

Where do the happiest children live?

May 13 2015, by Alexandra Guentzer

Children in European countries tend to report higher levels of satisfaction with their friendships while children in African countries tend to be happier with their school lives. Children in northern European countries are particularly dissatisfied with their appearance and self-confidence. Most of the 50,000 children in the 15 countries rated their satisfaction with life as a whole (on a scale from zero to ten) positively, but the percentage of children with very high well-being (10 out of 10) varied from around 78% in Turkey and 77% in Romania and Colombia to around 40% in South Korea. The percentage with low well-being (less than 5 out of 10) varied from less than 2% in Romania and Colombia to over 7% in South Korea and South Africa.

The survey asked [children](#) about all key aspects of their lives including their family and home life, [friendships](#), money and possessions, school life, local area, time use, personal well-being, views on children's rights, and their overall happiness.

Simon Sommer, Head of Research at the Jacobs Foundation which funded the work, said: "We are delighted to see the first report from this major new international study. The foundation is proud of being part of making complex research more accessible and to be one step closer to a better understanding of children's lives from their own perspectives. With innovative research projects such as this we would like to strengthen the transfer of research into practice and provide information that is valuable for political decision makers and others to improve children's lives."

Girls and boys are equally happy

Children's well-being decreased between the ages of 10 and 12 in many European countries and in South Korea, while there was no age pattern in other countries such as Israel and Ethiopia. Overall happiness did not vary between girls and boys, but there were significant gender differences in [satisfaction](#) with oneself (body, [appearance](#) and [self-confidence](#)) in Europe and South Korea, but not in the other countries in the survey in Asia, Africa and South America. As well as asking children about their well-being, the survey also asked them about their lives - including who they lived with, how they spent their time, and their experiences of children's rights. These types of questions enable the project to paint a picture of how children's lives vary around the globe.

For example, in terms of living arrangements, well over half (61%) of children in Nepal lived in a household consisting of parent(s) and grandparent(s) whereas in the UK, Norway and Israel less than 10% of children did so. The research also highlights the prevalence of children living in two different homes in some European countries—over 10% of children in Norway, England and Estonia—a pattern which is rarely seen in some other countries in the survey.

Homework in Estonia—caring for siblings in Nepal

There were substantial differences between countries in how children spent their time. For example, children tended to report spending much more time on homework in Estonia and Poland than in South Korea and England. Children in Poland, Norway and Israel spent the most time playing sports and exercising. Children in some countries (including Algeria, Nepal and South Africa) spent much more time caring for siblings and other family members than in other countries (such as Germany, Turkey and South Korea).

Finally, there were widely varying levels of knowledge of and views about children's rights across the 15 countries. Over three-quarters (77%) of children in Norway said that they knew what rights children had compared to 36% in England. Moreover, 84% of children in Norway agreed that adults generally respected children's rights in their country compared to less than 50% in seven countries.

Professor Asher Ben-Arieh, one of the study's principal investigators and co-chair of the International Society of Child Indicators, said: "This report is the culmination of many years of work to understand more about children's views about their lives and well-being. It fills a major gap in international research. Our work demonstrates that it is possible and valuable to ask children how they feel about their lives and that different children from different places share a common childhood. We would like to thank the 53,000 children in 15 countries who have taken part in this research so far for telling us about their views and experiences. The findings highlight aspects of life where children in each country have relatively high and low well-being. The report contains important messages for policy makers, practitioners, parents and all those concerned with improving children's quality of [life](#)."

Findings from the report will be presented to a meeting at the European Parliament in Brussels on 13th May and in a series of conferences around the world during the remainder of 2015. This is the first report from the current wave of the survey. At least five more [countries](#) are taking part in this wave. Later in the year further reports will be published including findings for children aged 8 years old.

Provided by Goethe University Frankfurt am Main

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