

FROM A SPREADSHEET TO THE FRONT PAGE



Leadership-in-Action Project with the Intergenerational Foundation
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ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Intergenerational Foundation (IF) is a UK-based charity that produces research advocating for greater fairness for younger generations. Established in 2011, it is often at the centre of policy debate regarding housing, student loans, and pensions.

Over my six-week placement at IF, I was in charge of producing a report of my own; a study examining the reason why young people date less. I used over three decades of household data, macroeconomic data, and a nationally representative survey which I then visualised through RStudio. In the end I produced a 23-page report with 13 constructed data visualisations.



THE REPORT

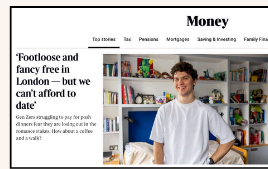
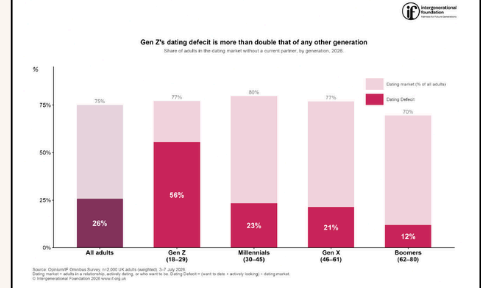
My report, titled *'The Cost of Loving Crisis'*, concluded that young people are being priced out of dating because of high rent prices and closing third spaces.

Using the data, I built a metric called the "Dating Deficit", the share of people who are seeking a partner, but don't have one. That number stood at 26% for all UK adults, but 56% for Gen Z. Alongside it, some other interesting findings include:

- 43% of 25-29-year-olds now live with a parent, up from 17% in 2009.
- 46% of 25-29-year-olds were single in 2023, a consistent rise from only 29% in 2011.

The report was published by IF and its findings reached the front page of the money section of *The Times*. →

Figure 4:



The 'Dating Deficit' by generation - the share of people who want a partner but don't have one: 56% for Gen Z vs 26% across all UK adults.



TIMELINE

Week 1

The discomfoting data

As I started to explore the data, some assumptions were wrong

- Young people did not move in more with partner to save money
- Opportunities were a bigger barrier to dating than financial reasons
- I had to adapt to changes and turn it into a stronger argument to support my narrative

Week 3

It started

A narrative started to form as I brought the data together

- The survey came back giving a dating deficit number for Gen Z at 56%
- The housing data showed people were staying at home and living with parents, showing housing as a key factor behind the lack of dating

Week 4

Nobody reads 23 pages

My first draft came back with clear feedback: condense the information and make it more digestible.

- Nobody reads 23 pages of a report
- Being clear and concise (especially at the start) is the most important part of translating insights into an understandable format

Week 6

The payoff

Section after section, the report was coming to its final draft. Six weeks of messy spreadsheets were now in one clear narrative that effectively explained how rising prices has affected the personal lives of the youth.

Seeing the culmination of my effort was incredibly fulfilling



SMART GOALS

Goal 1: Policy writing

Write 3, op-ed-style blogs evaluating current UK issues and what they mean for young people.

Successful - I published three blogs: one on Andy Burnham, one on Keir Starmer, and a book review on *'Gerontocracy in America'*. The first blog was something completely new to me, and came back heavily edited after the first draft. I was used to writing in a more academic, university style. I implemented the feedback and the second blog felt much more natural to me. By the third one, there were barely any edits by my supervisor. While the report was the focus of this placement, these blogs massively improved my understanding of UK politics, and developed my policy analysis skill

Goal 2: Data & R

Find relevant datasets, create visualisations, and translate economic data into clear insights (Target: ~10 graphs)

Partly Successful - I worked through the UKHLS dataset and ONS statistics to build around twenty graphs in total using RStudio. I then cut them down to the most relevant and important ones, rebuilding them in the IF house style. My goal shifted throughout my project as I expected the challenge to be the coding in R. Instead, it was the judgement behind the graphs that proved to be the skill developed. Deciding which type of graph to use (scatter plots, bar charts), what titles to give, and deciding which ones were actually worth using.

Goal 3: Communicating

Use all the data to build a clear and coherent narrative across a ~20-page research report.

Successful - The main aspect of my whole placement, and it resulted in the 23-page published report incorporating 13 graphs explaining why young people are priced out of dating. With over 7 different sections, each with their own subsections I believe that I effectively communicated what I wanted. The hardest part was not just the writing but also the first page, which is supposed to condense all the key information so people quickly and easily understand the message of report. I learnt, as my supervisor told me, that a reader needs to be captured in the first few lines.



WHY THIS MATTERED TO ME

As someone entering my twenties, this project wasn't just another abstract issue. I got to look at the pressures that I, like many others, are about to face. The research left me frustrated at how much wealth and power stays concentrated amongst an older elite at the expense of us, the young. The impending reality that I was not even aware of, only makes me want to be part of the solution that much more.

What's even harder is that older generations often dismiss the issue. Despite showing my mum the data, she didn't believe that this generation have it harder than previous ones. **No change can happen when the problem isn't recognised.** That's why I was proud to write a report that brings attention to these issues and explains the facts to make them more than just numbers. And I've since changed my mum's mind, which is no small feat.



THE LEADER I'M BECOMING

- 1. Being right isn't enough** - The data was there, but my mum still didn't believe it. Convincing her taught me that leading means winning people over, not just proving people wrong.
- 2. Don't be afraid to make your own judgements** - I spent a lot of time trying to cater directly to IF and forcing a narrative. I ended up following my own vision and despite the mountain of feedback I received from my supervisors early on, it was all to make my project stronger, not theirs.
- 3. Learn to make things work in your favour** - When the survey came back saying the biggest barrier to dating was meeting people, not money, I was annoyed that it went against my narrative. Instead, I ended up explaining how meeting spaces have fallen because of rising costs and economic conditions.



Full report on the IF website

Or scan the QR →



A huge thank you to Conor Nakkan and Toby Whelton from IF for welcoming me and supporting me with this project.