

The Barna Group in conjunction with World Vision have this week released the early findings of a new global study reporting the results of a survey of over 15,000 young adults across 25 countries.

While the full report, 'The Connected Generation' will be released at the end of September, early findings show that an alarming 4 in 10 young adults or 40% are anxious or uncertain about the future or have a fear of failure. Amongst the reasons stated for anxiety, finance and vocation appear to be the top root causes of anxiety for most of the young people surveyed. The study also showed that only 1 in 3 or 24% of those surveyed in the UK feel deeply cared for by the people around them.

Driving my 16 year old to school we start to talk about the challenges of mental ill Health. She casually says "dad most girls self-harm, it's a way of coping" my heart sinks, we start to discuss what is leading to such a heart breaking state of affairs. I try and listen instead of jumping in with ways that I can help and try and fix this situation. The pressure around exams, future, and friendships - I wonder how we have created such a culture. We then get onto the topic of anxiety, it is a term that is used so often now but what does it mean to a young person? My daughter then showed me a poem she wrote for GCSE acting to articulate her experience of anxiety and those around her.

Anxiety

Where you stay up all night, physically and mentally exhausted but you just can't stop. So you lay there, staring at the ceiling, asking a million questions however not really wanting to know the answer at the same time, getting scared how you won't get enough sleep and not be able to function the next day until you eventually pass out from tiredness, The feeling where nobody cares, nobody understands, are they all using me? Do they really like me? Do they just want to see me fail and laugh? Are they saying stuff behind my back? The feeling where whatever you do isn't good enough, you need to be thin, pretty, confident, popular, liked. You crave attention you know you just can't have, but without it you truly feel worthless.

The desire to belong is huge, yet often our young people think to be accepted they need to simply "fit in" which is very different to belonging. They care and want to have a say about the big issues - climate change, poverty, war, and in many inner cities the rise of knife crime. These things really matter, are we listening? It is no secret that in the European referendum the majority of young people voted to remain. Whatever your politics we cannot ignore the cry. There is a fear of disconnection and what that could mean.

When researching depression, journalist Johann Hari found that alongside basic needs such as food, water and shelter, we also have essential psychological needs including the need to belong. He concluded that we have become disconnected from the things we really need and that this contributes highly to the current epidemic of depression and anxiety. The facts are not comfortable, but they are real. Too many people, young and old, in our communities, feel completely alone, often not knowing where to go for help or not having anyone to turn to. From my experience people want to belong not fit in. The report further shows that mentorships and friendships play an essential role in 'keeping loneliness at bay'. We are so connected through our tech yet at the same time feel so alone,

Church a place to belong?

Faith has a huge role to play to support our young people. 'The Connected Generation' report also revealed stark differences between young people who have a faith as opposed to those with no religious beliefs or affiliation, whereby levels of connectedness were higher amongst those with faith than those with no faith and levels of anxiety were lower amongst the former group too. The being

together aspect of practising a faith and having deep meaningful relationship are essential for human living.

For me the church is so key it is in every community across this country. It will outlast government schemes and is committed to people's well-being – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. That's why eighteen months ago I started a charity called Kintsugi Hope after the Japanese art of mending broken pots with golden glue. The gold makes a feature of the cracks, instead of hiding them. All of us have broken pieces, but instead of hiding them, we can learn from them. We can discover treasure in life's scars. Kintsugi Hope's heart is to see a world where those who are struggling with emotional and mental health find safe and supportive communities to grow and flourish - in local churches who have an attitude of humility – not to judge, fix or rescue but to come alongside and love.

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