



**hbsc**  
ENGLAND

# HBSC England factsheet series: LIFE SATISFACTION OF ADOLESCENTS

Findings from the 2021-2022 HBSC study for England  
**HEALTH BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN:**  
World Health Organisation Collaborative  
cross-national study (HBSC)

**CHSS**  
University of Kent

Hrytsenko, V., Eida, T., Ferris, E., Hulbert, S., Pomplun, R., Kendall, S. (2024).  
Life satisfaction of adolescents. HBSC England 2022 data: Factsheet series.  
<https://hbscengland.org/>

## KEY MESSAGES



Boys and younger adolescents reported higher levels of life satisfaction.



Adolescents from high-affluence families reported higher levels of life satisfaction.



There was a decline in thriving boys and girls over time; figures for 2022 were the lowest since 2002.



Young people's life satisfaction in England was lower than the average across the participating HBSC countries in Europe, Central Asia and Canada.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Life satisfaction is one of the key measures of adolescent well-being, capturing the degree of mainly positive dimensions of mental health in youth (Mazur et al., 2018).

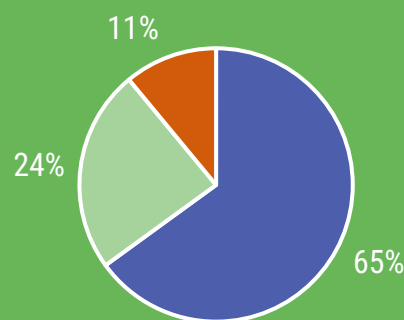
Life satisfaction has been shown to mediate between adolescents' positive school relationships and their mental health, but also, to be protective of mental health (Cavioni et al., 2021).

This factsheet presents findings from the 2021-2022 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study in England, which used data from 5377 adolescents aged 11, 13 and 15 years old.

## HBSC ENGLAND LIFE SATISFACTION FINDINGS 2022

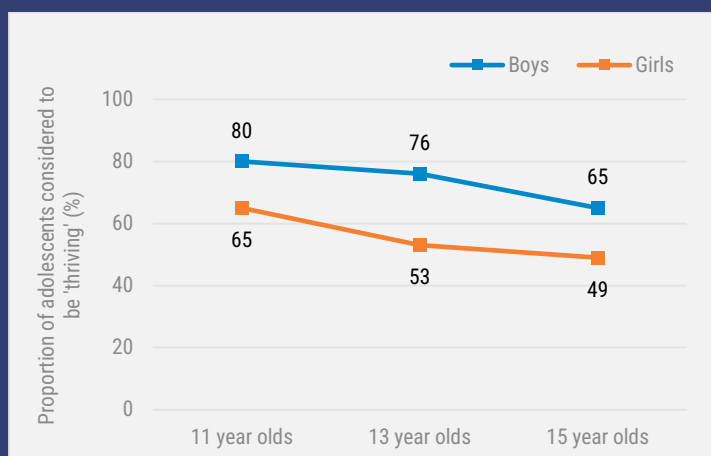
### THE PREVALENCE OF LIFE SATISFACTION

- Overall, 11% of adolescents reported low scores for life satisfaction which classified them as 'suffering'.
- 24% of adolescents recorded scores classified as 'potentially struggling'.
- 65% of young people rated their life satisfaction as high and could be considered 'thriving'.



■ Thriving ■ Potentially struggling ■ Suffering

### LIFE SATISFACTION: AGE AND GENDER

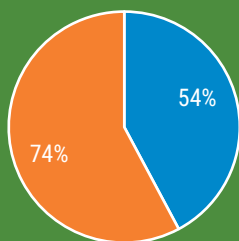


- The proportion of girls that could be considered 'thriving' was much lower than that of boys (56% versus 74%).
- The proportion reporting higher levels of life satisfaction fell with age, especially for girls.
- 15 year old girls were the least likely to rate their life within the 'thriving' category (49%) compared with 65% of boys at this age.

## LIFE SATISFACTION AND FAMILY AFFLUENCE

There's lots of pressure to have the right clothes, make up etc - if you don't have the money to buy these, it might make you not feel satisfied. Claudia, 14

...it seems that funding is being pulled away from the least affluent places – how much of a difference it has is actually quite heartbreaking. Youth café member



Proportion of adolescents considered to be 'thriving', by FAS

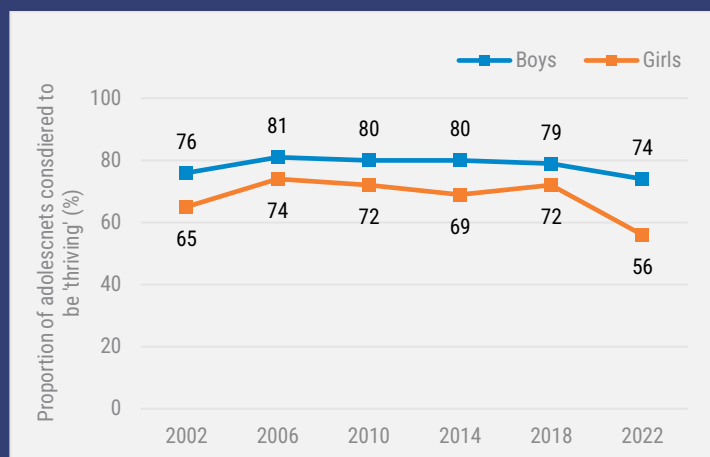
Low FAS High FAS

- A greater proportion of young people from the most affluent families (high FAS)\* could be considered as 'thriving': 74% vs 54% among those from the least affluent families (low FAS).
- This was apparent among both boys and girls.
- The widest family affluence gap for life satisfaction was among 13-year-old girls where the proportion of those considered thriving was nearly double among those from the most affluent families (71% vs 38%).

\* Family affluence level (high, low) was assessed through the Family Affluence Scale (FAS).

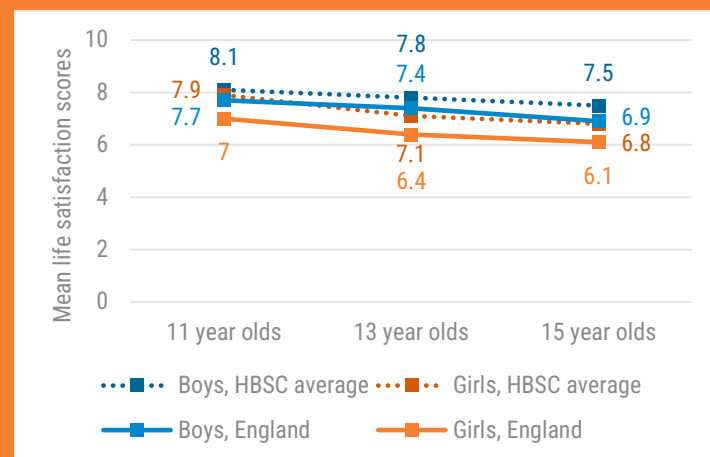
## LIFE SATISFACTION: TRENDS

- The proportion of young people who could be considered 'thriving' noticeably decreased between 2018 and 2022.
- While the decline over time was evident for boys and girls, it was particularly abrupt for girls, dropping from 72% to 56%.
- Life satisfaction among adolescents in 2022 was at its lowest level since 2002.



## LIFE SATISFACTION ACROSS HBSC COUNTRIES

- The mean score for English boys and girls in each age group was lower than the equivalent average score across 45 countries/regions participating in the 2022 HBSC survey\*. This puts English boys and girls in the bottom 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of the international distribution.
- Across all HBSC countries, mean life satisfaction scores declined with age: 15 year old boys and especially 15 year old girls displayed the lowest levels of life satisfaction.



\* Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study (2023), Data browser (findings from the 2021/2022 international HBSC survey): <https://data-browser.hbsc.org/>

## LIFE SATISFACTION IN CONTEXT

We analyzed the data for associations that may exist between adolescents' life satisfaction and other variables.

### LIFE SATISFACTION AND MENTAL WELL-BEING



**The strongest correlation was for life satisfaction and mental well-being** ( $r = .59, p < .001, N = 4999$ ).

Adolescents who reported low scores on life satisfaction were more likely to score low on the WHO-5 scale, indicating poor mental well-being.

### MULTIPLE HEALTH COMPLAINTS



**There was a strong and significant negative correlation between life satisfaction and multiple health complaints** ( $r = -.51, p < .001, N = 5105$ ).

Adolescents who reported low scores on life satisfaction were more likely to report multiple health complaints.

What could be done to increase life satisfaction? For me..., having an after school club for homework would have made my life a lot better as it is hard to have a space at home to do it without having to do chores and get distracted etc. Also having someone to help with homework would have been good to understand more and have more time to relax at home. Eleri, 19

### LIFE SATISFACTION AND SCHOOL



**Life satisfaction was positively associated with school liking** ( $r = .43, p < .001, N = 5036$ ).

Adolescents who reported low life satisfaction were less likely to report liking school. The correlation was strong and significant.

### LIFE SATISFACTION AND FAMILY COMMUNICATION



**Life satisfaction had a positive association with ease of communication with mother** ( $r = .41, p < .001, N = 4874$ ) **and father** ( $r = .38, p < .001, N = 4858$ ).

Adolescents who reported low scores on life satisfaction were less likely to report ease of communication with their mother and father.

## WHAT IS HBSC?

The HBSC survey is a WHO collaborative cross-national study that has been run every four years since 1983 and is now delivered across more than 50 countries and regions in Europe, central Asia and Canada. It monitors the health behaviours, health outcomes, well-being and social environments of school-aged children across a range of indicators, the role of gender, age and social inequality, and how adolescent health and well-being have changed over time.

## MEASURE

Life satisfaction was measured using the Cantril Ladder (Cantril 1965), where young people were asked to pick a number from 0 ('worst possible life') to 10 ('best possible life') presented as steps on a ladder to indicate their general level of life satisfaction. This measure reflects not just current emotions but is reliable for evaluating young peoples' lives amidst the wavering experiences of adolescence.

"Here is a picture of a ladder. The top of the ladder '10' is the best possible life for you and the bottom '0' is the worst possible life for you. In general, where on the ladder do you feel that you stand at the moment? Tick the box next to the number that best describes where you stand. (0 'worst possible life' to 10 'best possible life')."

- 0 to 4 = Low life satisfaction, defined as 'suffering'
- 5 to 6 = Medium life satisfaction, defined as 'potentially struggling'
- 7 to 10 = High life satisfaction, defined as 'thriving'.

## REFERENCES

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