

Girls and aspirations

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This year marks the 75th anniversary of Pippi Longstocking, a character who inspired generations of young women to defy expectation. In celebration of this, alongside what would have been author Astrid Lindgren's birthday on 14 November, we are reflecting on some of our key findings about young girls' and women's aspirations.

Reading encourages half of children (50.2%) to dream about the future¹. More girls (55.9%) than boys (43.5%) say that reading encourages them to dream about the future. More girls (68.2%) than boys (58.7%) also said that reading helps them to understand the views of other people.

Our research² has also shown that more girls than boys list doing something good for the world (50.3% vs. 39.6%) and helping people (58.3% vs. 40.5%) as their aspirations, while more boys than girls say that wanting to earn money (73.6% vs. 68.4%) and doing what they are good at (53.5% vs. 46.8%) are their main aspirations.

Yet, more girls than boys believe that there are barriers for achieving their aspirations. For example, more girls than boys perceive other people's negative attitudes (46.0% vs. 36.0%), a lack of opportunities to gain experiences they need (31.7% vs. 27.3%), peer pressure (28.5% vs. 23.8%), mental wellbeing (24.3% vs. 16.8%) and their gender (12.4% vs. 6.4%) as barriers. Confidence in particular emerges as a barrier for girls, with half (55.5%) of the girls see confidence as a barrier for their aspirations compared with 2 in 5 (41.7%) boys.

This research suggests that stories and reading could help give girls the confidence they need to achieve their goals. With almost twice as many girls as boys seeing their gender as a barrier to accomplishment, and more girls than boys feeling limited by other people's attitudes, there has never been a more important time for characters like Pippi to help inspire the next generation.

¹ Based on 4,141 children and young people aged 8 to 18 in the UK took part in our survey during lockdown between May and early June 2020.

² Based on data from a survey of 2,317 young people aged 11 to 18 in the UK conducted in autumn 2019.