
WHO: a “picture” of adolescents. Anxious about school, “amplified vulnerabilities”, early sex

The mental health of European adolescents is getting worse. This has been found by a survey of over 220 thousand boys and girls aged 11 to 15, conducted by the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organisation (WHO). In about one third of the countries, the survey showed a higher number of adolescents being anxious about school, while the number of those who love school is decreasing. “The experience of school gets worse with age”, this is the message, in a nutshell. Under the lens is also the relationship between using digital technology and mental wellbeing: next to positive factors, the survey also found “amplified vulnerabilities” and “new threats, first and foremost cyber-bullying, which is disproportionately targeted to girls”. “It’s worrying to see that adolescents are telling us that everything is not going well for their mental wellbeing; we must take this message seriously, because good mental health is a fundamental part of a healthy adolescence”, Jo Inchley, international coordinator of the survey, stated. Other problematic issues include risky sexual behaviour (24% of the boys and 14% of the girls said they had already had sex at the age of 15), heavy smoking, and, more often, alcohol abuse (20% of 15 year olds had already got drunk at least twice). The survey also found that adolescents exercise less and less, and are increasingly overweight (1 adolescent out of 5). The results of the survey published today bundle together the experiences made by adolescents in 2017/2018. The next survey, which will be issued in 2022, will tell about the impact of the pandemic on young people’s lives.

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