

# Children's Worlds National Report

## Finland



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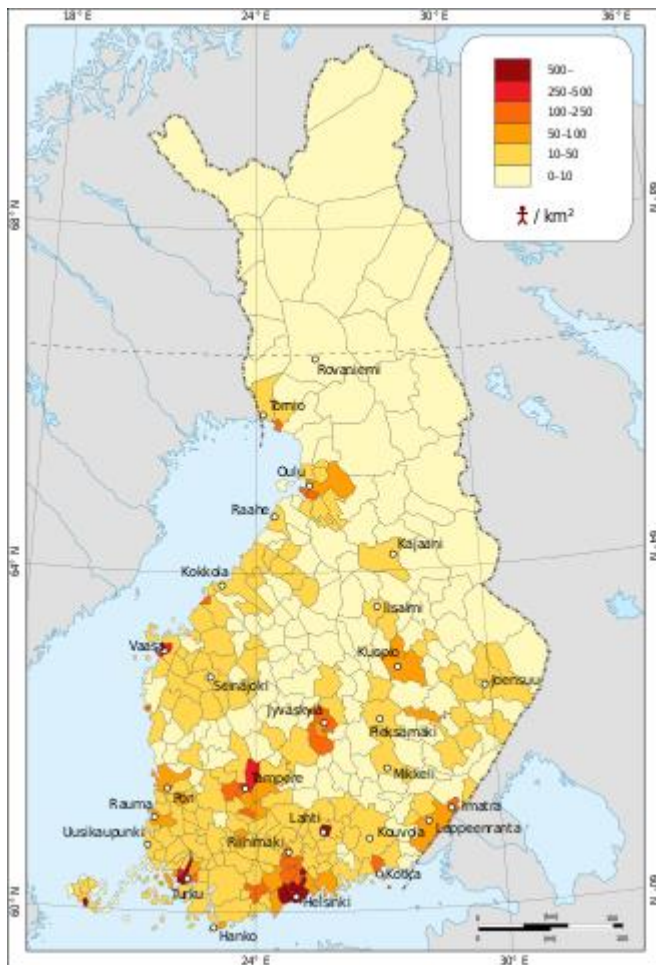
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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Context and population

- Population 5 549 807 (January 31<sup>st</sup> 2022)
- Size of the country: 338 424 km<sup>2</sup>; Finland divided into 18 provinces/regions and five major regions (including Åland)
- Children N=851 794 15.4 % (0-14 age, in the end of 2021)
- Religion (2021): Evangelical-Lutheran 67 %; Orthodox Church 1,1 %; Others 1,6%; 1,45 M of those not belonging to any religion 25 % (Men 30 %, Women 23%)
- Ethnicity: 249 452 population in Finland with foreign background (in the end of 2020). Altogether more than 170 different ethnic groups, 1. Estonians (n= 50 866); 2. Russians (n= 28 866); 3. Iraqis (n= 14 708); 4. Chinese (n= 10 458); 5. Swedish (n=8041).
- Economic context: GDP= 49 041,34 USD / capita (2020)
- Education system: 0-6-years-olds: early childhood education and care (ECEC, duration in years 0-6); 6-years-olds: pre-primary education (duration in years 1); 7-16-years-olds: basic education (comprehensive school, duration in years 9); (voluntary additional year 16-17-olds, duration in years 1); 17-19-years-olds general upper secondary schools (matriculation examination, duration in years 3) or vocational institutions (vocational qualifications, duration in years 3); 19-years-olds on-bachelor's degrees (universities, duration in years 3) or bachelor's degrees (universities of applied sciences, duration in years 3,5-4); master's degree (universities, duration in years 2), master's degree, (universities of applied sciences, duration in years 1-1,5), doctoral degrees, licentiate degrees (universities)
- Children's rights: Finland has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991. Children have a right to participate in decision making that promotes development of the society. Their right to influence decision making that concerns themselves is emphasized in several legal instruments. According to the Constitution of Finland (731/1999) the public authorities shall promote the opportunities for the individual to participate in societal activity and to influence the decisions that concerns him or her. This obligation applies to children and youngsters as well.

Figure 1. Population map of Finland (Räisänen 2010)<sup>1</sup>



### Context of COVID-19 in individual country contexts

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all the Finnish children however the extent and duration have changed. A serious threat has been that the crisis will increase inequality between children. To compete the threat on 25 May 2020, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health appointed a working group to assist in the preparation of the National Child Strategy. The working group was tasked to survey the rights of the child and the wellbeing of children and families and to strengthen these in the post-crisis measures related to the COVID-19 epidemic. (Finnish Government 2021.)

According to the working group, children's rights and their special position are easily disregarded in emergency conditions and in post-emergency measures. It also noted that, when the report was published in June, the crisis was already increasing inequality among children and young people. Profound impacts of the prolonged crisis on the wellbeing of children, young people and families have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g., increase of depression, school drop out and decrease of social relations. During the crisis, the limitations regarding social interaction has strongly affected children's everyday lives both

within early childhood education and the primary school, not to mention leisure time. These restrictions have both direct and indirect influence on familiar and other communication. In 2021 subjective loneliness has increased compared to 2019: 22–26 % of girls have felt lonely, of boys about 10 %.

School bullying has increased in Finland during the crisis slightly -although also distance learning has decreased bullying to some extent. In 2021 17 % (16 % in 2019) of 4th and 5th grader boys and 11 % (8% in 2019) of girls have experienced physical threat at least once a week. (Helakorpi & Kivimäki 2021.)

## **1.2 Sampling: Strategy and outcome**

The Finnish sample was designed to achieve a locally representative sample according to types of school and geographical distribution in Turku region (South-West Finland). The target was 1000 students per age group 10. The sampling strategy is based on experiences of former and other school-based surveys, which showed the difficulty to reach schools to participate in the survey and parents giving their active consent for their children.

We send a request to participate to every school in Turku which is the fourth biggest city in Finland. However due to so many declines we decided to enlarge the sample area to a nearby town, Naantali (about 19 000 inhabitants). So, this way we managed to get 1004 pupils. In Naantali we sent request to three schools (3/10 school).

## 2. Results

### 2.1 About you: Q1-2, Q5-10

The first results show the respondents' background information.

Table 1. Sample by age and gender (N and %)

	9 year-old	10 year-old	11 year-old	12 year-old	Else	Total
<b>Boy</b>	112(21.9)	219(42.8)	146(28.5)	34(6.6)	1(0.20)	512(51.0)
<b>Girl</b>	98(20.4)	221(46.0)	123(25.6)	38(7.9)	0	480(47.9)
<b>I do not think of myself as a boy or a girl</b>	2(18.2)	4(36.4)	3(27.3)	1(9.1)	1(9.1)	11(1.1)
<b>Total</b>	212(21.1)	444(43.3)	272(27.1)	73(7.3)	2(0.2)	1003(100)

10-years-olds formed the biggest age group. Number of boys was slightly bigger than girls with a somewhat higher number of boys in the 11-year-old sample. In addition, the sample included 11 children who reported they do not think of themselves as boys or girls.

Table 2. Home type (At present, with whom do you live?, %)

<b>With my family, in our home</b>	75
<b>With my family, but at a different place</b>	0,8
<b>With my family, but in more than one home, because my parents live in different homes</b>	21,90
<b>With my family, but in more than one home, because my family has more than one home</b>	1,7
<b>In residential care</b>	0,20
<b>In a family different than mine</b>	0,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Most of the Finnish children lived with their families -either with both parents (75%) or in single parent families (22%).

Table 3. Lockdown during the Coronavirus pandemic (The situation was during the Coronavirus pandemic)

Item	Yes	No	Not Sure
Everybody in my city/town/village was in lockdown for many days	73,1	7,2	19,7
Me or somebody in my home got infected with Coronavirus	6,8	89,2	4
Somebody in my family (not living with me) got infected with Coronavirus	7,6	78,7	13,7
Somebody I know got infected with Coronavirus (e.g.: from my neighborhood or in a friend's family)	35,7	34,1	30,2
At home we had to be very careful because somebody was considered at high risk of getting very ill if they got infected with the Coronavirus	26,2	59,1	14,6
I had to stay at home for many days	29,7	63,7	6,7
I could not attend school for many days	29,4	62,9	7,7
There were times where I had to be in my home all day (including the garden, yard or balcony, if you have) because of the Coronavirus	34,3	51,5	14,2
There were times where I was only allowed to leave my home for a few hours during the day because of the Coronavirus	18,2	69,1	12,7

In Finland, all the schools were closed at some point during the spring 2021 as was practically all the business. However, grocery stores were open, so in Finland we did not have a complete lockdown compared to many other countries. That means, the yes-option in the first questions is somewhat ambiguous showing two third of the children being in lockdown.

The Coronavirus infection was quite rare (7%) at spring 2021. One third (36%) knew someone that was infected. 60 percent of the children agreed with the argument that they had to be very careful with not spreading the Coronavirus. 30–34 percent had to stay at home for many days because of the Coronavirus. Most of the children were allowed (69%) to leave their homes daily.

Table 4. 9. Material well-being (Which of the following do you have at home?)

Item	Have	Don't have
Own room	82,5	17,5
Clothes in good condition	99,8	0,2
Enough money for school trips and activities	97,1	2,9
Access to the internet at home	98,5	1,5

<b>The equipment/things you need for sports and hobbies</b>	95,4	4,6
<b>Pocket money / money to spend on yourself</b>	70,8	29,2
<b>Two pairs of shoes in good condition</b>	96,7	3,3
<b>A mobile phone</b>	99	1
<b>The equipment/things you need for school</b>	99,2	0,8
<b>A place in your home where you can study</b>	94,7	5,3

Most of the Finnish children are high in the material well-being index. The percentage share of do-not-haves concerned more of the respondents only with having an own room (18%) or pocket money (29%).

Table 5. Feeling safe in different environments (%)

<b>Item</b>	<b>I do not agree</b>	<b>I Agree a little</b>	<b>I Agree somewhat</b>	<b>I Agree a lot</b>	<b>I Totally agree</b>
<b>I feel safe at home</b>	0,5	1,6	5,2	15,2	77,4
<b>I feel safe at school</b>	1,3	7,4	17,1	30,2	44
<b>I feel safe when I walk around in the area I live in</b>	1,4	4,2	9,5	26,9	58
<b>I feel safe with my friends</b>	0,8	3,3	9,9	25	61,1
<b>I feel alone</b>	63,4	19,6	8,5	5,3	3,2
<b>I feel protected from the Coronavirus</b>	3,7	7,2	21,7	28,5	39
<b>I miss my friends</b>	31,9	27,3	37,6	1,2	2
<b>I miss my relatives (e.g. grandparents, a parent living or working far from home)</b>	19,9	22,5	54,9	0,6	2,1

Finnish children feel in general very safe in all their living environments -at home (93%), at schools (74%), outside (85%), and with their friends (86%). About nine percent of them, however, feel alone while just 1,4 percent missed their friends. This is due to the quite loose restrictions during the Pandemic in Finland. Children had the possibilities to meet friends at least outside.

Table 6. During the lockdown did you have enough food to eat each day?

<b>Never</b>	<b>0,2</b>
<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>1,9</b>
<b>Often</b>	<b>13,1</b>

<b>Always</b>	84,9
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Very few children reported of not having enough food during the lockdown (2%). The municipals delivered food for school children which replaced the free school lunch. That helped especially the children in vulnerable conditions.

## 2.2 Your life during the Coronavirus: Q11-14

The next section breaks down answers about Finnish children's experiences of the corona's effects on their lives. Satisfaction with different arenas of life was also investigated.

Table 7. Arguments related to children's lives during the Coronavirus

<b>Item</b>	<b>I do not agree</b>	<b>I Agree a little</b>	<b>I Agree somewhat</b>	<b>I Agree a lot</b>	<b>I Totally agree</b>
<b>I have enough information about the Coronavirus</b>	2,8	6,7	19,9	36,4	34,3
<b>We speak together about the Coronavirus in my home</b>	14,3	24,1	24	20,3	17,3
<b>My opinions about the Coronavirus are taken seriously in my home</b>	14,6	14,6	22,3	22,2	26,3
<b>I received a lot of information about the Coronavirus from my family members or caregivers</b>	5	12,4	17,3	27,4	38
<b>I received a lot of information about the Coronavirus from other children</b>	19,9	27,9	27,4	15	9,9
<b>I received a lot of information about Coronavirus from teachers</b>	4,8	14,4	23,6	29,2	28
<b>I received a lot of information about Coronavirus through social media (Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.)</b>	21,1	16,4	15,4	17,7	29,4
<b>I received a lot of information about the Coronavirus through the news</b>	9	11	14,7	24,7	40,6
<b>I think that a lot of the news about the Coronavirus are unreliable</b>	40,7	32,3	17,8	5,9	3,3

Children experienced that they mostly got information about the Coronavirus from either their family members (65%) or through the news (65%). Generally, the respondents felt they had received enough information about the subject (71%). However, about one third (30%) felt they were not taken seriously when it came to their opinions about the Coronavirus.



Table 8. Satisfaction in various thing *before* and *during* the Coronavirus (0 = Not at all satisfied, Totally satisfied = 10)

Item	Mean	SD
<b>(Before the Coronavirus) Satisfaction: With how I normally spent my time</b>	9,0	1,6
<b>(Before the Coronavirus) Satisfaction: With The things I used to learn at school</b>	8,5	2,0
<b>(Before the Coronavirus) Satisfaction: With the relationships I had with my friends</b>	8,8	1,9
<b>(Before the Coronavirus) Satisfaction: With the relationships I had with people I live with</b>	9,1	1,7
<b>(During the Coronavirus) Satisfaction: With how I normally spend my time</b>	8,1	2,2
<b>(During the Coronavirus) Satisfaction: With the things I learn at school</b>	8,2	2,1
<b>(During the Coronavirus) Satisfaction: With the relationships I have with my friends</b>	8,3	2,2
<b>(During the Coronavirus) Satisfaction: With the relationships I have with people I live with</b>	8,9	1,9

The satisfaction in various things in life declined in four measured items before and during the Coronavirus. The mean difference was also statistically very significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) in all the items. The biggest drop in means was connected to time spending from 9.0 to 8.1 (mean difference = 0.9).

Table 9. Worry regarding certain things in life (0 = Not at all, Very much = 10)

Item	Mean	SD
<b>During the last month, how worried have you been about the following things in your life? By the Coronavirus situation</b>	4,7	3,0
<b>During the last month, how worried have you been about the following things in your life? That I may get infected by the Coronavirus</b>	4,2	3,4
<b>During the last month, how worried have you been about the following things in your life? That people I know may get infected by the Coronavirus</b>	6,1	3,3
<b>During the last month, how worried have you been about the following things in your life? That I may infect other people with the Coronavirus</b>	5,1	3,6

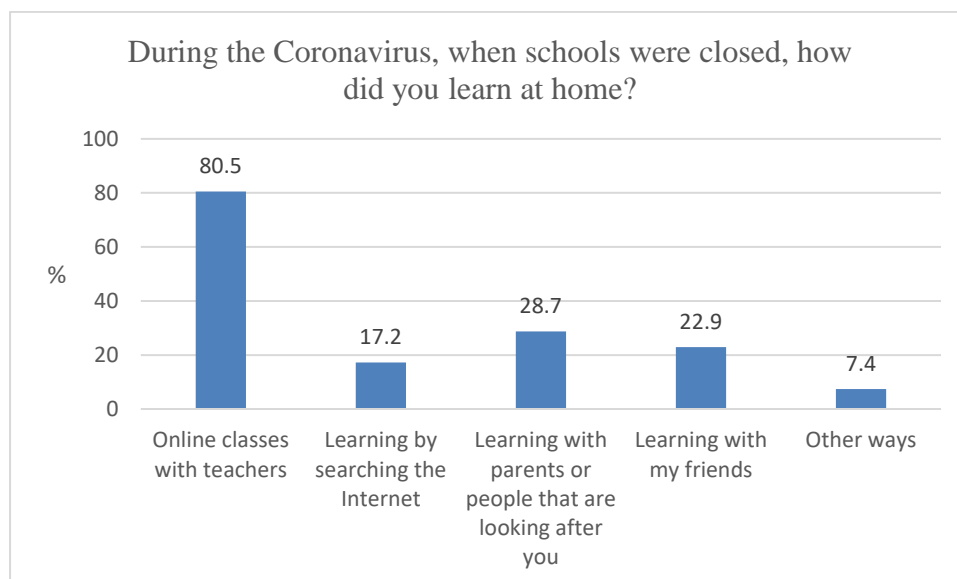
<b>During the last month, how worried have you been about the following things in your life? That I may get bad school marks because of the Coronavirus situation</b>	3,8	3,8
<b>During the last month, how worried have you been about the following things in your life? The money my family has during the Coronavirus period</b>	3,0	3,5
<b>During the last month, how worried have you been about the following things in your life? The changes in my life as a student because of the Coronavirus situation</b>	3,8	3,4

Items measuring worry revealed that most worry was caused to children's worry of someone they knew might have gotten infected by the Coronavirus (mean = 6.1). It is noteworthy that the standard deviation was remarkably large, which indicates that the children's assessments of different concerns varied greatly from individual to individual.

### 2.3 School and relationships: Q16-19, Q22-23

The following results show how children perceived different things related to school and relationships.

Figure 2. Learning during the lockdown (%)



According to the Figure 2, online classes (81%) were the most common way to learn during the lockdown. Parents or other close caretakers (29%) were named as the second alternative of learning.

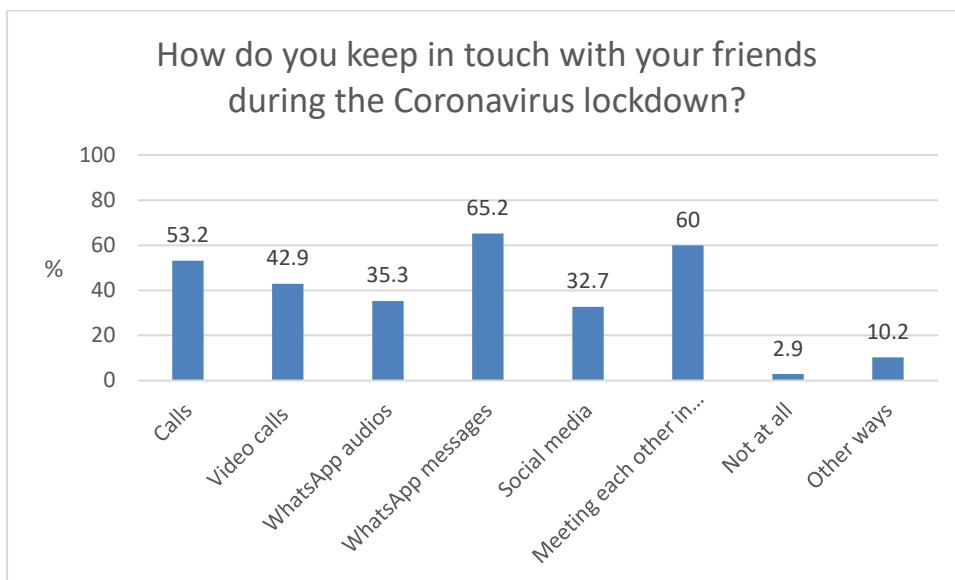
Table 10. During the Coronavirus...

Item	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
<b>How often did you have access to the Internet?</b>	1,1	5,7	29,9	63,3

<b>How often did it happen that you could not access the Internet for an entire day?</b>	39,7	38,1	12,6	9,6
<b>How often did you have problems with the Internet connection while having a class over web?</b>	34,3	55,3	9,1	1,3

The above results point out that in Finland children the Internet problems did not play any remarkable part in their daily routines, e.g. access to the Internet did not cause problems to the majority of the respondents (78%). That was the case also related to access to the Internet in general (93%).

Figure 3. The forms of connecting friends during the lockdown (%)



The most popular ways in keeping in touch with friends were sending WhatsApp-messages (65%) and meeting each other in person (60%). Social media (33%) was used rarely compared to the other ways, however, this may be due to restrictions parents give to their children. Only 3 percent of the children said they did not keep in touch with their friends in any way.

Table 11. During the Coronavirus... (%)

Item	I do not agree	Agree a little bit	Agree somewhat	Agree a lot	Totally agree
<b>I felt well-supported by some of my friends</b>	9,7	19,7	26,3	25	19,3
<b>I felt well-supported by some of my teachers</b>	8,5	15,2	23,1	31,1	22,1
<b>I felt well-supported by some people I live with</b>	2,9	4,9	10,4	25,8	55,9

<b>I became closer to some members of my family</b>	17	17	25,8	20,3	19,8
<b>My relationships with my friends was affected during the Coronavirus</b>	26,7	26,2	19,6	15,5	12
<b>I made new friends with other children online during the Coronavirus</b>	55	14,4	9,8	8,4	12,3

In Table 11, agreement in experienced support from different peer groups was measured. The results are encouraging, as the children felt that they had received sufficient support in relation to all the asked items. Especially high was the percentage share with support by their close relatives (82%).

The isolation period did not affect much the feeling of getting closer to the family, one fourth agreed with the statement (41%). Also the peer relationships remained quite the same during the Coronavirus period.

#### **2.4 How do you feel about life: Q24-28**

The last section of the questionnaire deals with different aspects of life, life satisfaction, emotions and feelings, and overall happiness.

Table 12. Satisfaction in things in life (0 = Not at all agree, Totally agree = 10)

<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>I enjoy my life</b>	8,4	2,2
<b>My life is going well</b>	8,5	2,1
<b>I have a good life</b>	8,7	2,1
<b>The things that happen in my life are excellent</b>	8,2	2,2
<b>I am happy with my life</b>	8,6	2,1
<b>I like being the way I am</b>	8,6	2,3
<b>People are generally friendly towards me</b>	8,3	2,1
<b>I feel that I am learning a lot at the moment</b>	8,2	2,3
<b>I feel positive about my future</b>	8,4	2,2

Satisfaction in different aspects of life is quite high among the Finnish children. 53 percent of children totally agreed with the argument *I have a good life* (mean 8,7) and 52 percent with *I am happy with my life* (mean 8,6). Totally agreed with positive feelings about the future were 44 percent of the children, while the means of learning (36% totally agree) and things happening in life (40% totally agree) were somewhat lower (mean = 8,2).

Table 13. Last two weeks, how often... (0 = Not at all, Extremely = 10)

Item	Mean	SD
How often feeling Happy	8,4	2,0
How often feeling Sad	3,6	2,9
How often feeling Calm	7,1	2,7
How often feeling Stressed	3,6	3,4
How often feeling Full of energy	8,1	2,3
How often feeling Bored	5,0	3,3

Measurement of different feelings show that Finnish children feel happiness in a similar level than life satisfaction, most of the children (62%) had felt often happy (mean = 8,4). Both not at all and extremely bored felt 12 percent of children and not at all stressed felt 30 percent of them. Noteworthy also here is the standard deviation with the item of feeling stressed (3,4).

Table 14. Feelings about the Coronavirus (0 = I do not agree at all, 4 = Totally agree)

Item	Mean	SD
I am very afraid of the Coronavirus	0,9	1,1
It makes me uncomfortable to think about the Coronavirus	1,5	1,4
My hands become sweaty when I think about the Coronavirus	0,3	0,7
I am afraid of losing my life because of the Coronavirus	0,6	1,1
When I watch news and stories about the Coronavirus on the TV and social media, I become nervous or anxious	0,6	1,0
I cannot sleep because I'm worrying about getting the Coronavirus	0,2	0,7
My heart races (beats very fast) when I think about getting the Coronavirus	0,4	0,8

In general, the Coronavirus did not cause children to experience negative emotions. The highest mean was shown with the argument *It makes me uncomfortable to think about the Coronavirus* (mean = 1,5). The responses to the other questions were close to the option *not at all*. Nor was the standard deviation large between the arguments.

Table 15. Satisfaction with different aspects of life (0 = Not at all satisfied, Totally satisfied = 10)

Item	Mean	SD
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<b>The people you live with</b>	9,1	1,7
<b>The house you live in</b>	9,3	1,4
<b>The area where you live</b>	9,1	1,7
<b>About how safe you feel</b>	9,1	1,7
<b>Your friends</b>	9,0	1,8
<b>How you use your time</b>	8,7	1,9
<b>The way you look</b>	8,2	2,6
<b>The things you have</b>	9,1	1,5
<b>The freedom you have</b>	8,9	1,9
<b>What may happen later in your life</b>	8,3	2,2
<b>How you are listened to by adults in general</b>	8,5	2,2
<b>Your health</b>	9,0	1,8
<b>Your life as a whole</b>	8,8	2,2

13 items measured children's satisfaction with various arenas of their lives. 62 percent of the Finnish children were totally satisfied with their life as whole. Two third (70%) were totally satisfied with the house they lived in. This percentage share was the highest in the ranking list. The looks caused the lowest satisfaction, four percent were not at all satisfied, while on the other 47 percent of the kids were totally satisfied with their looks. The rest of the results were placed between these.

Table 16. Happiness in life *before* and *during* the Coronavirus (0 = Not happy at all, Completely happy = 10)

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Thinking about how your life was before the Coronavirus, how happy were you with your life as whole?</b>	9,1	1,7
<b>Thinking about how your life now during the Coronavirus, how happy are you with your life as whole?</b>	7,4	2,6

The last table shows the decline in happiness that happened during the Coronavirus. Finnish children's overall happiness declined quite dramatically from 9,1 to 7,4 showing mean decline 1,7 unit. The result was statistically very significant ( $p < .001$ ).

### 3. Conclusions

This report presents the findings of an initial descriptive analysis of Finland's Children's Worlds dataset. We found that most Finnish children live with both parents at their home. Most children were satisfied with

the people they live (mean 8,9) and their friends (mean 8,3). Most of them, 68 % also felt protected from the Coronavirus and felt overall satisfaction with their lives (mean 8,8).

The level of satisfaction with life as whole decreased slightly during the Coronavirus: before the virus, the mean was 9,1 while during the virus it was 7,4.