

The Subjective Wellbeing of Children and Young People in Malta

Carmel Cefai, Rachel Spiteri,
Natalie Galea, Marie Briguglio
University of Malta



**L-Università
ta' Malta**



*The Malta Foundation
for the Wellbeing of Society*

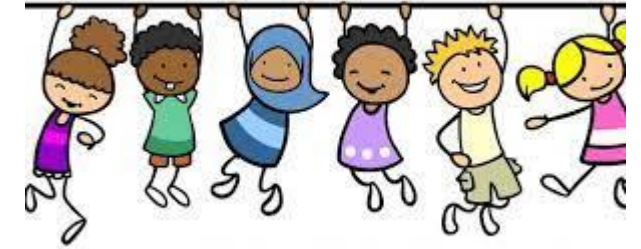
With special thanks to:



Children's Wellbeing

- **Defining** children's wellbeing:

“a dynamic state in which children and young people are able to develop their potential, learn and play creatively and productively, build positive relationships with others, and belong to and contribute to their community” (WHO, 2018)



- **Evaluating** children's wellbeing

Children's wellbeing can be examined both in terms of

Objective aspects of their lives such as family income, family structure, health status, educational attainment

Subjective wellbeing - children's views about these aspects of their lives and the level of satisfaction in their lives.



wellBeing rather than wellBecoming

This study focuses on children's **subjective wellbeing** within a **children's rights perspective** (UNCCR, 1989) recognising children as human beings engaged in shaping their own lives and having the competence of forming their own views

Focus on children's **wellBeing** rather than their **wellBecoming**: explores children's potential and achievement of aspirations as children, as well as their views on the quality of their present lives.

OBJECTIVES



- To identify the wellbeing experiences and needs of children and young people in Malta, to develop policy actions to enhance their wellbeing
- Explores several dimensions of children's subjective wellbeing within a systemic perspective

- Family
- Home
- Friends
- Life at school
- Neighbourhood
- Things children have (material goods)
- Use of time
- Physical health
- Rights as a child living in Malta
- Overall subjective wellbeing

Children's rights perspective: Data was collected directly from the children themselves (children as **subjects** rather than **objects** of the study)

METHODOLOGY

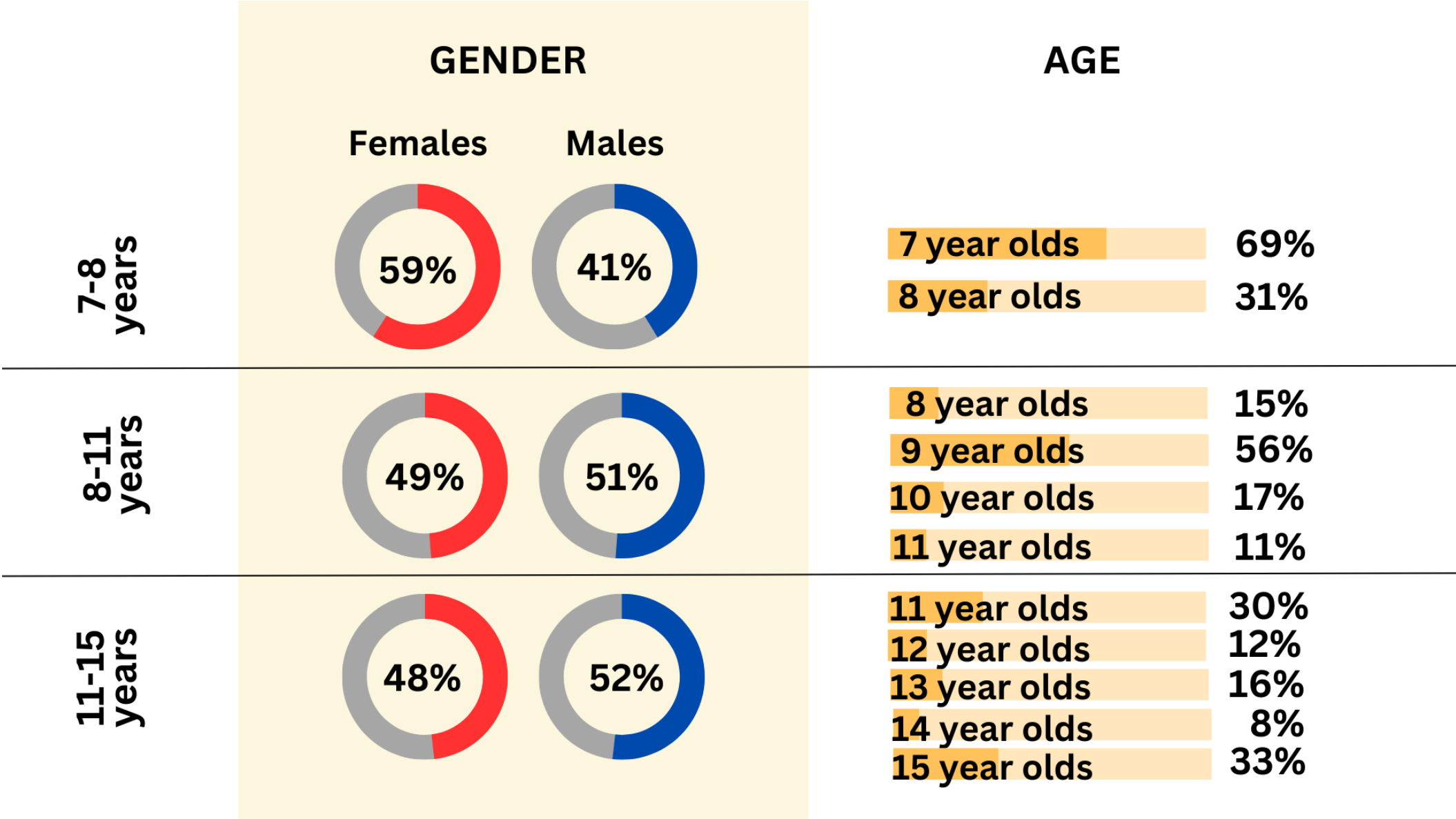
- Sample: 364 participants from 34 schools (state, church & independent), aged 7-15 years
- Instrument: Questionnaires adapted from the International Study of Children's Subjective Wellbeing, aimed at 3 different age groups.

- 7-8 years (paper-based) – 80 participants
- 8-11 years (online) – 143 participants
- 11-15 years (online) – 141 participants

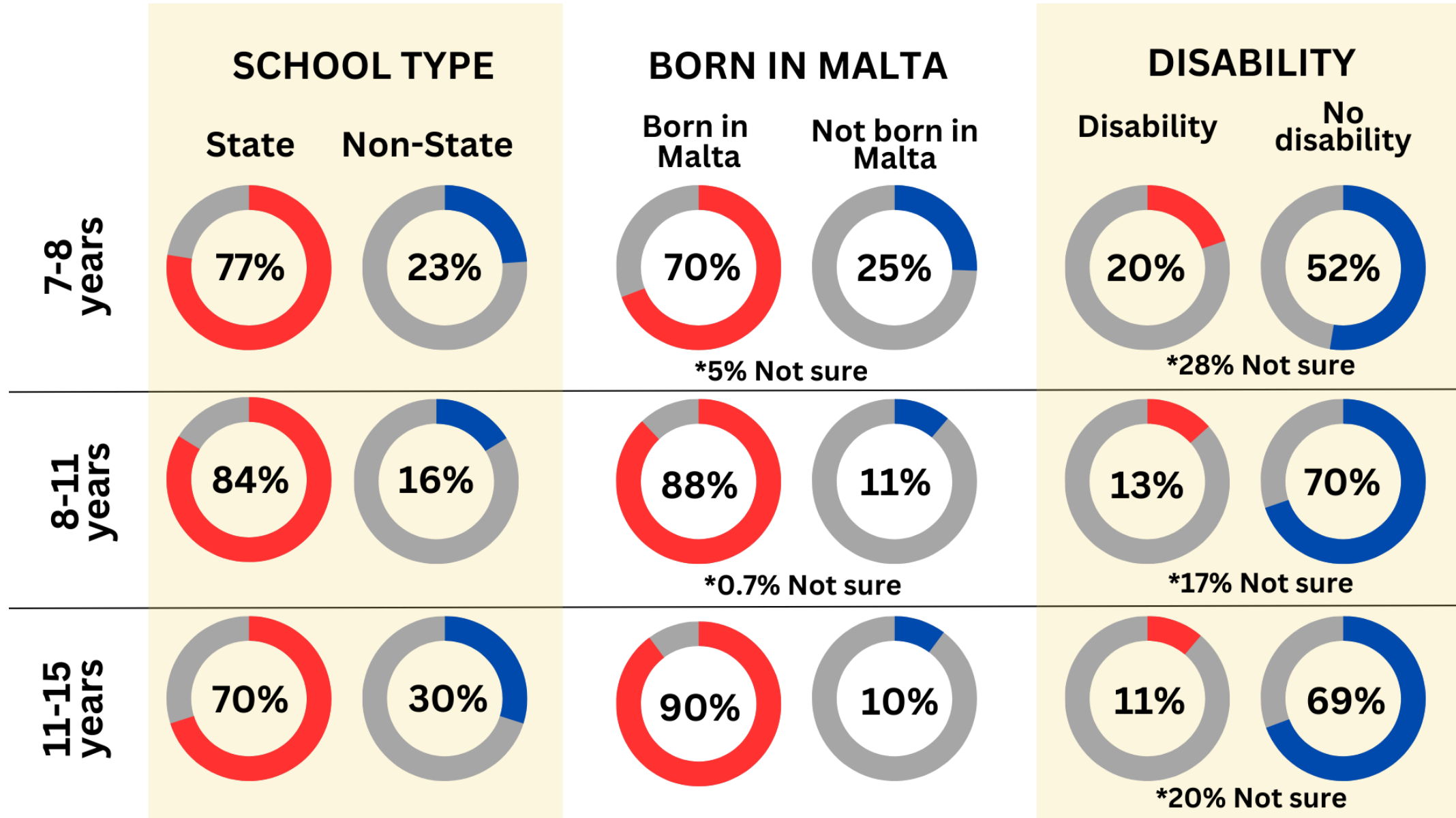
- Analysis: Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviation), ANOVA, t-tests and crosstabs/chi-square tests
- Data for 8-11 year olds and 11-15 year olds was weighted by gender and school year
- Data collection period: October 2022 – January 2023



PARTICIPANTS



PARTICIPANTS



FAMILY



FAMILY – 7-8 year olds

Agreed a lot or totally agreed that **their parents listen** to them and take what they say seriously

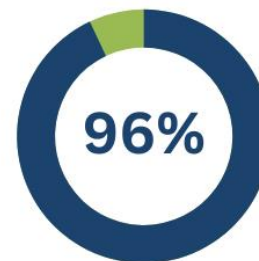


Agreed a lot or totally agreed that if they have a problem, their **family will help** them



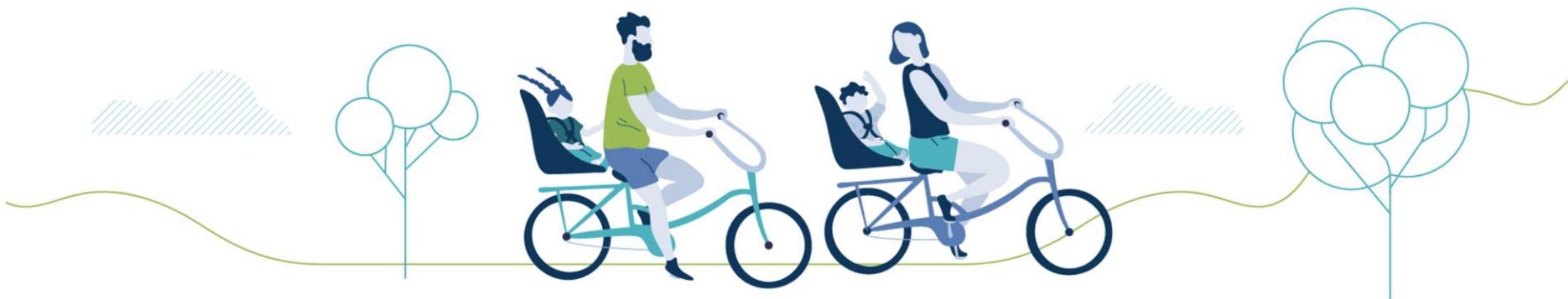
Have a **good time together as a family**

Those born in Malta scored significantly higher.



Feel safe at home and that there are people in their family who care about them

Girls scored higher than boys on the latter.



FAMILY – 8-11 / 11-15 year olds

Agreed a lot or totally agreed that they make **decisions about their lives together with their parents**



Have a **good time together as a family**

Agreed a lot or totally agreed that if they have a problem, their **family will help** them



Agreed a lot or totally agreed that **their parents listen** to them and take what they say seriously



Feel safe at home and that there are people in their family who care about them
Girls and those not worried about family income scored significantly higher than boys.

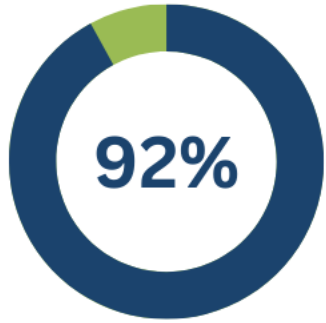


***Analysis showed that the more parents listen to their children and make decisions together with them, the higher is the child's subjective wellbeing.**

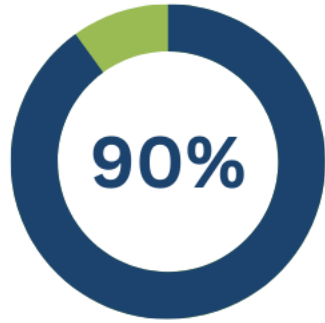
HOME



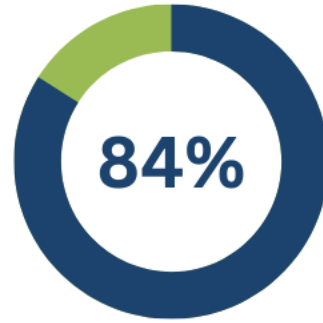
HOME



7-8 year olds are happy or very happy with their home



8-11 year olds are very or totally satisfied with their home



11-15 year olds are very or totally satisfied with their home

Those not worried about family income are more satisfied.

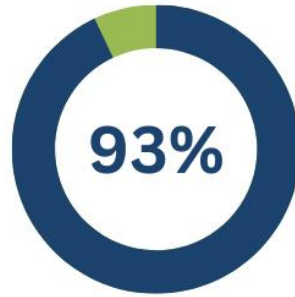


FRIENDS

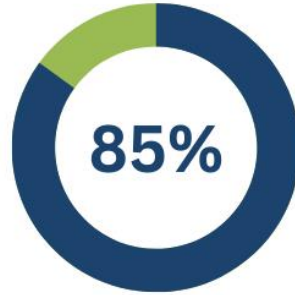


FRIENDS

7-8 year olds are happy or very happy with their friends



8-11 year olds are very or totally satisfied with their friends



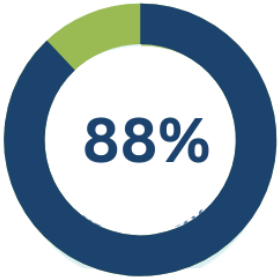
11-15 year olds are very or totally satisfied with their friends



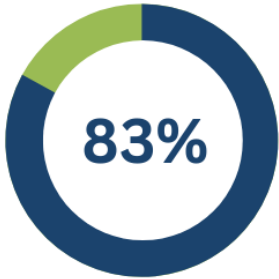
Those born in Malta and who do not have a disability are more satisfied.



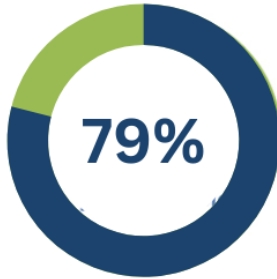
FRIENDS – 7-8 year olds



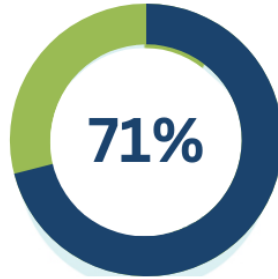
Agree a lot or totally agree that if they have a problem, they have a friend who will support them



Agree a lot or totally agree that they get along well with their friends



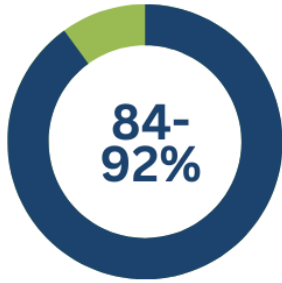
Agree a lot or totally agree that their friends are nice to them



Agree a lot or totally agree that they have enough friends

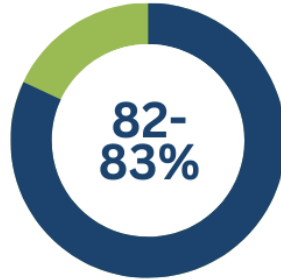


FRIENDS – 8-11 / 11-15 year olds

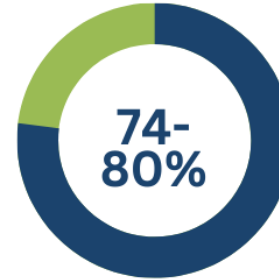


Agree a lot or totally agree that if they have a problem, they have a friend who will support them

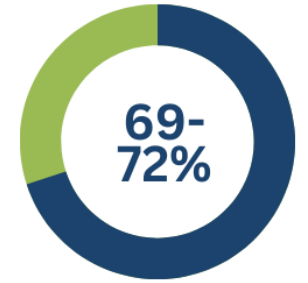
Girls are more likely to agree.



Agree a lot or totally agree that they get along well with their friends



Agree a lot or totally agree that their friends are nice to them



Agree a lot or totally agree that they have enough friends



SCHOOL



SCHOOL

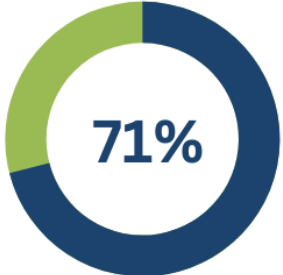
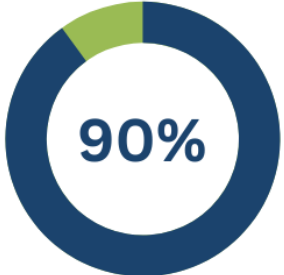
School

7-8 years

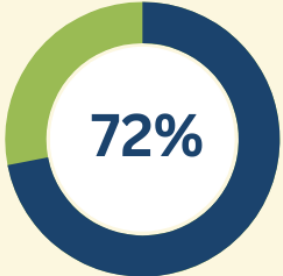
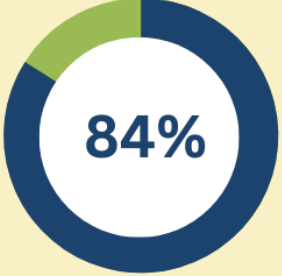
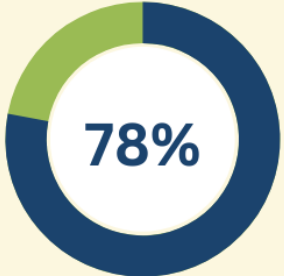
8-11 years

11-15 years

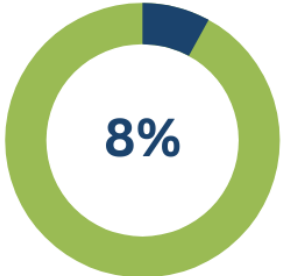
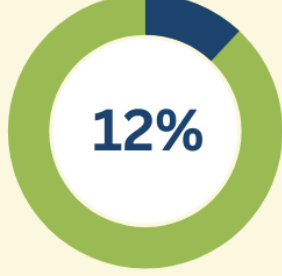
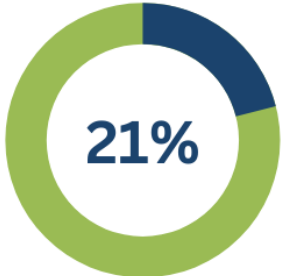
Agree that their teachers care about them



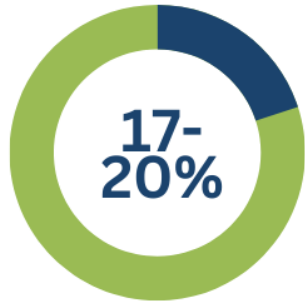
Feel safe at school
**Girls 7-8/8-11 years scored higher than boys.*



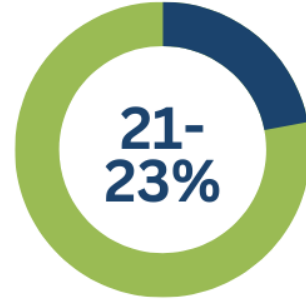
Reported missing school frequently



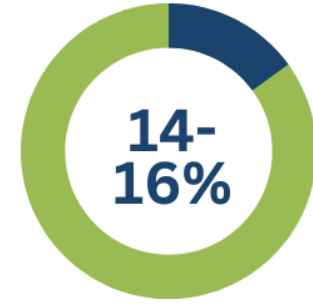
BULLYING



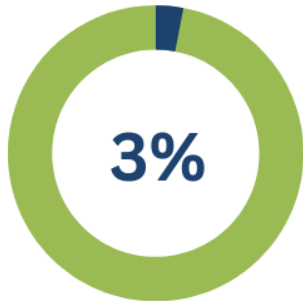
7-8 and 8-11 year olds reported being hit two or more times in the last month



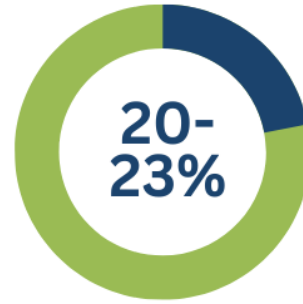
Of all age groups were called unkind names two or more times in the last month



8-11 and 11-15 year olds reported some form on online bullying at least once or more times



11-15 year olds were hit two or more times in the last month



Of all age groups were excluded by peers two or more times in the last month
Among 11-15 year olds, those not born in Malta and those with a disability were more likely to be excluded.

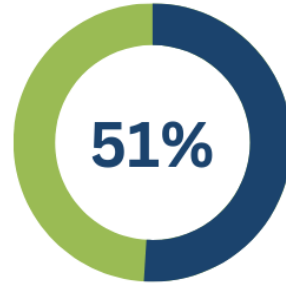


NEIGHBOURHOOD

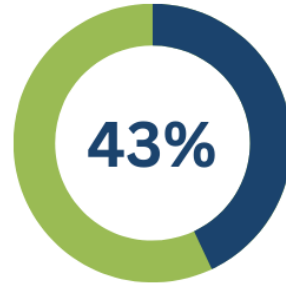


NEIGHBOURHOOD

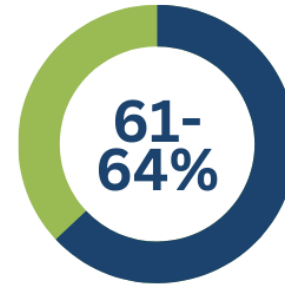
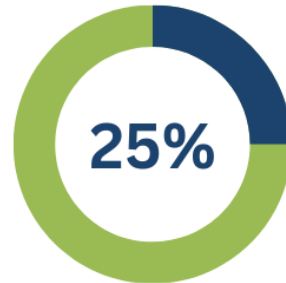
7-8 year olds feel totally safe when walking around their neighbourhood, however 14% do not



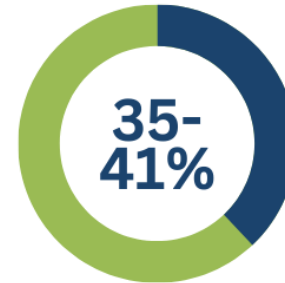
7-8 year olds totally agree that there are enough nature areas, however 38% are not satisfied
Those born in Malta scored higher.



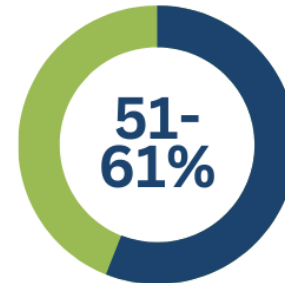
7-8 year olds are not satisfied with the cleanliness of their neighbourhood



8-11 and 11-15 year olds feel totally safe when walking around their neighbourhood, however 13-18% do not
Girls 11-15 years scored lower than boys.



8-11 and 11-15 year olds totally agree there are enough nature areas, however 28-44% do not agree

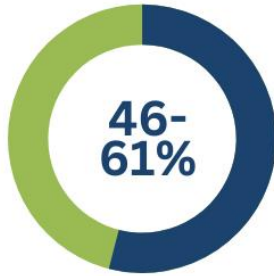


8-11 and 11-15 year olds are not satisfied with the cleanliness of their neighbourhood

USE OF TIME



USE OF TIME



Of children and young people spend time relaxing with their family everyday (61% of 7-8 year olds, decreasing to 46% for older age group)



Of 11-15 year olds spend time on social media everyday (compared to 32-41% of younger age groups)



Of 11-15 year olds spend time outside everyday (compared to 31% of 7-8 year olds and 26% of 8-11 year olds)



Of 11-15 year olds exercise atleast 5 times a week (compared to 30-34% of younger age groups)

The more days adolescents were active, the higher was their subjective wellbeing.

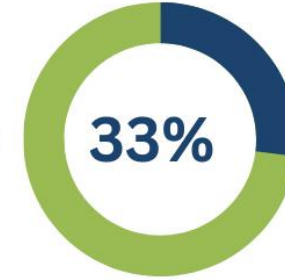


PHYSICAL HEALTH



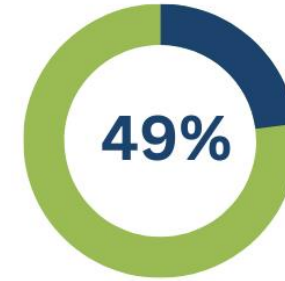
PHYSICAL HEALTH

7-8 year olds suffer from frequent headaches, stomach aches and backaches.



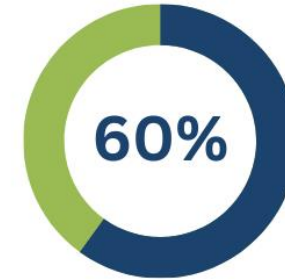
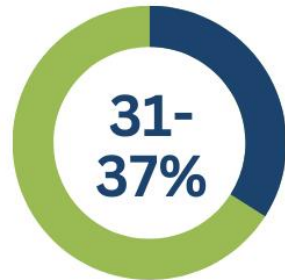
7-8 year olds suffer from frequent nervousness

8-11 year olds suffer from frequent headaches, stomach aches and backaches



8-11 year olds report feeling nervous frequently

11-15 year olds frequently suffer from headaches, stomach aches and backaches



11-15 year olds feel nervous on a weekly basis or more frequently (17.2% everyday)
Those worried about family income more likely to report feeling nervous daily

RIGHTS AS A CHILD IN MALTA



RIGHTS AS A CHILD IN MALTA

Rights as a child living in Malta

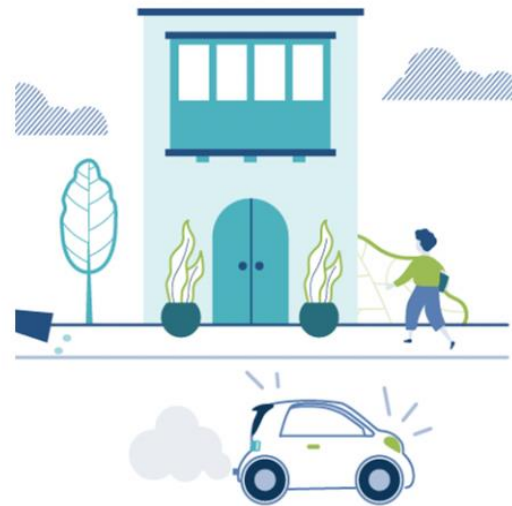
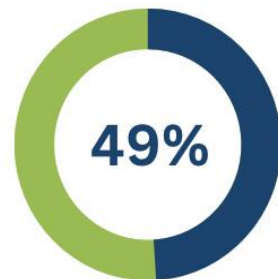
7-8 year olds know what rights children have
Children with a disability are more likely to report knowing their rights.



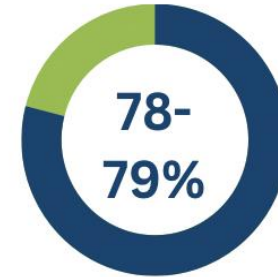
8-11 year olds know what rights children have



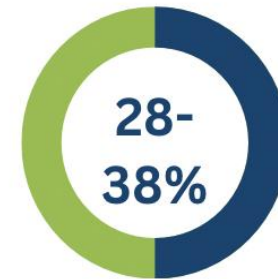
11-15 year olds know what rights children have



8-11 year olds believe Malta is safe for children and that adults care about them



8-11 year olds believe children are allowed to participate in decisions and their rights are respected by adults

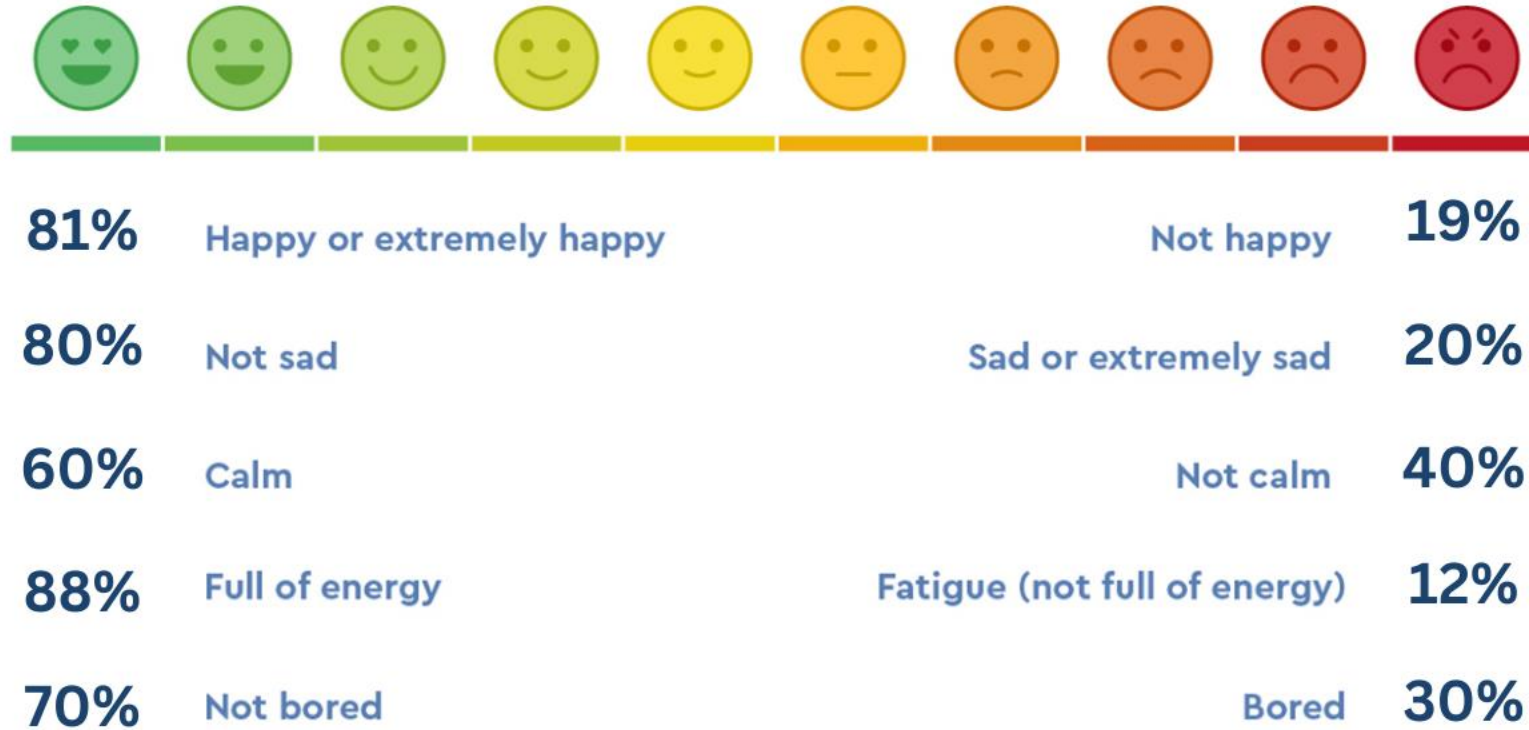


11-15 year olds worry about what is happening in the country and do not feel safe

SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING



FEELINGS – 7-8 year olds



FEELINGS – 8-11 year olds



75%	Happy or extremely happy	Not happy	6%
48%	Not sad	Sad or extremely sad	12%
80%	Calm	Not calm	8%
43%	Not stressed	Stressed	23%
75%	Full of energy	Fatigue (not full of energy)	4%
35%	Not bored	Bored	28%
70%	Cheerful	Not cheerful	5%
63%	Not lonely	Lonely	14%

- Participants who are worried about family income scored higher on all negative items, and lower on positive items.
- Participants with a disability scored higher on loneliness, sadness and boredom compared to their peers.

FEELINGS – 11-15 year olds



61%	Happy or extremely happy	Not happy	5%
42%	Not sad	Sad or extremely sad	10%
40%	Calm	Not calm	7%
22%	Not stressed	Stressed	30%
45%	Full of energy	Fatigue (not full of energy)	10%
24%	Not bored	Bored	28%
44%	Cheerful	Not cheerful	10%
48%	Not lonely	Lonely	17%
28%	Not anxious	Anxious	18%
49%	Did not feel so bad you did not want to do anything	So bad you did not want to do anything	17%

- Girls and those worried about family income reported a higher level of sadness.
- Participants with a disability reported more stress, boredom and loneliness.

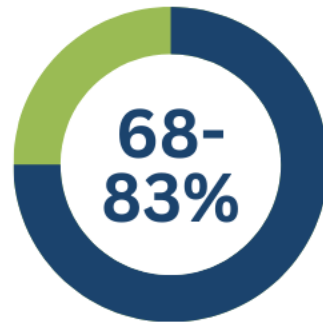
SATISFACTION WITH LIFE AND SELF

7-8 year olds satisfied with safety, health, life as a whole and the way they look

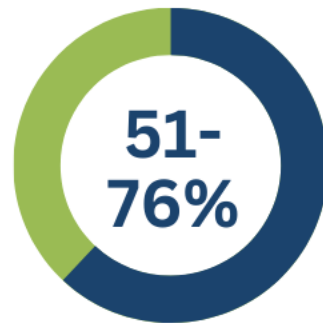
Participants attending state schools scored higher on health, body image and life as a whole.



8-11 year olds satisfied with various aspects of their life (most satisfied with their health, least satisfied with the way they look)



11-15 year olds satisfied with various aspects of their life (most satisfied with their safety, least satisfied with their appearance)
Those not born in Malta are more worried about their health and their future.



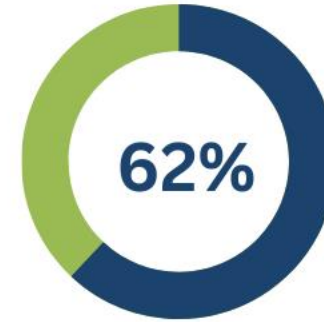
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING

8-11 year olds reported high scores on 'I like being the way I am'

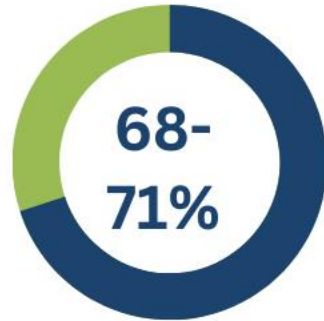


62%

11-15 year olds reported high scores on 'I like being the way I am'

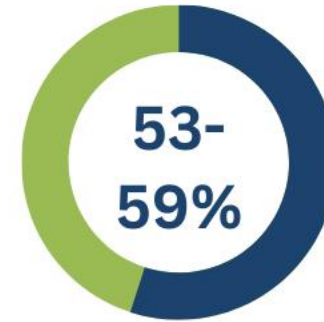


8-11 year olds are satisfied with their choice on how they spend their time and with how well they manage daily responsibilities



53-59%

11-15 year olds are satisfied with their choice on how they spend their time and with how well they manage daily responsibilities



Girls and participants with no disability scored significantly higher.

8-11 year olds feel they are learning a lot at the moment and are positive about their future



53-60%

11-15 year olds feel they are learning a lot at the moment and are positive about their future



CONCLUSION 1: Varying Aspects

- On average the majority of the participants in the study across different ages, enjoy a high level of subjective wellbeing and report safe and healthy systems such as home, school, friends, and the local community
- A closer look at the data shows that particular aspects of wellbeing remain problematic, such as peer bullying at school, decreasing liking for school with age, relative lack of autonomy and participation in decision making in the family, limited play areas, lack of physical exercise and excessive screen time



CONCLUSION 2: Different Realities

- It is indicative that wellbeing decreases with age, with the older participants experiencing the transition to adolescence.
 - a concerning finding is the relatively high level of negative affectivity amongst female adolescents, putting them at risk for developing mental health issues.
- Another concerning trend is the relatively low level of wellbeing amongst children from marginalized background such as low SES and migrant background and children with disability, constituting a potential a risk factor for the onset of mental health issues, particularly as they move into adolescence and young adulthood.



RECOMMENDATIONS 1

- An intersectoral national policy for the promotion of wellbeing and mental health in children and young people, bringing together various stakeholders such as education, health, social welfare and children's rights sectors, and the children and young people themselves. This would entail
 - universal wellbeing and mental health promotion for all children and young persons, with a particular focus on systems such as families, schools, local communities, and NGOs
 - in view of the relatively low level of physical exercise and extended screen time and the perennial high rate of obesity amongst Maltese children, as well as the positive link between exercise and mental health, the policy would also include a strategy to promote physical exercise amongst children and young people and their respective families and communities.



RECOMMENDATIONS 2

- A strategic focus on promoting and protecting the mental health of children and young people facing risk or adversity, such as children living in poverty, from a migrant background, LGBTIQ, and children with disability, as well as female adolescents.
 - since most children and young people are still attending school, schools, in collaboration with the health services, might serve as stigma-free centres for the promotion and protection of MH of such children and young people.
- A more inclusive and welcoming environment for children with diverse needs.
- Curbing bullying at school, at home and in the community
- Wellbeing and mental health as a key educational objective



PARTING SHOTS

- Children and young people to be actively engaged in any initiatives to develop and implement the policy actions recommended in the study
- Development of a Child Wellbeing Index for children and young people in Malta
- Need for regular surveying of children's and young people's wellbeing, making use of large and representative sample
- MA Transdisciplinary Childhood Studies, University of Malta



Further information



For further details please contact us on : carmel.cefai@um.edu.mt,
rachel.spiteri@um.edu.mt, natalie.galea@um.edu.mt