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Survey: Kids in periphery are materially poorer but happier

Noa Shpigel

Almost one third of children from small communities in Israel's periphery lack internet access at home – compared to only 3.6 percent of children in the center of the country. The report on the quality of life of Israeli children, which was released on Tuesday, shows that 31.9 percent of children in the periphery don't have internet at home and 32.8 percent lack clothing in good condition, compared to only 2.3 percent of children from the center of the country.

But in spite of the inequality in physical goods, children from these small communities are happier: 93.44 percent expressed general satisfaction with their lives, compared to 90.75 percent of children from central Israel.

The research was based on a survey of 2,733 children from all over Israel, with communities from the top half of the socioeconomic rankings defined as the "center" of the country, while communities from the bottom half and with less than 20,000 residents were defined as the "rural periphery."

Towns from the lower half of the socioeconomic rankings with over 20,000 residents were defined as the "urban periphery." The researchers did not include the responses of ultra-Orthodox children because they received only a shorter survey form due to disagreements over the nature of the questions.

The results show that there is a long list of other areas in which there is significant inequality between children from the periphery and center. For example, 33 percent of children from the rural periphery reported lacking the money for school trips, compared to only 4 percent of children in the higher socioeconomic groups; 35.7 percent of those in the rural periphery reported not having a cellphone, compared to 28.9 percent in the urban periphery and 9.4 percent in

the socioeconomic center. A third of children in the rural periphery reported lacking shoes, compared to 20 percent in the urban periphery and only 5.6 percent in the center. As for school supplies, 32.3 percent in the rural periphery didn't have what they needed compared to only 2.1 percent in the center.

The report was written by Prof. Asher Ben-Arieh and Dr. Hanita Kosher of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Dr. Daphna Gross-Manos of Tel Hai Academic College and Sagit Bruck of the Haruv Institute, with the help of the Central Bureau of Statistics.

The researchers also found that children from the urban periphery were less happy – 87.18 percent of them reported general satisfaction with their lives.

The differences in satisfaction between the three groups were statistically significant, said the authors. "It seems the rural periphery, in spite of the poorer material situation of the children living there, succeeds in maintaining the happiness of the children from the effects of the shortage," said Gross-Manos. "A deeper examination showed that this inequality stems mostly from dissatisfaction the children in the center feel about their lives

as students."

Gross-Manos said that the price of living with a shortage of material goods in the center is higher, and the happiness indexes plummet: Children from the socioeconomic center who lack adequate material goods are much less happy than children who lack such things in the periphery. "We don't see that in the periphery," he added.

The research team decided to divide the periphery into urban and rural communities based on the results of previous surveys, she said. "The quality of life of a child who lives in an Arab village is high, not like in a kibbutz it seems, but higher than in an Arab city."

The ultra-Orthodox community was left out of the study, but Gross-Manos said that "to the extent the Haredim would have participated, the results of the urban periphery would have become more extreme because in most of the Haredi cities the socioeconomic conditions are lower."

At the same time, she said, "Previous surveys had higher results for the happiness indexes in the Haredi community. Our ability to sample them in a proper manner is problematic, and it is a limitation that many surveys have today."



A student on a computer for distance learning.

Eyal Toueg