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'The children have their say'. A city-wide tool to assess and improve the well-being of children, from their perspective and with them taking centre stage

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'The children have their say: The Subjective Well-Being of Children in Barcelona (2016 - ongoing) is a city wide tool that focuses on the rights of children to be listened to in order to assess and improve the well-being of children, from their perspective and with them taking centre stage. Following ethical research guidelines for working with children, they are treated as key informants or experts on their lives (stage 1: survey of 4,000 boys and girls), researchers that learn (stage 2: joint workshops to analyse the results to prepare improvement proposals) and active city residents (stage 3: creation of dialogue with adults, representatives of the Administration, political parties and social organisations). 'Speak up' generates evidence about the room for improvement in the subjective well-being of children, the negative impact of certain living conditions and the significant experiences that generate well-being, in addition to other findings. The knowledge generated, which is unparalleled and both of a quantitative and qualitative nature, is collected in research reports and the 'Children's agenda' (a document containing 11 demands made by children and 115 proposed improvements), is linked to the public agenda and seeks to contribute to improving local policies and enriching the social debate.

1. Why is a municipal programme like 'The children have their say' needed?

Unfortunately, it is still all too common to talk about childhood and the needs of children based on adult visions and opinions. We talk about them to their parents, from the perspective of teachers or other professionals that care for them, and we forget that they

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are the ones who are most aware of what is and is not right for them, about what they like and what concerns them. Why is it so difficult for us to listen to them and take what they say into account? Why is it so difficult for us to view reality from a child's point of view? When excluding children from the debate on childhood, even inadvertently, we contribute to making them invisible.

In addition to recognising children as key informants and experts on their lives, strictly from the perspective of their rights, when including them in the process of assessing their needs, design, implementation or impact of childhood plans and services, we guarantee their right to be heard (Article 12) and to be considered a key part of society, acting in their main interests (Article 3), as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁹. Listening to children and taking what they say seriously contributes to the obligation of public administration to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents²⁰.

The interest in gathering data on the living conditions and rights of children and adolescents has been and remains a concern for Barcelona City Council. Since the creation of the Barcelona Institute of Childhood and Adolescence²¹ in 1999, Barcelona City Council has promoted initiatives to obtain information and generate knowledge on childhood in the city. Noteworthy examples of this include the Family and Childhood Panel (2007-2011)²² or the Barcelona Childhood and Family Barometer (2014)²³. Since 2015, efforts have continued as part of the new municipal programme 'The children have their say: The Subjective Well-Being of Children in Barcelona' (2016 - ongoing).²⁴ The goal of 'Speak up' is to resume an epistemologically significant commitment: generating knowledge on the subjective well-being of children, from their perspective and with them taking centre stage²⁵. Based on the concept of the child as the active subject of rights and active citizenship, children are asked questions, help to interpret the response and propose suggestions for improvement. Dialogues are also opened up with adults to inform them, first hand, of the demands of children and suggested lines of action.

Thus, 'Speak up' serves twin purposes. On the one hand, to genuinely set up a programme to generate knowledge linked to the public agenda, both in order to contribute to improving local policies, taking children's rights forwards to enrich the social debate by sharing the knowledge generated. On the other hand, using the comprehensive and representative surveying of 4,000 infants, 'Speak up' has also been conceived as an inclusive, cross-cutting experience oriented towards transformation.

2. 'The children have their say': 3 stages to achieve 3 major goals

'Speak up' was designed to offer the city a new permanent tool for obtaining knowledge, without losing sight of the fact that a strong diagnosis is merely the first step in defining improvement actions. As part of 'Speak up', pursuant to ethical and responsible research

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https://treballiaferssocials.gencat.cat/web/.content/03ambits_tematicas/07infanciaiadolescencia/observatori_drets_infancia/destacats_columna_dreta/Convencio_drets_infancia.pdf

²⁰. The right to be heard is also provided for in the Law on the rights and opportunities of children and adolescents (Article 34, and the Barcelona Citizenship Charter .

²¹. Between 1999 and 2015, it was known as the Institute of Childhood and the Urban World Consortium (CIIMU).

²². <http://institutinfancia.cat/mediateca/panel-families-infancia-instrument-laplanificacio-avaluacio-politiques-publicues/>

²³. <http://institutinfancia.cat/mediateca/barometre-dinfancia-i-families-a-barcelona-bifab-2014/>

²⁴. <http://institutinfancia.cat/mediateca/resum-parlen-els-nens-i-nenes-el-benestar-subjectiu-de-la-infancia-a-barcelona/>

²⁵. At the Family and Childhood Panel, children were also directly asked questions.

guidelines for working with children²⁶, they are considered key informants as experts on their lives through a survey (stage 1), while also serving as researchers who learn as part of a joint analysis to prepare improvement proposals (stage 2), in addition to active city residents in the dialogue to ensure these proposals reach political and social representatives as part of the 'Children's agenda' (stage 3). Generating shared spaces for adults and children, which recognise the active citizenship of children, 'Speak up' strives to include the visions of children in the city's public agenda.

2.1 Stage 1: Understanding the well-being of children (2016-2017)

'It has been an interesting experience, as being part of a survey is not something that happens every day and the people involved are working on an important project and they ask you things about yourself: it has made me feel important' (Alba, 11)

The starting point of the programme is asking the city's children 'How are you?' in a wide range of aspects of their lives: their health and how they feel about themselves, their family, their home, their friends, school and the activities they participate in during their free time or their neighbourhood. To understand the well-being of children, a survey was performed based on the questionnaire used in the Children's World project²⁷, which has been rolled out on a large scale in more than forty countries around the world.

Between December 2016 and April 2017, surveys were carried out on 4,000 children aged between 10 and 12, from years 5 and 6 at 52 schools across the city, chosen at random to guarantee representation of each school district, ownership type and size. Furthermore, the resulting sample of children (15% of the total benchmark population) was representative of gender and family income in the corresponding districts, thus enhancing the analysis potential and usefulness of the data.

The 2017 Subjective well-being survey on children in Barcelona (EBSIB-2017)²⁸ is therefore a useful tool in establishing, with a high degree of representativeness, the level of satisfaction of children in different aspects of their life²⁹ and the most important elements in terms of the subjective well-being of children³⁰.

2.2 Stage 2: Jointly analysing the results to prepare proposed improvements (2017-2018)

'I'm really happy that they asked us, because we are children and adults don't normally ask us our opinion. I hope that the outcome of this project is good and children feel better' (Pablo, 12)

The question 'How are you?' is not exclusive to the first stage of the programme, rather it is asked again when going back to the schools. The surveys provide answers to many questions, but also generate new ones. The dialogue with children continued with a new question: 'And what do we need to do to make you feel better?'. Children helped to respond to this question by co-interpreting the results, which was essential in obtaining a more in-depth understanding of the children's realities, from a qualitative perspective³¹. Furthermore, the question was asked from the point of view of the shared responsibility of

²⁶. <http://institutinfancia.cat/blog/que-implica-recerca-social-infants-adolescents/>

²⁷. <http://www.isciweb.org/>

²⁸. <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/ca/informacio-administrativa/registre-enquestes-i-estudis-opinio>

²⁹. <https://bcnroc.ajuntament.barcelona.cat/jspui/handle/11703/108123>

³⁰. <http://institutinfancia.cat/mediateca/analisi-en-profunditat-de-lenquesta-de-benestar-subjectiu-de-la-infancia-a-barcelona/>

³¹. <http://institutinfancia.cat/mediateca/analisi-en-profunditat-de-les-aportacions-fetes-pels-infants-als-tallers-del-parlen-els-nenes-i-nenes/>

the main environments: the children themselves, families, school and the City Council with other public administrations.

Between November 2017 and February 2018, 87 workshops were held in which 48 of the 52 schools participating in the survey took part, with 2,000 children from 9 of the city's 10 districts participating. The first part of the workshop involved providing feedback on the main results and their interpretation. The second part was dedicated to asking for proposed improvements in eight major areas assessed in the first stage: the family, material conditions, school, relationships with classmates and friendships, their neighbourhood, use of time, satisfaction with their health and body in addition to personal perceptions of autonomy and security.

These workshops generated 5,000 action proposals concerning the aspects of greatest concern to children, a huge number that required refining. Three criteria were employed to this end: the frequency of the proposal, geographical spread (mentioned in a high number of districts) and particular relevance to subjective well-being (based on the outcome of the survey). The overview was defined in the 'Children's agenda: proposals for improving our well-being'³², with 11 key demands that children seek from society and 115 action proposals divided between the four agents with the greatest ability to improve their well-being: the City Council and other public administrations, schools, families and children themselves³³.

2.3 Stage 3: Opening dialogue with the city's social and political representatives (2018-2019)

'I feel like I've been listened to and that makes me happy' (Andrea, 12)

' [The proposals] will generate a reaction and I think there will be changes in the city' (Iker, 12)

During the final stages of the programme, they were asked the following question: 'Would you like to be a spokesperson for the knowledge generated and the proposals for improving your well-being?'. The children from one of the schools involved in the programme were responsible for presenting their Agenda to the mayoress³⁴ and, subsequently, around thirty children who together comprise the spokeskids group³⁵ did so in other areas and to other individuals. In both instances, the children demonstrated their capacity to exercise their citizenship, establish dialogue with adults, and present and defend their Agenda as representatives of all the city's children.

Between June 2018 and December 2018, around thirty children from nine of the city's ten districts participated in the survey and the workshops saw volunteers step up to participate in the spokeskids group. Once the 'Children's agenda' was presented to the highest echelons of the city's government (the mayoress' office and the second deputy mayor and councillor for social rights), the spokeskids group embarked upon four further dialogues in different political spaces and social platforms: the Municipal Council for Social Welfare and the Citizen Agreement for an Inclusive Barcelona, the six municipal political groups and the Municipal Council Assembly. The Group also began a dialogue at the 'Childhood and

³². <https://bcnroc.ajuntament.barcelona.cat/jspui/handle/11703/109826>

³³. The Agenda can be consulted in video format at the following link:
<http://institutinfancia.cat/mediateca/video-11-demandes-lagenda-dels-infants/>

³⁴. The video of the presentation can be watched at the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gCnJfxIU5M>

³⁵. <http://institutinfancia.cat/noticies/arrenca-el-grup-altaveu-de-nens-i-nenes-per-obrir-dialegs-al-voltant-de-lagenda-dels-infants/>

adolescence in Barcelona: present and future' workshop³⁶, at which it received responses to its demands from the city government³⁷.

Approximately three hundred representatives from social institutions and networks, municipal political groups, municipal and citizen's services with the ability to reflect these demands in their workplaces or social activism institutions have received the 'Children's agenda' from the spokeskids group³⁸. Furthermore, the Area of Social Rights at Barcelona City Council has sent the 'Children's agenda' and a poster with the eleven demands³⁹ to all primary schools across the city.

3. How are Barcelona's children? Two premises and ten major findings in terms of children's well-being

Above, we have explained how 'Speak up' has been implemented; below, we will describe the main qualitative and quantitative findings of the research⁴⁰.

3.1 Two premises are essential in understanding the well-being of children

First premise: To listen to children, 'special listening skills' are needed. Faced with the same question about overall satisfaction in life, children and adults adopt different positions. While on a scale of 0 to 10 children tend to respond with a score of 9 or 10, adults score their satisfaction at around 7 or 8. This is known as the bias of vital optimism, as part of which children tend to respond more positively than adults when asked about their well-being. This bias means that we need to use 'special listening skills' when listening to and interpreting what children say. The bias of vital optimism explains the average overall satisfaction of children aged between 10 and 12 in Barcelona being 9 out of 10 (which is consistent with the results in other countries where this survey has been employed).

This bias serves as a warning in terms of incorrectly interpreting the data, based on which, during childhood, 'everything is fine'. In this connection, we have performed a special analysis on children that were not as satisfied: children who indicate that they are not as satisfied are identified (divided into 'not at all', 'somewhat' and 'quite' satisfied) and, then, from the group of children identified as 'not as satisfied', those who are not at all or only somewhat satisfied are determined. As this is an uncommon response from children, it may be indicative of significant upset or the need to deploy priority actions.

Second premise: All aspects of well-being are interrelated and changes in one aspect have an effect on others. Although the results on the subjective well-being of children are presented on a segmented basis (on the one hand, overall satisfaction with life, and on the other, satisfaction in five aspects of life), we are aware that well-being cannot be divided into separate compartments or measured using unique indicators. We understand well-being from the comprehensive perspective in which the different parts of a child's life are interrelated and their experiences in certain contexts have an effect on others.

³⁶. <http://institutinfancia.cat/noticies/jornada-de-debat-sobre-la-infancia-i-ladolescencia-amb-noves-diagnosis-i-retorn-de-lagenda-dels-infants/>

³⁷. Photographs of the workshop can be consulted at the following link:
https://www.flickr.com/photos/barcelona_cat/sets/72157703823564455

³⁸. <http://institutinfancia.cat/noticies/el-grup-altaveu-presenta-i-treballa-lagenda-dels-infants-amb-el-consell-municipal-de-benestar-social-i-lacord-ciutada-per-una-barcelona-inclusiva/>

³⁹. <http://institutinfancia.cat/mediateca/poster-les-11-demandes-de-lagenda-dels-infants/>

⁴⁰. <http://institutinfancia.cat/mediateca/informe-parlen-els-nens-i-nenes-el-benestar-subjectiu-de-la-infancia-a-barcelona/>

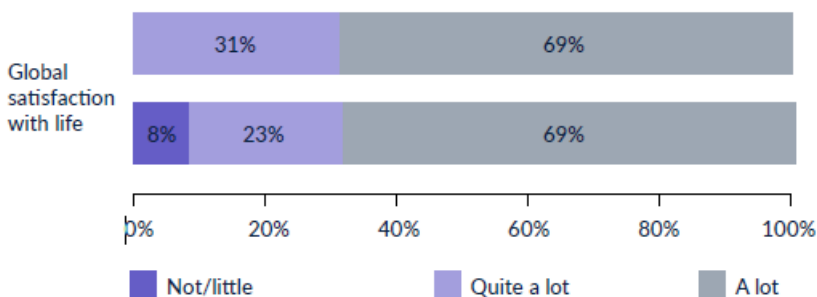
For example, a higher perceived personal autonomy results in the child feeling more satisfied with their security and how adults listen to them. Furthermore, children who perceive that ‘their parents listen to them and consider what they have to say’ are more satisfied with their school life in general, and children who consider that ‘their friends treat them well’, feel more secure at school. It is also worth noting that those who feel that ‘in the neighbourhood they live in, they have enough freedom to do what they want’ are more satisfied with the amount of free time they have and how they use it.

3.2 Ten findings on the well-being of children

1. Despite the satisfactory levels of well-being indicated by children aged between 10 and 12 in Barcelona, there is great room for improvement in terms of their satisfaction in life in general and the different, more specific aspects of their life

In Barcelona, 3 out of 10 children aged between 10 and 12 indicate that they are not satisfied with their life in general. Of the 31% of children who said they were not satisfied, 8% stated that they were not at all or somewhat satisfied with life in general and 23% indicated that they were quite satisfied, but not satisfied enough.

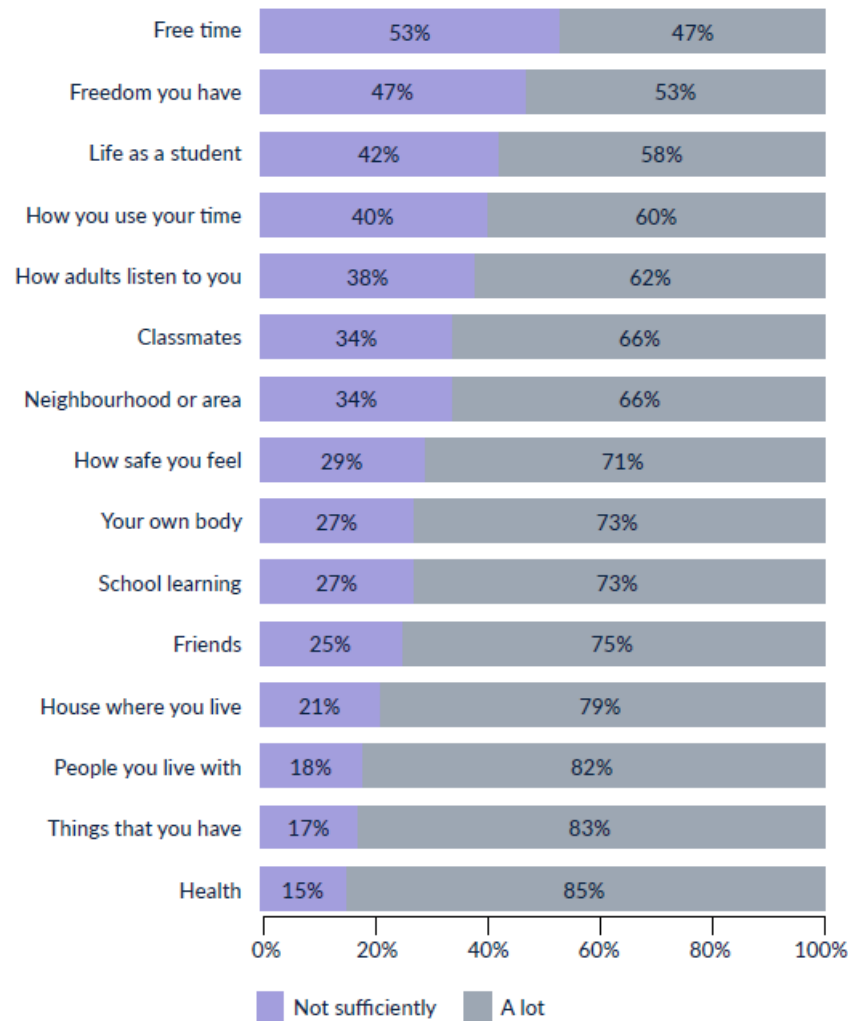
Graph 1. Overall satisfaction with life among children aged between 10 and 12. Barcelona, 2017



Source: Barcelona Survey of Children's Subjective Well-Being- 2017. Barcelona City Council.

Of the 15 aspects of life subject to analysis, those scoring the lowest and in which children were not satisfied were the amount of free time available (53% not satisfied), their freedom (47%), student life (42%), the use of time (40%) and adult listening (38%).

Graph 2. Satisfaction with the different aspects of life among children aged between 10 and 12 (from lowest to highest). Barcelona, 2017



Source: Barcelona Survey of Children's Subjective Well-Being- 2017. Barcelona City Council.

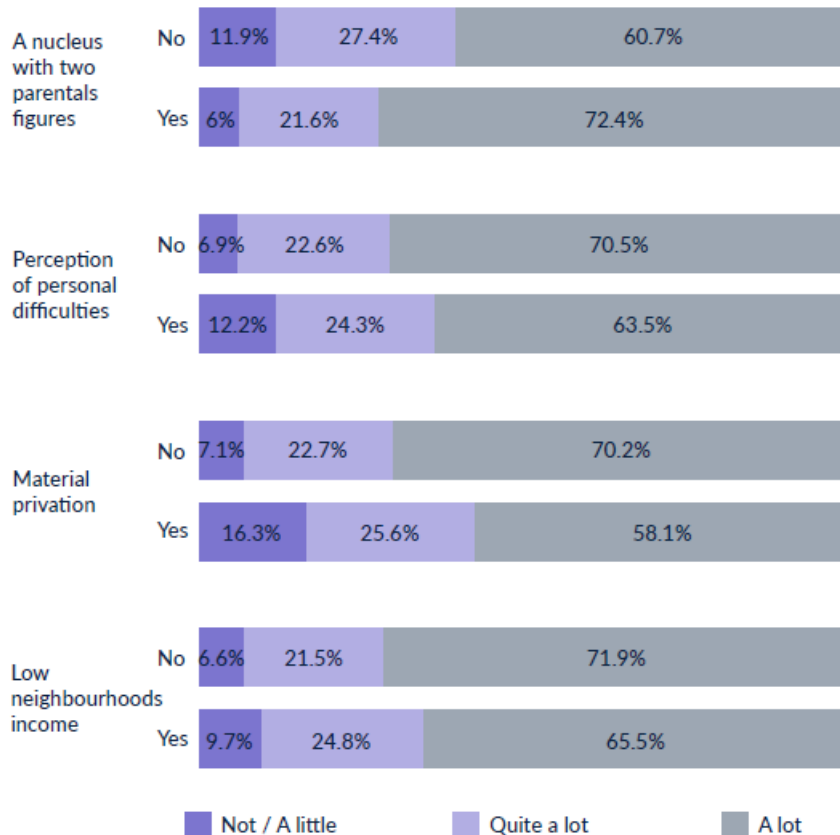
2. Corroboration of the negative impact of certain living conditions on children's well-being

The negative impact of certain aspects of living conditions inherent to the social structure, but not necessarily foreseeable, on the subjective well-being of children has been corroborated. Negative impacts: 1) living in an environment with just one parental figure; 2) living in low-income neighbourhoods or where there are limited resources, and 3) perceived physical or learning difficulties or any form of chronic illness. These results demonstrate the need to make a stronger commitment to equality and inclusion policies to minimise the negative impact of certain circumstances on the lives of children.

Contrary to expectations, there was no evidence that the child's gender had a negative impact on their overall satisfaction with life. However, it does have an impact on certain aspects of their lives: girls are less satisfied than boys with their bodies, their friendships and their perceived personal security, whereas boys are less satisfied than girls in terms of student life and school education.

Children whose parents are from a foreign country do tend to have a lower level of satisfaction with life. The negative impacts can be seen in specific aspects of their lives: they are less satisfied with their classmates and friendships, adult listening, the house they live in and, most importantly, the things they have.

Graph 3. Overall satisfaction with live among children aged between 10 and 12 years based on living conditions. Barcelona, 2017

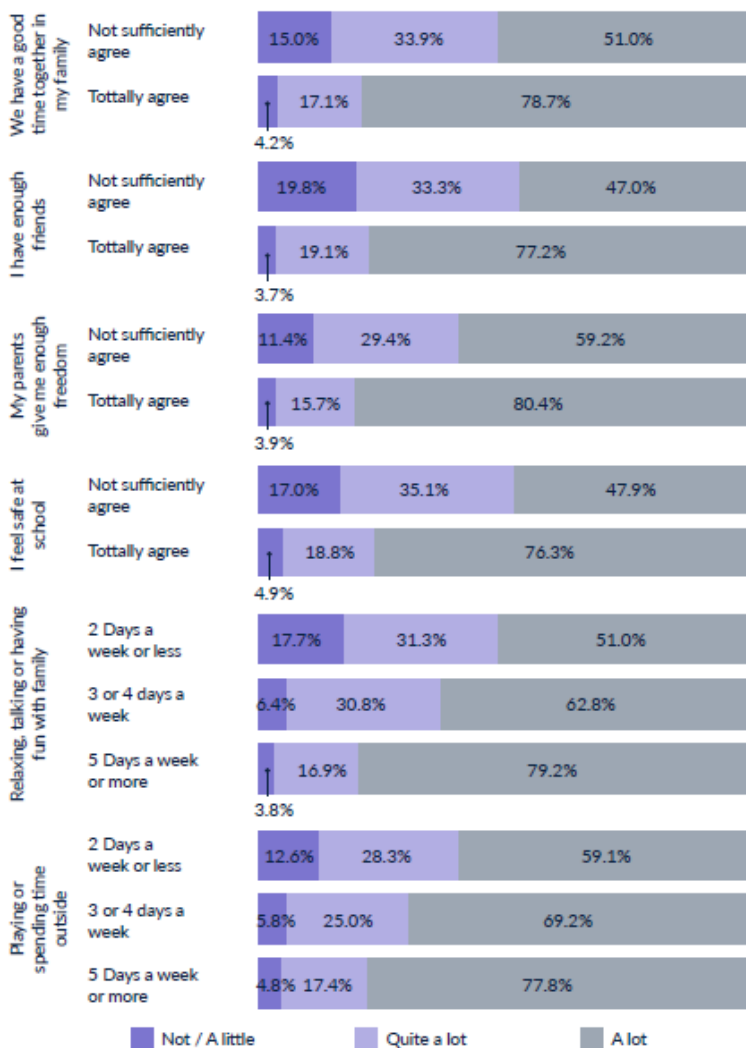


Source: Barcelona Survey of Children's Subjective Well-Being- 2017. Barcelona City Council.

3. The importance of certain experiences during childhood and how they have a particular impact on the well-being of children

The analysis has shown us that certain experiences in childhood play an important role in many children's perception of overall well-being. Among these experiences, six are particularly important in promoting well-being (or hampering it). Thus, children are much more satisfied with their lives when: 1) they have a good time with their family; 2) they believe they have enough friends; 3) they feel that their parents give them freedom; 4) they feel secure at school; 5) they can relax, talk or have a good time with their family; and 6) they play or spend time outdoors.

Graph 4. Overall satisfaction with life among children aged between 10 and 12 based on significant experiences. Barcelona, 2017



Source: Barcelona Survey of Children's Subjective Well-Being- 2017. Barcelona City Council.

4. It is not possible to ‘model’ the characteristics of children who are not at all or only somewhat satisfied with life in general, but it is possible to identify the conditions and experiences that promote or hinder well-being

Research demonstrates the importance of considering both the impact of living conditions and specific experiences during childhood; however, it is not possible to ‘model’ the characteristics of the 8% of children who are not at all or only somewhat satisfied with life in general, as they span a wide range of profiles and circumstances.

Therefore, children who are not at all or only somewhat satisfied with their life are not a *specific type of child*, rather they are children who *are more likely than others* to experience conditions that have been demonstrated as being harmful to a child’s well-being, or children who have been deprived of experiences that have been demonstrated as enhancing their well-being.

5. Self-esteem, health and free time are three key elements in children feeling satisfied with the personal aspects of their life

Children emphasise the importance of feeling good about themselves in terms of their

satisfaction with life and the importance of receiving support from those around them when they feel sad or disheartened. In total, 27% of children are not satisfied with their bodies (negative responses were higher from girls) and they attribute this to the enforcement of beauty standards that girls feel more pressured to fulfil than boys. 'Part of the survey asked you about your body and there are girls that feel badly about their body and in the magazines we're made to feel like we need to be amazing and we're not. Some girls get so obsessed with their body that they have bad experiences', said Georgina, from Sant Andreu.

Health was the highest scoring aspect amongst children, and 85% responded that they were very satisfied in this area. The factors that had the biggest impact on satisfaction with health are personal difficulties (physical, learning or illness-related) and growing up in circumstances of limited resources. The main health problems reported related to stress (30% responded that they felt somewhat or very stressed) and difficulty sleeping (31%). They attribute this to pressure with studies and too much homework. Furthermore, to improve their health, they responded that healthy habits (rest, hygienes, etc.), physical activity and a good diet were all important factors. The data backs up the belief that children who participate in sport or physical exercise frequently are more satisfied with their health and body.

Their satisfaction with free time is also worth noting, as this was the lowest scoring aspect (53% said they were not satisfied). In addition to dissatisfaction with the amount of free time, 40% were not happy with the way this time was spent. Children believe that they have to dedicate too much time to their studies and they do not have enough time for recreation and friendships. The figures speak for themselves: 71% assert that they have homework at least five days a week and 38% say that they do not play or spend time outdoors. In total, 26% said they do not relax, talk or have fun with their family often enough, despite this being one of the factors that has the biggest impact on children's well-being. 'As we have so much homework, we barely have any time to play' or 'Extracurricular activities take up a lot of time, I'd like to play outside or spend time with my friends', said Pau from Nou Barris and Carla from Sarrià - Sant Gervasi, respectively.

6. Support and adults listening to them, family time and freedom: the three key aspects in children feeling satisfied with their family life

The overall results for family life are very positive: 87% of children fully agree that people in their family are concerned for them and 82% responded that they feel secure at home. However, considering that a caring environment is essential, it is notable that 18% responded that they are not happy with the people they live with and 22% think that, if they were to have a problem, they would not receive support from their family. Research highlighted that children who live with just one parent (single-parent families or who mainly live with just one parent as a result of a separation or other factors) are generally less satisfied with life. Care must be taken to not misinterpret this aspect, as it does not necessarily mean that growing up in a two-parent family is beneficial. It merely suggests that single-parent families need to be given assistance through appropriate resources or support, as the problem is not the family structure, rather the resources (material and non-material) available to satisfy the children's needs.

Therefore, for example, family time is easier to provide when there are two or more adults at home than when only one parent is available to the child. Only 6 out of 10 children talk to and relax with their family often (at least five days a week) and 3 out of 10 children say they never do this or do so just one or two days a week. They mentioned the work-life balance of their parents as the main obstacle in sharing this time with them, particularly in the case of children from low-income neighbourhoods with poorer employment conditions.

Furthermore, the way in which adults listen to children has been indicated as being very relevant to their well-being. However, 4 out of 10 children are not satisfied with the way adults listen to them. They do not think that adults take them seriously enough and that their opinions are not taken into account. 'Adults don't listen to you and always have to be right', responded Paula, from Sant Andreu.

Finally, they spoke about their degree of freedom. This is the second lowest scoring aspect: 47% of children are not satisfied with the degree of autonomy they have at home, for example, to play outside with their friends, which they attribute to overprotectiveness. It is worth noting that spending time outdoors is one of the factors that has the biggest impact on the well-being of children. 'Adults being protective is good, but they should also allow us to decide certain things', responded children from les Corts.

7. The well-being of children at school is not only linked to education, but their relationship with classmates, friendships and their teachers, in addition to feeling secure at school.

School is not just an educational space for children, it is also a living space. Time spent at school, diversifying learning methods and participating in decision-making at school are all factors that have been indicated as important in a child feeling happy at school.

Relationships and self-assurance are also important, insofar as they are to blame for most upsets. The difference between the figures of 26% that are not satisfied with school education and 42% that are not satisfied with student life indicates that school life is more than just the acquisition of knowledge.

In terms of education, children said they feel more satisfied when working with computers and less with books, when involved in outdoor activities and when performing practical activities. Furthermore, 7 out of 10 children do not believe they have enough autonomy or ability to choose activities in the school environment. In terms of the causes of their dissatisfaction, they responded that they would like to have a space in which to express their views on school timetables or the amount of homework. 'We want teachers to ask us for our opinion, for example, how to distribute the class', said children from Eixample.

In terms of relationships, 3 out of 10 children said they were not at all satisfied with their classmates and 2 out of 10 with their friends. Concerning teachers, 44% of children do not think they listen to them enough or are concerned enough about them, and 37% responded that they do not believe their teacher would support them if they had a problem. Conflictive relationships and, sometimes, bullying at school, has a significant adverse effect on children who are victims of these phenomena. Bullying is a group phenomenon and many children feel that violence tends to be trivialised. In total, 70% said that there were fights at least one day a week and 43% said that they have been left out at least once. At this point, it should be noted that feeling secure at school was one of the six experiences that most contributes to children's well-being. 'If they don't treat you well, you get anxious and then you just start feeling worse and worse', responded Marc, from Sants-Montjuïc.

Based on the research, it can also be concluded that children who report having a personal difficulty (physical, learning or illness-related) are less satisfied with all aspects of the school environment (student life, school education, relationships with friends and classmates). This suggests that specific support measures are needed for these children. 'There are some children who don't like their school and that might be because they have difficulty learning and this makes them nervous', responded Gisela, from Sant Martí.

8. For children to feel satisfied with their neighbourhood and city, they need spaces where they can meet up with other children, have good relations with neighbours, and clean, safe neighbourhoods where they can move around freely

Children aged between 10 and 12 in Barcelona responded that a good neighbourhood must be peaceful (synonymous for *secure*), fun (synonymous for *community life*), clean and quiet (synonymous for *healthy*). Based on this perspective, 3 out of 10 children have said they are not satisfied with their neighbourhood and 5 out of 10 responded that there are no play areas in their neighbourhoods, particularly in low-income areas. Despite being an essential aspect of well-being, 38% reported that they neither play nor spend enough time outdoors. 'There are playgrounds, but they are for small children and we're told we cannot go in as we're too big. There are no play areas for children our age', said Arnau, from Horta-Guinardó.

Concerning neighbourhood relationships, the respondents said they have a good time when there are things to do in the neighbourhood, appreciating when neighbours know one another and when there are other children that they can play with. By contrast, 7 out of 10 children believe that the adults where they live do not listen to them enough and 6 out of 10 do not think they are friendly enough with them. 'It is important to like your neighbourhood. Your neighbourhood is like your home, it's important that you feel part of it', responded Emma, from Gràcia.

Finally, around half of children (49%) said they do not feel safe when moving around their neighbourhood, a concern which was raised more frequently by children living in low-income neighbourhoods. Children were unanimous in calling for less cars on the road, which they not only associated with reducing pollution, but also their safety and being able to travel by themselves. 'I don't like that they asked me whether I feel safe in my neighbourhood, as sometimes there are fights', responded Àlex, from Ciutat Vella.

9. Children aged between 10 and 12 in Barcelona are aware of the existence of social inequalities, the different gender roles and the bigger difficulties facing children whose parents were born abroad

Children demonstrated that they were aware of the adverse impact of social inequalities that afflict our society and asserted that having a home and having the necessary resources are essential conditions for the well-being of all children. Despite most children being happy with the house they live in (83%) and the things they have (79%), 22% are constantly or often concerned about their family's finances, particularly children who live in low-income neighbourhoods. Furthermore, children living in low-income neighbourhoods and those with limited resources tend to be less satisfied with their life in general.

In terms of gender perspective, children believe that they are educated to fill different roles, which they believe is unfair, insofar as expectations of them are dependent on their gender. As indicated above, despite gender not statistically having an impact on a child's overall satisfaction, important differences between boys and girls have been found in specific aspects (finding 2).

The impact on well-being of a child's parents having been born abroad cannot be demonstrated sufficiently; however, there is evidence that links this factor to lower satisfaction with life and specific aspects (finding 2). The most significant difference in terms of satisfaction is reflected in the things they have: among the most dissatisfied, 64% have parents from abroad whereas 36% have Spanish parents. Qualitative research showed that children highly agreed with the fact that a child's parents being from abroad may lead to discrimination in certain aspects of their daily life.

10. The more satisfied a child is with their life in general, the more likely they are to be happier, more optimistic and have a better outlook on the future

Children who are satisfied with life in general feel happy (86%) and optimistic (87%), and also have a better outlook on their future (75%). By contrast, children who are less satisfied with their life are three times less likely to have a good outlook on the future (only 23% do). Despite the strong association, there is no direct relationship, as 25% of children do not have a good outlook of the future, despite being satisfied with their life in general. Material conditions, security, satisfaction with their body and feeling heard by adults are the aspects that have the biggest impact on children having a better or worse outlook on the future.

During participatory workshops, children responded that the fact that 31% of their peers claimed that they were not satisfied with their life is a bad result and unanimously called for 100% of children feeling satisfied with their life. Promoting better conditions so that all the city's children feel highly satisfied with their life would have an impact on their current well-being. Children would be happier, more optimistic and have a better outlook on the future. In addition, the future would also be better for city residents as a whole.

4. And, finally, what do children aged between 10 and 12 in Barcelona think we can do to improve their well-being?

The city's children have not only told us how they feel, they have also said how they can be made to feel better. In total, 5,000 proposals were made that need to be condensed down to analyse them in depth. As explained previously, the 'Children's agenda' brings together the demands made by children from society and the proposals for converting everything they are unhappy with or concerned about into opportunities for well-being. Below, a number of the main proposals, divided into lines of action, can be consulted:

Personal aspects:

- Ensuring that adults promote children's self-esteem and accepting their bodies.
- Placing a greater emphasis on teaching them to care for themselves better and having healthier habits.
- Dedicating more time to relaxing, talking and having a good time with their family.
- Making it possible for them to spend less time on homework and have more time for recreation and spending time with their friends.

Family aspects:

- Having more time for being, sharing and having fun with the family.
- Feeling more secure, considering that they receive support from their family if they have a problem.
- Being heard by adults in their family and feeling that what they say is taken seriously.
- Expanding their freedom and autonomy and feeling that their parents trust in their abilities.

School aspects:

- Greater space for participating in decision-making at school and diversifying learning methods.
- Feeling more secure at school, considering that they receive support from their teachers if they have a problem.
- Measures to prevent bullying and sparing no efforts to combat bullying should it occur.

Neighbourhood aspects:

- Spending more time outdoors, more outdoors activities with people from the neighbourhood.

- Sense that they receive support from their neighbours if they have a problem and promoting kindness between adults.
- Having more spaces that are adapted to their needs to meet up with and play with other children.
- Feeling safer when they move about and play in their neighbourhood.
- Living in a greener, more peaceful, cleaner and pollution-free city.

Social and cultural aspects:

- Ensuring that all children have what they need to grow up in the city.
- Enhancing awareness of what they have and making them value these things more.

In short...

Although there is no magical or mathematical formula for guaranteeing the well-being of children, 'The children have their say' has made it possible to shine a light (in the form of unparalleled quantitative and qualitative information about children's well-being) on how to make sure Barcelona's children live and grow up better. 'Speak up' has made it possible to identify not just the aspects with which Barcelona's children are more or less satisfied, but also the areas for improvement in their well-being and the living conditions and childhood experiences that improve, or adversely affect, their well-being. Furthermore, it has also helped us to understand how overall satisfaction with life is related to happiness, optimism and outlook on the future.

The diagnosis is merely the first step in defining improvement actions; although all the knowledge generated (how children perceive their health and how they feel about themselves, their family, home, friendships, school, hobbies and neighbourhood) is of great value. However, this is not the full extent of what the programme has to offer.

In addition to generating all this knowledge, 'Speak up' has demonstrated that it is possible to do so based on children's right to be heard and, in particular, it has shown that it is possible to do this recognising the ability of children to be key informants (stage 1 of the programme: survey), their ability to be coparticipants in the interpretation of data and the preparation of proposals for improvement (stage 2: analysis workshops and proposals), and, furthermore, their ability to make their proposals reach the city's social and political agents, and discuss these proposals with them, first hand (stage 3: dialogue based on the 'Children's agenda').

The recognition of the twin benefits (participation and source of knowledge) by the different public and private agents, in addition to social initiatives, makes it possible for the programme to consolidate its position as a new permanent tool for obtaining knowledge, as part of the Observatori 0-17 BCN,⁴¹ which provides data, diagnostics and evidence to guide public policies affecting children and making Barcelona a progressively better city for children and adolescents.

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⁴¹. <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dretssocials/ca/content/observatori-0-17-bcn>

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