

## SUMMARY

Statistical information about welfare is relatively easily available, but subjective views about people's own welfare or how it affects their everyday life is more difficult to obtain. The cities of the metropolitan area (Espoo, Helsinki, Kauniainen and Vantaa) have a relatively good understanding of the objective welfare of their inhabitants. Objective information is available on a number of levels and in many areas (e.g. education, income, housing, the use of services). However, a lot less is known about the subjective welfare of the people in the area. The aim of this report is to present results, where the experiences of individuals play an important role.

The research was carried out in two parts. In 2008, an extensive survey questionnaire was sent out to individuals living in Espoo, Helsinki, Kauniainen and Vantaa asking questions about their housing and living conditions, health, work, welfare factors and financial matters. Almost 4,000 people responded to the survey questionnaire taking the response rate to 41 per cent. In the qualitative part of the study conducted in 2009, 25 young people (18–25 years old) living in the area were interviewed in order to gain a better understanding of how young people, in particular, experience their lives.

Most people are generally happy with their housing and their area of residence. Ease of mobility in the area, outdoor and sports facilities as well as transport connections were praised in particular. The main reasons for people wanting to live in the metropolitan area are things that make everyday life easier, such as local services, the range of services available and shopping opportunities.

The timing of the data collection may have played an important role. News about the global economic downturn was not a daily occurrence in the spring of 2008. This may partly explain why worries about the financial situation or about keeping one's job do not show clearly in the results. Moreover, finances and material matters do not arise in answers to questions that asked about increasing everyday welfare. Instead of material things, the foundations of everyday wellbeing are good relationships, a slower pace of life and cosy living.

The "urban nature" of the metropolitan area in the form of parks and green spaces is highly esteemed. This may be explained by people needing their own space and this is made possible by the relative abundance of parks

and other green spaces. The urban nature can also provide a counter for an otherwise hectic lifestyle.

Most of the respondents considered their health to be good or fairly good and only five per cent felt that it was poor or fairly poor. Moreover, the majority were happy with their current lives and hopeful about their futures. Nevertheless, many considered stress, worry, depression and loneliness to be frequently a part of their daily lives. These emotions were prevalent in young people, which is of concern.

Despite a hectic lifestyle and stress, over 80 per cent enjoy their work. The connection between satisfaction at work and other aspects of life is clear. People who are happy at work feel that their ability to influence is greater, their financial situation is better and their mental state improved. Work can also be seen a positive aspect of everyday life.

The majority of people see their financial situation as being good. However, almost one fifth feel that their financial situation has been poor for years and five per cent have gone hungry for a day or longer because of a lack of money. The main reason for financial difficulties are reported as being that their income is insufficient to cover their financial commitments.

Open ended questions regarding the pros and cons of everyday life revealed that family and other relationships, nature and an unhurried pace of life are the main contributors to wellbeing. On the other hand different aspects of antisocial behaviour can make life less enjoyable.

The qualitative part of the study revealed that young people have got many problems. Almost every young person interviewed had experienced or was experiencing difficulties in their personal lives. Many related that their friends were also experiencing difficulties. Problems in the families of the young people taking part in this study were also reported by them. Childhood and youth had often been affected by unemployment, alcoholism, relationship problems and mental health problems within the families. Many felt that these factors and their experiences affected their lives.

The values of society can be heard in the speech of young people. Competition for education and employment is fierce where only the fittest survive. Many of the young find this pressure to perform overwhelming. If one's capability is limited for example because of mental health problems, the pressure can be accentuated manyfold. Many are also scared of dropping out of society.

The desire of the young interviewees to do something meaningful can clearly be heard. Dreams are realistic, often fairly small and modest. So-

metimes a job (doing anything) would be enough, as it would help to enter mainstream life. It is also a common dream to “live like everybody else”.

One of the main concerns was the provision of mental health services for young people. The perception was that the current services were inadequate. A quicker service and a good listener were at the top the wishlist for many.

Good relationships, meaningful activities and interesting hobbies were mentioned as the main factors giving positive meaning to everyday life. All these could be better supported. Irrespective of background or income, free or inexpensive meeting places would provide a good base for forming and maintaining social relationships. Finally, many of the young highlight the responsibility for oneself and for one’s fellow citizens throughout life.

**The welfare research in the metropolitan area project is interested in the subjective welfare of the people living in the area. In the summer 2008 almost 4,000 people responded to the survey questionnaire. In the second phase of the study in 2009, 25 young people were interviewed. The study reveals that instead of finances and material things good relationships, a slower pace of life and cosy living form the foundations of everyday wellbeing. Many of the young people experience close relationships as a vital ingredient of their welfare. However, personal, efficient and fast support is needed in challenging and difficult life situations.**

**Socca – the centre of expertise on social welfare in the Helsinki metropolitan area was commissioned by the cities of Espoo, Helsinki, Kauniainen and Vantaan to conduct the study.**