

Headline Findings: Year One of Growing up in The Market Study

In year one of the GUIM project we interviewed 61 residents across different cohorts (See table). We set out to answer the question;

How and why does community context impact attitudes, aspirations and outcomes in wellbeing, health, education and employment?

Cohort	Key Stage	School Year	Age	n=61
Children	KS2	Primary 7	10-11	11
Young People	KS3	Year 10	13-14	9
	KS4*	Year 12	15-16	8
Young Adults	Post-16*	6 th Form/FE/HE/Employment/NEET	16+	11
Parents/Families	N/A	N/A	Varies	22

A wealth of data has been generated from year one alone with many interesting elements deserving of focused attention. It is also important to establish the baseline cross sectional and intergenerational lived experience of the community. Below are some of the headline findings that will be presented in an upcoming publication. Publications focusing specifically on education and educational transitions, as well as implications for community wellbeing, are also forthcoming.

Perception of community

The vast majority of adult respondents spoke positively about their community describing it as 'close knit' and a 'good community' people also praised the availability of 'help' and 'support' from those around them if needed. Our respondents shared that feeling close to and knowing their neighbours and living close to family created a sense of safety and reflected the strong in group identification and cultural identity of people as 'Market people'. Some respondents, across the cohorts shared a sense of embarrassment or shame about being from or living in the market when interacting with outsiders. This seemed related to experiencing stigma outside the community from people who believe the area has a negative reputation, a perspective likely rooted in classism and sectarianism. For example, both adults and young people shared experiences of discrimination, in education, that they experienced due to being from The Market.

Despite this there was overwhelmingly a sense of pride at being from The Market, with many people keen to confirm they were 'born and reared' or that they had family going back several generations. Generally, respondents also felt this was a safe community, family focused and a good place to bring up children or to have grown up. However, in recent years, this perception had been disrupted by two factors. First, the increasing prevalence of drug-related issues had begun to erode the sense of safety

among the residents. Second, outsiders who were not native to the area have increasingly relocated there, altering the community dynamics.

Community Wellbeing

The main concerns about the increasing drug landscape came from adult respondents.

Addiction has just took over the place, it has got really bad around here and it's due to all the mental health..... That's where it starts, people ring up, oh I'm not feeling very well and they are getting prescribed, then they are ringing back and they are getting prescribed again and the next thing they can't do without it so they are going to buy it. I had a friend who died, she bought something and she took it. (F7)

In contrast the younger respondents, children up to the age of around 14 did not have a lot of knowledge of substance use in the community. However, from around age 16 respondents were able to recognise the prevalence of drug use. Some shared how others their age took drugs, and they were able to share how easy it was for young people to buy them. Young people were also more likely to have a pragmatic attitude to the substance use in their area expressing that 'everywhere is just the same.'

In addressing the current challenges, respondents emphasised the need for more localised services to tackle social issues such as mental health problems, addiction, and unemployment. Some expressed that existing services located outside the area were not easily accessible or were less preferable to services within the community. However, there was a contrasting view from others that any service located inside the area would not be able to be confidential. People felt that while social support in the community was helpful there was a lack of provision of formal services. Respondents shared experiences of people they knew seeking help and not being able to find an appropriate service, not having a good response from GPs or being turned away from medical or psychological services.

Adult respondents had grown up in the area and remembered a time when it felt safer. Nostalgically recalling a time when children freely played outside, and people did not feel the need to lock their doors. However, they also acknowledged the impact that the 30 years of conflict had on the area. Many of the adults shared details of the impact of the 'troubles' while very few of the young people mentioned this. Like many working-class communities in Northern Ireland, both pre and post cease fire, paramilitaries were in operation within the area. This led to a heavy policing and army presence and naturally to incidents where those two forces came into contact with residents, often violently.

I mean, there was bomb scares everywhere, you were going to school in the mornings and you were getting put out and then you were told to go back to the house, "There's a bomb scare in (redacted) Street". (F11)

The events which took place in this neighbourhood would have had an impact on a great number of people and we know this is likely to have a continued legacy intergenerationally (Downes et al, 2013; Austin, 2019).

The Community's Experience of Education

A community's collective experience of education is a complex and nuanced phenomenon mediated by environmental and place-based factors that cannot be properly understood without the integration of multiple, diverse, local voices. The purpose of the GUIM study, from an education point of view, was to contextualise and test the assumptions of existing public data and to avoid the traps that have often claimed place-based approaches for addressing education inequality in the past—failure to adequately capture the lived experiences of residents.

Existing data on the community's education outcomes, available through the NI statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), indicate that a high number of residents living in the Market area have low levels of qualification (NISRA, 2011). Data from GUIM verify that the community suffers from relatively high levels of low or no qualifications, while adding further context to the educational challenges faced by the community, drawing particular focus upon the place-based nature of (under)achievement. It is clear from our sample that there is no universal nor uniform experience of education and that the community's collective experience is an amalgam of intergenerational perceptions, sentiments, and trajectories.

We find that participants' attitudes towards education are rooted in the socio-emotional experiences of the community. Residents' perceptions and approaches to education are significantly shaped by the collective emotions and social experiences within the Market. The enduring impact of intergenerational trauma, stemming from the conflict in Northern Ireland, has had a profound influence on how residents perceive and engage with education. Dissatisfaction with personal educational experiences among the adult respondents, including experiences of stigma, has resulted in a sense of mistrust and scepticism towards institutional structures, which subsequently influences attitudes toward their children's education.

You got it in school. Even the teachers, do you know, thought because you were from the Market area, do you know? "Them Market ones," or "Them Strand ones," And I actually had a go at one of the teachers one day and says, "Listen, just because I'm from the Market doesn't mean that I don't have the same qualities or whatever is Jessie over there from the Long Road," I says to her. "Don't be looking down your nose at me because a lot of good people came from my area and worked very hard". F13

Parents, predominantly mothers, lacked qualifications beyond GCSE or NVQ, and a lack of confidence hindered their interest in further study. Residents, both children and families, often used a language of deficit and exhibited negative patterns of thinking when discussing education. This included filtering, polarisation, overgeneralisation, and externalising/blaming, indicative of deep-seated attitudes that could impact their engagement with formal education. Parents expressed concerns about their children's future, aspiring for them to achieve their full potential and lead happy lives, emphasising the pivotal role of their own educational experiences in shaping these expectations.

Understanding the intricate interplay between intergenerational trauma and educational attitudes is crucial for developing nuanced interventions. Interventions should aim to foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment within communities like the Market, recognising the need to address historical trauma to facilitate positive change. In summary, this finding highlights the deep interconnection between socio-emotional experiences, historical trauma, and attitudes toward education in the Market community. Recognising and addressing these complex dynamics is essential for shaping interventions that resonate with the unique needs and challenges of the community, paving the way for a more inclusive and supportive educational landscape.

The broad perception of education appears to be that pathways are linear, fixed, and determined by academic ability. This perception, deeply embedded in the community, presents significant challenges for residents, echoing broader issues faced by working-class communities like the Market. Residents grapple with a narrow definition of success where academic achievement takes precedence over diverse talents and skills. This bias creates barriers, hindering residents from accessing opportunities that fail to recognise and reward their unique abilities and interests. The perceived rigidity of educational pathways constrains residents from exploring alternative routes to success.

A noteworthy gender difference emerged, with boys' primary aspiration being professional footballers with the concessionary option of training in a trade, while girls exhibited more pragmatic aspirations from the outset, often centred around careers associated with hair and beauty. Participants widely acknowledged the significance of qualifications as a form of currency essential for career aspirations and social mobility. However, despite evidence of aspiration, these aspirations often align neatly with existing, narrow pathways, potentially perpetuating educational inequality.

While residents spoke of 'choice' and opportunities within the community, barriers, such as inadequate information about options and timing, hindered them from making the most of available opportunities. Positive cases emerged where residents challenged the linearity of traditional pathways, with some recognising that attainment extends beyond the post-primary school period. However, such cases were outliers, suggesting a need for more alternative pathways through education and into employment.

Well, at first when I left school I was looking to go to the Uni but then I looked at the finances and stuff and that's what put me off but then I found out the tech like they help you and stuff and that and they don't really... you don't be in debt if you get me. YA4

Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion was identified with our community partners as the challenge area for year one of GUiM. At the time, the Market residents were in the midst of a Covid-19 lockdown as part of the pandemic response, which had underscored how various forms of inequality are exacerbated by digital exclusion. There was widespread agreement among all our respondents on the need for children to have access not just to a device, but to have an appropriate device for each child. This was particularly obvious for families that had children of different ages and at different educational stages (e.g. primary school and post primary).

Is essential... yeah. It's not a luxury no more. They need to have it if they're going to be able to keep up with the workload... yes, it is an essential. Five, ten years ago? No. But definitely now... and I don't know... teachers assume that children have access to them because they just...sent out online work... well [the Primary School] actually did say "does anyone need a device?" but [the Post-Primary School] didn't, so I don't know whether they just assumed...F1

The increased use of digital technology has been at a steady increase and the impact of the COVID pandemic only accelerated this. This includes the method by which parents communicate with their children's school.

It's not actually that difficult [for the children], but it's difficult for parents. If I want to ask something I have to go through the app, I can't go to the school to ask them like before. ... I prefer to go and walk and ask the teacher directly but they said everything is on the app now and I have to text and ask them. F19

Summary

We set out to discover how community context impacts attitudes, aspirations and outcomes in wellbeing, health, education and employment. Findings point to ways in which community identity and social relationships shape access to services, education and wellbeing. Respondents also highlighted a persistent pattern of challenges that reverberated both across generations and within families. Several parents shared their personal experiences of growing up amidst the turmoil of the

troubles, underscoring a shared history of trauma and loss within the community. Throughout QCAP's engagement with the community it has become increasingly clear that this is a traumatised population, as are many communities in Northern Ireland. In trying to address the need for social change, trauma and the intergenerational transmission of trauma is recognised to be one of the complex myriad of challenges faced. This legacy of adversity was further compounded by the disruptive influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, still very much ongoing as the project began, which not only disrupted the educational journeys of many children and young people but also deepened the existing sense of hardship. Moreover, in the aftermath of the pandemic, the escalating cost of living crisis added another layer of strain, significantly impacting the lives of community members.

In moving forward, part of QCAP's future work should focus on offering alternative educational pathways to residents, illustrating that pathways can be cyclical, flexible, and non-deterministic. By challenging and reforming the perception of education as a linear and fixed journey based solely on academic ability, we can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive, empowering, and equitable educational environment for all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic background.