

THE KINDNESS REPORT

A SNAPSHOT
OF COMPASSION
IN BRITAIN

December 2019

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ACTION FOR HAPPINESS 





ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

This report is by UK charity Action for Happiness, with fieldwork provided by Ipsos MORI and with support from Dr Chris Krekel at the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics, who carried out the regression analysis.



Ipsos MORI

**“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.
If you want to be happy, practice compassion ”**

The Dalai Lama



COM- PASS- ION

Compassion literally means “suffering together”. It involves recognising the feelings and needs of another person and then being motivated to act to alleviate their suffering. In simple terms, it means caring about other people and being kind to them.¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kindness Report provides a snapshot of levels of Compassion across Great Britain in 2019. At a time when the country feels increasingly divided and polarised, it explores this essential human characteristic which is arguably the very foundation of a good society: caring about the wellbeing of others around us.

The report is based on data from a national survey of levels of Compassion in Britain and attempts to answer important questions, including:

**HAS BRITAIN
BECOME MORE OR
LESS CARING IN THE
LAST 10 YEARS?**

**DOES COMPASSION
CHANGE WITH INCOME,
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT
OR SOCIAL CLASS?**

**DO FACTORS LIKE
GENDER OR AGE AFFECT
HOW COMPASSIONATE
WE ARE?**

**DO LEVELS OF
COMPASSION VARY
WITH DIFFERENT
POLITICAL VIEWS?**

HEADLINE FINDINGS

1.

PEOPLE BELIEVE KINDNESS IS IN DECLINE

60% of people believe Britain has become less caring in the last ten years (up from 52% in 1999); only 8% of people believe Britain has become more caring during that period.

PAGE 16

2.

INCOME, CLASS, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT DON'T MATTER

There are people with similar levels of Compassion across all income levels and social classes; and Compassion doesn't vary significantly with level of education or whether someone is currently working or not working.

PAGE 20

3.

KINDNESS IS EVERYWHERE

Although there is some variation in Compassion by region, it is not significant. People in urban areas are just as compassionate as those in rural areas.

PAGE 22

4.

WOMEN TEND TO BE KINDER THAN MEN

The factor which most strongly predicts someone having high levels of Compassion is being female rather than male.

PAGE 25

5. **OUR POLITICAL VIEWS PREDICT HOW KIND WE ARE**

People who voted Remain in the EU Referendum have significantly higher levels of Compassion than people who voted Leave. People who voted Labour in the last election have higher levels of Compassion than those who voted Conservative.

PAGE 26

7. **YOUNGER PEOPLE TEND TO BE KINDER**

People aged under 35 have higher average levels of Compassion than those aged 35 and over.

PAGE 31

6. **LIVING TOGETHER PREDICTS KINDNESS**

People who live in households together with others have higher levels of Compassion than people who live by themselves.

PAGE 28

8. **BEING KIND MAKES US HAPPIER**

79% of people in Britain agree that doing kind things for others makes them feel happier; and only 5% of people disagree.

PAGE 32



COMPASSION: TOP 5 FACTORS

This research has identified 5 factors which most strongly predict high levels of Compassion (see Appendix B for full statistical regression analysis).



1. BEING FEMALE

(vs Male)



2. VOTED REMAIN IN EU REFERENDUM

(vs Leave)



3. LIVING WITH 3+ OTHER PEOPLE

(vs Living alone)



4. AGED UNDER 35

(vs Aged 35 or over)



5. VOTED LABOUR IN LAST GENERAL ELECTION

(vs Conservative)



WHY COMPASSION MATTERS

It is commonly recognised that there are two sides to human nature.² One side is self-interested; our in-built instinct to do whatever we can to survive and thrive. The other side is co-operative and leads us to help others even if there is no direct benefit for ourselves. Both are important, but the balance between them has huge implications for our wellbeing.

WE ARE WIRED TO BE COMPASSIONATE

Compassion has a biological basis, which starts with the parent-infant bond. Human offspring are born less developed and more dependent than the young of any other mammal - and mothers' brains are wired to experience positive emotions when they bond with their children.³

But our innate compassion goes beyond parent-child relationships. Helping others has been found to trigger activity in the same areas of the brain that turn on when people receive rewards or experience pleasure.⁴ People are also found to be happier when they spend money on others than on themselves.⁵ This also makes sense in evolutionary terms, as observed by Charles Darwin back in 1871, when he noted that the communities most likely to survive and flourish were "those with the most sympathetic members".⁶

COMPASSION BENEFITS EVERYONE

Unsurprisingly, receiving compassion from others brings benefits for our own health and wellbeing. For example, young men who received warmth and compassion from their caregivers were found to be significantly less likely to be diagnosed with a range of major diseases later in life.⁷

Perhaps more surprisingly, when we show compassion to others, this also brings benefits for our own health and wellbeing - provided we don't become overwhelmed with the burden of helping.⁸ Compassionate behaviour releases the hormone oxytocin⁹ which has been linked to benefits for our relationships and heart health.¹⁰ Behaving compassionately has also been found to be associated with reduced overall mortality risk.¹¹

Compassion has also been found to be contagious and to spread from person to person across social networks.¹² And even in the world of business, research shows that people who help others without expecting anything in return very often achieve outstanding results and are more successful than those who simply pursue their own success.¹³

So cultivating compassion benefits individuals, organisations and society as a whole. And a more compassionate society is likely to be one with higher overall levels of wellbeing.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

Action for Happiness partnered with global market and opinion research specialists Ipsos MORI to carry out a national survey of Compassion across the UK. The sample obtained is representative of the population with quotas on age, gender, region and working status and weighted to an offline nationally representative population.

The research involved 2,237 adults aged 16-75 in the UK and was carried out between Friday 23rd and Tuesday 27th August 2019. To measure Compassion the survey used the Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale (SCBCS), an internationally recognised and validated scale.¹⁴ Respondents are given 5 statements (see Appendix A) relating to compassionate behaviour and asked how true the statements are of their own behaviour on a scale of 1-7. The overall Compassion score is the average of these 5 responses, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of Compassion.

The survey also recorded a range of demographic factors from each respondent, including age, gender, social class, location, marital status, household size, education, employment status, income and how people voted in the 2017 General Election and in the 2016 EU referendum. To determine what predicts high levels of Compassion, regression analysis* was used to identify which factors are most statistically significant, when controlling for all other factors; and also which factors are not significant. This analysis was carried out by Dr Chris Krekel at the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics.

The research involved **2,237** adults aged **16-75** in the **UK** & was carried out in **August 2019**

In addition to measuring Compassion, the research also asked respondents to answer some other key questions relating to compassion, including whether:

- they believe that the UK has become more or less caring in the last 10 years
- they agree people are kind in their local community
- they agree people are kind in the country as a whole
- they agree that doing kind things for others makes them happier.

* Regression analysis is a statistical method to identify which variables have impact on a topic of interest. Performing a regression allows you to confidently determine which factors matter most, which factors can be ignored, and how these factors influence each other.





ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

Action for Happiness is a non-profit organisation working towards a society where people experience the highest possible levels of overall wellbeing. Its vision is a world with as many people as possible flourishing and as few as possible struggling or suffering.

Action for Happiness helps people take action to increase wellbeing, both for themselves and for others around them. This involves helping people learn the skills for living a happy, healthy and fulfilling life, based on the latest scientific research. And it also involves cultivating the pro-social side of human nature, by bringing people together to develop compassionate attitudes and to help them live in a way that contributes to the happiness of others - in their homes, workplaces, schools and local communities.

www.actionforhappiness.org

HAPPY-
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1. PEOPLE BELIEVE KINDNESS IS IN DECLINE

The majority (60%) of people believe Britain has become less caring over the past ten years. Only a very small proportion (8%) of people believe Britain has become more caring during that period and nearly a third (27%) say 'about the same'.

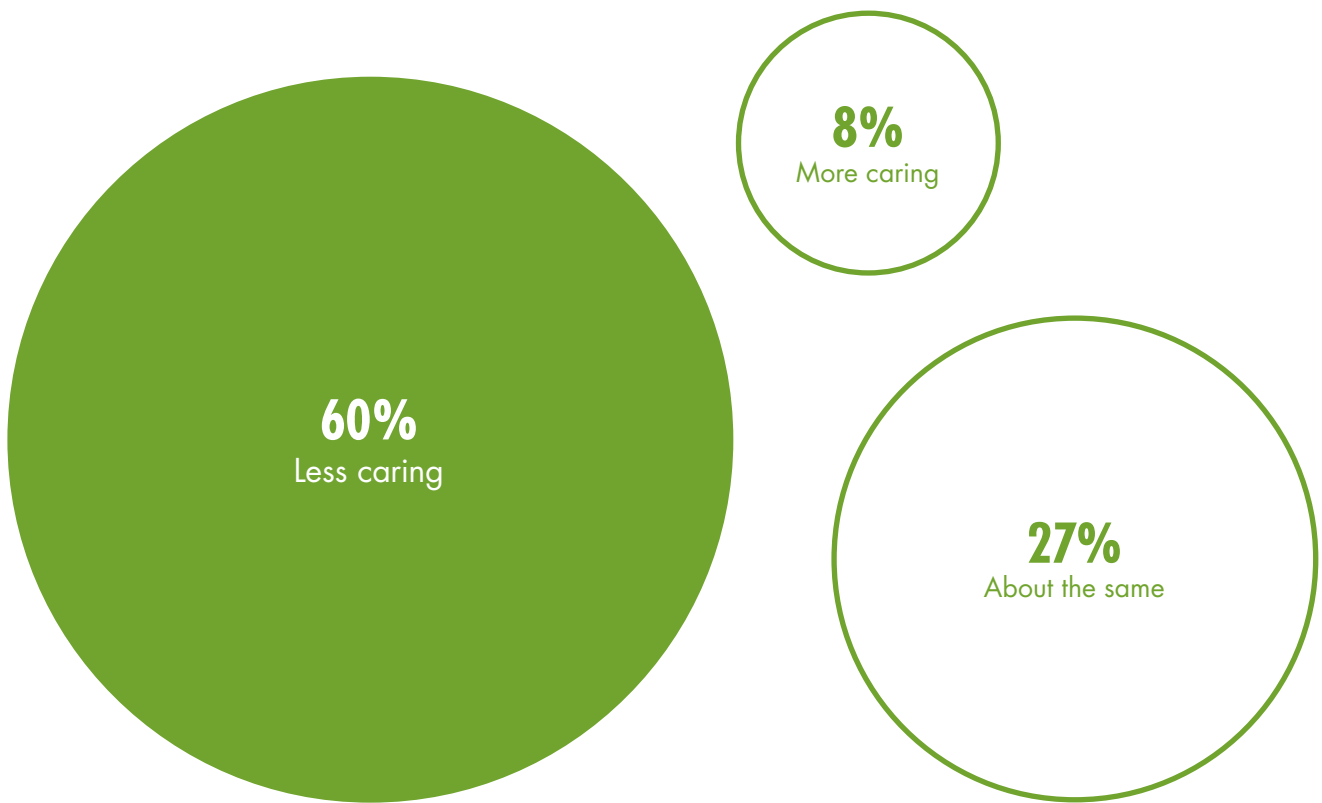
The majority (60%) of people believe Britain has become less caring over the past ten years (see Figure 1A). A similar pattern was seen when this question was asked previously by Ipsos MORI in 1999¹⁵, when 52% felt Britain had become less caring and 15% said more caring (see Figure 1B). So this may reflect a general tendency people have to perceive that things are getting worse. However, this belief has clearly become more marked compared to 20 years ago, with the proportion believing that Britain has become less caring increasing from 52% in 1999 to 60% in 2019.

The last decade has seen Conservative-led governments implementing a policy of austerity in the UK, with cuts to public services but also relatively high levels of employment. A majority of both Conservative and Labour supporters agree that Britain has become less caring over that period, with 60% of Conservative supporters in agreement with 62% of Labour supporters.

People were also asked their views on kindness in their local community and Britain as a whole. Although more people agree (44%) than disagree (25%) that people are kind in the country as a whole, this is notably different to the proportion of people who agree (49%) rather than disagree (15%) that people are kind in their local community (see Figure 2).

This discrepancy suggests people's perception of kindness in Britain may in part be driven by external influences - for example via the media and wider public debate - rather than the behaviours or attitudes they experience directly in their daily lives and communities.

FIGURE 1A: IS BRITAIN MORE OR LESS CARING?



Source: Ipsos Mori survey. Question wording: "Thinking about how life in Britain has changed over the last ten years, do you think that people are now more caring, less caring or about the same?"

FIGURE 1B: MORE OR LESS CARING OVER THE PAST TEN YEARS

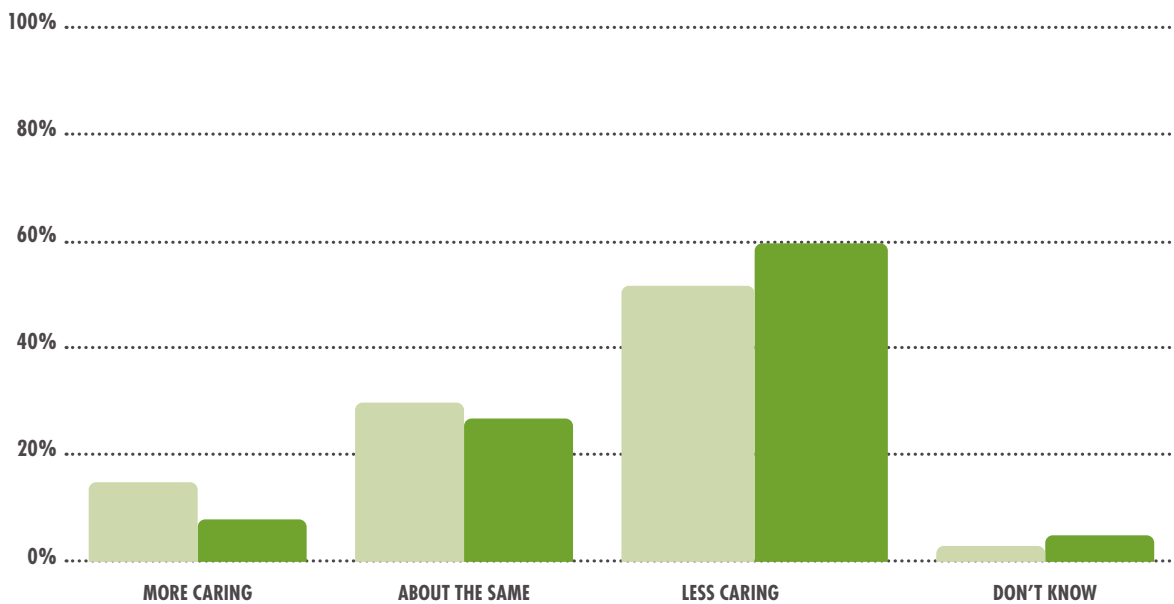
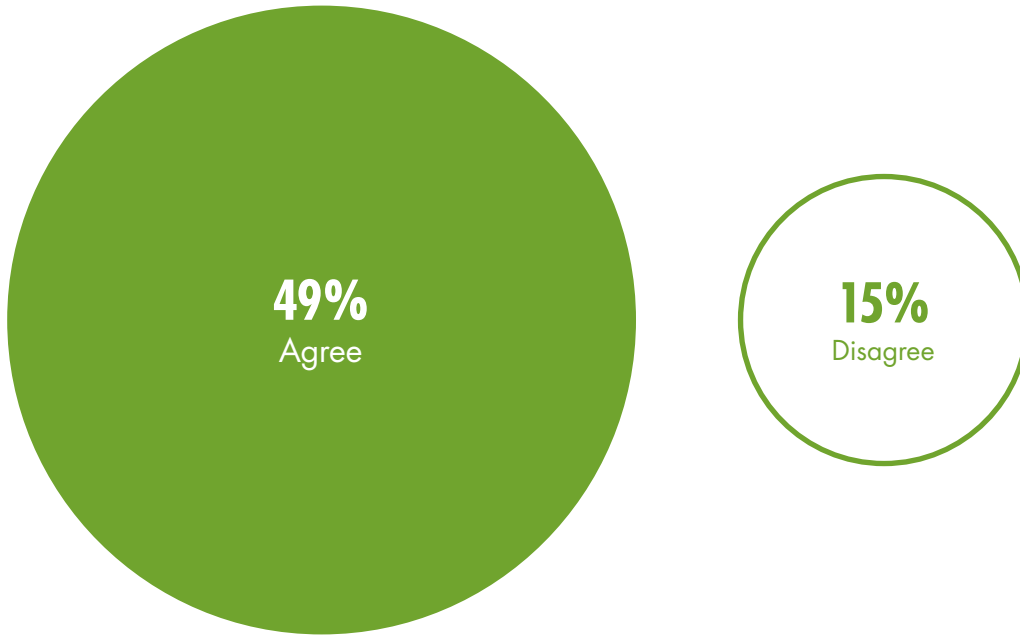


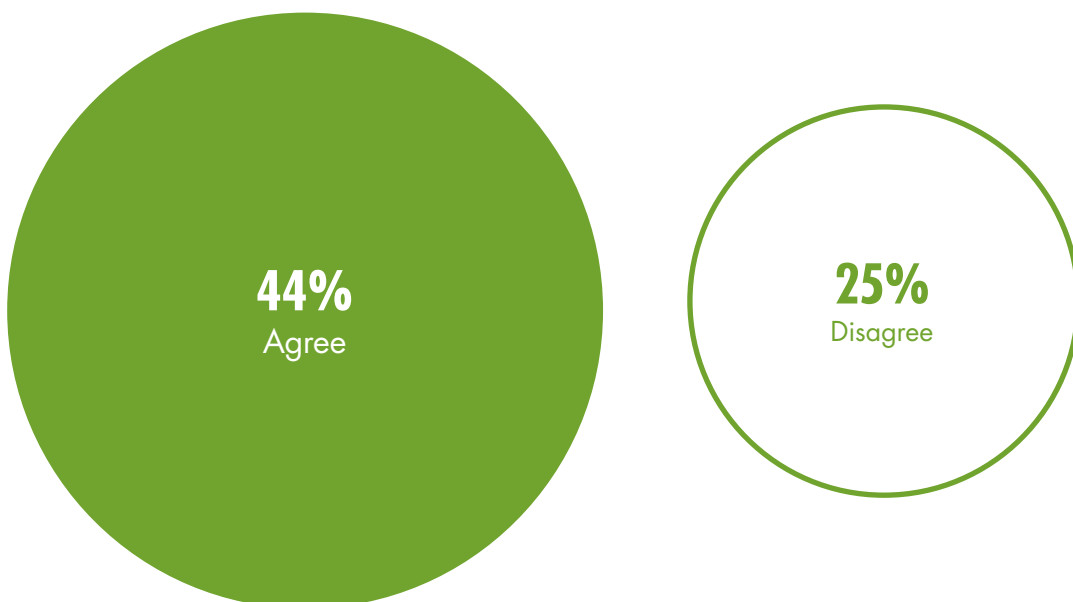
FIGURE 2: ARE PEOPLE IN BRITAIN KIND?

Source: Ipsos Mori survey. Question wording: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statements: i) People are kind in my local community; ii) People are kind in this country as a whole"

PEOPLE ARE KIND IN MY LOCAL COMMUNITY



PEOPLE ARE KIND IN THIS COUNTRY AS A WHOLE





2. INCOME, CLASS, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT DON'T MATTER

Income, class, education and employment don't matter in terms of how kind we are. There are people with similar levels of Compassion across all income levels and social classes; and Compassion doesn't vary significantly with level of education or whether someone is currently working or not working.

People often have their own assumptions and narratives about kindness and how this varies between different groups. For example, some may believe that people who earn higher incomes are more self-centred, while others may argue that those who are richer are better able to show kindness to others.

In practice our study finds that there is little variation in Compassion with either income level or social grade (see Figure 3); and regression analysis shows that these variations are not statistically significant.

Similarly, although there is some variation in Compassion with levels of education and employment status (i.e. whether people are currently working or not working), these variations are again not significant (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 3: VARIATION IN COMPASSION WITH INCOME & SOCIAL CLASS

Source: Ipsos Mori survey using Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale

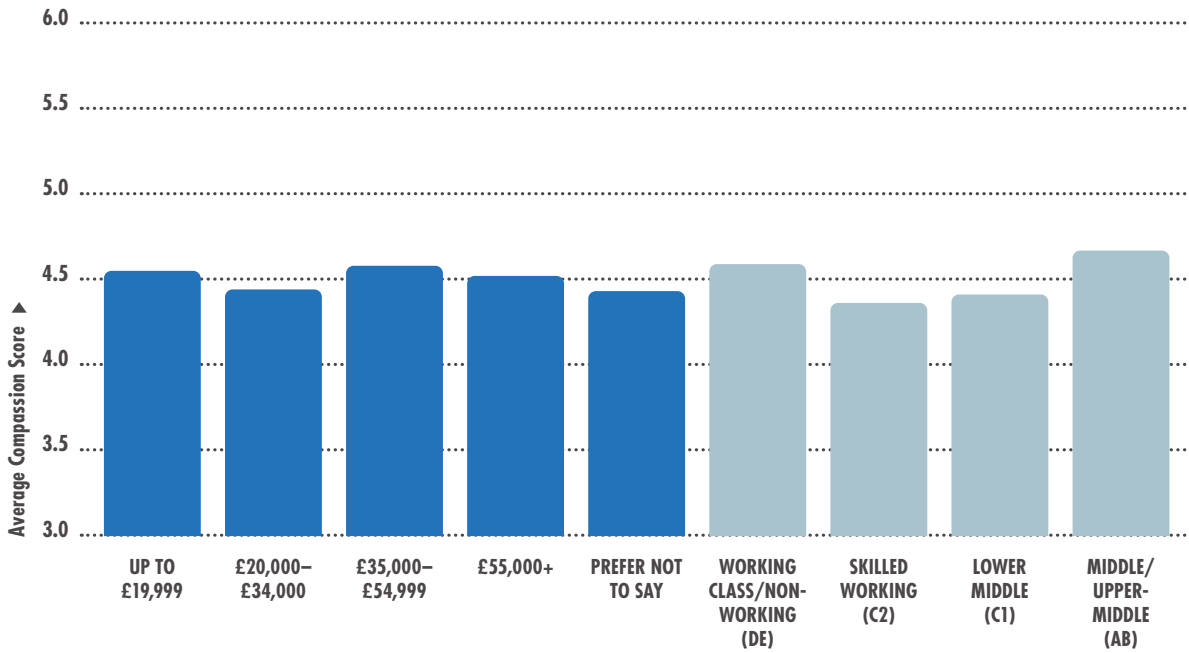
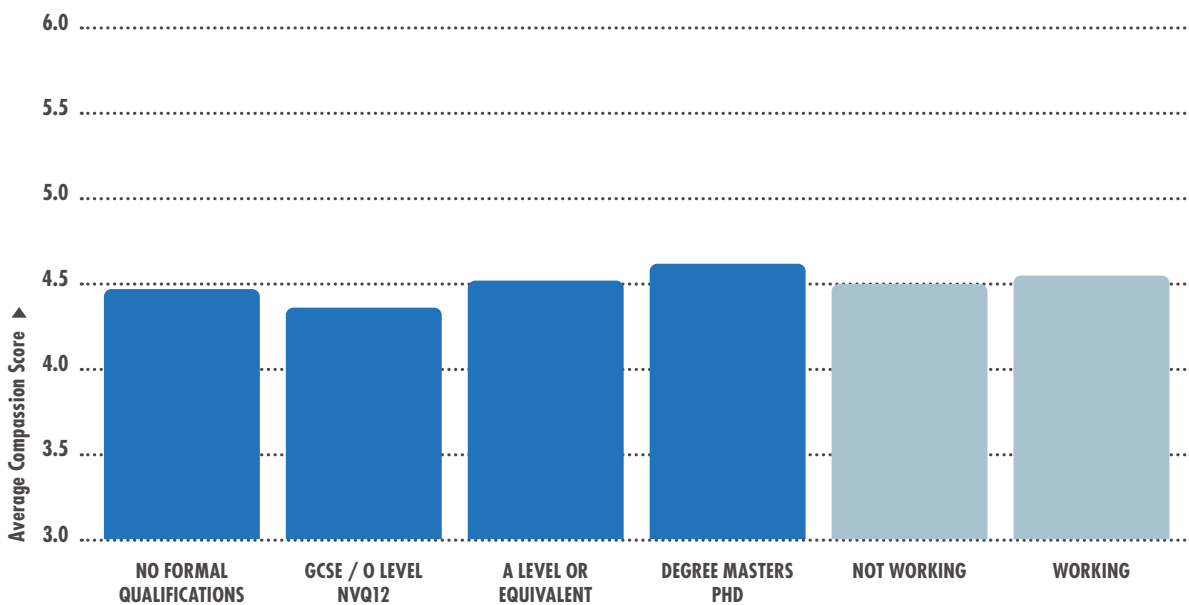


FIGURE 4: VARIATION IN COMPASSION WITH EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

Source: Ipsos Mori survey using Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale



3. KINDNESS IS EVERYWHERE

Although there is some variation in Compassion by region, it is not significant. People in urban areas are just as compassionate as those in rural areas.

There is some variation in Compassion across the different regions in Britain (see Figure 5), with the highest average scores seen in the North of England and the lowest average scores in Wales (although it should be noted the sample base for Wales was quite low compared to the other regions). The regression analysis finds that these variations are not significant once other factors are controlled for.

Similarly, when it comes to comparing people living in urban and rural locations, there is again no significant difference in average levels of Compassion (see Figure 6).



FIGURE 5: VARIATION IN COMPASSION WITH LOCATION

Source: Ipsos Mori survey using Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale

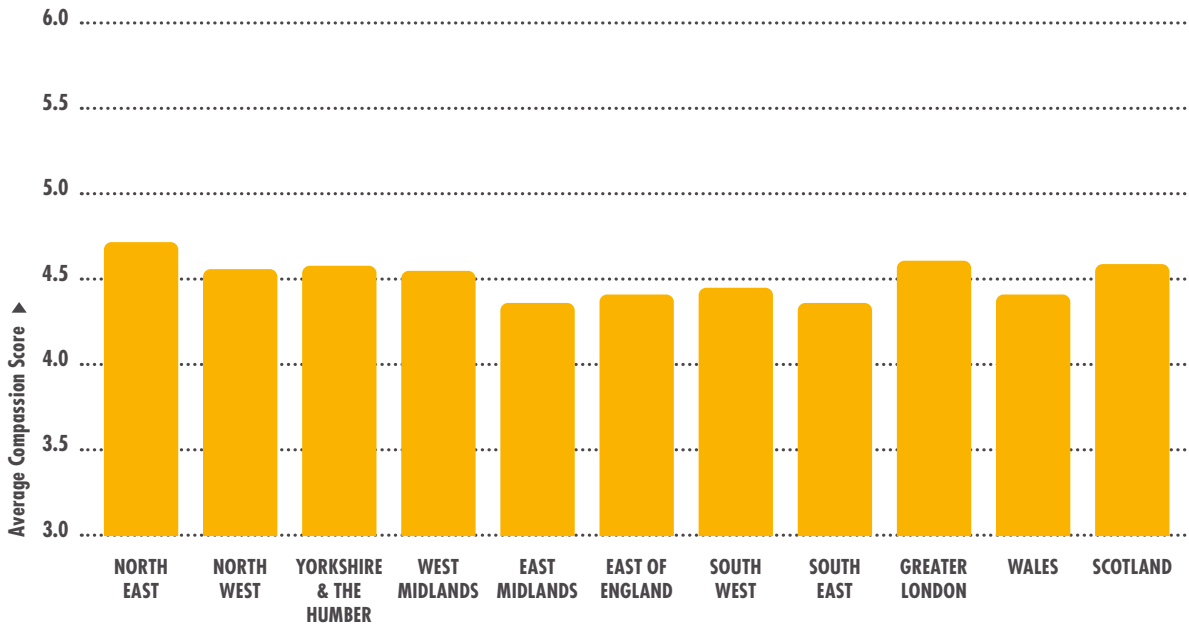
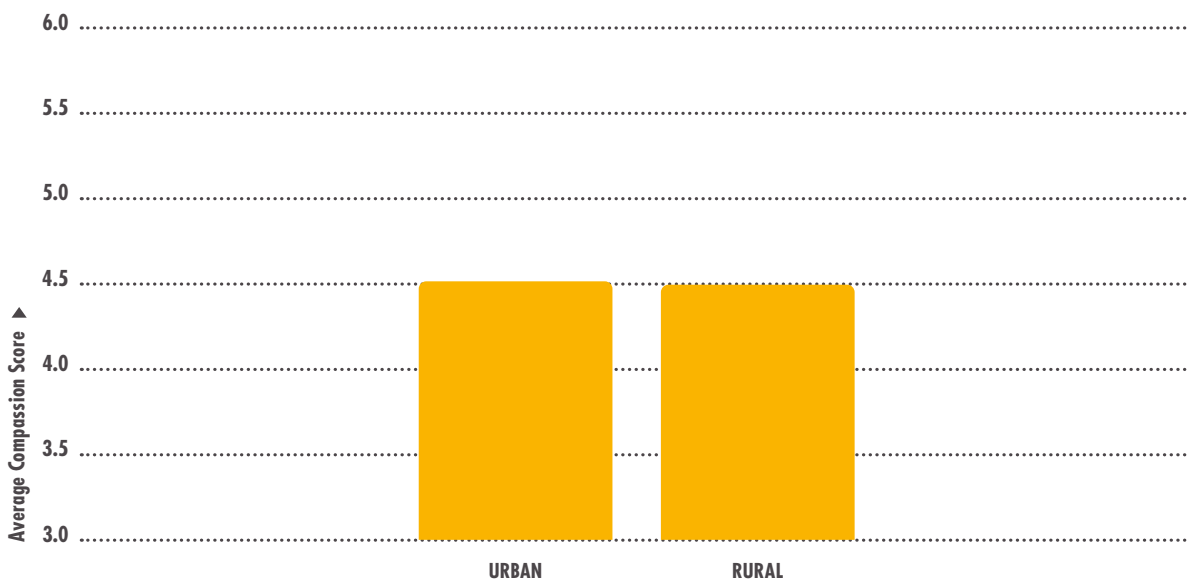


FIGURE 6: VARIATION IN COMPASSION URBAN VS RURAL

Source: Ipsos Mori survey using Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale





4. WOMEN TEND TO BE KINDER THAN MEN

The factor which most strongly predicts someone having high levels of Compassion is being female rather than male.

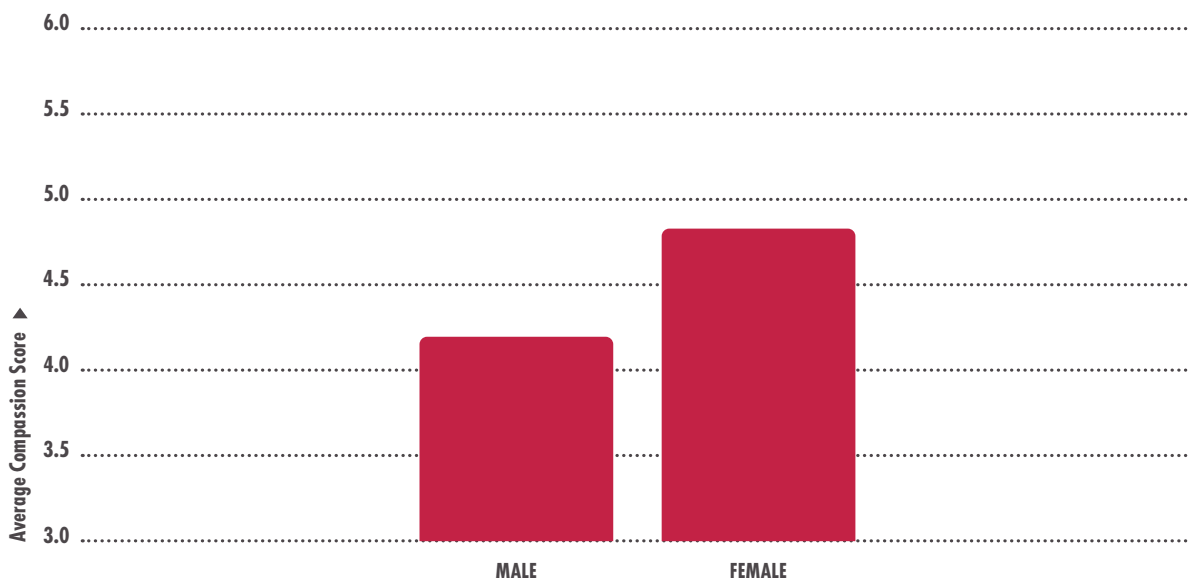
So if income, class, education and employment don't have a significant effect, then which factors do predict high levels of Compassion?

Compassion is found to vary quite noticeably between the genders (see Figure 7), with women having a much higher average level of Compassion (4.85) than men (4.21).

In the regression analysis, when controlling for all other variables, being female rather than male was found to be the factor which most strongly predicts having a higher level of Compassion. This also appears consistent with some other studies which have found, for example, that women tend to behave more altruistically than men.¹⁶

FIGURE 7: VARIATION IN COMPASSION WITH GENDER

Source: Ipsos Mori survey using Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale



5. OUR POLITICAL VIEWS PREDICT HOW KIND WE ARE

People who voted Remain in the EU Referendum have significantly higher levels of Compassion than people who voted Leave. People who voted Labour in the last election have higher levels of Compassion than those who voted Conservative.

Respondents were asked to indicate how they voted in the EU Referendum of 2016 and which party they voted for in the last UK General Election in 2017. The results show that levels of Compassion vary significantly with political views and voting patterns.

People who voted to Remain in the EU have significantly higher average levels of Compassion (4.7) than those who voted to Leave (4.3) (see Figure 8). In the regression analysis, when controlling for all other variables, voting to Remain rather than Leave was found to be the second strongest predictive factor for higher levels of Compassion.

People who voted Labour in the last UK General Election have higher average levels of Compassion (4.75) than those who voted Conservative (4.26) (see Figure 9). In the regression analysis, when controlling for all other variables, voting Labour rather than Conservative was found to be the fifth strongest predictor for higher levels of Compassion.

The fact that Labour supporters come out as more compassionate appears to align with their vision of a more collective society. Nearly half (48%) of Labour supporters agree they would rather engage in actions to help others than help themselves. In comparison, only one in three Conservative voters (34%) identified with this.

After spending over a decade battling with their reputation as 'the nasty party', a majority of Conservative supporters say they feel compassion with people, even if they don't know them (56%) and can feel a great deal of compassion for a stranger going through a difficult time (53%). However, this doesn't necessarily translate into action as just two in five (40%) Conservative supporters say helping others is one of the activities that provides the most meaning to their life, compared to three in five (58%) Labour supporters.

FIGURE 8: VARIATION IN COMPASSION WITH VOTING IN EU REFERENDUM

Source: Ipsos Mori survey using Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale

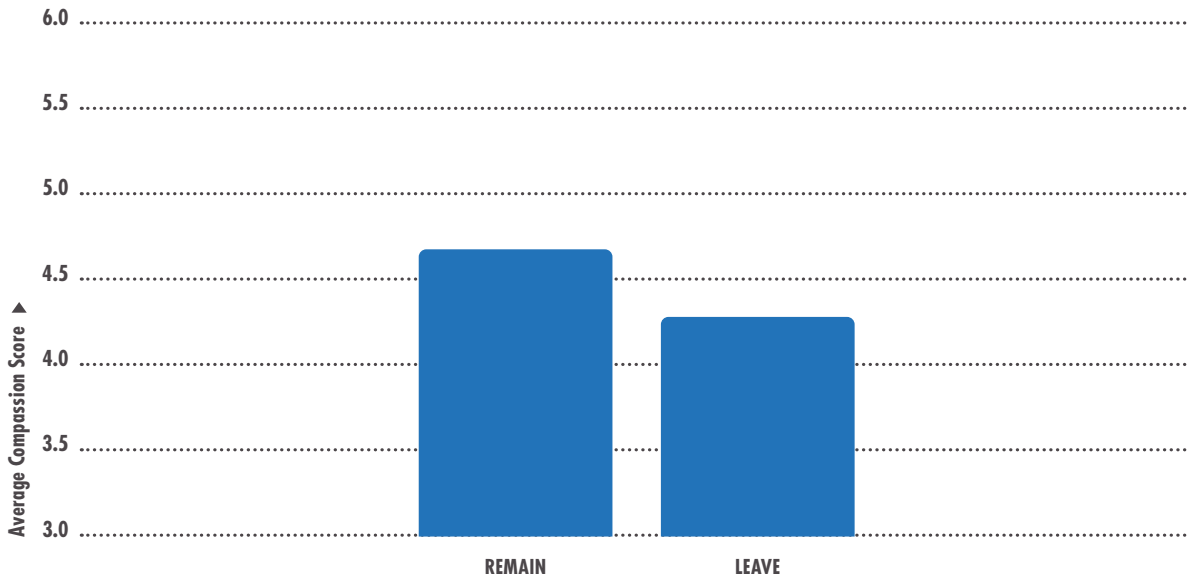
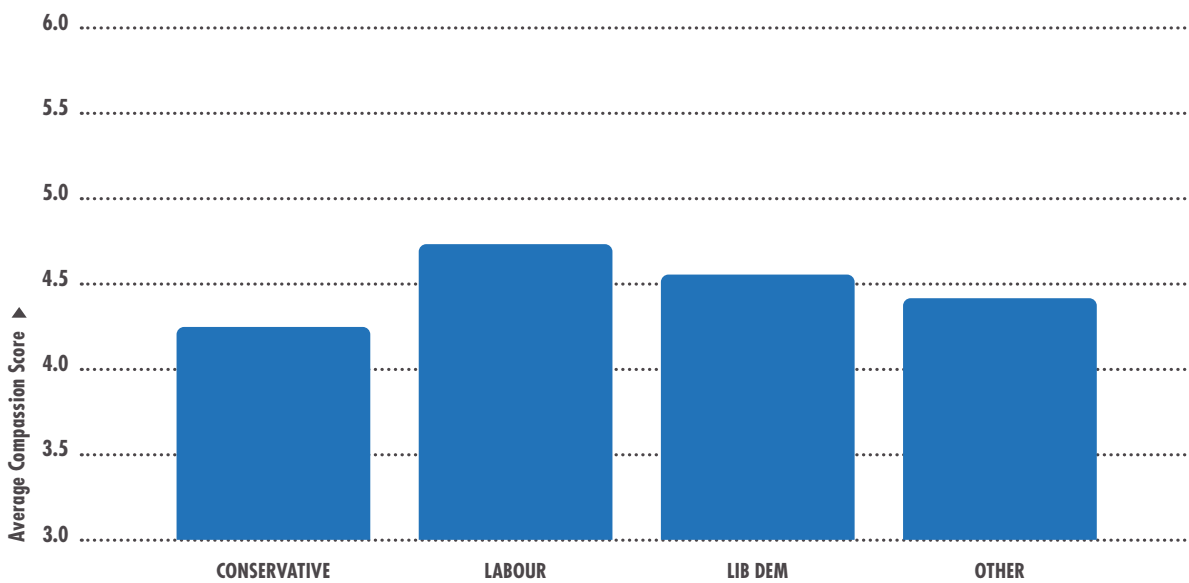


FIGURE 9: VARIATION IN COMPASSION WITH VOTING IN LAST ELECTION

Source: Ipsos Mori survey using Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale



6. LIVING TOGETHER PREDICTS KINDNESS

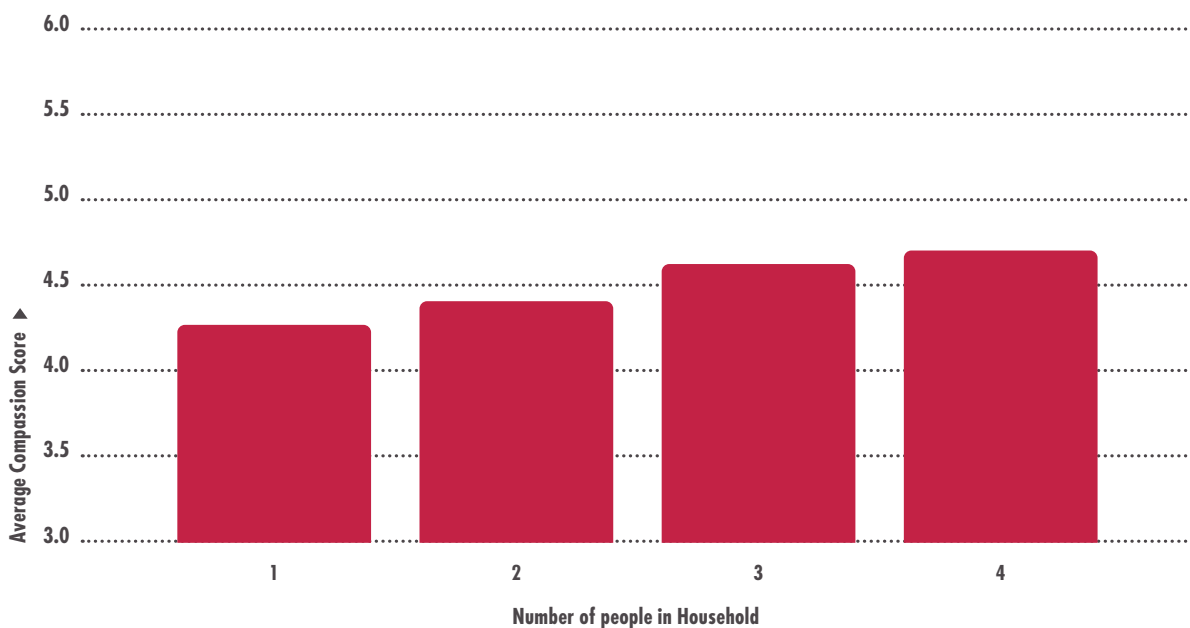
People who live in households with 3 or more other people have higher levels of Compassion than people who live by themselves.

Household size is another factor which appears to predict levels of Compassion. Those living with 3 or more other people (i.e. a household size of 4+ people in total) have higher average levels of Compassion (4.73) than people who live alone (4.29)

(See Figure 10). In the regression analysis, when controlling for all other variables, living with 3 or more other people (rather than living alone) was found to be the third strongest predictor for higher levels of Compassion.

FIGURE 10: VARIATION IN COMPASSION WITH HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Source: Ipsos Mori survey using Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale





7. YOUNGER PEOPLE TEND TO BE KINDER

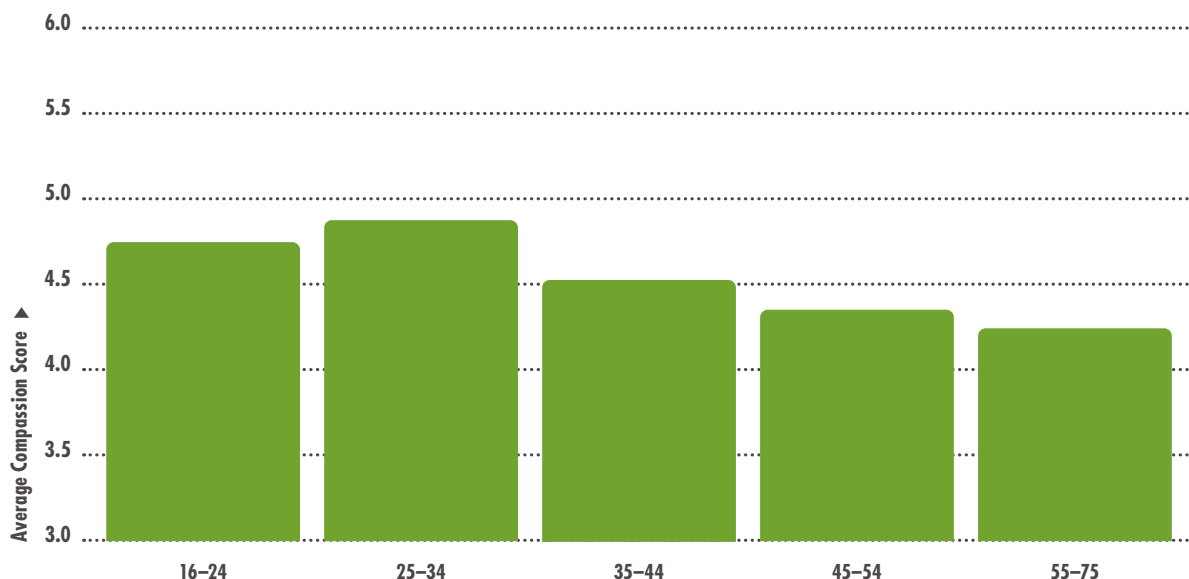
People aged under 35 have higher average levels of Compassion than those aged 35 and over.

People's age also predicts their levels of Compassion and the findings appear to challenge another common narrative - that young people are more self-centred and less socially minded. In fact the opposite appears to be true.

Those under 35 have higher average levels of Compassion (4.90 among 25-34 year olds and 4.77 among 16-24 year olds) than those aged 35+ and in particular the oldest population (4.26 among 55-75 year olds) (See Figure 11). In the regression analysis, when controlling for all other variables, being aged under 35 (rather than 35 or over) was found to be the fourth strongest predictor for higher levels of Compassion.

FIGURE 11: VARIATION IN COMPASSION WITH AGE

Source: Ipsos Mori survey using Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale





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8. BEING KIND MAKES US HAPPIER

79% of people in Britain agree that doing kind things for others makes them feel happier; and only 5% of people disagree.

Finally, the survey also asked people whether being kind to others makes them happier. The results show that this is a very commonly held feeling.

79% of people agreed with the statement “When I do kind things for others, I feel happier”, whereas only 5% disagreed with this (see Figure 12). This is also consistent with much other research showing that acts of kindness boost our own wellbeing too.¹⁷

“When I do kind things
for others, I feel happier”



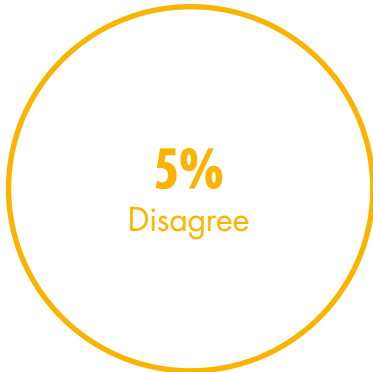
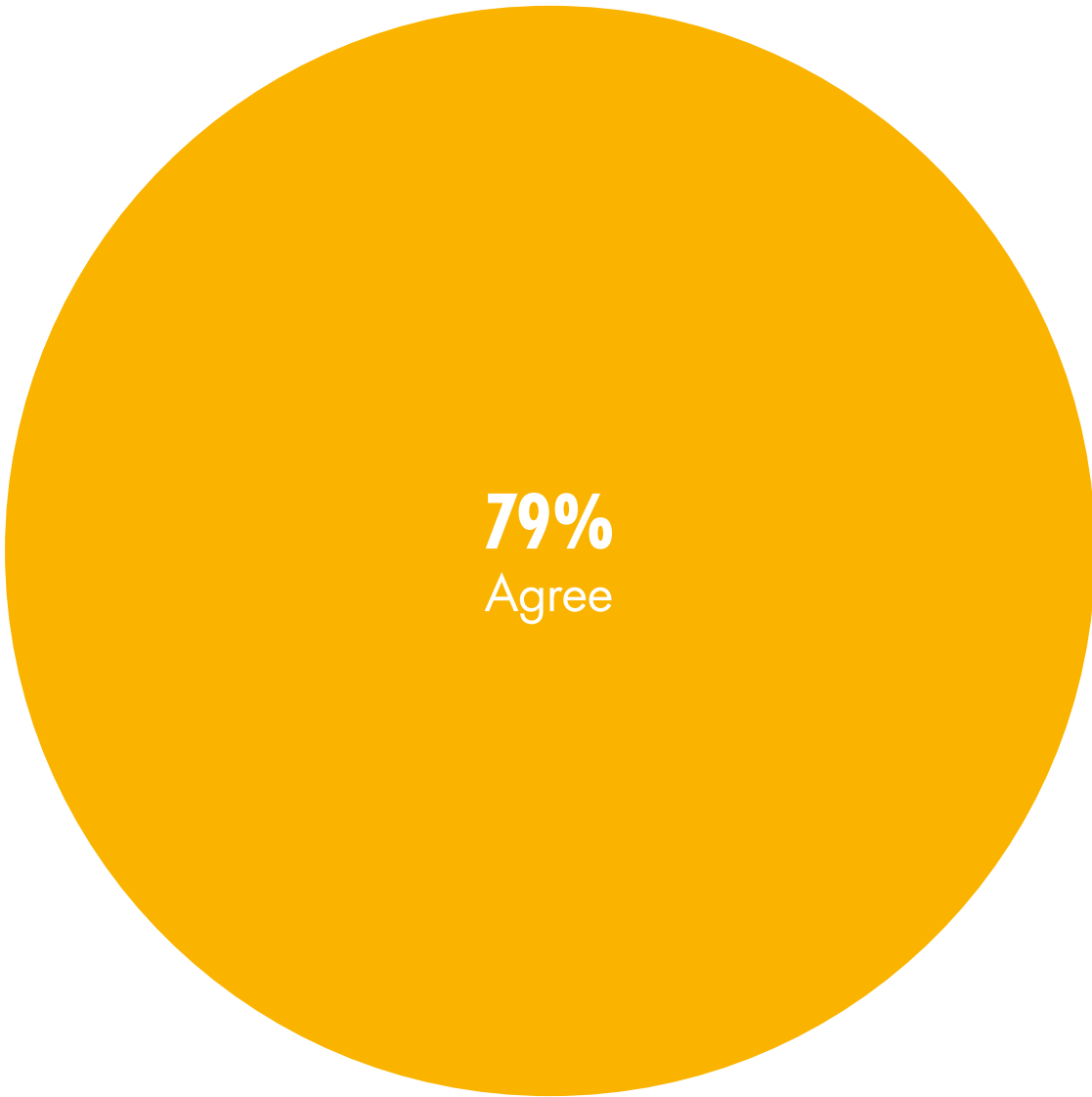


FIGURE 12 – BEING KIND MAKES US HAPPIER

Source: Ipsos Mori survey. Question wording: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: When I do kind things for others, I feel happier”



ENCOURAGING MORE KINDNESS

Action for Happiness is working to promote compassion across the UK, for example through its volunteer-led Courses and Happy Cafés in local communities:

www.actionforhappiness.org/course
www.actionforhappiness.org/happy-cafe

It also has a Kindness Calendar of daily actions people can take to spread happiness to others through daily acts of kindness:

www.actionforhappiness.org/calendars

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APPENDIX A

SANTA CLARA BRIEF COMPASSION SCALE

Respondents are asked to answer the following 5 questions honestly and quickly using a scale of 1-7 where 1 is "not at all true of me" and 7 is "very true of me"

- When I hear about someone (a stranger) going through a difficult time, I feel a great deal of compassion for him or her
- I tend to feel compassion for people, even though I do not know them
- One of the activities that provides me with the most meaning to my life is helping others in the world when they need help
- I would rather engage in actions that help others, even though they are strangers, than engage in actions that would help me
- I often have tender feelings toward people (strangers) when they seem to be in need

Reference: <http://www.midss.org/content/santa-clara-brief-compassion-scale-scbcs>

APPENDIX B

REGRESSION ANALYSIS TABLE

	Average Compassion Score (1-7)	Z-score (Partial Correlation Coefficient, β)
AGE		
>= 35	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
Age < 35	0.277**	0.102**
	(0.130)	(0.0475)
GENDER		
Male	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
Female	0.333***	0.128***
	(0.0824)	(0.0316)
MARITAL STATUS		
Married or Partnered	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
Separated, Divorced or Widowed	0.138	0.0324
	(0.183)	(0.0431)
Single	-0.0930	-0.0333
	(0.105)	(0.0376)
EDUCATION		
A-Level or Equivalent	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
GCSE/O-Level	0.0457	0.0153
	(0.122)	(0.0409)
Bachelors, Masters or PhD	0.206	0.0789
	(0.104)	(0.0399)
No Formal Qualification	0.178	0.0304
	(0.195)	(0.0333)
EMPLOYMENT		
Working	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
Not Working and Active	0.181	0.0269
	(0.279)	(0.0414)
Not Working and Inactive	0.0965	0.0342
	(0.0902)	(0.0320)

REGRESSION ANALYSIS TABLE CONTINUED

	Average Compassion Score (1-7)	Z-score (Partial Correlation Coefficient, β)
INCOME		
Up to £19,999	0.173	0.0559
	(0.113)	(0.0363)
£20,000 to £34,999	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
£35,000 to £54,999	0.0158	0.00518
	(0.107)	(0.0352)
£55,000 or More	-0.0374	-0.0107
	(0.126)	(0.0359)
Prefer Not to Say	-0.102	-0.0241
	(0.159)	(0.0377)
PEOPLE IN HOUSEHOLD		
1 Person	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
2 Persons	0.0517	0.0190
	(0.159)	(0.0586)
3 Persons	0.199	0.0611
	(0.171)	(0.0524)
4 Persons or More	0.313*	0.105*
	(0.166)	(0.0557)
CHILDREN		
No Dependent Child in Household	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
Dependent Child in Household	0.116	0.0404
	(0.107)	(0.0371)
URBAN VS RURAL		
Urban	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
Rural	0.215	0.0629
	(0.112)	(0.0329)
VOTED IN LAST ELECTION		
Conservative	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
Labour	0.247**	0.0828**
	(0.119)	(0.0397)
Lib Dems	0.263	0.0527
	(0.171)	(0.0342)
SNP	0.556*	0.0713*
	(0.299)	(0.0383)
Greens	0.423**	0.0652**
	(0.198)	(0.0306)
Other	0.201*	0.0734*
	(0.121)	(0.0443)

REGRESSION ANALYSIS TABLE CONTINUED

	Average Compassion Score (1-7)	Z-score (Partial Correlation Coefficient, β)
VOTED IN EU REFERENDUM		
Leave	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
Remain	0.303***	0.116***
	(0.106)	(0.0404)
Cannot Remember	-0.0884	-0.00760
	(0.484)	(0.0416)
Prefer Not to Say	0.579**	0.0693**
	(0.294)	(0.0352)
Did Not Vote	0.110	0.0270
	(0.154)	(0.0376)
Too Young	0.234	0.0338
	(0.173)	(0.0250)
REGION		
Greater London	Reference category	Reference category
	-	-
East Midlands	-0.404	-0.0804
	(0.164)	(0.0326)
East of England	-0.378	-0.0839
	(0.168)	(0.0374)
North East	-0.0256	-0.00390
	(0.170)	(0.0260)
North West	-0.0851	-0.0202
	(0.151)	(0.0358)
Northern Ireland	0.0695	0.00863
	(0.302)	(0.0375)
Scotland	-0.133	-0.0287
	(0.179)	(0.0385)
South East	-0.134	-0.0355
	(0.134)	(0.0356)
South West	0.0128	0.00274
	(0.172)	(0.0368)
Wales	-0.459	-0.075
	(0.216)	(0.0353)
West Midlands	-0.0148	-0.00322
	(0.151)	(0.0330)
Yorkshire and The Humber	0.128	0.0267
	(0.170)	(0.0357)
Constant		
Constant	3.765***	0.0637**
	(0.200)	(0.0317)
Observations	1,073	1,073
R-squared	0.132	0.132

Robust standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1



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