LET'S MAKE A DIFFERENCE - 30TH NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE REPORT

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A New Beginning

The Let's Make A Difference National Youth Conference saw its return to the beautiful and picturesque setting of Asia Plateau after a gap of one year. This year was an important milestone in the annals of Let's Make a Difference as the organization conducted its 30th Annual Flagship program.

It was also for the first time that the program was being conducted independently and outside the ambit of Initiatives of Change (IofC). Ever since Let's Make A Difference started operating as in Independent Trust this year, the volunteering team proactively came together to help in setting up the infrastructure, fulfil legal requirements and compliances, promoting the conference and worked towards getting as many people registered as possible.

It was a new beginning. A new era. It was akin to rebirth – emerging from the ashes like a Phoenix and starting anew. However, the mission was still the same – to share our idea to the youth of the country and beyond.

Armed with a new energy and driven by the principles and philosophy of this movement, 30 volunteers comprising young women and men from different parts of the country and from diverse backgrounds came together to help organize this conference. They were also given training as part of a Volunteer's workshop that took place from 28th May – 31st May 2024.

191 participants attended the program and they came from across India – Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, New Delhi, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. The participants also included Tibetans who came from various settlements across India that include Dharmshala, Manali, Mysore, Bangalore, Dehradun, Kangra and New Delhi. One Tibetan participant came from Bangalore as she is a student there; but her family stays in Nepal.

They arrived in droves at Asia Plateau on 1st June, and we (the volunteering team) were ready for them. This was the first time in the registration process, where the form was filled up online and where payment was collected before their arrival. This smoothened the process and reduced the turnaround time per participant. The participants also had

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to fill up a survey which captures various aspects of the youth such as their habits, behaviour, way of life, their thinking, their outlets, etc… In order to see the results of the survey, refer to Annexure II of this report.

After taking their phones and other communication devices, and allocating their rooms, the participants were asked to report to the auditorium.

The Inauguration

The Inauguration is a very important ceremony for us. It marks the start of the Conference. Before the Inauguration, the volunteers performed a traditional Māori song called Haere Mai to welcome the participants. This song is sung to welcome back the warriors of a tribe after they emerged victorious from a battle.

The Volunteers (in the Centre) performing "Haere Mai" in the Foyer for the participants

Once settled into the auditorium, the participants were entertained with a skit that was performed by the volunteers, and was written and directed by our senior volunteer Brijesh "Sonu" Arora. The message of the skit was that one must take the "long cut" or the hard, honest and ethical path in life instead of taking "short cuts" to achieving

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whatever it is one wants to. For the first time ever, we also invited a highly respected Yoga Guru – Acharya Mukund- who also displayed some asanas (Sanskrit word that translates to "manner of sitting/posture" in English) for the audience.

The conference was formally inaugurated with the customary lighting of the lamp. And six participants were called upon to light the lamp. **It was very interesting to note that this time, that out of the total participants, more than 82% were attending the conference for the first time**, and hence, it was important that they get an insight into the History, Profile and Future of Let's Make a Difference. This was done by our senior volunteers and trustees – Shraddha Agarwal and Bhisham Mansukhani. They covered the initial beginnings, the key conferences, impact, reach, milestones, the and the future goals of the movement.

Senior Volunteer Shraddha Agarwal (L) lighting the lamp with a participant, Mahi Kadu, while the Master of Ceremonies, Dnyanada Deodare looks on

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It is no secret that almost all the participants who have attended a conference of our movement, have come by word of mouth. Through word of mouth, we have been able to tell many people - across India and beyond - about the conference, the take aways, the learning and the overall experience. And who better to talk about their journey of change but the volunteers themselves. Two volunteers – Kusum Sukhwani and Unnyan Kumar shared their story of change for all to hear.

Towards the end, the master of ceremonies (MC) – Dnyanada Deodare invited the audience and volunteers to stand up for the Silent National Anthem and the National Anthem, to mark the close of the Inauguration and to mark the beginning of a new journey for the participants.

Morning Rituals and Quiet Time

Let's Make a Difference prides itself in being disciplined and punctual. And this way of life is practiced from Day 1. It is said that how you start the day also has an impact on how you manage the rest of your day. During all days, everyone was woken up early in the morning (as early as 05:00 AM). This was followed by a prayer and a short Yoga session for twenty minutes.

Yoga was a new addition to the conference this year and it was very well received by the participants. All the Yoga sessions was conducted by Yogacharya Mukund. His journey with Yoga started in 2019 when he pursued a one-year certification course from the Government Ayurvedic College, Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh. He later had the opportunity to complete a Masters' degree in Yoga from one of India's top Universities – Gurukul Kangri University- in Haridwar, Uttarakhand. Post the completion of his Masters' degree in 2022, he took part in many National Yoga events such as the All-India University Games, the Khelo India University Games, and the events organized by the Yoga Federation of India. He has been teaching Yoga for the last 3 years now.

Post the Yoga session, the Quiet Time sessions took place. **Quiet Time is at the heart of our idea and it is the foundation upon which one can connect with one's self.** It is a ritual where one remains quiet, in a quiet place, that is free from any distractions and external disturbances, and focuses on listening to their inner voice. It is a period where one can get insights, ideas, answers to pressing problems, and thoughts that one must act upon. This is where an important element comes in – the Diary. All participants are

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given a Diary on the first day of Quiet Time. This Diary was to be an extension of themselves where they could write down their reflections and nudges from their inner voice. Living in a tech driven world, where "typing" is commonplace, "writing" still remains relevant and putting "pen to paper" is indeed a very powerful exercise. All were encouraged to write as much as they wanted to and as much as they could. It was also emphasized that Quiet Time is to be done every day instead of doing it only once in a while.

Many past participants and volunteers have expressed appreciation for Quiet Time and they have gone on to bring changes to their lives by listening to their inner voice. This inner voice has also guided them during difficult times, provided answers when they failed to see a solution in sight and also nudged them to take action(s) in a particular direction.

Participants engaged in Quiet Time

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Over the course of the conference, approximately twenty hours of Quiet Time was recorded.

Participants were also encouraged to share on the podium post their Quiet Time reflections. For most of them, it was a beautiful experience. Some of them shared as below:

"The thought of being away from social media was scary. Have never experienced quiet time before today, but it was amazing."

"I am someone who is always on social media and mobile phone. But right now, I am focusing on the present. I was trying to think of how shall get quiet time in my busy schedule back at home"

"I am right now in a dilemma which university to choose, confused, I am facing difficulty in making a decision, it is brain versus heart, I think that I would find my calling in these quiet times."

Post the morning Quiet Time sessions and post breakfast, participants were treated to a morning song, a video and the news before going into the core sessions of the day.

The Youth – making a dent in the country and the world

The Youth is a critical national demographic and while many big countries and economies are coming to terms with an ageing population and declining youth population, India on the other hand, is home to the world's largest youth population (in addition to being the country with the largest population in the world).

Every year at Let's Make A Difference, we see young women and men coming from various backgrounds. Many of them are in Senior Secondary School, Junior College or Pre-University; some are either pursuing their Bachelors or Masters, while others may be working or running their own business. Some of them may even have families of their own and may be married.

Sensing the need for the development of Youth, the Government of India has also drafted a National Youth Policy. According to an article posted by the Press Information Bureau **"The NYP seeks to catalyse widespread action on youth development on five priority areas viz. education; employment & entrepreneurship; youth leadership & development; health, fitness & sports; and social justice."**

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Keeping the Youth in Mind, we have conceptualized and designed sessions to help the participants understand more about themselves, their potential and their role in nation building. These sessions are conducted using a combination of lectures, videos, presentations, objects and pen and paper.

And in order to give impetus to the sessions, the participants are also asked to take part in Group Discussions. Prior to the Inauguration, the participants are divided into various groups based on their age, hometown, gender, etc.. These groups are like their family for the duration of the conference. In these Group Discussions, one can share their experience and learning of the sessions, confide about what is going on with them and also talk about other things that they wish to talk about. The Circle of Trust is enforced in these groups and it provides the participants with a platform to express themselves freely without being judged in any manner.

Two important sessions that were conducted every day in addition to Quiet Time was Concentration and Guided Meditation/Pranayama. They not only helped in connecting with one's self, but also helped people in focusing and being in the present.

Yogacharya Mukund(R) conducting a guided meditation session for the participants

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Sessions - Values, Looking Within, The Power of Goals, Family, Breaking Free

- **Values**

Values – they are the principles that govern our approach to life. They are also the underlying factor upon which we conduct ourselves in all areas of life – personal and professional. Values also shape one's character. As the saying goes **"The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching."**

In today's world, where compromise is encouraged in terms of ethics and moral values, Let's Make a Difference stresses on four important values – Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love.

These core values are repeated over and over again throughout childhood, but more often than not, they tend to not have much of an impact. This is because even as children we observe how and what we're being taught isn't being implemented by the preachers themselves. The process of change that we at Let's Make A Difference believe in is that of self-realisation. Insights gained through introspection are much more likely to be acted upon than ones that are simply served on a platter. One's own learning from personal experience is far greater than any advice the wisest person on the planet could provide.

And these four values have stood the test of time and when followed, one can lead a good life and also grow to greater heights. Four volunteers shared their experience with these values to the participants. The participants also asked questions to get a clearer understanding of the values. Some key insights from this session are as follows:

"A person with compromised values will never be able to stand on firm footing"

"The softest pillow one can sleep on is one's own conscience"

"When people are honest, the nation is honest, India as a nation is known to be corrupt but we as its next generation have the power to change that"

"Purity should be purity in thoughts, word and actions". **The motto of the Parsi religion sums this up beautifully: "Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Actions"**

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"Unselfishness and how we can add value to the world around us, while also taking into consideration our own future."

"There is an abundance of unconditional love, if only we have within us the willingness to give"

- **Looking Within**

We often look for visible change and quick fix solutions to our problems. Yet many of us are yet to understand that change takes time and it should come from within. Inner change leads to outer change.

It all boils down to looking ward and examining the impurities we carry within us. The impurities can be bad behaviours, vices, negative thoughts and feeling of ill will towards others, etc…

These so-called impurities overpower our conscience very easily and cause results that will hurt us deeply later even if we do not see them immediately. Once we clear our inner selves, it will eventually reflect on our outer being. By bringing in good thoughts, positive actions and a new mindset, we can change our outer world.

The participants were asked to delve deeper within themselves, and identify those negative thoughts and behaviors that they wished to replace with pure thoughts and positive actions.

Some sharing by the participants:

"I only show the good side of me but in reality I am a selfish person."

"I regret that I lost friend and a mentor and I feel guilty. I could have been a little bigger hearted."

"Arguments, back answering and ego did not allow me to understand that people were trying to help me and not misunderstand my feelings."

"I have lied to the people who trusted me."

"I have done a lot of things. I remember all the hurtful things that I have done to people. I have trust issues due to certain experience in the past."

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❖ **The Power of Goals**

One key area of focus for today's youth is Career. However, Education precedes Career. If one achieves a stable academic record, and with the combination of acquired skills, she/he can build a good Career.

In addition to career, there are other aspirations such as the need for a good lifestyle, healthy relationships, good materials such as cars, clothes, etc..

The key lies in striking a balance with various areas of your life and achieving goals within each area. Key areas of one's life can be Career, Relationships, Health, Hobbies, Family, Wealth Creation, Habits, etc…

But, if one wants to achieve good things, it all boils down to habits.

The participants were first asked to write down their good and bad habits, as well as the habits they wished to cultivate. They then reflected on their careers, identifying the steps needed to reach their goals and the obstacles hindering their progress. Finally, they wrote down their short-term goals, which would ultimately help them achieve success.

Many past participants and volunteers of Let's Make a Difference have used this session to achieve their goals and have achieved success in their careers and other areas of life.

Major Shawn Fernandes, a volunteer, is one such example. He came across this session when he was a participant in the Nagpur Conference in 2011. He was in 12th Standard and he set a goal to become an Officer in the Indian Army. In order to do so, he had to crack the National Defence Academy Exam as the first part of his bigger goal.

He built good habits, prepared for the exam accordingly and later secured admission to NDA in the year 2012. Thirteen years later and standing today, he is now a Major in the Indian Army and is posted in Jalandhar, Punjab.

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Participants taking part in one of the sessions in the Auditorium

- **Family**

Family plays an important role in shaping a person. Family is the first unit. You are known because of your family and your first introduction to the society and the world comes from your family. However, as we grow up, we tend to get divided with certain family members mainly because of an invisible barrier called "EGO".

Our ego prevents us from building bridges to mend relationships with people from whom we have gone far apart. It also acts as the catalyst to create wider divisions in our society.

The importance of family was highlighted through a series of short anecdotes, emphasising the unpredictable nature of life and the brevity of our time together. For this session, the participants were given a quiet time question – **"With how many people am I divided, within my family?"**

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Participants were encouraged to share their own experiences, fostering a deeper connection and understanding among the group. Time was extended for sharing, allowing for more meaningful exchanges.

Attendees were urged to reach out to their families and mend any broken relationships, with a reminder that family is our ultimate support system through life's ups and downs. The session highlighted the blessing of having a family and the necessity of cherishing and not taking them for granted.

Many participants called their families, asked for forgiveness and apologized for their actions. Tears were shed, sadness was soon replaced by smiles and many of them felt light.

Brijesh Arora (Sonu) is a screenplay writer by profession and one of our senior volunteers. A resident of Bhandara District, Maharashtra, he first attended the NYC conference in the year 2003.

During the family session, he spoke about his late father, who had met with a near-fatal accident when Sonu was just 16 years old. After that, Sonu had to take charge of his family and shoulder the responsibilities of the house as he had five people depending on him - his ailing father , mother, two elder sisters and a younger brother.

Apart from running the house, he also had to return money to his relatives, who had given it to his father in good faith for making investments. It was during this time that the family got together and faced the challenges during this period.

Sonu's mother graced the conference with her presence. In spite of her son being involved with the idea and movement for so many years, yet, it was the first time she witnessed Let's Make A Difference in action. She shared how Sonu became a better person thanks to the teachings of the conference and commended him for looking after the family and always putting their needs ahead of his own needs. She urged everyone in the audience to face life's challenges and to never give up in the face of dark times.

She also thanked Let's Make A Difference for going above and beyond to help people.

A Lunch in Silence was followed by this session and post lunch, the participants were made to do Shavasana to settle down and reflect on their emotions.

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❖ **Breaking Free**

While the participants discovered the power of their ego and its role in the family dynamics, it was time to look at our other relationships as well. Relationships can be defined in various categories such as:

i. A Dead relationship – a relationship where no reconciliation is possible
ii. A relationship with a small amount of ego
iii. A relationship tainted with a strong ego
iv. A transactional relationship
v. A relationship based on pure unconditional love

The first step was to acknowledge the existence of these issues, particularly the presence of ego. Participants then engaged in group discussions to explore these themes in depth. Helium coloured balloons that represented the varying degrees of relationships described above were used for this exercise. The session concluded with participants praying for peace and forgiveness and releasing the balloons of these colours into the sky, symbolising the release and letting go of these relationship burdens and their egos.

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Speakers – Illuminating Lessons from People and their Experiences

Every year, we invite distinguished individuals as speakers to our conferences. These speakers share their stories and life experiences with the participants so that they too can pick up some leaves from their (the speaker's) life notebook and use the lessons for their own life.

Let's Make a Difference has hosted accomplished personalities from various fields such as politics, entertainment, journalism, environmental conservation, sports, defence, etc..

Here are the speakers of this year's conference:

- **Anurag and Aashish Maloo**

Anurag Maloo, is an avid mountaineer and startup coach. Prior to entering the startup world as a startup mentor, he has also had stints as a teacher and community builder. He is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (UK). In addition to his passion for travel and meeting different people, he has love for mountains. He learnt about mountaineering from Nehru Institute Of Mountaineering (NIM), Uttarkashi.

Apart from his stellar achievements, he is also a senior volunteer and member of the Let's Make A Difference family. He first attended the Youth Conference in 2010 when he was pursuing his under graduation in engineering from Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University. He also pursued a

He was in the global news in April 2023, when he fell into a deep icy crevasse in Mount Annapurna – the 10th highest mountain in the world and also one of the deadliest mountains; known for its treacherous terrain.

He was on a mission to climb all 14 peaks above 8,000m and scale the world's seven summits - the highest mountains in each continent - to create awareness about the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

However, he was rescued by two Polish mountain climbers – Adam Bielecki and Mariusz Hatala along with a team of Sherpas; **72 hours** after he fell into the crevasse.

Post his rescue, he was airlifted from the avalanche prone slopes of Mount Annapurna to Manipal Teaching Hospital in Pokhara; where **he was declared dead after 30 minutes of CPR.** The doctors feared that he would remain in a vegetative state. But his

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younger brother, Aashish, persisted and persuaded the emergency doctor on duty to continually administer CPR. The doctor and his team gave the longest CPR of their career **–4 hours non-stop, and finally Anurag took his first breath. He was reborn – on April 20th 2023.** Post his rebirth, he was airlifted to Nepal Mediciti Hospital in Kathmandu from Pokhara, where he remained in coma for 10-12 days. **21 days** later he was airlifted with the support of Adani Foundation (Mr. Gautam Adani and Mrs. Priti Adani) and shifted to AIIMS New Delhi for plastic and reconstructive surgeries, where he spent **6 months** recuperating and rehabilitating. He underwent 9 surgeries; 50 percent of his skin was grafted.

After a long period of recuperation, relearning and rehabilitation, Anurag was finally discharged and returned to his home town – Kishangarh, Rajasthan – on 1st November 2023.

'Now I remember when I took my first step, when I climbed my first stairs, when I ate food for the first time from my hands, when I wrote for the first time in the hospital"

On this panel, Anurag Maloo and his brother Aashish Maloo (Centre) sharing their experience with the audience. This session was chaired by Brijesh Arora (L) as Mudit Surana (R) looks on.

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❖ **Nitin Ghorpade**

Nitin Ghorpade's journey from a humble background to becoming a professional athlete is a testament to the power of grit, resilience and overcoming adversities. After completing his 12th grade, he found success in the field of business – mainly in the transportation of three-wheeler vehicles in addition to running a sports cycle showroom. However, his life was marred by chronic alcoholism, many health issues, and abuse that he directed towards his family. Overcome by shame, he later started attending Alcoholic Anonymous sessions upon the insistence of his family. After learning about the impact of his behaviour there, and after completing six months with AA, he fought his addiction and eventually went on to achieve medals and awards in the arena of athletics. He has competed in marathons and the very challenging IRON MAN triathlon.

In a Triathlon – one has to complete three sporting events - 3.8 km of swimming, 180 km of cycling and 42 km of running - within a given time to win the title of IRON MAN. Today, he is a professional athlete who competes in various marathons and triathlon events around the world.

Some of his key achievements include his completing the daunting Ironman triathlon four times, including events in Germany, Denmark and Estonia. His feats also extend to conquering distances of 200km, 300km, 400km and 600km on a bicycle. He repeated this incredible sequence thrice in a calendar year.

He is fitter than ever before and enjoys a joyous relationship with his family. He has won many awards in the arena of athletics and his story shows that anyone can turn their life around. He still continues to motivate and inspire people to change their lives and set an example for others.

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Nitin Ghorpade

- **Shilpa Phadke Tambe and Sukhada Khisti of Connecting Trust, Pune**

Mental health is an important health issue that is plaguing the world and in India, it is mainly the young people who are more affected by this. And while there is so much information available on the internet and other sources, many people are still unclear as to how to address their mental health and how to go about dealing with it.

In order to have a conversation around Mental Health, we invited two mental health professionals from Connecting Trust, Pune - Shilpa Phadke Tambe and Sukhada Khisti.

Connecting Trust offers a helpline through which anyone can connect and talk to a trained volunteer over a call. They mainly focus on helping suicide survivors.

They interacted with the participants and answered their questions around mental health and also spoke about depression and other aspects of mental health. The questions asked during the session included questions like "*My friend is going through a mental health issue, I feel I need to help. How can I help?* "; " *How would I know if I am simply feeling low or down or is it a serious mental health issue*"

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Ms Shilpa Tambe (L) and Ms Sukhada Khisti (R) conducting a session on Mental health for the participants.

Honouring Prathamesh Kadam's family and the Introduction of the Trustees

Prathamesh Kadam is a volunteer and asset to our team. During the calendar year 2023, he was responsible for organizing and attending all conferences of Let's Make a Difference. As a token of gratitude, his family was invited and honoured.

His mother – Smt Sunita Kadam- shared her thoughts with the audience:

"My son, Prathamesh, is 26 years old. For the last decade, I have been worried about how he would become a responsible man, take on responsibilities at home, and carry forward our family legacy. As a working professional in the medical sector, I often had limited time to spend with my children, Prathamesh and Akshata. Akshata graduated and got married, but Prathamesh, who is seven years younger, completed his engineering graduation and was struggling with his career and decision-making. My worries grew as he faced complications in his life.

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In 2022, Akshata suggested that Prathamesh attend the "Let's Make A Difference" Youth Conference, seeing his troubled state. When he returned from the conference, he had a new perspective on life and developed a passion for the idea. He stayed connected with Let's Make A Difference, finding clarity and happiness through their guidance. My worries started to lessen as I saw him move past his dark phase.

Prathamesh went to Delhi for a workshop at the Fellow Home and decided to live there and work. I responded positively to this decision. Although I didn't know the details of his work, he often talked about their activities, regional conferences, and instilling moral values in the youth.

He recently started working in the construction sector, from the basics, and it's been a year since then. Seeing his perseverance and dedication without family support makes me proud of his learning journey. His organized habits inspire me.

In the 2024 National Youth Conference, watching Prathamesh's presentation brought tears to my eyes. It felt like a divine intervention, making my dreams for him come true. Prathamesh found clarity and direction in his life, and his father is equally proud of him.

I am grateful to God for introducing us to the wonderful world of Let's Make A Difference and to Viral Bhai for shaping Prathamesh's life and making a beautiful difference in all of us."

Prathamesh's sister Akshata (also a volunteer) shared her experience of working for Let's Make a Difference and what she learnt.

"My journey with Let's Make a Difference began in 2007 when I attended the regional youth conference in Baramati. Initially, I joined simply because everyone else was attending. However, as the days passed, I experienced a deep realization and inner connection with myself.

In 2011, I had another opportunity to attend the regional youth conference. This time, the focus was on building myself morally stronger than before. Year after year, I eagerly awaited the chance to work as a volunteer. Finally, after a long gap of 12 years, I got the opportunity to volunteer at the Jamshedpur Youth Conference (JYC) in November 2023. This was my first experience as a volunteer.

Volunteering infused me with energy and confidence. A few months later, I attended a volunteer workshop surrounded by efficient and younger volunteers. I realized that I was in for a profound learning experience. Volunteering taught me more than punctuality; it encompassed humanity, patience, and creating a joyful atmosphere. Teamwork became a valuable lesson, and this experience helped me lead group discussions and gain confidence in whatever I do.

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The fifteen days I spent at Asia Plateau were transformative, marking my journey from a participant to a volunteer. Last year, my brother Prathamesh was part of the fellowship program, and his selfless work earned our family love and honour at the conference. This was an overwhelming experience for me.

The difference between arriving and leaving the conference was profound, fuelling my desire to work with the team again. I expressed my wish to start a conference in Solapur. This experience has left an indelible mark, and I eagerly anticipate every opportunity to contribute to Let's Make A Difference."

From (L) to (R) - Prathamesh Kadam, Neha Mazumdar, Viral Mazumdar, Prathamesh's parents – Shri Nandkumar Kadam and Smt Sunita Kadam, his sister Akshata Ghogare and her two sons Arnav (elder son) and Shivansh.

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Let's Make a Difference shifted gears in 2024 and went on to establish itself as an independent trust. It thus, operates outside the ambit of Initiatives of Change (IofC) and ended its twenty-nine-year association with them. This whole new chapter also saw the appointment of certain senior and experienced volunteers as Trustees, entrusted with overseeing the future work of Let's Make A Difference.

The Trustees include: Mrs Neha Mazumdar, Mr Viral Mazumdar, Mrs Shraddha Agarwal, Mr Rajiv Agarwal, Mr Amit Keshan, Mr Brijesh Arora and Mr Bhisham Mansukhani.

In addition, the Impact Assessment Report was released by the trustees. This report covered all the work done by Let's Make A Difference during the Financial Year 2023-2024.

The book is like an almanac – it contains details and information about conferences conducted, people impacted, reports of the conferences, etc… This book documents the entire work of the team. This will be prepared for each Financial Year going forward.

The Trustees of Let's Make A Difference launching the Impact Assessment Report of FY 2023-2024

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The Other Things

While the conference was filled with intensive Quiet Time, Group Discussions, and Sessions, we also made sure to include other activities for the participants to gain a wholesome experience of the conference.

Post tea, participants had their free time where they could play sports and also bond and interact with their other fellows. They were also made to do Services and Washups during their meal times.

The volunteering team also went above and beyond and organized a Community Lounge and served Lemon Grass tea for the participants to bond.

Our volunteer and speaker Anurag Maloo also conducted a session called "Half Baked" for the participants where they were grouped together to come up with a business idea.

Other activities also included Postcard Writing, Letter to Self and burning out the habits that one wanted to leave behind. Participants also recorded their positive commitments – something that they planned to do immediately post the conference.

Few sessions that also added value to the conference included the Power of Vision – conducted by Bhisham, Day Light Saving time conducted by Sayok Sarkar and Anger Management.

An important thing to note in this conference was the participation of a Mother, Father and their son. For the first time in its thirty-year history, Let's Make A Difference witnessed such a participation from one family.

Mr KM Shanmugam is the Chief Executive of the Amar Seva Sangam – a unique model institution that is focused on rehabilitating and caring for persons with disabilities. Let's Make A Difference began its association with the organization ever since its Promoter Co Chairman and Secretary – Mr Shankara Raman – addressed the gathering back in 2018.

The team also had an opportunity to conduct a conference at the Amar Seva Sangam in January 2023. After interacting with the Let's Make A Difference team in 2023, Mr Shanmugam wanted to experience the National Youth Conference and came with his wife, Smt Parvathi and his son, MeenakshiSundar.

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Towards the end of the conference, Mr Shanmugam shared that the teachings of the conference touched his life and that of his family. Before coming here, the three of them were divided in a certain way. However, they later ended up bonding so closely with one another and their bond is now stronger than ever and is governed by absolute love.

Earlier, they were forced to bond with one another. Now, they do it naturally. He also added that he, his wife and son have changed as people. His son, who never takes time off from his professional life, took the time to attend the Youth Conference for eight straight days.

Smt Parvathi also expressed herself on the stage. She had never been given such a platform before. Their relationship with one another improved and is now based on the values of Love and Purity.

Yogacharya Mukund also shared his experience. He had the unique advantage of witnessing the volunteers in action during the Volunteers Workshop and also took part in the Youth Conference as a participant.

Let's Make A Difference कान्फ्रेंस में जुड़ने से पहले मुझे इस कान्फ्रेंस के विषय मे ज्यादा नहीं पता था और यहाँ आने से मैंने नैतिक मूल्यों के विषय में केवल पुस्तकों में पढ़ा था और इसके अलावा मेरा संसार को देखने का नजरिया थोड़ा अलग था इससे पहले मुझे नये लोगों से बात करने में कोई खास रूचि नहीं थी। इस यात्रा की शुरुआत Viral sir के घर से हुई जहाँ उन्होंने पहली बार पंचगनी कान्फ्रेंस में चलने के लिए आमंत्रित किया और मैने जाने के लिए हाँ भी बोल दिया लेकिन कुछ समय के बाद मैं एक ऐसी परिस्थिति में फस गया कि मेरे लिए जाना बहुत कठिन था क्योंकि शायद उस समय मेरे लिए पैसा बहुत ज्यादा महत्वपूर्ण था क्योंकि अपनी योगा क्लासको 15 दिनों के लिए बंद करके जाना बहुत कठिन था लेकिन दूसरी बार बोलने पर मैने पंचगनी जाने का निर्णय ले लिया लेकिन पंचगनी जाने से पहले सर से एक शर्त रखी कि मुझे online class के लिए मेरा मोबाईल मुझे दे दिया जायेगा और सर ने भी मुझे स्वीकृति दे दी। इस तरह पंचगनी जाने की मेरी यात्रा शुरू हुई।

Let's Make A Difference कान्फ्रेंस के दौरान मेरा अनुभव - पंचगनी में होने वाली कान्फ्रेंस 1जून से 8जून तक थी लेकिन मुझे वहाँ उस कान्फ्रेंस से पहले जाने का मौका मिला।

27 मई को मैं दिल्ली से पंचगनी के लिए रवाना हुआ

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28 मई को में Pune पहुच गया और वहाँ मुझे Sayok ji, Prathmesh ji, Bhavesh ji मिलना हुआ और फिर हम सभी साथ में पंचगनी के लिए निकल गए अब मैं 12-13 घंटे ट्रेन का सफर करके बहुत थका हुआ था मुझे कार में भी नींद आ रही थी।

सुबह 5 बजे के लगभग हम Asia Plateau पहुँच गए

Asia plateau उस जगह का नाम था जहाँ वह कान्फ्रेंस होना था। उस परिसर का दृश्य बड़ा ही मनोहारी था चारों तरफ प्राकृतिक वातावरण पेड़ - पौधों और पहाडों से घिर हुआ वह परिसर जिसे देखकर मैं पूरी तरह स्तब्ध हो गया और मेरी यात्रा की सारी थकान मानो दूर हो गई हो इसके बाद कुछ देर बाद सूर्योदय का वह दृश्य भी बड़ा ही सुंदर था।

आज से वहाँ Volunteers की मीटिंग शुरुआत हो गई थी और मुझे इस बात की खुशी है कि मुझे इस मीटिंग में शामिल होने का मौका मिला।

इस कान्फ्रेंस के दौरान एक बहुत ही प्रभावी प्रक्रिया से जुड़ने का अवसर मुझे मिलला। उस प्रक्रिया का नाम Quiet time है यह प्रक्रिया एक ऐसी प्रक्रिया है जिसमे हम स्वयं से जुड़ते है, स्वयं को सुनते है और उस आत्मतत्व की ओर अग्रसर होते है जिसके साथ जुडना हमारे जीवन का वास्तविक लक्ष्य है इस प्रक्रिया की सबसे बड़ी खास बात यह है कि इस प्रक्रिया में आपको किसी विशेष आसन, आंखों को बंद करने और विशेष स्थान जैसी कोई आवश्यकता नहीं होती इस प्रक्रिया में आप अपने अनुसार किसी भी स्थित में बैठकर या खड़े होकर कर सकते हैं।

मेरा Quiet time का अनुभव बहुत ही अद्वितीय रहा इस प्रक्रिया में मैनें सीखा कि किस तरह स्वयं को सुनते है। इस प्रक्रिया में स्वयं को सुनने के बाद शांत समय में आये विचार को एक डायरी में लिखने का अनुभव हृदय को स्पर्श करने वाला था।

इसके अलावा इस कान्फ्रेंस में चार नैतिक मूल्यों सत्यता (Honesty) , प्रेम (Love) , पवित्रता (Purity) और निस्वार्थता (Unselfishness) को प्रायोगिक रुप से अलग-२ Exercise की मदद से समझा और हमारे परिवार और दोस्तों के साथ हमारा कैसा संबंध होना चाहिए यह भी मैनें इस कांन्फ्रेस के माध्यम से जाना

इस कान्फ्रेंस में भारत के अलग-२ शहरों से आये नये लोगों से मिलने और उनको सुनने का मौका मिला और मेरे लिए यह ऐसी जगह थी जहाँ सभी अनजान होने के बाद भी सब अपने से लग रहे थे।

कुछ ही दिनों में कान्फ्रेंस समापन होना था। पहले दिन लग रहा था कि यह सब जल्दी खत्म हो जाये लेकिन आखिरी दिनों में लग रहा था कि यह यात्रा कभी खत्म ही ना हो:) ।

सच में यह जगह एक जादूई जगह है जहाँ हम कब बदल जाते है पता ही नहीं चलता :) ।

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Let's Make A Difference कान्फ्रेंस से आने के बाद कई बदलाव मैंने खुद के अंदर महसूस किया ।

अब मेरा इस दुनिया को देखने का नजरिया पूरी तरह मोबदल गया है और अब मैं मेरा मेरे परिवार के साथ सबंधों के बदलाव हुआ है और अपने संबंधों को और मजबूत बनाने के लिए प्रयासरत हूँ। और इसके अलावा कान्फ्रेंस सिखाये गए चार मूल्यों के ताराजू पर रखकर जब में किसी विषय पर सोचता हूँ तो यह एक सही निर्णय लेने में मेरी मदद करते है। मैं इन मूल्यों को अपने जीवन में धारण करने की कोशिश कर रहा हूँ।

A brief translation of his experience is as follows:

Before I joined Let's Make A Difference, I hardly knew anything about what it meant and before I came to the conference, I had read about moral values and principles only in books. My vision of looking at the world around me was very different. In addition, I had no interest in communicating with new people whom I met for the first time.

My journey started from the house of Viral Sir, where he first invited me to join the conference in Panchgani and I consented immediately. However, sometime later, I was stuck in some unavoidable situation where it became difficult for me to go ahead with my decision to attend the conference. Maybe for me at that moment, money was more important than anything else. It was not an easy decision for me to close down the doors of my yoga class for fifteen days. It was worrisome for me as I was only thinking about the money I would lose during that period.

But when I was requested again for the second time to attend the conference, I agreed to go ahead.

Viral Sir being a person who really follows what he teaches, put a condition that I would be provided with my mobile phone to continue with my online yoga classes and I was allowed to do so in spite of the rule of not using the mobile during the fifteen days stay at Panchgani. And this is how my journey started.

My experience of the beginning of a new journey of attending the Let's Make A Difference Conference

Even though the conference was scheduled to take place from 1st June to 8th June, I was fortunate enough to go there earlier than that.

On 27th May, I left for Panchgani from Delhi and I reached Pune on 28th May where I met Sayok, Prathamesh and Bhavesh. From there, we all left for Panchgani together. After already

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travelling for almost twelve/thirteen hours by train, I was dead tired such that I started dozing off in the car itself. We reached Asia Plateau at five o'clock in the morning. This was the place where the conference was going to take place.

It was a very scenic property. It was surrounded by nature with big trees, plants and hills. I was speechless looking at the beauty of nature and I felt my tiredness vanish magically. The sun rise after a few hours was another magical moment for me.

The conference had taken off and I was very happy that I could become a part of it by attending it. During the conference, I got to experience a very powerful process called – Quiet Time – a process where we connect to ourselves; listen to our thoughts and feelings and later move forward to connecting with our soul; which is the primary goal of the process.

The most important part of this process is that one need not sit in some particular position/asana with closed eyes or in a particular place. One can follow this by either sitting or standing or in any way one feels like.

My personal experience of Quiet Time was divine. I learnt to listen to myself and after some introspection, the experience of writing in my diary brought peace to my heart and soul.

Other than this, I also learnt about the four values – Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love – and how to use them. I also learnt the importance of having a good relationship with my family and friends.

I also had a good opportunity to meet and hear the views of many people from all over India. This was also a place where all were strangers to me and yet they made me feel that I have known them for many years.

The conference was going to get over soon. On the first day, I felt that it should get over soon so that I can go back home – which was my comfort zone. And in the last week, I felt that it should not get over soon and this new journey of mine should be extended for few more days.

Truth be told, this place is indeed magical; from the time we entered this place and, on the day, when we leave, we feel that we have changed from within. Our limiting beliefs are washed out and replaced with new positive beliefs; we set a new vision for our future and above all, we become confident that we can achieve anything we put our minds and hearts to. The result of my experience here was that I felt a transformation within myself.

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Now, I see myself looking at the world differently. My relationship with my family has changed in a positive way. I am also making an effort to strengthen my relationship with each and every one of them. Whenever I face an issue in my life, I apply the four values and these values helps me make better decisions for my life.

I am inclined to imbibe these values in my life for good.

The Last Day and Conclusion

The last day of the conference is always filled with a sense of happiness, sadness and also excitement. The participants have experienced change here and are eager to go and talk to their families about it.

They have also made memories and have built new friendships for a life time. The Last day not only marks the last Quiet Time of the conference. But it also signals the end of a journey and a beginning of a new one outside the Gates of Asia Plateau.

The day began with a Multifaith prayer where we thanked the almighty for his blessings. In this prayer, people from all faiths were encouraged to recite a verse from their Holy Book or Scriptures. We also prayed for peace, harmony and joy in this world. The participants were also introduced to the Pledge – that talks about a way of life. Participants could choose to sign it if they wanted to. But signing it means adapting to a new way of life and committing yourself to sustainable living.

The Multi Faith Prayer being conducted in the Foyer

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The last few hours was devoted to appreciating the staff of Asia Plateau – who work behind the scenes to ensure that the conference runs smoothly-, filling up the feedback forms and also taking an Audit of the Conference.

The Audit of the Conference

Prior to distributing the phones and the certificates, the conference concluded with the National Anthem. The conference may have ended, but the idea and movement of Let's Make a Difference will still go on. There are many regions to cover, many people to meet, many doors to open, but the goal will always be to "MAKE A DIFFERENCE".

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ANNEXURE I– **Positive Commitments**

- I would like to carry forward with me, the idea of quiet time from here and I would also keep practicing it as part of my daily routine
- I will get back to regular exercising and also follow a low portion diet
- I want discipline and dedication to be an inseparable part of my routine.
- Learn music. Enjoy life. Start giving more time to family. Treat people well. Start going to the gym.
- Since long my mom has been asking to go to Temple to attend. Pravachan on Sundays. I'll ensure that I'll take her along once a month
- I won't hurt anyone after I go home
- I will stop procrastinating and will not delay any task
- I wasn't honest with the people who loved me the most. Therefore, I will tell them everything and be 100% honest with them hereafter.
- I will complete my math syllabus for improvement exam in 10 days with perfection
- It's my commitment and I will do it. I will do my best in studies for the 12th class board exams.
- I will burn my Ego
- I will wake up early
- After I go from here I will hug my father tightly
- My grandfather deserves a lot of respect from me
- Relax and redefine lifestyle by adopting quiet time. I will journal.

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- I would like to change my sleep schedule and add it to my daily life along with Yoga.
- Create a daily routine with schedules and timetable and follow it
- Form a structure and reorganize Google photos in categories for work.
- Give away diaries, childhood memory box, and extra cloth for research.
- Start writing name on LinkedIn newsletter
- I am going to follow my passion such as playing Veena and stitching
- Since last year, I have wanted to do something for an old age home. I will initiate it
- I will start working on myself
- I want to have concentration in every aspect of my life
- I commit to love myself the same way as I love my mother. I commit to exercising every day for 1 hour as a part of self-love.
- I will use less phone
- I will not to get angry on small things and will love myself unconditionally
- I hope to accommodate some time for quite introspection to set the tone for the day.
- I will inculcate all the four values in me. I will work very hard for my parents and to achieve my dreams. I will face the ups and downs in life and bounce back again
- I will not take decisions without thinking
- I will be honest with my work, my relatives and practice 100% purity

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- I will not be dependent on my sister for my work. I will help her whenever possible
- I will talk to people with a smile on my face and will greet them from my heart. I won't give fake smiles to anyone.
- Follow quiet time and be disciplined
- I will take my family out once every month
- I will reduce my phone usage
- I will learn to let go. Everything happens for a reason
- I want to think about myself and my life and not what others think. I want to do things for myself and not for others
- Give unconditional love without expectation
- I will make a vlog with my uncle (father figure).
- I will control my anger
- I want will pay INR 3,000 rupees to my previous home owner. I was supposed to pay that in 2015
- To support my parents more and to reduce my mobile time
- I want to reduce my constant hunger
- I don't want to lie anymore.
- I want to stop the habit of taking pride and pleasure by trying out bad habits or drugs
- I commit to waking up before 5:00 a.m. and practicing meditation every day. I will also plan my mornings and evenings

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- Organize my room properly and keep it clean
- Stop cursing
- I will not procrastinate and wake up early every morning and exercise daily.
- I will talk to my sister-in-law nicely and I will try to make our relationship more strong
- I will make sure that I practice the breathing exercise everyday
- I will learn how to show up instead of finding excuses to not do it and I will be honest with myself
- Many times, I think of helping people who are poor but afterwards I give it a second thought and avoid doing it. From now onwards I won't give it a second thought and always go and help others
- I am going to smoke less after the conference
- I am going to take time management more seriously
- Live to serve and be the source of Honesty, Purity, Love and Unselfishness
- The best commitment that I will make is to make myself a priority
- After this confidence, I will start exercising five times a week
- I will behave good with my family and talk to them with respect
- I will start giving my 100% efforts in every task I do once I go back home
- I am going to do my dream artwork
- I will clean the floor everyday

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- I wish, I could hug my dad as soon as I go home but I think I don't think that I will be able to do it. I will touch his feet and my mom's feet and say sorry to them for being dishonest and giving back answers.
- I will surely hug my mom once I reach home
- I will start cleaning my house so that it feels like home rather than just a house
- I will spread knowledge of machine learning to everyone
- I will start detaching myself from people.
- My positive commitment after the 8th day is to serve the society and fight for human rights
- I will try to give food to people who are unable to have proper meals, at least once in a week
- I will spend more time with my grandparents
- I am going to feed stray dogs
- I will try to be humble towards everyone
- I want to focus on my studies and share whatever I learn in.
- I will try to be less egoistic person when I go back
- Will keep the mind and body healthy by doing yoga and exercising regularly
- Will connect with old friends with whom I lost touch due to small fights
- Apologize to my family for being egoistic
- Will sit alone in nature to get to know the person I am
- After this conference I will go home and talk with my family members

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- I commit to practice Honesty, Purity, Love and Unselfishness every day. Will also keep a record of it for myself so I can track my growth
- I commit to become a better human being than what I am now
- After going to home I hope to learn graphic design.
- Clean all the glasses of my house. Help my parents do exercise.
- Manage my closet. Wash the car and bike. Feed the dogs
- I will try to remain positive irrespective of any life situation.
- My commitment is to stop procrastination and study sincerely without distractions. The same applies to my workout
- I will go hug my mother and talk a lot with her
- I will take action on my plans. I will improve my personality. I will stop using abusive words. I will be polite
- I want to quit cigarettes and stop hating people
- I will quit pornography
- I will practice yoga
- I will go home and then I will push myself to improve my focus
- I will apologize to my mother
- I commit to be more focused, disciplined and consistent
- I would remove all the fears I have and try and take all the
- opportunities I get
- I will keep the schedule of waking up 5:00 a.m. going to sleep at 10:00 p.m.

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- Be consistent in gym and swimming
- I will go to Dubai in next 6 months. I look forward to becoming a profitable trader. I will start reading books which will add some value to my life
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle and upgrade my skills and create wealth
- When I go back home, I will create a set of self-improvement habits and will strictly follow them and make them a part of my daily life. I will keep tracking my progress to see the change within myself and will be grateful for the things I have achieved.
- I am definitely going to correct my sleeping schedule and I am going to share my feelings in my diary.

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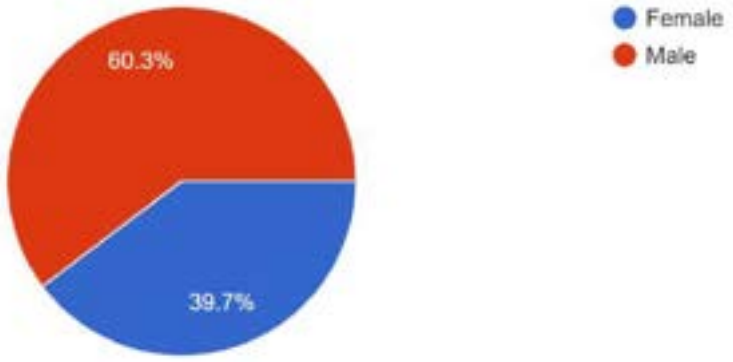
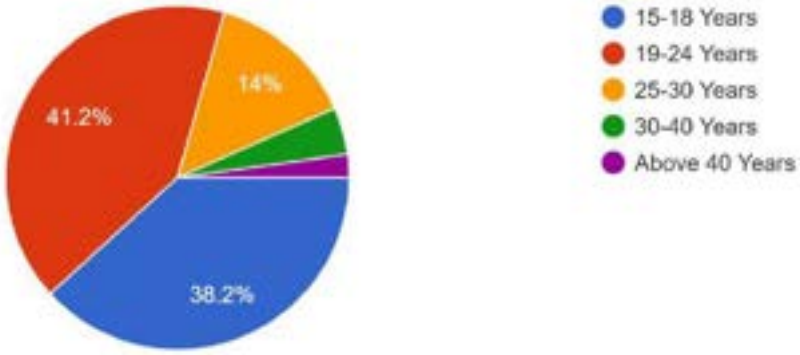
ANNEXURE II – **The Survey Results**

Gender:
136 responses



Age:
136 responses



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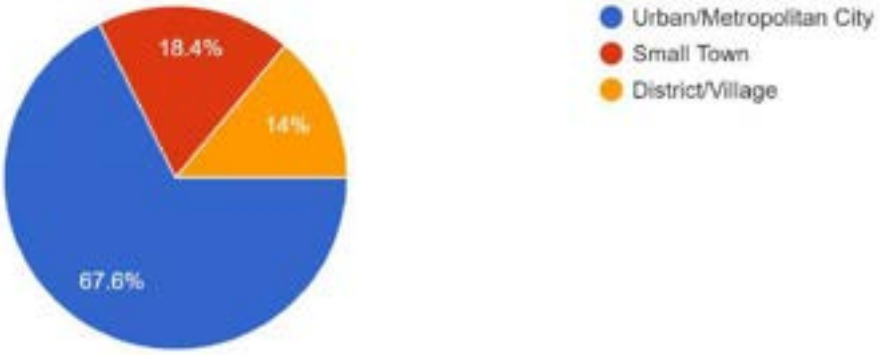
Region:

136 responses



Current Engagement:

136 responses

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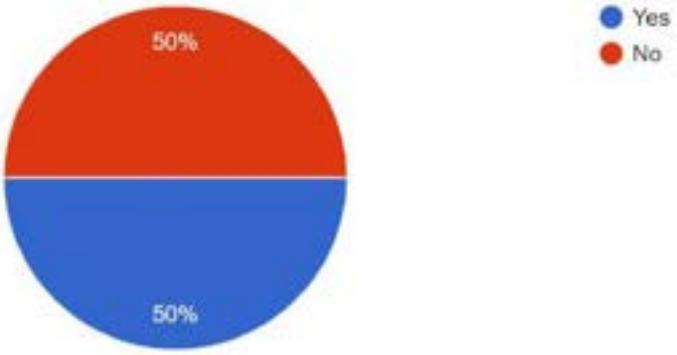
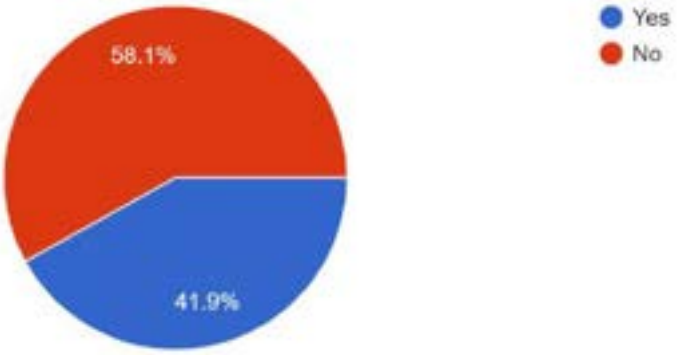
Are you a registered voter?

136 responses



Did you Vote (either in the recent election or in the past elections at the state or center level)?

136 responses



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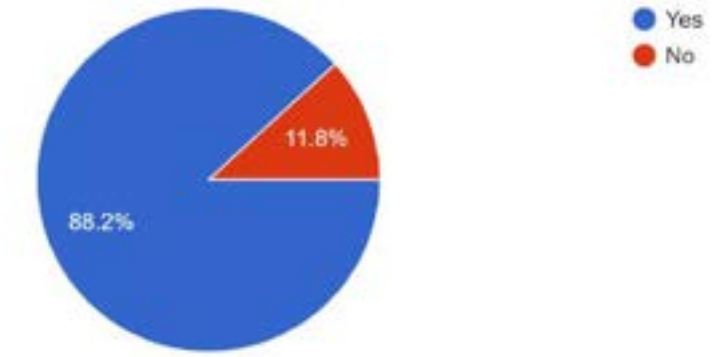
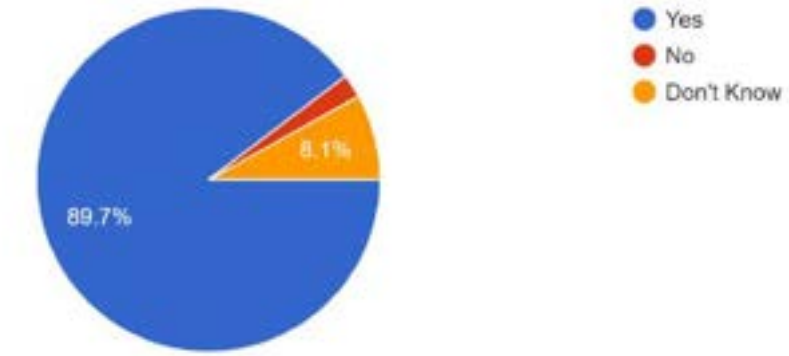
Are you aware of your Rights and Duties as stated in the Constitution of India?

136 responses



Is the Right to Vote a fundamental right according to the Constitution?

136 responses



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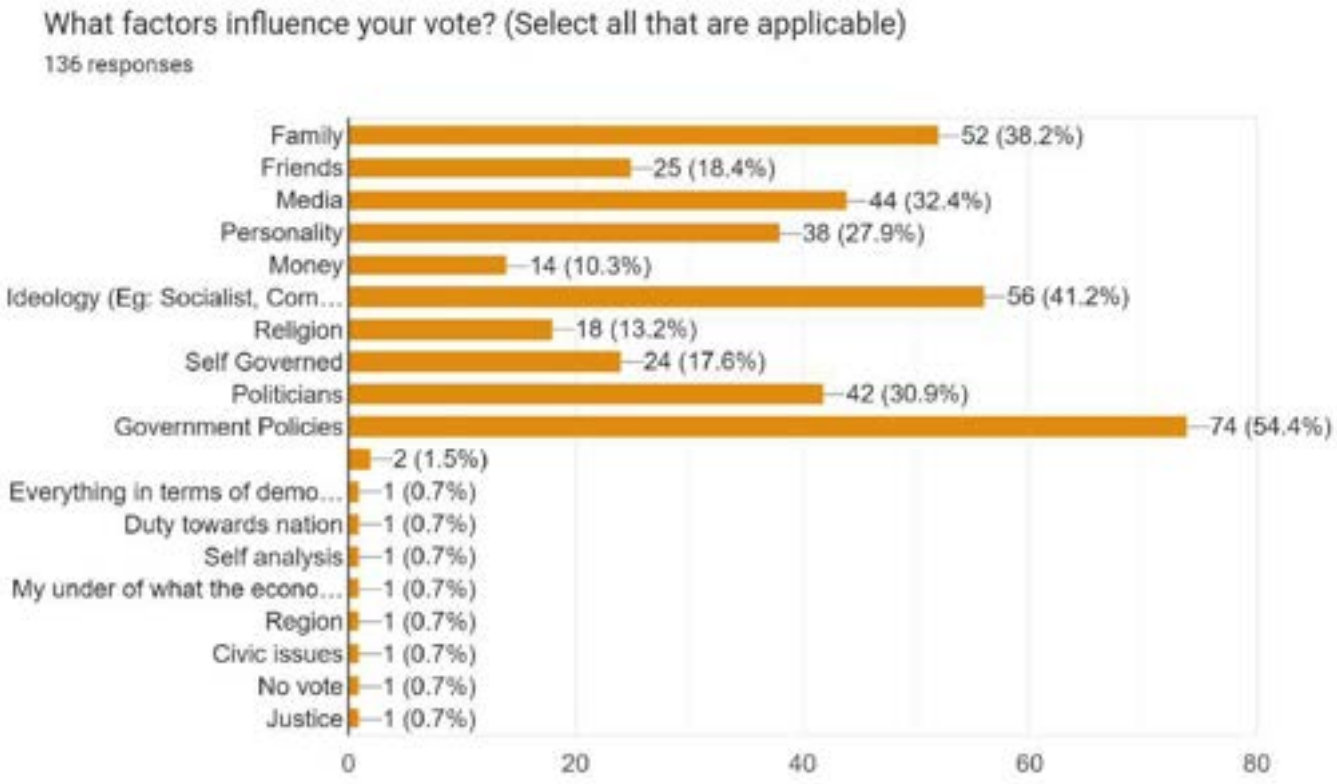

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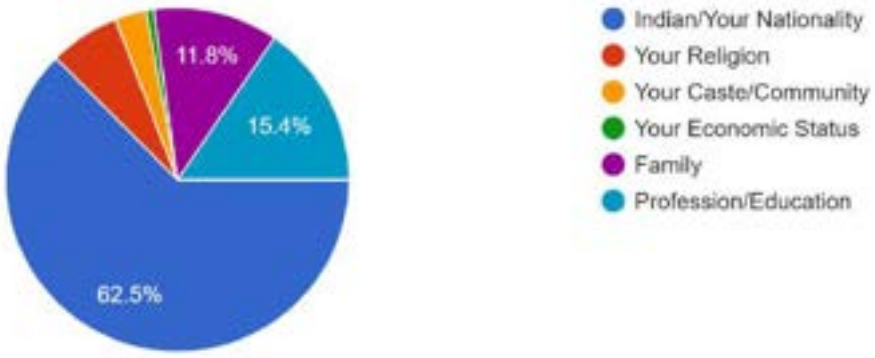
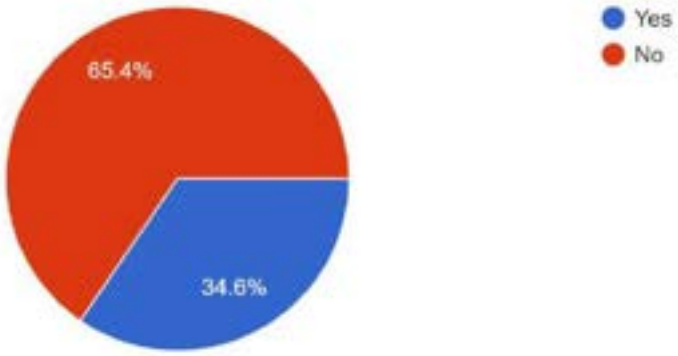
What is the root of your identity? In other words, how do you identify yourself with as first? (Select any one)

136 responses



Does peer pressure affect you?

136 responses



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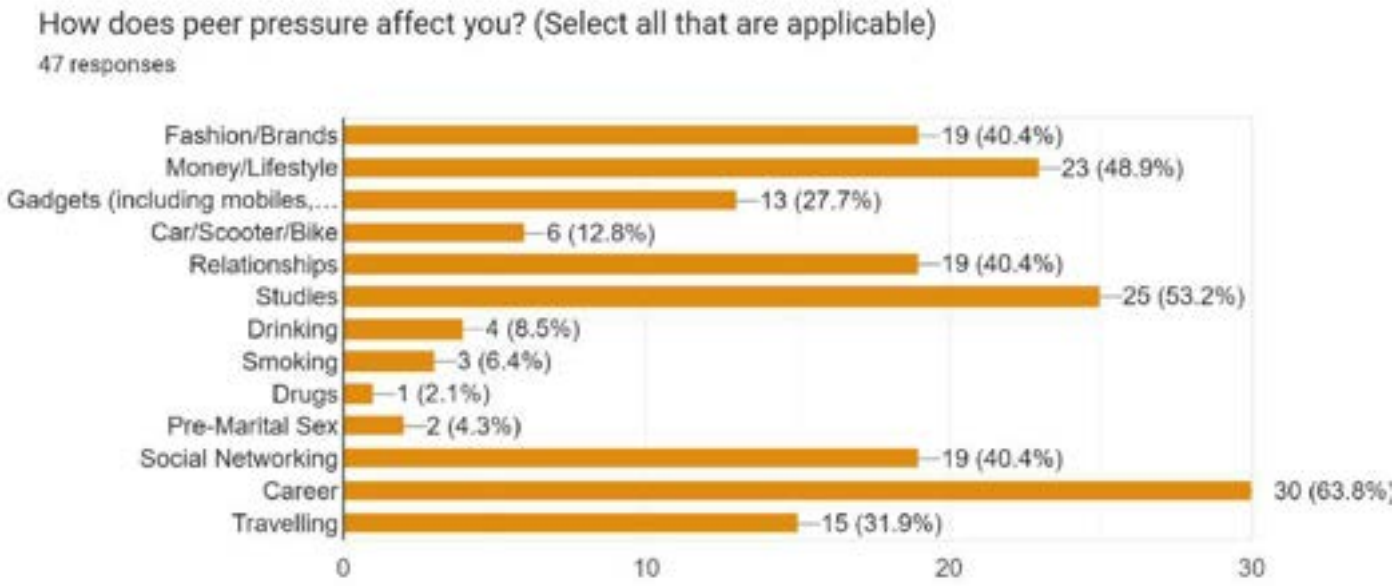

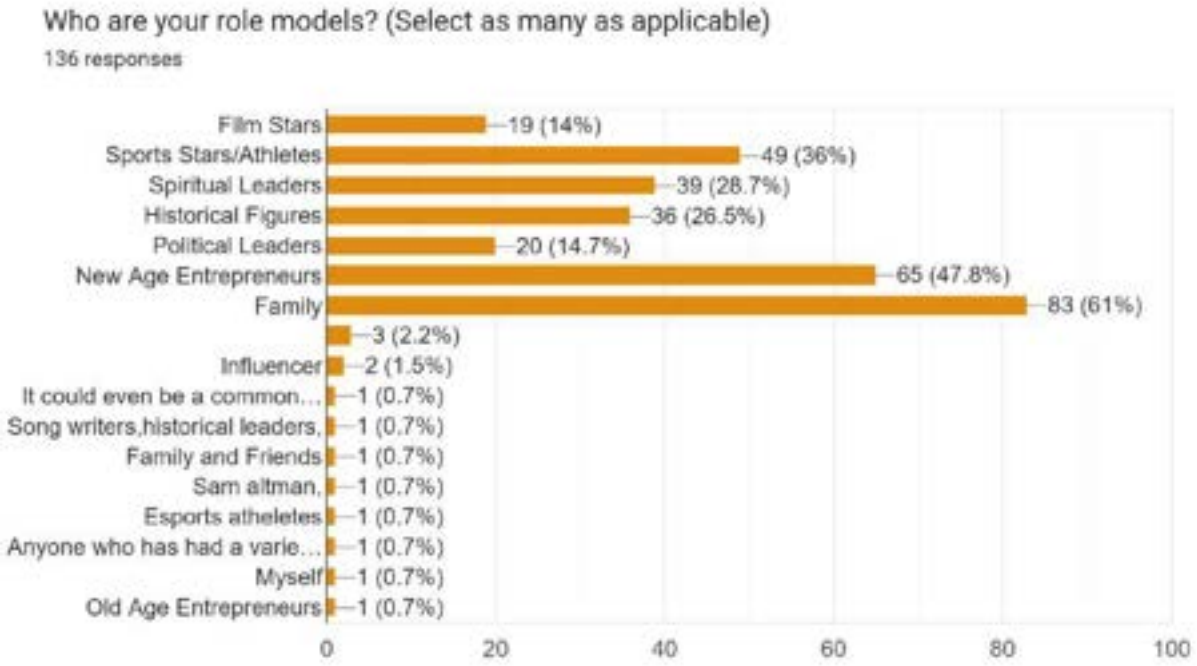

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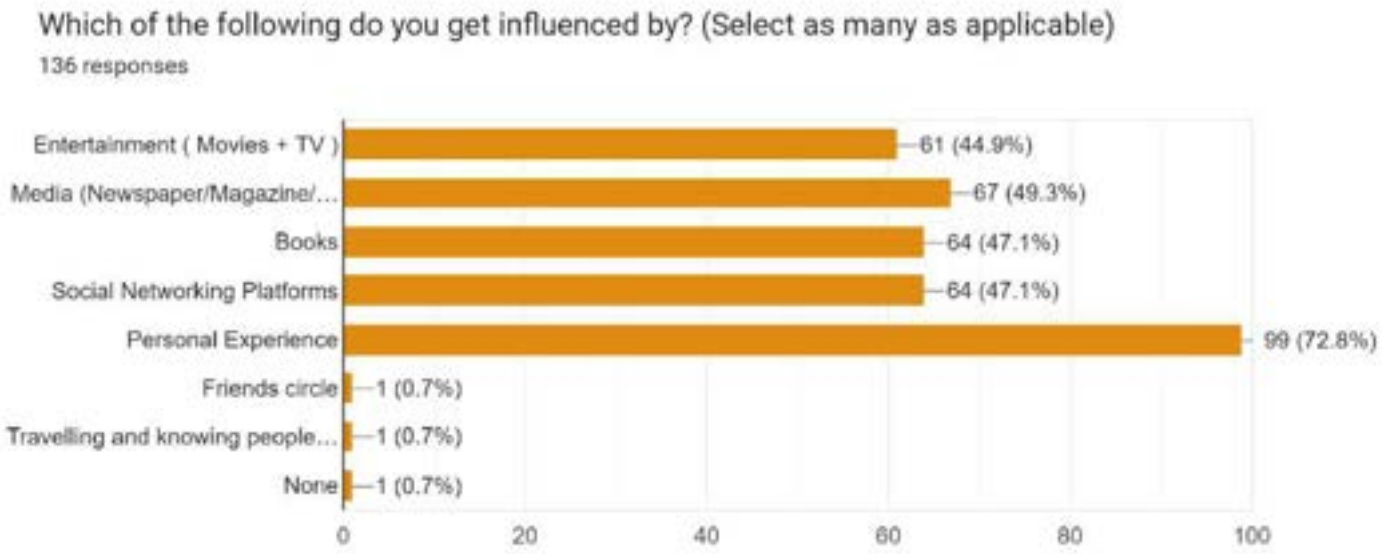

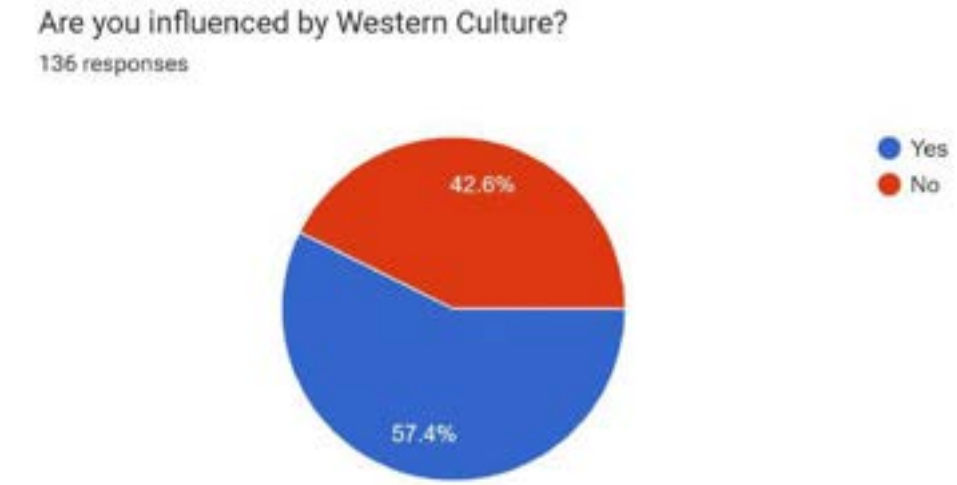

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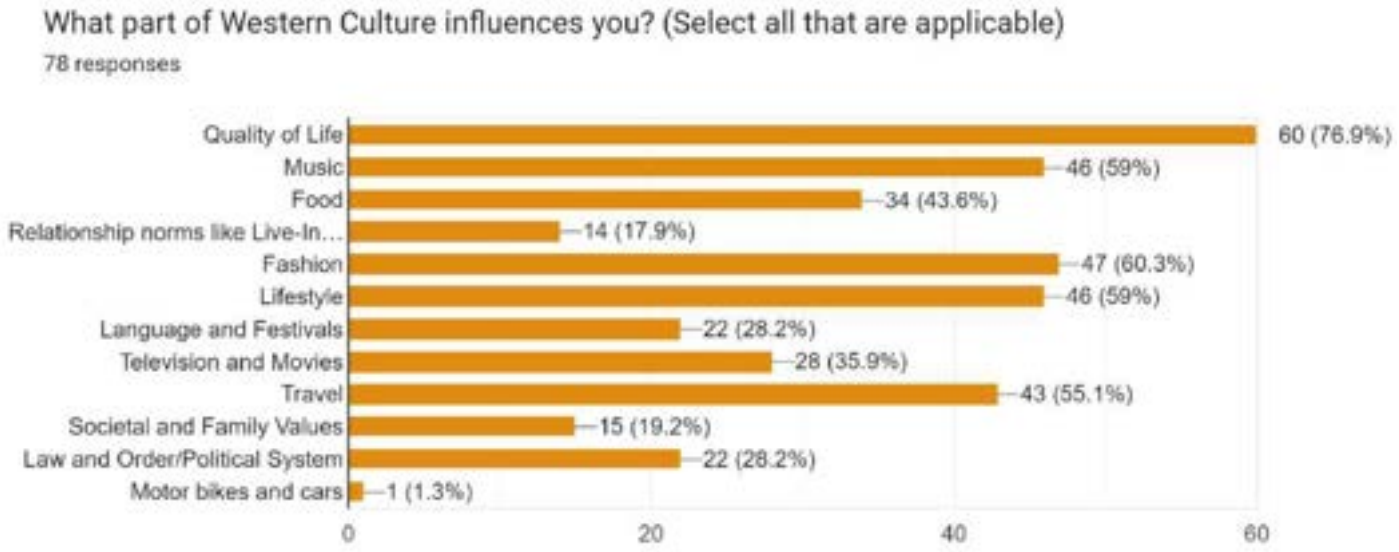

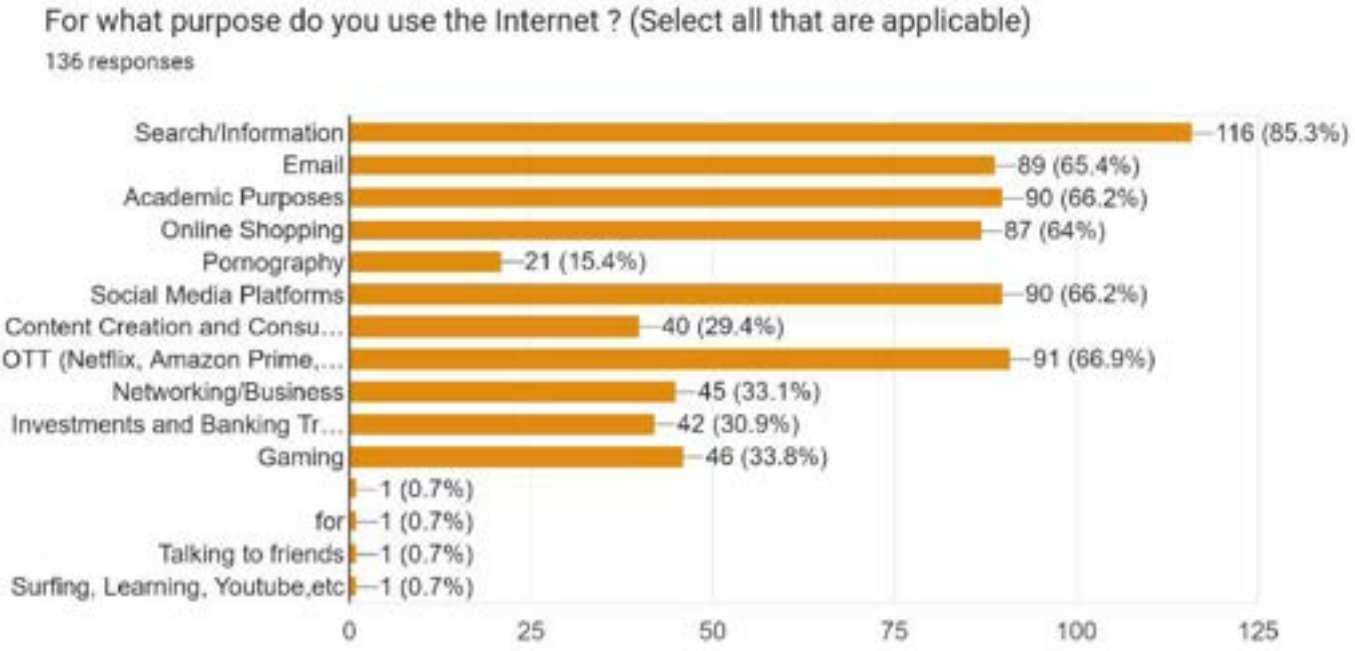

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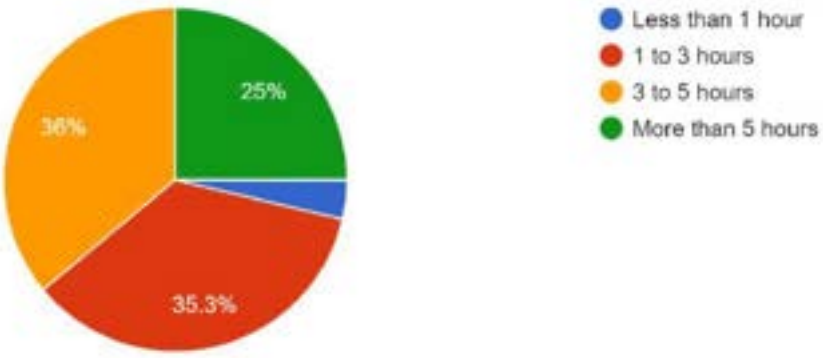
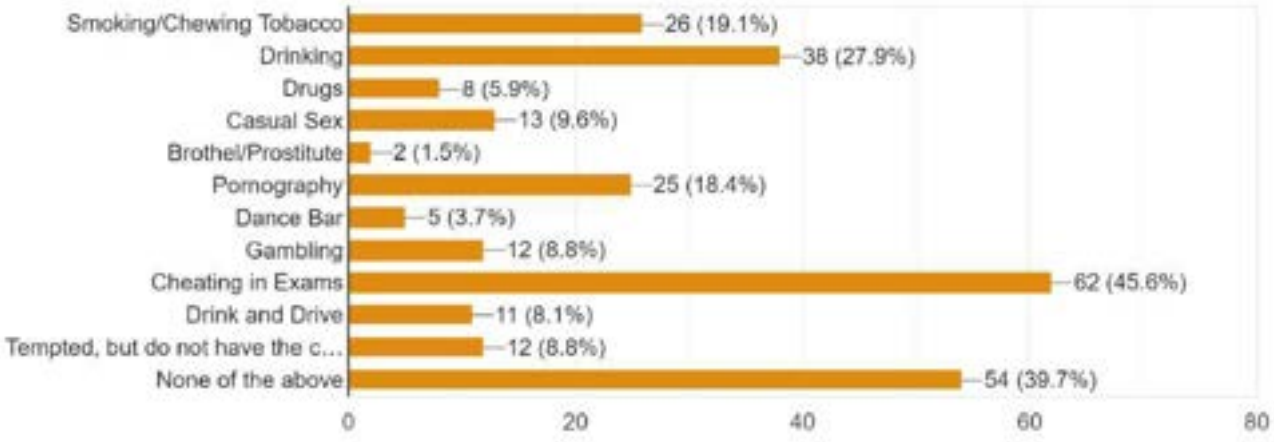
What is your average screen time for social media and content consumption (including Computer, Cell Phone, TV)?

136 responses



At any given point of time, which of the following have you tried? (Select all that are applicable)

136 responses



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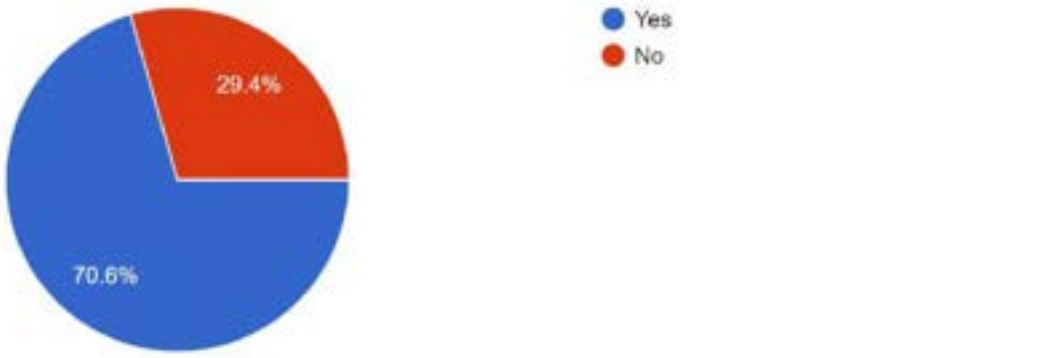
Have you been taught about Sex Education? Would you consider yourself informed about Sex Education?

136 responses



If yes, what is your source of information with respect to sex education?

96 responses

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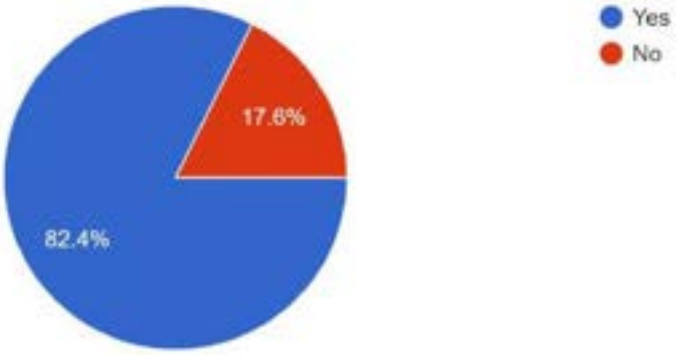
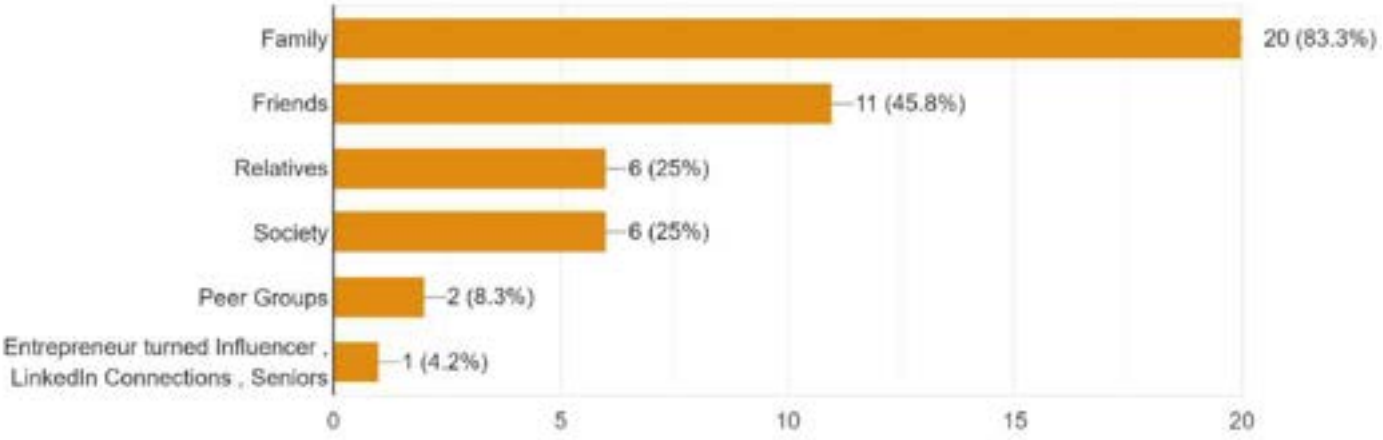
Are you governed by yourself?

136 responses



If you do not govern yourself, who does? (Select all that are applicable)

24 responses



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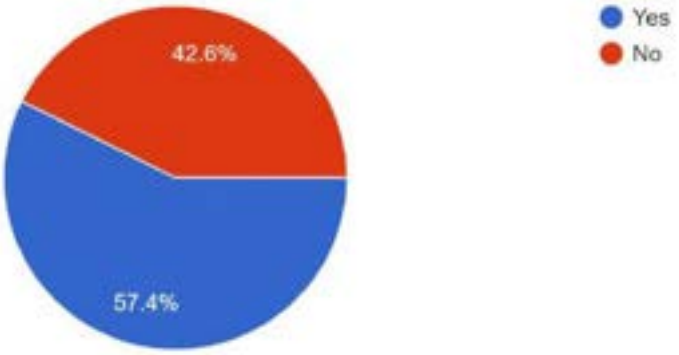
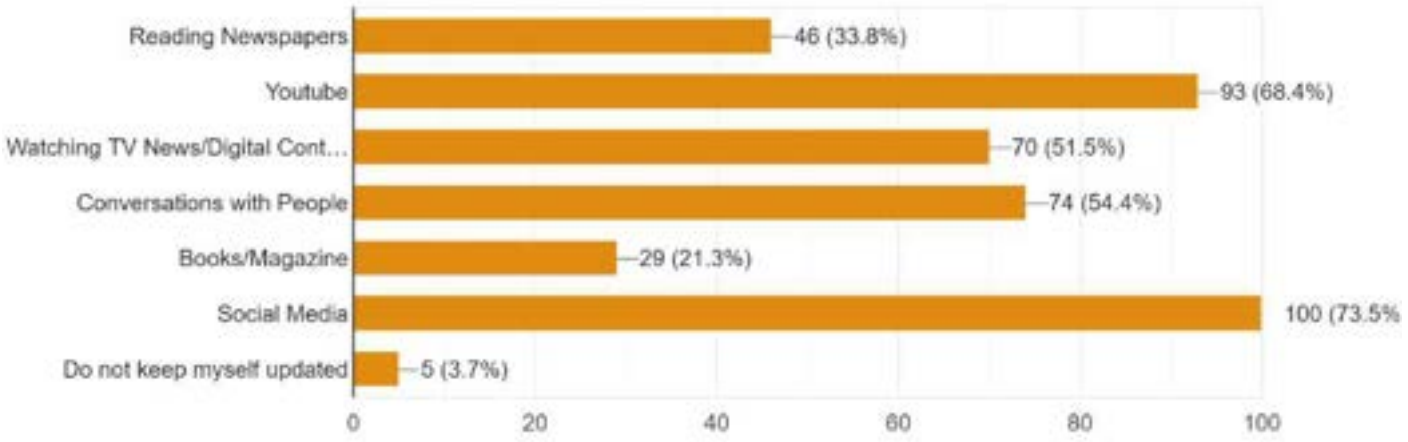
Do you find it difficult to make decisions?

136 responses



How do you keep yourself updated with current affairs?

136 responses



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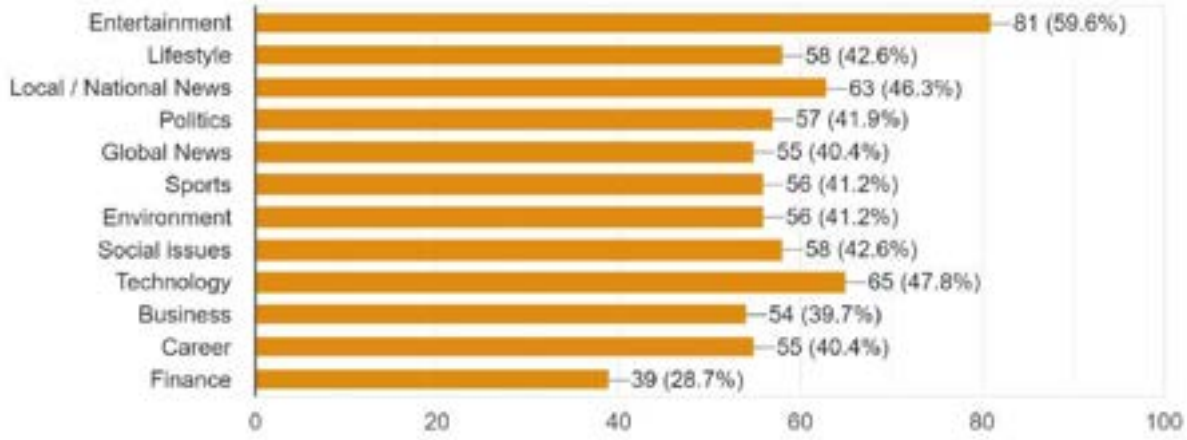
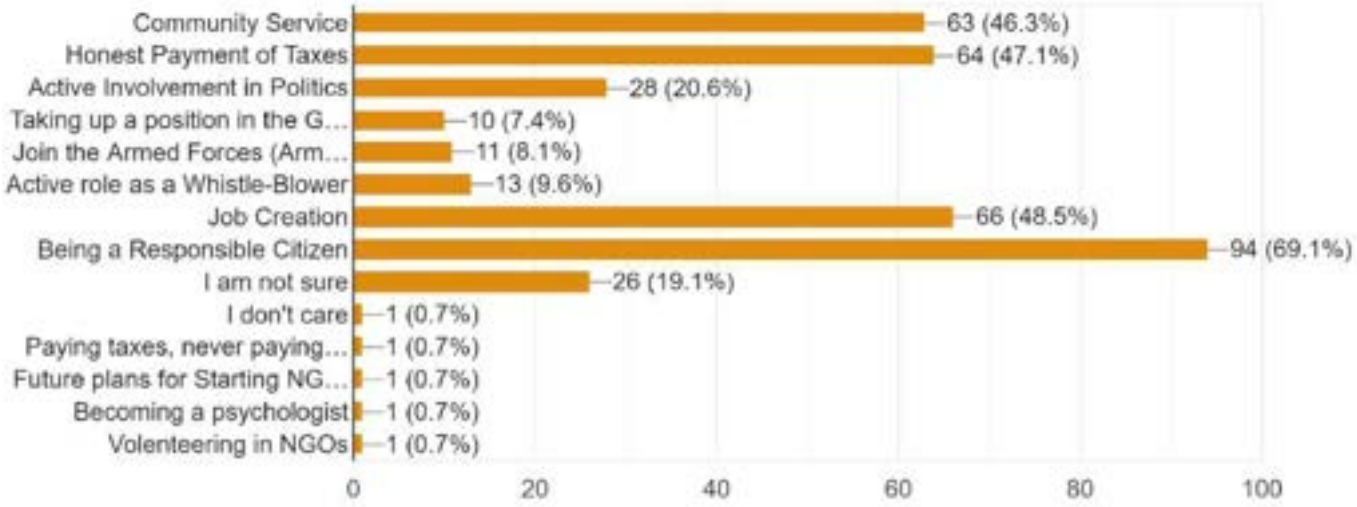
What sections of news do you keep yourself updated with? (Select all that are applicable)

136 responses



How do I plan to build the India of my dreams? (Select all that are applicable)

136 responses



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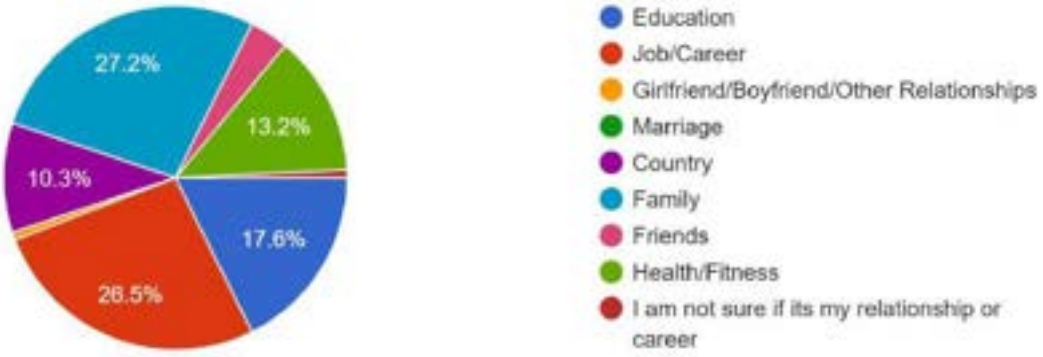
What is the topmost priority of your life?

136 responses

What is the second priority of your life?

136 responses



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What is the third priority of your life?

136 responses

Have you ever stolen anything ?

136 responses

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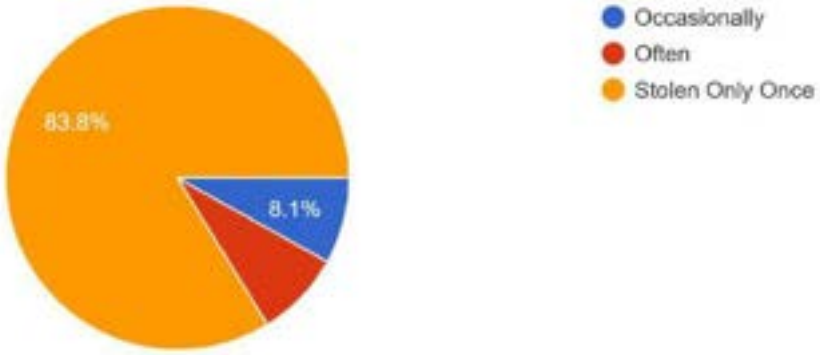
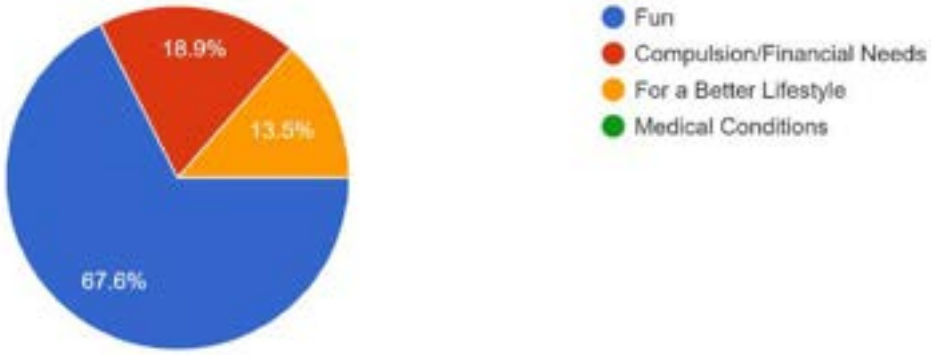
How often do you steal?

37 responses



Why do you steal?

37 responses



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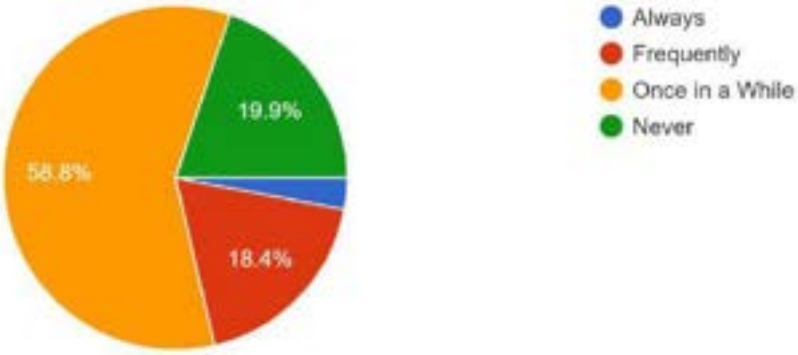
How often do you lie to your family?

136 responses



Who decides your career?

136 responses

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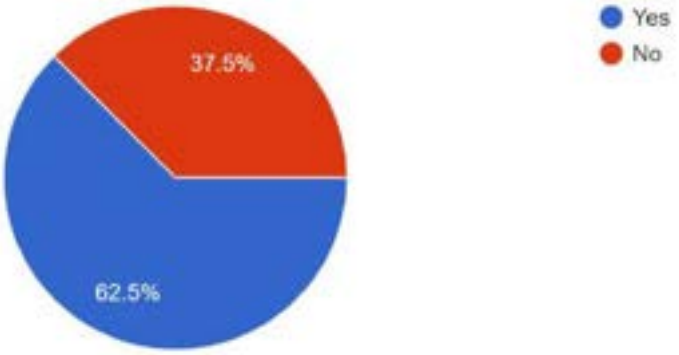
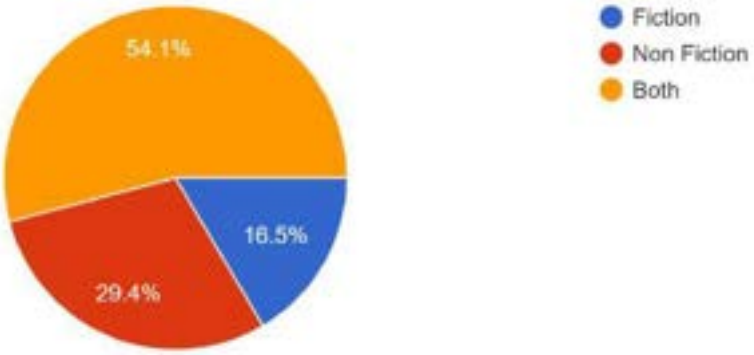
Do you read books?

136 responses



Which books do you prefer to read?

85 responses



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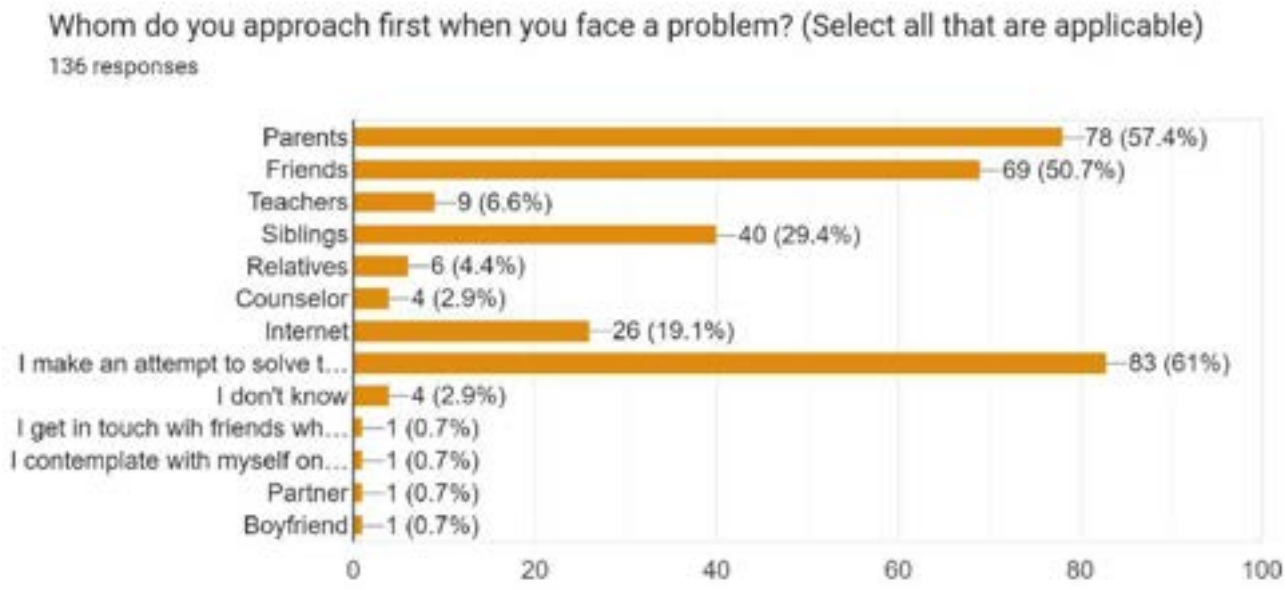

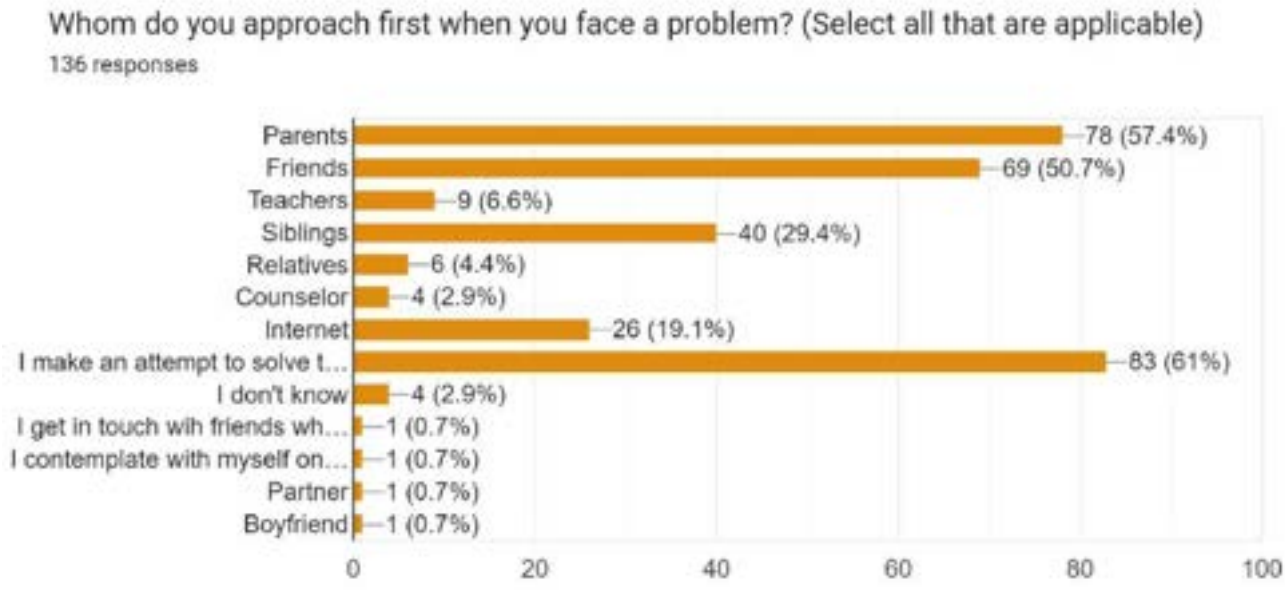

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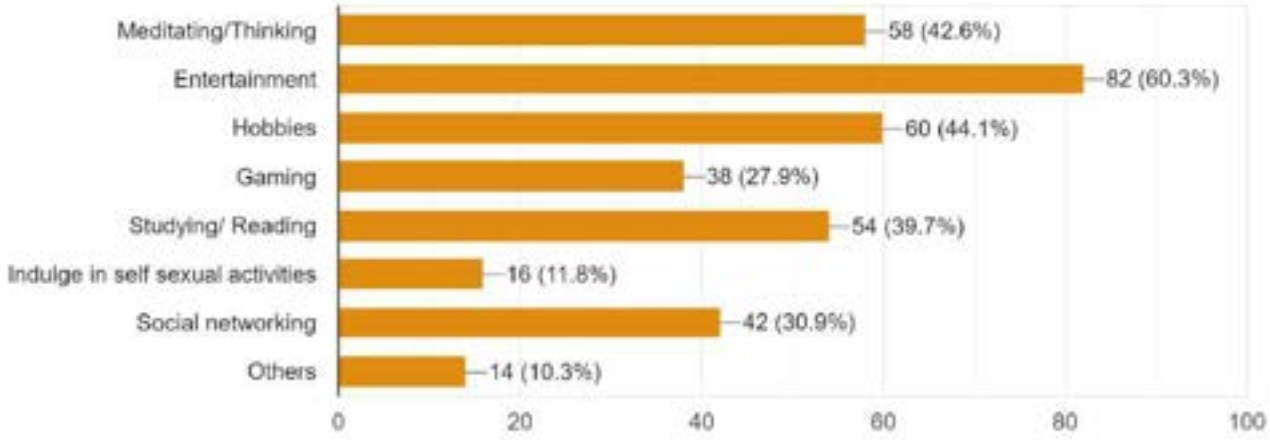
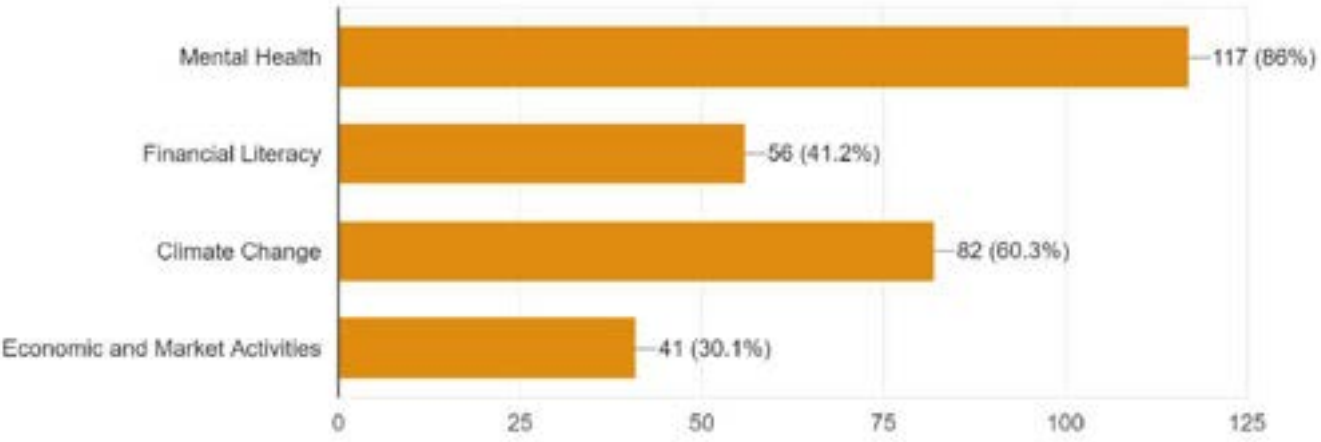
How do you spend time with yourself when you are alone? (Select as many as applicable)

136 responses



Do you have awareness/understanding of the following topics?

136 responses



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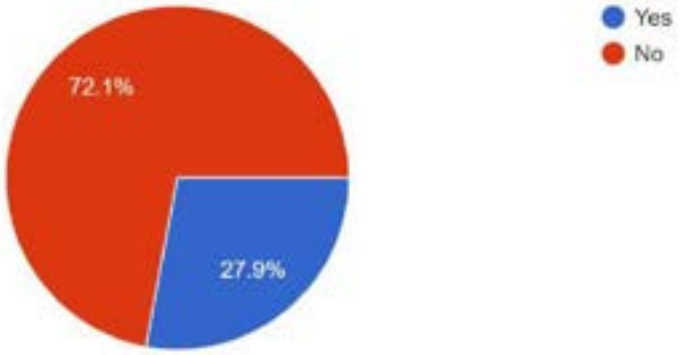
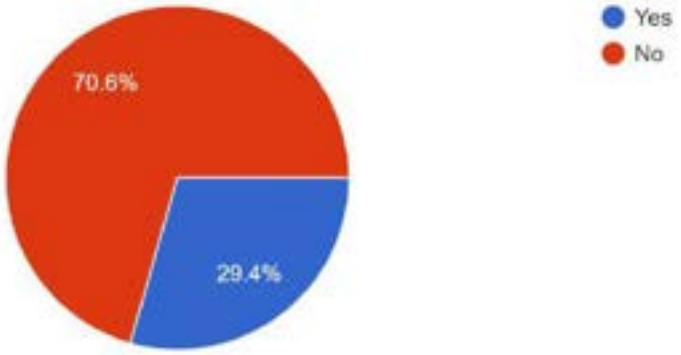
In the context of Mental Health, have you ever had suicidal thoughts?

136 responses



Have you ever taken counselling to address your mental health?

136 responses



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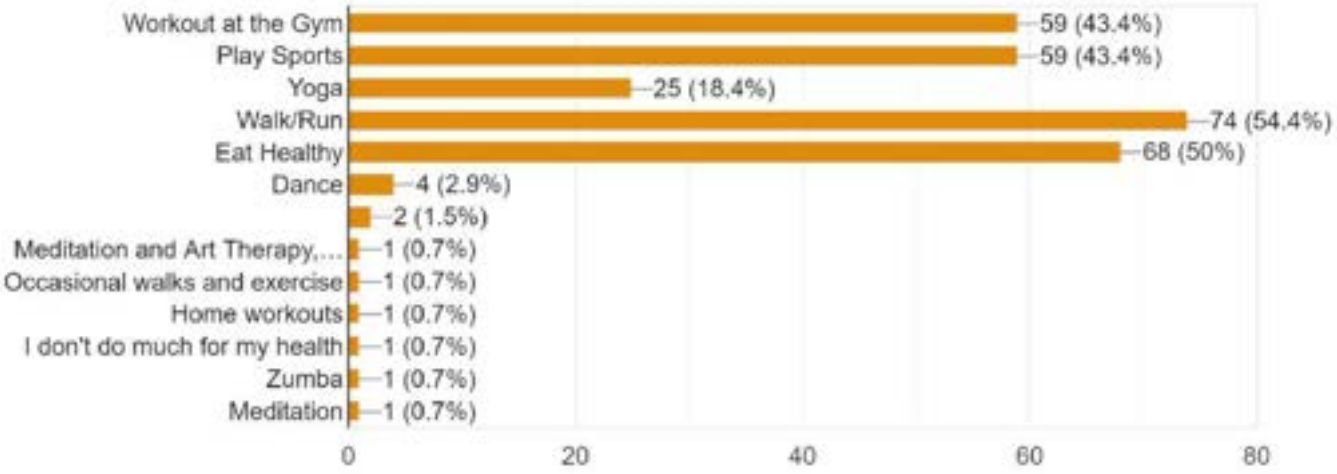
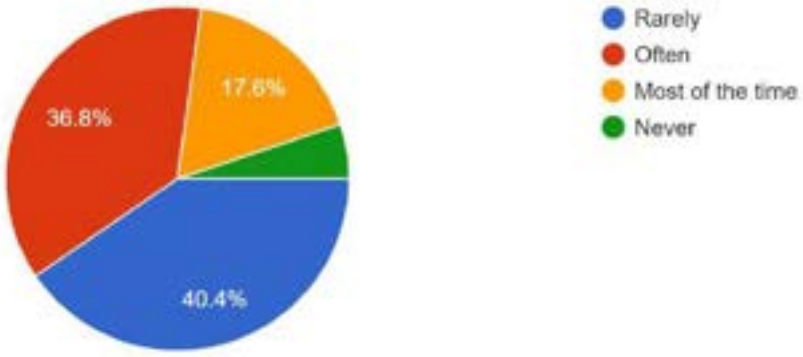
How do you maintain your health and fitness?

136 responses



How often do you feel stressed?

136 responses



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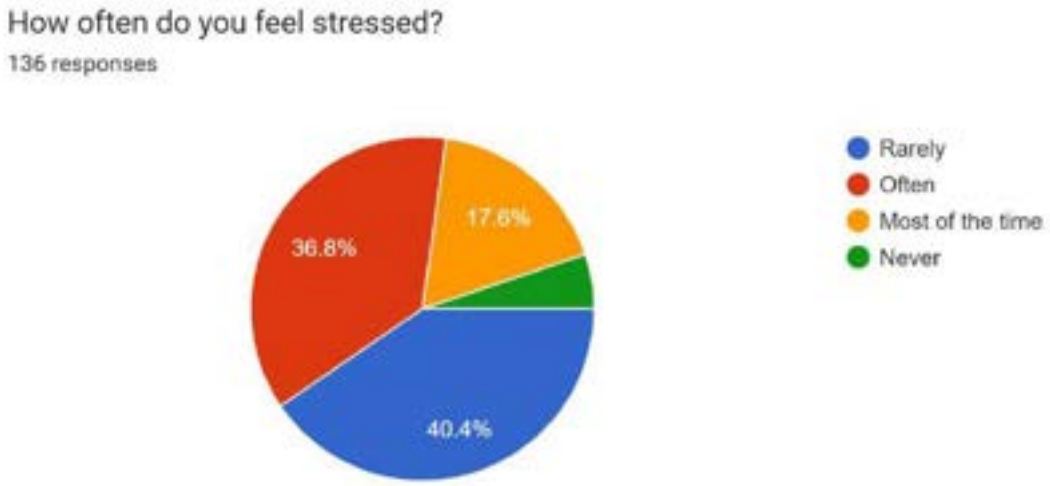

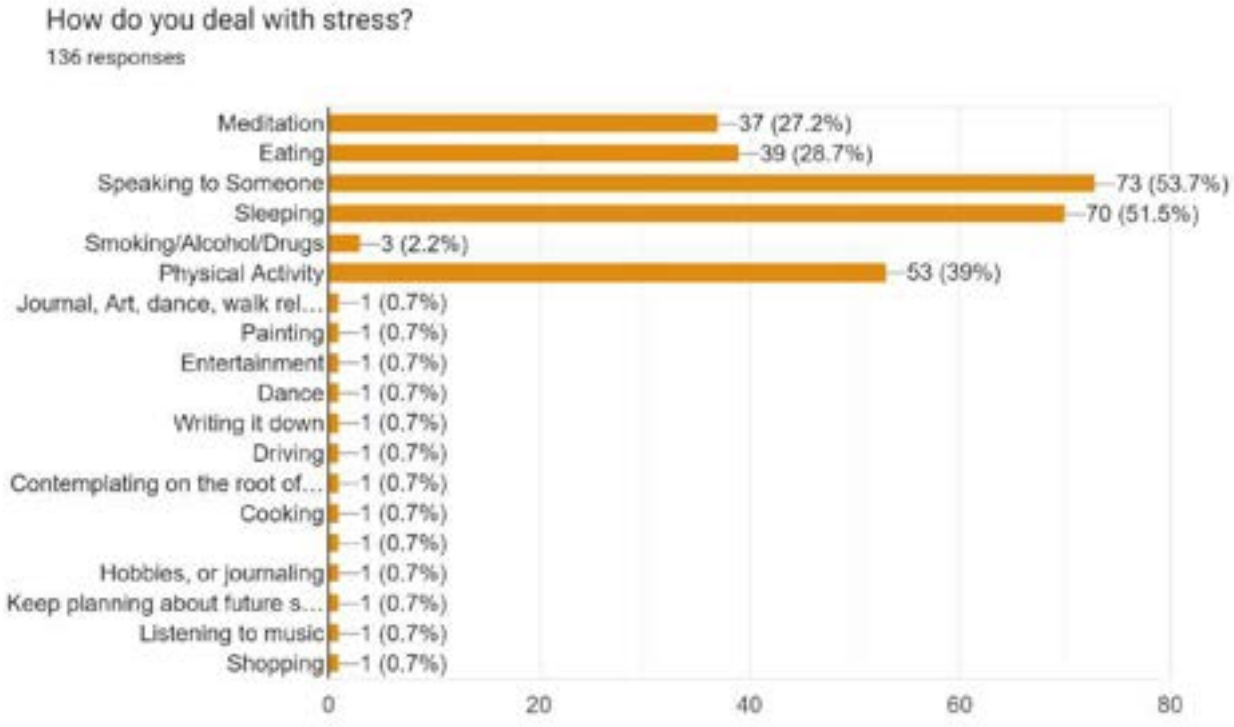

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