Youth in Israel

Health, Emotional
and Social Wellbeing
and Patterns of Risk Behavior
Among Youth in Israel

Health Behaviors in School-Aged Children
(HBSC)
A World Health Organization
Cross-National Study

Summary of Findings of 7th Survey 2014
Analysis of Trends in 1994-2014
An International Comparison

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the findings of the seventh national survey on youth in Israel, specifically their health, wellbeing, risk behaviors, and exposure to injury. The survey in Israel was part of the multinational survey conducted by WHO-HBSC and financed and sponsored by the Ministry of Health. The international survey is held once in four years with the participation of more than 40 countries in Europe and North America. Data is collected in each country by self-completion questionnaires administered to students in grades 6, 8 and 10 (ages 11.5, 13.5, and 15.5). In Israel in 2014, some 14,000 students participated in the sample of state schools, state-religious schools, and Arab schools.

The data from the HBSC survey reveal considerable information on the daily lives of youth in Israel in a broad range of areas, such as patterns of behavior at risk to health, psychosomatic symptoms, emotional distress, injury, participation in violence, the perceived school climate, parental involvement, leisure and recreational activities, community involvement and more. In addition, the study team generates periodic reports and comparisons with different countries as well as status reports on specific subpopulations.

How the Data from the Survey are Being Used

The HBSC survey contributes primarily to the research on the health and wellbeing of youth. It constitutes solid infrastructure for the development of intervention strategies and policy to promote the wellbeing, health and safety of youth in Israel, and facilitates the establishment of a base to advance that wellbeing on several planes. The survey makes it possible to:

- Identify key problems and risks in the lives of youth, to compare the data for different countries, and thereby to learn of their relative severity in a broad context. This, in turn, makes it possible to create and prioritize interventions since the survey addresses a large variety of major topics related to at-risk behaviors and measures of health and injury.

- Channel resources to interventions that focus on the needs of detectable at-risk populations.

- Raise public awareness of the main issues of youth health and wellbeing. Heightened awareness facilitates the receipt of support from the public and various civic organizations for activities to promote health and wellbeing.

- This survey constitutes a significant basis for research examining social and psychological influences on the patterns of behavior and injury among Israeli youth. Reliable research data enable the development of data-based intervention programs and prevention activities to make them more effective.

- The database makes it possible to follow trends and changes over time and thus to evaluate program effectiveness at the macro level and among specific population groups.

As said, the data emerging from the survey are extensive and relate to numerous areas of youth wellbeing. As such, the findings serve many divisions at the Ministries of Health and Education, which address various aspects. They are also helpful to inter-ministerial forums and quite a few civic organizations including the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Promotion of Health; the Israel Anti-Drug Authority – Office of the Chief Scientist; the Inter-ministerial Anti-Smoking Forum; the Committee to Reduce Harm from Smoking headed by Justice Gilon; the National Council for Trauma; Al-Sam –
Anti-Drug Abuse Association; Beterem – Safe Kids Israel; Or Yarok for Safer Driving; the Interdisciplinary Center to Prevent Violence against Children and Youth; the Ministerial Committee for the Struggle against Violence, and more.

Beyond all these, the survey results are presented to professionals who work with youth, at numerous forums, conferences, meetings and workshops with the participation of directors, supervisors, consultants, and instructors from national organizations and local authorities.

**Summary of Main Findings**

**Home and Family**

In this section, respondents were asked about their perceptions of matters concerning home and family. The first part examined the social support of family members, parental help and involvement in the daily life and schooling of the students, and family activities. The second part examined the socioeconomic background of the family as reported by the students.

- Some 91% of the students reported that it was easy for them to speak with at least one parent about matters that bothered them. Israel scored very high on this measure compared with the European average.
- Most of the students reported that their parents knew what was going on in their lives.
- The frequency of some family activities in which students participate decreases with age, such as: going on walks or engaging in sports and so on.
- Some 70% of the students reported that the family's financial situation was good or very good.
- Some 10% of the students reported that they sometimes went to bed hungry or that there was no food in the house (some 17% in the Arab sector and 6% in the Jewish sector).

**School**

In this section, respondents were asked about a number of areas relating to their day-to-day school experience: their general perceptions of school, sense of belonging, perception of rules and regulations, teacher-student relations, peer relations, attendance, scholastic achievement and measures of hidden dropout.

- Over the years, there has been a rising trend in the rate of students reporting that they liked school to a large extent. The percentage of students who so reported was some 33% while the European average was 30%.
- Students in the Arab sector reported liking school more so than students in the Jewish sector.
- Positive perceptions of school were more common among girls than boys.
- Some 50% of the students reported having no failing grades on their most recent report card.
- Some 25% of the students reported absenting themselves from lessons or studies for three days or more in the current school year.
- Some 79% of the students experienced pressure from studies, a feeling that increases with age.
Community Involvement and Volunteering
In this section, respondents were asked about the frameworks in which they volunteer, as well as the nature and frequency of their activities as volunteers.

- Over the years, the rate of community involvement and volunteering outside of the school framework has shown signs of increase, from 13% in 2004 to some 32% in 2014.
- Girls in both sectors reported a similar frequency of community volunteering (some 30%-31%).
- Boys in the Arab sector reported a higher frequency of community volunteering (47%) than boys in the Jewish sector (26%).
- Of the types of volunteer activity, the most popular were youth movements, political or religious movements, and student councils.

Patterns of Passing Time and Social Connectivity
In this section, respondents were asked about the number of friends they had, how they habitually passed the time with friends, their patterns of communication, social support, and feelings of loneliness.

- The rate of students spending time with friends outside of school on a daily basis, before 20:00 in the evening, was 22%. The European average was about 20%.
- Over the years, the rate of students reporting social isolation showed a decrease, although in the current survey (2014) there was a noticeable increase in the percentage of the three age groups reporting this. Furthermore, of the three, reports of loneliness were most prevalent in grade 6 – some 45% in 2014 versus 33%-39% over previous years.
- Regarding communication with friends via electronic devices (telephone, text messages or internet), a significant gap was found between the sectors; some 85% of the Jewish sector reported using these forms of communication versus some 33% of the Arab sector.

Leisure – Use of Computers and Media
This section examined leisure and recreational activity, including watching TV, playing computer games or just using the computer.

- Some 25% of the students reported playing computer games for at least four hours on a typical school day in their free time.
- Israeli students scored fourth place among the countries participating in the survey in the rate reporting computer use for games, chats, internet, email, homework and other activities for at least four hours on a typical school day.
- Israeli students scored second place (a rate of 29%) among the countries participating in the survey for watching television for at least four hours on a typical school day.

Eating and Dieting Habits
This section contained questions on eating breakfast, the frequency of consuming various foodstuffs and drinks such as fruit and vegetables; dieting, other activities to lose weight, personal hygiene, and the BMI measure.

- Some 50% of the students ate breakfast every day, midweek, while the European average was some 64%.
The proportion eating both fruit and vegetables more than once a day was some 20%.

The proportion eating fruit and vegetables more than once a day was higher for girls, students in the Arab sector, and younger students.

Some 25% of the students dieted to lose weight while the European average was 16%. Israel scored second place in the international comparison on this measure for students in grade 6, and in fourth place for students in grades 8 and 10.

Girls in the Jewish sector reported dieting or other steps to lose weight most frequently (33%), when compared with Jewish boys, and with boys and girls in the Arab sector.

The prevalence of dieting to lose weight rises with age among girls.

67% of the students reported brushing their teeth more than once a day.

Physical Activity
In this section, respondents were asked about the frequency of engaging in substantial physical exercise.

24% of the students reported engaging in substantial physical exercise (outside of school, at least four times a week and at least two times a week). The reported European average was some 20%.

Some 17% reported that they had done no daily physical exercise in the previous seven days.

Israel scored first place on the international scale in the non-performance of daily physical exercise.

Girls engage in physical exercise less than boys.

Engaging in physical exercise decreases with age.

The most common way of getting to school was on foot.

Sexual Behavior
In this section, respondents were asked about having experienced full sexual relations, the age of their first experience, and the use of contraceptives. These questions were asked only of 10th-graders. The questions were asked of secular Jewish students and, for the first time, also of students in the Arab sector.

22% of 10th-graders reported having had full sexual relations at some time. The European average for this age group was similar (21%).

69% of the students reporting sexual relations said that during their most recent experience they had used contraceptives (condoms), a percentage situating Israel in fifth place on the international scale.

31% of the students reporting sexual relations said that during their most recent experience, they or their partners had consumed alcohol.

Use of Addictive Substances

Cigarettes and Nargilah
This subsection contained questions on smoking cigarettes and nargilahs.
Over the past decade, the rate of cigarette smoking among youth has shown a trend of gradual decrease. Some 8% of the students reported smoking at least one cigarette a week compared with some 15% in 2002.

Boys reported higher rates than girls of smoking both cigarettes and nargilahs.

The rate of smoking nargilahs rises with age.

The rate of 10th-graders who had ever tried cigarette smoking was some 20%, somewhat higher than the European average for this age group – 17%.

**Alcohol**

In this section, respondents were asked about alcohol binging and getting drunk.

- Some 12% of the students reported that at least once in the previous month, they had drunk 5 or more alcohol servings within hours – a decrease from previous years of the survey.
- Boys report alcohol binging more than girls.
- Until recently, the rate reporting having ever got drunk gradually increased over the years. However, in 2011, after the introduction of the national program to reduce the problem of alcohol abuse, the trend turned around, decreasing from 20% in 2006 to 14% in 2011 and 10% in 2014.
- Compared with other countries on the measure of having gotten drunk at least once, Israeli students scored at the bottom of the scale, in 41st place.

**Drugs**

This chapter discusses the use of addictive substances such as cannabis, Ecstasy and LSD. The respondents were 10th-graders in all the sectors.

- The rate of Israeli students reporting having used cannabis at least once was 9% vs. the European average of 15%. In 2002 the reported rate of Israeli students was lower – 7%.
- The frequency of use of Ecstasy was some 4%.
- On both measures, the frequency was significantly higher among boys than girls.
- On both measures, the frequency was significantly higher in the Arab sector.

**Interpersonal Violence**

The questions in this section concerned involvement in pestering/bullying, the victims of bullying, involvement in physical fights, and carrying a weapon.

- Most of the findings showed a decrease in the rate of violence among Israeli youth over the years.
- The frequency of involvement in bullying on school grounds was higher among boys than girls.
- The frequency of involvement in violence was higher among students in the Arab sector than the Jewish sector.
- Some 10% of Israeli students reported participation in bullying or pestering on school grounds at least three times in the previous two months. The European average on this measure was some 8%.
Patterns of Injury
This chapter discusses injury – being hurt once in the previous 12 months to a degree that required medical attention from a physician, medic or nurse; being hurt in the previous 12 months to a degree that required more serious treatment such as a cast, stitches, surgery or hospitalization at least overnight. It also looks at the venue of the injury and the activity taking place at the time of the more serious injury.

- Some 46% of Israeli students were injured in the previous 12 months and required medical attention. The European average on this measure was 44%.
- Some 31% of the injured were treated with a cast, stitches, surgery or hospitalization at least overnight.
- The most common activity taking place at the time of injury was a game or sports practice.
- Boys reported injuries at a higher rate than girls.
- The frequency of reported injuries decreases in inverse relationship to age.

Emotional and Physical Health
In this section respondents were asked about their mental and physical health, in three main areas: their general feeling, physical and emotional symptoms, and self-image.

- On the international comparative measure of satisfaction with life, Israeli students scored relatively high.
- On the international comparative measure of emotional distress (anger, nervousness or bad mood), Israeli students scored relatively high. A rate of 23% reported having experienced such symptoms almost daily in the previous six months.
- Some 60% described their state of health as excellent.
- For students in the Jewish sector, the rate reporting excellent health has decreased since 2006.
- For students in the Arab sector, the rate reporting excellent health has increased since 2006.
- Students in the Arab sector reported symptoms of emotional distress and difficulty in falling asleep more frequently than students in the Jewish sector.
- In the Jewish sector alone: the rate of 10th-graders that had seriously considered suicide rose from 13% in 2002 to some 17% in 2004, whereas in the current survey, it dropped back to some 13%.
- The rate of students in the Jewish sector who had planned to attempt suicide decreased from 9% in 2004 to 7% in the current survey.

In conclusion, the survey findings describe a picture of the everyday life of Israeli youth. Some areas appear in a positive hue, others raise concern about behavioral patterns and negative experiences harmful to their wellbeing, health and safety.

Many of the encouraging findings relate to at-risk behaviors: a consistent decrease over the years in the proportion of youth experimenting with smoking cigarettes and nargilahs, consuming alcohol, and
involved in violence. Other major findings are an increase in positive feelings towards home and school over the years, and an increase in the rate of volunteering and community involvement.

On the other hand, there are a number of worrying findings: a higher sense of pressure from studies, a decrease in the extent of time spent with friends, and an increase in the use of computers and other electronic devices. In addition, the proportion of students dieting to lose weight is higher than the European average, and situates Israel on the top rungs of the comparison by country. In the same connection, Israeli youth show low rates of physical exercise relative to other countries. These findings expose trends that require attention and the introduction of real systemic changes of benefit to youth and their surroundings.