

# Children's Worlds National Report

## Germany



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# Introduction

The Children's Worlds study was conducted in Germany for the third time. The first time, it had a thematic focus<sup>1</sup>. This is because the Corona virus, as well as associated infrastructural changes, measures to contain the virus, etc., have a significant impact on children's lives. The German research team of Sabine Andresen and Johanna Wilmes reflected early on these changes in everyday experience and also changes in how childhood was publicly and politically negotiated. Together with colleagues from the University of Hildesheim, we interviewed young people between the ages of 15 and 30 as well as parents of younger children about their well-being and that of their children as early as April 2020, immediately after the onset of the "Corona Crisis" in Germany. In the ongoing pandemic, the studies JuCo I, II and III ("Jugend und Corona" [Youth and Corona]), KiCo and FamCo (both surveys about the situation of parents, how they experience family life and their children) were conducted.

This is where the Children's Worlds study comes in. We asked 9- to 13-year-old children online about their well-being, how they experienced the Corona period in retrospect and how they currently perceive it. The international context in which the study is embedded provides unique opportunities for comparison. Corona is a worldwide phenomenon, which is, however, dealt with in a country-specific manner.

In Germany, the first cases of COVID-19 disease appeared in Bavaria in late January 2020. By the end of February, additional cases were emerging in the west and southwest of the country. A crisis team was quickly appointed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Federal Ministry of Health to contain the pandemic and prevent the spread of the virus. Various measures were quickly adopted. For example, all schools and educational institutions were closed for the first time on March 14, 2020. One week later, far-reaching contact restrictions were closed. Outside of one's own household, contacts should be avoided as much as possible. Staying in public spaces was possible to a limited extent and partly restricted to persons from the common household. Restaurants and service establishments were closed. In Germany, it was permitted to be outside at all times - albeit with restrictions on certain groups of people and a certain number of people. These restrictions were largely maintained until the beginning of June 2020.

The situation of children and families was particularly affected and at the same time received little focus. Only during the course of the pandemic did political awareness of possible consequences for the younger generations also grow.

Data collection for this study took place in the fall of 2021: October 25 to November 29, 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> We heartily thank Marvin Lukas Biebert for his assistance and work on the study.

## Sample

First of all, it should be noted that children were not directly interviewed in the German study. For data protection reasons, parents were asked to give the questionnaire to their children. But in many cases, parents indicated that they answered the questions together with their child. Thus, despite indirect access, it is assumed to reflect children's views and we use equivalent wording in this data report.

In total, data are available from 590 children between the ages of 9 and 13.

As can be seen from Table 1, most of the participating children are 9 years old, at 30.8 percent, and between 15.1 and 19.3 percent of the participants are 10, 11, 12, or 13 years old. The average age is thus 10.7 years.

How old are you?					
		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	9	182	30,8	30,8	30,8
	10	102	17,3	17,3	48,1
	11	114	19,3	19,3	67,5
	12	89	15,1	15,1	82,5
	13	103	17,5	17,5	100,0
	Gesamt	590	100,0	100,0	

Table 1: Age distribution

The gender distribution is relatively balanced. 51 percent of participants are girls, 48.1 percent are boys, and 4 participants would not classify themselves in the binary gender system.

Especially in the context of the Corona pandemic, it is important to capture the domestic conditions of the sample. This is because various studies have already shown a significant impact on young people's and families' feelings of stress and well-being to be significantly related to housing conditions (Lips 2021).

Most of the children in our sample live in a house with a garden (67.1%), and 30.9% live in an apartment, so it can be assumed that we have a relatively privileged sample.

Moreover, 91.6% of the children live with their family in a home. 7.9% of children live in different places because their parents live separately. 3 children live with their family, but not in their home.

## Experience with Corona and infrastructural effects

In different questions, we first captured what infrastructural impact the Corona pandemic had on their daily lives.

Figure 1 shows that most children (64%) know someone who has been infected with the virus. A quarter of the children had someone in their relatives infected. 12.6% of respondents said themselves or someone in their home had already been infected. So the virus is by no means something abstract that they only hear about or learn about from the media. Many have had direct experience of it and have noticed that someone in their immediate environment has been infected.

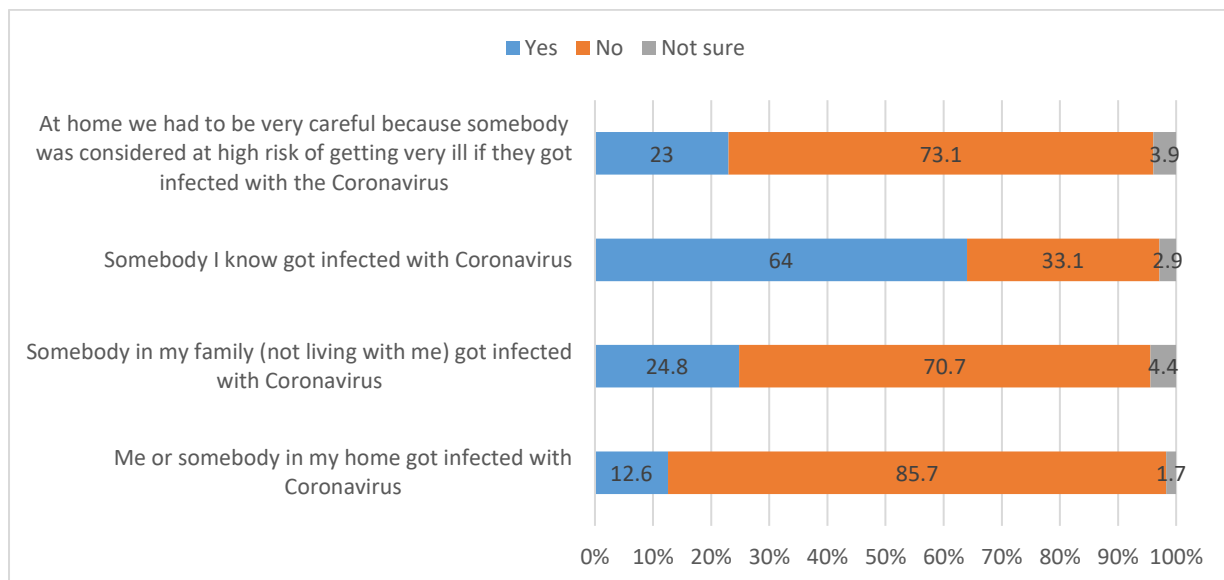


Figure 1: Experiences with infections

This question is followed by whether the children themselves have had quarantine experiences (Figure 2). More than a third of the children have already been in quarantine and about one in ten of the respondents even several times. At this point, it is at the same time interesting to note that almost a quarter have to be very careful at home because they live with people for whom infection with the virus can pose a high health risk.

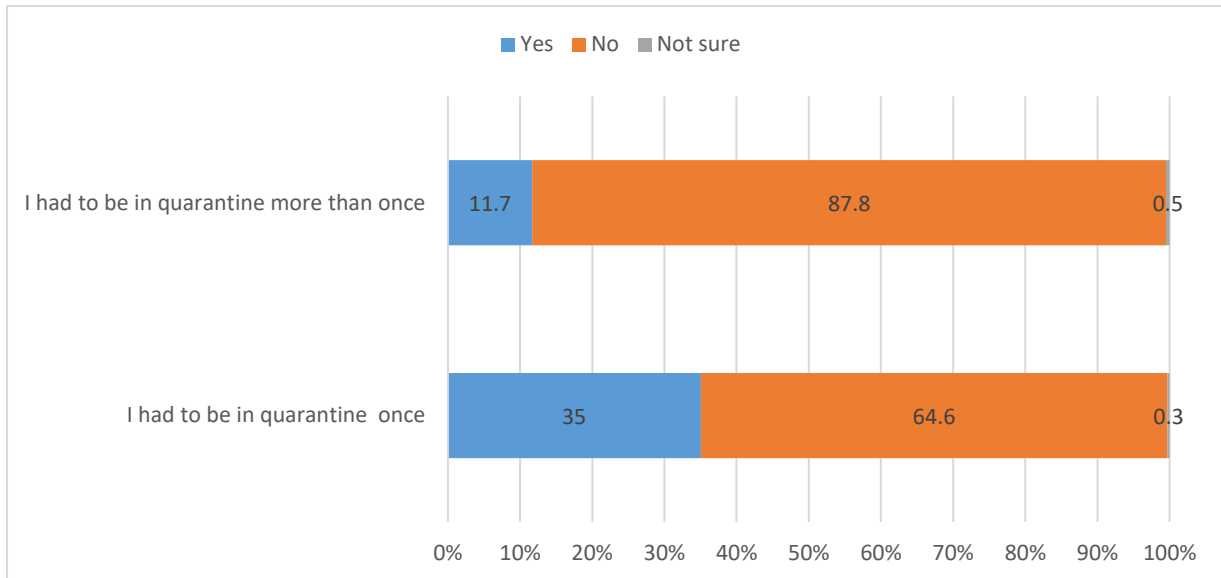


Figure 2: Experiences with quarantine

The infrastructural experiences are very clear. 80.4% state that all people in their place of residence were in lockdown, 9.6% are not sure about this. 86.7% of the children surveyed had to stay home for several days, which is not true for 12.1%. Almost all children (96.9%) were unable to attend school for many days during the pandemic. A similar number (96.5%) said their school was closed. 14.1% of the children experienced that at least one parent could no longer work due to the pandemic and had to draw social benefits.

### Feeling of (Un-)Safety and Protected

The time of the Corona pandemic is very much characterized by a feeling of uncertainty. This prompted us to ask more specific questions. Where do the children feel safe or unsafe? The following findings can give us answers, although they do not indicate what triggers the feeling of insecurity. This may be due to the virus, but completely different factors may also be decisive. This was not asked about at this point and would need to be captured, for example, through qualitative research approaches. However, we can show whether children feel safe or unsafe in certain places at all and, in later in-depth analyses, how the feeling of safety or insecurity affects well-being.

Specifically related to the virus, we can find that 4.9% do not feel protected from the virus, 10.3% a little, 28.5% somewhat, 24.3% of the children surveyed feel very protected, and 31.9% completely.

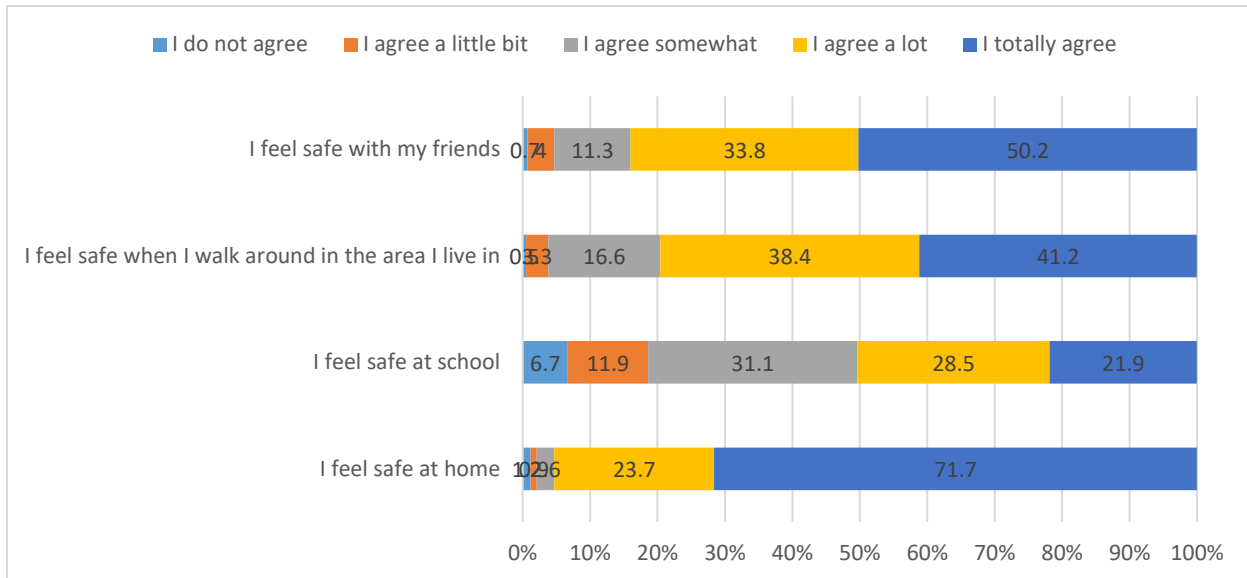


Figure 3: Safety

At home, at school, in the neighborhood, with friends, children feel least safe at school and safest at home, as Figure 3 shows.

## Feelings

The survey also asked about various emotional states of the children. Questions were asked about missing as well as whether the children were bored or felt lonely. Based on the fact that children spent significantly more time at home during the Corona period and that things are not always conflict-free there, the question was asked whether they have problems with siblings. As Figure 4 shows, this is certainly the case for almost 20% of the children.

Figure 4 also shows that many of the children surveyed miss their friends and relatives. At this point, it would be interesting to see whether this result is reinforced in bi-national families.

About 40% of the children agree very much or completely that they are bored. A quarter of the children feel lonely.



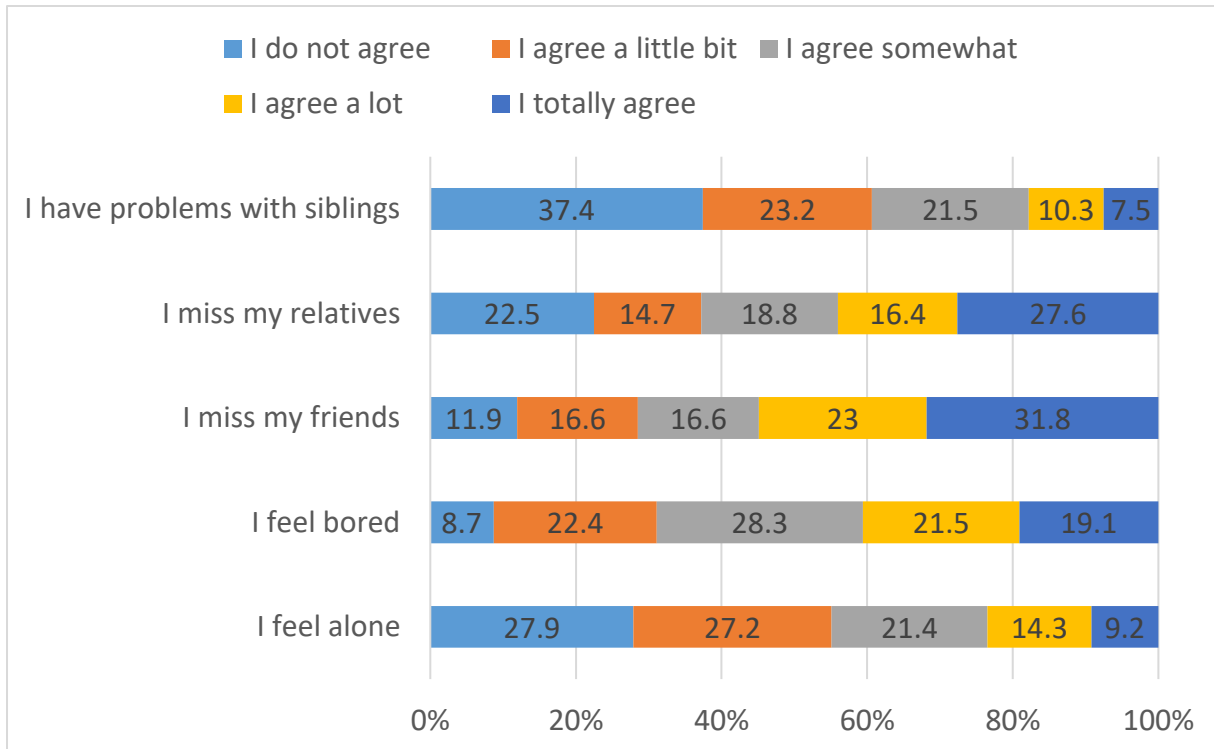


Figure 4: Feelings

### Possession and material resources

In order to inquire about material resources as well as to identify possible deficiencies, the children were presented with a list to which they could tick whether they had or did not have the items. In this form, however, it is important to emphasize that poverty risk can only be surmised from selective items. Moreover, the list is not accompanied by an assessment of living situation. It is well known, especially from poverty research, that experiences of lack are primarily associated with having no choices. Parents affected by poverty hardly have the choice whether or not to buy their child an expensive cell phone or to give them pocket money. For families without financial difficulties, this is more a question of parenting style. Of the items surveyed, at most the items "Enough money for school trips and activities," "two pairs of shoes in good condition," or "a place at home to study," which indicates cramped living conditions, could indicate a poverty situation, since these are social participation or basic needs (Figure 5).

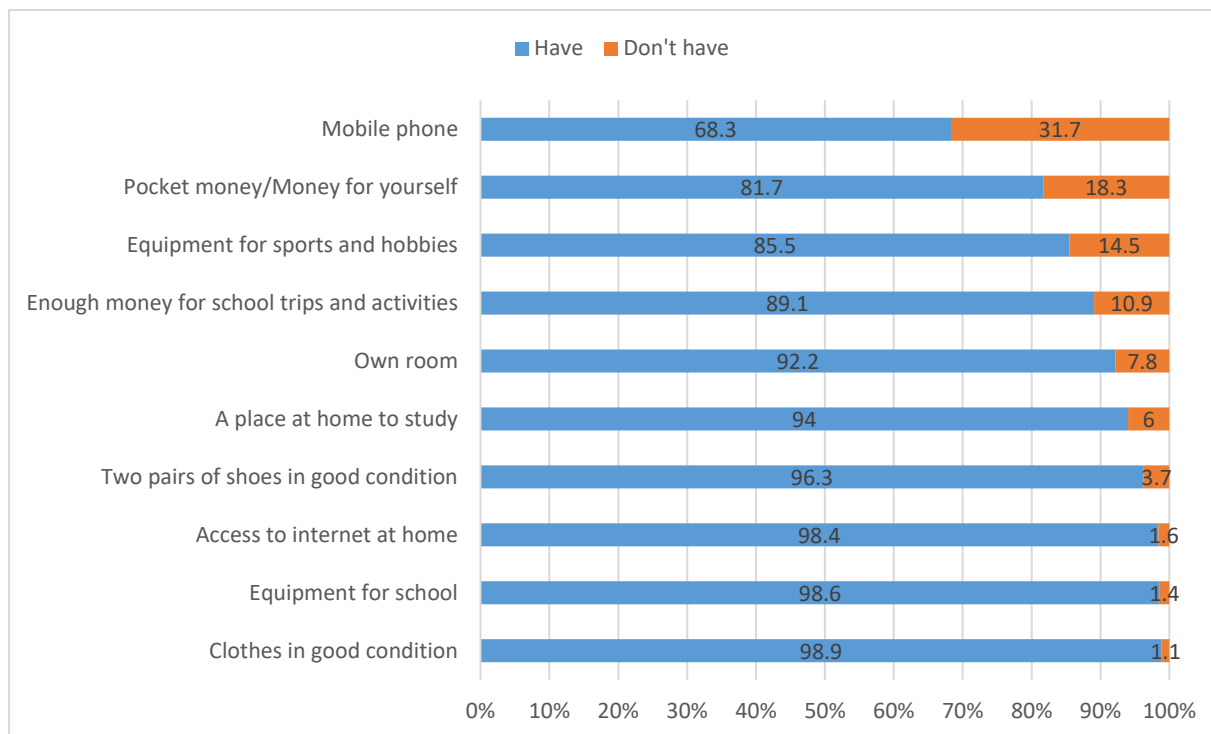


Figure 5: Possessions and material resources

Not having a quiet place to study 6% of the children surveyed, not having two pairs of good shoes 3.7% and not having enough money for school trips and activities one in ten children in the sample.

In addition, the children were asked if they had enough to eat each day during the lockdown. One child never had enough to eat, 9 children sometimes, 98% often or always had enough to eat during the lockdown.

### Information about the virus and the current situation

An important part of the survey was to find out where children get information about the coronavirus and, in a second step, how this information affects their well-being. Before they were asked about their sources of information, the question was whether they felt sufficiently informed at all (Table 2).

	I do not agree	I agree a little bit	I agree somewhat	I agree a lot	I totally agree
We speak together about the Coronavirus in my home	1,8	10,7	14,1	34,7	38,6
My opinions about the	1,6	2,2	8,9	35,0	52,2

Coronavirus are taken seriously in my home

I have enough information about the Coronavirus	1,3	6,3	29,9	36,9	25,7
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Table 2: Information about Corona

Over 60% of children feel well or very well informed. Around 30% say they have somewhat enough information about the virus. The majority feel that their opinions are taken seriously at home. However, significantly fewer children talk about the virus at home. 12.5% of the children surveyed do not talk at all or only a little about the virus, 14% somewhat.

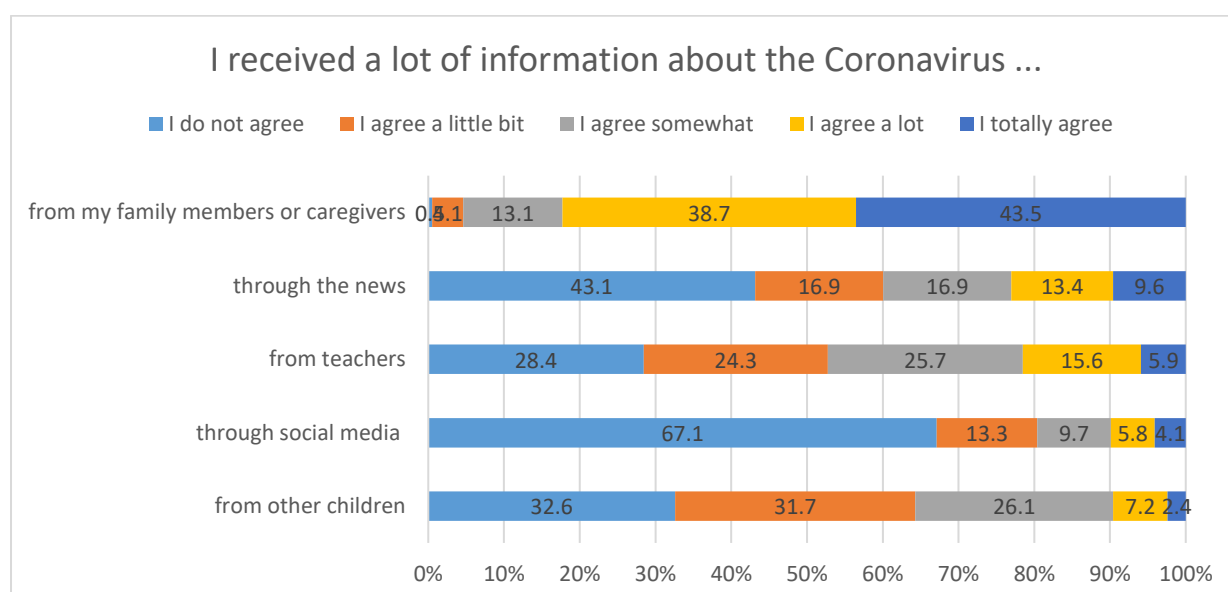


Figure 6: Source of information

With a view to Figure 6, family members are the most important source of information. In contrast, social media play the least important role in this age group.

### Satisfaction before and during the pandemic

The children were asked how satisfied they were with certain aspects before the pandemic and have been since. A scale of 0 to 10 was used, with 0 meaning that the children were not at all satisfied and 10 meaning completely satisfied.

Satisfaction ...	Before Corona		During Corona	
	M	SD	M	SD
With the relationships I had with people I live with	8,92	1,673	7,83	2,366

With the relationships I had with my friends	8,67	2,05	5,00	3,128
With how I normally spent my time	8,64	1,78	4,38	2,682
With the things I used to learn at school	7,57	2,466	3,92	2,796

Table 3: Satisfaction before and since Corona

As the comparison of means in Table 3 shows, the children are most satisfied, both currently and retrospectively, with the relationships with the people with whom they live. In both cases, they are least satisfied with what they learn at school. The biggest difference is in the item on how the children spend their time. In this area, satisfaction has worsened particularly significantly.

We also asked the children more generally how happy they were with their lives before Corona and how happy they are with their lives now. Here, impressive results emerge. Looking back on life "before", the children ticked an average of 8.97 on a scale of 0 to 10 (SD=1.371). For their current life they mark 6.04 (SD=2.782) on average. Here it is also noticeable that the children are relatively unanimous in the evaluation of their lives and tick similarly. The SD value, on the other hand, indicates that the current situation is perceived and assessed quite differently.

## Worries

The Corona pandemic brought worries on different levels. The fact that children also share concerns and react sensitively to developments in their living environment prompted us to take a closer look and ask them what they had been worried about recently - more precisely, in the last month. In the results, which are summarized on the basis of mean values in Table 4, it is striking that the children surveyed are clearly less concerned about an infection or the virus than much more about the consequences of the pandemic on a social, family and personal level.

<b>During the last month, how worried have you been about the following things in your life?</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
That I may infect other people with the Coronavirus	3,18	3,432
That I may get infected by the Coronavirus	3,21	3,435
That people I know may get infected by the Coronavirus	4,09	3,578
The money my family has during the Coronavirus period	4,44	3,755
That I may get bad school marks because of the Coronavirus situation	5,18	3,783
By the Coronavirus situation	5,73	3,431
The changes in my life as a student because of the Coronavirus situation	7,08	3,326

Table 4: Worries

## Everyday life and how children spend their time

In the study, the children were asked how much time they spend on different activities. The background to this question is the assumption that children may be spending their time differently than they did before the pandemic, or that there may have been a shift in the allocation of time and interests. This could be explored further in more in-depth analyses and

comparative values from previous Children's Worlds studies could be used. At this point, the focus is on descriptive presentation. An overview of all items queried can be seen in Figure 7.

It quickly becomes clear that the children spent most of their time at home doing appropriate activities during the pandemic. How much time was spent playing outside varies greatly. It is also striking that social media activities stand out in a polarizing way in the age group of the sample. Around half of the children do not use it at all and presumably have no access to social media, whereas 30% use it every day.

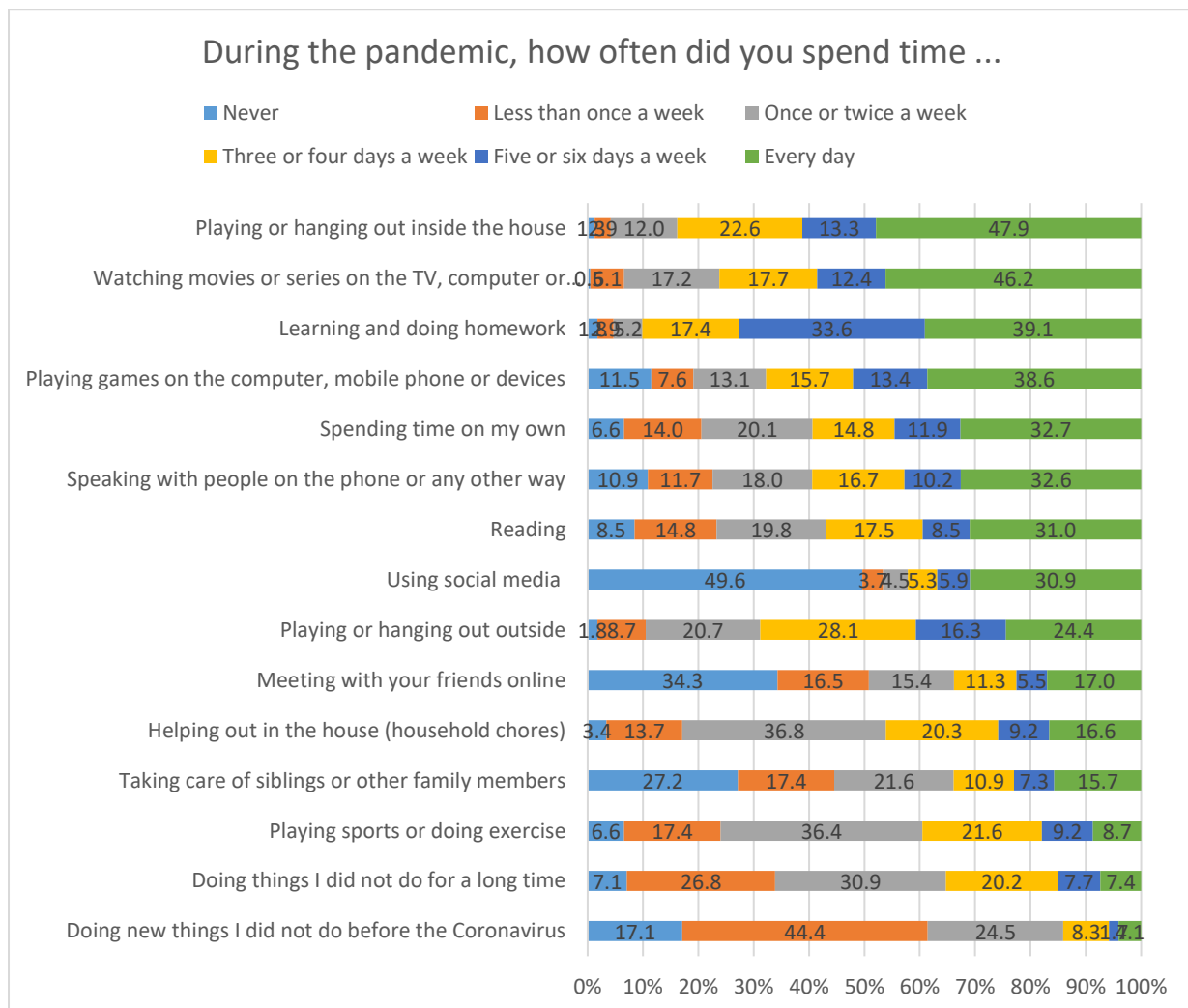


Figure 7: Activities

## School

As in almost all countries, schools in Germany were initially closed during the pandemic, vacations were extended and lessons were shifted to the digital home. We therefore wanted to know from the children how they experienced this phase, how learning worked at home and what they missed about school. This dimension of well-being took up a large portion of the survey overall. First, on the experience during school closures and how they learned during it: Figure 8 shows that children learned particularly with their parents or other people they live with, or online with their teachers. The item "During the coronavirus, when schools were closed, I managed to continue with my learning from home," which aims to capture whether children had difficulties learning at home or whether it worked well, is also informative. 7.3% disagree with the item, that is, they did not manage to learn from home. 21.4% agree a little, 28.3% agree somewhat, 23% agree a lot and for every fifth child learning at home was no problem at all.

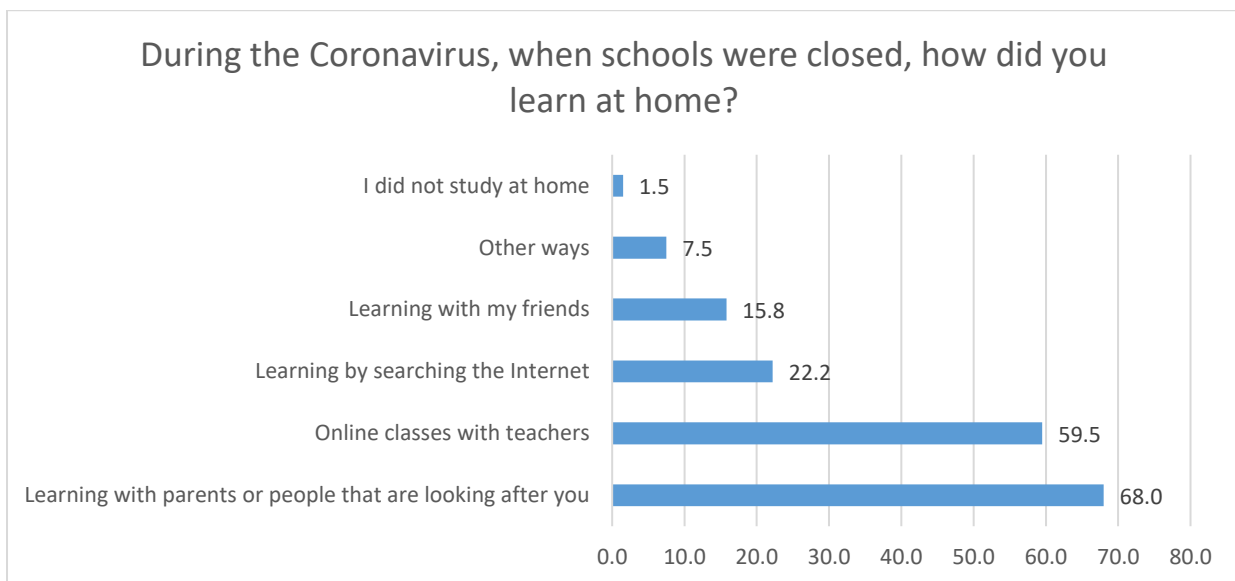


Figure 8: Learning at home

When it comes to learning and especially teaching at home, access to the Internet is relevant.

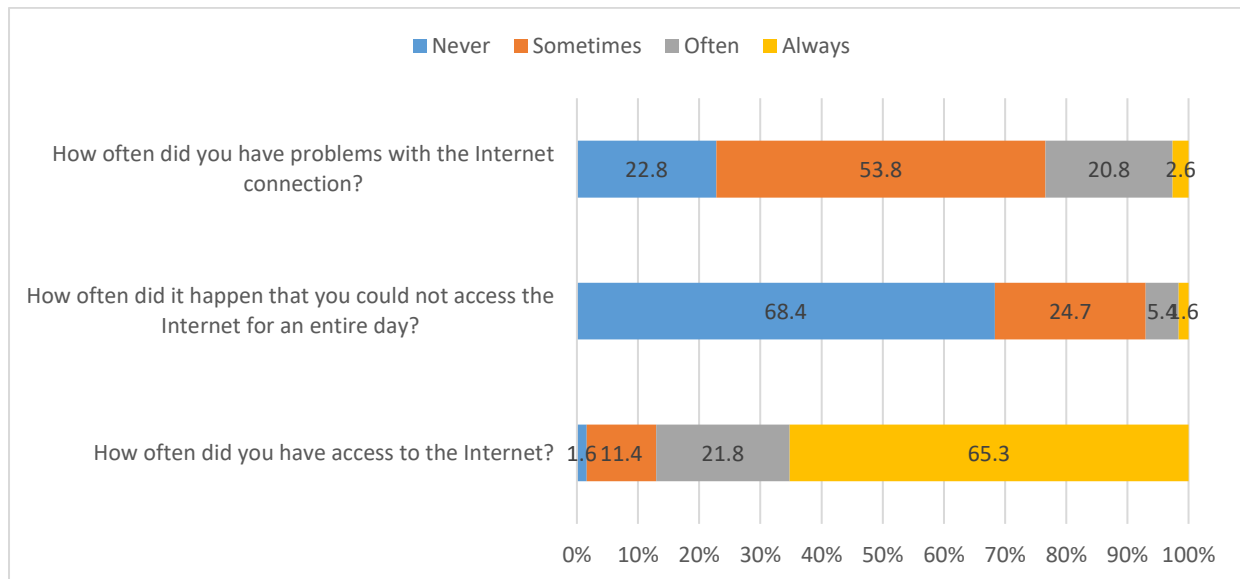


Figure 9: Internet access

Figure 9 shows that about three quarters of the children never or only sometimes had problems with the Internet connection during the online lessons. Only rarely did it happen that children had no Internet for a whole day.

We also asked whether the children got along well with the different online platforms they used during the online lessons. 18% reported not being able to cope with them, which is a significant number. 42.6% had difficulties with the platforms and for 39.5% of the children surveyed it was easy to cope with the platforms.

When asked what children miss in times of online instruction at school, it becomes clear that it is primarily the other children. Nevertheless, in many cases it is also necessary explanations and exchanges with teachers (Figure 10).

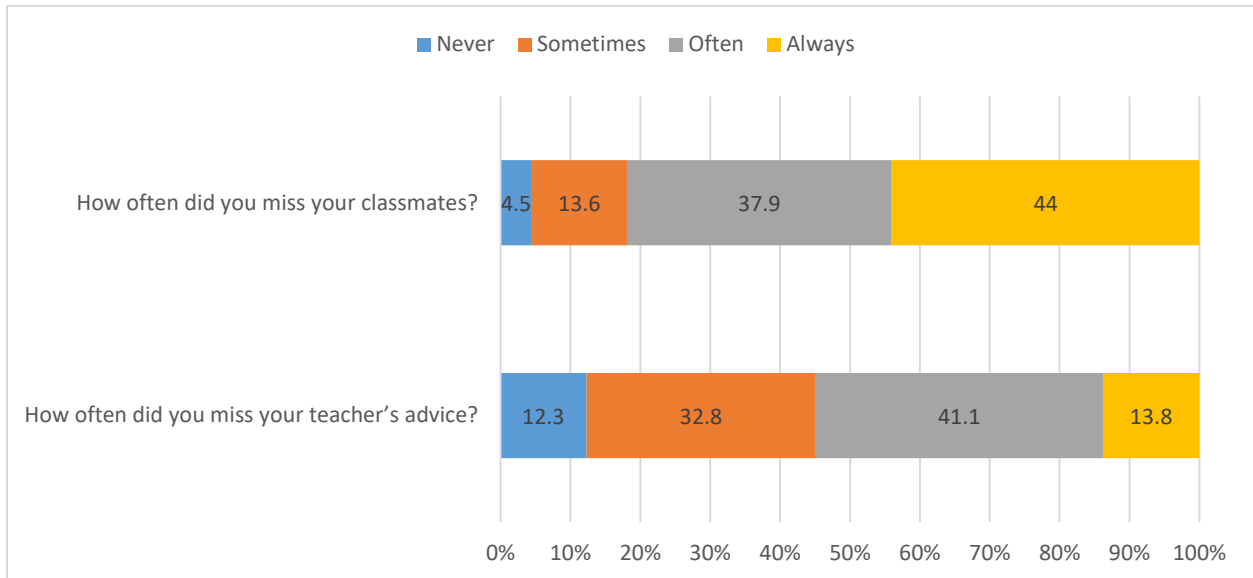


Figure 10: Missing classmates and teachers

### Keeping in touch and social media

Despite the lockdown, about half of the children met up with friends and thus kept in touch. Social media plays a more minor role at this age (Figure 11)

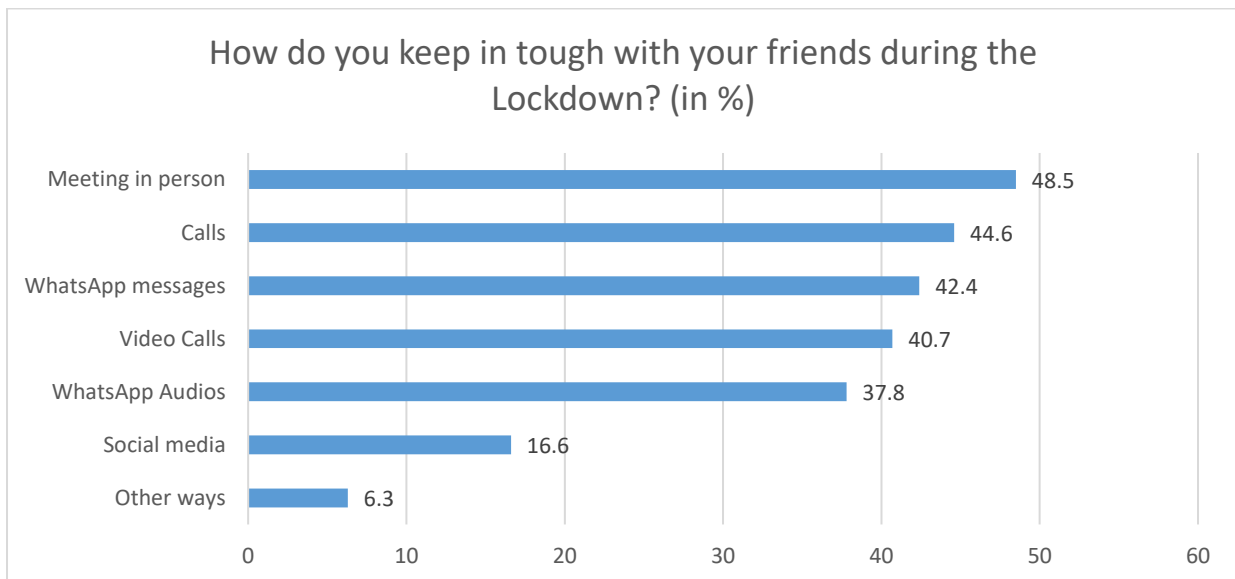


Figure 11: Keeping in touch during lockdown

With regard to social media, we also asked how the children would classify themselves in their usage behavior. In this context, it is important to note the previous findings that access to social media is polarized and that just under half of the children do not stay in contact with other children via social media.



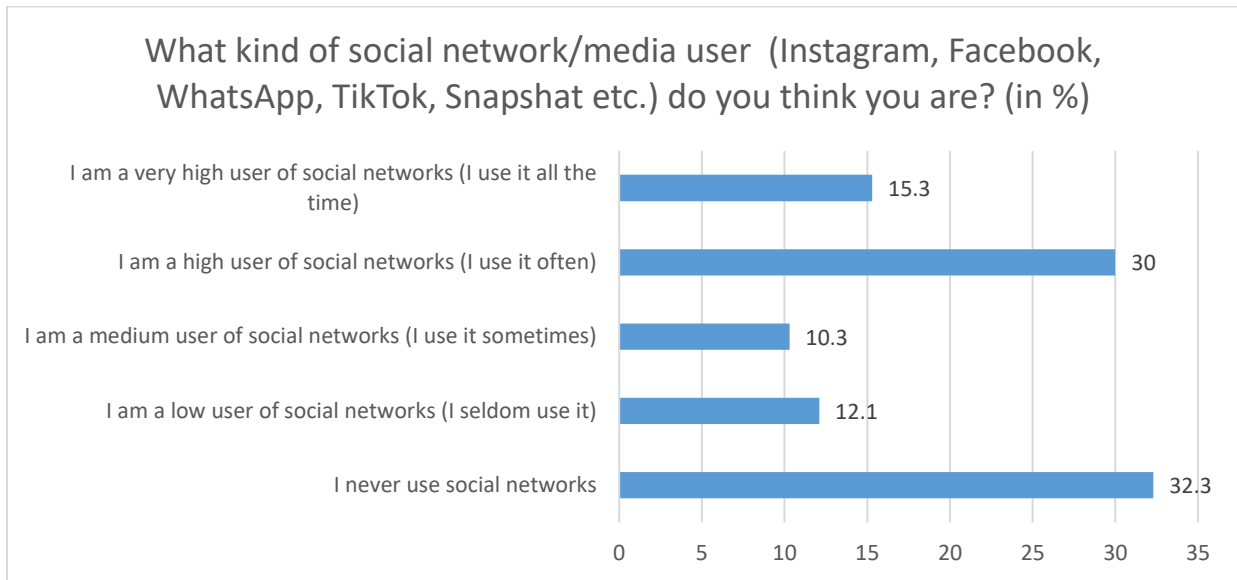


Figure 12: Social media usage

### Support and relationship experiences

When schools are closed for children, recreational activities are restricted and they are only allowed to meet a limited number of people, friendships and contacts with peers and other people sometimes take a different form. In the survey, we asked who the children felt well supported by during the pandemic (Figure 13).

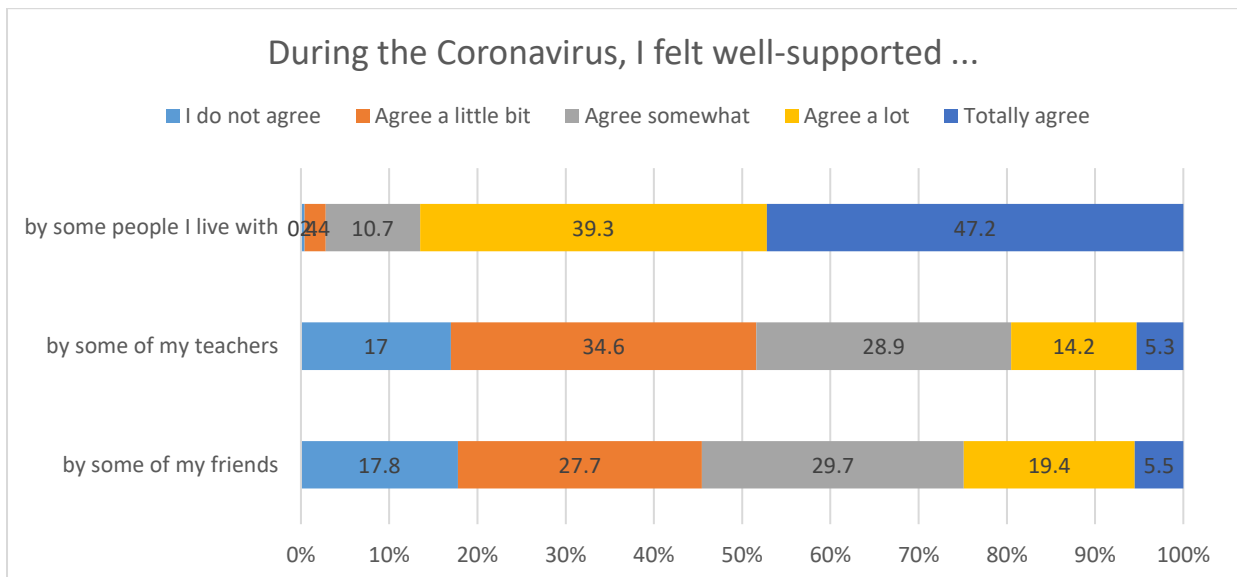


Figure 13: Support

Above all, they felt well-supported by some people they live with.<sup>2</sup> Support from teachers and friends was significantly lower.

When asked how relationships have changed (Figure 14), it is immediately apparent that it is a rarity for children in the age group surveyed to make friends online. About half of the children also state that Corona has had an impact on their friendships. It is reasonable to assume that these are negative effects. The assumption that children have developed a closer relationship with their family is only confirmed by half of the respondents.

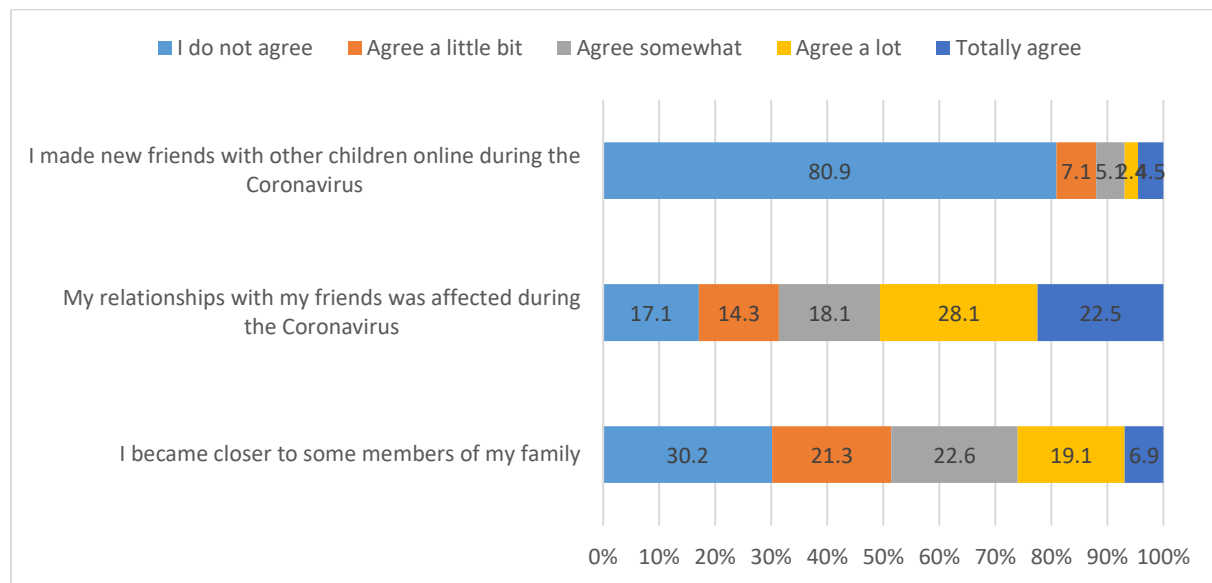


Figure 14: Relationships

### Overall subjective well-being

On a scale of 0 to 10, the children were able to indicate items related to their subjective well-being (Table 5).

The results overlap with other study findings. It has already been documented several times that children feel they have not learned much during the pandemic and, above all, that they are worried about their future.

	N	M	SD
I feel that I am learning a lot at the moment	491	6,05	2,896
I feel positive about my future	486	6,34	3,074
I am good at managing my daily responsibilities	489	6,78	2,536
My life is going well	492	7,20	2,574
I enjoy my life	491	7,25	2,550
I am happy with my life	492	7,42	2,582

<sup>2</sup> The question here is whether the parents have exerted any influence.

I have enough choice about how I spend my time	488	7,47	2,223
I like being the way I am	488	7,58	2,483
I have a good life	492	7,72	2,519
People are generally friendly towards me	490	7,81	2,029
The things that happen in my life are excellent	491	7,96	2,404

Table 5: Overall Subjective well-being

Furthermore, the children were asked how they felt during the last two weeks (Table 6).

	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Last two weeks: How often feeling Sad	486	4,71	2,876
Last two weeks: How often feeling Stressed	433	5,38	2,846
Last two weeks: How often feeling Calm	470	5,53	2,529
Last two weeks: How often feeling Bored	472	5,63	2,851
Last two weeks: How often feeling Full of energy	478	6,27	2,731
Last two weeks: How often feeling Happy	484	6,74	2,467

Table 6: Last two weeks (Scale!)

## Corona-Anxiety-Scale

The spreading virus scared some people more than others. Exactly what the children were afraid of or how their fear manifested itself was recorded in the Corona Anxiety Scale (Figure 15).

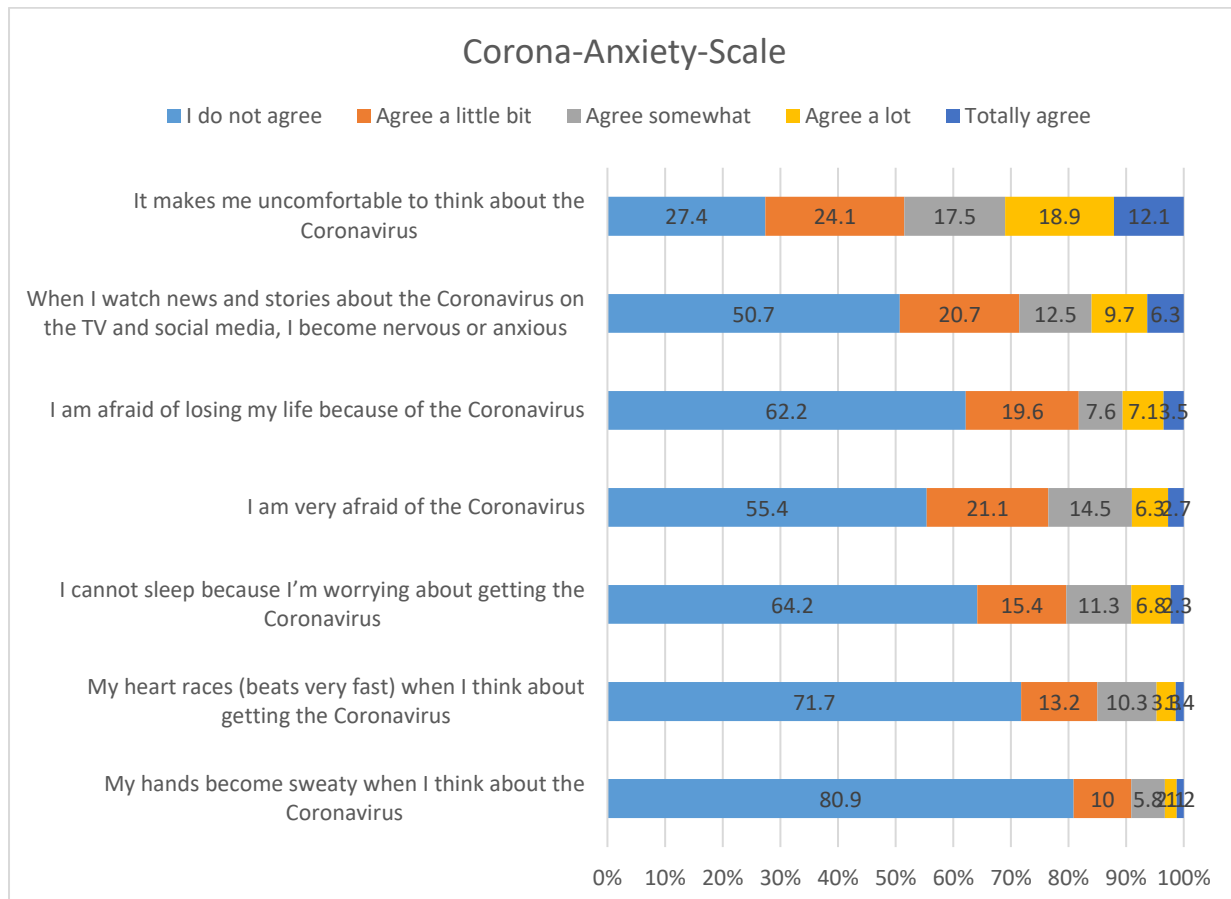


Figure 15: Corona Anxiety Scale

In the scale, it is noticeable that only a few children have developed great, physically perceptible fears. Most of them are comfortable when thinking about the virus. That the type of information they see or are confronted with has an influence is to be assumed and investigated more closely. Hints can already be seen at this point. However, it should also be noted that there are children in the sample who have developed strong fears about the virus itself.

## Satisfaction across dimensions

If we look across dimensions at the children's satisfaction scores, which they ticked on a scale from 0 = completely dissatisfied to 10 = completely satisfied, findings from other studies are reflected. Children in this age group are already not very satisfied or only moderately satisfied with their future prospects. We know from other studies that this relates both to the personal

level, for example with uncertainties about what career opportunities they will have, and to the societal level with regard to climate change, political instability, war, and so on.

Likewise, they are less satisfied with how their time is organized and how seriously they are taken by adults. Children of different age groups report again and again about partly also adultistic experiences. Overall, it should be noted that children want to have a say when something is decided about them. They want to be involved in discussions and exercise their right to participation.

<b>Satisfaction with:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
What may happen later in your life	417	6,64	2,523
How you use your time	479	7,06	2,404
How you are listened to by adults in general	477	7,20	2,308
The way you look	473	7,39	2,401
The freedom you have	480	7,68	2,236
The area where you live	479	7,93	2,093
Your life as a whole	480	7,95	2,106
Your friends	479	8,21	2,076
The things you have	478	8,40	1,742
About how safe you feel	480	8,40	1,910
Your health	481	8,56	1,913
The house you live in	482	8,70	1,855
The people you live with	482	8,80	1,466

*Table 7: Satisfaction*

## **Conclusion**

The survey of children in this age group shows limitations for Germany. It was not possible to survey the children in the schools. Due to the lockdowns, the schools do not have the resources to allow data collection.

The issue of missing lessons, digital lessons, the problem that it is unclear how high the proportion of children who have spent significantly less time learning than before the pandemic is still a major challenge.

We cannot verify how much influence parents had in the online survey.

The qualitative focus groups and individual interviews provide important insights into the children's experience during the pandemic. We will present another report on this at a later stage.

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