

The Wellbeing of Children and Young People in Malta

The Malta Wellbeing INDEX Project

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Executive Summary

The aim of this study is to identify the wellbeing experiences and needs of children and young people living in Malta in order to develop policy actions to enhance their wellbeing. It explores the various dimensions of children's subjective wellbeing and how they vary by age, gender, nationality/language, disability, and socioeconomic status. It adopts a children's rights perspective, with children seen as active agents having the competence of forming their own views and consequently the right to participate in the study. Data was collected through three separate questionnaires for 7 to 8-year-olds, 8 to 11-year-olds, and 11 to 15-year-olds respectively. A total of 364 children and young people completed the questionnaires. The questionnaires, adapted from the *International Study of Children's Subjective Wellbeing*, covered areas such as the living situation, home and family relationships, money and possessions, friends and other relationships, local area, school, leisure and free time, health, children's rights, and overall subjective wellbeing.

The findings of the study provide a detailed portrait of the wellbeing of children and young people in Malta. The overall picture suggests that most of the participants enjoy a high level of wellbeing and are satisfied with the various aspects of their lives. However, a closer look at the findings suggests that the level of satisfaction is not uniform across the domains or demographics. While the great majority of participants are satisfied with their family and home, their friends, their life at school, their neighbourhood, their free time, their economic wellbeing, their physical and mental health, their subjective wellbeing, and living in Malta, there is less satisfaction with particular aspects within these domains, such as participation in family decisions, having enough friends and seeing friends frequently; dealing with academic pressure and peer bullying at school; the available space for play and socialising, and the level of pollution in the neighbourhood; physical health complaints such as frequent headaches, stomach-aches and backaches, as well as negative affect such as boredom, sadness, stress, loneliness, and anxiety. The data reveals some interesting age and gender differences, with

the older participants becoming less satisfied with various aspects of their lives, boys experiencing more bullying, and adolescent girls experiencing more negative feelings and moods. As children move into adolescence, they appear to spend less time engaged in physical exercise and sports, and more time on TV and social media. Finally, particular groups of children reported a lower level of wellbeing and less satisfaction with various aspects of their lives when compared to their peers, namely children and young people from lower socio-economic status, from a migrant background, and those with disability.

The study makes several recommendations for policy and practice including a national policy on the promotion of mental health of children and young people, a nation-wide strategy to promote physical exercise, sports and nature-based activities for children and young people, a more inclusive and welcoming environment for children with diverse needs, a strategic focus on the wellbeing of children and young people at risk, initiatives to curb bullying at school, at home and in the community, the inclusion of wellbeing and mental health as a key educational objective, and the need for children's voices to be actively heard. In view of the present study's limitations, various suggestions are made on how further research may be enhanced and strengthened to lead to more robust and conclusive findings on the wellbeing of children and young people living in Malta.

