

UK youth are happy after all?

March 2 2011

As part of the study, which will follow 40,000 UK households over a number of years more than 2,000 young people aged between 10 to 15 years have been asked how satisfied they are with their lives. The findings indicate there is little difference between the average life satisfaction score of those children living in the household with the bottom fifth income and those children living in households in the top fifth income bracket.

Dr Gundi Knies a researcher based at ISER said: "Despite the seemingly high levels of [happiness](#) amongst young people in the UK, our children's well-being has remained about the same since the Unicef report in 2007, which rated Britain's children as some of the most unhappy in the developed world. Understanding Society research suggests that a focus on just improving income and material deprivation does not necessarily represent real improvements in quality of life as they are perceived by children themselves."

The results also show that young people are less materialistic than adults in their assessment of happiness. A much greater influence on a child's happiness is whether they live with both [parents](#) and the happiness of their parents' [relationship](#), and in particular their mother. In families where the child's mother is unhappy in her relationship, only 55 per cent of young people say they are 'completely happy' with their family situation – compared with 73 per cent young people whose mothers are 'perfectly happy' in their relationships.

Understanding Society also asked parents and children living at home

questions about [family relationships](#), including partners, and their level of happiness with these relationships.

The answers from 11,825 [adults](#) and 1,268 young people (aged 10-15) were analysed and compared. Together these findings reveal the complex influences of different family relationships on a child's happiness:

- 60 per cent of the children said they were 'completely satisfied' with their family situation
- children in lone-parent families were less likely to report themselves completely happy with their situation
- having older siblings is not related to children's happiness with their family, but having younger siblings in the household is associated with lower levels of satisfaction and this effect is greater the more younger siblings present in the household
- children who quarrel more than once a week with their parents, and don't discuss important matters with them have only a 28 per cent chance of rating themselves completely happy with their families
- children who eat an evening meal with their family at least three times a week are more likely to report being completely happy with their family situation than children who never eat with their family
- hours spent watching TV are completely unrelated to a young person's happiness with their family situation

Dr Maria Iacovou, who worked on the family relationship findings said:

"Families are a big part of every child's life, and our research highlights just how much family relationships matter for children's well-being. Over the years, as we follow the lives of the families in Understanding Society, we'll build up an even better picture of how children's lives are affected by all kinds of factors. Understanding Society is really set to become a fantastic resource for anyone interested in the well-being of children."

More information: The first findings book is published online at [research.understandingsociety. . . dings/early-findings](https://research.understandingsociety.ac.uk/early-findings) . Individual chapters are also available to download.

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

Citation: UK youth are happy after all? (2011, March 2) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-03-uk-youth-happy.html>

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