

The
Children's
Society

The Good Childhood Report 2014







Foreword

The Children's Society has been supporting children's well-being for over a century, putting their voices right at the very heart of our work. Children's well-being is so important not just for children themselves and the adults they become, but because it serves as a reflection on the place we hold for children in society.

Well-being is about so much more than happiness, going right to the very heart of a good quality of life. And a real understanding of well-being must also take into account the factors associated with it; the potential drivers. Children with low well-being are not grumpy teenagers experiencing the everyday ups and downs of growing up. Our research highlights stubborn and persistent issues of bullying, insecurity and anxiety; children growing up with little hope for their future.

The good news is that the majority of children in this country continue to be satisfied with their lives. Yet around 9% of children aged eight to 15 years have low life satisfaction which is a statistic none of us can

afford to ignore. Our annual state-of-the-nation report on children's well-being seeks to understand more about this. This year's report confirms gender variations in well-being – with girls showing lower levels overall often driven by concerns with the way they look. It also shows that the ages of 14 and 15 continue to be the ages of lowest well-being.

In this year's report, our third annual Good Childhood Report, we explore new work on the relationship between parents and their children's well-being and highlight new international evidence that shows the UK is behind the majority of countries in terms of children's well-being.

We are proud that our research with the University of York has become one of the most extensive programmes on children's well-being conducted globally. Our surveys of over 50,000 children have helped draw attention to important trends. Today, as always, we are ambitious for all children. In a period where the impact of austerity measures are disproportionately affecting low income families with children, it is critical to keep focused on how young people are faring. We are determined, through our campaigning, commitment and care, to give every child the greatest possible chance in life.



Matthew Reed
Chief Executive
The Children's Society



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1. Introduction

The Good Childhood Report 2014 is the third in a series of annual reports published by The Children's Society about how children in the UK feel about their lives.

This year's report contains new findings from our nine-year programme of research on children's well-being, involving around 50,000 children. This work is carried out in collaboration with the University of York and has become the most extensive national research programme on children's subjective well-being in the world.

The objective of each report is to focus on children's subjective well-being, drawing on the most recent evidence available for the UK, plus some comparative findings from other countries.

At the same time, the report provides an opportunity to place our new findings within the context of what we have learned from our well-being research programme since it began in 2005. The previous reports have covered a wide range of topics in relation to children's subjective well-being and some key findings from these reports are presented in Box 2.

In last year's report we presented a chart illustrating what life is like for children with low subjective well-being. This summarises many of the themes covered in our research programme to date, and so we have reproduced this chart as Figure 1.

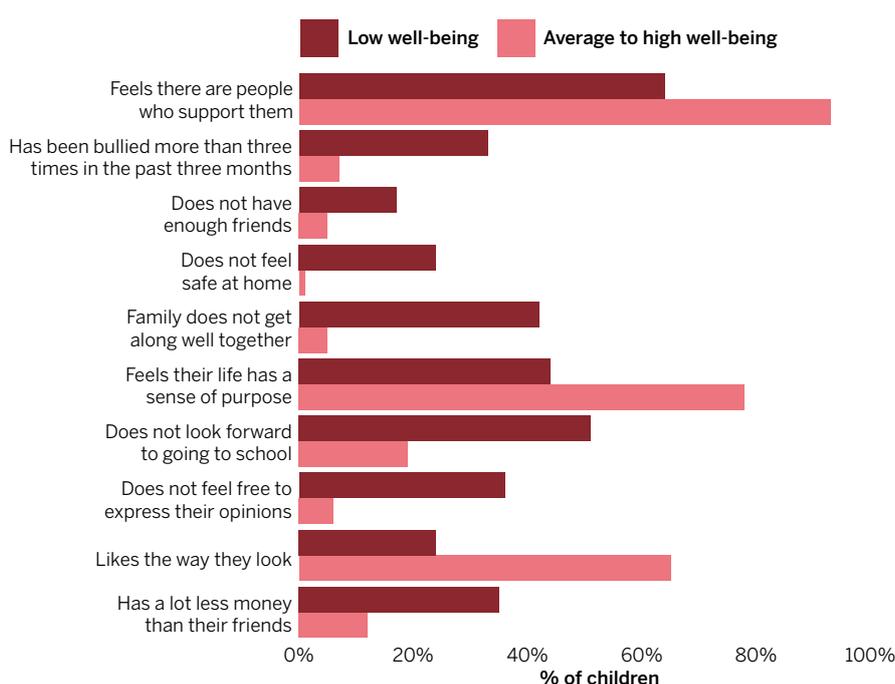
Box 1: What is 'subjective well-being'?

Subjective well-being is a person's own evaluation of how they feel about their lives. It is often thought of as consisting of two components. The first component is about how satisfied people are either with their life as a whole or about particular aspects of their life (e.g. family relationships). The second component focuses more on people's day-to-day moods and emotions (e.g. feelings of happiness).

There is also a related concept of 'psychological well-being'. This incorporates a number of different aspects (e.g. sense of autonomy and sense of purpose in life). Whilst we recognise the importance of this concept, this report focuses on subjective well-being (satisfaction and emotions) because at present most of the surveys we analyse ask about this.

Often subjective well-being questions use a scale, such as from 0 to 10, which people can use to say how satisfied or happy they are. Many of the questions we have asked of children have been in this format. In this report we use the term 'low subjective well-being', usually focusing on the children with the lowest scores for subjective well-being questions.

Figure 1: Low well-being and associated issues



Box 2: Previous findings from our research on children's subjective well-being

- Around 9% of children in the UK aged eight to 15 years have low life satisfaction. Using other measures of subjective well-being the proportion is between 5% and 10%.
- Children's subjective well-being varies considerably with age. Around 4% of eight-year-olds have low life satisfaction compared with around 14% of 15-year-olds. It appears that ages 14 to 15 represent a low point for subjective well-being and that there are slightly higher levels of well-being for young people in the 16 to 17 age group.
- There is some evidence of gender variations in subjective well-being, with girls often tending to have slightly lower well-being than boys.
- Socio-demographic factors, such as household income or family structure are often significantly associated with subjective well-being but only explain a relatively small amount of the variations in subjective well-being between children.
- From analysis of The Good Childhood Index we know that children feel much happier about some of aspects of their lives – such as family relationships, than others – such as the way that they look. Children's satisfaction with some of these aspects varies considerably between the ages of eight and 15 and by gender. The Good Childhood Index was developed by The Children's Society and includes 10 questions asking about different aspects of life that children have told us are particularly important for their well-being.
- The quality of family relationships emerges as one of the most important influences on children's subjective well-being. For example, children living with both birth parents tend to have slightly higher well-being than children living in other family arrangements, but again this factor only explains around 2% of the variation in subjective well-being, while a simple question about quality of family relationships explained around
- 20% of the variation.
- A second important factor highlighted by our research is children's satisfaction with the amount of choice they have in their lives, which consistently emerges as having a strong link with their sense of well-being.
- While household income has a small (albeit significant) association with children's subjective well-being, other measures of children's material circumstances show a much stronger association, explaining as much as 9% of the variation in their subjective well-being.
- Events in children's lives can have an impact on their well-being. Recent changes in family structure, for example, are linked with significantly lower than average well-being. Recent experiences of being bullied also appear to have a substantial impact on children's subjective well-being.

1 Where possible we make use of data for the whole of the UK – for example from the Millennium Cohort Study. However some of the analysis in the report only covers England, Scotland and Wales, and other analysis only covers England. Please refer to Box 3 on data sources, and the information on data sources contained underneath each figure and table presented in the report.

1.1 Overview of the 2014 report and key findings

This report makes a timely addition to ongoing debates about the well-being of children in the UK, and is split into two broad themes.

The first part of the report presents an updated picture of overall levels of subjective well-being in the UK¹. We:

- Provide new findings on overall levels of subjective well-being
- Analyse new data on how children's subjective well-being varies according to individual and household characteristics
- Update and expand our time trends analysis – using the latest evidence
- Present new findings on how children's subjective well-being varies between countries.

The second part of the report looks at new evidence on four different factors that are associated with children's subjective well-being:

- Children's activities and behaviours
- Material conditions – deprivation, relative wealth and changes over time.
- Parental subjective well-being and mental health
- Parenting behaviours.

Some key findings on these topics are as follows:

- Children in England are faring slightly less well in terms of subjective well-being than children in the other nations of the UK; and children in England are faring poorly in terms of subjective well-being compared to other countries within and outside Europe, ranking ninth out of 11 countries surveyed.
- Children in England fare particularly poorly in terms of satisfaction with the way they look, compared to children in a sample of other countries around the world. This finding supplements other evidence of a significant age-related decline in satisfaction with this aspect of life in England, especially for girls.

- There is some evidence of a gender gap developing recently in children's subjective well-being in the UK, with girls tending to have lower well-being than boys.
- The pattern of increases in children's subjective well-being seen during the late 1990s and early 2000s has ended and, in the period 2008 to 2011 (the most recent years for which time trend data is available) levels of children's subjective well-being appear to have plateaued (neither increasing nor decreasing).
- There are associations between how children spend their time and their subjective well-being. Children who participate more often in sports and related activities tend to have higher well-being. On the other hand, our analysis finds no evidence of a negative association between use of computer technology and subjective well-being. In fact, children aged 11 years old who engaged in this activity relatively frequently were significantly more satisfied and happy with their lives than children who never did so.
- Children who have fewer material resources than their peers have lower than average well-being. But those those who felt they have about the same resources tended to have slightly higher well-being than those who felt their families had more.

- There are indications that the recession is impacting children's well-being – those who perceive their families as having been impacted by the economic crisis have lower well-being.
- There are significant links between children's levels of subjective well-being and that of their parents. There is also evidence of a link between parental mental health problems and lower levels of child subjective well-being.
- There is evidence of a significant association between parenting behaviours and children's subjective well-being. Young people aged 14 to 15 whose parents more frequently provided emotional support, physical care, educational support and supervisory monitoring tended to have higher levels of subjective well-being. Of these factors, the availability of emotional support seemed to make the most difference for this age group.

1.2 Notes on data sources and statistics

1.2.1 Data sources

The report makes use of the best and most up-to-date evidence available on children's subjective well-being. Much of this data comes from our own research programme, including participation in the international Children's Worlds survey. However, we also make use of available data from other sources including two major UK studies – Understanding Society and the Millennium Cohort Study. More information on each of the data sources used is provided in Box 3.

1.2.2 Statistical testing

We have used a range of appropriate statistical tests to support the findings presented in this report. All comparisons highlighted in the report (e.g. gender differences) are based on accepted tests of statistical significance using a 99% confidence level unless otherwise stated. Weighted data sets have been used for analysis of the Children's Worlds survey and Millennium Cohort Study. Because this is a non-technical report we have avoided using technical language regarding these tests in the main text, although some basic explanatory information is sometimes provided in footnotes and appendix. Further details on the technical aspects of the research are available from The Children's Society's Research Team (see contact details at the end of the report).

Box 3: Data sources used in this report

The main data sources that we have analysed for this report are as follows:

Children's Worlds survey

(See www.isciweb.org for further details)

Children's Worlds is a new international survey of children's well-being. The survey aims to collect solid and representative data on children's lives and daily activities, their time use and in particular on how they feel about and evaluate their lives (and specific aspects of their lives).

Some of the data used in this report are from a large-scale pilot of the survey conducted with over 16,000 children aged around 12 years old in 11 countries across five continents. Other data are from the England component of the first full wave of the survey in 2013/14. The survey in England covered a representative sample of over 3000 children in Years 4, 6 and 8 in schools. We also conducted the survey with an additional sample of around 1000 children in Year 10, which is referred to as 'The Children's Society survey 2014'.

British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society

(See www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps and www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/about for further details)

The BHPS was a longitudinal study consisting originally of a sample of 5500 households in Britain

running from 1991 to 2009. It subsequently became part of a new ongoing longitudinal study called Understanding Society covering 40,000 households. From 1994 the BHPS incorporated a youth questionnaire for children aged 11 to 15 which include some questions on subjective well-being. These questions have been continued with children aged 10 to 15 in the Understanding Society survey.

Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

(See www.cls.ioe.ac.uk for further details)

The MCS is a survey following the lives of around 19,000 children born in the UK in 2000 to 2001. So far, five waves of the survey have been carried out when children were around the ages of nine months, three years, five years, seven years and 11 years. The data analysed for this report are from the fifth wave when the children were aged 11. We make use of information about subjective well-being and about various aspects of their lives provided by children and also some information gathered from their parents and teachers.

In addition to the above we also cite some findings on subjective well-being from the Health Behaviour of School-aged Children study (HBSC).

The Children's Society quarterly surveys

The Children's Society has conducted household surveys

in England with both parents and children aged eight to 15 since 2010. These were initially conducted every three months, and are now conducted every six months. In these surveys, we ask questions about the well-being of both parents and children. The surveys also offer a chance to collect data on children's well-being together with data on the household, such as income and occupation of the parents or carers. The survey covers 2000 households in England, Scotland and Wales, and is socio-economically representative of these countries.

Children's quotes from consultations

The Children's Society conducts well-being consultations with children and young people in various locations. These consultations usually consist of a well-being survey followed by a face-to-face group session in which survey findings are interrogated and explored. Recent consultations have taken place in Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight, Frome and Cheshire East, and have included over 20,000 children and young people. Quotes from these group sessions can be found throughout the report to illustrate the statistical points further. To learn more about our well-being consultations, please contact us at: well-being@childrenssociety.org.uk

Part one

We present an update on overall levels of children's subjective well-being in the UK and how we compare to other countries around the world.

2. The current state of children's subjective well-being: Overview and variations

2.1 Children's overall levels of subjective well-being

In previous issues of The Good Childhood Report, we have presented findings on different aspects of children's subjective well-being including satisfaction and happiness with life as a whole and day-to-day feelings. Here we present updated findings on these aspects using new data from the Children's Worlds survey in England with children in Year 6 (10 to 11 years old) and 8 (12 to 13 years old). Box

4 shows the questions used in this survey to cover subjective well-being:

2.1.1 Satisfaction with life as a whole

In line with our previous work, we found that children tended to rate their life satisfaction quite highly. Children in Years 6 and 8 scored a mean of 8.5 out of 10 on the life satisfaction scale, while around 7% of children in this age group had low life satisfaction (less than five out of 10). There were age patterns here – the percentages of children with

low life satisfaction were around 6% for Year 6 and around 8.5% for Year 8. However there was no statistical difference in life satisfaction between girls and boys.

2.1.2 Day-to-day feelings

Children also reported mostly relatively high levels of recent positive moods and feelings. Mean scores for the six questions asked (see Box 4) ranged from 8.6 out of 10 for 'happy' and 'full of energy' to 7.9 out of 10 for 'calm'. There was a significant age difference for all of these measures and the differences were strongest for feeling 'full of energy' which declined from a mean score of 8.9 out of 10 in Year 6 to 8.2 out of 10 in Year 8. There were also significant gender differences for all of these questions, with boys tending to have higher mean scores than girls, except the question about feeling calm for which there was no significant gender difference.

Box 4: Questions on subjective well-being (Children's Worlds survey)

Life satisfaction²

Here are five sentences about how you feel about your life as a whole. Please tick a box to say how much you agree with each of the sentences:

- My life is going well
- My life is just right
- I have a good life
- I have what I want in life
- The things in my life are excellent

Response options are on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 = 'Not at all agree' and 10 = 'Totally agree'. The life satisfaction score is created by adding up answers to the five questions and then dividing the total by five to obtain a score from 0 to 10.

Day to day feelings

Below is a list of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Please read each word and then tick a box to say how much you have felt this way during the last two weeks.

- Satisfied
- Happy
- Relaxed
- Active
- Calm
- Full of energy

Response options are on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 = 'Not at all' and 10 = 'Extremely'.

2.2 Variations in children's subjective well-being

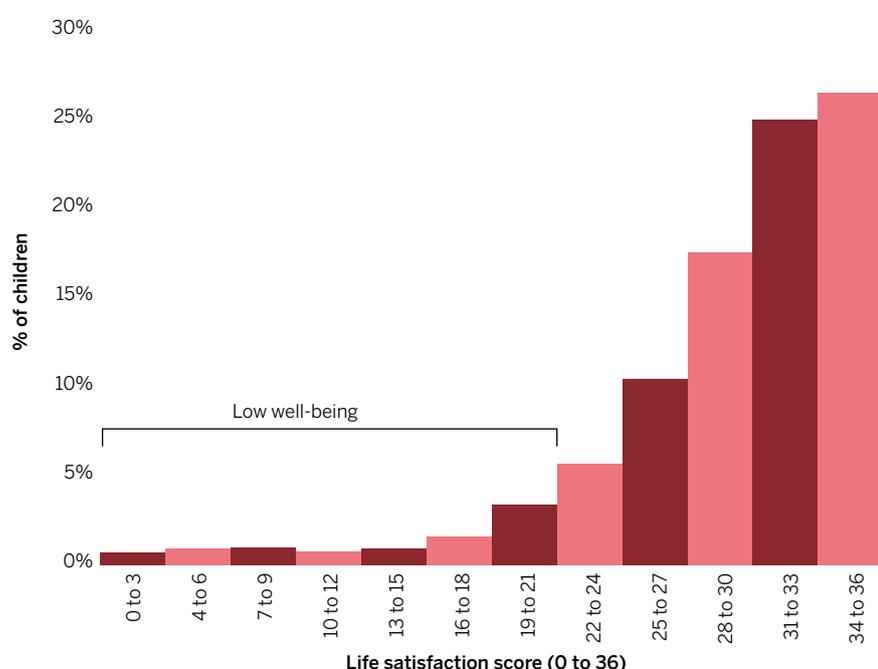
So far we have looked at the evidence on children's overall subjective well-being and variations by age and between girls and boys. It is also important to look at variations according to other individual and family factors as we may be able to identify particular sub-groups of the child population with much higher or lower than average levels of subjective well-being.

² These questions were derived from a longer set originally devised by Huebner (1991).

Table 1: Summary of mean scores for different measures of subjective well-being by age group and gender

	All	Year 6	Year 8	Female	Male
Life satisfaction score	8.5	8.8	8.3	8.5	8.6
Satisfied	8.1	8.3	7.9	8.0	8.2
Happy	8.6	8.9	8.3	8.5	8.8
Relaxed	8.1	8.3	7.9	7.9	8.3
Calm	7.9	8.1	7.7	7.9	8.0
Active	8.5	8.8	8.3	8.3	8.7
Full of energy	8.6	8.9	8.2	8.4	8.8

Source: Children's Worlds Survey, 2013-14. Age: 10 to 13 years old. Scope: England. Sample size: 2276.

Figure 2: Summary of life satisfaction scores (MCS)

Source: Millennium Cohort Study, Wave 5, 2011. Age: 11 years old. Scope: UK. Sample size: 13,469.

The newly-published data for children aged around 11 years old from the Millennium Cohort Study enable us to do this. It contains measures of children's satisfaction with their lives as a whole and with some aspects of their lives and we have used this to create an overall life satisfaction score from 0 to 36, with higher scores signifying higher subjective well-being.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of life satisfaction scores using this measure. It can be seen that most children are relatively satisfied with their lives. Around 10% of children scored less than 22 out of 36 and, in the analysis that follows, we classify these children as having low subjective well-being using this measure.

The survey also includes data on children's country of residence within the UK, their household income, parental employment status and family structure. This enables us to compare variation in overall subjective well-being according to these factors. Table 2 shows the mean life satisfaction scores and proportions of children with low life satisfaction for each group. The key differences here are as follows:

- There was no difference in the overall (mean) life satisfaction score for girls and boys.
- In the UK, children in England have the lowest mean subjective well-being. Children in Northern Ireland have the highest

Table 2: Variations in overall subjective well-being MCS

Gender	Mean life satisfaction (out of 36)	% with low life satisfaction
Boy	29.3	9.7%
Girl	29.5	10.0%
Country		
England	29.3	10.1%
Wales	29.6	8.8%
Scotland	29.7	9.2%
Northern Ireland	30.5	6.9%
Equivalent income quintile		
Bottom	29.0	12.3%
Second	29.0	11.6%
Third	29.3	9.9%
Fourth	29.9	6.8%
Top	29.8	8.0%
Poverty		
Above <60% median threshold	29.5	9.1%
Below <60% median threshold	29.0	12.4%
Family type		
Both natural parents	30.0	7.3%
Mother and step parent	28.4	13.5%
Father and step parent	29.2	10.3%
Lone mother	28.5	14.1%
Lone father	28.9	8.8%
Other	28.1	14.7%
Parental employment		
Both in work	29.8	7.7%
Main in work, partner not	30.1	7.7%
Partner in work, main not	29.8	9.1%
Both not in work	28.8	12.3%
Main in work or on leave, no partner	28.6	12.8%
Main not in work nor on leave, no partner	28.3	15.1%

Source: Millennium Cohort Study, Wave 5, 2011. Age: 11 years old. Scope: UK. Sample size: 13,469.

well-being and the smallest proportion of children with low subjective well-being. Mean subjective well-being in Northern Ireland is significantly higher than in England but not significantly higher than in Scotland and Wales.

- Children in families in the bottom two equivalent income quintiles have lower mean subjective well-being and are also more likely to be in the 'low subjective well-being' group. This is also the case for children living in families with incomes below the poverty line (i.e. equivalent net income is less than 60% of the median income).
- As reported in previous years, children living with both birth parents have higher levels of well-being than children living in other family arrangements. Children living with neither of their birth parents have the lowest mean well-being. Previous analysis (Rees et al, 2010a; The Children's Society, 2012) has shown that the quality of relationships explains 10 times more of the variation in overall well-being than family structure. Children who agree that their family get along well together have higher well-being irrespective of family structure. Where children disagreed that their family got on well together, their level of overall well-being was lower and virtually identical, no matter who they lived with.

- Children with one parent in employment have the highest mean well-being though the differences between them and those with two earners is very small. Within households with two parents/carers anyone with an earning parent has higher mean well-being than where both are unemployed. The lowest well-being can be found where children are in lone parent families without employment.

Of course all these factors overlap and interact. When we analyse them together³ they explain just over 2% of the variation in child subjective well-being. So, although there are differences between children in the sub-groups considered in Table 2, the types of factors considered – country, household income, parental employment and family structure – do not help us a lot in understanding why some children have much higher or lower subjective well-being than others.

However, we have shown in previous reports that measures of poverty and material deprivation based on children's direct experiences rather than household income show much stronger associations with their subjective well-being. We present some new findings related to this issue in a later section of the report.

2.3 Children's satisfaction with different aspects of their lives

In previous editions of The Good Childhood Report we have summarised children's satisfaction with 10 'domains' included in The Good Childhood Index. These are aspects of life that we have identified as being important through consultation with children (The Children's Society, 2008) and analysis of survey findings (Rees et al, 2010b). For each aspect of life, children are asked to rate their satisfaction on a 0–10 scale⁴.

We have shown previously that:

- Children's satisfaction with these different aspects of life varies considerably, with the highest levels of satisfaction tending to be with home, family and friends; and the lowest levels of satisfaction tending to be with appearance and the future.
- Some aspects of life – such as satisfaction with family and amount of choice – are more strongly associated with overall well-being than others – such as satisfaction with friends.
- There are some significant gender variations in satisfactions with certain aspects of life. In particular girls are much less satisfied than boys with the way that they look, particularly as they get older.

³ Using multiple regression analysis

⁴ In The Children's Worlds survey, the end points of this scale were labelled as 'Not at all happy' and 'Completely happy'. This is a slight change from previous versions of the index (previously 'Completely unhappy' to 'Completely happy' to bring the wording in line with that used in other countries in the Children's Worlds project. Our analysis suggests that this change of wording does not appear to have had a substantial effect on children's responses to the index questions.

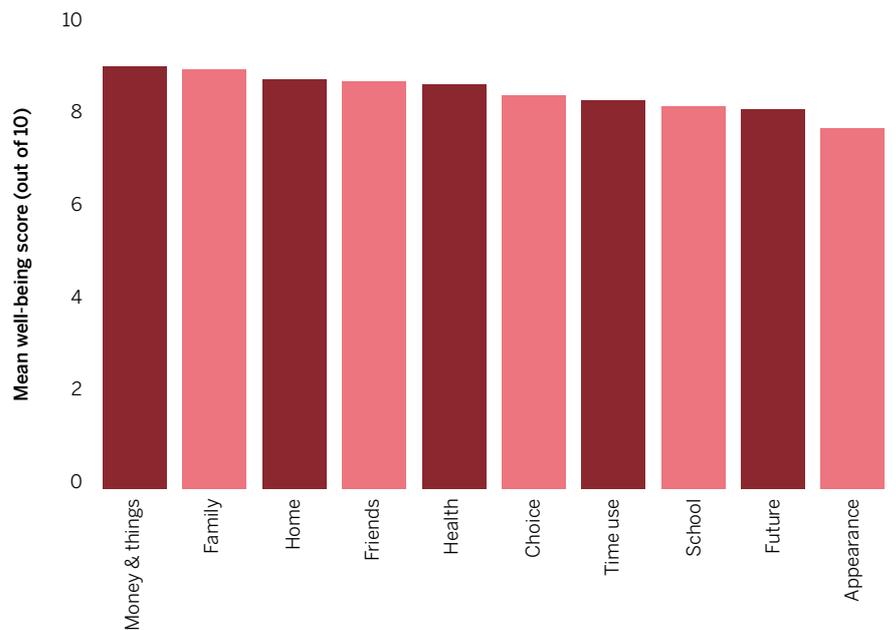
- There are also other age patterns. Satisfaction with friends changes relatively little across the age range from eight to 15 years old, whereas satisfaction with school and appearance drop significantly as children get older.

In this section we present the latest data on The Good Childhood Index, using the wave of the Children's Worlds survey which was carried out in England in late 2013 and early 2014 with children in Year 6 (10 to 11 years old) and Year 8 (12 to 13 years old). Broadly speaking these new findings are consistent with previous research.

Figure 3 shows mean scores in each of these domains for the Children's Worlds survey. Children reported the highest levels of satisfaction with money and possessions and with their relationships with their families; and the lowest levels of satisfaction (by quite a margin) with their appearance.

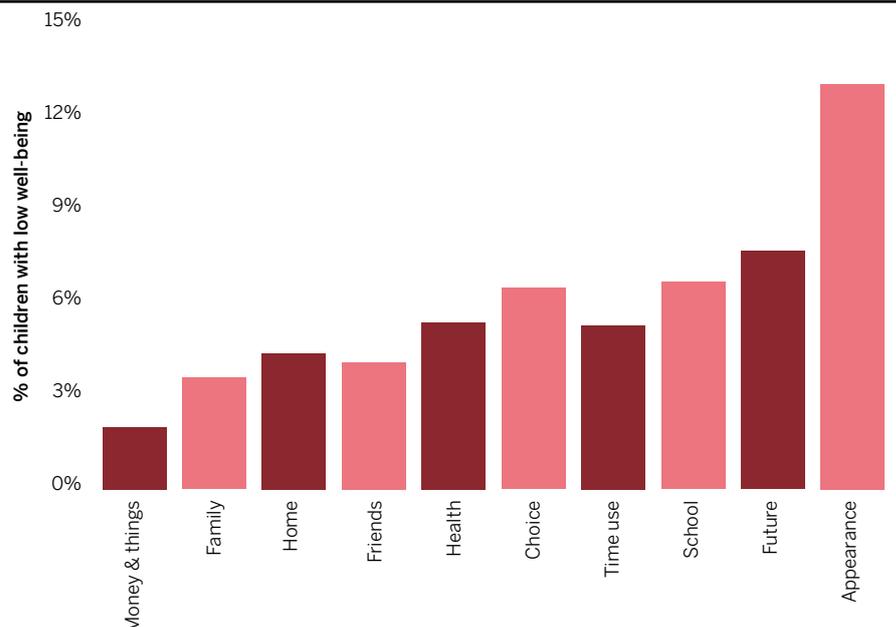
Considering the proportion of children with low well-being (defined as a score of four or less out of 10) on each of The Good Childhood Index domains, we found a similar (but not identical) pattern, shown in Figure 4. The domain with the smallest proportion of children with low well-being was 'money and things', with 2%, and the domain with the largest proportion was appearance, with 13%.

Figure 3: Mean scores on The Good Childhood Index domains



Source: Children's Worlds Survey, 2013-14. Age: 10 to 13 years old. Scope: England. Sample size: 2,276.

Figure 4: Proportion of children with low well-being for The Good Childhood Index domains

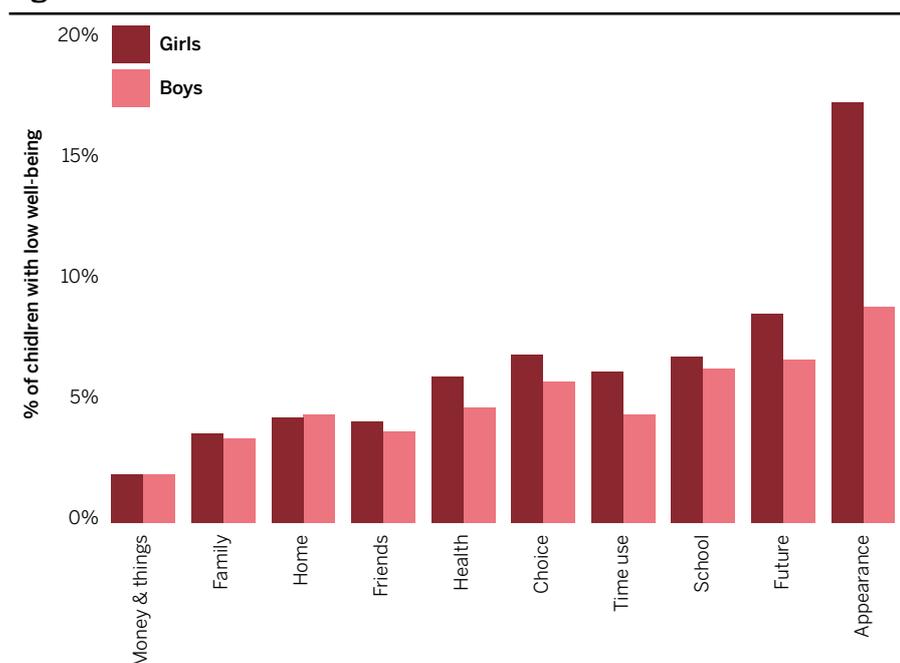


Source: Children's Worlds Survey, 2013-14. Age: 10 to 13 years old. Scope: England. Sample size: 2,276

'If you don't feel good about yourself you go in a bad mood and sometimes you don't want to eat'

Year 8 student (girl)

Figure 5: Gender differences for The Good Childhood Index

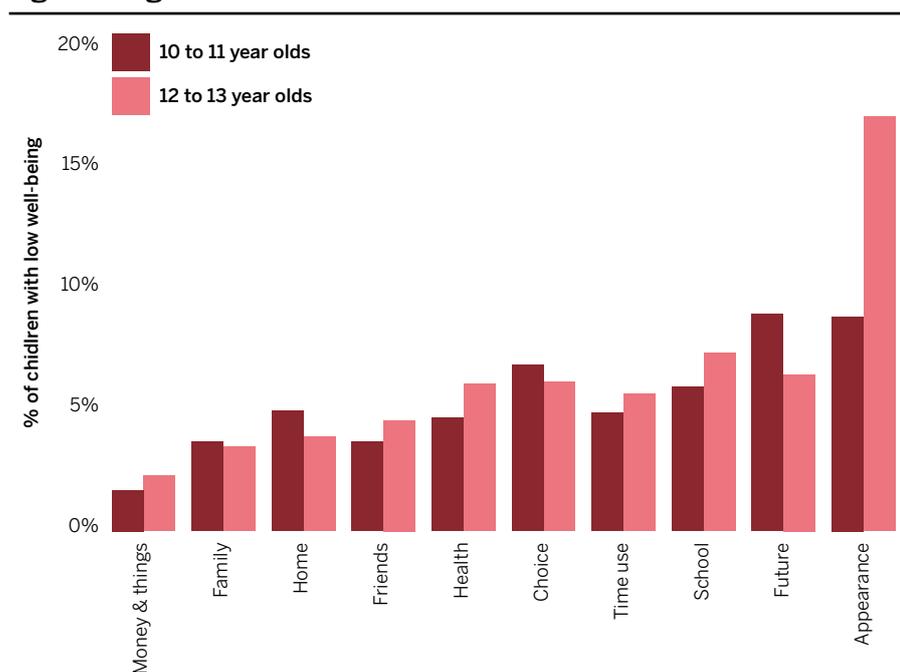


Source: Children's Worlds Survey, 2013-14. Age: 10 to 13 years old.
 Scope: England. Sample size: 2276

There were significant gender differences for some of these domains (Figure 5). The most notable difference was for 'appearance' – girls were twice as likely (18%) to have low well-being with this aspect of their life as boys (9%). The second strongest difference was feelings about the future, in relation to which 7% of boys and 9% of girls had low well-being⁵.

There were also differences based on children's ages (between the two age groups 10 to 11 years old and 12 to 13 years old) (Figure 6). Again, the differences for appearance were the most striking, with 9% of children aged 10 to 11 having low well-being in this aspect of their life, compared to 17% of children aged 12 to 13. As we will see below, appearance is also an issue where there are important patterns in time trends and in international comparisons.

Figure 6: Age differences for The Good Childhood Index



Source: Children's Worlds Survey, 2013-14. Age: 10 to 13 years old.
 Scope: England. Sample size: 2276

Data from the Millennium Cohort Study also enables us to look at gender differences for some aspects of life for children aged 11 in the UK, here using a scale from 0 to 6 (Figure 7). Girls were more satisfied than boys regarding school work and school. However they were less satisfied about their appearance, which is consistent with the results from the Children's Worlds survey presented above.

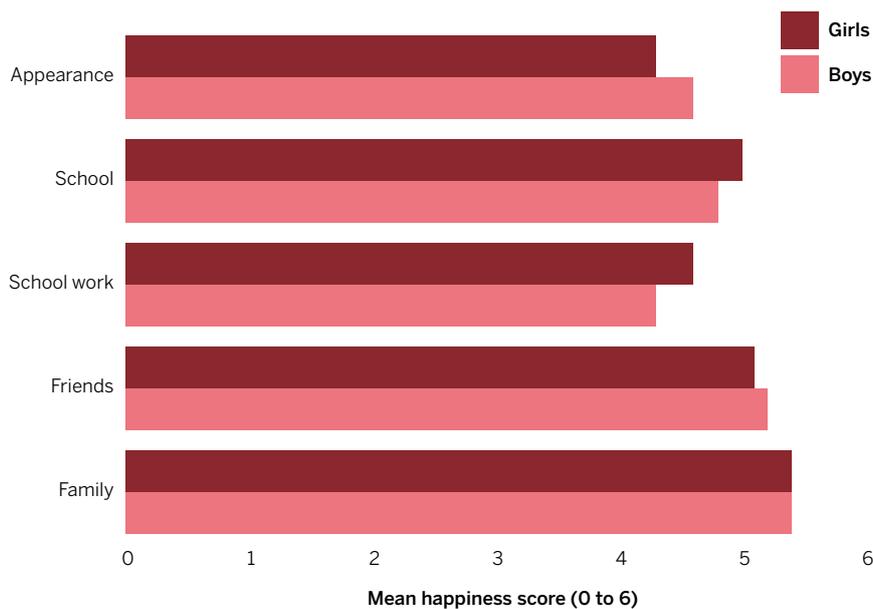
Data from children aged 10 to 15 in the most recent wave of the Understanding Society survey, focusing on the same five aspects of life, also broadly confirm this

5 Differences were established using chi square tests; n for all=1692.

'People are judged on looks. Sometimes you feel like you can't enjoy yourself unless you are pretty'

Year 8 student (girl)

Figure 7: Summary of happiness with different aspects of life (MCS)



Source: Millennium Cohort Study, 2011. Age: around 11 years old. Scope: UK. Sample size: 13,469.

picture. Girls were happier with their school work, but less happy with their appearance. There was no difference for the other domains – family, friends and school.

2.4 Summary

- Where we ask children about their satisfaction with life and their happiness with specific aspects of their life, we find that the large majority of children in the UK respond relatively positively. Around 5% to 10% of children aged eight to 15 years old can be said to have low subjective well-being, depending on the question being asked.

- The proportion of children with low well-being increases with age between the ages of eight and 15.
- There is also evidence of gender differences in feelings of happiness, with boys having higher well-being than girls.
- Children in Northern Ireland have higher subjective well-being than children living in England, although they do not have significantly higher subjective well-being than those in Scotland and Wales.
- There are some differences in child subjective well-being according to household type. Children living with both birth parents have the highest

well-being and those living in households without either of their birth parents having the lowest.

- Children living in low income households have significantly lower overall subjective well-being than those living in high income households, although the association is small.
- Children tend to be much happier with some of these aspects of their lives – such as money and possessions, family and home, and friendships – than with others – such as their appearance, their future and school. For example, only 4% of children aged 10 to 13 were unhappy with their family relationships compared to 13% who were unhappy with the way that they looked.
- There are some important gender differences in terms of happiness with different aspects of life. Girls tend to be a little happier with school than boys. On the other hand girls are much less happy with their appearance, particularly as they get older.



3. Trends in child subjective well-being over time

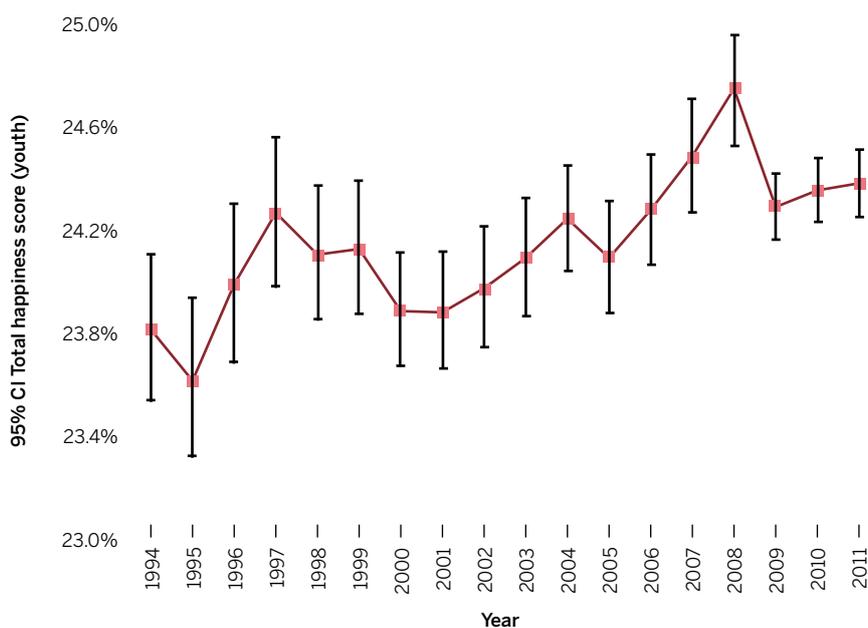
3.1 Overall trends, 1994 to 2011

Since 1994 the British Household Panel Youth Survey, and its successor the Understanding Society survey, has asked children aged 11–15 the same questions discussed above about their satisfaction with family, friends, appearance, school and life as a whole. When we first analysed this data (Bradshaw & Keung, 2011) we found that subjective well-being had improved significantly over the period 1994–2007. Most improvement had been in happiness with school and happiness with friends. Also at the beginning of the period, girls had had lower

subjective well-being than boys, but the gap had closed by 2007. In the last Good Childhood Report we observed that between 2008 and 2010 child happiness had stopped improving. We have now been able to update this picture adding the most recent data available, which is for 2011/12.

As can be seen in Figure 8, there is very little difference in the mean life satisfaction score between 2010 and 2011. We can conclude that after a period of increase from 1994 to 2007, children's subjective well-being has stopped increasing during the last few years for which data is available.

Figure 8: Children's life satisfaction, 1994 to 2011
(Note: See Box 5 for explanation of the bars in the chart)



Source: British Household Panel and then (from 2009) Understanding Society/BHPS youth survey, combined sample. Aged 11–15. Scope UK. Sample size: varies over time but in Understanding Society Wave C over 3700.

Box 5: Explaining 'confidence intervals'

The charts in this section show the mean scores (represented by the points joined by the trend line) in well-being. The mean scores are accurate for the group of children who took part in the survey but, because this is only a sample of children, we do not know exactly what the mean scores are for all children in the UK in this age group.

So, the charts show bars extending above and below each point. These bars show a 'confidence interval' which can be thought of as representing a range of values within which we can be 95% confident that the actual mean score lies. The reason for showing these bars is to provide a rough guide to compare one year with another.

If the range of bars for one year do not overlap with the range of bars for another then we can be reasonably confident that the mean scores in the two years are different. For example, it is likely that the mean scores in 2007 to 2011 are all higher than the values in 2000 and 2001 because there is no overlap in the bars between these two groups of years.

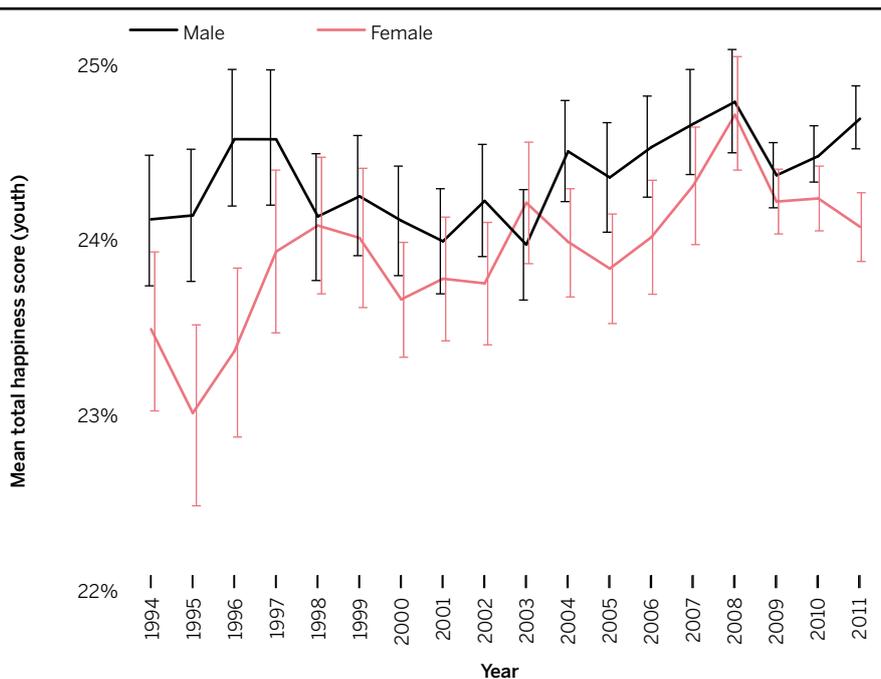
Figure 9 shows the trend separately for boys and girls. As indicated above, the gap between girls and boys narrowed and eventually closed between 1994 and 2007. In 2011, for the first time since 1996, there was a significant gender gap in subjective well-being of children aged 11 to 15 in the UK, with girls having lower mean well-being than boys. It will be important to see whether this trend continues in subsequent years (data from 2012 will be available later this year).

3.2 Trends in satisfaction with different aspects of life

Figure 10 to Figure 13 show trends by gender for the four aspects of life that have been tracked since 1994⁶. The key points are:

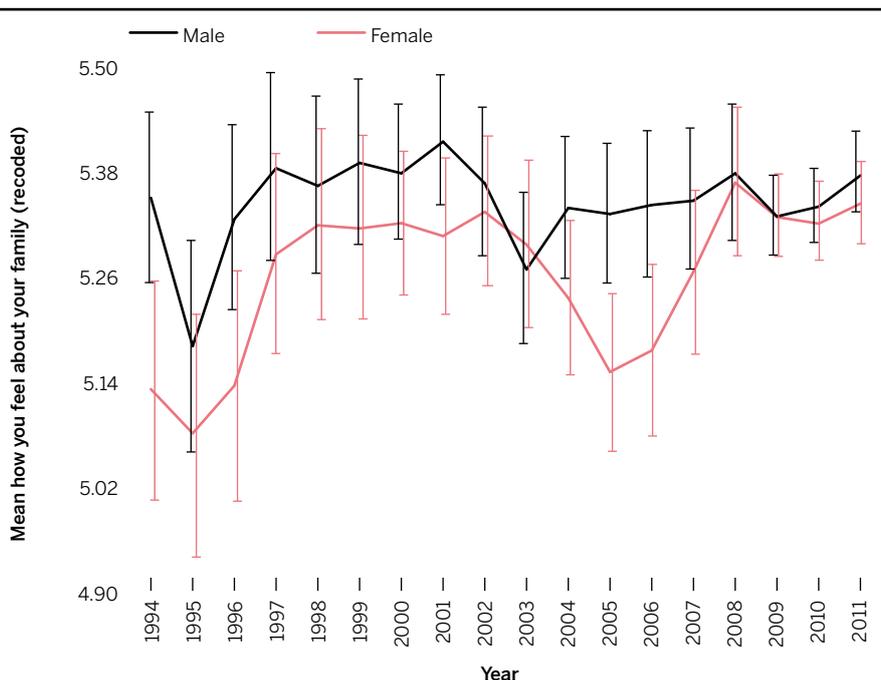
- Satisfaction with family has stayed relatively steady and there is currently no difference between boys and girls (Figure 10).
- There has been a sharp fall in girls' satisfaction with their friends since 2008. There is currently no difference between boys and girls with this aspect of life (Figure 11). It will be important to monitor if this trend continues and a gap develops between girls' and boys' satisfaction with this aspect of life.

Figure 9: Children's life satisfaction, 1994 to 2011 by gender



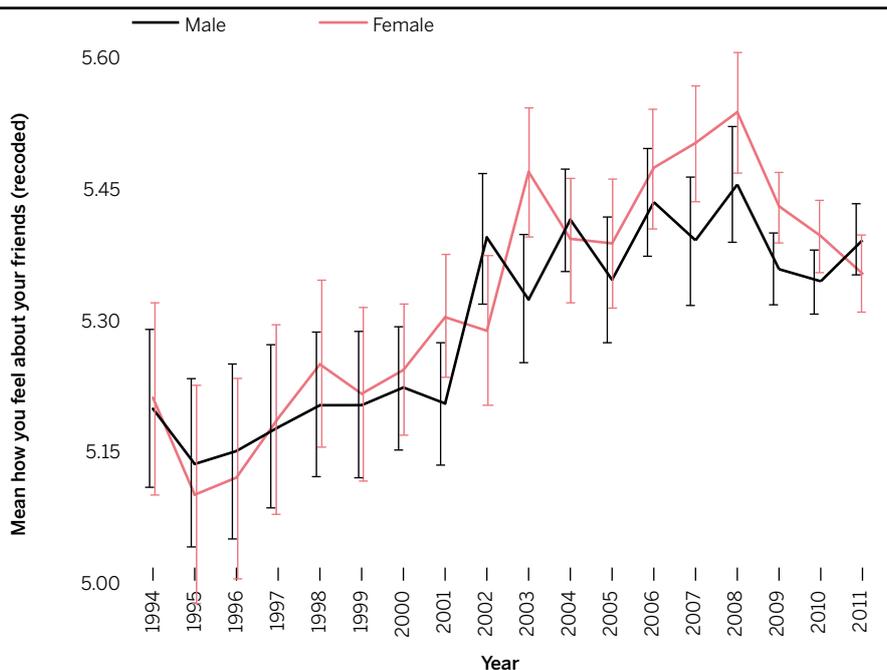
Source: British Household Panel and then (from 2009) Understanding Society/ BHPs youth survey, combined sample. Aged 11-15. Scope UK. Sample size: varies over time but in Understanding Society Wave C over 3700

Figure 10: Children's satisfaction with family, 1994 to 2011 by gender



Source: British Household Panel and then (from 2009) Understanding Society/ BHPs youth survey, combined sample. Aged 11-15. Scope UK. Sample size: varies over time but in Understanding Society Wave C over 3700

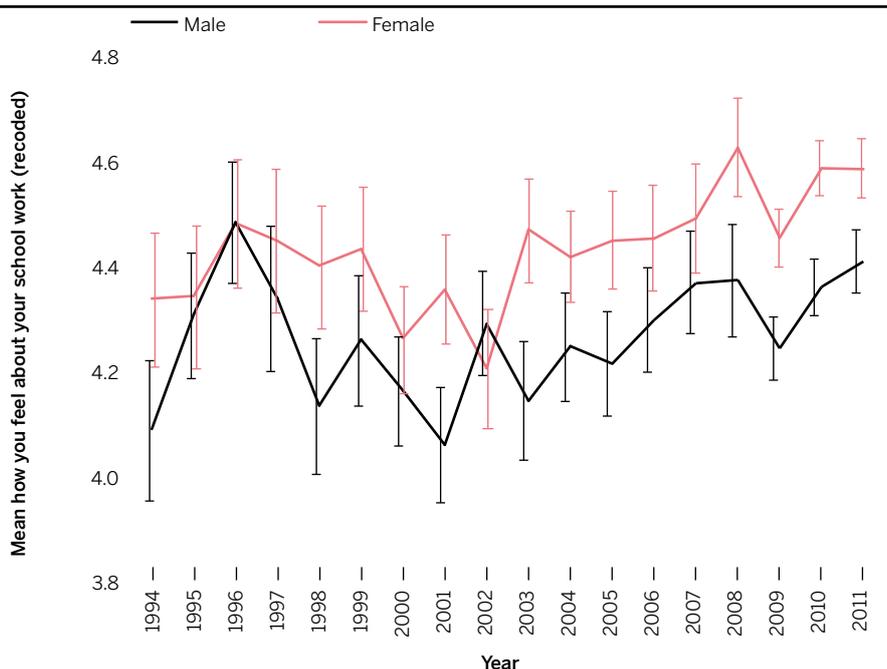
Figure 11: Children's satisfaction with friends, 1994 to 2011 by gender



- Levels of satisfaction with school work have been steady over the last few years and there is a consistent recent pattern of girls being more satisfied than boys with this aspect of their lives (Figure 12).
- Perhaps the most striking fact that emerges from a detailed analysis of the data is the trend in girls' and boys' satisfaction with their appearance. There was no difference in 2002 but since then the scores have diverged sharply. As we will see in the next section this may be a particular problem for the well-being of children in the UK (Figure 13).

Source: British Household Panel and then (from 2009) Understanding Society/BHPS youth survey, combined sample. Aged 11-15. Scope UK. Sample size: varies over time but in Understanding Society Wave C over 3700

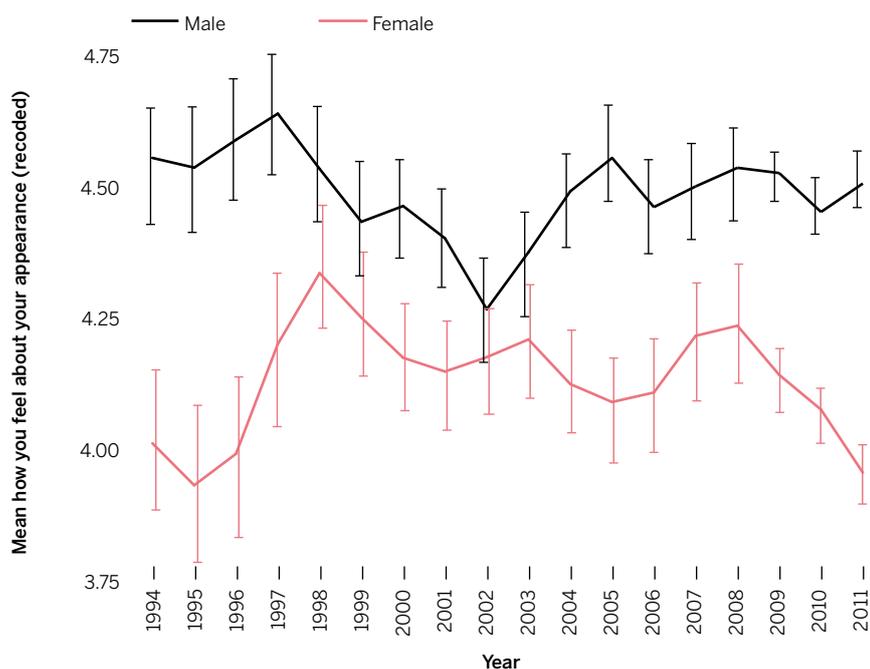
Figure 12: Children's satisfaction with school work, 1994 to 2011 by gender



Source: British Household Panel and then (from 2009) Understanding Society/BHPS youth survey, combined sample. Aged 11-15. Scope UK. Sample size: varies over time but in Understanding Society Wave C over 3700

6 Note that the 'school' category was only added to the BHPS more recently in 2002.

Figure 13: Children's satisfaction with appearance, 1994 to 2011 by gender



Source: British Household Panel and then (from 2009) Understanding Society/ BHPS youth survey, combined sample. Aged 11-15. Scope UK. Sample size: varies over time but in Understanding Society Wave C over 3700

3.3 Summary

- The latest available evidence on time trends suggests that, after a period of increase from 1994 to 2007, children's subjective well-being in the UK stopped increasing between 2008 and 2011.
- There is also some evidence of time trends in children's happiness with particular aspects of life. The most notable of these is a growing gender gap in happiness with appearance, with girls being increasingly unhappy with this aspect of their lives in comparison with boys.







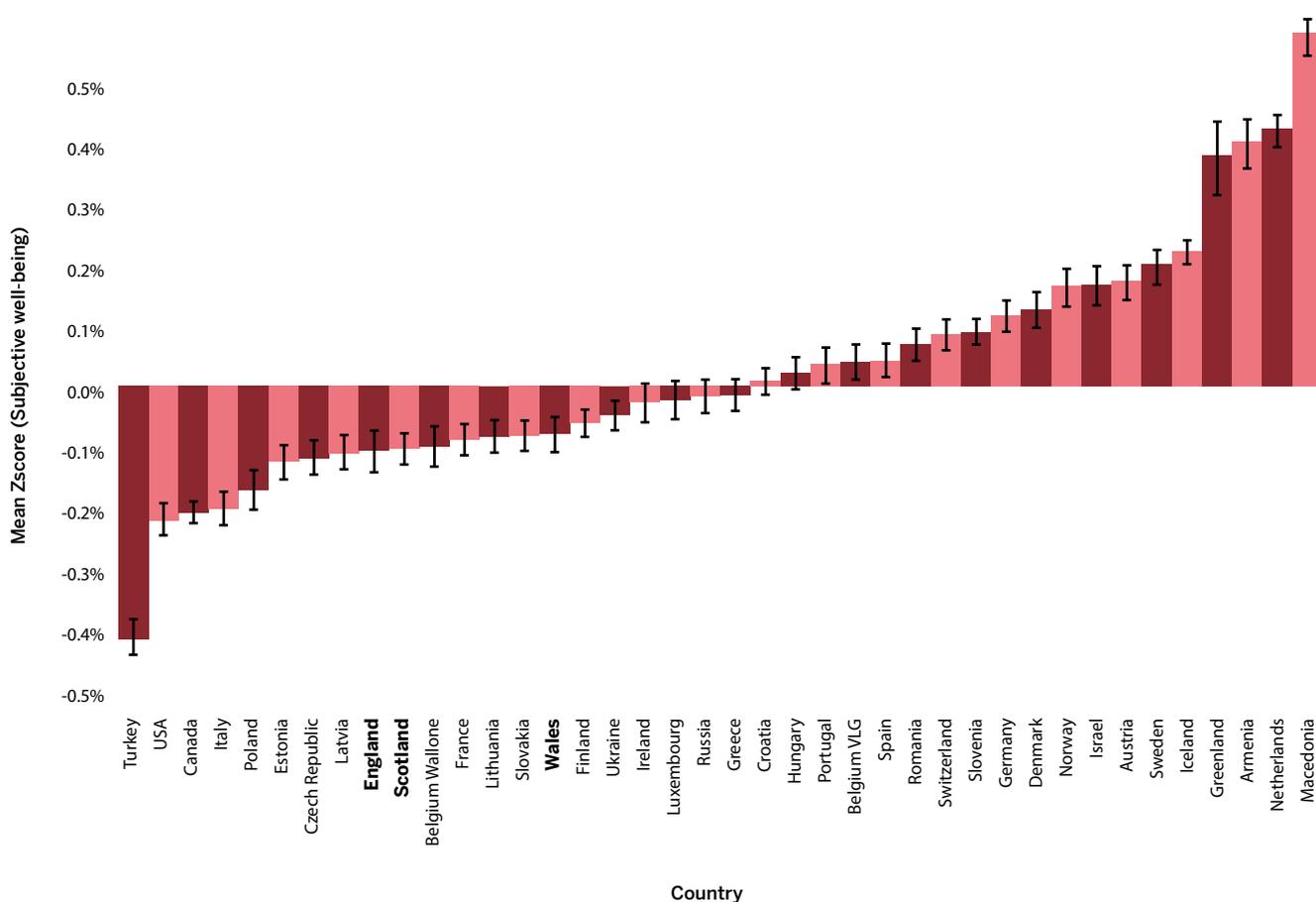
4. Trends across countries

International comparisons of children's subjective well-being have considerable potential value. In recent years there have been recommendations about the importance of measuring people's subjective well-being at an international level from the influential Stiglitz Commission prepared by leading economists (Stiglitz et al., 2009). Comparisons of subjective well-being between

countries enable the findings for particular countries to be placed in a broader context and also have the potential to identify specific aspects of life where children in a given country are feeling more or less positive than might be expected. This latter type of information might inform debates about the state of childhood and could also help policymakers to identify priorities for improving children's lives.

There are only two sources of comparable data on child subjective well-being – the Health Behaviour of School-aged Children (HBSC) (Currie et al., 2012) and the Children's Worlds survey (See Box 3 in the Introduction for further details). In this section we present some international comparisons derived from these two surveys.

Figure 14: Overall subjective well-being. League table of z scores



Source: Health Behaviour of School-aged Children 2010/11. Aged 11, 13 and 15. Total sample 213,595. National samples mainly vary between 4000 and 6000.

4.1 Overall life satisfaction

Figure 14 shows the league table of an index of subjective well-being using HBSC data from 2010/11 constructed by Bradshaw et al (2013) and Klocke et al (2014). Out of 39 countries/regions England comes 32nd, Scotland 31st and Wales 26th – all of them well below the average.

Table 3 shows the rank order of the British countries (Northern Ireland is not in the HBSC) on each of the components of subjective well-being. Scotland was ranked lowest on subjective health and England lowest on views about school. Wales was ranked much higher than either England or Scotland on relationships and Scotland was ranked much higher than England or Wales on life satisfaction.

Figure 15 presents data on satisfaction with life as a whole from the pilot wave of the Children’s Worlds survey. As with the HBSC data earlier, England fares relatively poorly in this comparison, being ninth out of the 11 countries in terms of overall subjective well-being.

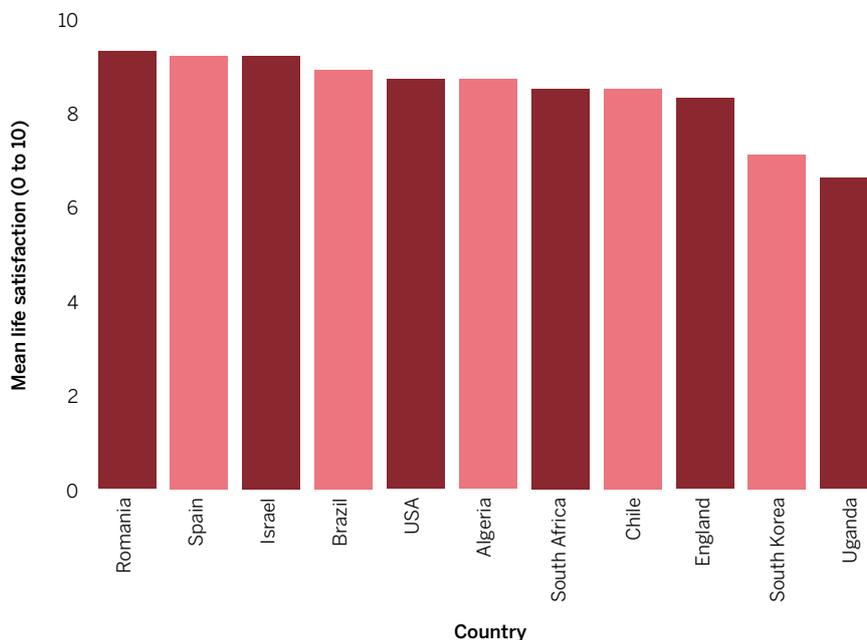
The international evidence therefore suggests that the overall subjective well-being of children in Britain is comparatively poor.

Table 3: Rank order of British countries on components of subjective well-being.

	Rank out of 40 countries		
	England	Scotland	Wales
Subjective health	29	35	32
Views about school	27	24	23
Relationships	26	31	17
Life satisfaction	34	15	35
Overall subjective well-being	32	21	26

Source: Health Behaviour of School Aged Children 2010/11. Aged 11, 13 and 15. England 3524, Scotland 6771, Wales 5454

Figure 15: Mean life satisfaction among 12-year-olds in 11 countries



Source: Children’s Worlds pilot study, 2011-12. Aged around 12 years old. Scope: 11 countries (regions within some countries) as shown. Sample: 16,903 children.

4.2 Satisfaction with different aspects of life

The Children's Worlds survey also includes the domains covered in The Good Childhood Index. Table 4 shows the ranking of children in England for these aspects of life. Children in England fared relatively well in terms of their satisfaction with home, money and possessions, and friends. They ranked higher for these aspects of life than they did for satisfaction with life as a whole shown in Figure 15. The aspect of life for which children in England ranked lowest was their satisfaction with their appearance – where they ranked 10th out of 11 countries, higher only than South Korea.

In fact, further statistical tests show that the mean scores for satisfaction with appearance were much lower among children in England (7.3 out of 10) than in the other 10 countries combined (average score of 8.1 out of 10).

The issue of how children feel about their appearance has been a recurring theme in our research on children's subjective well-being in the UK. Previous reports have shown that satisfaction with appearance declines substantially during the early teenage years, particularly for girls. Evidence presented elsewhere in this report suggests that in recent years there has been a growing gap between males and females in this respect. The provisional evidence presented above adds a further dimension to this picture, suggesting that children in England are much less satisfied with this aspect of their lives than children in a range of other countries.

It should also be noted that the gender difference regarding satisfaction with appearance is not a consistent feature across all countries. In five of the 11 countries included in the pilot survey – Israel, Uganda, Brazil, South Africa and Algeria – there was no difference between girls and boys in the mean scores for satisfaction with appearance. The gender gap in England was statistically larger⁷ than in any other country.

4.3 Summary

- Children in England fare relatively poorly in terms of their overall subjective well-being in two international comparative studies – ranking 32nd out of 39 countries in Europe and North America and ninth out of 11 in a pilot survey of countries across five continents.
- In the one study where data was available, children in Wales and Scotland also fared relatively poorly, although slightly better than England. International comparative data are not available for Northern Ireland.
- In terms of happiness with different aspects of life, children in England fare poorly in relation to their feelings about the way that they look, compared to children in nine out of 10 other countries around the world.

Table 4: Ranking of children in England for 10 aspects of life covered in The Good Childhood Index

Aspect	Ranking for England (out of 11 countries)
Choice	5th (out of 9 countries)
Home	6th
Money and possessions	6th
Friends	6th
Time use	7th
The future	7th
Family	8th
School	8th
Health	9th
Appearance	10th

Children's Worlds pilot study, 2011-12. Aged around 12 years old. Scope: 11 countries (regions within some countries) as shown. Sample: 16,903 children.

7 Using eta², the effect size for England was 0.046 and the next largest was for South Korea (.028)

Part two

We look at new evidence on four factors that are associated with children's subjective well-being including what children have and how parents behave.

5. Factors associated with children's subjective well-being: What children do

In this section we explore the relationships between children's subjective well-being and their activities and behaviours. We explored this issue in The Good Childhood Report 2013, looking at the links between children's subjective well-being and different categories of activities that have been found to be associated with well-being among adults.

In this section, we extend this analysis by making use of newly-available data from the Millennium Cohort Study which relates to children around the age of 11. We present findings on the links between children's subjective well-being and the following aspects of their lives covered in the MCS child questionnaire:

- Activities and leisure time
- Friendships
- Bullying
- Health behaviours
- Seeking help
- Social behaviours.

In exploring the associations here we have used two measures of subjective well-being included in the MCS questionnaire – satisfaction with life as a whole (referred to as 'life satisfaction' or 'satisfied') and happiness in the last four weeks (referred to as 'happiness' or 'happy'). The analysis focuses on mean subjective well-being scores and proportions of children with low well-being (defined in this case as scoring on or below the mid-point).

Box 6 draws attention to two general issues that should be borne in mind when thinking about the findings.

Box 6: Issues to consider in interpreting the findings in this section

1. It is not possible to identify 'cause and effect' in this data because it was all gathered at a single point in time. If we find a link between greater frequency of playing sport and higher subjective well-being, this could plausibly mean (a) that children with higher subjective well-being are more likely to play sport (e.g. because they feel more energetic); (b) that playing sport gives children a better sense of well-being (e.g. through feeling more healthy); (c) that the relationship is explained by some other factor (e.g. children who live in more prosperous areas have higher subjective well-being and better access to sports facilities); (d) combinations of the above and other explanations.

2. Because the MCS sample is relatively large, it is likely that many associations between variables will be found to be statistically significant even though the link between them is very small in practical terms. To take account of this we focus here primarily on findings that are not only statistically significant but also where the variable being considered 'explains' 1% or more of the variation in subjective well-being once other factors such as gender and household income are taken into account.

5.1 Activities and leisure time

The MCS questionnaire contains nine questions about how often children spend time on various activities:

How often do you...

...listen to or play music, not at school?

...draw, paint or make things, not at school?

...play sports or active games inside or outside?

...read for enjoyment, not for school?

...play games on a computer or games console?

...use the internet, not at school?

...use the internet for homework?

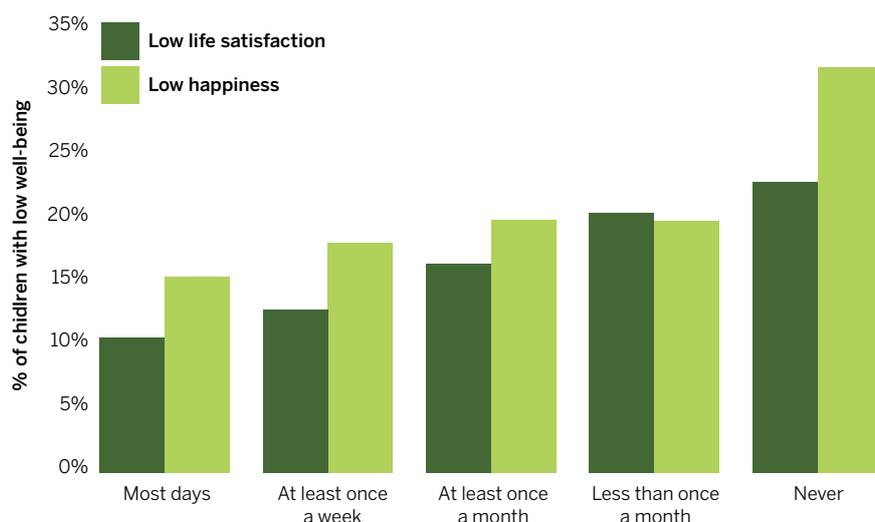
...exchange messages with friends on the internet?

...visit a social networking website on the internet?

There was a significant association between the frequency of eight of these activities and children's well-being – the exception was the question about exchanging messages with friends on the internet, where no significant association with well-being was found.

Most of the associations were significant but small. The only activity that explained more than 1% of the variation in children's subjective well-being was playing sports or active games. The proportion of children with low life satisfaction and happiness for different frequencies of this activity

Figure 16: Frequency of playing sports or active games, inside or outside, and low well-being



Source: Millennium Cohort Study, 2011. Age: around 11 years old. Scope: UK. Sample size: 13,469.

are shown in Figure 16. Children who play sports or active games most days were around half as likely to have low well-being as those who never did so.

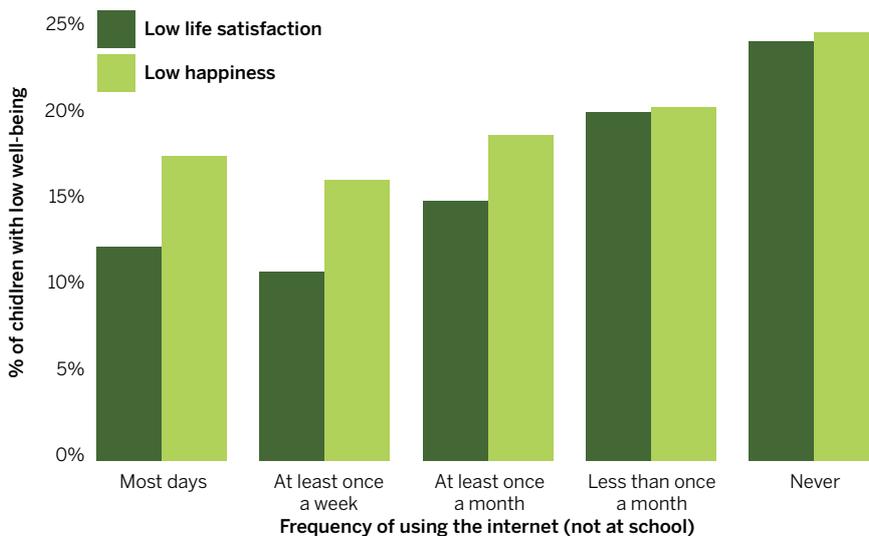
For the other activities that had significant associations with well-being there was sometimes a slightly different pattern which is worth noting. For some of these activities, the frequency associated with the highest level of subjective well-being was 'at least once week'. Figure 17 illustrates this pattern for the question about using the internet. Children with the least likelihood of low well-being were those who used the internet at least once a week.

Children who never used the internet outside school had the highest probability of low well-being. In terms of statistical comparisons,

those children who used the internet most days (55% of 11-year-olds) or at least once a week (31%) were significantly less likely to have low well-being than those children who used the internet less than once a month (3.3% of 11-year-olds) or never (3.1%). The strength of association here was relatively small, but the analysis does suggest that frequent internet use is linked to slightly higher well-being.

There was a similar pattern for the questions about listening to or playing music and playing computer games. For all of these questions children who did the activities at least once a week, but not most days, had the highest levels of well-being and those who never did the activities had the lowest.

Figure 17: Frequency of using the internet (not at school), and low well-being



Source: Millennium Cohort Study, 2011. Age: around 11 years old. Scope: UK. Sample size: 13,469.

In relation to using social networking sites on the internet, children who never did this activity had the highest levels of well-being, although again the association was relatively weak. It should be noted here that there are recommended lower age limits for the use of some social networking sites which are higher than the age group covered in the MCS (around 11 years old). In fact, perhaps reflecting this, over half of children in the MCS said that they never visited social networking sites even though, as noted above, 86% said that they used the internet outside school at least once a week or more.

Finally, the frequency of activities such as reading for enjoyment had a weak but straightforward association with well-being where higher frequency was associated with higher well-being.

'It's easy to get to most places to be active. I like to cycle in to the countryside for a nice peaceful environment and for sports'

Year 7 student

'It is easy [to be active] because we have lots of stuff like swimming pool and we can go biking or just for a walk or run'

Year 7 student

'Not much to do! Exercise equipment at park, boring leisure centre and PE at school. Nothing else to do. But I do ballet in a different place so we have to drive'

Year 7 student

'If you went for a run you would feel weird on your own and scared people will judge me'

Year 8 student

5.2 Friendships

Friendships are viewed by children as fundamental to their well-being (The Children's Society, 2006). However, the statistical evidence from our research programme has not always supported the central importance of friendships. Among the 10 aspects of life that make up The Good Childhood Index, children's satisfaction with their friendships has been found to make relatively little contribution to explaining variations in life satisfaction once other aspects of life are taken into account (Rees et al., 2010b), although there was more evidence of an association with happiness. On the other hand, whether children feel they have enough friends has been found to be significantly associated with their well-being (The Children's Society, 2012).

'It's easy to be happy because your [sic] friends are there'

Year 10 student

'You might not be happy at home but your friends cheer you up at school'

Year 7 student

'I have friends that care about me and I care about them'

Year 6 student

The MCS asks a number of questions about friendships. Here we look at four questions about conflict with friends and about spending time with friends. The first thing to note is that a very small number of children (around 30 or

'I am too fat to go out and also there is no one to play with'

Year 8 student

'When I get upset it's because my friends are sometimes mean to me'

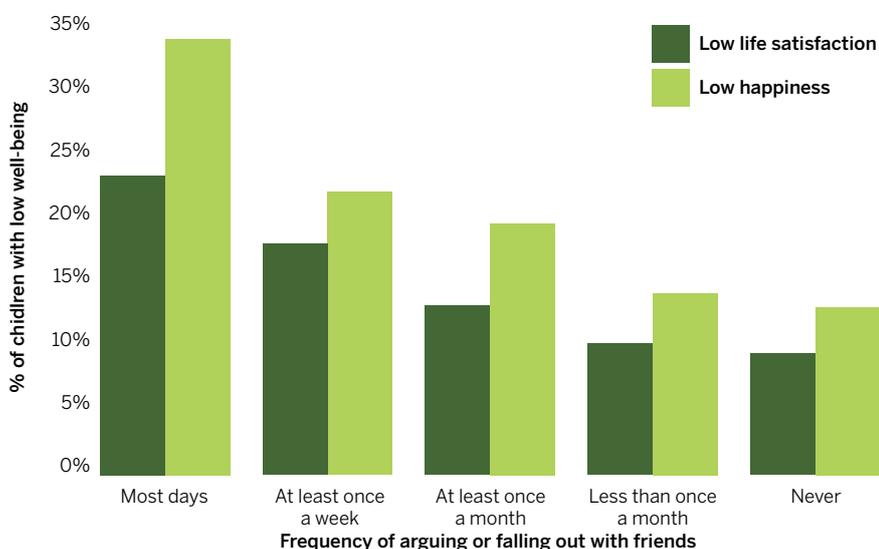
Year 5 student

so) said that they did not have any friends. The subjective well-being of this small group of children was markedly low with over 50% of them having low life satisfaction and low happiness (compared to figures of around 12% and 17% respectively for the whole sample).

Excluding this group, three of these questions asked children how often they spent time with their friends outside school in general, in the afternoon after school and at the weekend. There was only a small significant association between time spent with friends overall and well-being and little or no association at all for the other two questions.

Levels of conflict with friends showed a slightly stronger connection with children's subjective well-being. Children who argued more frequently with friends were more likely to have low well-being (Figure 18) – in particular those children who had arguments 'most days' – and this factor explained around 2% of the variation in life satisfaction once gender and household income were taken into account.

Figure 18: Frequency of arguing or falling out with friends



Source: Millennium Cohort Study, 2011. Age: around 11 years old. Scope: UK. Sample size: 13,469.

5.3 Bullying

Our previous research has shown that experiences of being bullied have a strong association with low well-being. In fact the extent to which a child has recently been bullied explained more variation in life satisfaction than the combination of a range of socio-demographic factors (Rees et al, 2010a).

The MCS child questionnaire asks four questions about bullying – the extent to which the child had been hurt or picked on by siblings and by other children and the extent to which she/he has hurt or picked on siblings and other children. Response to all four questions

had a significant association with children's subjective well-being. Children who were bullied more frequently had significantly lower well-being as did children who bullied others more frequently. The strongest association with subjective well-being was the experience of being bullied by children other than siblings (Figure 19). Over 40% of children who had been bullied in this way most days had low happiness and 30% had low life satisfaction (compared to 10% to 11% of children who had never been bullied). This variable explained more than 5% of the variation in life satisfaction (taking into account gender and household income).

The MCS data at age 11 therefore support our earlier findings about the significant association between experiences of being bullied and subjective well-being.

It is notable that two recent pieces of analysis have found evidence that the effects of being bullied in childhood can extend well into adulthood affecting a range of adult outcomes (Wolke et al., 2013; Takizawa et al., 2014).

'Bullying. Smoking helps me release my stress (depression)'

Year 10 student

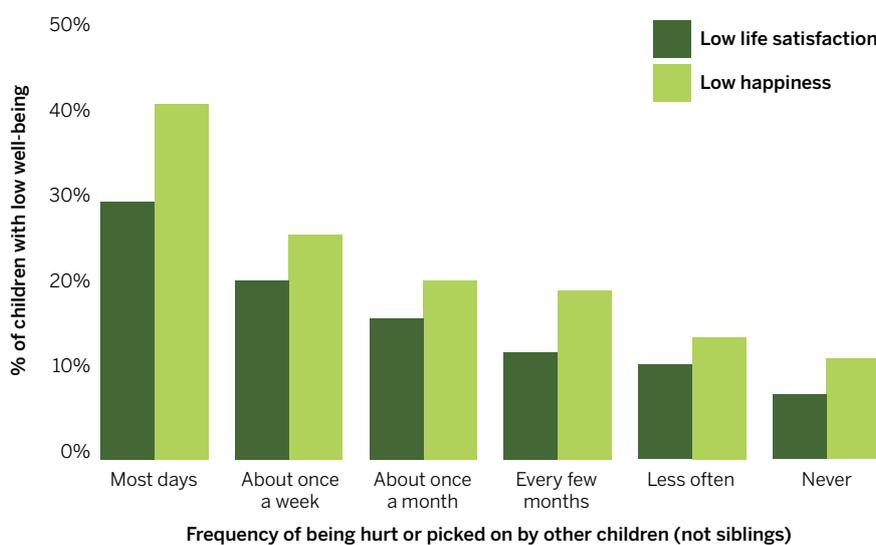
'Popularity is very important, but to be popular, you have to be pretty, rich, skinny, clever. If you're not you get bullied'

Year 9 student

'It's not that easy to feel happy when you're being bullied and people make fun of your family and it makes you feel sad when you care about them and love them'

Year 7 student

Figure 19: Frequency of being hurt or picked on by other children (not siblings)



Source: Millennium Cohort Study, 2011. Age: around 11 years old. Scope: UK. Sample size: 13,469.

5.4 Seeking help

Children's propensity to seek help when they have problems may be an important source of resilience. A willingness to seek help may be indicative of strong and trusted relationships with others and may be instrumental in resolving problems and maintaining a sense of well-being in the face of adversity. There is therefore a plausible link between help-seeking and children's subjective well-being

The MCS questionnaire asked a series of five questions (each in yes/no format) about possible actions that the child might take if they are 'worried about something'. Of these options, children were most likely

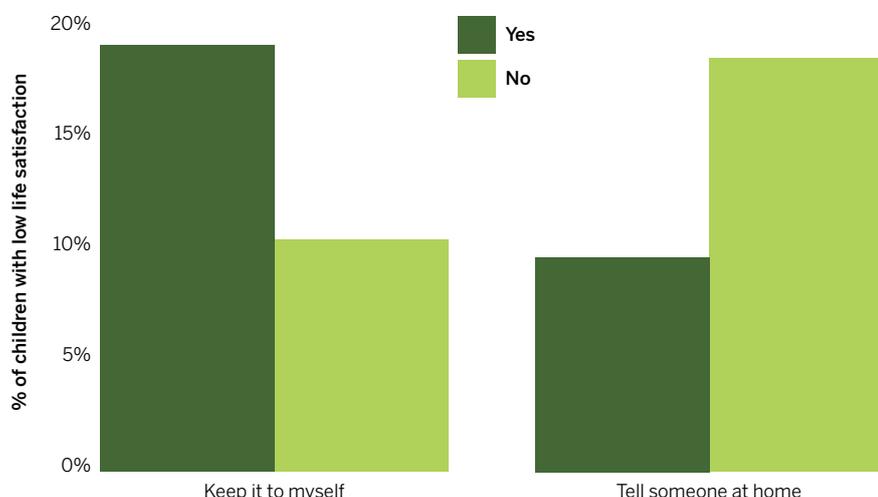
to say that they would tell someone at home (70%). Around 39% would tell a friend, around 28% would tell a teacher and around 12% would tell someone else. More than one of these responses was possible. On the other hand just over a fifth (22%) of children selected the option 'keep it to myself'.

There were some significant relationships with subjective well-being here. Children who would tell someone at home had higher subjective well-being than those who would not. Conversely children who would keep the issue to themselves had lower subjective well-being than those who would not (Figure 20).

5.5 Health behaviours

Children were asked a series of questions about smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol. In general, children's responses to these questions showed significant but weak associations with their subjective well-being. Children who had friends who smoked; who had tried a cigarette themselves; had friends who drank alcohol; and who had had an alcoholic drink themselves had lower than average well-being, but the strength of all these associations was quite small. However it should be borne in mind that, at age 11, only a minority of children fell into these categories. For example, only 3% of children had tried a cigarette, even if it was only a single puff and 13% had ever had an alcoholic drink (defined as more than a few sips). It may be that the strength of these associations would be different later in adolescence.

Figure 20: Help-seeking and children's subjective well-being



Source: Millennium Cohort Study, 2011. Age: around 11 years old. Scope: UK. Sample size: 13,469.

5.6 Social behaviours

Children were asked four questions about social behaviours (e.g. 'Have you ever taken something from a shop without paying for it?'). Responses to all four questions were associated with children's subjective well-being. Children responding in a more pro-social way tended to have higher well-being. The strongest association related to being noisy or rude in a public place – children who said that they had been noisy or rude in a public place were more likely to have low well-being.

5.7 Summary

- Children who regularly play sports or active games have higher well-being than children who do so less regularly.
- Regular use of computers and the internet is not associated with lower well-being. In fact, children who never use the internet outside school have much lower well-being than children who did.
- There is little variation in this age group, in children's well-being depending on how much time they spent with friends. But children who regularly argue or fall out with friends are much more likely than average to have low well-being.
- Children who are more likely to seek help from someone at home if they have a problem tend to have higher well-being. Those who are likely to keep problems to themselves tend to have lower well-being.
- Children who have less often engaged in anti-social behaviours such as stealing from a shop are more likely to have high well-being.



6. Factors associated with children's subjective well-being: What children have

Although associations between income and child subjective well-being tend to be small, it is widely established that children's material living standards, and especially child poverty, are of central importance to children's lives, and to the lives of the adults they become. Children living in poverty are more likely to suffer from worse mental and physical health; they are less likely to do well at school; and their life chances in adulthood in fields such as work, health, happiness and even premature mortality are impacted (for an overview see Griggs & Walker, 2008). But the relationship between household income and children's subjective well-being is complicated.

This complexity arises for two reasons:

- Firstly, studies of children have found a limited direct association between income poverty and subjective well-being (see Rees et al, 2011; Knies, 2011). This is mirrored in a limited association between income and subjective well-being for adults beyond a certain point (see Easterlin,

1974)⁸. But while there is a limited direct link, the outcomes of income – such as better nutrition, better healthcare, and an increased ability to live according to personal preferences – are associated with subjective well-being (Cummins, 2000). This suggests that the relationship between income and subjective well-being is indirect, rather than absent (Cummins, 2000; Main, 2014) – people cannot produce resources from nothing (Main and Pople, 2011).

- Secondly, household income tells us only a limited amount about children's own resources. Studies have shown that we cannot assume that material resources are shared fairly within households. Many researchers have found, for example, that men tend to get a greater share of household income and to spend more on themselves, while women tend to get a lesser share and spend more on children (Pahl, 2005; Grogan, 2004; Middleton et al, 1997; Lundberg et al, 1997). Children themselves, even those

who work, are likely to have only very limited control over both the amount of income available to the household, and what this is spent on⁹.

The issue of child poverty and children's material living conditions is especially important in the current economic climate, and in light of austerity measures which are impacting particularly strongly on families with children (Reed and Portes, 2014). In this section we update previous findings on material deprivation which have been included in previous editions of *The Good Childhood Report* (The Children's Society, 2012 and 2013). Next, we present some early findings on children's perceptions of the economic crisis, its impact on their families and their well-being in relation to this. Finally, we look at some new findings about how children's perceptions of how much they have compared to others – be they the child's peers or their family – impact on subjective well-being, and about how children perceive sharing within their households.

8 Although a point has not yet been reached in any country where increased income is no longer associated with any increase in subjective well-being (Stevenson and Wolfers, 2013).

9 Redmond, 2014, highlights the need for more research into sharing between adults and children in the same household. This is very likely to vary according to multiple factors including the age of the child and parenting style, but parents, legally at least, have a greater access to and control over finances than children.

'A new uniform is £50, but it's quite good because I don't grow very fast so I can manage with my old stuff, so my mum only has to buy a new uniform for my sister. It would be hard if she had to buy both at the same time'

Year 7 student

6.1 Material deprivation

To try to unpick the links between child poverty, children's material resources, and their subjective well-being, we worked with the University of York to develop an index of child material deprivation which was based on children's own perceptions of their material needs (see Main and Pople, 2011; Main, 2013). Some small refinements have been made to the index since then. In particular, one item from previous surveys – 'designer or brand-name trainers' – has been replaced with 'the right

kind of shoes or footwear to fit in with other people your age'.

We would not expect to see large changes in the proportion of children experiencing material deprivation in the time frame within which we have asked the questions (2010–2014). This is borne out in our findings. Table 5 shows the percentage of 14-year-old children lacking and wanting each item on the scale, based on our 2010 and 2014 surveys. The item with the largest difference – relating to

shoes – is probably accounted for by the change in the wording of this question.

In line with our previous research, we found that material deprivation was significantly associated with subjective well-being. Results are very similar for both years¹⁰, with material deprivation explaining 11% of the variation in subjective well-being in 2010 and 13% in 2014. Results are shown in Figure 21.

Our findings here show a consistent, negative impact of material deprivation on children's subjective well-being, measured according to children's own perceptions of their needs.

Table 5: Deprivation of individual items, 2010 compared to 2014 (% children)

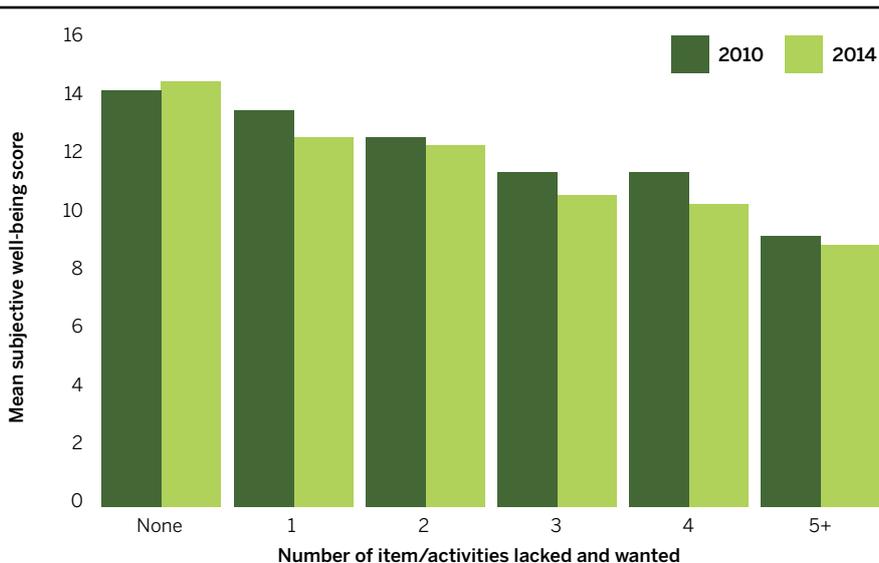
	Lack: want (2010)	Lack: want (2014)	Difference
Some pocket money each week to spend on yourself	21%	18%	-3
Some money that you can save each month, either in a bank or at home	20%	20%	0
The right kind of shoes or footwear to fit in with other people your age (2010: A pair of designer or brand-name trainers)	11%	6%	-5
An iPod or other personal music player	9%	7%	-2
Cable or satellite TV at home	4%	3%	-1
A garden at home or somewhere nearby like a park where you can safely spend time with your friends	8%	6%	-2
A family car for transport when you need it	5%	7%	+2
The right kind of clothes to fit in with other people your age	6%	6%	0
At least one holiday away from home each year with your family	18%	18%	0
Trips or days out with your family at least once a month	20%	21%	+1

'Sometimes it's a good week and sometimes it's a bad week. When it's a good week we get treats like loom bands and a notebook, when it's a bad week and there's not much money left and we can't really do anything'

Year 7 student

Source: The Children's Society surveys, 2010 and 2014. Age: 14 years old. Scope: England. Sample size: 2010:1166; 2014:928.

10 This was tested using ANOVA with Tukey's post-hoc test for differences between groups: 2010: F(5)=24.1; 2014: F(5)=25.9.

Figure 21: Mean subjective well-being according to deprivation scores

Source: The Children's Society surveys, 2010 and 2014. Age: 14 years old.
Scope: England. Sample size: 2010: 1030; 2014: 854.

6.2 Understanding the impact of the economic downturn on children's well-being

Measures of material deprivation reflect the material living standards of children, but may not immediately reflect recent changes to household income. In order to understand better the impact on child well-being of recent changes to household income, we included questions on this in The Children's Society survey 2014. We are hoping that this will form the basis to explore in more depth how economic shocks to the household might impact children and their subjective well-being.

From previous research, we know that children are often aware of financial difficulties faced by their families: qualitative studies with

children have shown that they often know about money tensions in their families (Ridge, 2002), and that they change their behaviours in response to this – for example by not asking over-stretched parents for things to spare them the stress of either saying no or putting further pressure on already tight budgets. Additionally, previous research by The Children's Society found that children living in families with problematic debt were often aware of the situation and faced a range of negative impacts (Royston and Surtees, 2014).

In order to explore the impact of the recent economic downturn on children and their subjective well-being, we asked children four questions: whether the economic crisis had had an impact on their

family in the last two to three years; and three questions around the financial situation of their household (how much money their family had compared to a year ago, how much money their parents spent on things for them compared to a year ago, and how often they heard adults in their family talking about money problems compared to a year ago). These questions were only asked of children in Year 10.

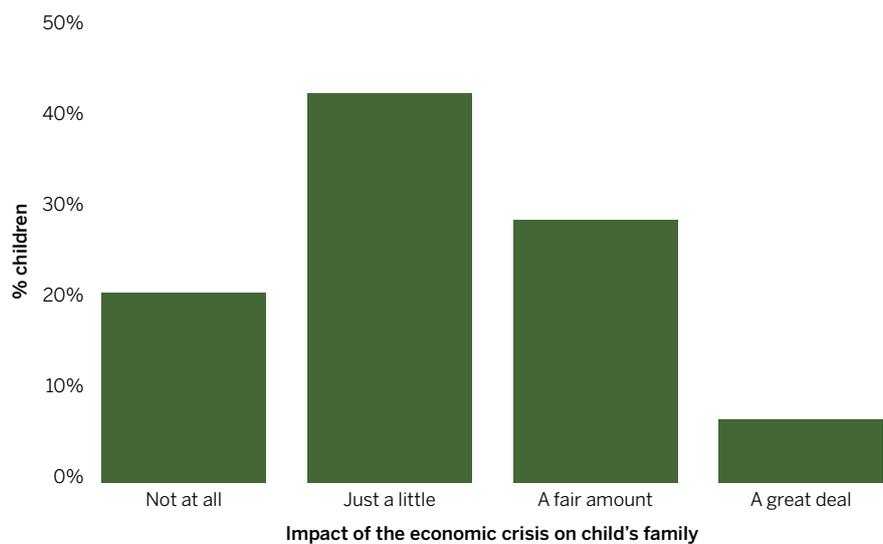
Overall, only 12% of children reported no impact of the crisis. Almost half – 43% – reported 'just a little impact'; and the remaining 36% reported either 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal' of impact¹¹.

One question regarding this data is around whether children are able to differentiate between simply being less well-off, and the impact of the crisis. We can tentatively make the case that children are aware of a difference between the two. Some children who were deprived based on responses to the child-derived scale reported no impact of the crisis, while some children who were not deprived reported an impact. Specifically, 23% of children surveyed reported 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal' of impact of the crisis despite not being deprived; and 18% of children reported the impact to be 'just a little' or 'not at all' despite being deprived. These results are shown in Figure 22.

11 The question of the impact of the economic crisis on their families was first piloted with children and young people in a household panel survey in autumn 2013. The figures of those who said their families had been affected 'not at all', 'just a little' and 'a fair amount/a great deal' were broadly in line with the data from The Children's Society 2014 survey.

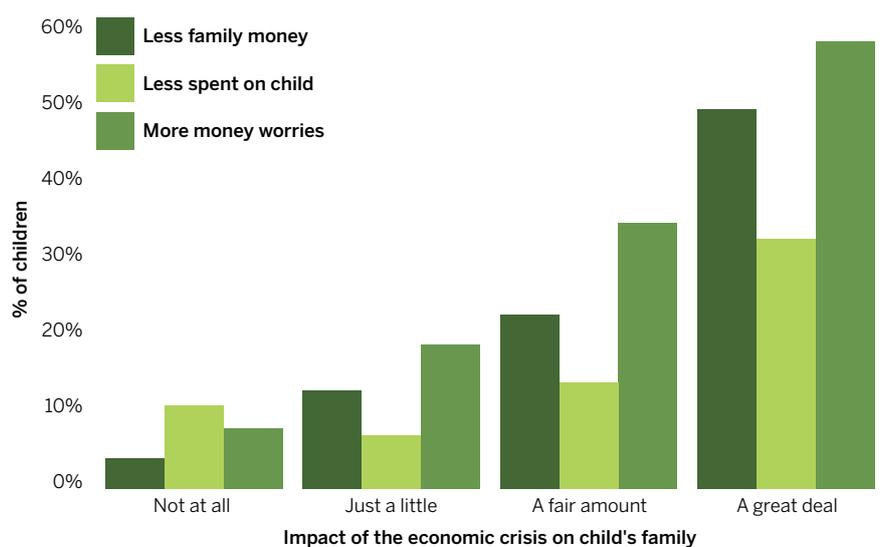
As noted above, three questions were asked about children's perceptions of their family's financial situation compared to a year ago. These were intended to pick up on the tangible impacts of a lower household income on children themselves. We found that on each measure, children reporting a stronger impact of the crisis were likely to report a worsening in their situation over the past year – so they were likely to say their family had less money; spent less money on them; and spent more time discussing money worries. Results are shown in Figure 23.

Figure 22: Children's perceptions of the impact of the economic crisis on their families



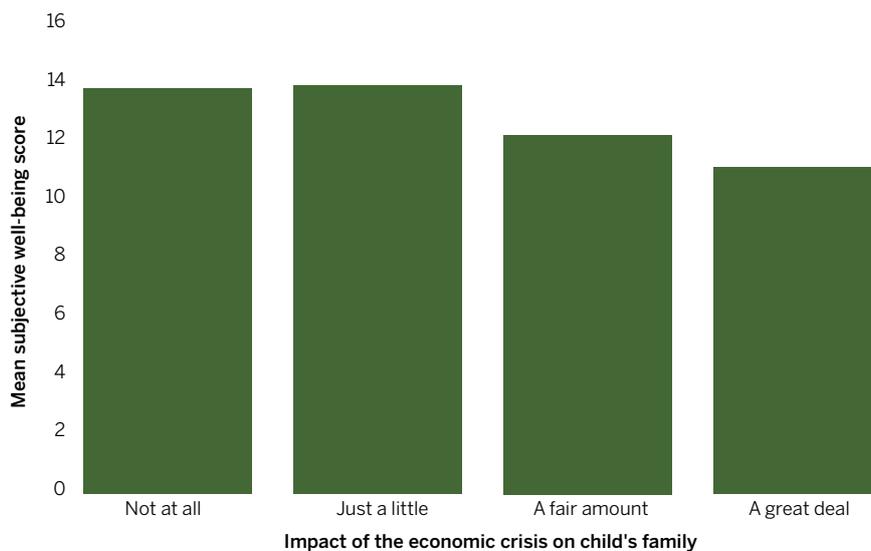
Source: The Children's Society survey 2014. Age: 14 years old. Scope: England. Sample size: 890

Figure 23: The proportion of children reporting a worsening financial situation, by the impact of the economic crisis



Source: The Children's Society survey 2014. Age: 14 years old. Scope: England. Sample size: 878

Figure 24: Mean subjective well-being by children's perceptions of the impact of the economic crisis



Source: The Children's Society survey 2014. Age: 14 years old. Scope: England. Sample size: 845

Previous research has found that children, similarly to adults, experience stress and anxiety as a result of financial worries (Ridge, 2002). This was confirmed in our analysis. Children reporting a stronger impact of the economic crisis on their families had significantly lower levels of subjective well-being, as shown in Figure 24. However, there was no significant difference between those reporting 'just a little' impact and those reporting no impact¹².

Our findings suggest that children's awareness of the impact of the economic crisis on their families goes beyond a simple awareness of the level of their own material

possessions¹³. Children who perceive the economic crisis to have had a 'fair' or 'great' impact on their families report lower levels of subjective well-being, and higher levels of exposure to the effects of lowering income and increasing financial strain within their families.

Above, we have mentioned studies which have found that children have an awareness of their family's financial situation, and that they experience stress and make efforts to adapt their behaviours in response to financial hardship. These findings also tie in with those on parental well-being, presented later in this report. Children living in families which are suffering as a

result of the crisis may face a double impact to their well-being, directly via their awareness and experiences of the crisis, and indirectly through the impact of the crisis on their parents' well-being.

In combination with our findings that material deprivation impacts children's subjective well-being, this leads us on to our next question; when it comes to money and material resources, we know that having less than others can have a negative impact. But does that mean that having more is better?

¹² This was tested using ANOVA: $F(3)=10.5$, $p<0.001$.

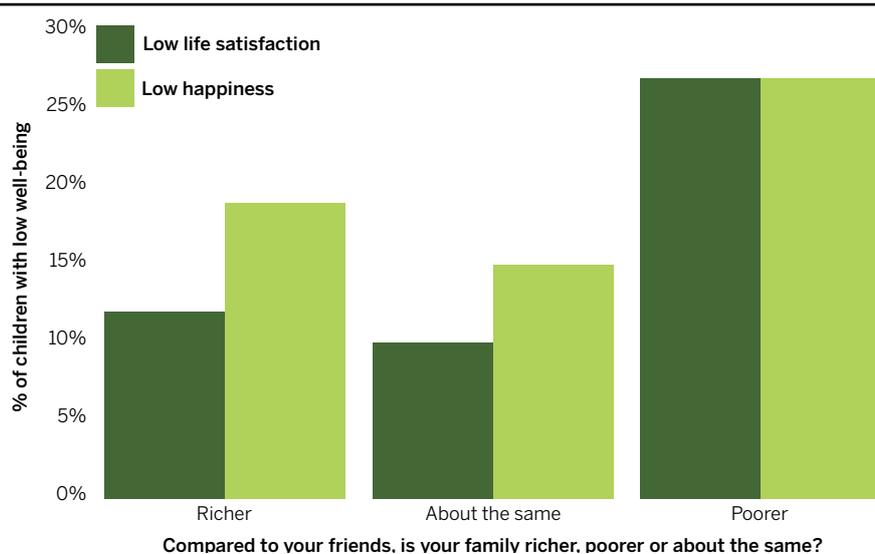
¹³ However, it should be noted that the wording 'the impact of the economic crisis' is fairly vague and could be interpreted by children to encompass a number of different changes to their circumstances. As such, the findings are as expressed above indicative of children's awareness rather than definite indicators of specific impacts of the economic crisis.

6.3 Less, more, or about the same?

Much attention is currently directed towards the question of materialism in our culture, and especially among children (for example see Mhonda and Bhaumik, 2007). While it is difficult to measure changes in levels of materialism without data collected over time¹⁴, this does raise an interesting question about how the association between material resources and children's subjective well-being works. We know that material deprivation is bad, but this does not necessarily mean that more is always better. Some analysis of the Millennium Cohort Survey provides an interesting insight into this.

Children who wished their family could 'afford to buy me more of what I want', and who were bothered 'if my friends have things I don't' had significantly lower well-being than average. However, there was no link between the extent of liking clothing with popular labels and subjective well-being. There was also an interesting pattern in response to the question 'Compared to your friends, is your family richer, poorer or the same?'. As might be expected, children who felt their family was poorer than their friends' families were more likely to have low well-being. However, children who felt their families had about the same as other families were less likely to have low well-being than those who felt their families were richer (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Perceptions of family wealth and children's subjective well-being



Source: Millennium Cohort Study, 2011. Age: around 11 years old. Scope: UK. Sample size: 13,469

This evidence is consistent with findings we published in The Good Childhood Report 2012 which indicated that children who had about the same spending money as friends had the highest subjective well-being compared to those who had either more than their friends or less than their friends. It seems from these two pieces of evidence that material equality is more important for children's subjective well-being than wealth.

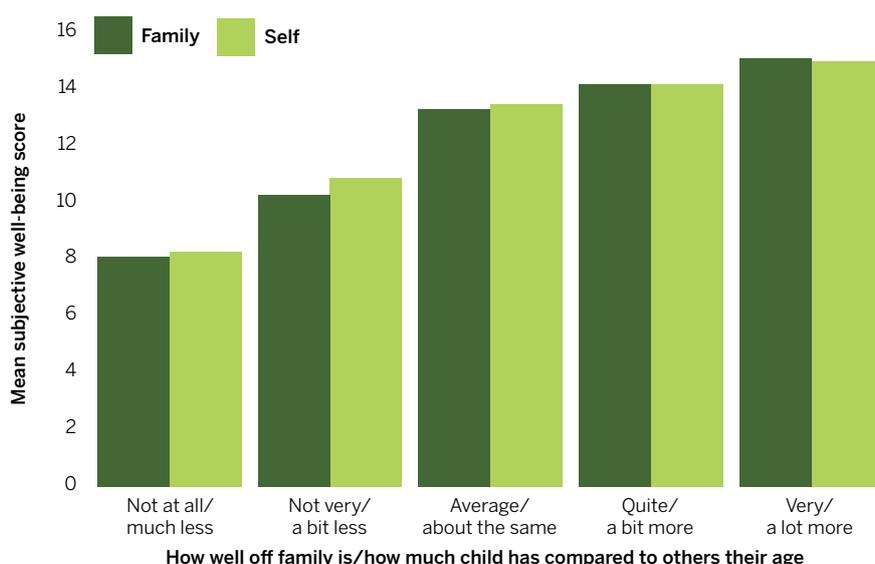
In addition to the data from the Millennium Cohort Survey, data from The Children's Society were available on children's perceptions of their material situation in two forms – firstly, the relative position of their family compared to others, and secondly their own relative

position compared to other young people they knew. Although we did not find a drop in well-being for those rating their families or themselves as better off than others, there were no significant differences between those who rated themselves or their families as average or above. Conversely, those rating themselves as a bit worse off had lower well-being than those who were average or above, and those rating themselves as much worse off had significantly lower well-being than all other children (Figure 26).

Children did not give identical responses to the questions about their own material position and that of their family – indeed, Table 6 shows that for 5% of children, differences in their perceptions

¹⁴ Retrospective data, as used in the previously cited report where adults were asked to compare their own childhoods to contemporary childhoods, are notoriously subject to recall bias, meaning that respondents are unable to report accurately on events from the relatively distant past (Hassan, 2005). Some researchers have also identified a role of nostalgia, whereby people are more likely to recall past times and events with positive emotions (Connell et al, 2013).

Figure 26: Subjective well-being by children's perceptions of their own and their family's comparative material position



Source: The Children's Society survey 2014. Age: 14 years old. Scope: England. Sample size: 890

interesting that based on children's subjective perceptions, this group is smaller than those who see themselves as worse off than average while their family is better off.

We were interested to see how a combination of children's perceptions of their personal and their family situation impacted subjective well-being. We found that the children with highest subjective well-being were living in situations where they perceived neither themselves nor their family to be poor. These children had significantly higher subjective well-being than all other groups.

Table 6: Children's ratings of their own material situation by their rating of their family's material situation (%)

		Own material situation	
		Less	About the same or more
Family material situation	Below average	5	5
	Average or above	10	80

Source: The Children's Society survey 2014. Age: 14 years old. Scope: England. Sample size: 901

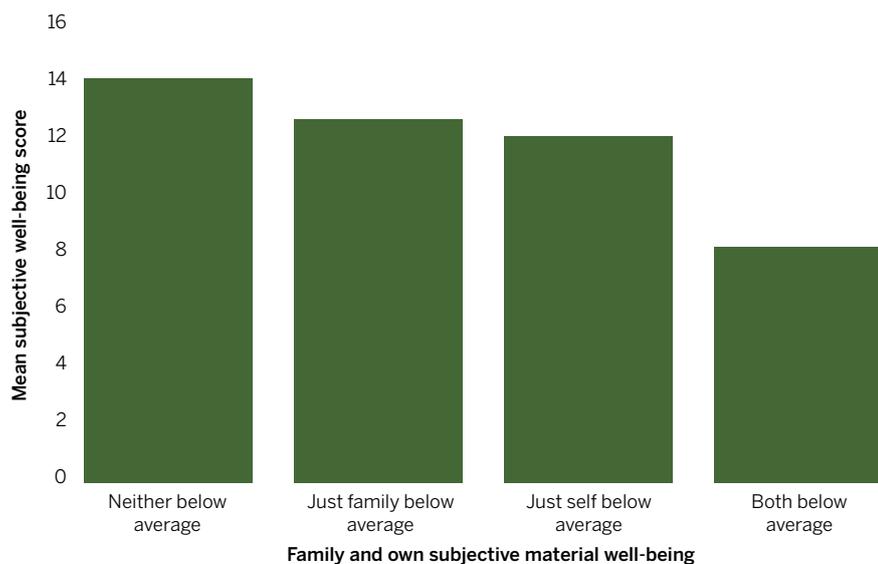
placed their families as worse off than average while they were better off than average; and 10% placed themselves as worse off than average while their family was better off than average.

For the 5% of children who felt their own situation was better than that of their family, we can assume that the reason for this in at least some cases is that parents are

attempting to protect their children from poverty. This assumption is borne out in other research findings, with many researchers concluding that parents living in impoverished situations protect their children from the worst material impacts of poverty by going without themselves (See Main and Bradshaw, forthcoming; Ridge, 2002; Middleton et al, 1997; Gordon et al, 2013). However, it is

There was no significant difference between children who perceived just themselves or just their family to be below average, but children in either one of these groups were significantly happier than children who perceived both themselves and their family to be below average.

The fact that children whose families are below average while they are above average fare better than those who perceive both themselves and their families to be below average suggests that potentially, protective parental behaviours such as those found in previous research (see Main and Bradshaw, forthcoming; Ridge, 2002; Middleton et al, 1997; Gordon et al, 2013) play a role. But in line with previous research, children appear to remain aware that their family is under financial stress

Figure 27: Subjective well-being by subjective poverty

Source: The Children's Society survey 2014. Age: 14 years old. Scope: England. Sample size: 891.

(Ridge, 2002) – children who are themselves above average in families which are below average do not fare so well as children in situations where neither they nor their family is below average (Figure 27). This suggests that further research into how children experience and interpret their situations when their own perceived material status does not match up with that of their family is warranted.

6.4 Summary

In combination, the research we have presented here confirms that material living standards matter. While household income does not necessarily have a direct impact on the subjective well-being of children, material resources and children's perceptions of their

relative position do influence levels of happiness. Therefore, while material deprivation and subjective measures are important, this does not mean that income is not; income is the primary method by which families can acquire the things children need to survive and thrive. In addition, children's own views on their material needs are important; this may reflect our findings, reported here and in our previous Good Childhood Reports, that the amount of choice children have in their lives is an important factor in determining their overall subjective well-being.

Children do not necessarily have a great deal of direct control over family finances (Main, 2013), and those who are listened to and have their preferences about spending

on them taken into account may fare better than those who feel their parents or carers do not, or cannot, consider their opinions in decisions about spending.

But while material resources are important, their importance (at least, above levels needed to achieve an 'average' standard of living) is relative rather than absolute. The relationship between how well-off children feel themselves and their families to be, and their subjective well-being, is not linear. Rather, there is no significant difference between those feeling they are about average and those above average. Indeed, in the Millennium Cohort Survey data there is some evidence that those seeing themselves as above average, while still doing better than those below average, do not fare so well as those thinking of themselves as about average.

Analysis of children's perceptions of their family's material living standards over time and their well-being suggest that declining living standards are likely to result in lower subjective well-being. Children who reported less family money, less spending on them, and more instances of hearing adults in their family discuss money worries were worse off in terms of their subjective well-being than those who did not. Trends in subjective well-being and the impact of the crisis, and austerity, then, require close observation.





7. Factors associated with children's subjective well-being: Parental well-being, mental health and physical health

The link between parental well-being, mental and physical health and the well-being of their children is of practical as well as theoretical interest. If these aspects of parents' lives are shown to be significant factors in determining children's subjective well-being then efforts to improve child well-being need to take this into account.

However it is also possible that children's subjective well-being can impact on parents or that there is a two-way relationship. The association is theoretically interesting because it has been shown that subjective well-being is to some extent heritable. So a significant association would be expected, although this could also be at least partly attributable to a large number of shared environmental factors such as household income, family atmosphere and events, quality of housing, nature of the neighbourhood and so on.

In this section we present new evidence on the links between children's subjective well-being and three aspects of parents' lives: their subjective well-being (see Box 1 in the Introduction for further discussion), their mental health (at least in relation to depression) and their physical health.

7.1 Parental subjective well-being

Research on the link between subjective well-being of parents and children is quite limited. Three small-scale studies in Israel (Ben-Zur, 2003), Spain (Casas et al., 2008) and the US (Hoy et al., 2012) have found significant associations between parents' and children's subjective well-being although the associations were small to moderate¹⁵. In the UK, Clair (2012) analysed data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and found that both mothers' and fathers' life satisfaction were significantly associated with children's life satisfaction. This remained true even when children's life satisfaction in the previous year was taken into account. However parental life satisfaction only explained around 2% of the variation in children's life satisfaction. The BHPS provides a large-scale sample but it should be noted that the measures of adult and child subjective well-being were not the same to one another and included questions about differing aspects of life.

The Children's Society, in its quarterly surveys, has gathered information about parents' subjective well-being since Wave 3. The questions were asked of whichever parent or carer provided background information and consent for their child to participate. Exact information about the adults' relationship to the child is not available but their gender is known. We have used the term 'parent' for

brevity in this section but in some cases it is likely that the adult will have been a step-parent or other carer such as a grandparent. The parent was asked five questions about life satisfaction which were identical to those asked of the child. Here we analyse data from Waves 3 to 9 of the survey which relates to around 14,000 children.

Overall, we found a significant correlation between parental and child subjective well-being of around 0.36. This means that parental subjective well-being predicted around 13% of the variation in child subjective well-being (or vice versa). This is quite substantial compared to findings for other factors associated with children's subjective well-being and is higher than the associations reported in the previous studies reviewed above.

It is also possible to examine the associations between parental and child subjective well-being for sub-groups on the basis of age of the child, gender of the child and gender of the parent. As shown in Table 7, the associations were fairly similar irrespective of which of these factors were taken into account. The link was slightly stronger for older children (12 to 15) than younger children (8 to 11). It was also a little stronger where the parent was a mother rather than a father. There was very little evidence of differences according to the gender of the child. The

¹⁵ Casas et al., report a correlation of 0.19 for the seven-item Personal Well-being Index, but no significant correlation for a one-item life satisfaction measure. Ben-Zur reports correlations of 0.34 and 0.25 between children and fathers and mothers respectively. Hoy et al. found correlations of 0.29 and 0.26 between the child and the father and mother respectively.

strongest link was between mothers and female children (explanatory power = 14%) and the weakest was between fathers and female children (explanatory power = 10%).

The finding of a moderately strong correlation between parental and children's subjective well-being raises some interesting further questions. It is possible for example that the effect of family events on children's subjective well-being may be transmitted through changes in parental subjective well-being in response to these events.

In an earlier report (Rees et al., 2011) we presented findings that showed that children's subjective well-being was linked to parent's responses to questions about changes in household income over the past year and expectations about income over the next year. Children who lived in families that had experienced a recent drop in income or where the parent was concerned about a potential drop in income in the near future had significantly lower than average subjective well-being.

We have run this analysis again, also including information about parental subjective well-being. The results suggest that, once parental subjective well-being is taken into account, there is no longer a link between these household economic factors and children's subjective well-being. One plausible explanation for this finding is that children are not so much directly affected by these types of household economic

factors as indirectly affected by the change in parents' subjective well-being. More detailed further analysis along these lines could increase our understanding of the mechanisms through which adverse family events affect children's sense of well-being.

Finally, we can also look at the correlation between parental subjective well-being and children's evaluations of the aspects of life in The Good Childhood Index.

There were statistically significant associations of small to moderate strength for all 10 aspects of life as shown in Table 8 in descending order. The strongest associations were for happiness with home and with money and possessions. The weakest associations were for school, friends and appearance. Children's happiness with family relationships was the fifth strongest correlation with parental subjective well-being which perhaps would

Table 7: Associations between children's and parents' subjective well-being by age of child, gender of child and gender of parent

	All	Female child	Male child
All	0.36	0.36	0.35
Primary (8 to 11)	0.34	0.34	0.34
Secondary (12 to 15)	0.38	0.38	0.37
Female parent	0.38	0.38	0.37
Male parent	0.32	0.31	0.33

Source: The Children's Society quarterly surveys, 2010 to 2012, Scope: England, Wales & Scotland. Age: eight to 15 years old, Sample: 15,816

Table 8: Associations between children's and parents' subjective well-being by age of child, gender of child and gender of parent

Child's happiness with...	Correlation with parental life satisfaction
Home	0.27
Money and things	0.27
Choice	0.22
The future	0.21
Family relationships	0.20
Time use	0.19
Health	0.16
School	0.15
Friends	0.15
Appearance	0.15

Source: The Children's Society quarterly surveys, 2010 to 2012, Scope: England, Wales & Scotland. Age: eight to 15 years old, Sample: 15,816

be expected to be a little higher in relative terms. The results indicate the parental well-being explains as much as 7% of the variation in children’s happiness with their home but only 2% of the variation in their happiness with their appearance. These patterns appear to make sense in that aspects of life such as home and money represent relatively shared experiences for children and parents whereas aspects such as school, friendships and sense of self do not.

‘I feel happy at home because my mum always hugs me’

Year 7 student

‘It’s pretty hard to be happy because I hardly see my mum and I’m really close to my nan but I hardly see her because they don’t make arrangements’

Year 8 student

‘I don’t see my dad much so I want him to be home more. He’s always at our restaurants or takeaways.’

Year 9 student

7.2 Parental depression

The availability of wave 5 of the Millennium Cohort Study enables us to take the exploration of the association between parents’ lives and child subjective well-being a little further. In the MCS, parents are asked about depression and assessed for mental illness using the six item Kessler¹⁶ scale. This produces a depression score ranging from 0 to 24 with scores over 12 indicating severe depression.

While there has been considerable interest in the impact of maternal depression on the cognitive and behavioural outcomes of children, particularly post natal depression and infancy (Agnafors et al., 2013, Goodman et al., 2011, Grace et al., 2003, Kiernan and Huerta 2008, Kiernan and Mensah 2009, Walker et al., 2013), we do not know of any study that has looked at the association of parental depression and child subjective well-being.

Analysis indicates that there is a small but significant association between child subjective well-being and mother’s depression. The association is stronger for girls than it is for boys (Table 9). The association with father’s depression is not as large but in this case is stronger for boys than for girls.

This is reflected in the fact that 15% of children living with a severely depressed mother had low subjective well-being, compared to 9% of children if the mother was not severely depressed. The proportions for fathers were also different at 13% and 8% respectively.

Table 9: Association between child subjective well-being and parental depression by gender

	All	Girls	Boys
Pearson correlation for mother’s depression score	-0.113	-0.138	-0.088
Pearson correlation for father’s depression score	-0.045	-0.032	-0.057

Source: Millennium Cohort Study, Wave 5, 2011. Age: 11 years old. Scope: UK. Sample size: Mothers 13,149, Fathers 9032

16 Frequency parent is depressed

- How often felt hopeless in last 30 days
- How often felt restless/fidgety in last 30 days
- How often felt everything an effort in last 30 days
- How often felt worthless in last 30 days
- How often felt nervous in last 30 days

Response codes= 0 All of the time, 1 most of the time, 2 some of the time, 3 a little of the time, 4 none of the time (reverse coded)

Kessler, R. et al (2003) Screening for serious mental illness in the general population, Arch Gen Psychiatry, 60, 184-189

Table 10: Mean child subjective well-being and % with low subjective well-being by whether depression ever diagnosed or currently treated¹⁷

Mothers		Mean child subjective well-being	% of children with low subjective well-being
Mother currently being treated for anxiety or depression	Yes	28.1	15.0
	No	29.0	10.8
Doctor ever diagnosed anxiety or depression in mother	Yes	28.9	11.5
	No	30.0	8.0

Fathers		Mean child subjective well-being	% of children with low subjective well-being
Father currently being treated for anxiety or depression	Yes	28.9	9.9
	No	30.0	10.6
Doctor ever diagnosed anxiety or depression in father	Yes	29.1	10.0
	No	30.0	7.7

Source: Millennium Cohort Study, Wave 5, 2011. Age: 11 years old. Scope: UK.
Sample size: Mothers 13,149, Fathers 9032

We also found that children had lower mean well-being scores where the mother was currently being treated for anxiety or depression and where the mother had ever been treated for anxiety or depression (Table 10). Children also had lower mean scores if the father had ever been treated for anxiety or depression.

These associations between parental depression and child subjective well-being are fairly weak. We also do not know the direction of the association. But they are nevertheless important to take into account because they are at least as important as a whole raft of other child and family characteristics in explaining child subjective well-being.

7.3 Parental health

The MCS also asked parents to rate their general health using a five-point response scale from 'Excellent' to 'Poor' and whether they had a longstanding illness.

There was a small significant positive association¹⁸ between each parents' rating of their own health and their child's subjective well-being. There was also a very small significant association between either parent having a long-standing illness and their child having lower subjective well-being.

7.4 Summary

- Parents who have higher subjective well-being tend also to have children who have higher subjective well-being.
- Children living with a parent who is depressed or has been treated for anxiety or depression tend to have lower well-being than other children.
- There is also a small association between parents having poor health and their children having lower subjective well-being.

¹⁷ The comparisons regarding whether mothers and fathers are currently being treated exclude cases where the relevant parent has never been diagnosed by a doctor as having depression or anxiety.

¹⁸ Pearson correlation of around 0.08 for both mothers and fathers.

England comes
9th
out of 11 countries for
children's well-being

18%
of girls are unhappy
with the way they look

36%
of children said their
families were affected by
the economic crisis

Around
**half a
million**
children in the UK
have low well-being



8. Factors associated with children's subjective well-being: Parenting

The importance of the quality of family relationships in contributing to children's well-being is an issue that has been explored in earlier phases of this research programme. In last year's Good Childhood Report in 2013 we began to look at how particular aspects of family dynamics and parenting styles are associated with variations in well-being.

This analysis suggested that parenting styles correspond to variations in well-being, but there remained an interesting area to look into further – how specific parenting behaviours may have different impacts on well-being.

In this section of the report we outline early findings from the use of a new measure which asked young people to report their experiences of parenting¹⁹ in the context of their wider well-being.

8.1 Parenting styles and well-being

In the 2013 report, exploratory analysis of the impact of parenting styles on well-being showed that there was a marked effect on life satisfaction for 14 and 15-year-olds, with benefits for young people who lived in a home environment characterised by high levels of 'harmony', 'support / communication' and 'choice / autonomy-granting'.

The first dimension – 'harmony' – describes how well family members get on together. The latter two link closely to the idea of 'authoritative parenting' (See Baumrind, 1991; Soenens & Bayers, 2012) – where parents are responsive, warm and accepting but at the same time offer clear boundaries combined with encouragement to their adolescents to exercise appropriate levels of independence and individuality.

We found that all three dimensions contributed significantly and separately to children's life satisfaction.

8.2 Developing a measure of parental care

To facilitate a more detailed consideration of the impact of different parental caring behaviours we firstly designed and tested a self-report measure for young people to reflect the variety of aspects of the parental role. The focus in this was on parenting of teenage children – partly to build on our prior work around this age-group, but also because of burgeoning interest in the challenges of parenting teenagers and in 'adolescent neglect' (Rees et al., 2011).

Although measures were already available around aspects of how parents care for their children, none had been successfully administered directly to young people themselves, although we did incorporate some

of the thinking behind a measure of 'neglectful behaviour' which had been trialled in the United States (Dubowitz, 2008).

Research has grouped parental behaviours into four (or sometimes five) categories or dimensions (Straus & Kantor, 2005):

- Physical
- Emotional
- Supervisory
- Educational
- (Health).

Using this framework we drafted short phrases for items to describe different aspects of each dimension and created a 25-item measure. This was included within a longer questionnaire (with additional questions on demographics and a range of well-being measures, alongside questions about externalised behaviours – smoking, drinking alcohol and offending).

The questionnaire was cognitively tested with 10 young people (aged 12–14) who were asked to complete a paper version and to give detailed feedback to an interviewer around whether the questions were clear and understandable, and what it felt like to answer them (e.g. were any questions too intrusive).

¹⁹ We use the terms 'parent(s)' and 'parenting' in this section to refer to the care provided by adults within a household – while acknowledging that a proportion of our respondents may not live in one home with both their parents.

This exercise confirmed that young people had interpreted the questions in the ways intended and that the content and structure of the questionnaire were suitable and fit for purpose.

An electronic pilot was also conducted with over 500 12–15-year-olds through an online panel survey²⁰. Analysis of the pilot survey responses suggested that a 16-item measure, with eight core items, would work best for the full-scale survey. Details of the final measure are given in Box 7.

The abridged measure of eight core items was included in the Children's Worlds survey in England for Year 8 students and the full, 16-item version was administered to the additional sample of Year 10 students.

8.3 Initial findings on parental behaviours

The early analysis of the data in relation to this measure that is presented here focuses on the responses of Year 10 students to the (full) parental behaviours measure, and is limited to young people who lived in one home.

Combining the figures for 'Never' and 'Hardly ever', and those for 'Often' or 'Always' to gain an overview of how 14–15-year-olds had reported their experiences revealed that the large majority of young people reported high levels of care and support (see Table 11).

Box 7: Items in the parental care measure

In the last year how often did your parents, or the adults you live with ...

Physical care

- ...encourage you to wash or shower regularly*
- ...make sure you saw a doctor if you needed one*
- ...make sure you ate healthy food
- ...support you to look after your teeth and go to the dentist

Emotional support

- ...help you if you had problems*
- ...support you if you were upset*
- ...tell you when they thought you had done something well
- ...take care of you if you felt ill

Supervision

- ...ask you where you were going when you went out*
- ...like to know where you were after school*
- ...expect you to call or text to let them know if you were going to be home late
- ...make sure you attended school

Educational support

- ...keep track of how you were doing at school
 - by doing things like reading reports*
- ...show an interest in what you were doing at school*
- ...attend parents' evenings at school
- ...help you to learn things outside school

Response options were 'Never', 'Hardly ever', 'Sometimes', 'Often', or 'Always'.

N.b. (i) a star (*) indicates a 'core item' – those which were used in both the Year 8 and Year 10 surveys, and with young people who lived in two homes, who were asked to answer the eight-item scale twice, once in respect of each of their homes; (ii) the items were ordered differently – into mixed categories – in the questionnaire.

However, there were identifiable differences within this – for example, 97% of young people said that their parents often / always

'made sure they attended school', but only 63% experienced the same frequency of 'help to learn things outside school'.

Table 11: Frequency of parenting behaviours as reported by young people

During the last year how often did your parents, or the adults you live with ...	'Never / Hardly ever'	'Some-times'	'Often / Always'
Supervision			
...make sure you attended school	1%	2%	97%
...expect you to call or text to let them know if you were going to be home late	5%	8%	88%
...ask you where you were going when you went out	5%	7%	87%
...like to know where you were after school	8%	10%	81%
Physical care			
...support you to look after your teeth and go to the dentist	4%	6%	90%
...make sure you saw a doctor when you needed one	6%	9%	85%
...encourage you to wash or shower regularly	11%	7%	80%
...make sure you ate healthy food	8%	15%	77%
Emotional support			
...take care of you if you felt ill	4%	8%	87%
...tell you when they thought you had done something well	9%	17%	75%
...support you if you were upset	11%	14%	75%
...help you if you had problems	10%	17%	74%
Educational support			
...attend parents' evenings at school	7%	11%	81%
...keep track of how you were doing at school – by doing things like reading reports	8%	16%	76%
...show an interest in what you were doing at school	8%	17%	75%
...help you to learn things outside school	16%	21%	63%

Source: The Children's Society survey 2013/14, Scope: England, Age: 14 to 15 years old, Sample: 928

Young people's reporting of parenting behaviours showed a wide variation between categories, and in some instances between items within a category:

- The supervisory aspects of parenting were present for the largest majority of young people,

with high proportions indicating that their parents often / always 'made sure they attended school', 'asked to be kept informed regarding their whereabouts' and 'expected a call or text if they were going to be home late' – although a lower proportion said that parents 'liked to know where they were after school'.

- 'Educational Support' was the least regularly experienced category of parenting behaviour overall – e.g. around three out of four young people said that their parents often / always 'kept track of how they were doing at school', or 'showed an interest in what they were doing at school'.

- Proportions for the items where the fewest young people (one in 20 or less) said their parents never / hardly ever behaved in particular ways were predominantly located in 'Supervision', but also in 'Physical care' ('support you to look after your teeth and go to the dentist') and 'Emotional Support' ('take care of you if you felt ill').

These are crude readings of the data but they may suggest some overarching patterns of caring – norms for how 14–15-year-olds are being looked after at home – where supervision remains relatively high, but emotional support, for example, is a less regular experience than might be expected for younger children.

Table 12: Associations between young people's experiences of parenting behaviours and life satisfaction

During the last year how often did your parents, or the adults you live with ...	Correlation with life satisfaction score
Supervision	
...make sure you attended school	0.24
...expect you to call or text to let them know if you were going to be home late	0.20
...ask you where you were going when you went out	0.21
...like to know where you were after school	0.29
Physical Care	
...support you to look after your teeth and go to the dentist	0.31
...make sure you saw a doctor when you needed one	0.32
...encourage you to wash or shower regularly	0.22
...make sure you ate healthy food	0.30
Emotional Support	
...take care of you if you felt ill	0.37
...tell you when they thought you had done something well	0.49
...support you if you were upset	0.50
...help you if you had problems	0.46
Educational Support	
...attend parents' evenings at school	0.23
...keep track of how you were doing at school – by doing things like reading reports	0.36
...show an interest in what you were doing at school	0.44
...help you to learn things outside school	0.44

Source: The Children's Society survey, 2013/14, Scope: England, Age: 14 to 15 years old, Sample: 928

8.4 Parental behaviours and young people's subjective well-being

To gauge the degree to which different parenting behaviours link to young people's well-being we performed correlation tests for each item against scores for life satisfaction. We found a range of significant correlations between different items and categories, principally ranging from weak to moderate, as shown in Table 12.

The strongest positive correlation (at 0.5) with reported life satisfaction was with 'support you if you were upset'. In a similar vein, the category which contained this item – 'Emotional Support' – was the most positively associated with life satisfaction overall, although one item in our Educational Support category scored relatively highly too (at 0.44, 'show an interest in what you were doing at school').

This suggests that, at a headline level, despite the potential benefits for the well-being of their children, Emotional Support was not prioritised by as many parents as Supervision.

8.5 Summary

- As in our previous research, we have found a significant association between children's experiences of parenting behaviours and their subjective well-being.
- Children who said that their parents more frequently engaged in emotional support, physical care, educational support and supervisory monitoring tended to have higher well-being.
- This association was strongest for the provision of emotional support such as support with emotional difficulties and praise.
- It was weakest (although still significant) for supervisory monitoring such as wanting to know the child's whereabouts after school.

Conclusion

The Good Childhood Report 2014 provides crucial new insights into how children in the UK feel about their lives, how this is changing over time and how they compare with children in other countries.

9. Concluding comments

9.1 Key points

The intention of The Good Childhood Reports is to summarise the best and most up-to-date information about children's subjective well-being in the UK. This year's report is split into two parts.

The first half of the report looks at overall levels of subjective well-being of children in the UK and how they vary in three ways – between sub-groups of children, over time and in comparison with children in other countries.

'I have friends that care about me and I care about them'

Year 6 student

The findings from a very large representative sample²¹ of children aged around 11 throughout the UK back up our previous published findings that children's subjective well-being varies according to their individual and household characteristics, but that these variations are not very large. This suggests that although, for example, income poverty does matter for children's subjective well-being, there is also a great deal of variation of children's subjective well-being among children living in income-poor households. We need to look for additional factors to try to fully understand these variations in subjective well-being.

We have updated our previous analysis of trends²² in child subjective well-being stretching back to 1994. Overall, analysis of the latest available data (up to 2011) indicates that the trend of increasing subjective well-being of children in the UK which had been seen in the late 1990s and early 2000s stopped in about 2007 to 2008 and that, after an apparent drop in child subjective well-being between 2008 and 2009, there has been little change since.

'How happy I feel depends how people around me feel because that massively effects how I feel'

Year 8 student

Supplementing this information we present findings from two different sources of information²³ about international comparisons of child subjective well-being. Both data sources suggest that England (and, in one survey, Wales and Scotland) fares relatively poorly in terms of overall subjective well-being in comparison with other countries (outside the UK). These findings indicate that while most children in the UK have relatively positive well-being, there is significant room for improvement.

The report also summarises new evidence on children's satisfaction with different aspects of their lives. There is significant variation here with children tending to be much happier with some aspects, such as family relationships, than others, such as their expectations of the future. There is evidence of gender variations with, for example, girls tending to be happier than boys with school and less happy about the way that they look.

'There aren't enough opportunities – to be able to do something that you really want to do'

Year 8 student

Here, there are also some indications of possible (although not all statistically significant) time trends among children aged 10 to 15 in the UK. Satisfaction with friendships has started to fall a little over the past few years, particularly among girls. Satisfaction with school work has increased between 2009 and 2011. Finally, the gender gap in satisfaction with appearance appears to be increasing.

21 The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

22 This analysis uses the British Household Panel Survey and its successor, the Understanding Society survey.

23 The Health Behaviour of School-aged Children Survey (HBSC) and the Children's Worlds survey.

The issue of children's feelings about the way that they look, and gender differences in relation to this, is also highlighted in new evidence we present on international comparisons. This is the aspect of life where children in the UK fare particularly poorly in comparison with a sample of other countries. It is also notable that the gender gap in satisfaction with this aspect of life is only evident in some countries, indicating that we should not accept that it is inevitable that girls will have significantly lower satisfaction with their appearance than boys. More needs to be done to understand the factors at play in creating this gender gap in the UK and in leading to children in the UK faring so poorly on this particular aspect of their well-being.

'When I feel fat I tend to either hide myself or not go out. I try and put on a lot of makeup on to hide behind a mask.'

Year 8 student (girl)

Overall, the findings presented in the report and summarised above provide important new insights into how children in the UK feel about their lives, how this is changing over time and how they compare with children in other countries.

The second half of the report explores the relationships between children's overall sense of well-being and a number of factors in their lives – their activities and behaviours, their material circumstances, parental well-being, mental and physical health, and parenting styles.

'It's easy to be happy at home because your family aren't judgemental'

Year 7 student

The first section of this part of the report focuses on children's activities and behaviours and builds on work published in last year's report on 'ways to well-being'²⁴. This is an important area for research because there is evidence, among adult populations, that the behaviours and actions that people choose to take can have an impact on their sense of well-being.

We present new findings for children aged around 11 in the UK that show significant associations between, for example, more frequently playing sports and active games and higher well-being. We also show that frequent use of the internet is not associated with lower well-being. In fact, children who never or rarely used the internet outside school tended to have lower well-being than those who did so more frequently.

'[Football's] a good thing so you can be active with your friends and you can make new friends and you can have fun.'

Year 4 student

The section also presents findings on links with friendships, bullying, health-related behaviours, help-seeking and social behaviours. There are a number of useful indications here which could have practical implications for improving children's sense of well-being. However, our research programme has consistently highlighted the fundamental importance of children having a sense of choice for their well-being; and this indicates that it would be crucial to ensure that any changes in behaviour or activities are, as far as possible, voluntary.

For the second topic we extend our previous analysis of the association between household economic factors and children's subjective well-being. The new findings in this report show that, while the direct impact of household income on child subjective well-being is relatively small, children's sense of well-being is more strongly associated with the levels of material resources they have available to them and their perceptions of their material situation in relation to others.

In addition, the findings also indicate that where children are aware of their family's worsening economic situation this also can have a significant impact on their subjective well-being.

'There is a girl who is in a higher year than me, because she can't afford [school uniform] she constantly breaks rules. She's in isolation all the time and in trouble.'

We then went on to explore the link between parental well-being, mental and physical health and children's subjective well-being. Using several data sources we show that low parental subjective well-being, parental depression and poor physical health are all associated with lower subjective well-being for children. This is another important area for more detailed research to develop an understanding of the mechanisms at play and inform potential ways of enhancing children's sense of well-being in such circumstances.

'If I was doing something with my friends and my family were going out I'd probably want to go with my parents cos you want to have that time with them when you're young.'

Year 7 student

Finally, we look at new evidence on the links between children's experiences of parenting and their subjective well-being using new data we have gathered on children aged 14 to 15 years old in England. In previous reports we have shown that children's well-being is strongly associated with various aspects of family relationships such as levels of conflict, levels of parental warmth and control. Here we look at four dimensions of parenting – emotional support, physical care, educational support and supervision/monitoring.

All four of these dimensions are significantly associated with children's overall sense of well-being. The most important dimension is levels of emotional support, and the least important is the level of parental supervision and monitoring of the child.

Key findings

1. The UK fares poorly on children's well-being in comparison to many other countries

2. There has been little change in children's overall well-being since 2008

3. The gender gap in regards to happiness with appearance seems to be growing

4. Children who are regularly active have higher well-being

5. Children who felt poorer were three times more likely to have low life satisfaction

9.2 Conclusions

Three broad conclusions can be drawn from the evidence presented in this report and the previous evidence from our ongoing programme of work on children's subjective well-being.

Conclusion one

The first is that there is still a substantial amount of work to do to understand the root causes of variations in child subjective well-being within the UK. There is substantial variation with most children faring relatively well but up to 10% of children aged eight to 15 experiencing low well-being at any given point in time. We know that children's sense of well-being shows a degree of stability over time. As with adult subjective well-being, it is likely that this stable component of subjective well-being can be explained by factors such as personality (Goswami, 2014; Suldo et al., 2014) and inherent protective mechanisms (homeostasis – see Cummins & Nistico, 2002).

However it is also clear that there is considerable variability in subjective well-being for individual children over time and this is likely to be related to factors and events within the child's environment.

Our research so far suggests that a wide range of factors contribute to well-being – for example family relationships, children's sense of autonomy, and their experiences of being bullied all appear to exert

a significant influence on their sense of well-being. Other factors such as family economic status and major changes in children's lives also play a part. This range of factors illustrates the complexity in understanding variations in children's subjective well-being but at the same time, demonstrates the wide-ranging relevance of this field of work in thinking, in practical and policy terms, about how to improve children's lives.

Conclusion two

Second, the analysis of recent trends in child subjective well-being in the UK has produced evidence of variation over time both in terms of children's satisfaction with life as a whole and with particular aspects of their lives. There are also indications that in some cases the trends are moving in different ways for girls and boys and it is possible that further analysis would demonstrate that the same applies to other sub-groupings within the child population. This evidence highlights the importance of continuing to monitor child subjective well-being, particularly during the current period of economic hardship and other major societal changes.

Conclusion three

Our third broad conclusion relates to international variations in child subjective well-being. Although there are additional methodological challenges inherent in cross-national and cross-cultural research, it

seems clear that (as with adults) there are substantial variations in the way that children evaluate their lives in different countries. Again this relates not only to satisfaction with life as a whole, but also children's relative experiences of different aspects of their lives. Relatively little work has been done so far to understand the roots of these international variations for children. The increasing availability of representative data from a range of countries, such as the Children's Worlds survey data which will become available in 2015, should make it possible to identify factors at a national level that are associated with international variations in child subjective well-being.

This new data will have particular value for national policymakers in providing an understanding of the links between national political, economic and cultural factors and children's experience of childhood and could suggest potential areas for policy focus to improve children's lives. Until then, The Good Childhood Report 2014 provides crucial insights for everyone from teachers, to parents and opinion-formers, because it is based on children's own evaluations of their lives. The Children's Society will go on to build on our understanding of children's well-being as we continue to work towards a society where all children are free from disadvantage.



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