

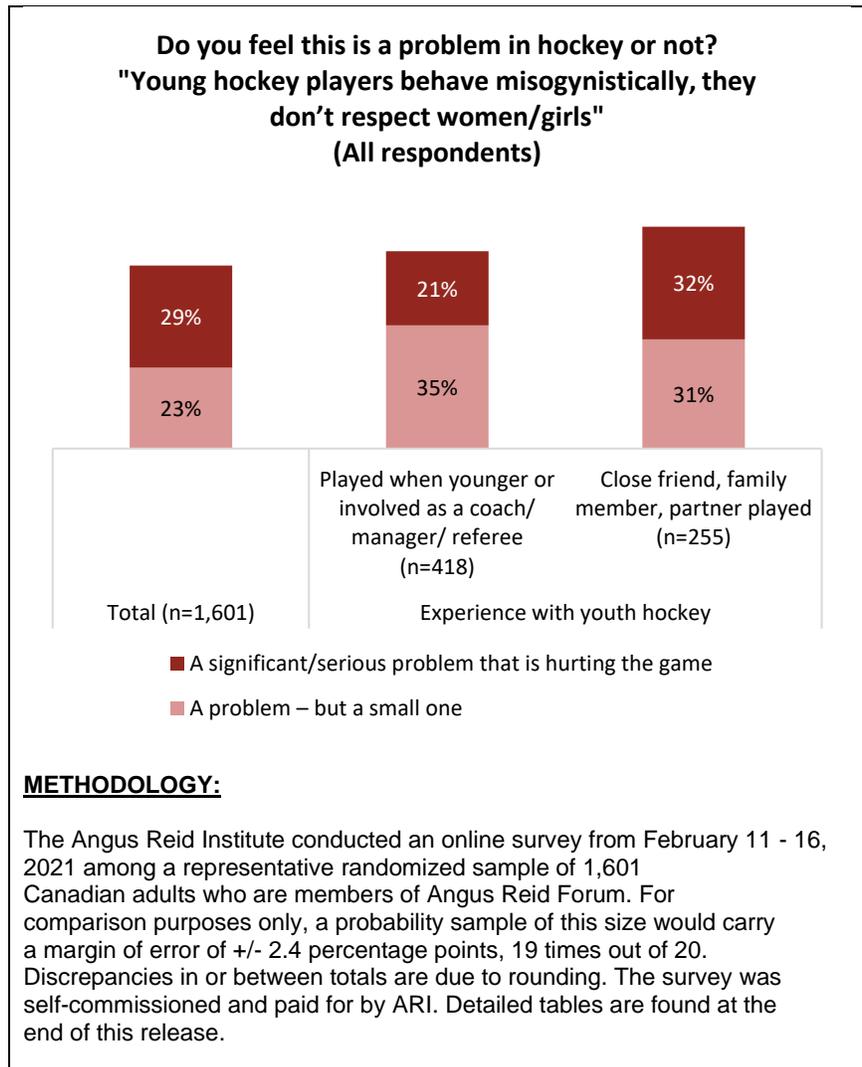
Game Misconduct: Canadians may love their hockey, but they also see serious problems with its culture

Half of those who played say misogyny, racism, inclusion and bullying are problems

May 5, 2021 – Outdoor shinny on a winter afternoon, early mornings with cold coffee at the community rink and pick-up games in the neighbourhood cul-de-sac. Few things are as prominently Canadian as hockey.

In addition to the important place it holds in Canadian society, however, a new public opinion survey also finds a majority of those closest to the game – be they players, coaches or friends and family members of participants – say hockey at the amateur and recreational level has culture problems.

Against the backdrop of [news that Vancouver Canucks forward Jake Virtanen](#) has been placed on leave following allegations of sexual misconduct, recent data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute reveals more than half of those who have played or coached youth hockey (56%) say they perceive the treatment of women and girls by young male hockey players as misogynistic or disrespectful.



This sentiment increases to 63 per cent among those who did not play but identify as having spent time around the game cheering on a close friend, family member, or partner.

Meantime, efforts by the NHL and grassroots organizations to encourage diversity and promote the role of [Black](#) and [Indigenous](#) athletes in the game are seen as necessary by Canadians, half of whom say that hockey also has a problem with racism. Notably, the percentage saying there is a problem within the hockey community rises to 58 per cent among those who identify as a visible minority - nine points higher than Caucasian respondents (49%) and to that same level among those who have personal proximity to community hockey.

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More Key Findings:

- 62 per cent of Canadians have at least one connection to youth hockey, be it playing themselves, someone close to them playing, or watching the game at the community level as a supporter.
- Nine-in-ten (93%) Canadians say hockey provides a sense of identity and community in this country, while 87 per cent say it teaches good qualities such as hard work and dedication.
- However, two-thirds of Canadians (64%) who coached or played youth hockey say the game culture has a problem with players bullying kids outside of the rink.
- While the NHL has stated that [Hockey is for Everyone](#), 88 per cent of Canadians say that organized hockey is too expensive for lower-income people to play.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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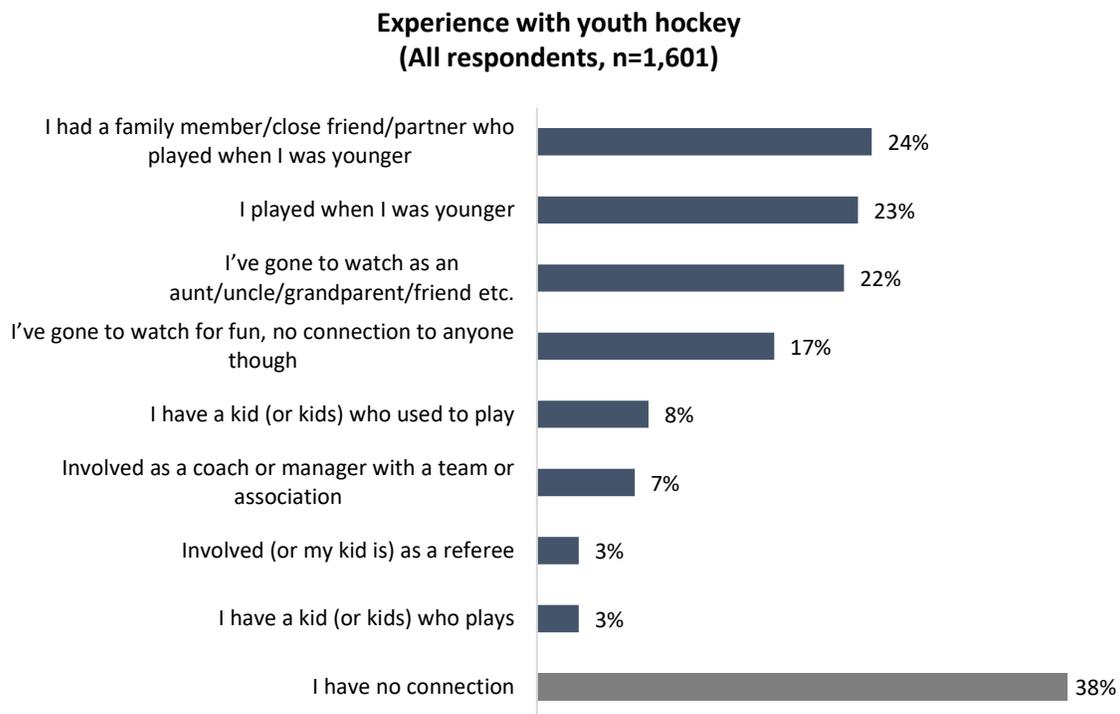
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Part One: The Good of the game

Little unifies Canadians the way hockey does. Ask many who were alive at the time and there’s a good chance they can tell you where they were for Sidney Crosby’s [Golden Goal](#) or Paul Henderson’s [Summit Series clincher](#). In previous polling, [78 per cent of Canadians](#) told the Angus Reid Institute that hockey was an important part of the nation’s culture.

Widespread involvement in hockey

In order to establish the breadth of exposure to youth hockey, the Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians what their experience has been. One-in-four say they played when they were younger (23%) while the same number did not play but someone close to them did (24%). Even if they didn’t participate, many attend or attended games to support friends and family (or just for fun). Overall, 62 per cent of Canadians are or have been engaged with youth hockey at some point:



Men are much more likely to have played the game in an organized form, though participation among women appears to be rising generation over generation. Respondents over 54 years of age are more likely to have been involved in the game through their children. One-in-five across all age and gender demographics have gone to support a friend or family member:

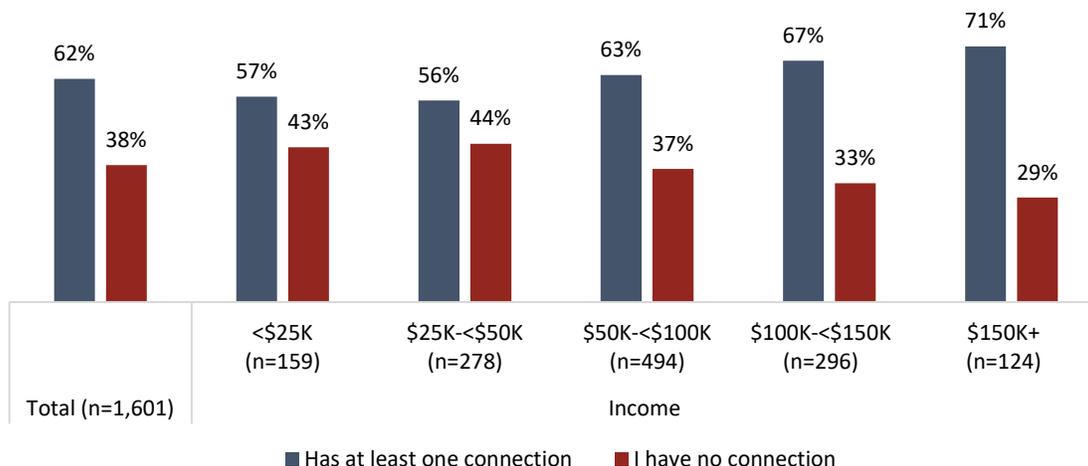
Experience with youth hockey (All respondents)							
	Total (n=1,601)	Age and Gender					
		Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=217)	35-54 (n=266)	55+ (n=286)	18-34 (n=235)	35-54 (n=288)	55+ (n=309)
I had a family member/ close friend/partner who played when I was younger	24%	31%	21%	19%	33%	22%	19%
I played when I was younger	23%	34%	45%	44%	11%	7%	4%
I've gone to watch as an aunt/uncle/grandparent/ friend etc.	22%	23%	24%	21%	24%	20%	22%
I've gone to watch for fun, no connection to anyone though	17%	20%	21%	18%	19%	14%	13%
I have a kid (or kids) who used to play	8%	1%	7%	15%	1%	7%	14%
Involved as a coach or manager with a team or association	7%	9%	9%	14%	2%	3%	4%
Involved (or my kid is) as a referee	3%	6%	3%	6%	1%	1%	1%
I have a kid (or kids) who plays	3%	2%	4%	3%	1%	6%	2%
I have no connection	38%	33%	28%	30%	36%	47%	49%

The highest levels of engagement are found among higher income households, though across the spectrum of household income at least half of respondents report some level of proximity to the game. This underscores just how interwoven hockey is into the fabric of Canadian society:

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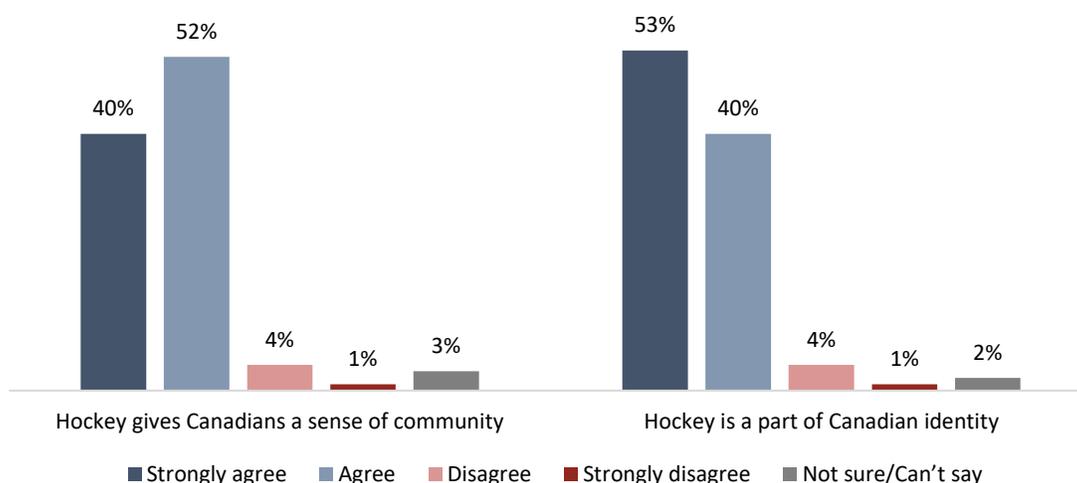
**Experience with youth hockey - By household income
(All respondents)**



Identity and Community

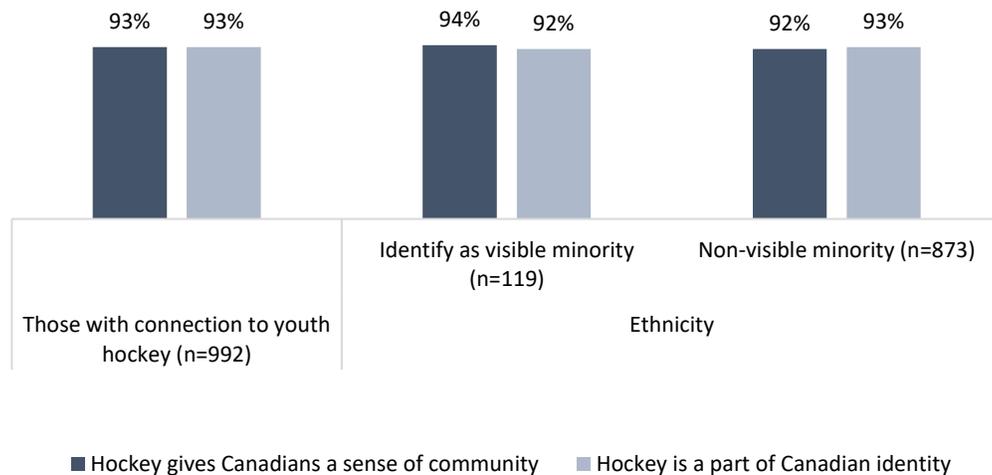
There is little question that hockey is a source of pride for Canadians. Among those that have a connection to youth hockey (the aforementioned 62% of the population) an equal number, just over nine-in-ten, say that the sport both gives them a sense of community and that they believe it is a large part of the identity of people in this country:

**Agree vs Disagree for each statement.
Those with connection to youth hockey (n=992)**



Despite some of the discussions of hockey's need to expand its inclusivity, which will be examined in Part Two of this report, those who identify as a visible minority in Canada are equally likely to agree with both statements:

Agreement with each statement among those with connection to youth hockey (62% of Canadians)

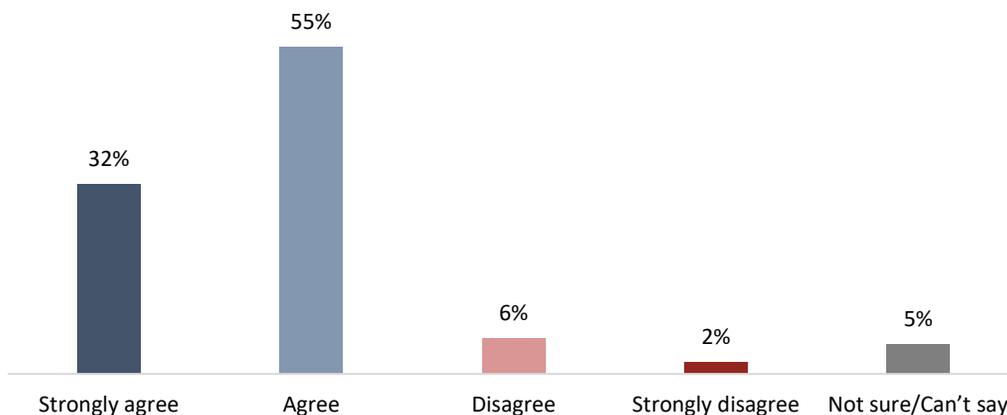


The benefits of youth involvement

When hockey players win major awards or championships there is one aspect of their acceptance speech that is all but guaranteed: they’re going to thank their parents for getting up before the break of dawn to drive them to the rink for practice.

Often lost in that scenario, however, is the will and discipline it takes to succeed in the game. Early practices, weight rooms, bag skates and other challenges are seen as a key point of benefit for hockey involvement among young players. Indeed, nearly nine-in-ten Canadians (87%) say that they view hockey as building character through hard work and discipline.

Agree vs Disagree
"Hockey teaches positive traits like hard work and persistence"
Those who have any exposure to youth hockey (n=992)



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Those with experience in youth hockey are also overwhelmingly of the opinion that it prepares players to deal with problems unrelated to hockey outside of the rink, as seen in the following table:

Percentage agreeing with each of the following					
	Has any experience with youth hockey (n=992)	Experience with youth hockey			
		Played when younger or involved as a coach/manager/referee (n=418)	Close friend, family member, partner (n=255)	Have kid who plays/kid who used to play (n=80*)	Gone to watch as either relative/friend or just for fun (n=389)
Hockey teaches positive traits like hard work and persistence	87%	89%	85%	95%	86%
Being involved in hockey makes kids more prepared to deal with the world outside the rink	65%	76%	61%	79%	55%
Hockey is too dangerous for younger kids, under the age of 14	12%	7%	13%	11%	15%

**Small sample size, interpret with caution*

Few are worried about risks of playing

But what about the safety of the game? Minor leagues have taken major steps to improve player safety and minimize risk, including reducing or eliminating hitting among younger players, and adding “STOP” badges to the back of jerseys to remind players to avoid that point of contact. One [University of Alberta study](#) suggested that this has helped to reduce injuries overall, but unfortunately, not concussions.

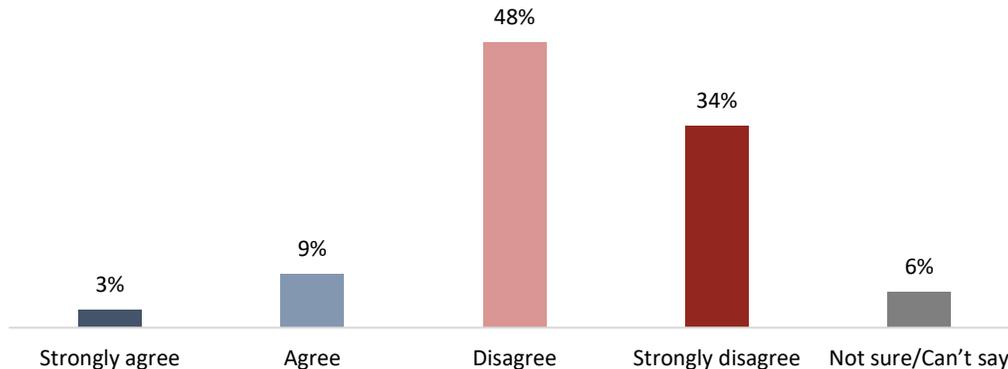
Related: One-in-five Canadians say they've suffered a concussion playing sports

For Canadians that have some proximity to youth hockey, the risks are not perceived as prohibitive. Few say that hockey is too dangerous for young children, with little variance across generation, gender, or involvement ([see detailed tables](#)).

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Agree vs Disagree
"Hockey is too dangerous for younger kids, under the age of 14"
(Those who have any exposure to youth hockey, n=992)



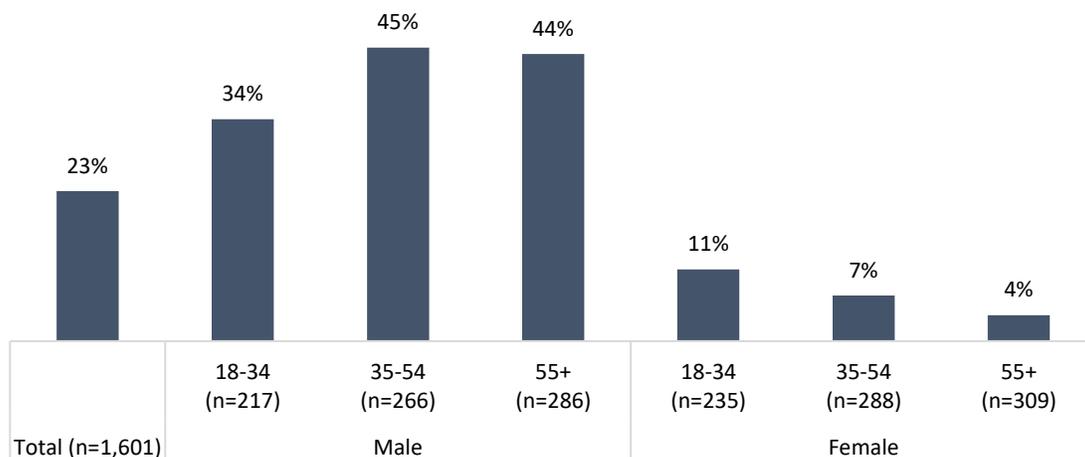
Part Two: 'Hockey Culture' has problems

The game of hockey clearly has a place in the foundations of Canadian identity. This does not, however, mean that everyone is satisfied with the culture surrounding the game.

Misogyny

While involvement in hockey is growing among young women, the sport in its organized form has largely been played by men. Indeed, looking at involvement of players across age and gender in this study underlines this trend:

Percentage who played hockey when younger - By age and gender
(All respondents, n=1,601)



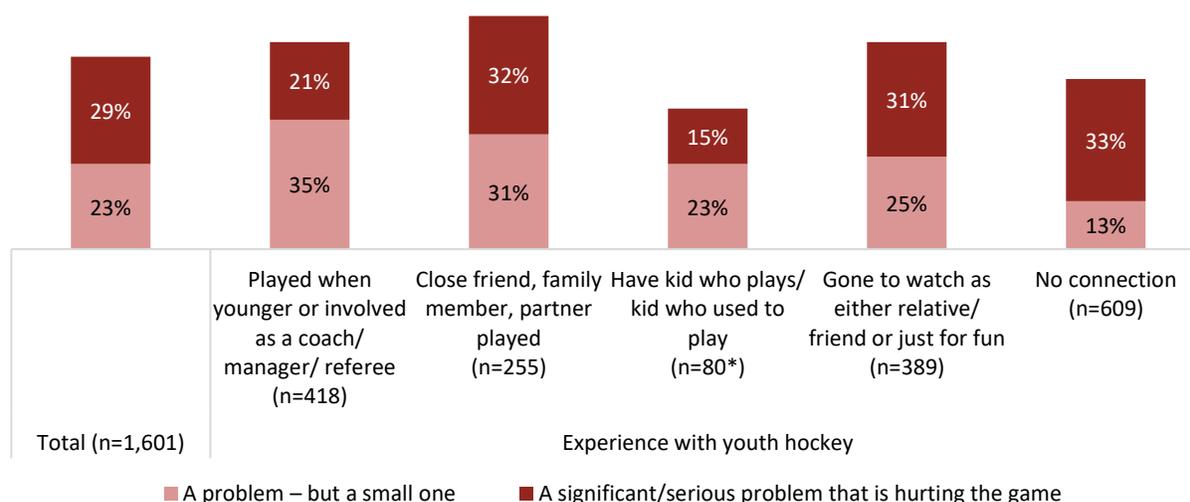
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This has led to myriad cases where players have been reportedly abusive and misogynistic towards women at different levels of the game. Multiple instances of this type of behaviour have been reported over the past year at the professional level in the NHL. Both Hockey Canada and the NHL have implemented training programs to address these issues in recent years.

Canadians who have experience around the game are attuned to this issue and identify disrespect or misogyny towards women as a problem. Notably, this sentiment is held by more than half (56%) of former youth players or coaches, and by 63 per cent among those who did not play but have had a person close to them who did – either a close friend, sibling, or partner.

**Problem or not:
"Young hockey players behave misogynistically, they don't respect women/girls"
(All respondents)**



**Small sample size, interpret with caution*

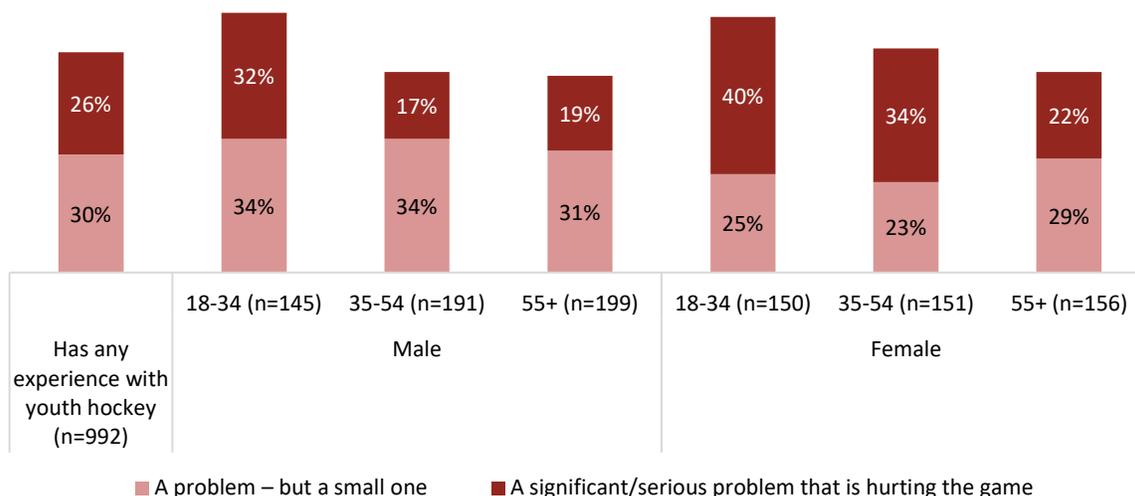
In 2016, the NHL and NHLPA began a training initiative to educate players on this issue. Hockey Canada implemented its "Speak Out" program in 1997 in order to bring awareness to sexual misconduct and bullying, among other issues, and has revised those guidelines since.

Among those with a connection to youth hockey, women of all ages are more likely than their male counterparts to perceive a serious problem with the way young players treat women:

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**Problem or not:
"Young hockey players behave misogynistically, they don't respect
women/girls"
(Among those with a connection to youth hockey)**



Exclusion and racism

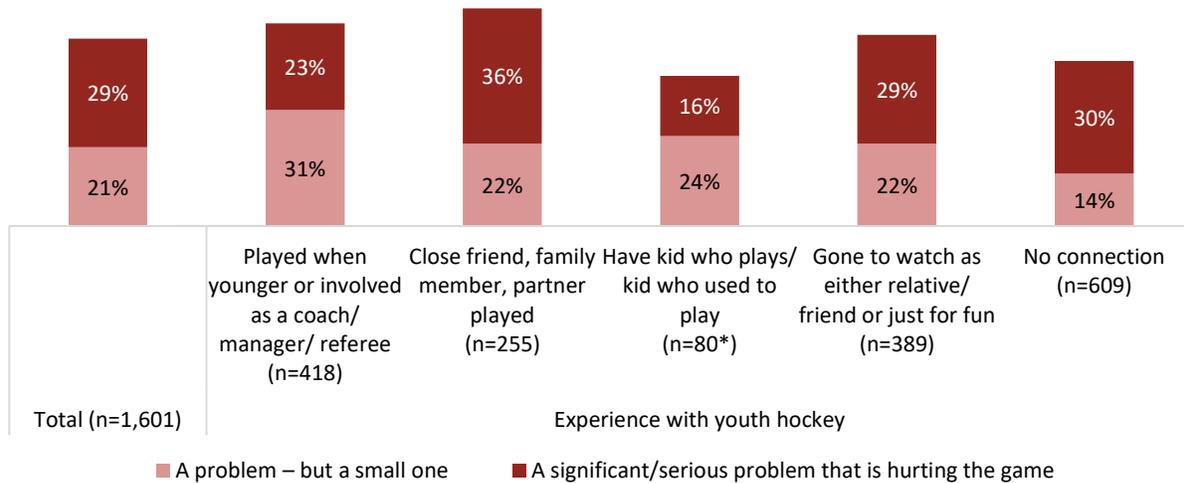
Another emerging issue around hockey culture has been how the game treats non-white players. In November 2019, television icon Don Cherry was fired after referring to minority Canadians as “you people” in one of his trademark rants. Shortly after that, Calgary Flames coach Bill Peters “[resigned](#)” after being accused of using racial slurs against a Black player, Akim Aliu, during his time in the American Hockey League. More recently, non-white players have formed the [Hockey Diversity Alliance](#) to speak about the mistreatment they endured growing up in the game and to push for better treatment. The NHL has only had [just over 100 Black players](#) play a game in its history. Racism against Indigenous players has been documented in Canada as well, with [taunts and threats](#) commonplace.

Canvassed about this issue, half (50%) of Canadians who claim some proximity to the game say that this is indeed a problem, nearly three times the number who say it is not (18%) ([see detailed tables](#)). Those closest to the game are most likely to perceive an issue:

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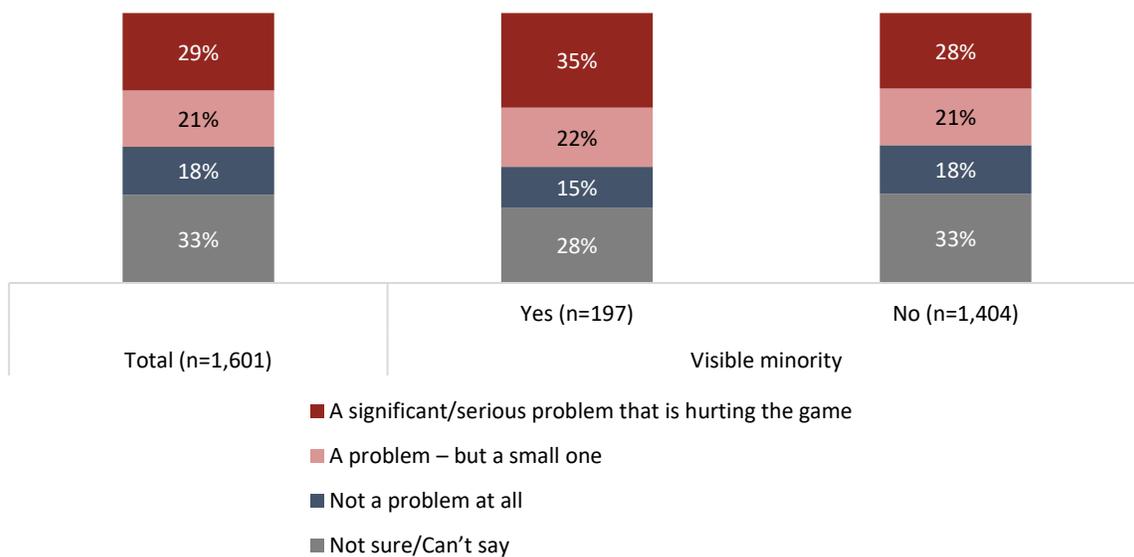
For each of the following items, please tell us whether you think it's not a problem at all, a serious problem, or something in between
[Hockey has a problem with racism] (All respondents)



**Small sample size, interpret with caution*

Respondents who identify as a visible minority are – perhaps unsurprisingly – more likely than those who do not to say hockey has a problem with racism.

For each of the following items, please tell us whether you think it's not a problem at all, a serious problem, or something in between
[Hockey has a problem with racism] (All respondents)



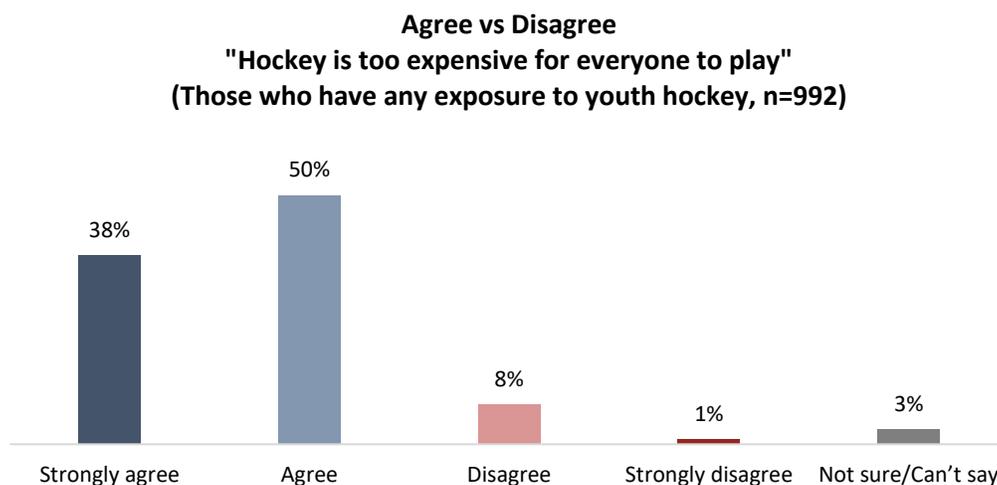
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Cost to play

In 2013, the Globe and Mail [published a story](#) about an issue well known to many Canadians. “The great offside: How Canadian hockey is becoming a game strictly for the rich” delved into the increasingly prohibitive costs of organized hockey in Canada. A survey by Hockey Canada in 2011/2012 found that the average cost a parent paid to have their child play hockey was \$3000, which rises as players achieve more competitive leagues and older age categories.

The idea that hockey is too expensive is accepted by almost everyone who has had any exposure to the game. Across all age and income categories, respondents are near-unanimous ([see detailed tables](#)):



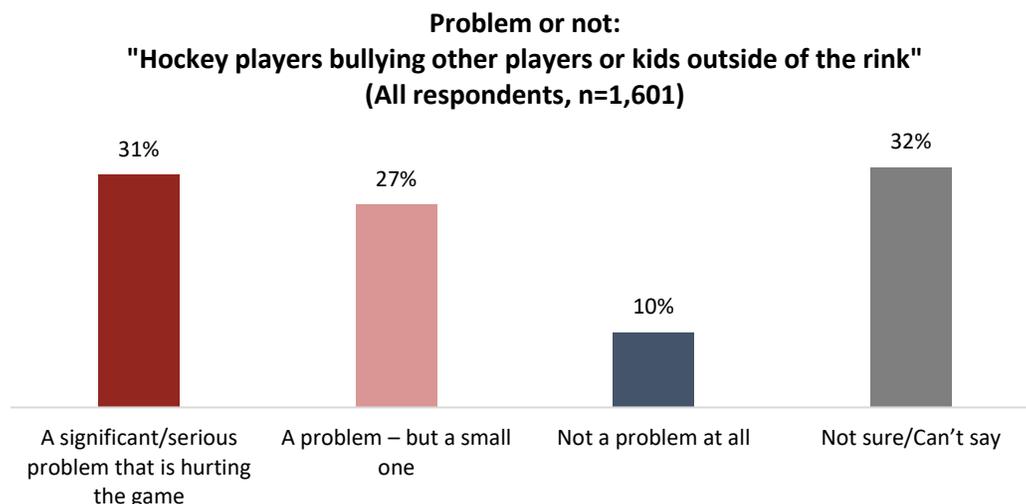
Bullying

One other issue that Hockey Canada has put an emphasis on solving is the bullying that kids face outside the rink from youth hockey players. The issue was recently confronted at the NHL level when the Arizona Coyotes [cut ties with a top draft pick](#) after his bullying of a disabled Black student at his school was made public.

Previous Angus Reid Institute data found parents and children alike [widely supportive](#) of anti-bullying efforts and evidently those targeted at hockey culture would be popular as well. Three-in-five (59%) Canadians say that bullying is a problem in youth hockey:

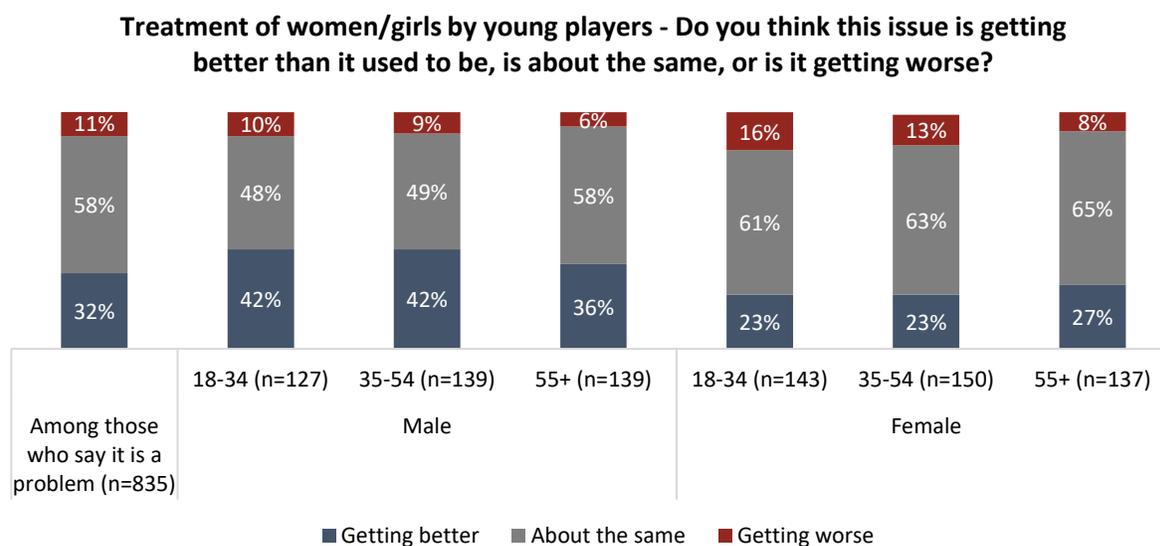
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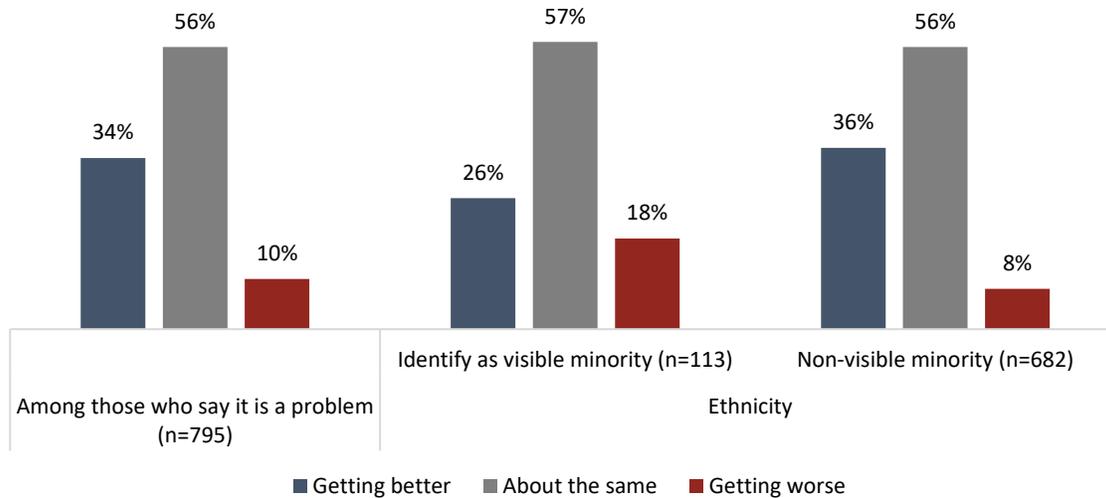
Is progress being made?

Those who perceive problems also say more needs to be done. On the question of how young players treat women and girls, just one-quarter of female respondents say this issue is getting better, while most are inclined to say it remains about the same. Men across all age groups are much more likely to say that progress is being made. These responses are notably very similar among those with a close connection to the game ([see detailed tables](#)):



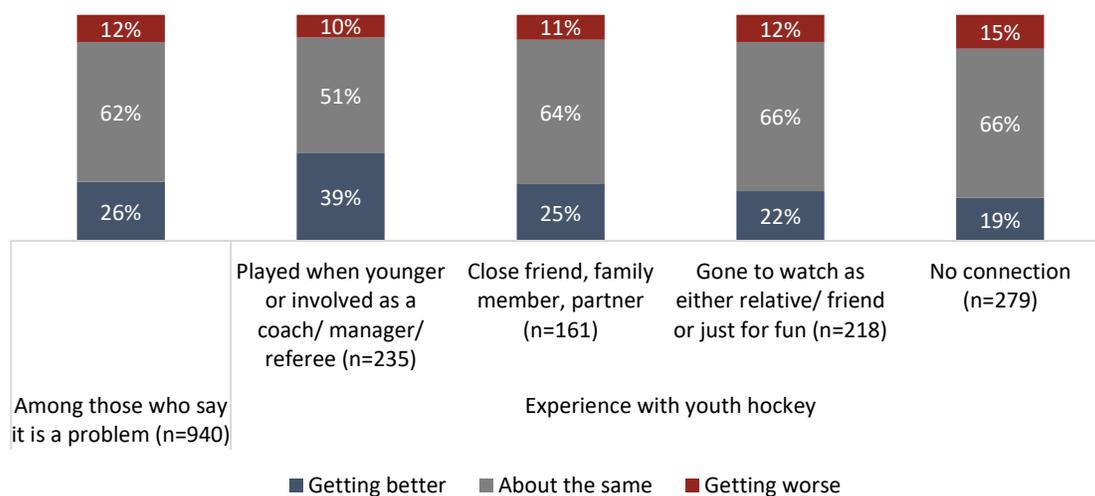
On the question of racism, similar responses are noted. One-in-three say that hockey is becoming more inclusive, while few say that the problem is worsening. That said, those who identify as a visible minority and also perceive this as a problem are twice as likely to say that it is getting worse when compared with those who are not visible minorities:

Hockey and racism: Do you think this issue is getting better than it used to be, is about the same, or is it getting worse?



When it comes to the bullying that some players and other kids receive at the hands of youth hockey players, here too, Canadians who perceive a problem are divided. Those who played are much more likely than others to say that the situation has improved, though overall, three-in-five (62%) say that more improvement is needed:

Bullying by hockey players: Do you think this issue is getting better than it used to be, is about the same, or is it getting worse?



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here.](#)

For detailed results by experience with youth hockey, [click here.](#)

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