

Can't get more satisfaction

May 2 2012

Young people in Scotland are more satisfied with life than many of their counterparts in Europe, according to a major new study into inequalities in health.

The research, undertaken every four years by academics at the University of St Andrews, provides a health check of young people aged 11, 13 and 15 across 39 different countries.

The findings, announced today (Wednesday 2 May), suggest that Scottish youngsters are performing well at school and generally happy with their lot, thanks to a good, close network of friends.

Compared with young people across Europe, Scots rated themselves amongst the top at having a high [life satisfaction](#) and having at least three close friends they can talk to.

Trends in Scotland also show young people are smoking less, decreasing cannabis use, drinking fewer soft (fizzy) drinks, and brushing their teeth more.

However the picture of Scottish youth is not all rosy - fifteen year old girls in Scotland are drinking and having unprotected sex more than many of their European counterparts, and Scotland is rated poorly in levels of physical activity at all ages. The report also links inequalities in the health of young Scots to family affluence.

The new Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) report is

published by the WHO ([World Health Organization](#)) European Office and is based on a wide-ranging survey conducted in 2009/2010.

Young people across Europe were asked to answer questions on 60 topics related to health and well-being, social environments and behaviour. The report, which takes into account differences across age, gender and socio-economic circumstances, has been issued every four years since 1996.

One of the Scottish researchers is Dr Jo Inchley, Assistant Director of the [Child and Adolescent Health](#) Research Unit at St Andrews. She commented, “Despite having typical teen problems such as poor communication with parents, Scottish youngsters are generally a sociable bunch and not at all isolated.

“Not all young people have equal access to opportunities for good health and wellbeing, but generally they appear to be content with their lives. It may be that we see Scottish grit coming through.”

One area in which young Scots ranked themselves particularly high is in the use of electronic media such as Facebook and texting, but as Dr Inchley points out, this may not be a bad thing. “Actually this could be what’s keeping our young people content. They are spending more time with their friends than ever, but the changing nature of communication means that a lot of that is done remotely these days, particularly among girls,” she said.

The main aims of the report are to address inequalities in health across Europe, so that policy makers can pave the way for all young people to have the same opportunities of good health and well-being in future life.

NHS Health Scotland, the national agency for health improvement, has been one of the main funding bodies for the international coordination

of HBSC for the last eight years. It also funded the Scottish side of the study.

Gerry McLaughlin, CEO of NHS Health Scotland, said, "Research studies like the HBSC survey are significant. They give us access to the true picture of the challenges faced by young people today.

"Scotland's results provide cause for both comfort and concern. On the whole the health of Scotland's young people compares well to that of their European counterparts. However, what is worrying is that despite the fact that young people are showing signs of more positive health awareness, it is apparent that socio-economic factors play a key part in determining better health.

"Persistent health inequalities are highlighted within the report predominantly linked to family affluence and therefore it is more important than ever that we continue to focus our efforts on creating a fairer, healthier Scotland."

Professor Candace Currie is the International Coordinator of the HBSC study at the University of St Andrews. She said, "This report is unique as a comprehensive picture of young people's health and well-being across Europe and North America, and provides an important barometer of how healthy our future generation will be.

"Scotland is doing really well across two of the three social networks: our young people are getting on well at school and have the best relationships with their peers, more than anyone else in Europe, but are doing less well when it comes to family relationships. The areas that are disappointing for us are in sexual health, alcohol intake and physical exercise, which policy makers will need to take a good look at.

"The critical message is that it's worth having a look at ourselves in

relation to the bigger picture across Europe, and that we shouldn't be complacent. There are some good headlines for young people in Scotland, but our report also shows what we need to urgently address in order improve the health and social conditions of young people.”

More information: euro.sharefile.com/d/s089b2fe26d74d4ca

Provided by University of St Andrews

Citation: Can't get more satisfaction (2012, May 2) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-05-satisfaction.html>

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