

HBSC Pilot Results – February 2019

The pilot implementation of the HBSC survey in Cyprus took place in December 2018. The aim of the pilot study was to test the procedures and the tools of data collection, so that Cyprus can apply for associate membership to the HBSC study.

Cyprus proceeded with the mandatory HBSC questionnaire in an electronic form, with the addition of two optional package questions. In total, 61 classes were sampled, constituting a representative national sample for all three age populations (11- 13- and 15-year-olds). Data collection took place between November 12th and December 12th, 2018. The response rate reached 92,4%, since 1092 out of the 1182 selected students completed the HBSC questionnaire.

With regards to **demographics**, across all three age groups,

- Half of the respondents were boys and half were girls.
- As to family socio-economic status, 65,3% of the respondents came from families that had two or more vehicles. The majority reported that, in their homes, they had two or more computers (82,7%), two or more bathrooms (73,1%), and a dishwasher (66,1%). Out of five respondents, four had their own bedroom, and at least three had spent a vacation abroad in the previous year.

As to **health and well-being aspects**,

- More than 90% of the respondents described their health as '*Excellent*' (52,2%) or '*Good*' (38,3%).
- On a scale from 1-10, children tended to be overall satisfied with their lives with the average of 7,81; 11-year-old children indicated higher levels of life satisfaction (8,49), compared to older ones (13-year-olds: 7,86; 15-year-olds: 7,32).
- Less than 8% of the respondents reported daily problems of headache (6,9%), stomachache (2,3%) or backache (7,5%). Higher percentages of children reported experiencing '*feeling low*' (10,3%), bad temper (19,3%) and nervousness (20,2%) on a daily basis. Interestingly, older children tended to complain more than younger respondents, which could point to increased anxiety with age. Lower numbers of children reported difficulties with sleep (10,1%) and dizziness (4%) on a daily basis.
- About half of the children (51%) reported that their body image was '*about the right size*', while 15-year-olds believed to a greater extent that they were too fat i.e. '*a bit too fat*' and '*much too fat*' (27,7%), compared to younger respondents (11-year-olds: 22,3%; 13-year-olds: 23,4%). On the contrary, 11-year-olds tended to think that they were '*much too thin*' and '*a bit too thin*' to a greater extent (31,6%) compared to older children (13-year-olds: 21%; 15-year-olds: 22,4%).

The **health-related behavior findings** were interesting and were as follows:

- Children reported spending an average of 4 days (11- and 13-year-olds) and 3 days (15-year-olds) for physical exercise per week. However, deviations above and below this average were large.
- One in four 11- and 13-year-olds (24% and 25%, respectively) and one in three 15-year-olds (33,6%) never had breakfast during the weekdays. The respective percentage for the weekends was lower (11-year-olds: 6%; 13-year-olds 8: 3,6%; 15-year-olds: 10%).
- Almost half the children overall (51%) tended to eat fruits and vegetables 5-6 times a week or more often i.e. '*once*' or '*more than once*' every day. The respective percentage for eating sweets was much lower (32,5%). The consumption of soft drinks was also less frequent (21,9% '*never*' and 25,8% '*less than once a week*'); only 18,9% of the respondents reported consuming soft drinks at least 5-6 days a week or more often (i.e. on a daily basis).
- With regards to family meals, half of the children (50,3%) tended to have these '*every day*'. A little more than half (54,3%) brushed their teeth '*more than once a day*'.
- Seven out of ten children (70,5%) exercised two or more days a week; the frequency of exercising decreased with age, as more 11-year-olds exercised daily (26,6%), compared to older students (13- and 15-year-olds: 17,7% and 15,7%, respectively).
- Children spent on average 2,6 hours over the weekdays and 3,3 hours over the weekends for watching TV, 1,8 hours and 2,5 hours for playing computer games over the weekdays and the weekends, respectively and 2,9 hours and 2,6 hours on electronic devices over the weekdays and the weekends, respectively. Children spent more time watching TV and using electronic devices, as they got older. During the weekends, compared to 11-year-olds, Grade 10 children spent almost an extra hour per day watching TV. This difference was even larger for the use of electronic devices and reached 100 minutes. However, deviations remained large, signaling important variation among the population.
- Almost all (97,4%) 11-year-olds reported that they had never smoked; this percentage decreased to 87,3% for 13-year-olds and to 65,3% for 15-year-olds. At the same time, more than 1% of 13 year olds and 9% of 15-year olds appeared to be regular smokers i.e. smoking '*20-29 days*' and '*30 days or more*' in the last 30 days.
- As to the consumption of alcohol, students appeared willing to try it out, as six out of ten children on average (60%) reported consuming alcohol at least once. Older students reported more frequent consumption of alcohol; more than half (52,2%) consumed alcohol, more than once in the last 30 days.
- On average, 37,8% of 15-year-olds and 12,4% of 13-year-olds, compared to 4% of 11-year-olds reported getting drunk at least once in their lifetime; this decreased to 14,3% (15-year-olds) and 5,3% (13-year-olds) for the last 30 days.

- One out of ten 15-year-olds had, at some point of their lifetime, consumed cannabis, while almost 2,5% reported consuming it regularly (every day) in the last 30 days.
- The results regarding the smoking of a water pipe appeared concerning, since more than 50% of 15-year-olds reported using it at some point of their lifetime, while 26,7% reported smoking a water pipe at least '1-2 days' or more often in the last 30 days.
- The study also indicated the average weight and height of students for each age group. Children had an average weight of 41,7 kg (11-year-olds), 52,6 kg (13-year-olds) and 61 kg (15-year-olds) and an average height of 151,5 cm (11-year-olds), 163,4 cm (13-year-olds) and 168,4 cm (15-year-olds).

As to **views about the school**,

- Students' feelings about the school were positive since 60,2% reported that they either '*liked it a bit*' or '*liked it a lot*'. Positive feelings towards school appeared to drop with age; 39,3% of 11-year-olds reported that they '*liked it a lot*', compared to only 11,9% of 13-year-olds and 9,5% of 15-year-olds.
- On the other hand, older students (13- and 15-year-olds) reported feeling extensively more pressure at school, when compared to 11-year-olds; whereas only 18,1% of 11-year-olds reported feeling '*some*' or '*a lot of*' pressure at school, this increased to more than 60% for 13- and 15-year-olds.
- The majority of children on average indicated that in their class they enjoyed being together (61,9%), that most of the students in their class were kind and helpful (52,8%) and they felt accepted by the other students (74,7%).
- As with student support, children on average reported positive feelings about teacher support. 11-year-olds appeared to have stronger feelings about teacher support than older children, since 89,3% reported ('*agree*' and '*strongly agree*') feeling that their teachers accepted them as they were, 89,2% that their teachers cared about them as persons, and 84,6% reported feeling a lot of trust in their teachers.

With regards to **violence and injuries**,

- About 14,1% on average reported bullying another person at school at least once '*in the past couple of months*'. More students (22,2%) reported being bullied at school.
- A few students (7,6%) reported taking part in cyberbullying at least once '*in the past couple of months*', with a higher percentage of 13-year-olds reporting this activity. Again, more students (12,6%), reported being cyberbullied at least once '*in the past couple of months*'.
- Almost four out of ten students on average reported getting into a physical fight at least once in the past year. In addition, almost one out of two students (45,4%)

reported getting injured and being treated by a doctor or nurse at least once in the past year.

As to **peer support**,

- The majority of children believed they were close with their friends: 77,4% agreed to some extent that their friends really tried to help them, 76,4% that they could count on their friends, 82,3% that they could share their joys and sorrows and 76,6% that they could talk about their problems.

As to **electronic media communication**,

- Students of all ages reported having frequent online contact (*'almost all the time throughout the day'*) with close friends (36,5%), rather than friends from a larger friend group (16,0%), people other than friends (21,8%) or friends that they knew through the internet (7,4%). While 77,1% of students reported having at least daily online contact with close friends, this percentage dropped to 63% for *'friends from a larger friend group'*, 55% for *'people other than friends'*, and 19,6% for friends they only got to know through the internet.
- Contrary of what could be expected, the majority of children of all age groups disagreed (*'disagree'* and *'strongly disagree'*) that they could talk more easily about secrets (63,2%), their inner feelings (57,6%) and concerns (64,5%) online, compared to face-to-face settings.
- A substantial number of students reported that during the past year, they often *'used social media to escape from negative feelings'* (44,5%), *'felt bad when they could not use social media'* (35,2%), tried to *'spend less time on social media, but failed'* (34,2%). Almost one in four students, *'felt dissatisfied because they wanted to spend more time on social media'* (27,6%), *'had arguments with others because of their social media use'* (25,7%), *'couldn't think of anything else but the moment that they would be able to use social media again'* (25,5%) and *'neglected other activities (e.g. hobbies, sport)'* to use social media (25,0%). Less children *'had serious conflict with'* their family because of their social media use (21,9%) or *'lied to their parents or friends about the amount of time they spend on social media'* (17,5%).

As to **sexual health** of the 15-year-olds,

- One out of five (19,8%) reported having sexual intercourse, with the majority being boys (33,2%).
- With regards to the age of first sexual intercourse, the majority of both boys (44%) and girls (53,8%) that reported having sexual intercourse indicated that this occurred at the age of 15.
- From the respondents that indicated having sexual intercourse, 62,7% of boys reported using a condom in their last sexual intercourse, while 46,2% of girls reported using birth control pills.

With regards to **family**,

- The majority of children were born in Cyprus (86,6%), followed by a small percentage born in Greece (3,5%), Romania (2,8%), Bulgaria (1,6%), Russia (1,3%), and other countries. The distribution was different as to their parents' country of birth, with only 78% of the fathers and 66,2% of mothers, being born in Cyprus.
- Almost all children reported living with their mother (94%) and less with their father (77,4%). Some students indicated that they lived with a stepfather (about 6%) and less with a stepmother (about 1%).
- More than 90% of the students' fathers and more than 80% of their mothers were reported as having a job. About 37,7% of those whose father didn't have a job, stated that he was sick, while 34% stated that their father was looking for a job. More than half of the students whose mother didn't have a job, reported that she was taking care of the home (52,8%) and only 23,1% that she was looking for a job.
- More than two thirds of the children (66,3%) stated that they found it '*Very easy*' or '*easy*' to talk to their father about things that really bothered them. This percentage was larger (>80%) in the case of their mother. Both figures decreased, as students got older. The majority of children reported that they didn't have a stepfather (78,6%) or a stepmother (82,9%).
- About eight out of ten children stated that their family tried to help them (87,3%) and supported them emotionally (83,4%), that they talked about their problems with their family (74,3%), or that their family was willing to help them make decisions (84,4%). Older students indicated less support from their families, compared to the younger ones.

The most interesting of these results will be discussed among stakeholders, as they are likely to highlight important policy directions. Some findings e.g. consuming cannabis, smoking a water pipe and addiction to electronic communication emerge as areas for concern, with regards to health education of children (especially older).

Overall, no problems were reported in either the pilot survey preparation or the implementation phase; in fact, the data was collected on time, as expected. Provided that the application of Cyprus to join the HBSC study is successful, regular participation is expected in the next cycle, with a higher number of children in the three age groups. The study is also expected to be addressed to both public and private schools, so both languages of administration will be used (Greek and English). At a later point, a decision will be made as to the optional packages of the questionnaire that will be included.