



# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WELLBEING MONITOR FOR WALES 2015

## Summary

The Children and Young People Wellbeing Monitor for Wales was published for the first time in November 2008. A second edition was published in March 2011. This is the third edition.

The aim of this publication is to provide a multi-dimensional picture of children and young people's wellbeing (aged 0 to 25) in Wales, using a variety of wellbeing indicators and other statistical and research sources. Maintaining the same thematic chapters as the 2011 Monitor, as well as an introductory section on policy developments, and a concluding section on trends and comparisons, the 2015 Edition aims to provide an accessible and concise overview of relevant key information. Drawing on recently published research evidence, it also identifies gaps in current evidence about children's wellbeing.

Producing the Monitor is also one of the initiatives that the Welsh Government has taken to fulfil its commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. For this reason, the structure of the Monitor is based on themes taken from the Welsh Government's seven core aims for children and young people which are underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These themes are:

- Early years
- Education and learning opportunities
- Health
- Access to play, sport, leisure and culture
- Participation in decision-making
- A safe home and community
- Not disadvantaged by poverty

While each chapter covers a specific topic, there are also some cross-cutting indicators of children's overall wellbeing based on self-reported data. There is growing international interest in such subjective wellbeing measures to complement policy value of established objective measures of societal progress, such as GDP (Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi, 2009). Within

Wales, this is being considered under the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and during the Autumn of 2015 Welsh Ministers consulted on proposals around national well-being indicators to monitor progress against the seven well-being goals.<sup>1</sup>

In the UK, the Office for National Statistics has been developing sets of measures of national wellbeing which include subjective measures (ONS, 2015) and this initiative includes a specific indicator set for children (Beardsmore & Siegler, 2014). Two other sources are the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey and the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS). The indications from both studies are that the majority of children in Wales are reasonably satisfied with their lives as a whole, but a minority are not. An important aspect of ongoing research on this topic is to develop a better understanding of the factors that affect children's subjective wellbeing.

## **1. Chapter Overview**

### **Chapter 2: Early years**

The picture presented is generally encouraging, with most recent trends going in a positive direction. For example, there has been a notable reduction in the percentage of mothers drinking alcohol in the 12 months before and during pregnancy (down from 55% in 2005 to 39% in 2010) and an increase in the percentage of mothers initiating breastfeeding (up from 67% in 2005 to 71% in 2010). Infant mortality rates in Wales have decreased substantially over the last three decades. There have also been improvements in the diets of children aged four to seven, with an increase in the percentage of children eating fruit and vegetables daily. However, one negative trend identified is a fluctuation in the percentage of children aged four who were up to date with immunisations (86% in 2014-15 compared to 90% in 2009-10).

### **Chapter 3: Education and learning opportunities**

Recent trends in children's engagement in compulsory education have been mostly positive. There has been a decrease in the number of half days missed by children and a reduction in the proportion of children, both in primary school and secondary school, who are persistently absent. On the other hand there has been an increase in unauthorised absence, particularly in primary schools. The rate of longer fixed-term exclusions has increased a little in primary school but fallen in secondary schools. Progress is reported in a number of indicators of children's educational attainment up to the age of 16 over recent years. There have been increases in the percentage of pupils achieving expected levels at the end of Key Stages 2 (around 11 years old) and 3 (around 14 years old); and a substantial increase in the percentage of children achieving at least five GCSEs at Grades A\* to C (83.4% in 2014/15 which almost an increase of almost 20 percentage points since 2009/10). There have also been reductions in the attainment gap between children eligible for free school

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<sup>1</sup> <http://gov.wales/consultations/people-and-communities/future-generations-act-how-do-you-measure-a-nations-progress/?lang=en>

meals and other children at Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and GCSE level. These positive trends present a different picture to slightly older trend data for Wales from the international PISA study of 15-year-olds where there were significant falls in Mathematics and Science scores, but not in Reading scores, between 2006 and 2012, but no significant change in either Mathematics, Science or Reading between the last two waves in 2009 and 2012.

With regard to post-compulsory education, more Welsh young people are attending higher education with the number of Welsh-domiciled enrolments to Higher Education Institutions increasing from just under 55,000 in 2009/9 to almost 59,000 in 2013/14.

Children's views and feelings about school are also important. According to the PISA 2012 National Report for Wales children report a *'high sense of belonging and satisfaction with school'*. In the 2014 HBSC study, over a quarter (27%) of children in years 7, 9 and 11 said that they liked going to school a lot; a figure similar to that in 1986 (25%) and in 1990 (26%).

#### **Chapter 4: Health**

There are encouraging signs in the health of children aged eight and above. Dental health and frequency of tooth-brushing have improved. The rate of immunisations for MMR and the three-in-one teenage booster have increased. Children's evaluations of their own health have also improved consistently over the last decade with only 19% of children in school years 7 to 11 rating their health as 'fair' or 'poor' in 2013/14 compared to 26% in 2001/2. The rate of teenage conception also decreased substantially between 2008 (64 per 100,000) and 2013 (43 per 100,000). There are two substantive negative trend in the health statistics: the rates of hospital admissions for self-harm have increased for females aged 10 to 17 over the last few years and that there has been a long-term increase in the reported rate of chlamydia, potentially though attributable to increased awareness and diagnosis rather than increased incidence.

In terms of health behaviours, there has been a 16% increase in the number of referrals of young people under the age of 20 to treatment services for cannabis use over the last five years. However, where trend data are available, other indicators are stable or show signs of improvement. Rates of alcohol and tobacco consumption among children have fallen substantially in recent years, as have the number of referrals of children to substance misuse treatment services, which reduced by 63% between 2009/10 and 2013/14.

#### **Chapter 5: Access to play, sport, leisure and culture**

There is limited Welsh-specific information in relation to children's play, sport, leisure and culture. However, there is evidence to suggest that the amount of time that children spend using computers has increased over the past four years; while time spent watching television has remained relatively stable.

On the other hand, the latest statistics from the Welsh Health Survey and HBSC indicate no significant change in children's levels of physical activity

in recent years. Levels of active travel to school have also remained relatively stable over the last eight years. Recently published results from the 2015 Sports Wales Survey indicate that the numbers of children and young people taking part in sport or physical activity three or more times a week has risen from 40% in 2013 to 48% in 2015. Most recent data suggest that the participation of young people (15 to 24 years old) in sporting activity has also increased. The only decreasing trend in sports activity is a reduction in take-up of free swimming and other structured swimming activities by children.

Levels of children's engagement (attendance and participation) with arts and cultural events appear to be fairly stable, and there has been an increase in attendance at National Eisteddfod activities over the last three years.

### **Chapter 6: Participation in decision-making**

There is a distinct lack of Welsh specific data available on children and young people's views on identity and participation in decision-making. Evidence from the National Survey of Wales indicates that fewer young people aged 16 to 24 felt that they could influence decisions in their local area in 2013/14 compared to the previous year. There is also some evidence that fewer young people in this age group had had a personal experience of discrimination. However, the differences are relatively small and longer-term trend data is needed to draw any firm conclusions. There is evidence of a big improvement in the proportion of children aged 11 to 15 in Wales who find it easy to talk to their father (up from 60% in 1994 to 75% in 2014).

### **Chapter 7: Safe home and community**

The information available on some of the topics relating to children's safety at home and in the community is diverse. There has been a decrease in the number of families in temporary accommodation and in the percentage of families who spend over a year in such accommodation.

There has been an increase in children's experiences of bullying in secondary schools in Wales in 2013/14 compared to baseline statistics for 2002. The number of child homicide each year in Wales remains very low (typically less than 10 homicides). The rate of recorded sexual offences against children under 16 in Wales has increased in recent years; perhaps partly attributable to a greater willingness to report abuse and improved recording practices (Jutte et al. 2015).

The number of road traffic casualties of young people aged 16 to 24 was 8% higher in 2014 than in 2013, but the longer-term trend shows a reduction in numbers of casualties over the last decade.

### **Chapter 8: Not disadvantaged by poverty**

Recent trends present a mixed picture. The percentage of children living in relative poverty has decreased slightly over the past few years but is still higher than in the period from 2002 to 2005. In contrast, the percentage of children living in families with absolute low income has increased over

recent years.

There are more positive trends in youth education, employment and training. The youth unemployment rate has fallen recently from a peak of 24% in 2012 to under 19% in 2015, although this rate is still higher than in 2008 (under 15%). The proportion of young people aged 19 to 24 who are not in education, employment and training has also fallen, but there has been little change in the rate for young people aged 16 to 18. After a period of decline, average wages for young people aged 16 to 24 in full-time employment returned to their 2008 value in 2014.

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