

Student mental health survey reveals high levels of happiness, but also strong demand for greater professional supports

One-in-five students still experience cyber bullying, while 40% aware of mental health issues amongst fellow students

A clear awareness of the benefits of healthy diet and exercise

A survey published today on student mental health and wellness has found that 86% of all students surveyed reported being generally happy overall, with almost half (47%) reporting being happy at least most of the time.

However, almost 20% have experienced cyberbullying and 40% are aware of mental health issues amongst their fellow students.

The research was conducted by Amárach Research on behalf of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, the representative body for secondary school principals.

The research surveyed over 300 students (319) spread across Ireland and across a variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

Key findings of the research include:

On levels of happiness:

- 86% of students surveyed reported being generally happy overall;
- 47% of students reported being happy all or most of the time; however a higher percentage of males compared to females reported being happy most of the time (49% males versus 32% females);
- Only one in ten students cited being occasionally or rarely happy;
- While students reported higher levels of happiness and enjoyment compared to the national average, they also reported higher levels of boredom and anger;
- When dealing with these difficult emotions, students are more likely to talk to someone they have a close relationship with such as family and school friends rather than an independent healthcare professional;

Cyberbullying:

- One in five students reported experiencing cyberbullying, with a higher incidence among females.

Diet and exercise:

- Students recognise the importance of good diet and exercise for positive mental health with 80% reporting they get the opportunity to take at least 30 minutes exercise per day;
- However, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were less likely to get 30 minutes of exercise per day (81% v 71%) and also reported higher levels of lack of energy and motivation;

Incidence of mental health issues and supports available:

- Almost one in four students (38%) were aware of a friend or classmate who was experiencing mental health issues, with a higher level of awareness amongst females and higher socio-economic groups of classmates who might be struggling;
- A majority of students (58%) do not believe that there are sufficient supports in our schools for students with mental health problems;
- Two-thirds of those surveyed (65%) support having a school counsellor or psychologist available to students on a daily basis in their school;
- Male students and those in Connacht-Ulster were more likely to feel that there were sufficient in-school supports for students with mental health problems;
- Over 60% (61%) support additional curriculum time or dedicated classes to help students deal with mental health issues and other issues such as exam stress.

Commenting on the survey findings, NAPD Director Clive Byrne noted: “In recent years, a strong emphasis has been placed on high profile campaigns focused on the improving the mental health of our young people. The results of our survey indicates that these public campaigns are having an impact.

Teenage and adolescent years can be challenging for all young people but It is encouraging to know that a significant majority of pupils surveyed (86%) are generally happy, and more importantly they also recognise the need to talk about their problems”.

“However, the survey also points to areas where we must continue to address with 40% of those surveyed being aware of a classmate or friend who was experiencing mental health issues and 20% admitting they themselves had experienced cyberbullying.

The other key finding to emerge from this survey is the strong need felt by students for additional mental health supports within our schools. A majority of students would like to see a dedicated counsellor or psychologist available to students within schools, as is the case in English schools, or additional classes to help students deal with mental health issues and stress and anxiety. This is something all stakeholders need to urgently examine to ensure that increased resources are available to students who are struggling with mental health issues”.

Speaking the publication of the survey results, Minister Helen McEntee commented: “I welcome the publication of today’s NAPD survey results. It represents an important snapshot into the mental health and wellbeing of our students, while also highlighting the areas where we must do more such as continuing to tackle cyberbullying and investing in increased resources and supports at all levels of education system.

It’s so vital that we listen directly to the opinions of those most affected by mental health issues and equally how they believe we can improve the services currently available. The challenge for all is to ensure that we respond appropriately to what they are telling us.”

ENDS.