

How can we improve happiness among young people?

English executive summary of the study conducted by The Happiness Research Institute commissioned by Nordea-fonden.

How are the young people in Denmark?

Since 2012 Denmark has topped the happiness rankings in the World Happiness Report commissioned by the United Nations. Now the Happiness Research Institute have carried out a study commissioned by Nordea-fonden that focus specifically on young people in Denmark. The study aims to explore the factors that loom large in their lives and identify the social forces that shape their happiness.

Between the spring 2016 and the fall 2017, The Happiness Research Institute evaluated the well-being of young people in Denmark aged 16-24, who participated in four different activities. The study is based on survey replies from 427 people, as well as on personal interviews with 40 participants. Furthermore, 82 of the participants have answered the questionnaire both before and after their participation, providing some illumination on how such activities can improve well-being over time. The study builds upon the methodological recommendation for measuring subjective well-being by the OECD, and has specifically employed the measure for well-being used by the UN in the annual World Happiness Report. In addition, The Happiness Research Institute employed questions and scales to measure self-perceived experiences of *loneliness*, *purpose in life* and *social support* as well as self-assessments of one's *confidence* and *autonomy*.

Insight 1: Participation promotes well-being

All respondents in the study have evaluated their own quality of life by the scale 'Cantril Ladder', which provides a well-being score between 0-10. The average well-being score of the young people in this study are 6.7, which is significantly lower than the average score of the Danish general population – 7.5. The study finds that 55% of the young participants report higher levels of well-being after participating in the projects. At the same time, 15% report lower levels of well-being and for 30% the well-being levels haven't changed. Overall the average well-being level has increased by 12%.

Insight 2: The activities have in particularly helped girls

On a scale from 0-10, girls on average report a well-being level of 6.5 while boys report 7.0. Interestingly, the increase in well-being over the duration of the project activities are significantly higher for girls than boys. While the well-being of boys has increased by 0.4 points, girls report a 1.1 points higher average level of well-being.

Insight 3: The activities made the participants feel more acknowledged and positive about themselves

Over the duration of the project activities we find a very significant increase in the experience of acknowledgement, as 25% more girls and 8% more boys feel they get acknowledged. Further, we find that 15% more of all young people hold a positive attitude toward themselves.

Insight 4: The projects have been an eye-opener for young people

22% of the young people are inclined to feel like failures, which has a significant negative impact on their well-being. Participating in the project suggest a positive impact, as the amount of people who are inclined to feel like failures have dropped by 16%.

Insight 5: The projects promote social cohesion

Based on the 'UCLA Loneliness scale', which provides a notion of perceived loneliness, the data suggest that a concerning 11% of the young people can be considered as lonely.

Over the duration of the project both *social relations* and *social support* have improved significantly for the participants, but the experience of loneliness seems unchanged. This emphasise the complexity of the phenomenon and calls for more dedicated efforts and interventions.

Insight 6: Participation promotes purpose

This study shows that 16% *do not* feel a purpose in their life, that 41% feel a *strong* purpose and that 43% fall in between the two and only *to some extent* find purpose. By asking the participants about their experiences with the activities, we find that the participation promotes a sense of meaning. Thus, in relation to the activities 48% of the participants report to have felt responsible, and 72% feel they have learned something through the activities, that they want to teach others.

Insight 7: Through the project, young people learn what they can become

Several factors indicate a stronger believe in one self and the future, as 17% more feel they have handled problems well and 6% more feel optimistic about the future. Together with the qualitative insights, this suggest that the young people have acquired new perspectives and tools, which in turn expand their ideas on who they are and can become.