



European Cohort Development Project

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELL-BEING

“It’s nice to be involved in the research”

“Childhood and Youth Happiness Research is important”

“My mission was to give the researchers a view from children eyes and to help them and other children that will participate in future research”

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European Cohort Development Project (ECDP)

Children and young people's well-being is a highly relevant scientific issue and an important concern for policy makers because the quality of children's lives strongly affects their lives in adulthood. The European Cohort Development Project (ECDP) highlights the importance of child-centered approaches and posits that the survey measures, ethical issues, format and ways of implementation should be developmentally valid and appropriate for child and youth as survey participants. When results from the survey become available, children and young people should be key stakeholders in their interpretation and use. The EuroCohort Survey will be co-created by children, policy makers, and scientists. ECDP focuses on engaging children, young people and families in the development of EuroCohort. It is important to share their voices and expectations about their well-being and future.

“Happiness research is important because you listen to us “

“That will help our parents understand better”



The aim of ECDP

The aim of the project is to create the specification and business case for a European Research Infrastructure that will provide comparative longitudinal survey data on child and young adult well-being.

Establishing CYPAGs in UK and Croatia

In order to ensure children and young people's engagement and coproduction in the current project, Children and Young Person's Advisory Groups (CYPAG) was set up in two countries (UK and Croatia). The CYPAG is used as a formal mechanism to engage children and young people. It relies on the continuous involvement (across several years) of a small number of young people and builds their capacity towards their role as advisors. This collaboration between youth and researchers aims to:

- ensure that children and young people have a formal role in EuroCohort,
- inform children and young people about EuroCohort,
- seek their feedback (e.g. ethics, videos).



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Involvement of Children and Young People in Research

A structured literature review has been done to scan for articles and study designs which may help capture a good practice and ways how children and young people (CYP) have been engaged in research over the horizon of last 18 years. We have focused on study designs that enable CYP to become active part of the research team as young researchers who advise on the applied methodologies or help to gather and assess data.

The aim was to capture three main dimensions of children and young people's (up to 25 years old) direct engagement in research over the selected period 2000-2018:

- To cover means and ways of how young people have been involved in the research process;
- To ascertain best practice, to search for new ideas of CYP engagement in research and to search for most effective tools and forms of engagement as evidenced in the previous studies;
- To capture the evolution from passive role of CYP in research towards consultation and active involvement in academic research.

Benefits of engaging CYP in the research design and process

Opportunities for improving critical thinking, communication, co-ordination, leadership, ability to deal with situations by agreement or the expansion of contact networks are opened.



“I would like to ask questions about hobbies and free time”

“It seems interesting to participate in research”

“I feel responsible, I have a feeling that someone wants to hear our opinion and I feel important”

“My mission was to advise researchers that are leading this project to think like children do”

“To help other children that have the same problems as me”

Results

During the ECPD project CYPAG and several direct consultations with children and young people as members of the CYPAG were conducted in two countries only: in Croatia and in UK. Within each of these two CYPAGs three separate meetings were conducted where the main well-being concepts and research design approaches, ethical aspects of children and young people as participants of the research, and aspects of the questionnaire development were discussed.



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Participants

In Croatia, CYPAG consisted of 20 children aged from 10 to 15 years including a considerable number of participants who came from potentially vulnerable groups. CYPAG was largely dominated by female participants (14 out of 20).

Recruitment

The first steps towards identifying potential CYPAG participants was made through the direct collaboration and personal contacts with different national and local relevant institutions, such as children's school councils, relevant NGOs, sport organizations, local public and private schools (primary and secondary) and universities. The most efficient recruitment strategy was through contacting local schools (meetings with head master). Personal contacts also played a significant role here as they facilitated communication in the first instance. 20 participants for the CYPAG is a sufficient number to assess different opinions and to have children and young people from different backgrounds. However, it may be more efficient to have a smaller group of 10 children and young people. Smaller group size can also contribute to facilitating supportive, trustful, professional relationships between both adults and children and, children and their peers. This, in turn, can enhance the discussions of potentially sensitive topics, like ethical considerations.



Informed consent

When engaging young people in research, it is vital to ensure that they provide informed consent. Children and young people liked the idea that they are asked for their consent for participating in the CYPAG.

“We are not usually asked for our signature. So it makes me feel good”

Children provided insightful feedback regarding improvements to the consent form.

“You could change the look, add more colours, increase the font”

“It's better, more colorful”

“I like the look of the revised form, it looks nicer with this color, the amount of text was reduced and still gives us all the needed information”

Presentation of the project

It is necessary to present the project, the purpose of the workshops and answer young people's questions. Other innovative approaches such as a short video presenting similar information can also be envisaged.

“Social networks”



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“I think maybe a presentation would be better because a movie or social networks can be easily turned off and people can just skip them“

“It was interesting and fun, we learned what is happiness and thank you for that.”

“Maybe the presentation should be delivered over the commercials on TV“

Children rights and privacy protection

The aim is to capture the CYPAG's understanding of children rights, data and privacy protection throughout EuroCohort development and gather limits/barriers of sensitive data protection, ethical standards and protocols.

“We are not really aware of the rights “

“I would not like to talk about the relationship of my parents”



Honesty and clarity around roles and responsibility

The CYPAGs were established as consultative forums where young people were invited to express their views on topics selected by the researchers. It is important that young people understand their role and the limitations associated with it. This needs to be clearly established from the onset of the project. Youth-friendly summary of contributions are also important to show young people how their opinions have been taken into consideration and how they have influenced some aspects of the project.

“I feel responsible, I have a feeling that someone wants to hear our opinion and I feel important.”



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2019 REPORT on measurement of children and young people's well-being

Location and time

Croatian workshops took place in the school attended by participants, once school activities were over. It offered a familiar environment to the CYPAG members, and is most of the time at the walkable distance from their homes. CYPAG organisers should organise the workshops at a familiar and friendly location that ensures sense of safety and trust and that are relatively close, or easily accessible, to participants' homes. CYPAGs were organised at times that did not interfere with young people's educational commitments. The workshop took place on a week day, after school. This facilitated attendance as it did not involve extra traveling for participants. It is important to consider their safety on their way home.

Structure of the workshops

The structure of the workshops was adapted throughout time to focus on different topics and respond to observations made by the researchers. This created a dynamic atmosphere and supported better dialogue with the young people. Feedback provided by the young people also indicate that they enjoyed the last workshop more than the previous one.



„Showing understanding for things we say“

“It is important that people respect each other so barriers can be crossed“

It is essential that the workshops have a respectful, supportive, and trustful atmosphere; otherwise, the collected data might fail to represent the views of the children involved.

“Yes we would feel comfortable because they would help us take out our opinion“

This enables a safe and enjoyable environment in which children and young people can feel free to express themselves and share their views, without fear of being judged. This is essential in order to really capture the true voices of children and young people (otherwise the researcher risks hearing only what participants think the researchers want to hear, and indeed may not find out very much at all).

“I had great time during the workshop. People who worked with us were kind and nice. It was wonderful experience“

“I had a good time in this workshop. I learned a lot, and it was very interesting and educational“



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Staff

It is advised that two to three staff members facilitate a group of maximum ten young people that can then be divided into smaller groups to allow for better discussions. In Croatia, three members of staff facilitated the workshop. Two of them delivered the workshop, whilst the third mostly provided technical support. The staff delivering the workshops require specific skills and competencies and experience in working directly with young people. All staff involved in the workshops should be trained in child protection issues. Some countries will require that researchers working directly with children and young people have their criminal records checked. Staff delivering the workshops also need to be aware of and sensitive to the local sociocultural context, as well as current social, economic and political processes. In this sense, it is important for researchers to have strong facilitation skills that invite and support children to talk, compare, give examples, explain, and particularly the ability to use questions and creative methods (e.g. drawings) to elicit information from groups of children and young people, while emphasizing the importance of respecting one's own boundaries.

“The atmosphere is pleasant, and the researchers are very friendly”

“The workshop was pleasant and I liked the ways the researcher treated us.”

“We would feel comfortable because they would help us take out our opinion”



Food

During the break, food was provided. It is better to provide some plain food (e.g., ham sandwiches). Pizzas alongside with crisps and fruits are also a very good idea. It is important to ensure that the workshop settings, including food, appear attractive to the young people.

“I think it was fun and full of new experiences. I like best the food and juices. I hope we will do this again”

“It was interesting and fun, we learned what is happiness and thank you for that.”



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Children's and Young People's Understandings of Well-Being

Studying well-being of children and young people is very important because it is positively and strongly related to various beneficial outcomes. The first goal of the present study was to gain new insights into the ways children and young people understand and conceptualize well-being by actively engaging children and young people in well-being research processes and by ensuring their voices are heard. One of the CYPAG's aims was to get feedback about importance of different well-being topics and domains.

Global understandings and definitions of well-being

When describing their happiness, many young people describe it in terms of intrapersonal relations, and specific activities, mostly, doing interesting things, and achieving desired goals (e.g. good grades). CYPAG participants defined well-being using specific terminology relating to their significant relationship in life, namely, with parents and friends, and their important school-related experiences.

Two main aspects of life emerged as the most important well-beings domains:

- a) The quality of social relationships (family, friends)
- b) Engagement in school, learning and interesting leisure activities



„I'm happy when I'm doing great in school and when things are great with my friends”

„When we have free time“

„It makes me happy when I have a sense of good relationships with my whole family, when I have no stress and when I'm good at school“

When asked about what makes them happy, CYPAG participants stated that for them, it depends on the age or period of life they are in. As a source of positive feelings, they mentioned the absence of stress, spending time with friends, and the possibility of freedom in leisure time. Computers and mobile phones and lack of time seem to be the main obstacle to achieving happiness that comes from using leisure time.

„I'm happy when there is no stress“

„I'm happy when it's weekend“

When we asked CYPAG participants about how happy children and young people are today, they stated that children are mostly happy, but that they may be somewhat less happy than before. As a reason for less happiness, they mention too much use of digital media and technology, and too little play and socialising outside.

„Perhaps today children are less happy than before, perhaps because of isolation, isolation in the sense that fewer children are going out than ever before“

„We are spending too much time on computers so we miss playing and socializing“



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Well-being topics

Children and young people discussed the roles of relationships, education, health, leisure time, and material resources as important aspects of their well-being. Children and young people emphasized the social relationships in their lives as most significant elements of their well-being. They particularly emphasized the importance of family and friends (parents, caretakers, siblings, peers) as the strongest resource for their well-being.

The main areas of well-being:

1. Friends
2. Home and family and relationships
3. Protection against abuse
4. Life satisfaction
5. Happiness
6. Children's rights
7. School
8. Health
9. Having your voice heard
10. Work

„Friends are important because we can talk to them better about things than with adults“

„When I'm happy then I'm happy and when I'm sad then friends help me“

„Relationships with brothers and sisters can both diminish and increase happiness“

Conclusions

According to CYPAG participants

- the most important well-being domains are the quality of social relationships and engagement in school, learning and interesting leisure activities
- psychological well-being, social well-being and physical well-being as the three most important general well-being topics
- family, friends, having your voice heard and protection against abuse are the most important well-being specific topics.
- family money, using computers and social media are the least important topics
- researchers should first ask parents if their child can participate in the study
- parents should not be present during interviews
- they are not sufficiently familiar with children and young people's rights as participants in research
- they understand the importance of an informed consent
- they like the idea that they are being asked for personal permission
- an informed consent should be relatively short and concise
- the term Children and Young People should be changed to Youth
- there are some issues that are so private they should not even be inquired
- researchers should show respect and understanding for the youth's opinions without judgment
- ECPD research project is beneficial, important, and useful
- they understand their mission in CYPAG and ECDP
- they liked the project as well as their role in the project



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