

1st September 2024

Press Release

"2024 Secondary School Students' Well-Being Survey"
Well-Being Levels Average, Over Half Regularly Engage in Self-Criticism,
20% Require Attention to Mental Health
Prosociality and Family-School Connections are Key to Happiness

The Mental Wellness Service of Children and Youth of the Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service conducts regular mental health survey among secondary school students across Hong Kong. The objective is to monitor trends in youth mental health and identify preventive measures. This year's survey was conducted between November 2023 and April 2024, collected 1,646 valid questionnaires from secondary students. The survey assessed their overall well-being, mental health status, life satisfaction, self-criticism, and prosocial behavior.

The latest results show that overall well-being levels among students are average, with a mean score of 2.63 out of 5. Only 26.3% of students reported an ideal level of well-being. About 20% of respondents exhibited moderate to severe symptoms of depression (25.5%) or anxiety (20.5%), indicating the need for professional help. Males reported significantly high levels of well-being than female, who also had poorer overall mental health. These findings highlight well-being as a crucial protective factor against mental disorders, aiding resilience in adversity and reducing the risk of mental health issues.

Key Findings

Well-Being Levels: The average well-being score is 2.63, indicating an overall moderate level of well-being. Males and junior secondary students reported higher well-being levels compared to girls and senior secondary students.

Mental Health: 25.5% of students showed moderate to severe depression, while

20.5% exhibited moderate to severe anxiety, necessitating early intervention. The most common symptoms included feelings of worthlessness and a lack of anticipation for good things in life.

Life Satisfaction: The areas of least satisfaction were academic performance (36.6%), body image (25.5%), and the HKDSE (24.2%). However, well-being was most strongly associated with family relationships, future prospects, and school adaptation.

Self-Criticism: The average self-criticism score was 2.66, with over half of the students (57.4%) frequently engaging in self-critical thoughts. Common self-critical beliefs included feeling less happy than others and fixating on personal shortcomings after failures. Self-criticism was highly correlated with depression, anxiety, stress and well-being.

Prosocial Behaviour: The average prosocial behaviour score was 6.45 out of 10, below the passing mark of 7. Over 50% of students showed suboptimal levels of kindness and helpfulness. The study found a positive correlation between prosocial behaviour and well-being.

Analyses and Recommendations:

Reduce Self-Criticism: The analysis indicates a strong positive correlation between self-criticism and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among students. The more frequently students engage in self-critical thoughts, the more likely they are to experience more emotional distress and lower level of well-being. Students who tend to harshly criticize and question themselves, magnify personal shortcomings, overlook strengths and achievements, and set overly strict standards or hold perfectionist views are more prone to feelings of shame, guilt, failure, and worthlessness, which can also complicate interpersonal relationships. Clinically, high levels of self-criticism are associated with emotional disorders, self-harm, and even suicidal behavior.

Clinical psychologist Mr. Jeff, Kei Ching-nam from our mentalhealth service explains that both inherent traits and life experiences contribute to the tendency for self-criticism. He advises students to set achievable goals and develop effective action plans, focusing on growth rather than outcomes. Additionally, practicing self-compassion—treating yourself with the same kindness and care that you would treat a good friend—can help reduce self-criticism and alleviate emotional distress.

Enhance Family Relationships:While students' top sources of dissatisfaction include academic performance, body image, and the HKDSE, correlation analysis reveals that family relationships, future prospects, and school adaptation have the strongest impact on students' level of well-being. In other words, enhancing family relationships is more effective in boosting students' well-being than solely focusing on academic achievements.

We recommend that parents practice self-compassion to reduce self-criticism and alleviate parenting stress. Additionally, parents should recognise their children's unique qualities and strengths, minimize criticism or comparisons with others, and create a supportive environment where children feel comfortable sharing their feelings. This approach can help reduce self-criticism in children and improve parent-child relationships.

Promote Prosocial Behaviour:The study also revealed that the average score for prosocial behaviour among students was 6.45 out of 10, with 7 being the passing mark, indicating a subpar level of kindness and helpfulness. More than half (53.3%) of the students exhibited less than ideal prosocial behavior. The analysis shows a clear correlation between higher levels of kindness and a significant increase in students' well-being. We recommend fostering a culture of kindness, encouraging students to actively express goodwill, share with others, and offer support within their capabilities. Schools can enhance opportunities for students to serve their school or community, such as through student ambassador programs or uniformed groups, to further boost their well-being.

Build a Positive School Culture: Mr. Thomas, Fung Chak-tong, centre-in-charge of the Mental Wellness Service for Children and Youth at our organization, noted that in the post-pandemic era, secondary school students face several challenges, including increased negative emotions, diminished social skills, weakened peer relationships, and heavy academic pressure. These factors contribute to significant stress and emotional distress among students.

We recommend that schools focus on building a positive school culture by organizing relaxation and stress-relief activities, as well as offering personal development training, such as education of failure, emotional management, and social skills workshops. Additionally, schools should increase activities that enhance students' sense of belonging, such as creating campus journalism programs. These initiatives can help improve students' well-being, strengthen their connection to the school, and encourage them to seek help when needed, thereby preventing the escalation of issues.

Policy Initiatives

• Strengthening Regional Collaboration

To effectively support students and families experiencing mental or emotional distress, it is essential to enhance collaboration between school-based mental health programs and regional support services. For instance, schools should refer cases requiring support to the nearest Integrated Community Centre for Mental Wellness (ICCMW) for timely follow-up. Additionally, as part of the "Student Mental Health Support Scheme" during the later stages of case management, students and their families can be assisted in transitioning to regional ICCMWs for ongoing recovery support, including outreach visits and caregiver assistance.

• Youth Engagement in Policy Development

In the process of formulating policies related to mental illness treatment and support services, it is recommended to establish platforms for listening to the opinions of young people. This approach will enhance the collaborative elements of policy-making and increase youth willingness to seek help.

- **Primary Healthcare Promotion**

Beyond initiating regional DHC to encourage early attention to mental health, authorities should also involve medical professionals, including private general practitioners, family doctors, and pediatricians, in promoting mental health awareness. Clinics can display information about the services offered by the local ICCMWs, showcase promotional materials emphasising the importance of listening to youth, and encourage the public to monitor their own and their surrounding youths' mental health, thereby fostering early prevention and intervention.

Support Services

The Mental Wellness Service for Children and Youth of our organization has collaborated closely with the Education Bureau and schools across Hong Kong for many years to support the mental health needs of students. Our key initiatives include:

Hi-Five Student Engagement Award Scheme: This program promotes a mentally healthy school culture by establishing five key connections: knowledge, action, emotion, family-community, and interpersonal relationships.

For more details: <https://www.hi5.bokss.org.hk>

YOUTHorizons: This service is designed to support young people aged 11 to 25 who are experiencing emotional or mental health challenges. Services include mental health assessments, early intervention and counseling, and parental support.

For more details: <https://bokssmwcy.wixsite.com/mwcy/blank-11>

Student Mental Health Ambassador Training: This program offers psychological education and peer counseling training to enhance students' skills and networks for supporting one another.

For more details: <https://bit.ly/3MqsYH6>

Photo caption (from left to right):

Mr. Frankie, Mak Ka-lun, Project Officer of Mental Wellness Service for Children and Youth, Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service

Ms. Scarlet, Poon Fung-oi, Assistant Chief Executive Officer, Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service

Mr. Thomas, Fung Chak-tong, Centre-in-charge of Mental Wellness Service for Children and Youth, Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service

Mr. Jeff, Kei Ching-nam, Clinical Psychologist at ICCMW, Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service

For media inquiries:

General Inquiries: Ms. Nicola Ng Ka-kei at 9683 8361 or nicolang@bokss.org.hk

Research Data: Mr. Thomas Fung at 6623 5389 or thomasfung@bokss.org.hk

About Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service: Founded in 1982 under the Hong Kong Baptist Convention, Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service provides a wide range of services from early childhood to elderly care, with a focus on mental health and community support.