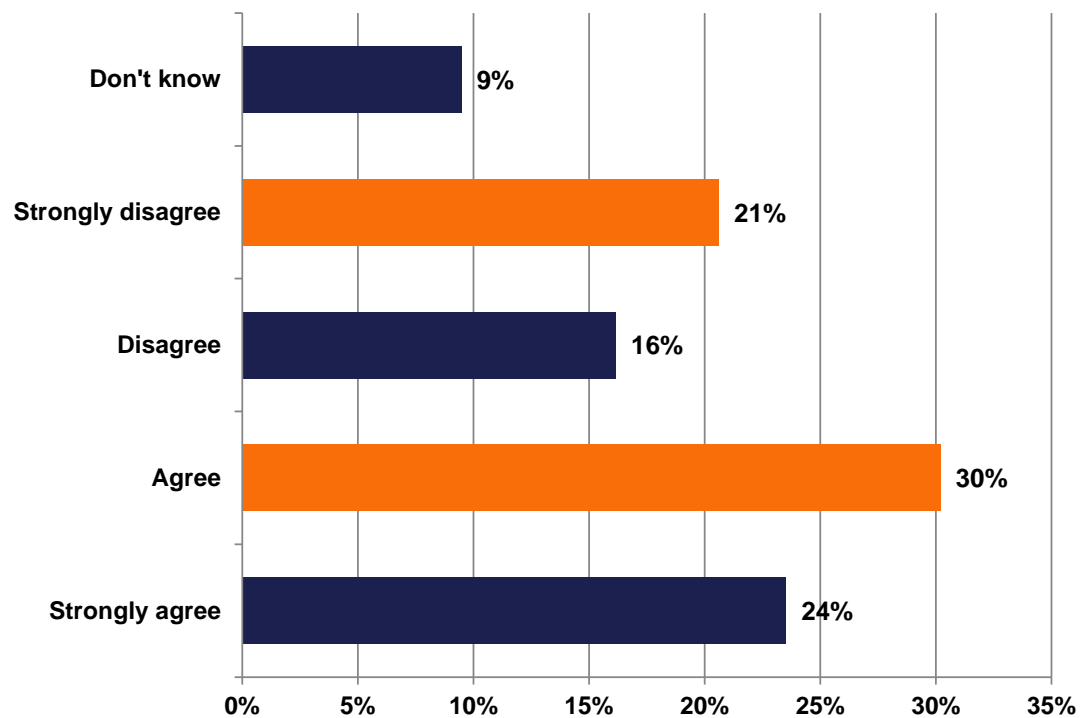


Question 5 – Please indicate whether or not you strongly agree; agree; disagree; strongly disagree or don't know, with the following statements.

“I would know where to look if I wanted to obtain legal highs”

Total number of responses: 1,033

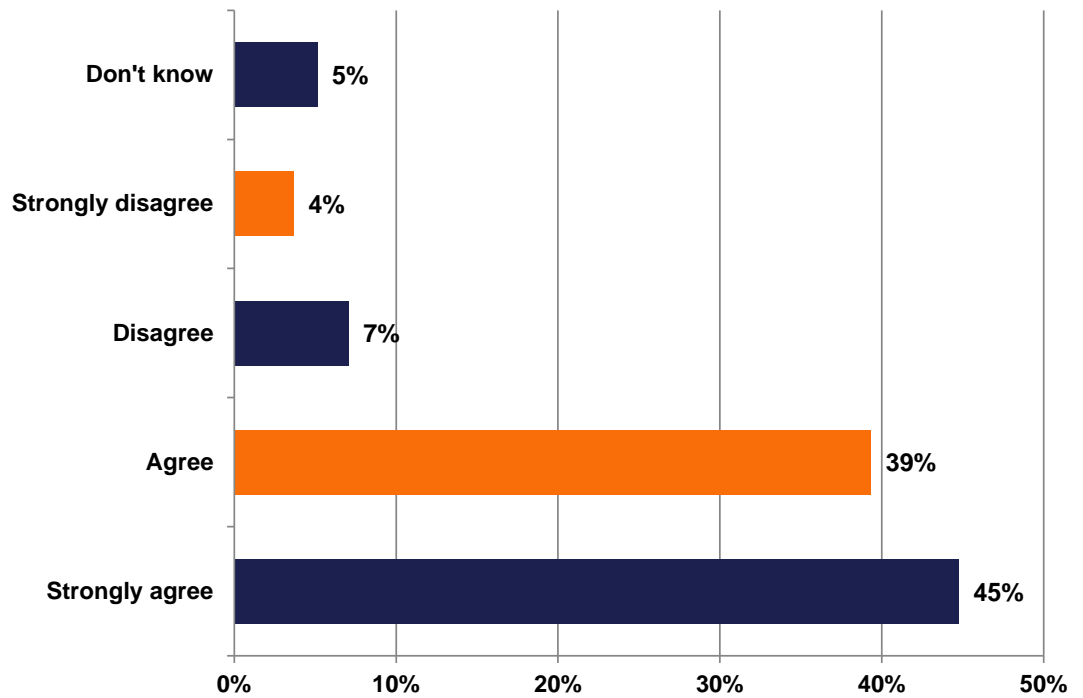
- Strongly agree: **23.42% (243)**
- Agree: **30.20% (312)**
- Disagree: **16.17% (167)**
- Strongly disagree: **20.62% (213)**
- Don't know: **9.49% (98)**



“I am aware of the potential health risks associated with taking legal highs”

Total number of responses: 1,032

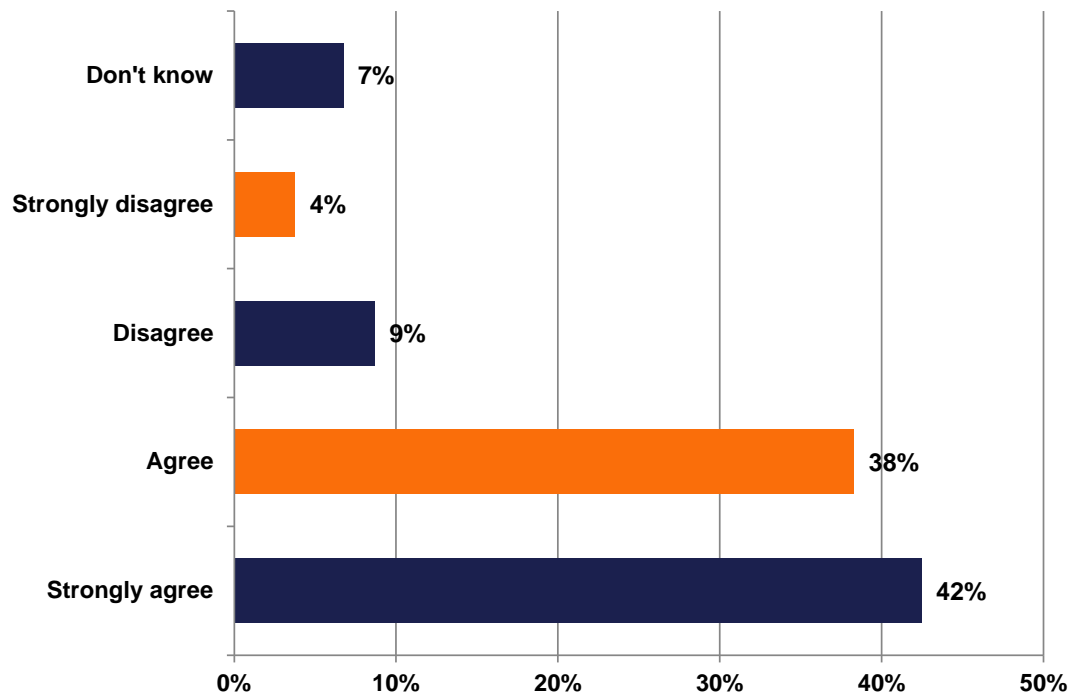
- Strongly agree: **44.8% (462)**
- Agree: **39.34% (406)**
- Disagree: **7.07% (73)**
- Strongly disagree: **3.68% (38)**
- Don't know: **5.14% (53)**



“I am aware that legal highs may contain illegal substances”

Total number of responses: 1,034

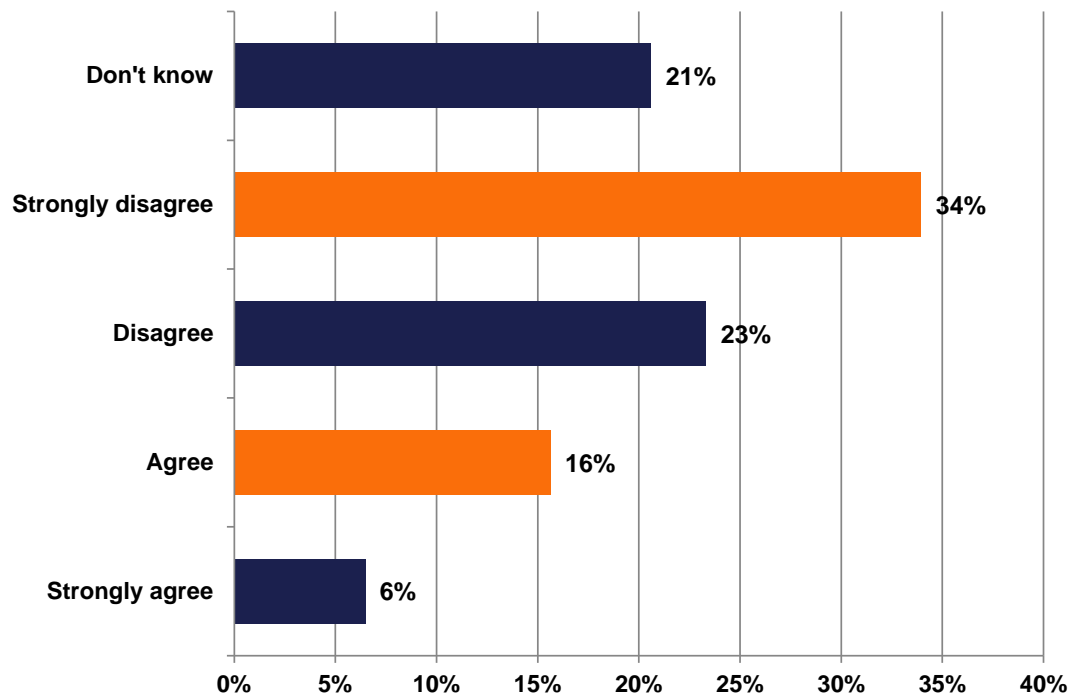
- Strongly agree: **42.5% (439)**
- Agree: **38.3% (396)**
- Disagree: **8.70% (90)**
- Strongly disagree: **3.77% (39)**
- Don't know: **6.77% (70)**



“I am more likely to use a legal high than a banned substance i.e. Class A/B/C drugs such as cocaine, cannabis or ecstasy”

Total number of responses: 1,016

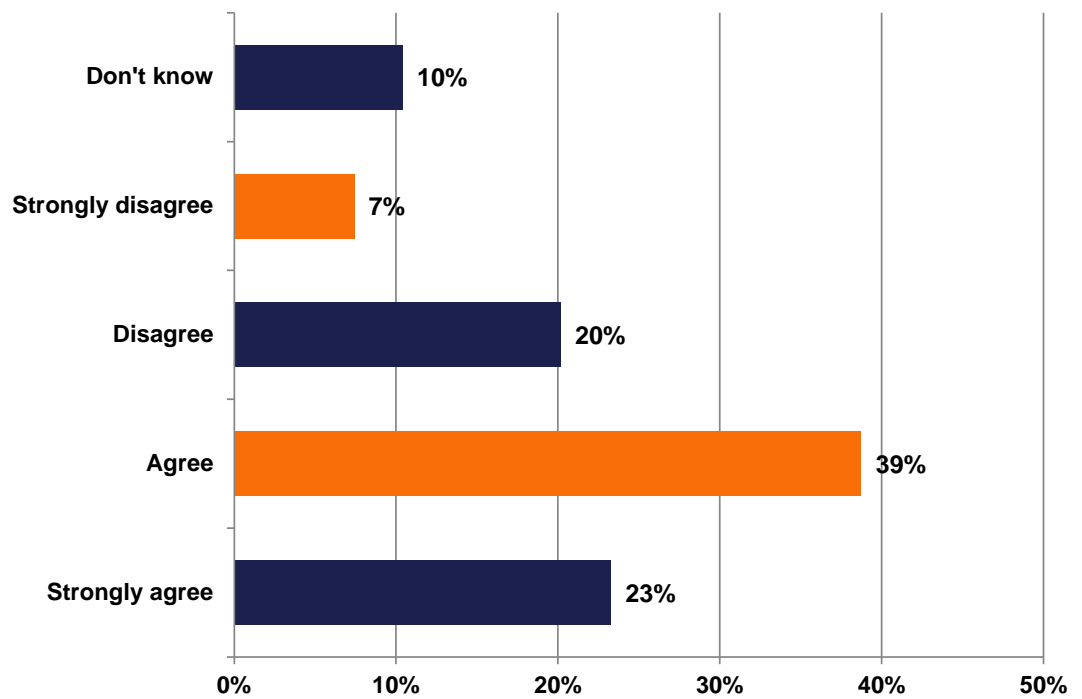
- Strongly agree: **6.49% (66)**
- Agree: **15.64% (159)**
- Disagree: **23.32% (237)**
- Strongly disagree: **33.95% (345)**
- Don't know: **10.4% (106)**



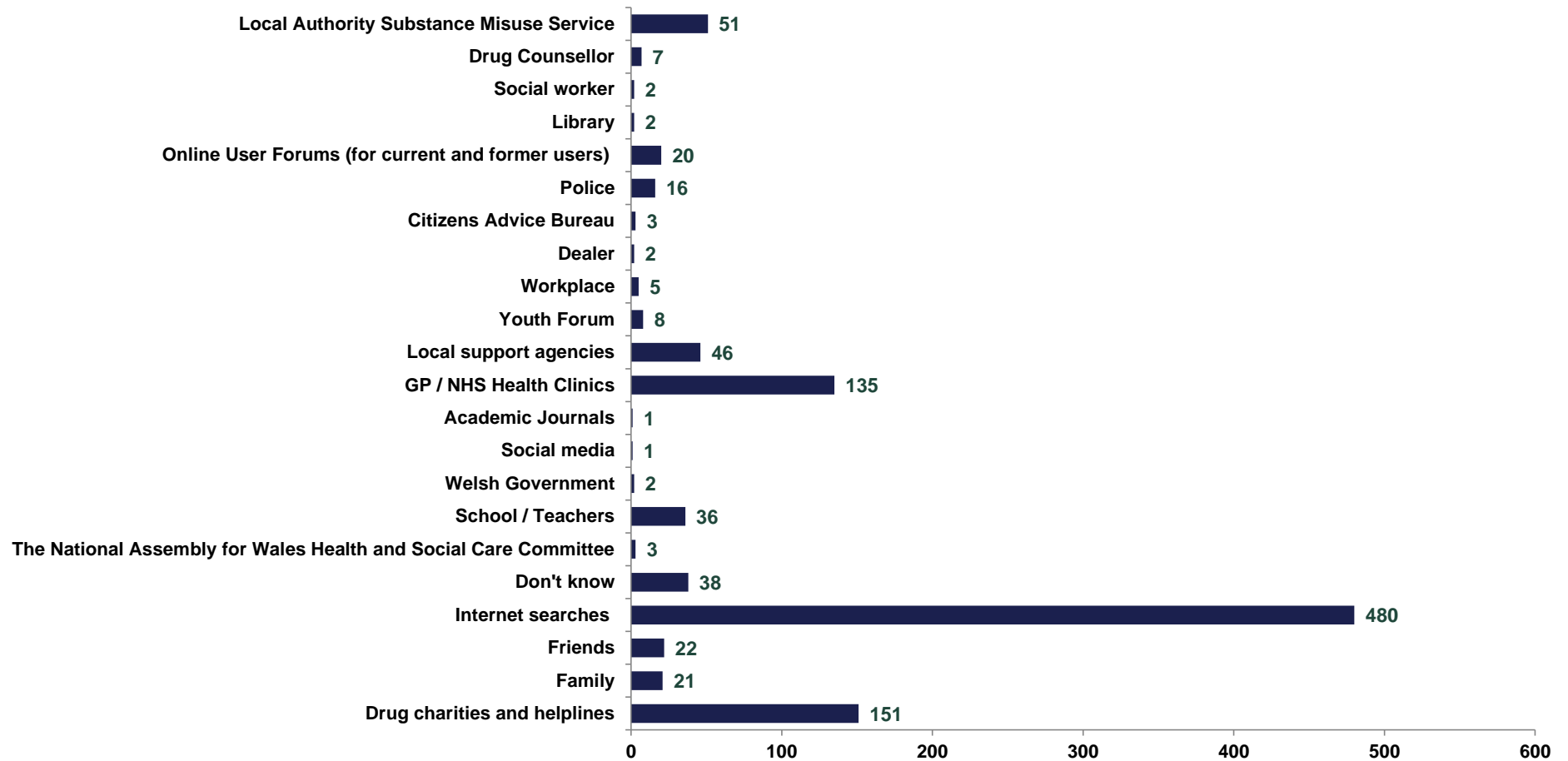
“I would know where to look if I wanted to access support, information and advice about legal highs”

Total number of responses: 1,022

- Strongly agree: **23.28% (238)**
- Agree: **38.74% (396)**
- Disagree: **20.15% (206)**
- Strongly disagree: **7.43% (76)**
- Don't know: **10.4% (106)**



Question 6 – If you wanted to get support, information and advice about legal highs for yourself, a friend or a family member, where would you go to access this information?

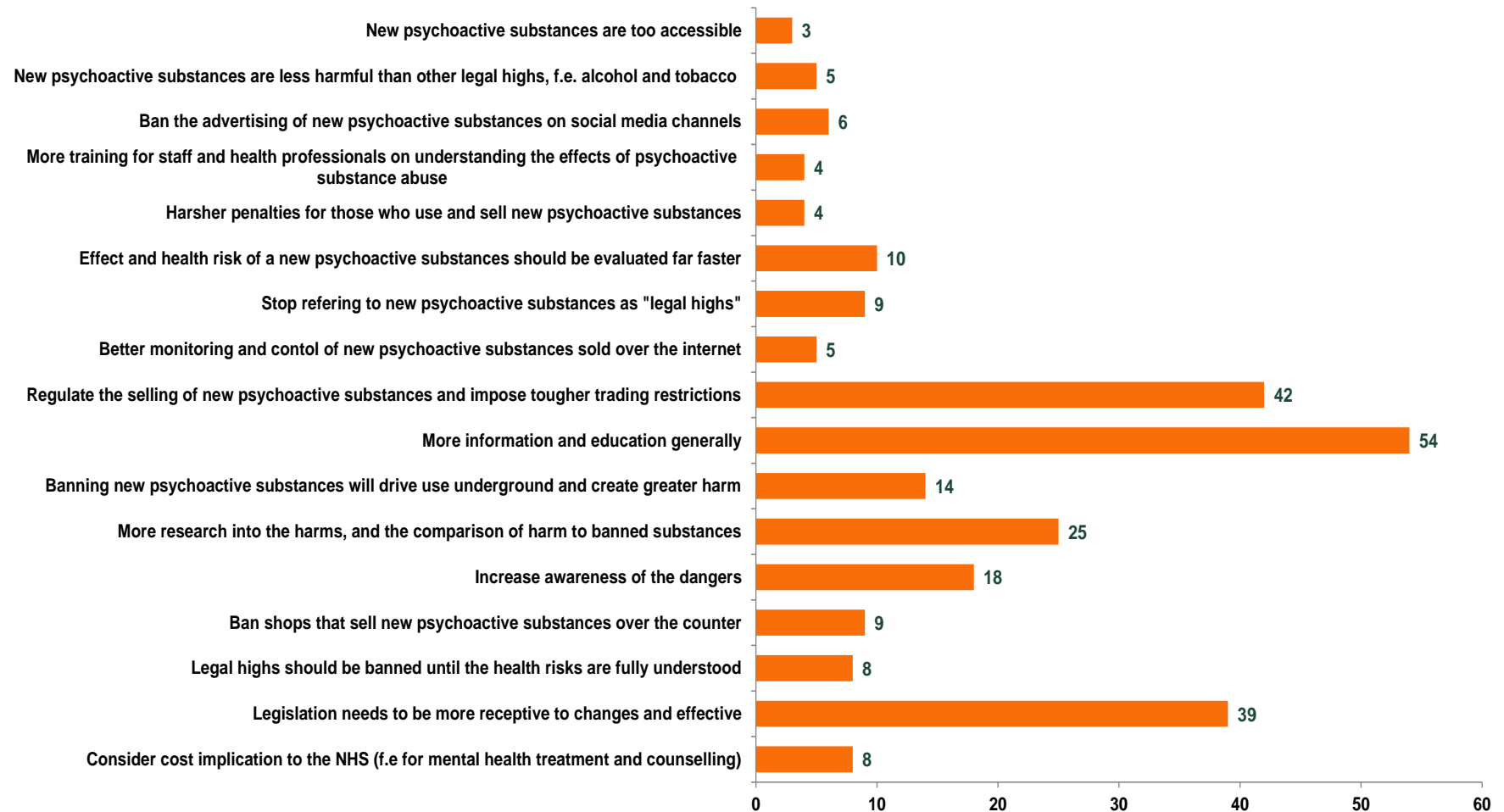


Question 6 – Comments

- 480 respondents explained that they would use the internet and search engines to find more information;
- 151 individuals stated that they would contact veritable drug charities and helplines such as Talk to Frank and Dan 24/7;
- 135 people would speak to their GP or attend a health clinic for advice on legal highs;
- 51 respondents explained that they would get in touch with their local authority substance misuse service;
- 46 individuals stated they would get in touch with their local drug support agency, f.e CAIS;
- 38 people wouldn't know where to get more support, information and advice about legal highs, or how to access them;
- 36 respondents explained that they would find further information in School and through their teachers;
- 22 people would seek advice from their friends;
- 21 respondents would seek advice from their family members;
- 20 individuals stated that they would access online forums used by current and former legal high users to access support, f.e. bluelight.org
- 16 people would contact their local police force;
- 8 respondents explained that they'd find this information through their local Youth Forums;
- 7 individuals would seek advice from a drug counsellor;
- 5 people stated that they would speak with a colleague or an occupational nurse at their workplace;
- 3 respondents would contact the Health and Social Care Committee in the first instance for further advice;
- 3 individuals stated that they would contact their local Citizens Advice Bureau;
- 2 people said they would contact the Welsh Government;

- 2 respondents explained that they would speak with their drug dealer;
- 2 individuals would look for support at their local library;
- 2 people stated that they would contact a social worker;
- 1 individual felt they would find support and information through academic journals;
- 1 respondent would use social media to get more support.

Question 7 – Do you have any other thoughts or points that you would like the Committee to consider as part of its inquiry into legal highs?



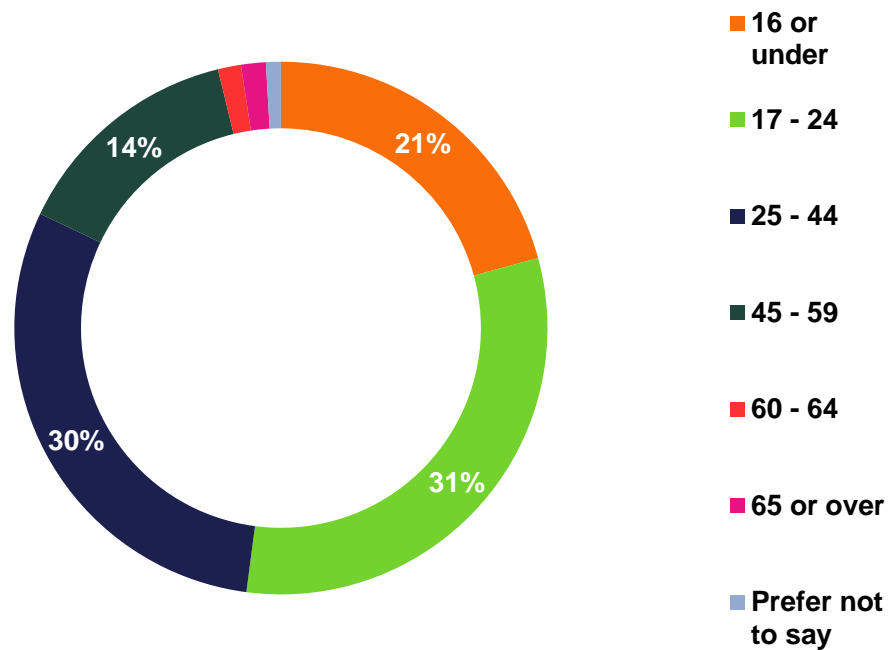
Comments

- 54 respondents stated that more information should be made available to the general public, as well as better education for people of all ages;
- 42 people felt that banning new psychoactive substances would be futile, and instead, Government should attempt to regulate the “legal high” market and impose tougher trading restrictions on shops that sell them;
- 39 respondents argued that the law should be reformed in order to close the “legal” loopholes. Manufacturers of new psychoactive substances are always one step ahead and the law needs to be receptive to this;
- 25 people felt that more research should be undertaken into the health risks of taking “legal” substances, and compare the harms of taking both legal and illegal substances;
- 18 respondents argued for increased awareness of the dangers of taking new psychoactive substances;
- 14 people felt that banning new psychoactive substances outright would only serve to drive the market underground, thereby allowing criminals to profit;
- 10 respondents argued that new psychoactive substances and their effects should be tested and evaluated faster;
- 9 people felt that shops that sell new psychoactive substances over the counter should be closed and banned;
- 8 respondents argued that new psychoactive substances should be banned until the health risks are fully understood;
- 8 people felt that consideration should be given to the cost implication on the NHS who ultimately treat new psychoactive substance misusers;
- 6 respondents argued for a ban on advertising new psychoactive substances on social media channels (f.e. Facebook and Twitter);
- 5 people felt that there needs to be better monitoring and control of substances sold over the internet;
- 5 respondents argued that new psychoactive substances pose no greater health, and perhaps a lesser threat, than alcohol and tobacco;
- 4 people felt that there should be harsher penalties for those who are caught using or selling new psychoactive substances;
- 4 respondents requested more training for professionals on understanding new psychoactive substance abuse;
- 3 people felt that new psychoactive substances are too accessible.

Question 8 – What is your age?

Total number of responses: 997

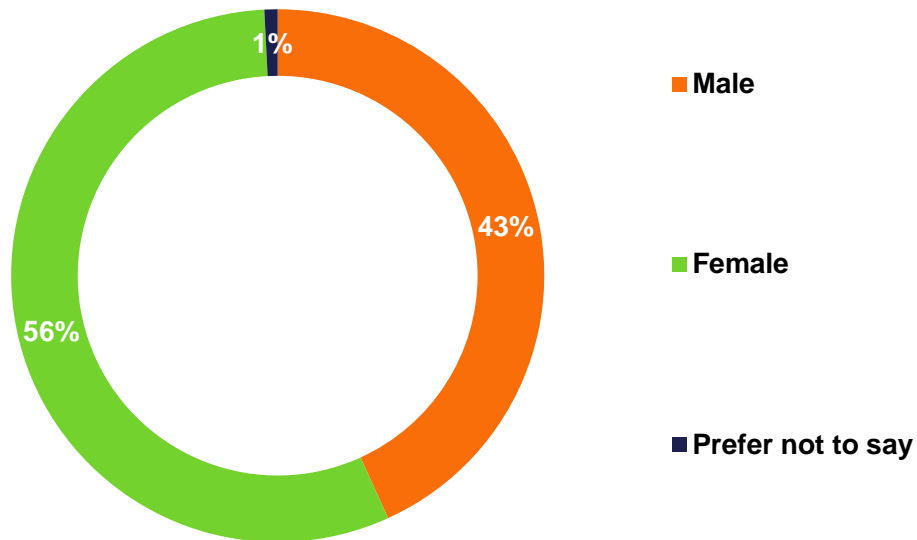
- 16 or under: **20.8% (207)**
- 17 – 24: **31.3% (312)**
- 25 – 44: **30% (299)**
- 45 – 59: **14.14% (141)**
- 60 – 64: **1.40% (14)**
- 65 or over: **1.50% (15)**
- Prefer not to say: **0.90% (9)**



Question 9 – What is your gender?

Total number of responses: 993

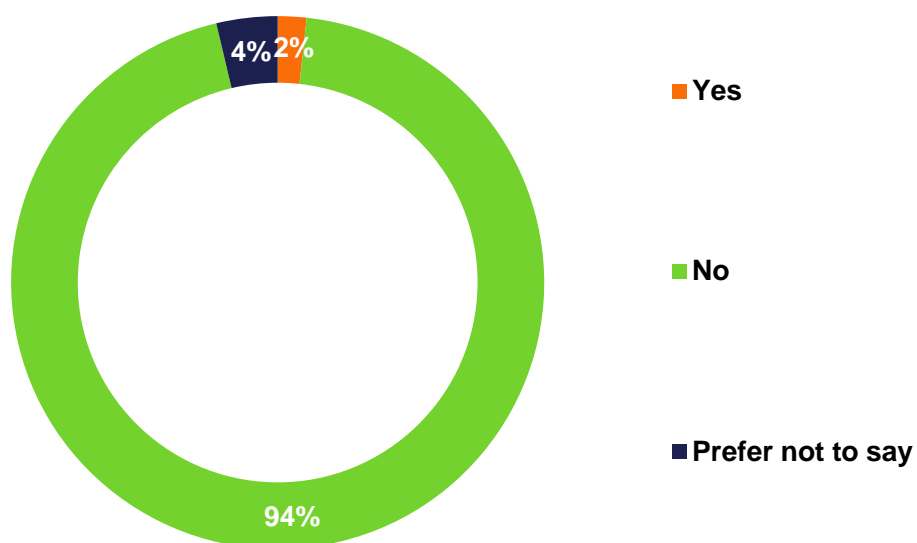
- Male: **43.20% (429)**
- Female: **56.00% (556)**
- Prefer not to say: **0.80% (18)**



Do you identify as transgender?

Total number of responses: 973

- Yes: **1.74% (17)**
- No: **94.55% (920)**
- Prefer not to say: **3.7% (36)**



Question 10 – In which local authority area do you live? If you live outside of Wales, please write your local authority area below.

