
Growing up unhappy?

WORKSHEET A

In recent years evidence has been collected which suggests that the proportion of British children and teenagers who are unhappy is higher than in many other developed countries. For example, a recently published report set out to measure 'well-being' among young people in nineteen European countries, plus the United States and Canada, and found that the United Kingdom came bottom.

The report was based on official statistics and surveys in which young people answered questions on a wide range of subjects. With regard to 'material well-being' it concluded that when comparing developed countries, there is no clear relationship between GDP per head and happiness, but that economic inequality within those countries is linked with unhappiness. The United Kingdom is a relatively unequal country with a relatively high proportion of children and teenagers living in households with less than half the national average income, and this seems to have a negative effect on how they feel about themselves.

Young British people also seem to have less healthy family and peer relationships. The report found that relatively few British fifteen-year-olds sit down with their parents to regularly share the main meal of the day – an event seen by the researchers as an indicator of family togetherness. More worrying was the fact that fewer than half of British eleven, thirteen and fifteen-year-olds said they generally found their peers 'kind and helpful' (compared with more than 70% in most of the countries near the top of the well-being table) and that almost 40% said they had been bullied by other young people in the previous two months. As for 'risk behaviours', the report suggested that in Britain a higher proportion of fifteen-year-olds have been drunk on alcohol, smoked cigarettes and taken illegal drugs than in most other developed countries.

More recently, another study has produced similar findings, concluding that young people's lives in Britain have become 'more difficult than in the past' and that more of them are 'anxious and troubled'. This report blames factors such as family breakdown, too much competition in education, income inequality, and even the construction of houses and other buildings in open spaces where children used to play. Its authors also argued that what lies behind most of these things, directly or indirectly, is an individualistic society in which adults are too concerned with their own objectives and insufficiently concerned with looking after others, including children.

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WORKSHEET B

Exercise 1

Answer the questions about the text on Worksheet A.

1. How many European countries featured in the first report?
2. What two sources of information was the first report based on?
3. Which three 'risk behaviours' are mentioned in the text?
4. What measure of economic inequality is mentioned in the text?
5. According to the first report, what had happened to almost 40% of British eleven, thirteen and fifteen-year-olds in the previous two months?
6. What did the researchers see as an indicator of family togetherness?
7. According to the more recent report, in what way is the British education system contributing to unhappiness among young people?
8. Who does the second report blame for the factors causing unhappiness among young people?

Exercise 2

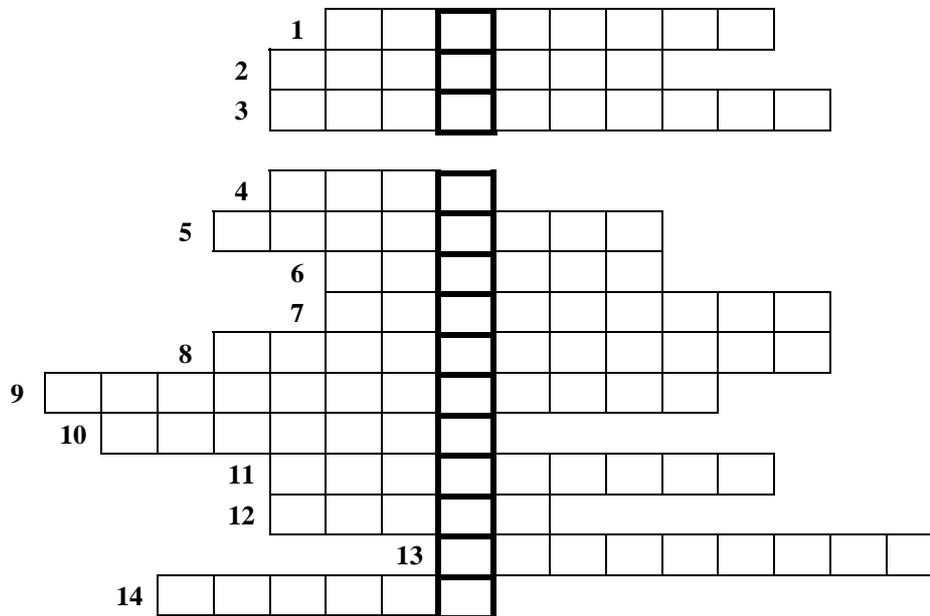
Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F), or if the text doesn't say (D).

1. The United States is near the bottom of the well-being table in the first report.
2. The first report found that young people in the richest developed countries were much happier than their peers in the other developed countries.
3. The first report found that economic inequality within developed countries is linked with unhappiness among young people.
4. The United Kingdom is poorer than most other countries in the first report.
5. According to the first report, fewer than half of British eleven, thirteen and fifteen-year-olds said they found their peers 'kind and helpful'.
6. The second report concluded that the lives of young people in Britain used to be easier.
7. The second report suggests British society is too individualistic.
8. Both the reports conclude that economic inequality is linked with unhappiness among young people.

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Exercise 3

Complete the crossword below. If all the words are correct, the country that came top of the table for well-being among young people will read from top to bottom.



1. _____ well-being was one of the factors the first report looked at.
2. The _____ of the second report suggest children need open spaces to play in.
3. The second report says British adults are too concerned with their own _____ .
4. British fifteen year olds do not eat their _____ meal of the day with their parents as regularly as fifteen-year-olds in other countries.
5. Both reports seem to contain _____ that young people in the United Kingdom are relatively unhappy.
6. The United Kingdom came _____ of the well-being table in the first report.
7. The first report suggested that young British people's family and peer relationships were relatively _____ .
8. According to the second report the British education system is too _____ .
9. The authors of the first report believed sitting down to share meals shows family _____ .
10. The United Kingdom is more _____ than many other European countries.
11. According to the second report the _____ of families is one of the factors that cause young people to be unhappy.
12. The first report found that British fifteen-year-olds are more likely to have been _____ than their peers in other developed countries.
13. The United Kingdom and the United States are _____ countries.
14. The second report _____ adult individualism for young people's unhappiness.