



Ipsos MORI

In partnership with Dr. Agnes Nairn

unicef 
UNITED KINGDOM

Research on child wellbeing, inequality and materialism

Children's summary

What is this report about?

We wanted to find out about child well-being (how happy, healthy and satisfied children are), how children see inequality (the differences between different people's lives) and materialism (the idea that money and things you can buy are really important). This report tells you about the things parents and children (like you) who took part in the research told us.

We're sending you this report to say thank you for taking the time to work with us, and so that you can see what UNICEF UK are going to be working on in the near future to make lives better for children.

It might also be a good thing to use in your class for a discussion about the project.

Why we did this research

UNICEF UK has done lots of research in the past which has shown that children in the UK aren't as happy and well off as children in other countries.

UNICEF UK wanted to find out why this is the case, so they asked Ipsos MORI (a research company) to help.

UNICEF UK thought that it might be because:

- There is a big difference between rich families and poor families in the UK;
- British people are more interested in possessions than people from other countries.

So, we spent time with children and their parents in the UK, Spain and Sweden to see what we could find out.

Who we spoke to

We spoke to children and parents from three countries – the UK, Spain and Sweden.

We talked to a range of children from different types of families while they were in school. The children we spoke to were aged from 8 to 12.

We also took our video cameras and visited with families from the three countries, to see what their lives were like at home. The families we spoke to had children of all ages, from babies, to older teenagers.





What makes children happy?

Spending time with people they love (friends, family and even pets), being outdoors and doing fun activities make children happy in all three countries.

Not many children talk about their belongings when they tell us about what makes them happy.

When we ask children to choose between being a child who has everything they want, but doesn't get much time with their parents, and a child who has lots of time with their parents, but doesn't always get what they want, almost everyone chooses more time with their parents.



What are families like in the three countries?

In the UK families who took part in this research, quite a few parents seem to be too tired, or work too much, so they can't spend much quality time with their children. Some children stay indoors a lot and play computer games or watch TV, especially children whose parents don't have much money. But some other children have lots of fun things to do, and get enough time with their parents.



In Sweden, the children we spoke to seem to spend a lot more time with their family, and often do lots of activities outdoors. In many Swedish families, everybody shares the chores around the house. Many families also have rules in Sweden about how much TV and computer time children are allowed.

What makes children unhappy?

Problems at home, fights with friends, being bullied, and being bored and stuck indoors make children unhappy in all three countries.

Some children tell us they feel stressed by having too many activities and they get worried about not getting good enough grades, or not winning in their sports teams.

In Spain, quite a few children spend lots of time with their mums (their dads spend a lot of time at work). They also do lots of after-school classes such as music lessons or sports. At home Spanish mums do most of the work around the house. Most Spanish children who took part in the research think they have to study hard and get good grades.



What do children want to have?

Some children (especially the richer ones) talk about getting equipment to do activities, such as football boots, or a hockey stick.

Some girls talk about wanting new clothes and shoes when we asked what makes them happy. Girls from less well-off families are more likely to talk about these things than other girls.

Some children think their lives would be better if they won the lottery, or had lots of money so they could do lots of new and exciting things. Spanish children who have richer parents want things like expensive cars or to go on nice holidays.

Lots of children talk about wanting mobile phones, music players, or computers. Especially in the UK, children often want the newest and latest models because they think it might help them to fit in.

Does it make a difference what people have?

Younger children think everyone in their class is pretty much the same.

Older children (in secondary school) feel their classes are a bit divided into children who have all the latest stuff, and those who don't.

Some children worry about getting bullied because they don't have the right stuff.

Most children don't like children who care about what they have rather than who they are – they think it's not nice to be spoiled. But, they also want the things that these children have.

How do families handle buying stuff?

In the UK, despite children saying they don't need lots of stuff, some children have boxes and boxes full of toys, and lots of things are broken. Some parents feel pressured to buy things for their children because of adverts on TV, and they want to make sure their children fit in. Most children in our study don't get pocket money, their parents just buy things for them. Many UK families don't seem to talk about how much money they have or what they can afford.



In Sweden, some parents buy expensive brands for their children, not because they are cool, but mostly because they think they are better quality. Many Swedish children have to earn things they want by doing chores – they share the cost with their parents.

In Spain, parents and children in the research talk more about what they can afford, and most children don't seem to mind if they can't have all the things they want. Spanish children seem to look after their toys and games to make sure they last a long time. Spanish parents try not to buy their children branded things. Spanish children told us that they generally get the things they want as a reward for getting good grades.



What will happen next?

UNICEF UK are going to think about what children have told us, and what we saw when we visited families in the UK, Spain and Sweden.

They'll use some of the things that we found out to help them decide what they want to achieve over the next year, working with government and other people to help make children's lives in the UK better.

So a big thank you to all the children and their parents who took part in this research and shared their views and experiences with us!





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