

A survey on happiness in primary school children in Flanders

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Background

Although a complex concept, happiness seems to be associated with factors such as physical and mental health and wellbeing. Nevertheless, studies directly assessing happiness in young people are scarce and children from primary schools are seldom the subject of study.

Methods

In Spring 2013, a questionnaire was distributed among all primary schools of the city of Lier (34,000 inhabitants, 20 km southward from Antwerp). To assess happiness, a ten point scale was used, asking: 'If I would give myself a score on ten regarding how happy I feel most of the time, then I would give myself (0=very unhappy, 10=very happy)'. Besides, several other items were addressed regarding the social network, health behaviour, leisure time, . . . The questionnaire was pilot tested. Single frequencies, descriptive statistics (Chi-square), regression models and a regression tree were calculated.

Results

In total, 873 pupils participated in the study, 422 females, mean age 10 years. The mean happiness score was 8.0, as was the median. Of all participants, 494 (56.6%) mention that they are bullied at least now and then, 206 (23.6%) like it very much to go to school and 536 (61.4%) like their teacher very much. No association with the happiness score could be found for sex, parents not living together, receiving pocket money, having a cell phone. An inverse relationship was found with being bullied ($p < 0.001$); being bored ($p < 0.001$), sitting at the computer for over three hours a day ($p < 0.001$) and daily having soft drinks ($p < 0.001$). On the other hand, pupils were happy, when they have a lot of friends ($p < 0.001$), can call on a lot of people in case of problems ($p < 0.001$), like to go to

school ($p < 0.001$), like the teacher ($p < 0.001$). Having friends, not being bullied, liking the teacher, liking school, not feeling bored, sitting less than three hours a day at the computer and having several activities, explained 26% of the variance in happiness.

Conclusions

Primary school children in Lier are happy. However, there are some points of interest. Primary schools have to take action to prevent and discourage bullying. But also the parents have their responsibility. They should keep abreast of what their child is doing on the computer, so that it is sitting less long at the PC.

Key messages

- We developed a questionnaire for monitoring important parameters in primary school children.
- Schools as well as parents have a responsibility regarding the happiness of primary school children.