Author:                               Erik Jan de Wilde, Dominic Richardson & Jonathan Bradshaw

Organisation:                   Netherlands Youth Institute, OECD, University of York

Title of Paper:                  youth well-being and youth suicide: two sides of the same coin?

Abstract:

It seems only logical to think that young people in more adverse life conditions are more likely to commit suicide. However, the evidence so far collected using general population data, analysed in a sociological tradition, suggests otherwise. Lester (1985a) was the one of the first contemporary researchers to address this issue by testing a theory proposed by Henry & Short (1954), that suicide is more likely if external circumstances are better.

As much as the well-being rankings in the OECD countries are indicative of the quality of children’s lives in various countries, so are the juvenile suicide rates. The United Nations qualifies the suicide rate as “an important proxy for the prevalence of mental health disorders” and a major public health concern in its own. This paper studied the relation between the OECD and UNICEF well-being indicator rankings and the suicide rate rankings provided by Eurostat. Remarkably, an inverse relation was found: Generally, countries with better well-being rankings also have higher suicide rates. These results are discussed from the perspective of the theoretical frameworks. Policy implications will be addressed.