



Pelastakaa Lapset - Rädda Barnen
Save the Children

STRESS, WORRY AND LONELINESS – EFFECTS OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

“I THINK WE YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD ALSO HAVE OUR VOICES HEARD IN THIS EXCEPTIONAL SITUATION!”

In April 2020, Save the Children surveyed the view of Finnish children and youth on how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted their everyday lives, leisure time, studies, mental well-being, future prospects and the situation of their families.

Children felt that the exceptional circumstances had changed their lives considerably: in order to avoid physical contact teaching was conducted remotely, meeting friends became more difficult, hobby options narrowed down and leisure time changed.

Many felt that their mental well-being had declined. More than one in four of the children who responded to the survey felt that their mental well-being was bad or fairly bad. More than one in three was also worried about their custodian or custodian coping in the exceptional circumstances and one in four felt

that the custodians' stress impacted the atmosphere of the entire family. The experience of inadequacy of the support received caused stress and worry. Maintaining social relationships felt challenging and many felt lonelier than before.

According to the responses, the exceptional circumstances impacted especially children of low-income families, who reported declined mental well-being, challenges with studies and the family's increased need of support more often than others. They were also more often worried about the impact of the exceptional circumstances than other children. More than one in ten children of low-income families reported that they did not get a warm or nourishing lunch daily after school lunches stopped.

CHILDREN'S VOICE

Children's Voice is a survey that Save the Children Finland has conducted since 2001. The survey maps the thoughts of children* on varying themes. The objective of the survey is to lift up the voices of children and include them more in Finnish society – from everyday life to broader social dialogue and decision-making. In 2020, the survey focused on the experiences of 13–17 children and youth regarding the exceptional circumstances caused by the coronavirus pandemic from the point of view of everyday life, studies, leisure time, hobbies and mental well-being.

Results of the survey will be published in two parts. This report focuses on how children and youth have experienced the exceptional circumstances caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The complete results of the Children's Voice 2020 survey will be published in the autumn of 2020 when the experience of poverty by children and youth will be highlighted especially as it affects hobbies and leisure time.

**The term child refers to everyone under the age of 18 as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).*

SURVEY DATA

The data for the report was collected nationally in Finland (incl. the Åland Islands) using an online form in Finnish and Swedish during 6–26 April 2020. A total of 3,129 children responded to the survey, with 7% reporting Swedish as their native language. Approximately 2% of the respondents reported some language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sámi as their native language. Of the respondents 84% were girls, 12% were boys and 4% of the respondents chose the alternative “other”, “I do not wish to define” or “I do not wish to answer”.

At the time of taking the survey, the majority of respondents (57%) were studying in a secondary school. A total of 40% studied at the upper secondary level either in an upper secondary school, vocational training or were completing a dual qualification. Of all respondents, 27% were in a general upper secondary school and 11% in a vocational secondary school. In addition, 3% of the respondents reported being outside these alternatives, such as attending class 6 or 10 or in VALMA training (preparatory training for vocational education). Of the respondents, 1% reported not currently being in school or studying. The most common reason for this was mental health issues. About 27% of the respondents live in Uusimaa.

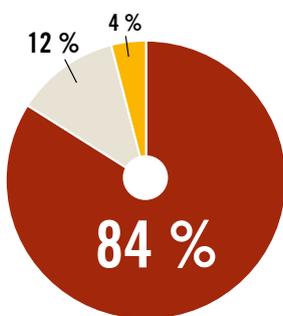
The other most common places of residence were Pirkanmaa (9%), Northern Ostrobothnia (8%) and Southwest Finland (8%). 46% of the respondents reported living in a big or mid-sized city. Of them, 10% live in the city centre and 36% in the suburbs or the outskirts. About 37% of the respondents lived in a small city or town and out of them 18% in the

centre and 19% in the outskirts. In addition, 17% of the respondents reported living in a rural setting. Of the respondents, 20% defined themselves as belonging to at least one minority. Clearly most of the minority respondents reported belonging to a minority due to their sexual orientation. They comprised 17% of the respondents.

The children were asked to assess their family’s financial situation. The assessments are based on the children’s own experience of their custodian’s income level. 53% of respondents felt their family’s income was average. 29% of the respondents felt their family had a fairly or very high income and 14% felt their family’s income was fairly or very low. 5% could not say. For the data that was collected with an online form, we cannot be completely certain of the respondents’ backgrounds, as the veracity of their responses cannot be verified. Some respondents may have filled the form in several times, for example, which may cause a skew in the survey results. In addition, the movie prizes that were raffled among the respondents have likely impacted the selection of respondents.

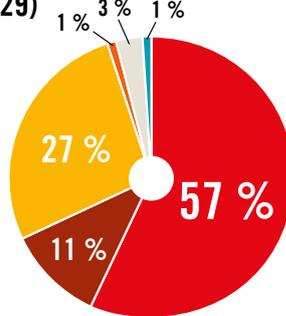
In addition to different social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) children and youth were approached through people who work with them, such as school social workers and other social workers. Responding to all the questions of the survey was not mandatory, and this has been taken into account when processing the data.

Respondents’ gender (N=3129)



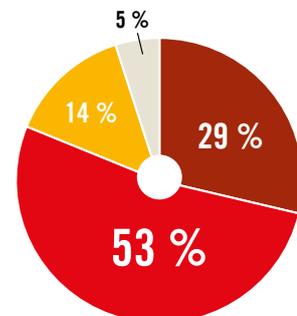
- Girl
- Boy
- Other/I do not wish to define/I do not wish to answer

Respondents’ educational background (N=3129)



- Lower secondary school
- Upper secondary school
- Vocational education
- Not in school/educational institution
- Double qualification
- Other

Family income level (N=3129)



- Fairly or very high income
- Average income
- Fairly or very low income
- Does not know

KEY FINDINGS

- 1.** 20% of all respondents felt that their family's income had decreased due to the exceptional circumstances and 22% worried about their family's livelihood. The corresponding figures for children of low-income families were 47% and 57%.
- 2.** 27% felt that their mental well-being was bad or fairly bad. The corresponding figure for children of low-income families was 43%.
- 3.** 55% felt lonelier than before due to the exceptional circumstances.
- 4.** 33% felt that there were more arguments than before in the family.
- 5.** 25% felt that they, their family or their family member needed help or support in coping with everyday life due the situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The corresponding figure for children of low-income families was 47%. Out of the families in need of help, 13% had not received any, despite trying.
- 6.** 75% felt that success in studies had become more difficult or declined due to remote studying. In 8% of the cases the situation at home (e.g. substance abuse, mental health issues, mental or physical violence) was reported as the reason for this. The corresponding figure for children of low-income families was 15%.
- 7.** 12% reported that they lacked equipment required by remote studying. The corresponding figure for children of low-income families was 18%.

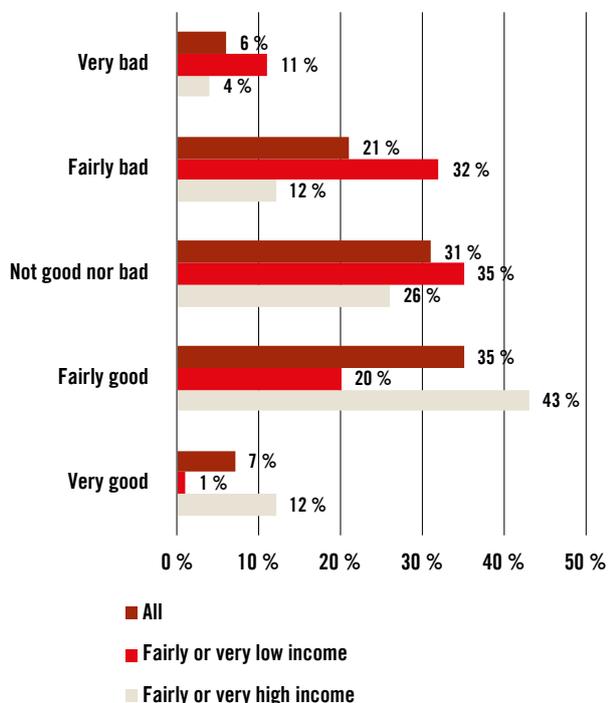


EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES CAUSE STRESS AND ANXIETY

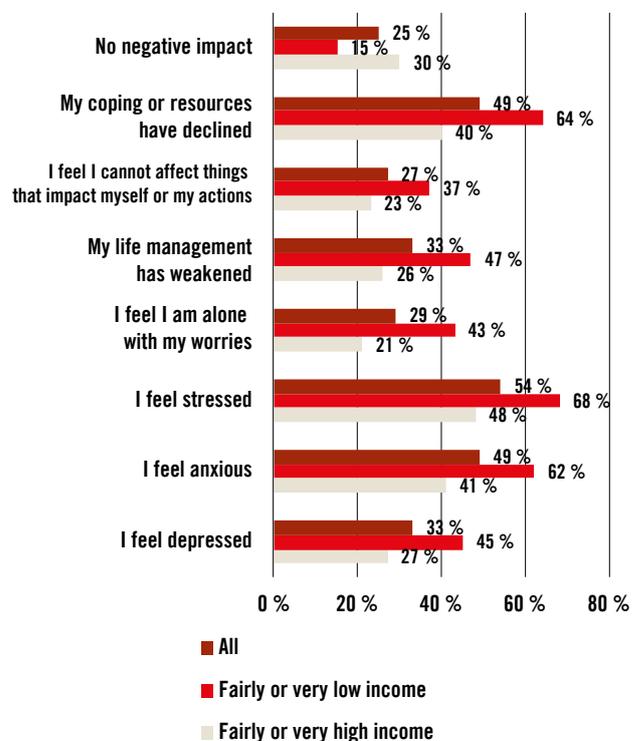
At the time of responding, one in four (27%) respondents felt that their mental well-being was bad or fairly bad. Based on the responses, the exceptional situation has negatively impacted especially the children of low-income families who report the situation having impacted their mental well-being negatively more often than other children. At the time of responding, the children of low-income families felt that their mental well-being was bad much more often than others: 43% of them reported feeling their mental well-being as fairly or very bad. Correspondingly, the children of high-income families felt mentally better than others: 55% of them reported that their mental well-being was fairly or very good. The corresponding figure for all respondents was 42% and 21% for children of low-income families.

Roughly half of the respondents (49%) felt that their resources or coping had declined due to the exceptional situation. About half (54%) felt stressed or anxious (49%). One in three (33%) also felt their life management had worsened and many (29%) felt they were alone with their worries or that they could not affect things that impact themselves or their actions (27%). On the other hand, one in four respondents (25%) did not feel that the exceptional situation had impacted their mental well-being negatively and in the open-ended answers some children reported their mental well-being having improved due to decreased hurry and anxiety related to going to school.

How do you feel your mental well-being is at the moment? (N=3129)



How do you feel the exceptional situation has impacted your mental well-being? (N=3129)



Challenges with mental well-being were emphasised in the open-ended answers, even though some positive effects of the exceptional situation were also identified. The answers relate especially to experiences of increased stress and anxiety related to remote studying and the frustration of constantly being at home.

“I am much more efficient, active, able and much more content with the current situation than the so-called normal.”

“Now, I am myself mostly responsible for my studies and there is much more schoolwork which makes me stressed and anxious.”

“Fed up with staying inside.”

“Bored and frustrated.”

“I feel helpless because I can’t do anything about the situation.”

The children also reported existing mental-health issues having aggravated due to the exceptional situation. Some were unable to meet or otherwise remain in contact with a care provider.

“Mental-health issues have gotten worse.”

“I am no longer meeting my care provider, which has a big impact on my condition getting worse.”

The responses also highlighted the children’s longing for social contacts and experience of loneliness. The support of friends can be of utmost importance to some children if their home situation causes worry.

“I miss having more human contacts.”

“I feel down and heavy because I haven’t seen my friends and cannot share things and have a good time like before.”

“My biggest worries are at home and, due to the situation, I cannot spend the night with my friend, which is what I usually do when I need support.”



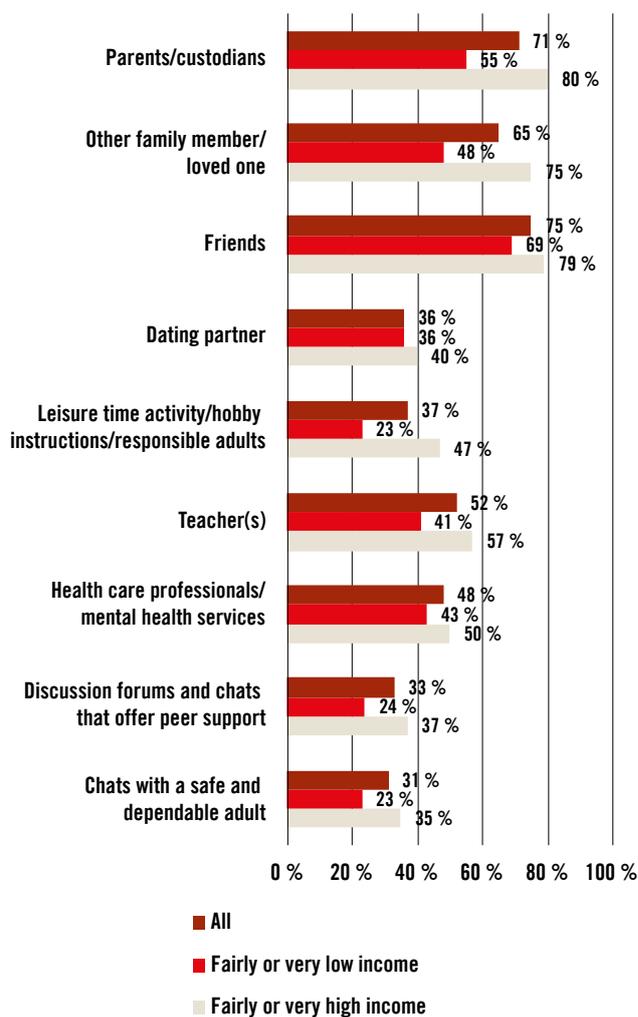
CHILDREN OF LOW-INCOME FAMILIES NEED MORE SUPPORT WITH THEIR MENTAL WELL-BEING

The survey also asked who the children felt were the most important parties that had supported their mental well-being. The most important parties were identified as friends (75%), parents or custodians (71%), other family members or loved ones (65%), teachers (52%) and healthcare professionals or mental health services (48%) and healthcare professionals or mental health services (48%).

About one in three respondents identified as their most important support online forums or chats offering peer support (33%) and confidential chats with a safe adult (31%). Also, parish (youth) workers, social workers and child protective services employees were identified as important supporting parties.

The children reported wanting more support especially from teachers (30%), parents or custodians (27%), other family members or loved ones (26%), friends (24%), adults responsible for hobbies or leisure time (24%) and health care professionals or mental health services (22%).

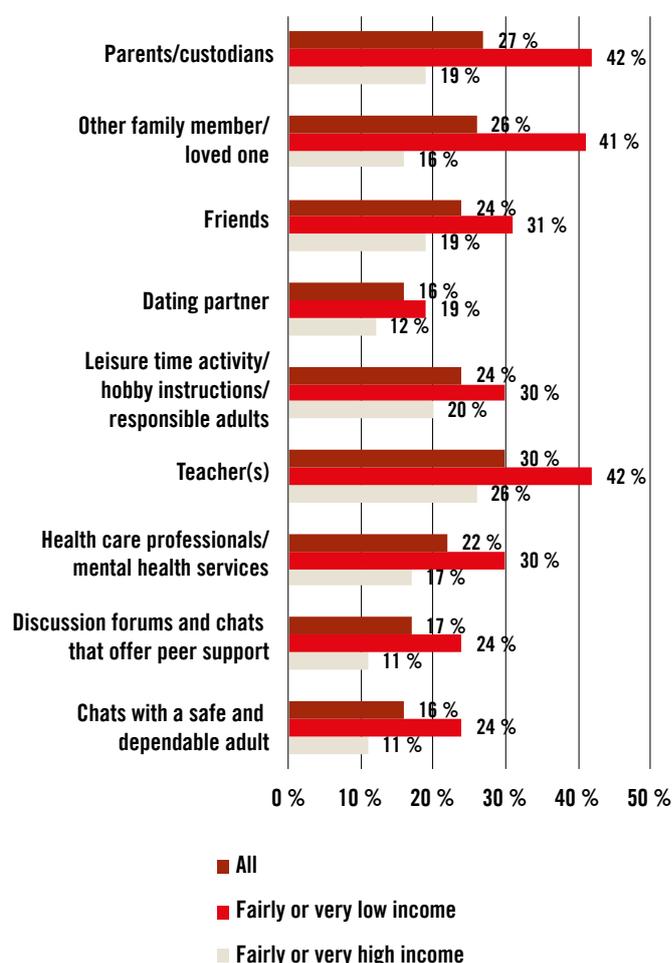
The most important parties that support mental well-being. (N=3117)



Children of low-income families reported considerably fewer important supporting parties than other respondents. Based on the responses they also need clearly more support for their mental well-being than other children.

Of the children who responded to the survey, 19% reported not having received the support they require from people that are important to them. More than one in four (28%) felt that they had received less support for their mental well-being than before. 16% wanted more information on how to get a discussion with a professional or a volunteer adult about their situation and 13% wanted more information on how to get peer support from discussion forums and chats, for example. In addition, nearly one in three (31%) said they wanted more information on how to help a friend in a difficult situation and more than one in four (26%) on how to help someone close to them.*

The most important parties from which the children wish to receive more support for their mental well-being. (N=3117)



*We gave the children opinion statements on the scale of 1–5, where the value 3 can be considered a neutral option and 1–2 and 4–5 as the gradually agreeing with the far ends of the spectrum.

ONE IN FIVE CHILDREN WORRY ABOUT THE LIVELIHOOD OF THEIR FAMILY

About one in five (20%) of the respondents felt that their family's income had decreased due to the exceptional circumstances or were worried about their family's livelihood (22%). The corresponding figures for children of low-income families were considerably higher: of them 47% felt that their family's income had decreased and as many as 57% worried about their family's livelihood.

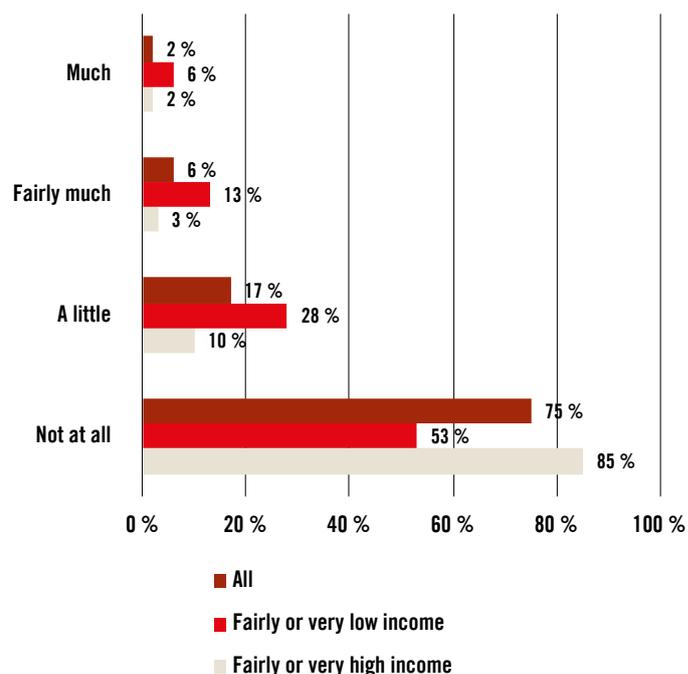
In addition, 37% were also worried about their custodian or custodians coping in the exceptional circumstances and 26% felt that the custodians' stress impacted the atmosphere of the entire family. The corresponding figures for children of low-income families were considerably higher: 62% worried about the custodian's coping and 45% felt the custodian's stress impacted the atmosphere of the entire family.

ONE IN FOUR CHILDREN FEELS THAT THEY OR THEIR FAMILY NEEDS SUPPORT TO COPE WITH EVERYDAY LIFE

Of the respondents, 25% felt that they, their family or their family member needed help or support in coping with everyday life due the situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The corresponding figure for children of low-income families was 47%. Of all respondents, 8% reported that much or fairly much support would be required. Out of children of low-income families, 19% gave this response.

We also asked if those in need of help or support had received any (N=767). According to the respondents, the most common support received was mental health services (31%) and food support (29%). Many respondents reported that they, or their family, had received help for their situation during the coronavirus pandemic from a private person (18%) or financial support, for example, from social services (17%). 15% of the respondents reported having received equipment aid, such as a computer for studying. More than one in ten (11%) of the respondents who had received help reported having been helped by child protection. However, of families in need of help, 13% had not received any help, despite trying. In addition, many reported that despite a need, their family has not tried to get help or support for their challenging situation.

Do you feel that your family or some family member (incl. yourself) needs support or help for everyday life and coping due to the exceptional circumstances caused by the coronavirus? (N=3129)





We asked the children to tell in their own words how their families could best be helped in the current situation. The responses highlight needs related to promoting livelihood, psychological support and organising remote teaching. Many worried about the family's livelihood, their own or their parents' coping or their younger sibling's learning. Proposed solutions included a more open culture of conversation related to mental health, mental health services that would be easier to reach, peer support, communality, financial aid, grocery bags and gift cards as well as support and flexibility of workplaces.

"We should support each other in these difficult situations."

"With peer support and psychologists working remotely ."

"Youth mental health services in Finland should be considerably increased in general and not just during the pandemic. There are long queues everywhere and I, too, have been left without treatment due to this. That is one of the reasons why my mental state now during the coronavirus pandemic has declined."

"Talking about mental health at the workplace? Or something else that would make mental health issues less taboo among adults. Talking about the matter face to face, not sending messages home."

"The best support for my family would be financial or food support because we are spending much more than usual on food as all 4 school children are staying home."

"Organise better quality teaching in comprehensive school/ more teaching via video in different subject so that mum would not have to teach and look after my younger siblings' learning so much."

"Ask teachers to have teaching take everyone into consideration. Not just the skilled ones."

Of the respondents, 85% reported receiving a warm or otherwise nutritious lunch daily even after school lunches stopped. However, about 7% reported that they did not get a warm or nourishing lunch daily. The corresponding figure for children of low-income families was 13%.*

Most children did not experience any threat of violence or increase of the threat in their family due to the exceptional situation. However, 3% of the children felt that the threat of violence had increased. In addition, 8% of the respondents worried about their parents' substance use. Based on the responses it is also clear that most did not want more information on how to get help for their family's situation from health care, substance abuse, mental health or child protection.*

CHANGES IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND LEISURE TIME

Of the respondents, 82% felt that their everyday life had changed fairly much or very much due to the exceptional situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The most significant changes to everyday life included blurring of the separation between studies and leisure time (67%), irregular daily routines (66%) and limited social interaction (61%). In addition, over half (51%) of the respondents reported not being able to spend time engaged with their hobbies. Although 46% of the respondents felt that their leisure time had increased and 39% felt time spent studying had decreased, 44% did feel that time spent studying had increased.

In the open-ended answers the children detailed that changes to everyday life focused especially on mental health and challenges of remote teaching. Some also reported previous mental health issues having aggravated due to the exceptional situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic because meetings or other contact with the care provider had become impossible. However, many reported feeling better due to the changes to their everyday lives.

“Visits to the psychologists were interrupted for months.”

“I feel that my mental health has improved a lot after school ended.”

“I have started taking better care of myself (exercise, diet etc.) because now I have more time for that.”

Many responses emphasised stress and anxiety related to remote studying, which related mainly to an increase in the workload or the difficulty of progressing in the studies. Staying constantly at home and by the computer also felt frustrating and the respondents missed getting back to school with their friends. In addition, the entire family staying home was seen to increase tensions within the family.

“It would be nice to do something else than just sit at the computer. At school, I could be with my friends and work with animals.”

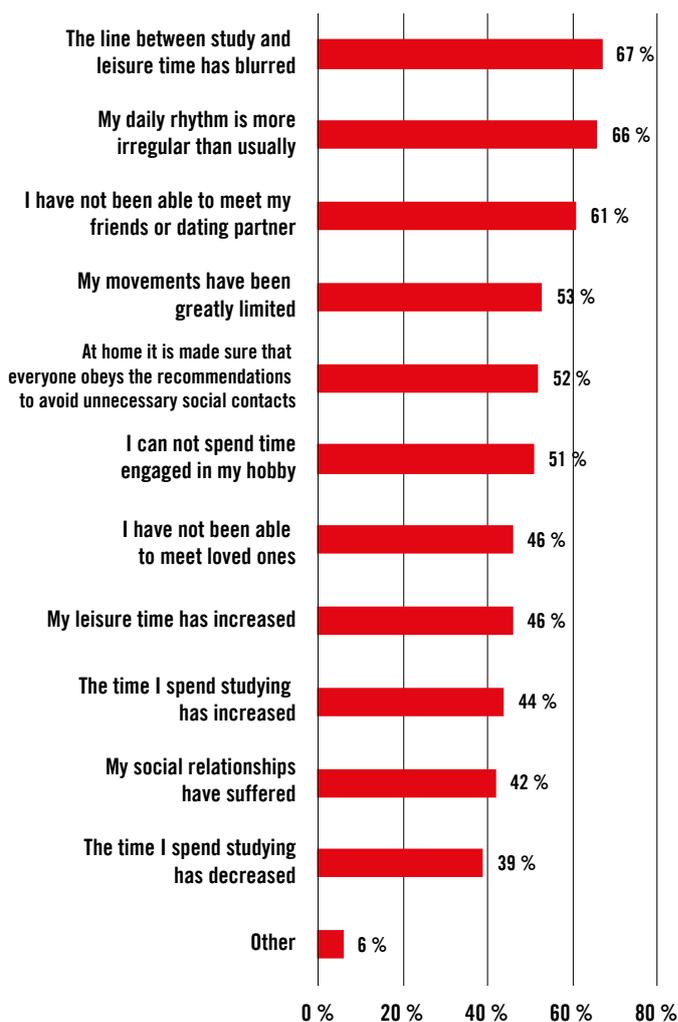
“Schoolwork requires much more work and causes anxiety.”

“I have a mix of school and leisure time around the clock.”

“Nearly all of the family is at home all of the time, which causes tension and there are a lot of arguments.”

Of the respondents, 68% felt that the way they spend their leisure time had changed considerably in the exceptional situation. In addition, 45% reported having to let go of a leisure time activity or hobby that was important to them. However, 33% felt they could still spend leisure time in a way they liked. A clear majority (86%) also reported their screen time having increased during the exceptional situation.*

How is the exceptional situation caused by the coronavirus visible in your everyday life? (N=3129)



The biggest changes in regard to hobbies and ways of spending leisure time were related to different social activities outside the home, such as going to cafes, restaurants and movies as well as activity in organisations, associations and clubs and spending time at youth clubs. All of these were greatly reduced by the exceptional circumstances. In addition, there was a decline in sport and exercise. The popularity of at-home activities increased a little. For example, arts and crafts, reading and virtual gaming were on the rise.

The most common reasons preventing participating in leisure time activities and hobbies were the restrictions on public gatherings (54%), closing of facilities for hobbies and gatherings (50%) and the activities ceasing (45%).

Hobby/activity	Normally	During exceptional circumstances	Change
Sport	78 %	54 %	- 14 %
Art	50 %	55 %	+ 5 %
Crafts	23 %	30 %	+ 7 %
Music	49 %	41 %	- 8 %
Reading	40 %	45 %	+ 5 %
Virtual gaming	47 %	53 %	+ 6 %
TV/Streaming	73 %	72 %	+1 %
Content creation for social media	69 %	60 %	- 9 %
Organisation, associations and clubs	20 %	9 %	- 11 %
Culture and entertainment, e.g. movies	54 %	6 %	- 48 %
Cafes and restaurants	62 %	7 %	- 55 %
Youth clubs	22 %	6 %	- 16 %

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS SUFFERED FROM THE EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Of the children who responded to the survey, 83% per cent reported that maintaining friendships was at least somewhat challenging during the exceptional circumstances. More than one in three (36%) felt that maintaining friendships was very or fairly challenging.

More than half (55%) of the respondents felt lonelier than before due to the exceptional circumstances. A majority (79%) also reported spending less time with their friends and 47% of the respondents reported

being more distant with their friends. On the other hand, 61% reported spending more time with their family and 37% felt close to their family than before. However, 33% of the respondents felt that there were more arguments than before in the family.*

REMOTE STUDYING CAUSED STRAIN AND STRESS

Of the children who responded to the survey, 62% reported increased stress related to school and studies due to moving to remote teaching. In addition, 59% of the respondents felt that studying was harder with remote teaching. Over half (52%) also considered that the amount of independent studying was too large at the time of the survey.*

Of the children who responded to the survey, 34% felt that they needed more support as their studies had increased. At the same time, 40% reported receiving

less support for their studies than before. When it comes to the daily amount of time spent studying the respondents were fairly evenly divided into those who felt the time spent studying had increased (38%) and those who felt it had decreased (42%) with remote studying. 43% of the children felt that remote studying put students in an unequal position.*



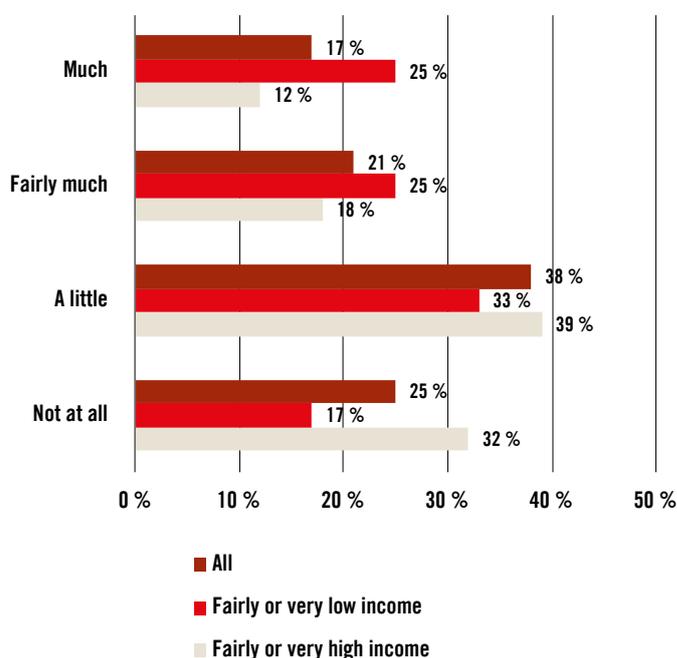
75% OF CHILDREN FELT THAT SUCCESS IN STUDIES HAD BECOME MORE DIFFICULT OR DECLINED DUE TO REMOTE STUDYING

A majority (75%) of the respondents felt that success in studies had become more difficult or declined due to remote studying. Out of all respondents, 37% had experienced many or fairly many difficulties. The corresponding figure for children of low-income families was 50%.

The most common reason for remote studying being challenging was not having the patience to study independently (61%). Almost half (49%) of the respondents reported learning better together with others. 44% reported there being too many distractions, such as noise, at home or that they did not have a dedicated space to study. In addition, more than one in three (36%) felt that remote studying was challenging because they required a lot of support or help. Many respondents also felt that they did not receive enough support in their studies: 29% felt that support provided by teachers was inadequate and 17% felt the same about support at home. The corresponding figures for children of low-income families were 37% (teachers) and 29% (parents).

More than one in ten (12%) respondents reported not having sufficient equipment for remote studying, such as computer, software, internet connection or books. Out of children of low-income families, 18% felt their equipment was lacking. Almost one in ten (8%) of the children also reported that their home situation, such as issues with substance abuse or mental health problems or the threat of mental or physical violence, made coping in remote studies more difficult. The corresponding figure for children of low-income families was 15%.

Do you feel remote studying has weakened your success in your studies? (N=3112)



Of the respondents, 10% reported that success in studies was impacted by some other reason than one of the predefined ones. The open-ended answers highlighted especially different experiences of having too much schoolwork, too high demands and instructions that were either lacking or that came from too many different sources. The blurring of lines between school and leisure time also felt difficult.

“Too many assignments. They take all day. I have no free time and that is starting to cause stress.”

“The workload is higher than usual, and it feels like I don’t have enough time to do all the assignments.”

The amount of work has increased and at the same time we are expected to be more independent than ever before.”

“There are too many assignments and they are too broad. Maybe teachers have not understood how much time they require and how difficult it is to separate school and free time when you easily have to do 8h of schoolwork in a day. Constantly staring at the computer also makes my eyes and head hurt, which makes concentrating difficult.”

“I don’t know how to separate school from free time, which causes increased stress.”

“Getting instructions from several different sources makes remembering them more difficult.”

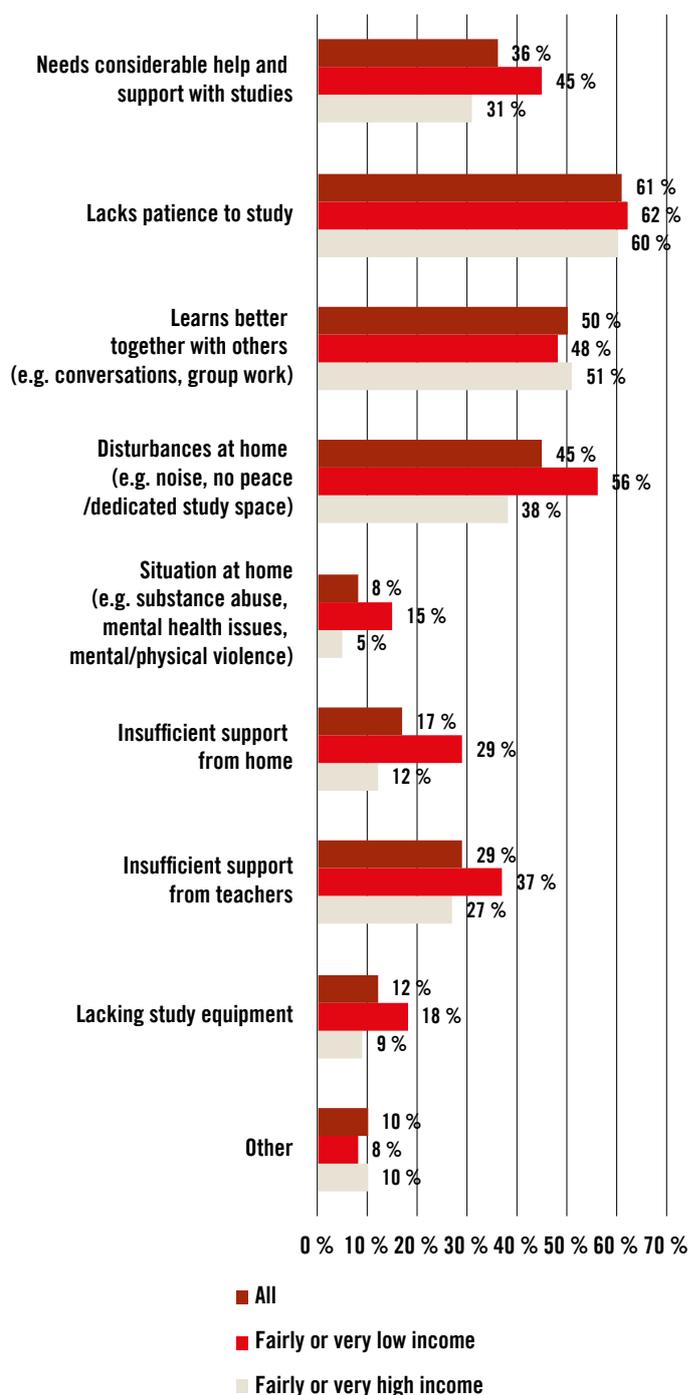
Some respondents reported concentrating on studies being more difficult at home than in school. In addition, some respondents reported being engaged in an area of study that made remote studying difficult for practical reasons.

“I can’t concentrate as well.”

“The presence of teachers would help in concentrating.”

“My area is difficult, almost impossible, to study remotely.”

What causes these challenges? (N=2330)

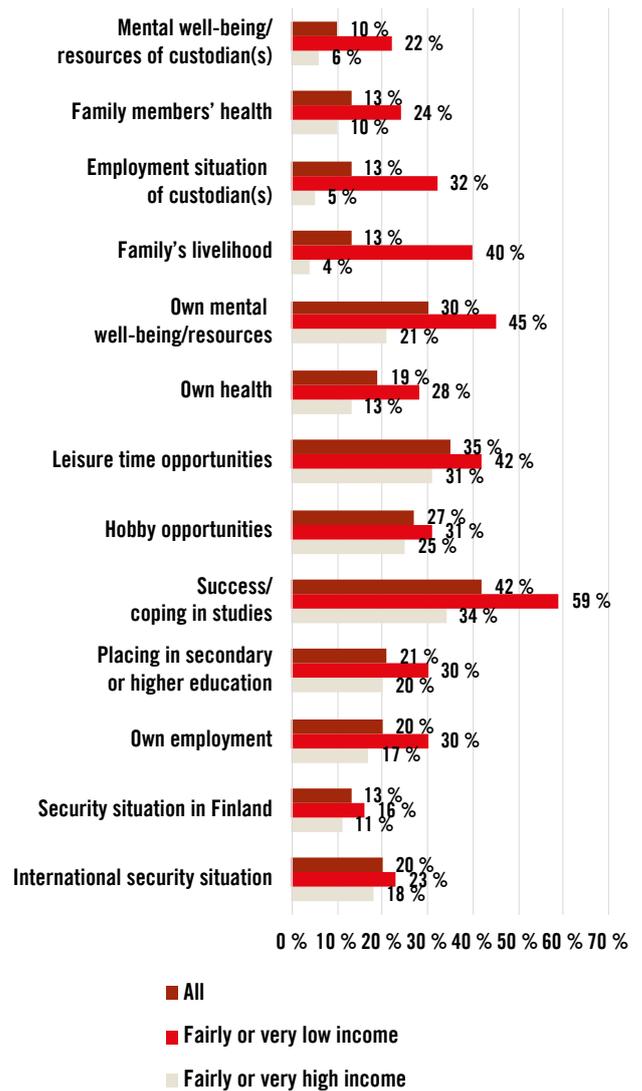


WORRIES ABOUT THE FUTURE

Regarding the impact of current or future exceptional circumstances, the children were most worried about success and coping in studies (42%), possibilities for leisure time activities (35%), personal mental well-being and resources (30%), hobby opportunities (27%), placing in further studies (21%), own employment (21%) and the international security situation (20%).

Children of low-income families were, on average, more worried about the impact of current of future exceptional circumstances than other children. Compared with others, they were considerably more worried, for example, about success and coping in studies (59%), their own mental well-being and resources (45%), their family's livelihood (40%) and their custodian's employment situation (32%).

Are you worried about the impact of current of future exceptional circumstances on the following issues when it comes to your future? (N=3129)



SAVE THE CHILDREN'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Save the Children recommends that the government and the decision-makers of municipalities

- Secure sufficient livelihood and social security for families. Extended exceptional circumstances cause strain especially for families with low or suddenly stopped income, and with parents that belong to a risk group.
- Ensure that schools' student welfare services and mental health services targeted to children and youth are sufficient and easy to reach.
- Ensure that there are sufficient services for children and families in municipalities and that they are flexibly available and take into account families' different needs.
- Guarantee resources to the parties that produce low-threshold services, digital and otherwise, that promote well-being in children and youth so that these parties can offer support to the municipalities.
- Appoint additional resources to informing children and youth regarding matters that involve children and their rights in a way that takes into account the child's age and different language groups.
- Invest in the development of comprehensive participation in municipalities, together with children and youth.
- Guarantee sufficient equipment for every comprehensive and secondary school student studying remotely now and in the future.
- Guarantee sufficient support for learning for children in need of special support.

Save the Children encourages professionals working with children

- To make sure that children receive information regarding their rights and the impact the exceptional circumstances have on their lives.
- Try to make sure that practices that have been found to work during the coronavirus pandemic would be applied at schools and in leisure time activities also after the exceptional circumstances end.
- Make sure that teaching children and youth mental well-being skills is at a sufficient level. Preventive measures can strengthen the resilience of children and youth and preparing for possible future exceptional circumstances.

Background information related to the theme of the survey and statistics regarding children and children's status in Finland

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Save the Children Finland is a politically and religiously independent non-governmental organization founded in 1922, which fights for children's rights in order to immediately and permanently improve children's lives in Finland and all over the world.

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