Children in the Arena of Today's World

Value orientations of children aged 6 – 15

Keys for Life Developing Key Competences in Leisure-Time and Informal Education

NATIONAL INSTITUTE
FOR FURTHER
EDUCATION

Children in the Arena of Today's World
Value orientations of children aged 6 – 15
First English Edition, Prague 2016

Children in the Arena of Today's World

Value orientations of children aged 6 – 15

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INVITATION

Have you ever thought about today?s world as perceived through the eyes of a twelve-year old boy or a ten-year old girl? What does a fifteen-year old young lady or a boy of the same age think about it? What do they consider important in this world? How do they see their situation at school, in their families or amongst friends? What do they really care about – and why?

If there are children and teenagers in your surroundings or in your family, you may have talked about it with them. You might have even dabbled in their blogs and read with astonishment what they were able to confide not only in each other there but also to people utterly unknown to them. Each such statement is of course very subjective and unique (and therefore valuable), but at the same time possibly also applicable only to their respective authors.

If you want to know what answers to the above questions prevail among children and young people, what trends can be observed among them, what is quite common and, on the contrary, what occurs only rarely – then you have to use a well-conducted sociological survey, which means to come up with the right questions and choose a representative sample – with a proportionate representation of respondents in terms of age, gender, family situation, place of residence, and get the most accurate answers from them and finally evaluate them. It is also advisable to support the questionnaires with group interviews with children and young people, which should also be chosen in such manner as to represent their peers.

This was also the direction pursued by the Keys for Life (Klíče pro život) Project that focussed on extracurricular education of children and young people and support for those working with them. In 2010, a team from the National Institute for Children and Youth in cooperation with the Factum Invenio agency selected a total of 2,238 children and adolescents in three age categories (6 – 9, 10 – 12 and 13 – 15 years old). The sample was selected based on quotas according to the current data from the Czech Statistical Office in order to make it sufficiently representative. With the help of questionnaires, experts asked children a number of questions aimed to find answers not only to the above questions but also to many others[1]. To support the data obtained, 12 group interviews were conducted with children from one chosen metropolis, one larger Moravian city and one municipality in the Tábor region, with the purpose to learn more than what answers from questionnaires could provide. Those interviews were also made subject to analysis and below in the text you can see some typical answers shown as specific evidence of how the children of today speak, think and feel, what they want and expect. The names of the children were changed in order to maintain anonymity.

The publication you are reading is trying to describe the value world of today's children. However, how should we look at values as such? In general, a value is something that is important for people. However, there may be a substantial difference between things that people consider important and things that really matter. This should also be taken into account when reading the following pages. We sometimes have misconceptions about ourselves. Finding out about values from what people say about themselves – i. e. what they write in questionnaires – is therefore a good indicator of how they see themselves but not necessarily of who they really are. Let us take into account a well-known fact that over the past 20 years it has turned out in all researches on values that the vast majority of people indicate a good family as the most important value. But how come that so many families are falling apart? More than 50% of marriages end in divorce….We can see that values have at least double-sided nature, both sides differing a lot from each other: one type shows what "is right" – such values show our ideals. The other type of values shows what is really important to us (even without us realising it) – i.e. "the reality". Such pitfalls associated with a value-oriented research apply also to children. Possibly even more so, because it is the youngest children (unlike adults) whom you cannot ask numerous questions directly.

---

[1] The original research report as well as the electronic version of this publication and other outputs are to be found on the website of the Keys for Life Project www.kliceprozivot.cz as well as in the National Register of Research on Children and Youth on www.vyzkum-mladez.cz.

For better illustration of the most important and the most interesting findings about our children we have included clearly arranged charts. One important comment on the charts should be made in advance. Each chart includes a box with the letter "n" showing the number of children who answered the respective question (for example, "n = 2238" means that all the sample respondents answered the question). If "n" is lower, it means that the chart shows answers only of a certain group of children, or that all answers could not be included. This situation occurs, for example, with a question about education of parents as some children failed to mention it in the questionnaire. Their answers, quite understandingly, cannot be shown in that chart.

CONTEXT

When trying to find out the shapes of the world of children and the things they consider important, we drew on a self-evident fact that every man, even more so a child, forms their inner world through an intense interaction with the outer world – with the things that surround them and affect their perception and thinking. Such world is not, from the perspective of man, a compact blend of people, things and stimuli, but is formed of various areas of which some play a more important role than others. They include a sphere of the known or home-like, characterised predominantly by groups of related persons who give us feelings of certainty and safety, a sphere of obligations and entertainment and also (even though less specific) a sphere of threats and uncertainties. When looking into the world of children, we divided this outer space into four spheres through which we analysed the lives, opinions and feelings of children. Our findings from particular areas were finally supplemented with statements of children about what they consider important for themselves and their future lives.

At first sight it is clear that the four areas analysed in detail play a really important role in the lives of children. Therefore we call them "key players": Family, School, Friends and Leisure Time, where we focussed in particular on the media and organised extracurricular activities.

Family is traditionally a living space for children and until recently it had unquestionably been a decisive factor for the child?s socialisation – a process during which an individual becomes integrated into society, becomes its responsible member capable of taking care of themselves and, moreover, contributing to the development of a society as a whole. In what kind of families do children live today? What can be found out if we look at the family both through "hard sociological data" and through the eyes of children? Is it still true that it is mainly through the family where children learn how to perceive the world and adopt the value creation system? Is it still parents who show their children the very first lines between the good and the bad, and pass cultural patterns on their children? What are the areas where the family still keeps its role and where is its role weakened or even lost? And if the family is forced out of this space, who or what is behind? And how is it related to the age of children, education of their parents, their economic situation or place of residence?

School is an environment where children spend most of their daytime, five days a week. Mandatorily. It would have been unthinkable to doubt whether it is right or wrong some ten years ago. Isn't its role still indispensable today? It is a gateway to society for children, a place where they acquire and develop their knowledge and skills, where their personalities are shaped, where they learn about social norms, how to pursue their interests, defend their opinions, develop and present their views; this is where they learn about existence of principles and rules that are an indispensable part of our lives; and they also learn that respecting, observing or denying them bring about inevitable consequences. Moreover, school is usually one of the very first places where children get an impartial assessment of their personality, their knowledge and skills from teachers, friends or peers. Such assessment does not draw only on emotions any more but makes use of objective criteria. At least adults usually perceive it. But do children perceive it in the same manner? What do they appreciate about school and what do they refuse? What bothers them and what are their expectations? How much time do they spend preparing for classes? What is the role of teachers in their lives? Is the school of today able to compete with an attractive offer of information and entertainment pouring out on them from all over?

Friends are often underestimated by adults, and still they are absolutely essential in the life of children. Some time ago, one survey of Junák (A Boy Scout)[2] revealed that the second biggest concern of today's parents in relation to their children was a possibility that they "get together with bad guys". But this becomes clear already at younger school age. What are the criteria children apply in search for friends? What do they appreciate most in them? In what respects do friends do or do not influence them? What do they want to do together? Do parents have voice in it?

Leisure time is a time that remains to us after we fulfil all our work- or school-related obligations as well as other activities that inevitably need to be performed (including sleeping). During our leisure time everything we do is based on our voluntary discretion and our own interest. The role of leisure time gains more and more importance today, especially in children and adolescents because it provides them with some space for getting to know themselves as well as the external world; allowing self-fulfilment in various activities based on one's own needs and preferences. Passing leisure time in an active manner means entertainment, relaxation, learning of new things and, for children and young people it may also function as proper prevention against tendencies to manifestations of dangerous behaviour. We could keep on enumerating theoretical issues, but what about practice? When exploring the leisure time phenomenon we focussed in particular on the following three groups of questions: With whom children mainly spend their leisure time – and how? What is the role of the media – mainly TV and the internet – in the world of today?s children? How do children engage in various leisure-time activities and how are they affected by them?

During our preparatory works for the survey we made certain assumptions the truth of which was to be, based on the interpretation of results, either proved or disproved. The original range of hypotheses was rather broad, which is also given by the fact that there are lots of important and interesting issues associated with the life of our children. However, on the contrary, very few surveys dealing with this topic have been conducted so far. After all, with respect to the research restrictions, and in attempts for maximum comprehensibility and applicability of outputs, the following basic eight hypotheses have been drafted.

1. The value system of children is fundamentally determined by their family lifestyle, which is given by its socio-economic position (socioeconomic status) and education of parents.
2. Children born to families with a higher socio-economic status and children of parents that have a higher education spend leisure time more actively and in a more organised manner.
3. Children's life priorities depend on their parents' education and socio-economic status of their family – children of parents with higher education and from families with higher socio-economic status have a more positive and proactive approach to their lives.
4. The importance of key players changes with age – parents are the most important for youngest children while the influence of friends and the media grows substantially with age.
5. The importance of the internet and other communication tools in the life of children is on increase. This importance increases even more with the growing age of children so the oldest group would have more difficulty doing without them than doing without TV.
6. The approach of children to their teachers and school environment in general changes with age. The older the children are the less positive attitude to school they have and teachers become a less important source of certainty and knowledge.
7. Children in general verbally proclaim "the right" behaviour and values (lying is always wrong, etc.). However, these norms become relativised (lying is wrong but there are exceptions…).
8. Children who proactively spend their leisure time in organisations that provide leisure activities or informal education (organised leisure activities in hobby groups or various clubs, etc.) feel more happiness and satisfaction in their lives.

What have been our findings?

---

[2] In 2003, a survey titled *Probes into the World of Scouts* was conducted by Junák – an association of scouts in the Czech Republic. The full final report is freely available at the National Register of Researches on Children and Youth on www.vyzkum-mladez.cz.

FAMILY

The family does not only substantially affect the children who live in it but the family itself is affected by many factors. The research conducted has shown that the decisive factor is the socio-economic status of parents[3] and their education. It is so dominant, affecting almost all strata of children's lives, that we have decided to dedicate it one separate chapter, in which a specific nature of its influence will be reviewed. This is how its enormous importance in our conditions will become apparent. For this reason, the remaining chapters will discuss only marginally the influence of parent's socio-economic status and education on the development of children.

What types of families do children live in? Complete or incomplete ones?

In spite of the fact that almost every second marriage gets divorced in the Czech Republic, approximately 75% of children are likely to live with both parents at this age. The following chart shows the percentage of children per type of family they live in – based on their answers to the question.

Chart 1. Family environment and age of children

---
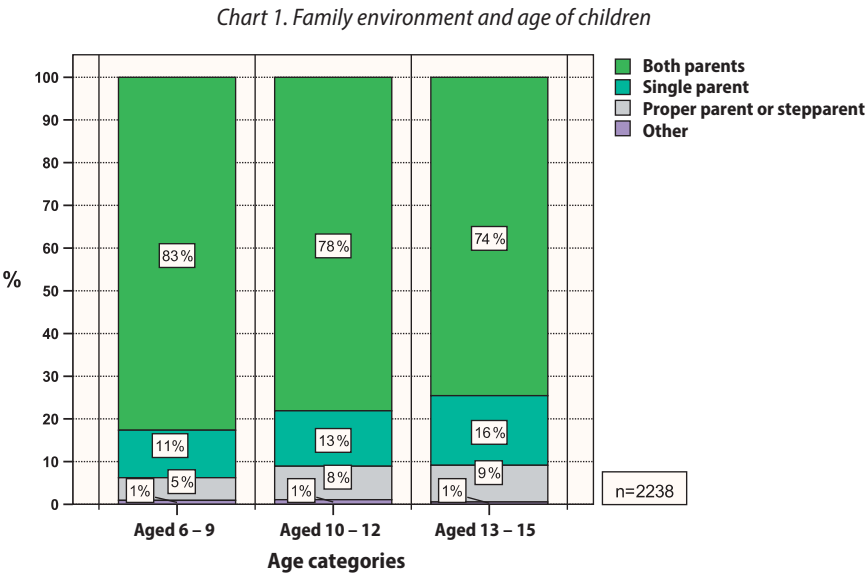
[3] The research used four-category classification: very high-status families, rather high-status families, medium status families and poor status families (the original two groups: rather low-status families and very low-status families have been merged into one). More details are to be found in chapter The most important factor.

This result may seem rather astonishing at first sight should we take into consideration that according to the data provided by the Czech Statistical Office approximately one third of children in our country is born out of wedlock and every second marriage gets divorced (Czech Statistical Office, 2010). In addition, it should be noted that children were inquired about other persons living together with them in the same household, and not about whether their parents were a married couple. In relation to our findings the following explanation is therefore presented, going, however, a bit beyond the research as such.

Firstly, informal unions among young people are generally accepted. The official statistics thus show high numbers of children born out of wedlock, even though such children live together with both their mother and father who are "only" unmarried. It should also be taken into consideration that the average length of cohabitation of married partners is 12 years before they get divorced, and at least one third of children are born within eight months of the wedding. It may be inferred therefrom that children in our sample still live in a complete family but it may be assumed, for quite a significant percentage of them, that their parents will get divorced in the future. Moreover, it is likely that especially some younger children who live with one proper parent and one stepparent, are not able to distinguish between their biological and non-biological parents; even more so, if the non-biological parent lives in the family from their early childhood. Such children then may have stated that they lived with both parents instead of correctly stating that they lived with one proper parent and one stepparent. And finally, the fact that they may feel ashamed should also be considered. Some children did not answer the question correctly on purpose; and older children did not feel ashamed so much.

For parents' employment the following results have been obtained:

Chart 2: Economic activity of parents
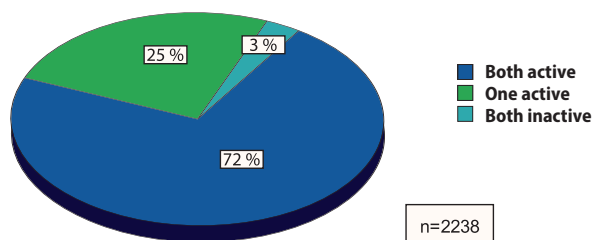
Although some regions in the Czech Republic face high unemployment rate, 75% of children live in families where both parents are economically active. 25% of children come from families where only one parent is economically active; and a minimum percentage of children live in families where neither of the parents work.

How are today's parents perceived by their children?

It is important and positive to find out that the vast majority of children from "ordinary" families have respect for their parents. At the same time it is true that most children are also critical about their parents in many respects. The following chart shows the percentage of children who ascribe the given quality to their parents.

Chart 3: Character qualities of parents as perceived by their children
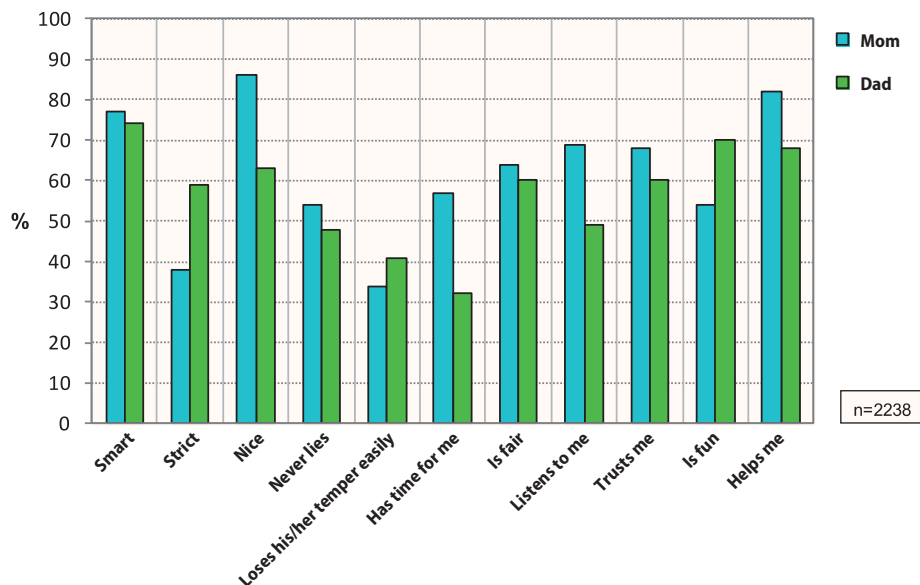
Children were much more positive about their mothers than about their fathers in almost all character qualities. Children see their fathers as easily losing their temper, being stricter than mothers and, for sure, having less time for them. And the differences are quite big as far as some qualities are concerned. While children see their moms most of all as nice (almost 90% of children), only slightly over 60% of them feel their fathers are nice. It means that more than one third of children do not consider their fathers to be nice. At the same time their fathers are perceived as much stricter than their mothers. We can also see quite clearly that 50% of fathers are not – according to children – able to listen to them. A mere third of children think that their fathers have enough time for them.

However, children's relationship with their parents changes overtime. With the onset of adolescence children's personalities are more independent and they – at least in some cases – think rather poorly of their parents compared to younger children (aged 6 – 9). With growing age their conviction that parents are smart, nice and fun weakens; on the contrary, they believe still more often that their parents occasionally lie.

The following charts show the percentage of children stating that their parents had the given character quality.

Chart 4: Character qualities of mom in relation to age
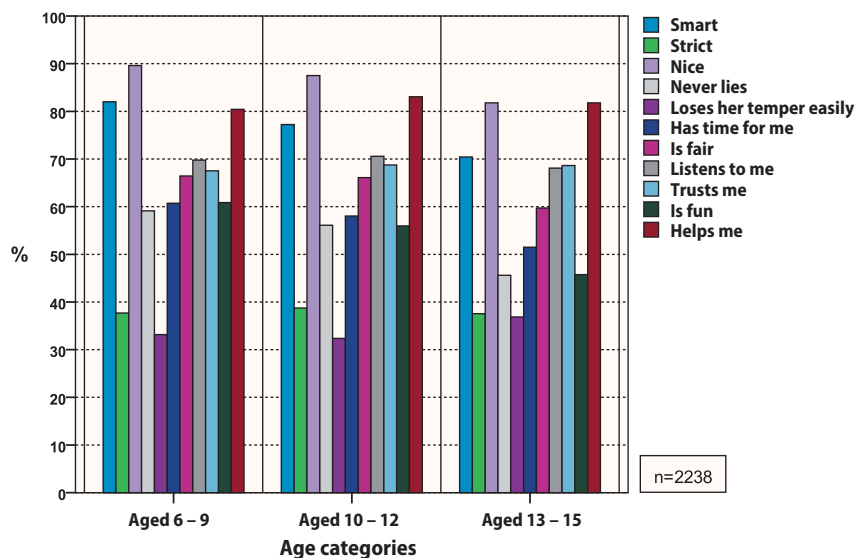
Chart 5: Character qualities of dad in relation to age
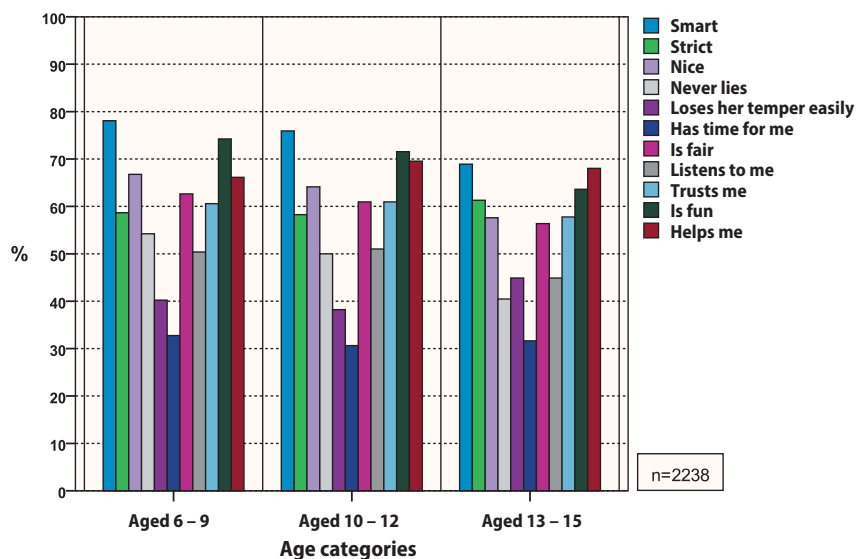
If we were to demonstrate typical qualities of today's parents, we would say that for children it is most important that mothers are nice, willing to help, smart and able to listen. The only quality perceived by children more positively in fathers than in mothers is that fathers are usually more fun, even though they are considered much harder on children. All in all, this shows that education is predominantly seen as non-authoritative and protective.

What do today's parents encourage their children to do?

This question was asked only to older children aged 10 – 15. But still, it is necessary to take into account that the data obtained shows children's opinions of their parent's intentions and not their real character and desires[4].

Children's opinions are shown in the following chart; the columns show the percentage of children who answered "definitely yes" to the question whether their parents encouraged them to have the attitude in question.

Chart 6: Educational intentions of parents through the eyes of their children in relation to age
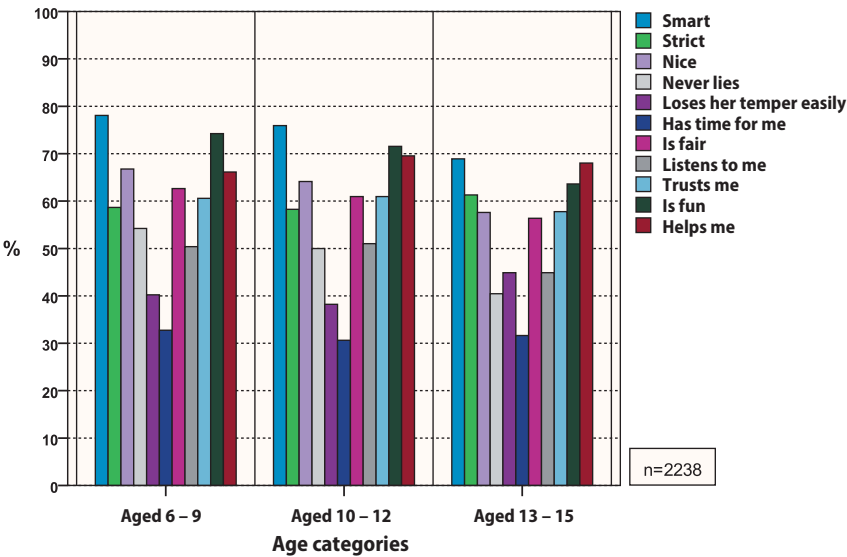
___
[4] There are other researches dedicated to educational priorities of parents. For example, CVVM indicated industriousness, sense of responsibility, making efforts to utilise one's own abilities, thoughtfulness and selflessness as the most important children's qualities.

In contrast with the finding that only a small percentage of children believe that their parents never lie, it seems rather paradoxical to hear from children that their parents care most of all about them speaking the truth. Almost all children also believe that their parents encourage them to have good manners, study and have their things in order, i. e. to be tidy. However, fewer children (approximately one quarter) think that their parents support them in voicing their own opinions, mastering foreign languages or not getting bored in their leisure time. However, parents' encouragement is, of course, dependent on a number of factors both on the part of children and on the part of parents.

As a result of a very high number of affirmative answers from child respondents and very small differences regarding other character qualities we believe that a certain degree of stylisation come into play. Children are not able to judge to what extent these are real attitudes of their parents and to what extent these are rather external generally applicable ethical and social standards.

> Question: *Do you think that your parents have inculcated you with something important for your life? For example, some character quality; or have they been encouraging you to do something throughout your life ….?*
> Martina (Age category 13 – 15): *Good manners, for sure, you know…I don't know how to say it…the basics, you know…*
> Lenka (Age category 13 – 15): *Well, good manners, too…I don't know, probably keep trying to set goals that are more demanding than I can achieve because this drives me ahead and then I might even achieve them; but, more importantly, that I should keep pushing ahead and not giving up anything.*
> Pavla (Age category 10 – 12): *They give us health and show rules; well, they simply prepare us for the life outside when we are adults and teach the same to others.*

Based on children's answers we would like to suggest that the educational approaches of parents may be divided into two areas.

- The first one places emphasis on education towards self-confidence and self-assertiveness (studying, not getting bored, not being afraid to voice one's own opinions, self-reliance, proper money management, and mastering foreign languages). These educational emphases placed by parents are slightly less widespread than emphases encompassed in the below mentioned approach. As shown below in the text, the parent's position and education also play an important role in this respect.
- The second style is characterised by education towards moral and social values (speaking the truth, keeping on promises, being tidy, having good manners and being considerate). This area covers moral demands of parents that are generally very widespread. On the one hand, these are universal moral principles accepted across all age, social and other categories (such as not lying and keeping on one's promises), on the other hand these include conservative attitudes, which should make children's interaction with their social surrounding easier (having good manners and being kind).

In what respects do parents influence their children?

The above text shows that parents are undoubtedly an important authority and ethical role model for children. As expected, however, parental influence declines in all respects with growing age of children, most frequently at the expense of friends and peers and as a result of children's increased independence.

Children's perception of this situation is shown in the following chart, in which specific columns show the percentage of those convinced that parents do influence them in the given respect. So, where is the parental influence felt most of all?

Chart 7: Parental influence as perceived by children, in relation to age
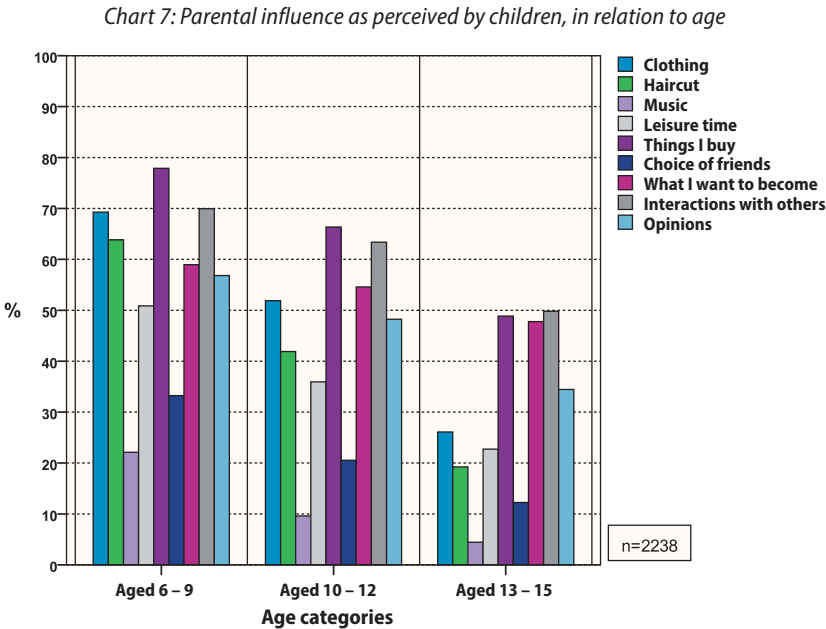
Children think that their parents have most say in the choice of the things they buy. Parental influence is in their opinion also quite substantial on their interactions with other people and/or on what they want to become in the future, as well as on the shaping of their opinions. Similarly, parents also have a say in clothing and hairstyle. Even though parental influence gradually declines with age, parents remain the key role models for approximately 50% of children aged 13 – 15 in terms of interactions with other people and their future career.

On the contrary, children are convinced that they are least influenced by their parents (and actually by no one) in the choice of music as well as friends and their opinions. The question is whether they do not realise the parental influence in these important areas or whether parents do not actually have it. Both are likely to be true.

How do children feel in their families?

The answer can be found by analysing two specific factors that substantially determine how children generally feel about their family:

- who they get into conflicts with and how often
- in whom they may confide

With respect to conflicts, the situation is quite well demonstrated by the following chart, in which a certain percentage of children aged 10 – 15 say to have conflicts with the respective person often or occasionally (as a matter of interest, see a comparison with other people who are not part of the family).

Chart 8: Age-related conflicts
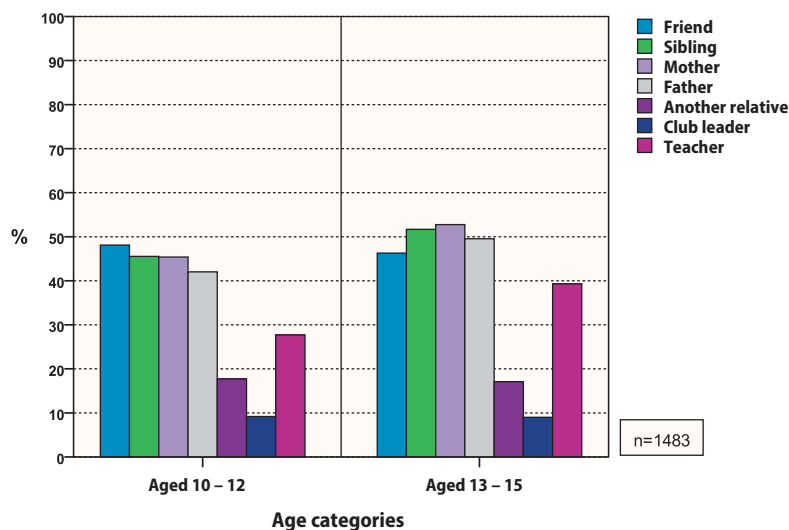
The fact that it is the mother for older children with whom they get into conflicts most frequently may be quite surprising, especially in relation to the finding that the vast majority of children see their mom as nice. However, we need to realise that frequent conflicts occur also because children's most frequent interactions are with their mother; she voices most educational demands and they often discuss all kinds of problems with her. It is also girls that have conflicts with their mothers more often than boys, mainly as a result of delimitating themselves towards her authority, but also due to rivalry between them. This finding, however, does not necessarily have to have a negative connotation. In conflict situations children learn to assert their opinions as well as to be tolerant to one another and respect other people's opinions; they learn to make trade-offs and assume responsibility for their behaviour. A typical example may be the obligation to write your homework first and then to engage in your hobbies; or for older children to come back home at the agreed time. Conflicts with siblings do happen for the same reason as those with mothers, i. e. mostly due to frequent interactions; however, children attach great importance to them and perceive them quite intensely.

Tibor (Age category 10 – 12): *It is my daddy who punishes me if I fight with my brother, or, for example, at night, my bro is lying on my side of the bed and I am telling him to move and he is beating me, so then one of us has to go to sleep to another room and the other one stays in children's room.*
Fanda (Age category 10 – 12): *I've got younger siblings and they sometimes make me so furious that I have to slap them, and then of course my parents must punish me. And they say that they are still too little…*
Monika (Age category 10 – 12): *I'd rather have my best friend for a sister, because my sis keeps beating me and I don't have much playing with her either.*

Even though children have frequent conflicts with their mother, she is still a person they most frequently confide in. Also this fact shows that conflicts with mothers are actually only common controversies that are perceived as conflicts mainly by children themselves. Other persons children confide in include their fathers and friends. It is understandable that the role of mother in this respect declines with growing age of children and it is friends who gain on importance. This is shown quite clearly in the following chart where children indicate persons they confide in most, in relation to age.

Chart 9: Persons children confide in most in relation to age
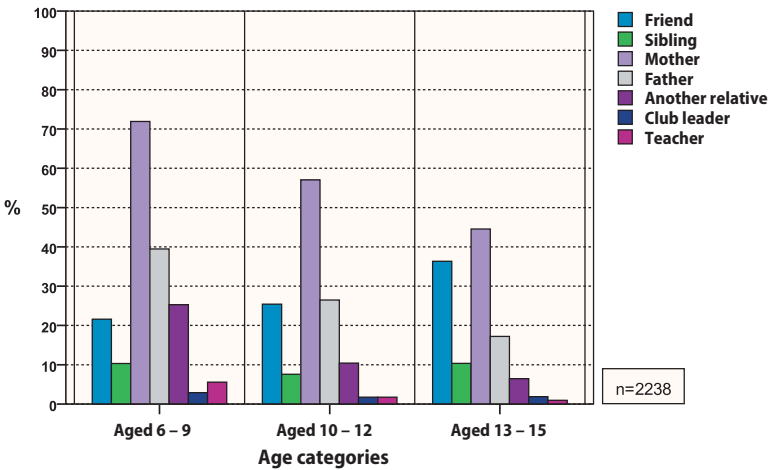
Children have been asked about how well they feel in their proper families, what their parents are interested in and how much privacy they have. In general, it may be said that children aged 10 – 12 feel most comfortable in their families. Their parents are more interested in their opinions, school results, and they also know what their children do in their leisure time. Children 13+ are gradually becoming more autonomous, which of course is related to the onset of adolescence. Parents still care about their school results because their children are at the age when they need to choose a secondary school, but they are not so well informed of their children's leisure activities. It results from the fact that children at this age are quitting organised leisure activities (such as clubs, etc.) and they spend their free time with friends "somewhere outside".

There is no substantial difference in how boys and girls feel in their families. In spite of that it may be said that girls compared to boys think a bit more frequently that parents care about their school results, are more interested in how they spend their leisure time and they have more duties. According to our research girls feel more comfortable than boys in their respective families.

What do children want to change in their families?

> Žofie (Age category 13 – 15): *I wouldn't change anything, if only my parents stopped arguing.*
> Amálka (Age category 6 – 9): *If only mom and dad did not argue so much.*

This is typically something children would like to change in their families. Although many of us might not realise it, children are very sensitive to conflicts between their parents. Conflicts between adults at home substantially disrupt the feeling of home safety. The children's desire for no more arguments or conflicts between parents may in fact be a call for re-establishment of home as a place of safety.

> Question: *What would you like to change in your family and with your parents?*
> Eva: (Age category 6 – 9): *To make them come back home in the afternoons, not in the evenings as always.*
> Láďa: (Age category 10 –12): *To be able to spend more time together.*

As described above, children are very often convinced that parents do not have enough time for them (father in particular) or that they do not listen much to what they say. These facts were mentioned by children of all age categories, most of all by children aged 13 – 15. It is therefore surprising that it is in particular older children who complain of this as due to their growing autonomy and desire to spend more time with their friends and get out of the parental influence the contrary could rather be expected.

What is the main message children are trying to give us about their families?

- *Children aged 6 –15 are in most cases raised in a complete family.*
- *Mothers are – compared with fathers – judged much more positively in many respects; their engagement in caring for and raising children is much higher than the father's; the majority of children think that their father does not have time for them.*
- *More than one third of children do not see their father as nice.*
- *50% of children believe that their mother sometimes lies and according to most of them their fathers do the same, too.*
- *Children believe that parents most frequently encourage them to be truthful, honest and cleanly.*
- *Children think their parents have a say in things like shopping, interactions with others and their future. On the contrary, they attach little importance to parents as far as the choice of friends is concerned.*
- *Children would most frequently like to avoid conflict situations between parents (arguments, etc.).*
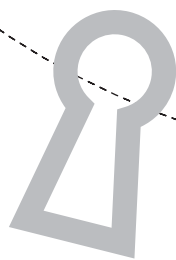
SCHOOL

It is in particular the first years of school attendance that totally change the day-to-day life of children; the contents and purpose of activities are different. Games with no resultant effect are replaced with games with hard and fast rules and subsequent evaluation of results. In the life of a child school therefore represents a world with rules, requirements, and opinion pluralism and – certain harshness. Children, no later than with the beginning of school attendance, get out of the space of safety and unconditional love into the "wide blue yonder". And from now on they will be judged also by those who will not consider them to be their blood. How will they manage? This will be to a great extent determined by their own families.

School and family – competition or teamwork?

"If a family is responsive to school requirements and the school understands well the demanding character of such change, children become fond of the change and are happy to face it. They find it exciting and fascinating. They learn something new about themselves, proudly finding out what they have achieved, what their capabilities and possibilities are. If all this is associated with success, acknowledgment and good standing, then a new, higher stage of socialisation occurs. However, if children face trauma, punishment, humiliation, failures, etc., such change in their socialisation makes them be fearful of their future lives and block their motivation to develop socially outside this projective circle."

(Professor Zdeněk Helus)

Mutual educational efforts of family and school seem to be absolutely essential for a healthy development of children. However, it is quite common that each parent has different opinions on education and on methods of copying with various situations; there is lack of harmony in educational styles and/or opinions on the rights and obligations of a child differ. If parents do not reach an agreement and a child is adrift between two educational approaches, and at some point gets fixated on one parent and at another point on the other, this will certainly have an adverse effect on their future life. The problem may even get worse with school starting to influence them. Especially the 5th to 9th graders may experience a clash of several educational styles and authorities. If a teacher is expected to replace the parental authority in situations when family environment is not really satisfactory, significant risks may occur. Mutual communication among all the persons involved and looking for possibilities of harmonising educational efforts is the best solution, even though – unfortunately – not very usual. If it is not possible to influence the child in a well-balanced manner and individual stakeholders fail to pull together, children find themselves in an unenviable situation and their healthy development may be endangered.

School – the foundation of life?

Although the research shows that children see school attendance as a necessary obligation, almost all of them are convinced that it is important and meaningful. The importance of education could also be seen from children's answers to the questions related to future achievements expected by them. The completion of the highest possible education, which would ensure them a high-quality and happy life, was on top of the list of their priorities.

Libor (Age category 13 – 15): *I think that school has given us a lot of education…We will be able to get a job that will make us happy in our future life.*
Pepa (Age category 10 – 12): *We will know quite a lot….I can become a vet.*
Jára (Age category 10 – 12): *Foundations, foundations…to build our life upon.*
Daniela (Age category 10 – 12): *So, I also believe that school has given us some experience and that we can achieve something with the knowledge obtained. And also the environment that teaches us to learn how to behave like humans.*

> Lexa (Age category 6 – 9): *We are taught something different at each place. For example, in a club we learn a sport, at school we learn how to count, read and write; and parents sometimes explain things better than teachers because the teachers need to care for all the children and not just one.*
> Jonáš (Age category 13 – 15): *We learn how to work in groups and talk; we learn how to express ourselves; it is an investment in our life.*

Children understand that the purpose and goal of education is not only to learn particular subjects but to acquire such knowledge and skills that will help them to use their abilities in practice, shape their attitudes, be knowledgeable and be able to "function" well in society.

What are competencies and why are they important?

Over the past decades, an educational approach that places emphasis on the ability to generate real results in specific areas we are involved in has been gaining ground (certainly also under the pressure of ever more demanding competitive work environment). The point is not only to want and do the "right things" but also to "do them right" – i. e. in such manner that the results of our efforts be easy to apply. A method to achieve this usually includes knowledge and skills (= to know how to do something) as well as attitudes that force people to want to strive for anything like that. **The harmonisation of knowledge, skills and attitudes** *that leads to the achievement of a desirable goal is called* **competency**. In connection with children and their school attendance the primary goal for children is to be able to learn, deal with problems, communicate, acquire social and personal as well as civil and working competencies. During our research, especially during group interviews, we learned a lot of interesting from children about various competencies.

Specific **learning competencies** are associated with methods of appropriate and efficient learning, techniques, strategies and logistics. Every child attending elementary school should understand the purpose and objectives of learning, be positive about it and able to critically assess one's own results. Children claim to start preparing themselves for the next day and do their homework right after they come back from school or leisure activities (we will touch upon this subject in more detail in the following chapter). This shows that they are usually used to working within a scheduled timeframe. However, it does not show whether their preparation is really efficient, whether the selected manner of preparation is the best one and whether the results of such preparation are relevant to the task, efforts and time exerted. We can often hear from parents that their child prepares themselves for classes every single day and therefore it is not possible they lacked the required knowledge. Then it is important that teachers give advice to parents or children, and it is up to parents to check whether their child really knows how to study.

Communication competencies are very closely related to language competencies, which are developed under the influence of family, school, the media and peer groups. During their school attendance, children learn still more about the structure of the language and methods of its use; their vocabulary becomes enriched with specific expressions and terms. We have already quoted the answer of the fourteen-year old Jonáš to our question – *What does the school give you for your life: "We learn how to work in groups, how to talk, and we learn how to express ourselves."*

The development of **social and personal competencies** at school age is given by new relationships with various people, teachers and peers. Success or failure in life is often associated with relationships we are able to establish, how we behave within a group, what roles we assume, how we accept and provide help, how we respect one another, how we acknowledge ourselves and others, how we appreciate our own work and work of others, whether we are able to collaborate and work in a team.

> Láďa (Age category 10 – 12): *The school has influenced me in all respects. When I did not feel comfortable among people but now it is much easier for me.*

Social and personal competencies are closely related to **civil competencies.** These are associated with mutual respect for other people's values, understanding of fundamental principles that form basis of laws and social norms. They are presented through our attitudes to society, culture, history, traditions, environment, differences and values. Children's awareness of social and political situation in the world is in certain respects incomplete and lacking context. Children most frequently expressed their opinions about topics such as unequal distribution of wealth in the world, but they were not knowledgeable about political, national or ethnic issues.

It has been confirmed that a great majority of children and young people do not want to talk about political issues because the information coming from the political space (in particular, from the media, but also from conversations among adults) is hard to understand for them and they do not have the slightest idea how they could make a difference. This is a trend known to us from other researches, too (for example, *The Awareness and Engagement of Young People (Informovanost a partepcipace mládeže),* National Institute for Children and Youth, 2009)[5].

Unlike their political awareness, children show their engagement in environmentalism and environmental issues. Most older children consider environmentalism a serious issue that needs to be addressed mainly in order to ensure a better future. The competencies acquired are illustrated by children's answers to the question what they would like to change in this planet if they could. A desire not to have wars followed immediately after a desire for environmental changes.

Sára (Age category 13 – 15): *I would definitely come up with another source of raw materials to prevent the countries from attacking each other because of mineral wealth; to have cars that do not need petrol.*
Honza (Age category 6 – 9): *I would use different fuel for cars and I would address the issue of electric power stations, and prevent wars from happening so often.*

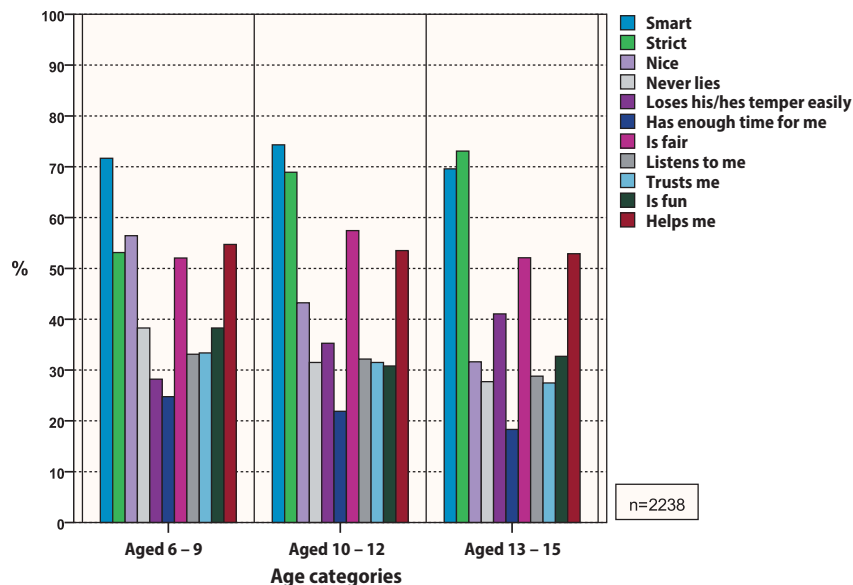## How do our children see their teachers?

It is known that in the long-run the teaching profession ranks among the five most highly respected professions in the Czech Republic. At the same time teachers themselves feel the opposite, i. e. they are hardly respected today. This fact is supported not only by below-average salaries within the European Union context but also by frequent conflicts with pupils' parents as, for example, high-status parents demonstrate lack of respect for teachers and show the power of their money to be used to have it their own way. Moreover, there are an increasing number of children who come to school without the very basic obedience, cleanliness and concentration abilities.

And what about students? With the start of school attendance a child assumes a new social role, a role of a student with lots of new demands placed on them. These demands constitute an integral part of an educational process facilitated by teachers. The position of teachers in classrooms is, however, dependent not only on their position in relation to the director and colleagues, but also on the relationships students establish with them. Teachers do need feedback from students not only in form of results but also in form of mutual relationships. Interactions between students and teachers occur on a daily basis and they can be divided in three types. Teachers and students may cooperate (certainly the best option), compete or be in conflict with each other. A particular relationship also evolves depending on personal character qualities of teachers and/or their teaching style. Mutual trust is a necessary precondition of success. How do children see their teachers today? When giving answers, children used the same assessment criteria for teachers as they did for their parents (the chart shows the percentage of children mentioning a particular character quality in relation to their class teachers).

---

[5] The research report is freely available on the website of The Keys for Life Project www.kliceprozivot.cz and in the National Register of Research on Children and Youth on www.vyzkum-mladez.cz.

Chart 10: Character qualities of teachers as seen through the eyes of children, in relation to age

We can see that as far as positive character qualities are concerned, most children consider their teachers to be smart, fair, willing to help and not losing their temper easily. The assessment becomes less positive with growing age though. In spite of that children do not think better of teachers than of their own parents in any of these respects (for example, they are not even smarter).

On the other hand, most children believe that teachers do not have enough time for them, do not listen to them, do not trust them much, sometimes lie and are no fun. With growing age there are also a growing number of those who assess their teachers negatively in these respects. It may also be added that the older the children are the more they consider their teachers strict (up to 72% in the oldest group) and they think that they lose their temper easily (increase by 15% compared to the youngest children). We can see that interactions between numerous teachers and students show negative features.

Apart from the influence of the socio-economic status and education of parents (to be discussed in a separate chapter) on the assessment of teachers' personalities, also other facts have become apparent. Teachers are more positively perceived by girls rather than they are by boys. Girls more often than boys believe that their teachers are nice, truthful and fair. 55% of children aged 6 – 9 as opposed to only 32% of respondents aged 13 – 15 see their teachers as nice. This may result from the fact that teachers get less frequently into conflict with younger children than with teenagers whose behaviour may be rather problematic at that age. It is also the relationship the young schoolchildren (aged 6 – 9) have to their teacher. The relationship with the children of this age is more personal and is based on personal emotional bond. Children's answers also show that the mutual trust, feeling of certainty and safety declines with age.

Statements noted during group interviews show that children are very sensitive to the teachers' full efforts and enthusiasm. If they feel that teachers do not enjoy their job, they stop showing interest in the given subject. The following are the typical statements of children during group interviews:

> Johanka (Age category 13 – 15): *Our teacher does not behave professionally to students and some teachers are desperate, having to teach.*
> Jolana, Štepán, Martin, Sára (Aged 13 and 14): *Our teacher teaches poorly, she takes down our self-confidence, sometimes she behaves like a racist.*
> Klára (Age category 10 – 12): *I would replace some teachers, they are horrible.*

What are children's likes and dislikes about school?

Children were often in agreement regarding their answers to the question what they really liked and what they really disliked about school. Their likes most often included friends and breaks, occasionally a specific subject.

> Question: *If you were to name one thing you really like at school, what would it be?*
> Karel (Age category 13 – 15): *Well, I don't know, there are not many things at school I really like. Purely and simply the breaks.*
> Karolína (Age category 13 – 15): *I love geography most of all because this is where we can do what we want….and I also like film classes….and breaks.*
> Marie (Age category 13 – 15): *Most of all I love music lessons because this is where we can say what we enjoy doing most of all, what music we listen; and we have our class teacher.*
> Štepán (Age category 13 – 15): *Most of all I enjoy having friends here, and I do like PT.*
> Tonda (Age category 13 – 15): *I like breaks and subjects where you don't have to think too much.*
> Adéla (Age category 13 – 15): *I'd say art lessons and Czech.*
> Klára (Age category 13 – 15): *Breaks and lessons taught by good teachers.*
> Honza (Age category 13 – 15): *PT, after-school activities and friends, in particular.*

Almost all the subjects were assessed negatively; mathematics, Czech language and natural science were mentioned quite often.

> Question: *What do you enjoy least at school?*
> Marie (Age category 13 – 15): *Perhaps chemistry….*
> Leoš (Age category 13 – 15): *The Czech language….*
> Karolína (Age category 13 – 15): *History, because I am not into history at all, and maths – I don't like that much either.*
> Adéla (Age category 13 – 15): *Maths, too, because I am not good at numbers; well, and then the PT teacher.*
> Karel (Age category 13 – 15): *Maths, too, because I think that now we go over things we wouldn't have to know at all…….*
> Láďa (Age category 13 – 15): *I would replace our teacher of Czech and change curricula, 8 kg on our shoulders is damaging for our back.*
> Honza (Age category 13 – 15): *Czech, national history and geography, natural science.*

If there is a teacher among the teaching staff who is not able to establish a friendly relationship with students or professionally present the curriculum, it has an adverse impact on the child's relationship to the subject in question. The student relationship to school and the curriculum presented is therefore very strongly determined by teachers' abilities to attract children's attention to the topic, as well as by

teachers' character qualities. An important factor of a mutual relationship is the ability of a teacher to positively stimulate the relationship, to listen, to leave the children some space for expressing their own opinions and to respect their age dissimilarities and needs.

And what about boredom and stress?

Another research area covered questions related to children's feelings about their stay at school: whether classes are boring and they feel stressed or uncomfortable seeing bad behaviour of their classmates, or, whether they have good friends there, teachers are nice and they learn things that are useful for their future.

It has turned out that for the vast majority of children the school is predominantly a place where they meet friends and establish new friendships; friends are usually the most popular part of school. A roughly half of respondents believe that they learn things at school that will be useful in the future, 44% of children believe that their teachers are nice. Occasionally, children feel bored (25%) or uncomfortable or stressed (10%). Although almost all children have good friends at school, they sometimes witness bad behaviour among children.

Children from ordinary families and children at risk of social exclusion[6] associate the school environment mainly with good friends. Further comparisons show significant differences. Children at risk of social exclusion, however, are more frequently bored at school, feel more stressed there and/or feel other people around behave badly. If we look at the situation at school per age group, we will get the following result (the columns show the percentage of children who mentioned to experience such situations at school).

Chart 11: Situation at school, in relation to age

---
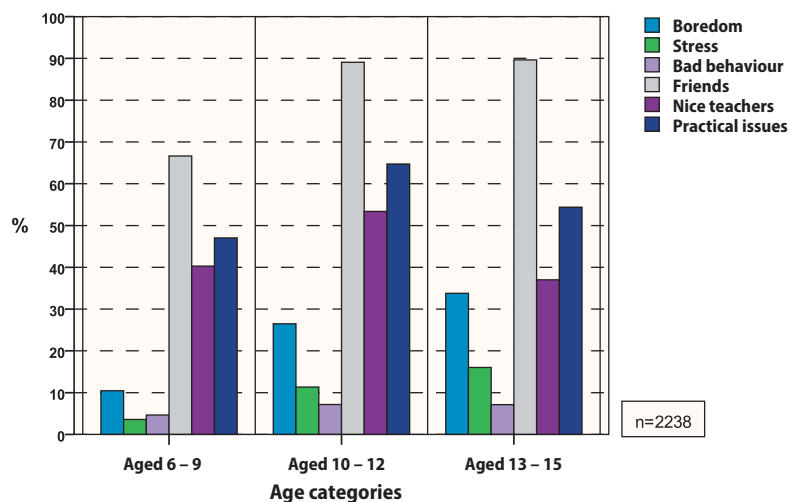
[6] In 2009, the National Institute for Children and Youth dedicated an entire research to such children: "Healthy Atmosphere in Leisure Time and Informal Education"; the final report is freely available on the website of The Keys for Life Project www.kliceprozivot.cz and in the National Register of Research on Children and Youth on www.vyzkum-mladez.cz.

The older the children are the more friends they have at school. There are 66% of children aged 6 – 9 as opposed 90% of those in the old-est group saying to have good friends at school. Unfortunately, the feeling of boredom grows with age. Only 10% of children aged 6 – 9 feel bored at school while in the oldest age group it is more than one third. The reason for that may lie in the fact that children do not un-derstand the purpose and practical use of the curriculum presented, the given subjects are not appealing for them, they are not suffi-ciently motivated, they do not like either the teaching style or the personality of the teacher and therefore there is not enough "action" for them during classes.

Students' relationship to school is also influenced by their success, mutual teacher-student relationship, possibilities for expressing one-self, quality of communication and interaction. Mutual trust, teacher's enthusiasm and sincerity, teacher's ability to link theory to prac-tice and children's experience are essentially important.

Two thirds of children aged 10 – 12 believe that they frequently learn things at school that are useful for their future. This is by 20% more than in the youngest age group. In the oldest group, roughly half of the respondents believe so.

The older the children are the more stress they feel. While elementary school first graders feel stressed at school only rarely, the number is as high as 16% in the oldest group. This may result from the growing demands on students and their preparation for further education (admission exams for secondary schools, etc.) or by their own unmet expectations, or expectations of teachers or parents.

If gender is taken into consideration when assessing the situation at school it is evident that girls feel better there. They have roughly the same number of friends as boys but a lower number of girls feel stressed or bored at school. More girls also believe that there are nice teachers and that they learn things that are useful for their life. The above mentioned shows that girls meet school requirements slightly better than boys, and are able to cope better than boys with typical school situations.

What is the key message our children have given us about school in this research?

- *Although children consider school to be more or less a necessary obligation, almost all of them are convinced that it is important and meaningful to go to school. They do realise that school brings some specific benefits to them.*
- *Teachers are smart and strict according to most children (especially for adolescents); however, most children are con-vinced that they do not have time for them, do not trust them much, are no fun and sometimes lie.*
- *Children enjoy school mainly because they have friends there who, together with breaks, are the main school attractions.*
- *The older the children are the more they feel bored and stressed during classes.*
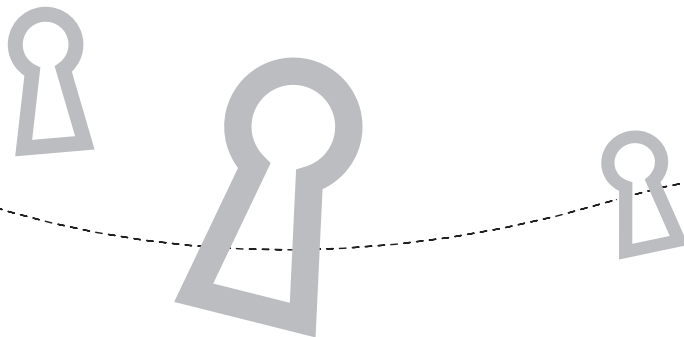
LEISURE TIME

Leisure time could be defined, with some degree of overstatement, as a time when "one does not have to but wants to". As always, however, reality is slightly more colourful than that. On the one hand, many of us fulfil their school or work obligations with interest and without compulsion; on the other hand, by enrolling in a club we assume the obligation to respect certain rules, including appointment dates.

In general, for the child's world it is true that leisure time is an after-school time and/or a time to fulfil tasks planned by someone else. How to make use of this time interval in between obligations needs to be decided by proper families. They also discuss what to choose from a variety of art, hiking or sports clubs, taking into account affordability and possibilities offered in the given location. The chapter dedicated to organised leisure activities will show that children's clubs have a long tradition in this country. For many readers it might be surprising to learn about a high number of children who participate in these activities on a regular basis. At first, we will discuss an unorganised leisure time. We will show a "snapshot of a day" of today's children, the importance of friends to them and finally, a few important remarks on the media will be included.

Unorganised, and (therefore) extremely important leisure time

Unlike membership in a club or a hobby group, unorganised leisure time is a time for more specific activities. But it is not meant to be a lonely time with no friends. On the contrary. However, there are no institutions to supervise over the passing of leisure time, which is governed by social rules only. As one such rule says that weeks are divided into the working and relaxation parts, we applied this rule as the first one. Children were asked about their most frequent weekday and weekend leisure activities. As the same activities repeated in their answers, we could compare their frequency and intensity. And the result? Children spend their leisure time mainly with *friends, TV, computer – and studying*. The importance attached to these activities changes, quite understandably, with age and possibilities of their family. What do children of school age regularly do after school?

Chart 12: Weekday leisure activities, children aged 13 – 15

n=743
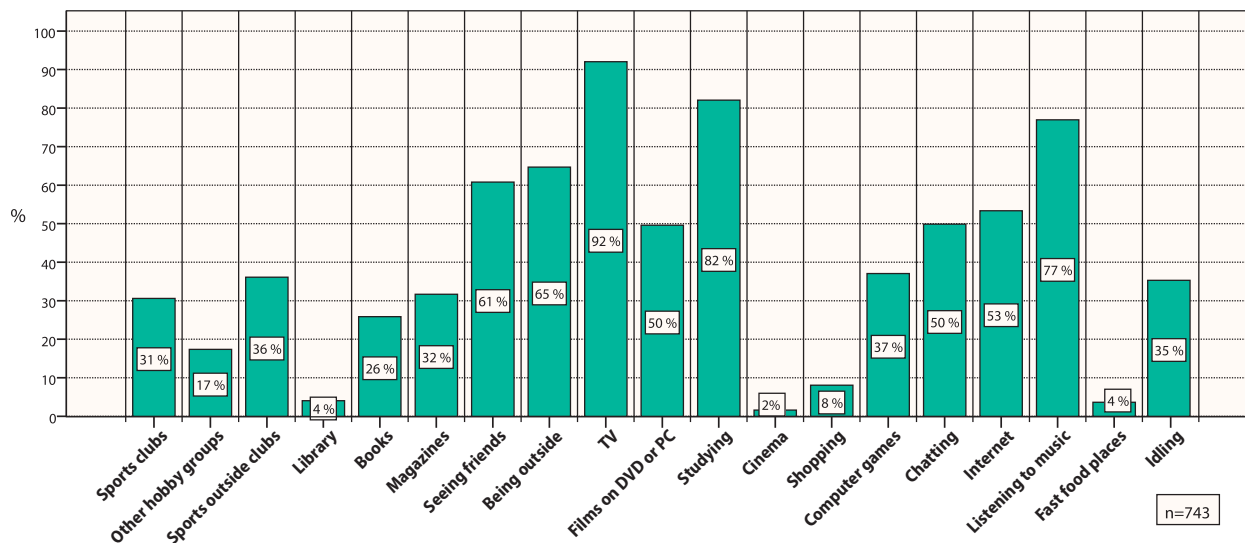
The columns show the percentage of children aged 13 – 15 saying to engage in a given activity on a daily basis or at least 2 to 3 times a week. The data for the remaining two younger age categories do not differ significantly. The vast majority of children regardless of age most of all watch TV on weekdays and, rather surprisingly, spend the same time studying or preparing for classes (this issue will be addressed later on). When asked what else they do the younger children answer that they attend clubs or hobby groups. The older ones also mention seeing friends and just "being outside", younger teenagers speak about the internet, social networks and listening to music, which is considered a matter-of-course - valued only a slightly less than watching TV. From what teenagers say it is quite evident that these changes in priorities are at the expense of activities in hobby groups (but not sports clubs), which still more often do not fit into a week schedule.

For teachers (but possibly also for parents) it may be quite gratifying to learn from children about their interest in studying. Especially among the 5th and 6th graders there is hardly anybody who would not speak about studying at home several times a week, which is likely to be associated with increased demands on children in relation to the transition from primary schools (grades 1 – 5) to "middle schools" (grades 6 – 9). On the other hand, we should not forget two important factors:

- In this particular respect it is quite likely that children use some kind of stylisation – they know that adults attach great importance to education, so why not to improve their own image;
- The results shown in the chart also say nothing about the intensity of their studying and amount of time children dedicate to it. While other data show that children spend two to three hours watching TV every day (and some of them much longer), our research does not provide data on the number of hours they spend studying at home every day.

Debates dedicated to children and young people often mention their tendency to consumerist behaviour and distorted sensitivity to interpersonal relations due to their entering the viral world as early as during childhood. However, children themselves view this issue differently. At first, it is good to know that they do not excessively indulge in fast food or shopping. Only a very small percentage of all school-aged children go to fast food places several times a week. A half of children state that they do not go to fast food facilities at all. It is therefore quite clear that consumerist behaviour starts to change later on. The second issue is more complicated and will be addressed at the end of this chapter. It is a hard fact that one third of all today's children play computer games several times a week. One third of children do not play them at all. It is up to the readers to judge whether it is too much or too little.

The computer age has sad victims and they are traditional repositories of knowledge – libraries. Children simply reprobate them; it seems obvious that they are not an attractive space inviting them to enter. It is self-evident that it also results from the fact that their resources and information transfer methods have long been neglected, which leads to constant decrease in their number. The internet, which is permanently competing with them, provides an increasing supply of information (which is positive) but on the other hand it distorts readers' ability to choose high-quality books and, in particular, leads to succinctness of expression; entire novels are reduced to mere popularised fragments, or essential information is presented like a promo. This is, in our opinion, a great challenge for teachers and parents because it is evident that children still know how to read (even though their interest in reading declines dramatically with age) and the literature speaks to their imagination in spite of all the above mentioned challenges.

Jana (Age category 10 – 12): *I have just finished reading a book titled "Tobias Volnes" and the book was actually about some young people living in a tree…so I would like to be like them….*

The structure of the day on weekends is naturally different from that on weekdays. There are no classes at school and usually no out-of-school activities – apart from sports clubs that organise matches, contests and competitions for children. The same applies to hiking clubs that organise various trips. However, these activities do not take place every weekend, or they do not occupy the whole week-

end or an entire weekend day. Most parents are not at work on weekends and therefore they usually spend much more time with their children. For these reasons the below chart may seem to show that children do not engage so much in activities we would assume they have finally enough time for. It is apparent that on weekends many children spend time with their parents, at weekend houses, cottages, seeing grandparents or other relatives or acquaintances or going for a trip. During such family activities children do not have much time to sit in front of their computer, do shopping, etc. When monitoring the frequency of activities children engage in every weekend, apart from one, the result is the same as with activities they do several times a week on weekdays. And that is watching TV by younger children.

> Jakub (Age category 13 – 15): *I do not attend any hobby groups, I have enough of them at home….a goat, I need to take care of a goat, we have kids now.*

The following chart shows what children do most frequently if their families stay at home on Saturdays and Sundays. This time the chart shows all three age categories – 6 – 9, 10 – 12 and 13 – 15. The columns again show the percentage of children in the given age category who *perform the given activity every weekend or almost every weekend.*

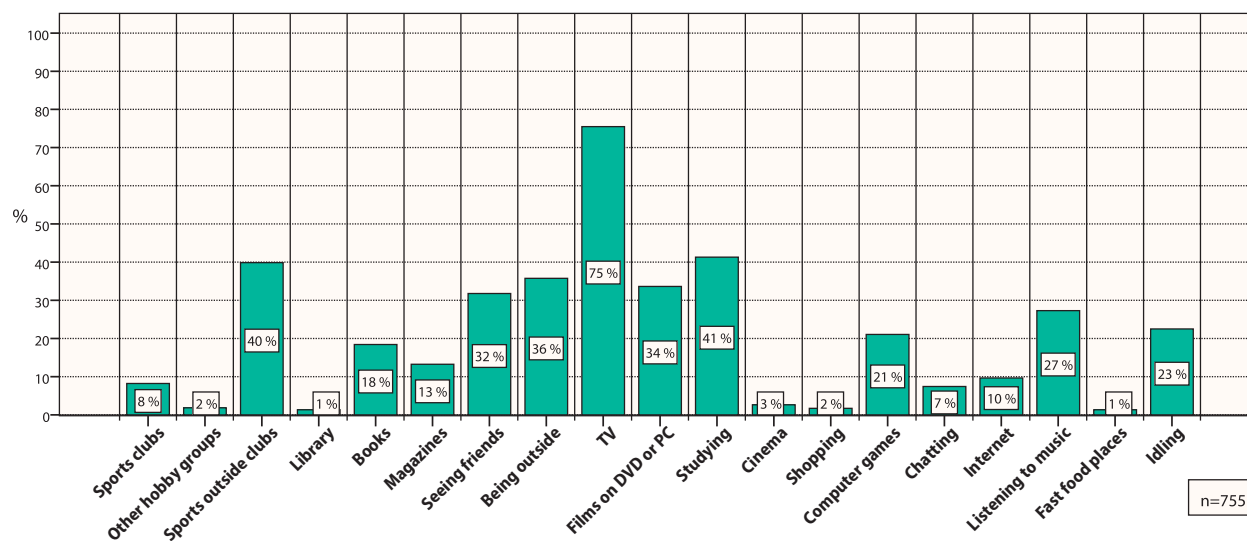*Chart 13: Weekend leisure activities, children aged 6 – 9*

n=755

Chart 14: Weekend leisure activities, children aged 10 –12
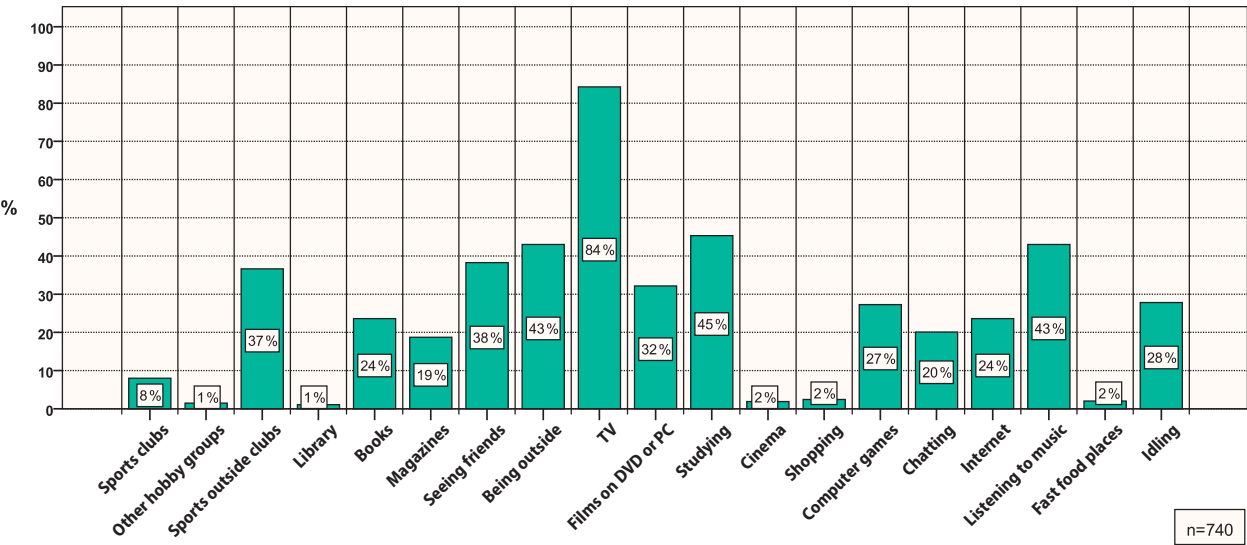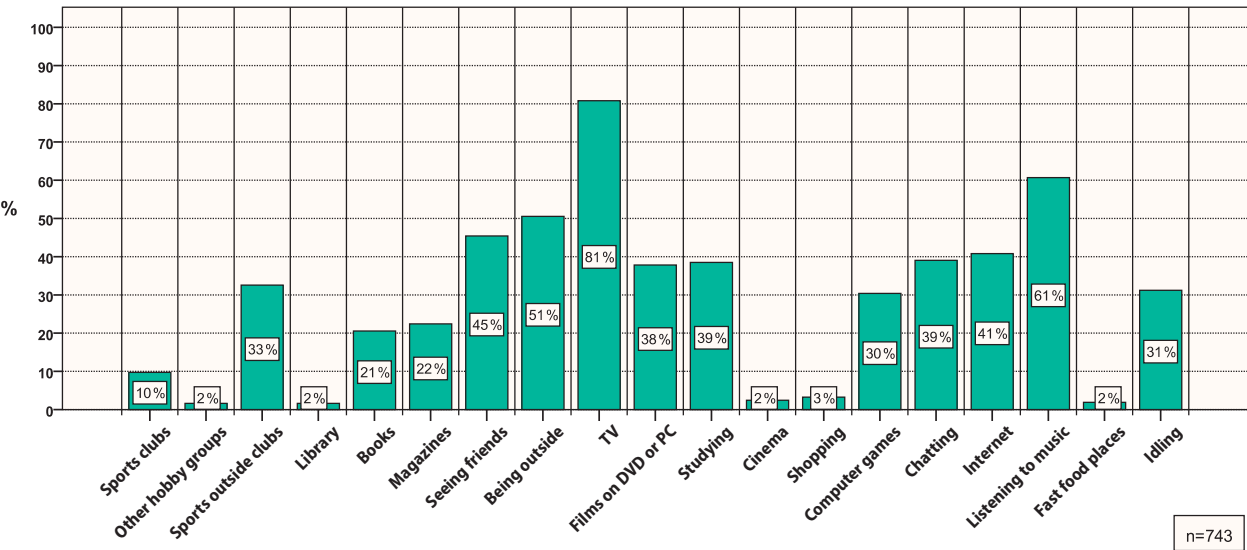

n=740

Chart 15: Weekend leisure activities, children aged 13 – 15

n=743

It is quite obvious that the most frequent activity in all age categories is watching TV. The youngest children aged 6 – 9 mentioned studying and sports as the second most frequently performed activity. According to the oldest children their second most frequently performed activity is listening to music and "being outside". Older children compared to the respondents from the youngest age category spend three or four times more time in front of a computer.

On weekdays, the most frequent companions of the Czech younger children are their parents or siblings. Friends from school or from the neighbourhood and grandparents follow the closest relatives by a huge margin. According to the information obtained from children this ratio starts to change in favour of school friends around the age of 12, and it is first parents, grandparents and partly also brothers and sisters who need to "abandon their positions". The chart shows answers of children aged 10 – 15, the columns show the percentage of children who spend their leisure time with the respective person *"4 – 5 times a week" "2 – 3 times a week"*.

Chart 16: The people children spend their leisure time on weekdays, children aged 10 – 15
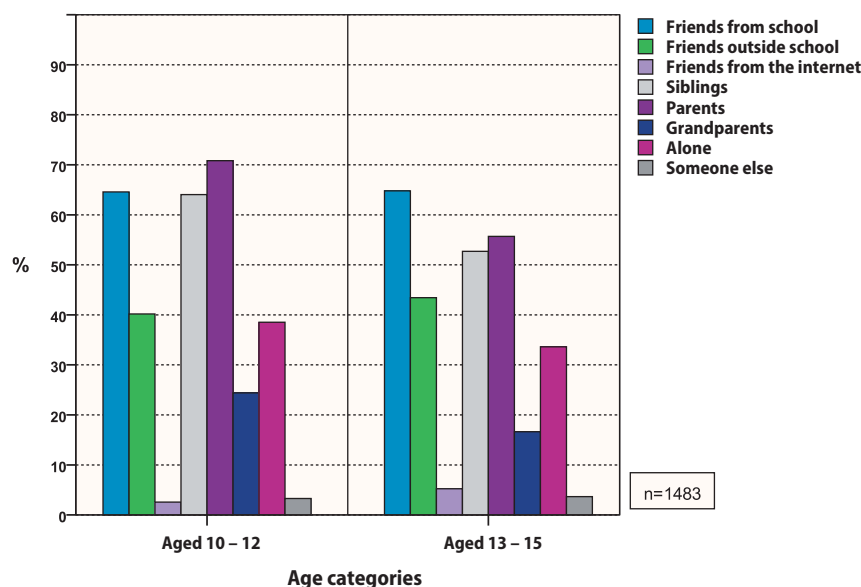
The circle of people the children spend their leisure time with does not change much on weekends. This circle includes, first of all, parents, siblings, grandparents and friends, while parents are starting to take a back seat with the growing age of children as they spend more time with friends. The concept of a weekend as "family time" logically results in a 50% lower participation of friends in weekend activities. However, if children do spend time with friends over the weekends, these are most frequently children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, children of low-educated parents and children from smaller municipalities where they apparently have more opportunities, as shown in the following chart:

Chart 17: The people children spend their leisure time on weekends, aged 6 – 15, per size of municipality
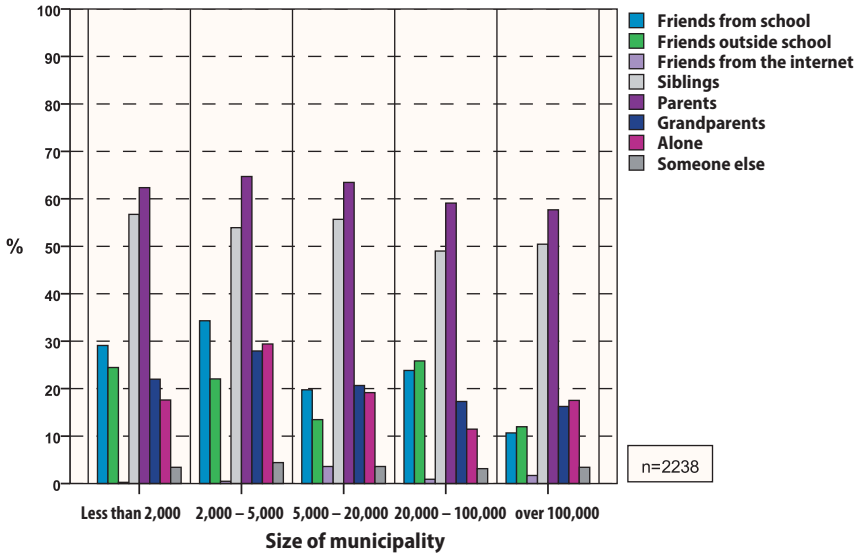
The research also shows that some children are visibly overloaded with out-of-school activities. Their percentage can be found in the chart included in the section dedicated to organised activities.

Eva (Age category 10 – 12): *I have many friends, I have a lot of out-of-school activities, I participate in three summer camps, my mom has a great number of acquaintances who have children and I am friends with them, too. When my brother has a party or someone invites him to a party, he also takes me with him and I meet children there. I like friends who are from other countries. We had some people from Croatia staying with us for New Year's Eve, they were speaking about their country in English. They were teaching me some English, and I really enjoyed it.*

Friends lie but it does not matter…

A lot has been said and written about the importance of friends, and justly so, needs to be said. In brief, their importance for older children lies in particular in the fact that they are daily companions creating a peer background with all that goes with it. Such peer groups may have either positive or negative impact on the behaviour and mindset of their members, and most frequently they have both. Apart from these peer groupings, there are, on the one hand, groups formed with some clearly positive foundation and mission (and these will be discussed in the section dedicated to organised leisure activities) and on the other hand, there are groups with a clearly negative programme, leading to anti-social behaviour of their members, ending in the hands of law-enforcement officials.

So, a group of friends have common interests and have a positive impact in terms of providing an informal space for interaction, sharing of values and goals of activities done together. A vast majority of respondents confirmed that they were part of such group and a great part of them felt fine about it. Friendship as such is a complex system of relationships and the reasons for establishing and maintaining them are very varied. Such relationships are always based on at least one dominant feature shared by two or more children. It has come out, and quite logically so, that children establish friendships most of all at school or in their home place. However, it should be emphasised that their circle of friends becomes larger if they engage in out-of-school activities (the chart shows answers of children who say to have friends).

Chart 18: Friends

I have friends and I am satisfied with them.
I have friends but I would like to have some more.
I do not have any friends but I do not mind.
I do not have any friends but I would like to make them.

71 %
27 %
1 %
1 %

n=2197
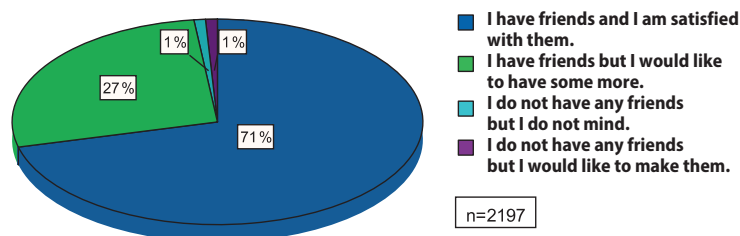
And how do children see their own friends? The answers show that friends are predominantly described as fun. Almost each respondent sees their friends as fun most of all. Compared to other key players such as parents, teachers or siblings, this has been by far the best result in this category. It is quite interesting to learn that only half of children believe that their friends are smart, able to listen, and that they would help them if needed. On the other hand, the best friends are usually not strict and do not lose their temper easily. Only very few children mentioned strictness or losing one's temper easily in relation to friends. The meaning of *fun* as understood by children is quite clearly shown from the above.

However, friends do not always speak the truth. Only one third of children believe that their friends never lie. And we may expect that saying about their best friends that they sometimes lie to others reflects, in particular, how they perceive themselves. This issue will be further discussed in the following chapter.

The friend profile may be seen in the following chart where particular columns show the percentage of children who find the given character quality in their friends.

Chart 19: Character qualities of friends through the eyes of children
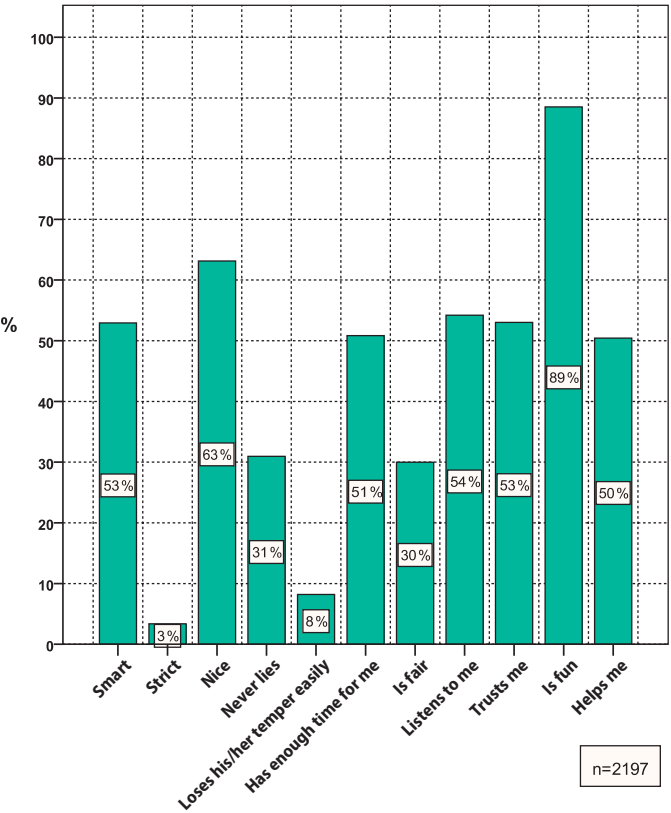
There are certain differences between boys and girls: girls unlike boys more often see their friends as nice, truthful, fair and able to listen. At the same time they trust them more and by 7% more girls than boys are also convinced that the friends are willing to help them. The development of the perception of friendship in relation to age is shown in the following chart.

Chart 20: Character qualities of friends in relation to age
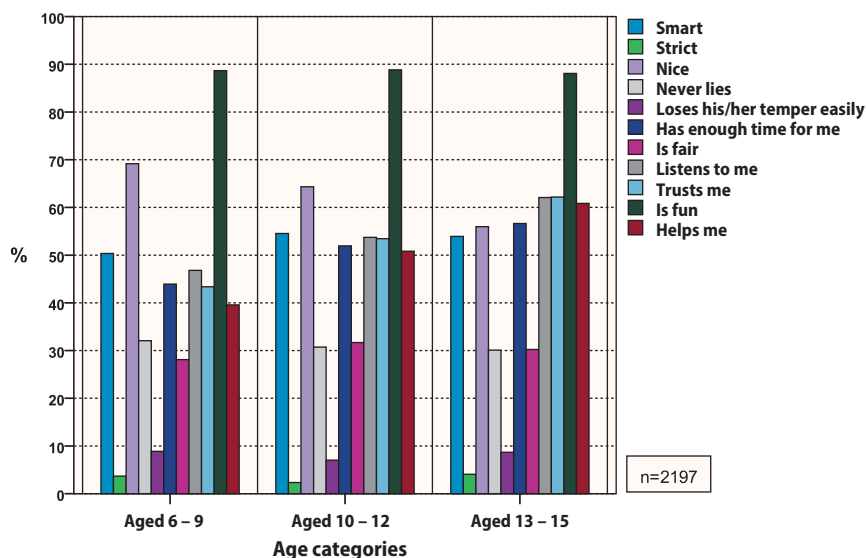
It has been said that friends are extremely powerful because they are able to influence (through a group) not only behaviour but also attitudes in various life situations. In spite of that the children's answers show a bit different result: friends are not taken much as role models but rather as a source of inspiration for matters that are not utterly essential. Most frequently it is friends who influence the choice of music or ways of spending leisure time. According to a rather small percentage of children the friends influence their clothing and hair style, and/or choice of other friends. The influence of their friends on more substantial issues such as shaping one's views, interactions with others or future career is according to them negligible. The seeming discrepancy is caused by the fact that the actual influence of friends remains hidden to children (just like it remains hidden to many adults) and so they do not realise it.

As far as leisure time spent with friends outside is concerned, older children do not engage in any extraordinary activities; their activities are predominantly based on the possibilities offered by the respective community. If there is a shopping centre within their reach it becomes a frequent destination for older children. Although they know that they do not buy anything there, apart from checking out new products (fashion for girls, computer items for boys), they like watching the people around, chatting and waiting to meet acquaintances, possibly from other crowds. If outside, they often spend free time in parks "on benches" where they chat, often flirt (older age groups) and boys show off in front of girls. If they spend time on a playing field, their sporting equipment serves more as a stage property. It is true that some of them actively engage in sports but others get involved only occasionally. Playing fields and their surroundings are mainly used as social interaction venues where especially the older ones have an opportunity to have their overconfidence excel.

It is interesting to examine the real leisure activities and compare them with the dreamed-of picture. Children were asked to specify how and where they would like to spend their leisure time if it were only up to them to decide and if they had unlimited possibilities (financial, time, etc…). The oldest age group respondents from cities with a population of over one hundred thousand often mentioned large shopping malls as their destination. It is quite surprising to find out that they feel comfortable like this and if they were to be given an opportunity to spend their "dream day" they would only amend their financial situation, so that they could buy anything the shops offer. Among older children in general there were tendencies toward consumerism as means of relaxation: to buy as many things as possible and to enjoy them later. Another dream leisure activity turned out to be travelling some place without parents, preferably to the seaside. To put it simply, children were not much creative or imaginative as regards leisure time. The most important for them is to be with friends, which applies to all age categories. Although exceptions could of course be found.

Interviews with children reveal another interesting fact: the least satisfied with their leisure activities are younger children in particular. They were the only ones to name one specific activity that can be performed during a day but which they still are, for various reasons, forbidden to do. Older children had some ideas on how to spend their leisure time but these were rather one-time activities such as travelling to the seaside, to Africa, etc. They did not want to change much about their daily activities, they were happy about what they were doing, including children who spend their free time almost exclusively aimlessly with a bunch of pals in a park or in the streets. A generally known statement that children "very well know what they do not want to do but have no idea what they would like to do" has been confirmed.

> Mikuláš (Age category 6 – 9): *I would like to be with my friends…my dreamed-of dream is to build a secret clubroom. And we already have wood for it so this is what I would like to build.*
> Jonáš (Age category 13 – 15): *I would like someone massaging me, scratching my head, giving me food all the time, someone choosing new films for me, a big TV set, a girl to it, and someone giving me one thousand crowns for a mere fact that I am sitting there.*

The media? The media!

TV as an information medium is not astonishing for anyone today. Since 1953, when TV broadcasting was launched, "tellies" have found their way to our cars, not speaking about our mobile phones. A little bit different is the situation with the internet, as not all of us are on friendly terms with it and, frankly saying, even though its popularity in Czech households is on increase it cannot beat the traditional television evenings. This may be due to the connection fees and equipment cost as well as the computer literacy that many of us still lack.

Today's children do not have these problems. TV and the internet are on a mass scale taken for granted especially by the older children; in effect they are restricted in watching TV only by sporadic parental bans. Scientists often warn that the media influence the way we perceive the world around us, who we blame for what, how we react to this or that, why we once keep quiet and another time protest loudly. The media also influence children and the people who work for them are very well aware of this fact. On the other hand, it is not only the media that influence children, they always "broadcast" in connection with other educational factors – parents, school, bunch of pals and also in the context of the value system of the given society. To balance out all these pressures is an extremely responsible, almost Sisyphean task. And it concerns all of us.

More detailed questions about the media were in our research asked only to the two older groups of children – i. e. to those aged 10 - 15. At first we wanted to know answers to the question: „*Would you rather do without TV or without the internet?*" The following chart shows that only every tenth child could do without both. There are 57% of children who consider TV a necessity and 71% of those who would not give up the internet. Almost forty per cent of children do not want to live without either one.

Chart 21: What would children rather do without?

Internet
TV
Both
Neither one
No opinion and/or no answer

32 %
18 %
11 %
0 %
39 %

n=**1483**
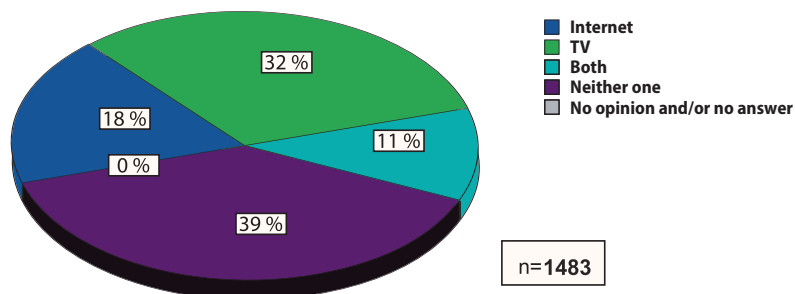
Can we interpret this finding by saying that the vast majority of children are already at risk of being addicted to TV and the internet? It cannot be inferred directly from what the children said during group interviews (it is a cell phone that is considered an absolutely indispensable means of communication) but the following data on the amount of time spent by children in front of TV and on the internet clearly shows that these media play a key role for quite a large group of children.

Further on, we will see that older children gradually abandon hobby group and club activities and spend their time as they please – mainly with friends or in front of TV or computer. Our research has also confirmed that most children watch TV for more than one hour a day on weekdays; and it is more than two hours for every fifth child. The time they spend in front of TV increases with age. The following chart shows television behaviour of children depending on age, and each column shows the percentage of children depending on the amount of time spent in front of TV.

Chart 22: Time spent in front of TV on weekdays, children aged 10 – 15

Legend:
- **30 minutes and less**
- **31 – 60 minutes**
- **61 – 90 minutes**
- **91 – 120 minutes**
- **121 – 180 minutes**
- **More than 180 minutes**

n=1483

Age	30 minutes and less	31 – 60 minutes	61 – 90 minutes	91 – 120 minutes	121 – 180 minutes	More than 180 minutes
10	11 %	35 %	10 %	29 %	11 %	4 %
11	7 %	39 %	17 %	22 %	11 %	4 %
12	8 %	33 %	10 %	27 %	15 %	7 %
13	8 %	32 %	13 %	30 %	10 %	7 %
14	5 %	27 %	14 %	32 %	14 %	8 %
15	8 %	25 %	14 %	34 %	13 %	6 %
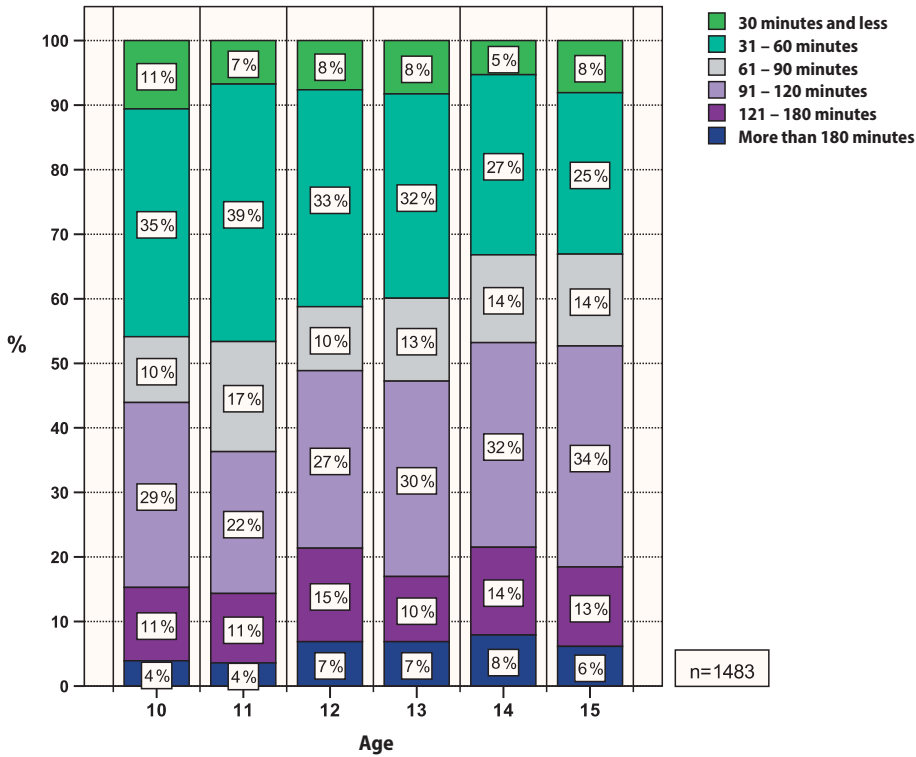
Our children spend substantially more time in front of TV on weekends. It is again obvious how the number of passionate viewers grows with age. The research has also revealed quite a significant correlation between the size of the place of residence and the time spent in front of TV. This trend is noticeable when comparing larger municipalities (population of 2 – 5 thousand) with smaller municipalities (population of 5 – 20 thousand).

Chart 23: Time spent in front of TV on weekends, children aged 10 – 15

Legend:
- 30 minutes and less
- 31 – 60 minutes
- 61 – 90 minutes
- 91 – 120 minutes
- 121 – 180 minutes
- More than 180 minutes

n=1483

Age	30 minutes and less	31 – 60 minutes	61 – 90 minutes	91 – 120 minutes	121 – 180 minutes	More than 180 minutes
10	1 %	11 %	7 %	31 %	23 %	27 %
11	2 %	11 %	6 %	24 %	24 %	33 %
12	1 %	15 %	4 %	21 %	24 %	35 %
13	1 %	9 %	7 %	25 %	26 %	32 %
14	1 %	9 %	5 %	24 %	25 %	36 %
15	3 %	10 %	7 %	22 %	25 %	33 %
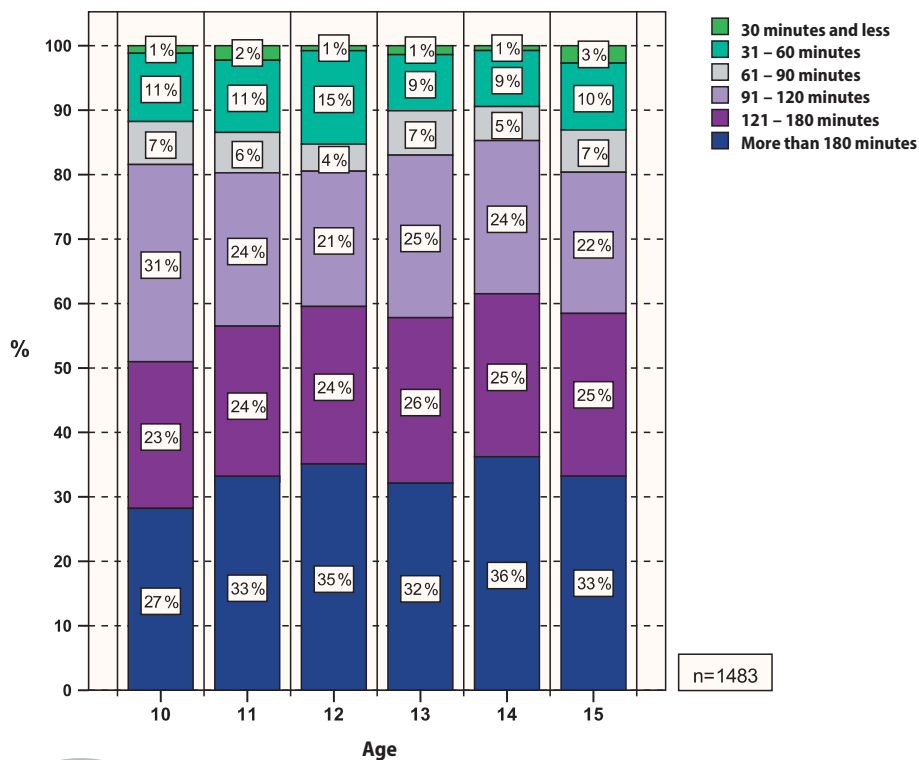
Chart 24: Time spent in front of TV on weekends, per size of municipality

Legend:
- 30 minutes and less
- 31 – 60 minutes
- 61 – 90 minutes
- 91 – 120 minutes
- 121 – 180 minutes
- More than 180 minutes

n=1483

Size of municipality
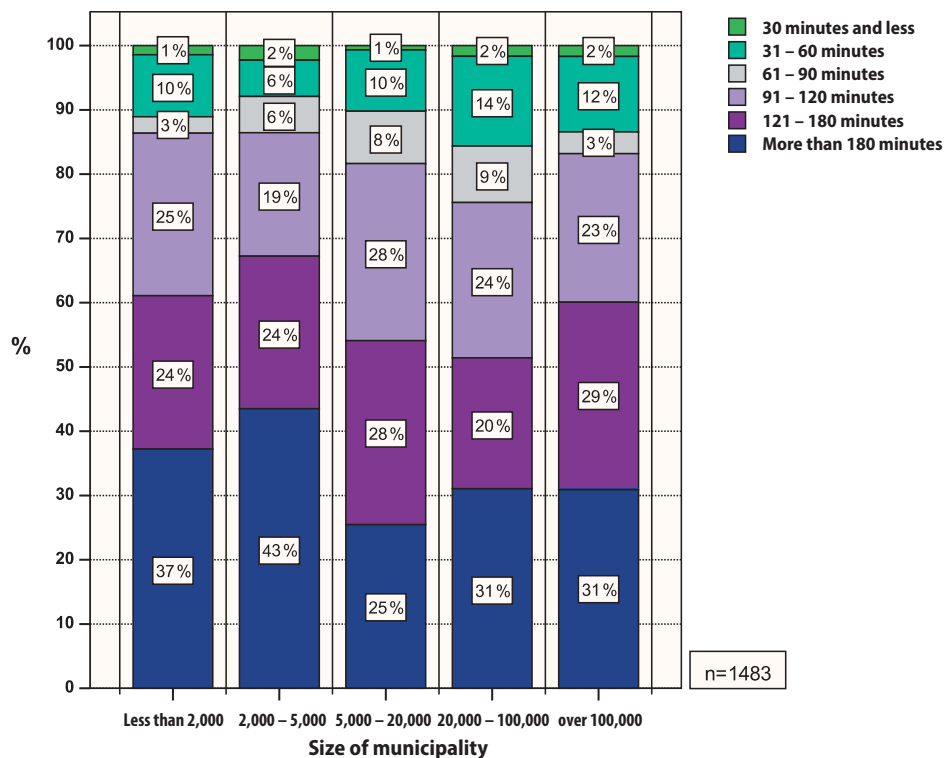
The internet is a phenomenon of a contemporary society. Although it is only a bit older than Czech school-aged children - or maybe that's why - they have found their way to it easily. Unlike TV, the internet fundamentally changes access to information. While news or entertainment channels always need to be careful about their programme selection and adapt the contents to variable taste and age of viewers, the internet usually does not have to respect such rules. On the contrary, its popularity lies in an immense range of sources and products intended for all those who are interested or just by chance stray into the website. Access to the internet is basically restricted only by the connection technical parameters and, therefore it has become quite common to use the term "surfing" for its use. You can move freely around just like in the ocean waves, sail in, sail out, wherever and with whomever you feel like to. The internet as a means of learning about the world has a clearly positive effect.

The internet brings into the world of children an infinite number of images, videos, discussions and articles that are freely available and interlinked by click-throughs. However, this may bring about considerable traps that children can hardly reveal. Then it is up to parents and schools to teach children read on the internet just like they are taught how to read a book or a timetable.

The following two charts show how much time children from different age categories spend on the internet on weekdays and on weekends.

Chart 25: Time spent on the internet on weekdays, children aged 10 – 15

Legend:
- 30 minutes and less
- 31 – 60 minutes
- 61 – 90 minutes
- 91 – 120 minutes
- 121 – 180 minutes
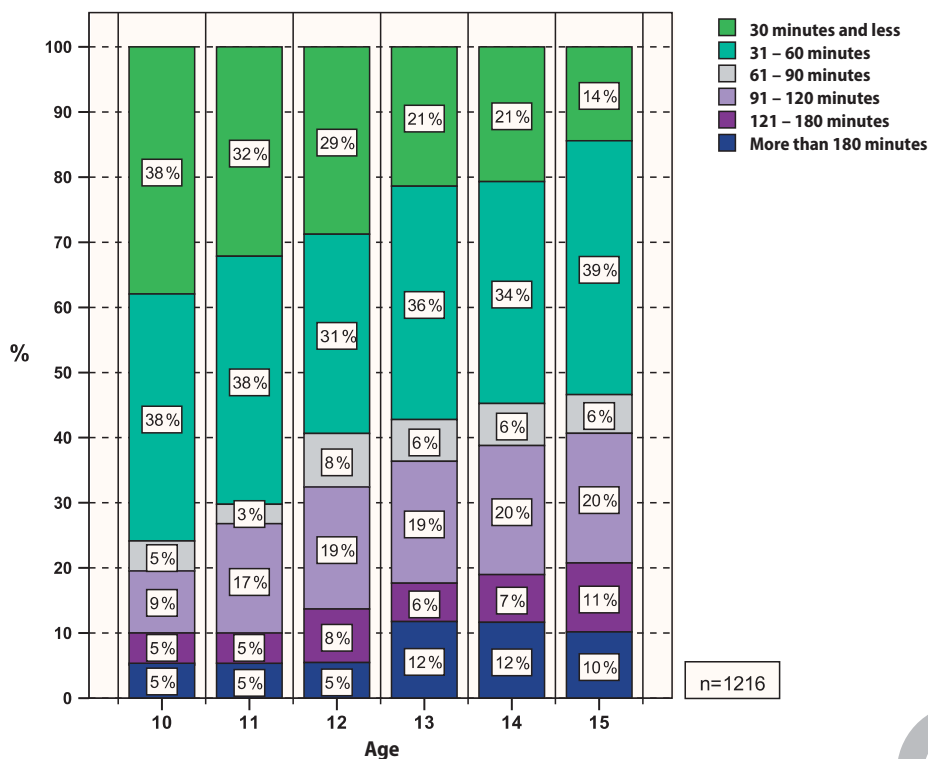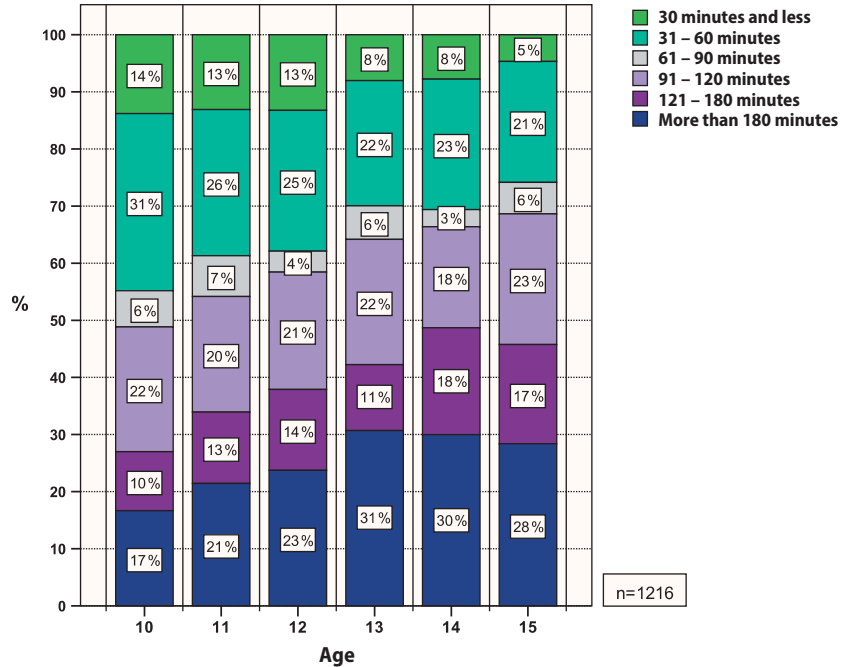- More than 180 minutes

n=1216

*Chart 26: Time spent on the internet on weekends, children aged 10 – 15*

The fact that the internet is a popular and indispensable means of communication (ICQ, Skype), entertainment (YouTube) but also studying is demonstrated by children themselves by the amount of time they dedicate to it. Personal interviews reveal over 80% of older schoolchildren being "online". On weekdays, they usually spend over an hour a day in this virtual world. Improved user skills also mean a longer time spent by surfing, and the internet becomes still a more serious competitor of the traditional TV. Note, for example, that there are 50% less ten-year old children who spend more than two hours on the internet than those aged fifteen. A ninth grader surfing on the internet for three or more hours a day during weekends is no exception either.

Libor (Age category 13 – 15): *I could do without TV or play station but I am slowly becoming addicted to the internet because it is multifunctional.*

During weekends, one has more time for both TV and the internet. When children are at home, according to their own words they spend – compared to weekdays – about twice as much time on the internet (and in the figurative sense of the word also with their connected friends). They usually spend there about 120 minutes. The amount of time spent on the internet correlates with the time spent in front of TV. Even though children spend more time in front of TV than they do on the internet it has been found out that these two factors are interrelated – the more time they spend in front of TV the more likely they also spend more time on the internet (particular columns in the chart show the time spent in front of TV; the numbers inside the columns show the percentage of children who spend some time on the internet).

Chart 27: Time spent on the internet on weekdays in relation to the time spent in front of TV

41
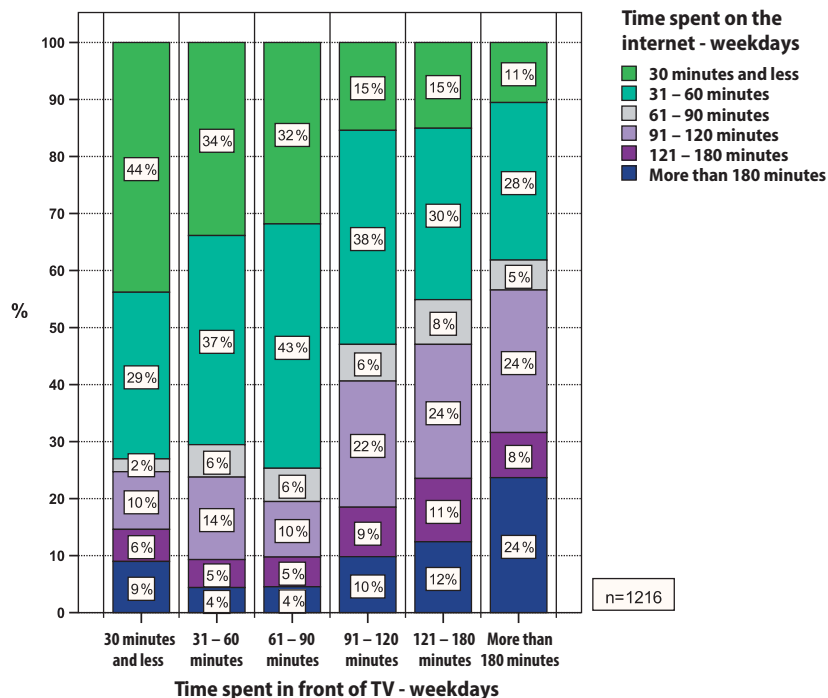
For example, children claiming to spend no more than 30 minutes on the internet a day also claimed to spend 30 minutes at maximum in front of TV. And on the contrary, of children claiming to spend in front of TV more than three hours a day 24% of them claimed to spend the same amount of time on the internet.

We also wanted to know how much and how often moms and dads come into play as far as selecting or banning TV programmes and internet sites are concerned. Children say that both are common phenomena but only up to a certain age. While the youngest ones should expect quite frequent supervision of the programmes, one half of the eighth or ninth graders do not take this form of supervision seriously and the other 50% of them admit that parents pay attention to this only occasionally.

Children's testimonies also reveal that a number of parents make recommendations about programmes they consider interesting. Again, it is true that parents' interest in what their children watch declines with age. While the vast majority of parents make recommendations about certain programmes to the first and second graders at least occasionally, only slightly more than 50% of them make any recommendations whatsoever in this respect to 15-year olds.

If children are to be completely banned from watching TV, parents are significantly less hard on them than in the case of bans on selected programmes; and the ban does not by far last long. One third of the youngest ones have never experienced this educational method at all, half of them did but only occasionally. Teenagers are (from their perspective) in still a better situation because every second has never been banned from watching TV and if they have, it more often concerned boys than girls.

Bans on being connected to the internet have the same mechanics as bans on watching TV. Parents most often prohibit the internet to the youngest ones and least often to the oldest schoolchildren, of whom still one half have never experienced this method of punishment. What is, however, interesting is the approach of parents to bans and to recommendations of selected websites. Children's testimonies show that parents do not understand the internet much and apparently do not know how to get children acquainted with it. This can be inferred from not only a surprisingly low number of bans on specific website, especially for the youngest ones, but compared with TV also from much less frequent recommendations where and what should be watched.

Due to the fact that these are testimonies of children themselves from which we can hardly conclude whether parents, for example, have not installed any type of child filters for their browsers without the children knowing, the results should be taken with a pinch of salt. On the other hand, interviews may confirm a rather more general surmise that the internet is not a common platform where parents could encounter their children, which may be due to lacking computer literacy mentioned above. Now we can see that it is inadvisable to underestimate it. Being able to cope with the electronic world is, with respect to a permanent inflow of stimuli and contacts for the development of children, important also because it still more often becomes part of the real world.

In conclusion, allow us one warning and one piece of advice. Unorganised leisure time ***should not*** be perceived as a time in which children can do whatever they want. However, they should also be given an opportunity to remain themselves. Respecting both these factors is not an easy task for parents. In order to manage this task it may be useful to think about the following overview of the key players who may fill in the children's leisure time with a range of various activities.

If you, when going through the following charts, fictitiously put together a "model" day or week of a Czech schoolchild, do not forget to take into account the fact (apart from the time spent at school, with the family, friends and in front of TV or on the internet) that the vast majority of children has two or more out-of-school activities a week, which is discussed in the following chapter.

As far as unorganised leisure activities are concerned, we have learned most of the below mentioned from respondents:

- *Children's leisure time is filled with friends, TV, computer and studying on both weekdays and weekends. Older children also often listen to music. One third of all children aged 10 – 15 claim to play computer games several times a week, another third of them do not play them at all. One third of children engage in sports on a regular basis, read magazines – but also indulge in idleness.*
- *Over weekdays the most frequent companion of younger children are parents and siblings; school friends or friends from neighbourhood and grandparents are less represented. This ratio starts to change in favour of friends from school around the age of twelve. A similar situation is on weekends, however, there are less friends in villages.*
- *In particular younger children are less satisfied with the manner they normally spend their leisure time. It is only them who are able to name one specific activity that can be performed during a day but which they are banned from doing for various reasons. Older children also have some ideas on how to spend their leisure time but these are mainly one-time activities. Therefore, they feel fine about their activities even though it is true that "they know very well what they do not want to do but they have no idea what they would like to do".*
- *Almost all children have friends and it is fun they appreciate most about them. Only half of children think that their friends are smart, able to listen and willing to help if needed. Most children believe that their friends sometimes lie.*
- *TV and the internet play still a bigger role for children with their growing age. The more time children spend in front of TV, the more time they also spend on the internet. Over 80% of older schoolchildren claim to be "online" almost every day. The internet is so popular that if they were to do without one of them they would choose TV.*
- *While the younger ones have to count with a relatively frequent supervision of parents regarding the programmes they watch on TV, half of the eighth graders or ninth graders do not admit such method of supervision at all and the other half confess that parents show their interest in this respect only scarcely.*
- *Parents decide to ban their children from visiting certain websites only exceptionally and unlike with TV they give much less recommendations to their children as to where and what they should watch. It may be concluded therefrom that the internet is not a common platform yet where parents and children could frequently meet.*

Time spent in an organised manner does not have to be a bore

We are now approaching an area that has had a rich tradition going back to mid-19th century, which witnessed the national revival in the Czech lands driven by not only intelligentsia (revivalists) but also by newly emerging associations, with Sokol playing the key role among them. In the disturbed times of the 20th century these were followed by various movements, which further intertwined, changed under ideological or political flurries; some ceased to exist while others such as Punkva immersed under the surface of totalitarian regimes in order to come alive again at the times of "thawing". Anyway, at the end of the 20th century there had already existed a remarkably varied range of possibilities for children to take part in organised leisure activities.

In general, at present we have five types of organisations that offer such activities.

- *Non-governmental non-profit organisations (NNO) of children and youth* (or working with children and youth) are most in line with the original character of Sokol, even though many of them are in tune with time. These include typical associations such as scouts, pioneers, woodcrafters, campers, TOM members or woodsmen, but also a number of others founded after 1990. If children speak about affiliation to a club, it is quite probable that they attend this club and are members of some association. It is the beginning of a life-long journey for many.

- *Sports clubs* are in almost every village (for example, football clubs) and hundreds of thousands of children attend them in a certain stage of their lives. Unlike previous types of clubs they predominantly focus on results.
- *School facilities for the leisure-time education* is an umbrella name for leisure-time centres, school clubs and after-school care centres. These include houses of children and youth that offer all-year-round regular specialised activities, and camps as well as other attractive one-time events. School clubs and after-school care centres are usually part of school and care for children of that particular school. They offer meaningful after-school activities to these children (after-school care centres are usually intended for the first to fifth graders, while clubs for the sixth to ninth graders).
- *Hobby groups at schools* – they have contributed to the fact that the term "out-of-school education" is not used any more, and has been replaced with a vague (but not naturalised yet) term of *"informal education"* because the vast majority of hobby groups are active at their proper school and they are often led by teachers. These hobby groups also provide support for some school subjects – for example, languages, maths, physics, etc.
- *Commercial entities* have offered their products to children and parents since 1990, at the beginning rather hesitantly but today very fiercely.

How many children spend their leisure time with a leisure-time organisation?

About 75% of children aged 6 – 15 in the Czech Republic spend their leisure time with a leisure-time organisation at least once a week. Similar results have long been confirmed also by other surveys and statistics. The attendance-rate of hobby groups at schools is accurately reported on an annual basis, which shows that selected hobby groups are attended by almost 60% of schoolchildren. About 220,000 children and young people use services of non-governmental non-profit organisations. If we take into consideration the fact that there is also a certain percentage of children who do not like this manner of passing leisure time, such finding is certainly positive for us – the vast majority of children voluntarily develop their personality also during their leisure time.

A lot of them attend more than one such activity, as shown in the following pie chart.

Chart 28: Percentage of children attending hobby groups and clubs, per number of activities
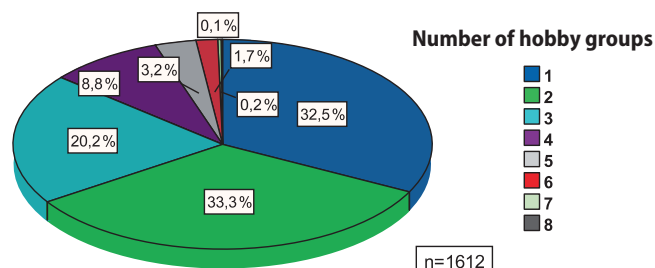

Our research has shown that a hobby group or club is attended at least once a week on average by 74% of children aged 6 – 15. The highest numbers of such active children attend two leisure-time activities a week – roughly one third of them. Nearly one third of children have one leisure activity a week and one fifth of those who have organised leisure-time activities attend three hobby groups or clubs a week.

Who attends hobby groups?

If we want to analyse the attendance of hobby groups, clubs and other activities in greater detail, we have to take into account a number of various factors. The strongest age group of children attending hobby groups are those aged from around 9 to 12. Younger children join hobby groups less because they are not old enough for certain activities, they "have not specialised" yet, or their parents or they themselves have not chosen anything yet. On the contrary, older children aged 13 – 14 start to leave hobby groups and clubs. This trend is shown in the following chart:

Chart 29: The attendance of hobby groups in relation to age
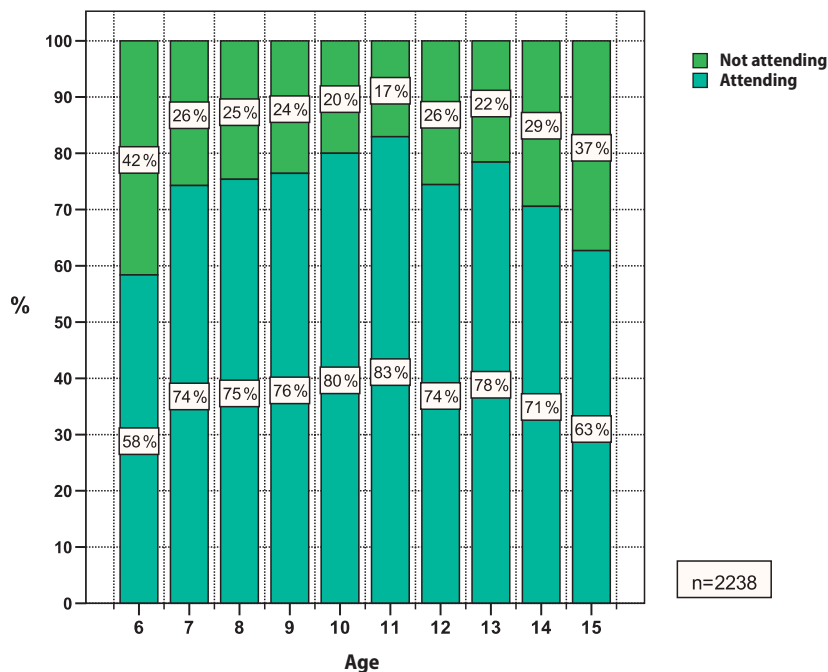
There are numerous reasons why children quit hobby groups. Moreover, these reasons overlap. The most frequent reason is a personality development – with the onset of adolescence, i. e. a stage when they are looking for their own identity and may be unstable in their emotions and integration into society. Also their autonomy and independence increases at this stage and they increasingly want to make own decisions about their leisure activities. The most important players in the life of children gradually becomes a friend or rather a whole bunch with whom they can have fun without adult supervision, and not a group of children in a club together with its leader.

> Karel (Aged 14): *Most of the time we sit in a park and chat….there is always someone to come, so…*
> Leoš (Aged 15): *I don't really mind us doing this [aimless passing of time with friends], I cannot imagine it would be different…*

The research titled *"Sources of information and criteria for the selection of leisure activities"*[7] and conducted by the National Institute of Children and Youth in 2008 revealed that the vast majority of children (73%) joined hobby groups and clubs between the age of 6 and 8. This may lead older children attending a hobby group or a club since the beginning of school attendance to feel it is not attractive any more. A particular activity does not offer anything new to them and children do not enjoy it any more. In connection with the onset of adolescence we should not forget that organised leisure activities are not "IN" for children at this age. Actually, some of them do take part in leisure activities but they quickly switch from one to another (they often get excited about something under the influence of friends); moreover, they join them without any profound interest and they leave them soon. Another reason may be the fact that these children imitate their friends who can be expected not to attend any club either, and so in general they identify themselves with their peer group. This may, in extreme situations, result in them feelings ashamed of taking part in any activity at all. Last but not least, older children may abandon organised activities for disagreements with club leaders.

### *What hobby groups and clubs are attended?*

As far as the content of hobby groups/clubs are concerned, the most popular are sports clubs followed by music and drama groups, art and craft lessons; older children also take part in some educational activities. The specialisation of activities is not so much related to age but certain differences have been revealed in relation to gender. Boys compared to girls engage much more in sports, and also in technical and hiking activities. On the other hand, girls attend more often music and drama groups, educational, art and craft clubs.

---

[7] The research report is freely available on the website of the Keys for Life project on www.kliceprozivot and in the National Register on Researches on Children and Youth on www.vyzkum-mladez.cz.

The correlations between the types of activities performed and gender may be found in the chart where the columns show the percentage of children claiming to engage in the given type of activity. The chart shows answers of children claiming to do some leisure activities organised by hobby groups or clubs.

Chart 30: Gender-related types of activities
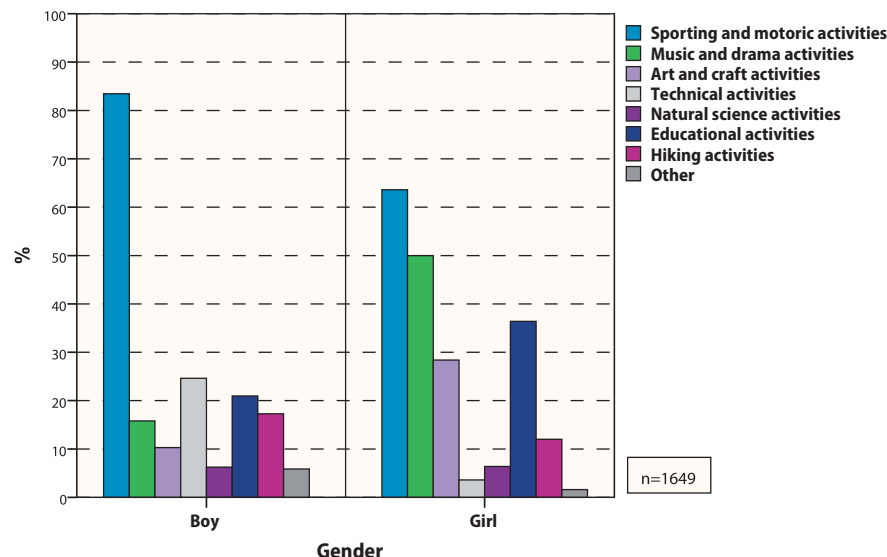
The above mentioned research titled *"Source of information and criteria for the selection of leisure activities"* also shows us that it is mainly children who decide about hobby groups they want to join; parental desires only follow as impulses for joint decisions. Of course specific types of activities play the key role – it is mainly children who decide about sporting activities, music and drama, art and craft, technical, natural science hobby groups or hiking clubs (and their friends) and it is mainly parents who decide about educational or religious activities.

Eva (Aged 10 –12): *…on Mondays I have badminton. It is my first year and I have chosen it myself; then dancing, it is trendy; then folk dances – I have been doing them for six years already and I really love that. On Wednesdays, I take guitar lessons, my mom said that I should play some musical instrument but I don't like that much, especially the theory. On Thursdays, I do dancing again and on Fridays I take ceramics lessons I have chosen myself because I wanted to craft something.*
Patrik (Aged 10 – 12): *As I said, on Mondays and Wednesdays I do athletics, on Tuesdays and Fridays we have scouts club meetings…….we agreed all that with my mom.*

However, this does not mean that the parental influence on their children's participation in leisure activities is negligible. It is in particular education and socio-economic status of parents that play quite a significant role in this respect and it will be discussed more in detail in the following chapter.

What does make children attend hobby groups and clubs?

Children need to be properly motivated to attend a hobby group. Apart from the initial impulse which makes them decide to engage in a certain activity, there are objective reasons why to take part in some leisure activities.

> Daniel (Aged 15): *I do dancing, it is one of those trendy dancing groups – my sister took me there; then I attend a technical hobby group, I like that a lot, then I attend a fishing group, I take sporting lessons and I have joined a football club, my dad took me there.*

An important finding is that children from all age categories attend clubs and hobby groups mainly because they like the particular activity, because of friends they encounter there, and also because they learn interesting things there. Younger children are often motivated (especially in clubs) by the leader's personality, the older ones do not want to get bored. Naturally, the older they are the percentage of those who justify their attendance of hobby groups by their parents' wishes, increases. The reasons for their attendance are summarily shown in the following chart (children were also allowed to state more reasons than one).

Chart 31: Reasons for attending hobby groups
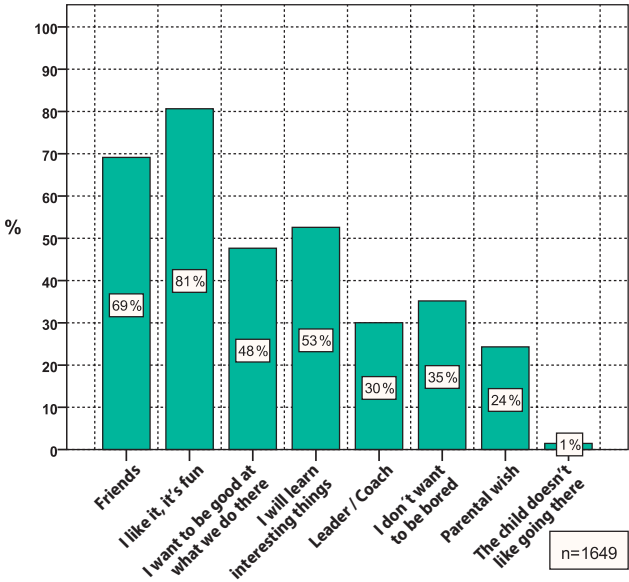
Hobby groups or clubs rank among the most important environments in which children exist (more or less intensely) during their lives. As has been said children associate this environment mainly with fun, but also with the learning of new things. Although our research does not look into this, other researches and experience of leaders show us that children also realise that they can excel there and show others their abilities much better than in an unorganised bunch of friends, at school or even in their proper families. Most children are

also aware of the fact that unlike among a bunch of friends, there are certain rules in hobby groups or clubs that need to be adhered to but it is due to them they can experience what they experience. This also shows that children feel freely in hobby groups and clubs but at the same time they realise that they cannot exist without some rules.

Moreover – often without children even realising it, engaging in activities of hobby groups or clubs has usually an important impact. There is more in it than to make children have fun and prevent them from getting bored at home or in the streets, or provide some free time for parents for their own hobbies. When participating in a hobby group programme, children not only acquire the skills for which the group was formed but they also develop numerous other skills, knowledge and attitudes (i. e. competences) hardly realising it themselves. These organisations play an important role in children's socialisation, in forming habits such as team cooperation, developing communication skills, assuming responsibility, play fair, etc. Children are also prevented from getting bored if they pass their leisure time in an organised manner. This research shows that children who do not get bored often are happier in their lives. Since children seldom confide in their parents the fact they do not feel happy or are often bored, parents should not let leisure time activities of their children unnoticed and encourage them to spend it actively.

Why some children do not join any hobby group or club?

Apart from a group of children who pass their leisure time engaging in activities organised by leisure time organisations, there is also a smaller group of children who do not get involved in any organised activities. The reasons why have been summarised in the following chart (children mentioned the main reasons, there might have been more).

Chart 32: Reasons for not attending hobby groups
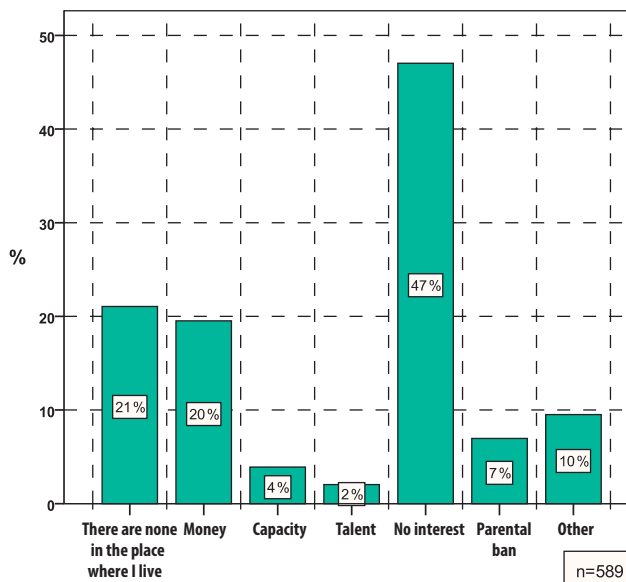
We can see that "No interest" prevails as a reason, in particular in older children aged 13 to 15. "No interest" is also indicated as the main reason for non-participation in hobby group activities by children from well-off and medium well-off families.

David (Age category 13 – 15): *I do not attend any hobby group but I often play basketball or something like that with my friends…*

Attendance in hobby groups or clubs is also dependant on possibilities offered by the location the respective children live in. If hobby groups/clubs are not within reach, children simply cannot attend them. The reason that the respective hobby group or club is not within reach is mentioned twice more frequently by children from municipalities with a population of 2 thousand or less than by children from towns with a population of 20 thousand or more. However, the main reason for children from less well-off families is money and for children from very well-off families it is the fact that the given activity is not within reach. In this case it may be caused by children's high demands when choosing an activity.

When summarising the above obstacles mentioned by children as a reason for not attending certain hobby groups or clubs, we have to bear in mind that these are obstacles subjectively perceived by children. They do not realise the role their parents may play in this respect, not motivating them enough or not being able to find a substitute activity for the one they cannot afford or is not within reach.

However, it may also work the other way round. I. e., there are also situations in which lack of interest of children in organised leisure activities comes from an excessively active parent, i. e. parents projecting their own unfulfilled aspirations from their childhood onto their children. For example, under the influence of successful national hockey (football, etc…) team they want their child to become a top sportsman just like they themselves wanted to be in their childhood or adolescence. Therefore, they enrol their child in a selected club regardless of their child's missing talent, physical abilities, etc. Children may thus experience lack of success there and the resulting frustration, quit the club and lose interest also in other organised leisure activities. The reason may be fear of another failure.

When do children get bored?

The passing of leisure time and life in general is associated with periods of time simply called "boredom". Boredom is an unpleasant temporary state of mind in which individuals experience profound lack of interest in their usual activities and find it hard to concentrate on them. Boredom does not necessarily mean that there is nothing to do but rather the fact that we are not able to get excited about any activities even though we would like to get engaged in something. Boredom is characterised by feelings of weariness, uselessness, dissatisfaction, lack of interest, reduced concentration, tiredness and depression.

Of course children in general do get sometimes bored, but it is striking that there is quite a large group of children claiming to get bored often. It is true that question: *"Do you sometimes feel bored in your leisure time?"* was answered negatively by 47% of children, 46% claimed to get bored occasionally, but 7% claim to get bored often.

Chart 33: Feelings of boredom
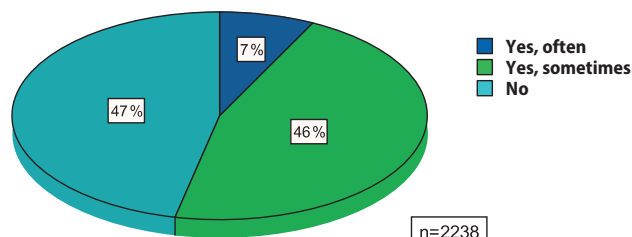
The research shows that feelings of boredom are neither related to gender or age of children, but are slightly influenced by the size of the municipality the children live in as well as by their parents' education and socio-economic status. As far as the size of a municipality is concerned it is children living in small municipalities with a population of 2 to 5 thousand who get bored most frequently. This may be attributed to the fact that these municipalities do not have a character of rural area where nature is all around and where one can engage in specific activities, but at the same time they do not offer a sufficient range of leisure activities or enjoyment.

The question is when the children of today actually get bored. There are several factors that influence this condition and in general they cannot be arranged in a hierarchical manner according to their intensity with which they influence children. The factors causing children's boredom include parental bans, in particular if they are banned from watching TV, using computer or having house arrest, i. e. being banned from going out. These are also the main three activities children engage in if they are allowed to.

Question: Do you ever get bored?
Patrik (Age category 10 – 12): *I do not get bored, but if I get an F at school, I am banned from using my computer and that's why I get bored.*
Karolína (Age category 13 – 15): *Sometimes I do. If I am on the computer I don't know what to do any more…so I get bored, I don't know what to do so I start reading, for example.*

Feelings of boredom are also affected by weather. Children complain, among others, that during rainy weekends they cannot go out. Although they have a TV or computer at home, after a certain period of time they get tired of them and get bored. It should also be noted that children are not able to manage their time properly and therefore they also feel bored if they do not have any obligation to fulfil or a scheduled organised leisure activity to attend. Children thus choose their distraction activities based on stimuli coming to them throughout their life. And again, it is organised leisure activities that give them numerous possibilities for getting busy in their leisure time.

The impact of participation in these activities is shown in the following chart.

Chart 34: Feelings of boredom during leisure time in correlation with leisure activities attended
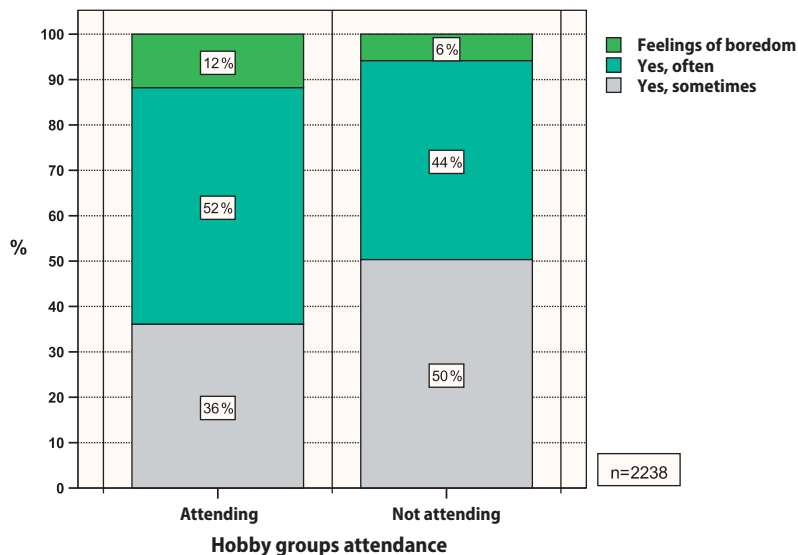
The more children participate in these activities the less room for getting bored they have and the more stimuli they get for being able to get busy during their leisure time. On the other hand, this does not mean that it is absolutely necessary for a child to have one or several organised leisure activities a day. Children could be overloaded, they would not concentrate enough on all of them (i. e. that such activities would not fulfil their purpose) and by having a minimum time for themselves or for playing with friends, they would lose interest in organised leisure time.

Summary or How do children spend their leisure time?

Ways of passing leisure time depend on numerous factors, such as age or gender, but in particular on education of parents and socio-economic status of a family (see chapter The decisive factor). Our research also includes an "analysis of factors", helping us to break down the types of leisure activities into five categories.

"Unorganised activities" (being outside with friends, seeing friends, unorganised sporting activities, watching TV) is the first category and includes those activities that rank among the most popular ones among our respondents.

The second category has been designated as *"IT and music"* (internet, chatting, computer games, films on DVD/PC, listening to music). This category includes leisure activities that are, compared to other types, rather widespread; listening to music ranks among the most frequently performed activities among older children.

The third category of leisure activities has been titled **"Sports and hobby groups"** (sporting clubs, unorganised sporting activities, other hobby groups). This category represents the types of leisure activities that, compared to other types, are moderately widespread.

The fourth category has been titled **"Intellectual activity"** (reading of books, reading of magazines, visiting libraries, studying, but also some hobby groups). The category includes activities the distribution of which varies among population members. While studying ranks among the most widespread ones, reading of books as well as reading of magazines rank among moderately widespread, participation in hobby groups' activities, not speaking about visiting libraries, is only a marginal issue.

On the contrary, the fifth category titled **"Focus on consumerism"** (going to fast food places, shopping and going to movies) – rank among such leisure activities that are popular only marginally among children.

Should children be broken down into groups according to gender, we may say that girls more frequently than boys engage in such leisure activities that fall within the category of intellectual activities; on the contrary, boys more often than girls engage in sporting activities and in computer-related activities. Interest in activities that fall within the "IT and music" category grows with age, while the percentage of those engaged in sports and activities organised by hobby groups and clubs declines.

The key message from children regarding their leisure activities can be summarised as follows.

Positive findings
- *About 75% of children in the Czech Republic participate in a leisure activity organised by a hobby group or club at least once a week.*
- *Children of all age categories attend them mainly because they enjoy what they do there, because of friends they meet there and also because they learn something interesting there. For young children it is also about the personality of the leader. This shows that in most cases there is a good and children-friendly environment.*
- *An important impulse for starting to attend a hobby group is the child's desire.*

Negative findings
- *Older children (aged 12+) are losing interest in organised leisure activities, the reason being their natural development stage and increased autonomy – they wish to spend more time with friends, as well as the fact that organised leisure activities are not "IN" any more, and/or particular organisations have basically nothing to offer to older children any more.*
- *According to the children from the smallest municipalities they do not take part in organised leisure activities mainly because there are no hobby groups within reach; children from lower socio-economic background or those with low-educated parents also mention lack of money, apart from lack of interest.*
- *The vast majority of organisations focus their recruitment efforts on the youngest children, i. e. on the first graders and pre-school children. Children aged 12+ are ignored in these recruitment efforts in spite of the fact that it is at this particular age when children start to quit organised leisure activities.*

VALUES

In our pursuit of the inner world of children we have so far observed the world around us through the eyes of children, and based on that we have got the picture of them: what they want, what they mind, what they pay attention to, what they rely on and what influences them. In this chapter we will discuss how children answered direct questions regarding themselves, which allowed us to describe typical values of the children's world.

Based on the results of this research we tried to put together a certain typology of children's preferences and to determine their representation in the population. We will also discuss what children mind, whether today's children have their role models – and if so, who they are and what they appreciate most of all about them, as well as what children want to achieve in their life. At the end of the chapter we will try to find out whether children consider themselves happy.

What is important for children?

Values are realities that are important, often very important, for people. Children were confronted with a number of preferences (the youngest ones were presented with ten of them and the other two age categories with fifteen of them) that are in our society generally considered the most important ones, usually occurring in long-term value surveys conducted among adults and in recent years also among children and adolescents. Children were supposed to determine whether they are crucially important, rather important, rather unimportant or absolutely unimportant to them. They also had a chance to answer I don't know. It is obvious that by providing a specific range of values we significantly limited the scope of values that are – according to children – important. Therefore, certain unique typical children's values that could have been an inspiring view into the world of children had to be left aside; however, they would have had a very low frequency from the statistical point of view. On the other hand, this generalisation provided us with a very good picture of children's attitudes to the prevailing values in our society.

The following three charts show – per age categories of 6 – 9, 10 – 12 and 13 – 15 – how many children considered particular values crucially important.

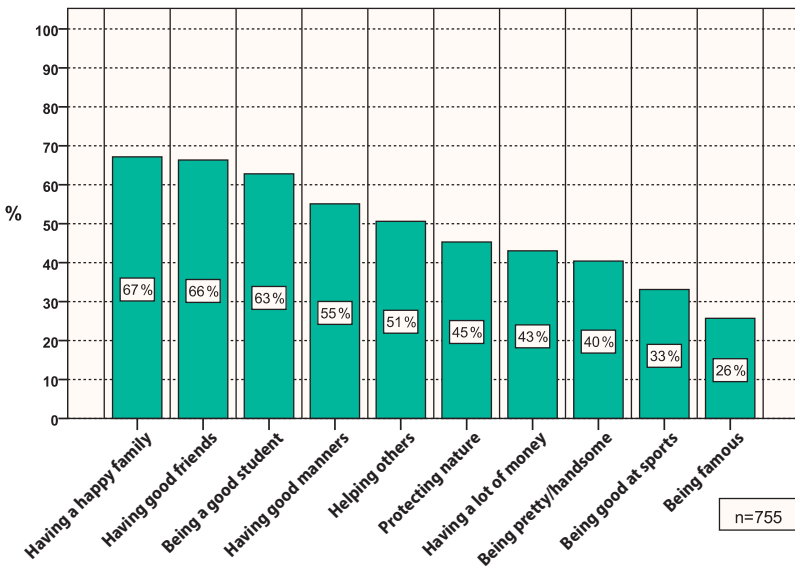*Chart 35: Life priorities of children aged 6 – 9*

n=755

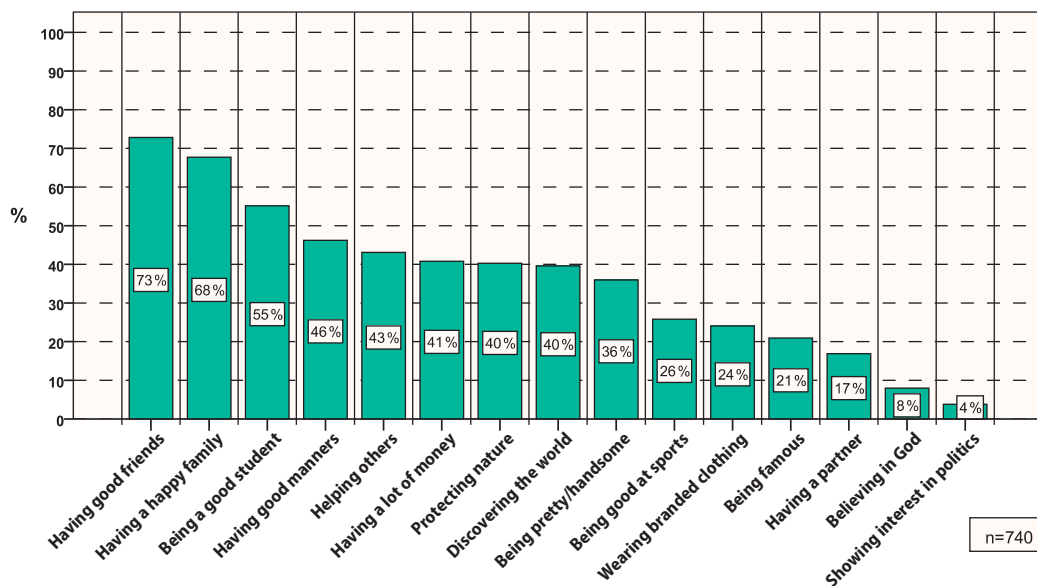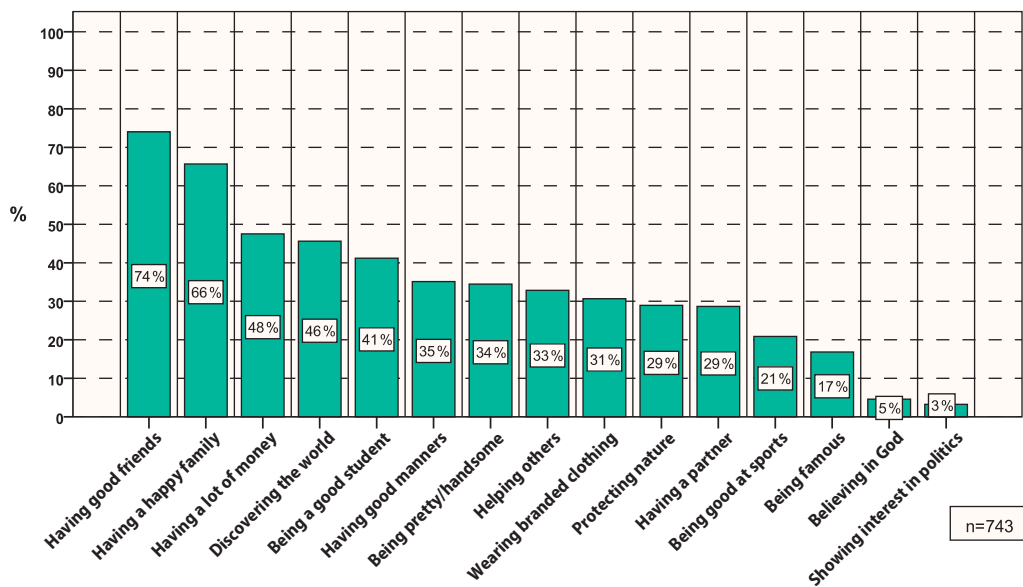*Chart 36: Life priorities of children aged 10 – 12*

73% Having good friends
68% Having a happy family
55% Being a good student
46% Having good manners
43% Helping others
41% Having a lot of money
40% Protecting nature
40% Discovering the world
36% Being pretty/handsome
26% Being good at sports
24% Wearing branded clothing
21% Being famous
17% Having a partner
8% Believing in God
4% Showing interest in politics

n=740

Chart 37: Life priorities of children aged 13 – 15

74% Having good friends
66% Having a happy family
48% Having a lot of money
46% Discovering the world
41% Being a good student
35% Having good manners
34% Being pretty/handsome
33% Helping others
31% Wearing branded clothing
29% Protecting nature
29% Having a partner
21% Being good at sports
17% Being famous
5% Believing in God
3% Showing interest in politics

n=743

55

What do the charts show us? The overwhelming majority of children consider the highest value to have good relationships both in family and with peers. These values are mostly appreciated also by adults. The examination of preferences shows us substantial changes in correlation with age. The importance of friends increases in general (while in the youngest age category friends are crucially important for two thirds of children, they are crucially important for already three quarters of respondents aged 13 – 15), which was a rather predictable result related to the children gradually becoming more and more independent. We will also not be surprised by an increased importance attached to the value of "having a partner/dating someone" (crucially important for 17% of children aged 10 – 12 and for 29% of those aged 13 –15).

We should in particular draw attention to two tendencies that are rather alarming: The older the respondents are the more often they think that "having a lot of money" is *crucially important* "; and this value ranks the third in terms of importance. On the other hand, children attach less importance to the value of "being a good student" (from 63% of children aged 6 – 9 to only 41% of children aged 13 – 15). This is followed by "Having good manners" (from 55% to 35%), "Helping others (from 51% to 33%) and also "Protecting nature" (from 45% to 29%).

A decline in these life preferences can, to a certain extent, be attributed to an overall personality development of a child. These values express desires of adults to have "well-behaved children" and especially younger children try to accommodate such desires. After the tenth year of age the importance of parental authorities decline and young people shape their own views and attitudes and often try to define themselves against their surroundings. This also gives us a clear feedback from children about how the world of adults and society as a whole affect them. If, for example, two fifth of children between the age of 9 – 15 lose conviction that it is very important to help others, then we find out how the influences they are exposed to long before they grow mature gradually suppress tendencies towards the common good. And just like adults, they desire living in functional families and being surrounded by good friends.

The opposite end of preferred values spectrum shows "Faith in God" and "Interest in politics". If children comment on these values at all, negative statements prevail, which is true mainly about politics.

> Gabča (Age category 13 – 15): *The main thing is to throw out our politicians and alike because they do sweet Fanny Adams for us, just sitting on their buttocks, perhaps drinking and smoking.*
> Janka (Age category 13 – 15): *I am used to going to Serbia and the situation with politicians is totally the same there as it is here, they do politics because they want to get richer.*
> Libor (Age category 13 – 15): *I definitely agree, politicians should be thrown away because they promise, promise and do not keep on their promises, keep lowering wages, but not their own; their pockets are packed full with money and they do not care about anything; the main thing being that they have to remain unaffected.*

Faith in God is accepted by children a bit better. There is a small but highly visible minority (faith is definitely important for 6.3% and rather important for 9.7%) that attaches a great importance to it, and the overwhelming majority takes it positively. This does not take anyone by surprise. Children who come from the believing environment do not often confide with their faith in others, in particular for fear of incomprehension as confirmed by one girl during group interviews. For this reason, it suggested itself that we should rather pursue the opinion of the non-believing majority to the religion and faith in general.

> Karolína (14): *I have a friend and her family believes in God, she is 14 and I didn't know it. And I have known her for about five years. Every Sunday she goes to church for a mass. She actually goes there only because of her family, because they want it. And she was terribly ashamed of it. I learned about it about two weeks ago. And she said she was ashamed of it, but there is nothing to be ashamed of.*

Some children, and they are in a minority, say that believing in God is normal. Due to a low religiousness in the Czech Republic they do not have many opportunities to meet ordinary believers. Their opinions and attitudes to faith and religion are shaped in particular at other occasions when they encounter rather extreme manifestations of various religions (mainly the media show religion in the context of suiciding attacks or religiously motivated violence), or with believers with suspicious types of behaviours (religious fanatics, coercing people into dialogues about faith, etc.). An impression of children that believers usually behave in a strange manner and therefore religion is something strange (abnormal) is also encouraged by news stories about sects and religious fanatics. This belittles the relevance of faith, God and religion for their life even more.

The information obtained can be generalised in the following statement: If children are not believers their answers do not reveal any signs of transcendence. On the contrary, there is a clear denial of any higher principle. This finding reflects opinions of the majority of Czech society, i. e. failure to have social values anchored in values that go beyond humans.

Roman (Age category 13 –15): *Those terrorists who believe in Allah are able to kill, that is terrible. This is fanatism.*
Štepán (Age category 13 – 15): *I think they are a bit screwy, standing there with their leaflets, but if someone believes in God, I think it's normal.*
Gabča (Age category 13 – 15): *I don't know where they have got it from, to believe in something. I think it is bullshit, for example when they go around and impress it upon all people around. I would like to know what it looks like in the heaven or in the hell, may be they have made it up.*
Sára (Age category 13 – 15): *I think it is everyone's own business if they are a bit disturbed and believe that something like that is here. It is possible but it needs to be scientifically proven. And those sects that is also something, how they bull other people.*
Karolína (Age category 13 – 15): *I am not a believer but my mom is a teacher and she had a student who was crazy about God and she was simply a nutcase. She had to leave the school because she did not live a normal life.*
Jeny (Age category 13 – 15): *I am not a believer and my opinion of those people is….I don't know, I do not concentrate on it because it is a controversial topic whether to believe or not, I just don't get into it.*
Tobiáš (Age category 13 – 15): *I don't care if someone believes in God but they should not impress it upon other people.*

A more detailed analysis of what children consider important (by means of the "analysis of factors") allowed us to decide which life values usually occur together. It means that if children see one value as very important there is a high probability that they attach the same importance yet to another one. It has turned out that values the children were confronted with include five groups of answers always occurring together. They are the following five categories.

1. **"Social values"** (include such values as *"Having good manners, Being a good student, Helping others, Protecting nature)*. This category of life priorities is moderately widespread among children aged 10 – 15 and about one third to one half of respondents consider this value to be definitely important.
2. **"Outer values"** *(Being pretty/handsome, Having branded clothing, Having a lot of money, Being famous). These priorities are given varied preferences by children. While being famous is definitely important for one fifth of them, Having a lot of money is definitely important for more than two fifths of them.*
3. **"Politics and God"** *(Interest in politics, Faith in God).* Showing interest in politics and believing in God is a priority for children aged 10 – 15 only exceptionally.
4. **"Success in sports"** (Being good at sports, Being famous). Success in sports is important for about one fourth of children. *Being famous* is the only value that appeared in two categories, which shows that it is associated both with sport and with the desire *"to show off"* which is not incompatible after all.

5. **"Family and friends"** *(Good friends, Happy family, Discovering the world, Having a partner).* This category of life priorities includes in particular variables that are considered definitely important for most children.

The above mentioned five value categories divided according to children's choice have further been subjected to analysis from several perspectives. The results (taking into consideration the socio-economic status of parents and their education) are shown in a separate chapter titled "The decisive factor". It will be manifested below how age and attendance or non-attendance in clubs or hobby groups are reflected in children's attitudes.

Chart 38: Life priorities of children in relation to age
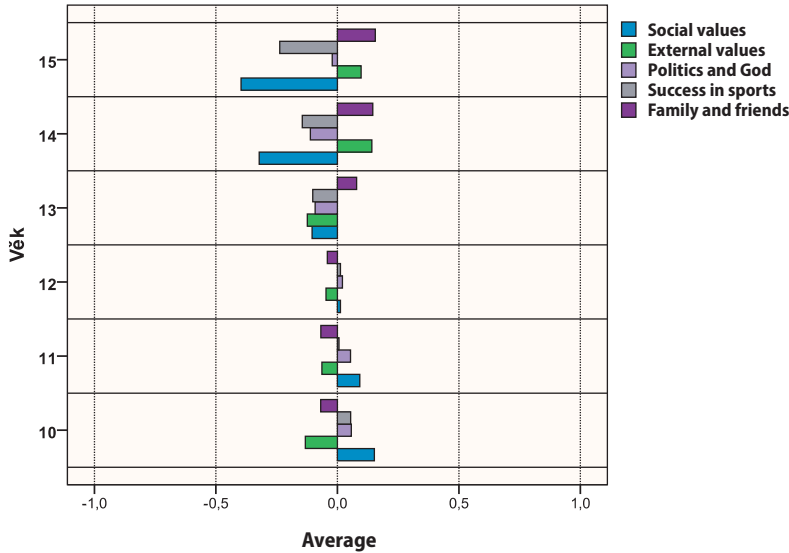
The scale of −1 – +1 ranges from *zero interest* (−1.0) in these values and *maximum interest* (1.0) in these values, which shows that the interest of children in this part of values that are important for a peaceful and good life of society increases. In this research, these values include "social values" *(Having good manners, Being a good student, Helping others, Protecting nature).* On the other hand, family and friends are the values that grow with age *(Having good friends, Having a happy family, Discovering the world, Having a partner)* that are also considered important for future life. With the growing age of children their interest in sporting performance values declines and their interest in consumerist values grows (external values).

Chart 39: Life priorities of children in relation to participation in organised leisure activities
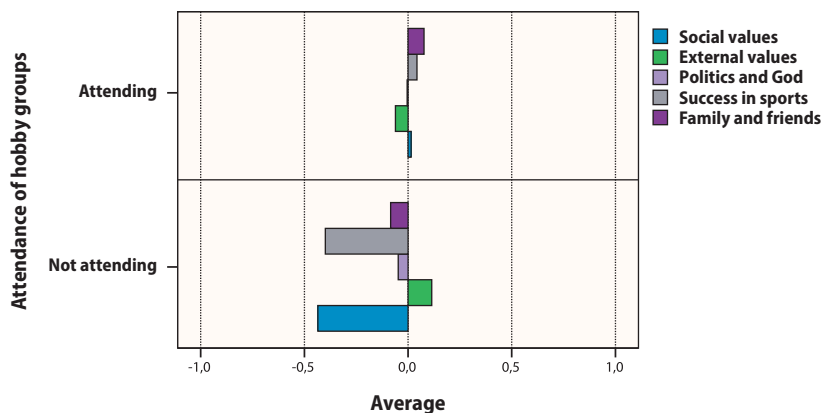

Children who do not engage in any organised leisure activities have a very similar relationship to values. The only difference is that the importance of relational values grows with age in general (Family and friends). However, these values slightly decline in children who do not attend any clubs or hobby groups. Therefore, it may be concluded that the life of children in a good club or hobby group may be an efficient prevention of children losing (with growing age) interest in values that are important for coping with their life amidst other people.

What do children mind?

We have demonstrated what our children consider important, what really matters to them, what they want to strive for. The other side of the coin is what they do not want, what they would like to avoid, what they mind. Just like with positive (or at least desirable) values, children also expressed their opinion on a range of phenomena they marked as *It really bothers me, It rather bothers me, It does not bother me much, It does not bother me at all.*

The columns in the following charts show the percentage of children stating that the given phenomenon *really bothers them.*

Chart 40: What bothers children in relation to age
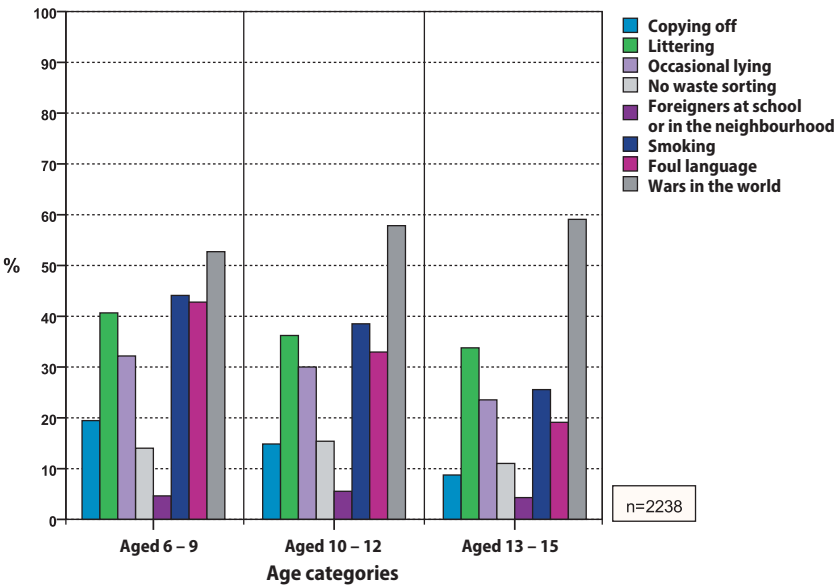
The above mentioned chart could easily be interpreted through the following sentence: ***The already low children's sensitivity to negative phenomena even declines with growing age.*** The older the children are the less they mind copying off, littering, lying, smoking or using foul language. This "tolerance" of theirs (apart from attitudes to foreigners where it is fully appropriate) is in quite a logical correlation with what has been mentioned above: with growing age most children lose interest in values that have been traditionally associated with good manners and behaviour. Possible causes have already been discussed. The summary of these causes may be expressed by the following statement: Children only faithfully imitate and mirror the world of adults. It is certainly true that its role plays an absence of a certain principal spiritual foundation used for ethical decision-making of both children and adults. Under such circumstances the ethical decision-making process is predominantly determined by the surrounding and current moods.

It is worth noting what has been confirmed by almost all children in group interviews: copying off is an entirely common method of coping with school demands.

A question asked to children aged 13 to 15. *Do you mind copying off?*
Martin: *Yes. Actually no, I don't. If someone needs help I'll help and then they help me. All friends help and I think it's normal.*
Štepán: *I think it's OK, I do it, too.*
 Jolana: *I think it's ok to have cribs, but I don't like the guys who sit next to someone else only to be able to copy off.*
Libor: *I don't mind it if people do it in a smart manner so that teachers do not catch us, so that I don't get into trouble.*
Adam: *I don't mind it. Only when the teacher catches us, both of us will get the worst of it.*

While there are no substantial differences between girls and boys as far as most other issues are concerned, here we could see some substantial differences. The following chart shows lower sensitivity of boys to bad behaviour.

*Chart 41: What bothers children, depending on gender*
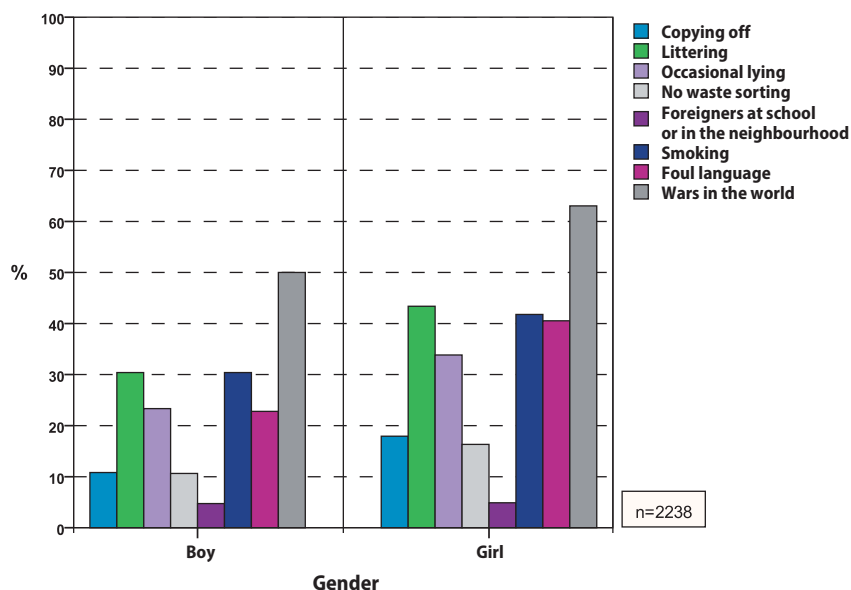
They are much less frequently bothered by foul language (one of five boys and two of five girls). Girls are more sensitive to mess, smoking and lying. This lower sensitivity of boys to various manifestations of moral failure or bad behaviour is undoubtedly related to issues that will be discussed later on: *role models* they would like to resemble. Other differences have come out depending on socio-economic status of parents and their education (see separate chapter titled *The most important factor*).
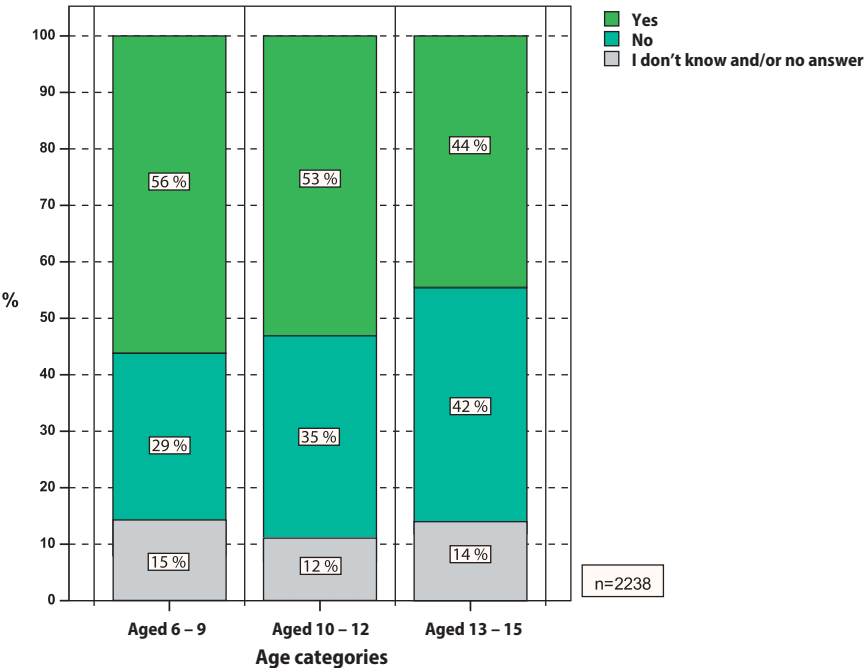
Who do children want to resemble?

Do today's children have any role models? Would they like to be like someone else? If you want to build house, you need to have a design first. If you get involved in a bigger project you need to know what you are aiming at. To have a vision. And what about the life of man? Isn't it a piece of work that needs to have a vision? Isn't our life a project one should grasp into one's own hands and create a unique original? But therefore it is important that such project has a vision – a role model.

Chart 42: Role model (Question: Is there anyone you would like to resemble?)

- Yes
- No
- I don't know and/or no answer

14 %
35 %
51 %

n=2238
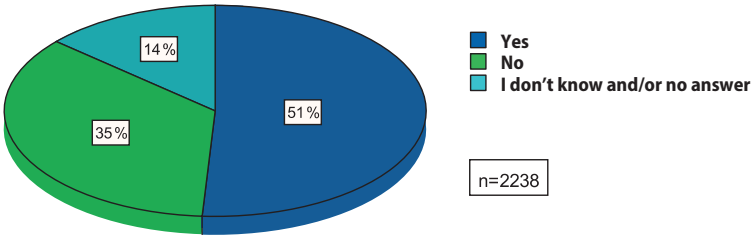
The answers to the question whether children have a role model they would like to resemble show that only half of respondents have a role model. The other half of boys and girls were either at a loss or claimed to have no role model. Other substantial information was revealed by making comparison with age.

Chart 43: Role models in relation to children's age

- Yes
- No
- I don't know and/or no answer

%

Age categories

Aged 6 – 9: 56 %, 29 %, 15 %
Aged 10 – 12: 53 %, 35 %, 12 %
Aged 13 – 15: 44 %, 42 %, 14 %

n=2238

Most children in the oldest age group do not have any role model (56%) or were not able to answer the question. There may be several sources of reasons. Undoubtedly, a certain teenage desire to define their own personality against the authority of the world of adults plays its role. Quite a few teenagers today identify themselves with a certain group or entire subculture rather than with one person. This may be caused by the fact that sensibility of children is rather low in this respect or such role models do not really exist in their surroundings.

And those who do have a role model – who do they want to resemble? The following table shows clearly arranged answers of children broken down per role model.

Role model	Number of children	%
Sportsman	288	27.0
Singer/musician	184	16.5
Mom	141	13.0
Other relatives	113	9.5
Dad	93	8.0
Fictitious/fairy tale character	74	6.5
Friend	51	5.0
Actor/actress	50	5.0
Teacher	25	2.5
Club leader/coach	25	2.5
Model	21	2.0
Other	32	2.5

It is evident that almost half of children consider sportsmen, singers or musicians as their role models. It means persons they almost certainly know only from the media and/or quite remotely. Of real persons, i. e. the persons children really know it is moms who are doing the best – which only confirms the results from the chapter on family. Daddies are in a much worse position. In spite of that there are still children today who look up to their parents, as results from group interviews:

Sylva (Age category 6 – 9): *I would like to be either mom or dad. Either of them.*
Vladimír: *I admire daddy and mommy, that mom can work in children's home because there are two who are very much handicapped. And dad, because he can stand it, all the time, that over three weeks he sleeps at home only three times. That he drives a truck, that he can bear it. No to sleep, get up at five.*
Martina (Age category 13 – 15): *I would like to do things like my mom because she is able to help other people and she can cope with everything, is able to take care of the family.*
Kristýna (Age category 10 – 12): *I would like to be like my mom because I think she is successful.*
Janek (Age category 10 – 12): *I would like to be like my dad. Whenever I have a problem he helps me.*
Šimon (Age category 10 – 12): *I would also like to be like my dad because he has been involved in football for a long time.*
Pavla (Age category 10 – 12): *I think like dad, he is such a laid-back person, he is witty, competent, he does everything, builds…*

We have revealed that there are a growing number of children saying not to have any role model. The following chart shows how the representation of individual types of role models changes with age. Included are only those answers of children who say to have a role model; answers "I don't know" or "I don't have a role model" have been excluded.

*Chart 44: Role model in relation to children's age*
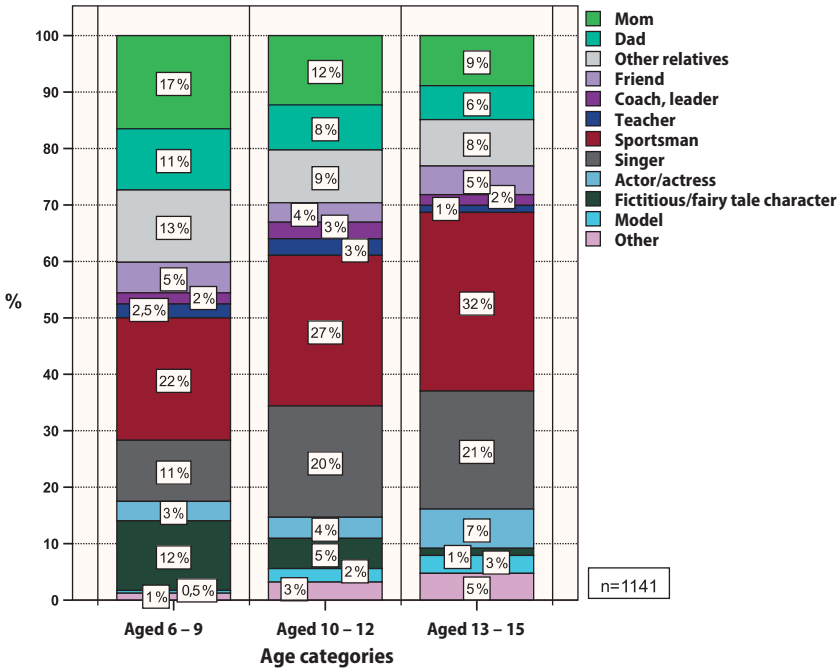
We can see that the older the children are the less frequently they find role models in their families. They increasingly look for role models among celebrities such as sportsmen, singers or musicians. While sportsmen are role models for 22% of children aged 6 – 9, for those aged 13 – 15 it is 50% more often (32%). Similarly, the popularity of singers and musicians goes up (from 11% in the youngest respondents to 21% in the oldest ones). Such people as friends, coaches, teachers, on the other hand, do not show any development across the age range.

If the answers are broken down according to gender we find out that there is no difference as to one group having role models more often than the other, but there is difference in preferences. The following chart contains only such answers of children who said to have a role model; such answers as "I don't know" or "I don't have a role model" have been excluded.

Chart 45: Role model (person) in relation to children's gender
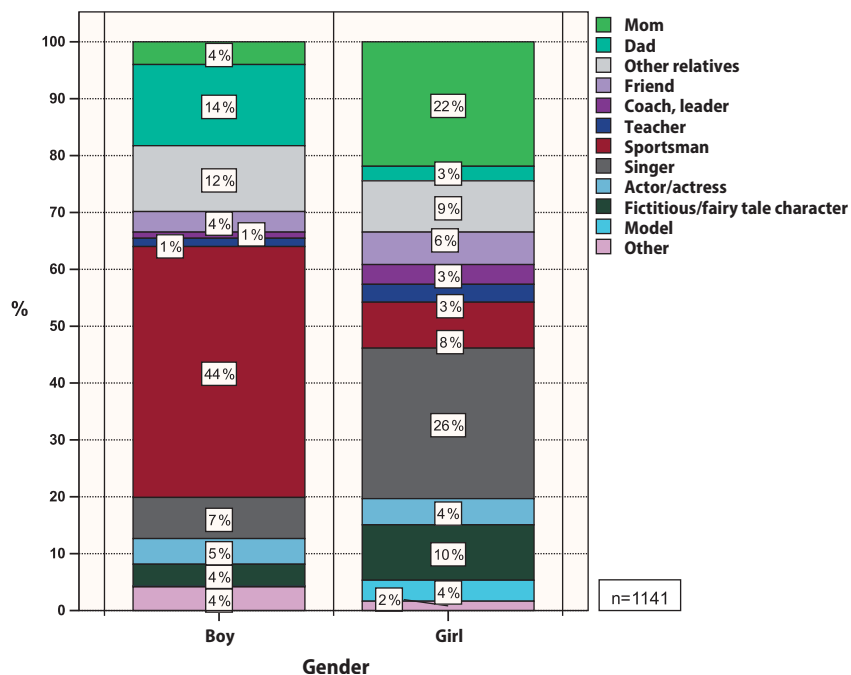
While mom is every fifth girl's (of those saying to have a role model and mentioned it) role mother, only every twenty-fifth boy says to have mom as their role model. Similarly, dad is a role model for only 3% of girls while he is a role model for 14% of boys, mainly those from the youngest age group. Sporting role models are, as expected, mainly the domain of boys, as claimed by half of them. Apart from Jaromír Jágr, famous footballers prevail among role models.

Jonáš (Age category 13 – 15): *Well, I know one football goal keeper, so I would like to be like him.*
Denis (Age category 10 – 12): *I would like to be a football player because he plays football well, is famous and so on.*
Tibor (Age category 10 – 12): *I would like to be like Messi, a footballer or a good cyclist.*
Eva (Age category 6 – 9): *I don't know. Well, I know already – Martina Sáblíková.*
Aleš (Age category 6 – 9): *I would like to be like…I know him from TV, it is wrestler Jackson.*

Girls most frequently prefer singers or musicians as their role model (26% of them). Together with actors and actresses they are also attractive for some boys. It is the fame what attracts them most about these people who appear in the media.

Mikuláš (Age category 6 – 9): *I would like to be like Cejnar, the host of the "How to build a dream" show on TV. Because he was at the School Leavers Ball. He was hosting the event.*
Franta (Age category 6 – 9): *I would like to be like the singer from the Divoký Bill band.*
Vanda (Age category 6 – 9): *My role model is Lucie Vondráčková.*
Jenda (Age category 6 – 9): *I would like to resemble Eminem.*
Adam (Age category 13 – 15): *My role model is Miroslav Donutil. I am happy if the other people are happy and that is exactly what he is able to do – make even sad people laugh.*

In the final part of this section we will focus on the qualities children appreciate most of all about their role models, i. e. reasons why they actually choose them for their role models. Just like with other preferences, age is an important factor here, which is shown on the following chart (the chart again includes only statements of those children who say to have a role model; answers such as "I don't know" and "I don't have a role model" have been excluded.

Chart 46: Children's reasons for respecting their role models in relation to age
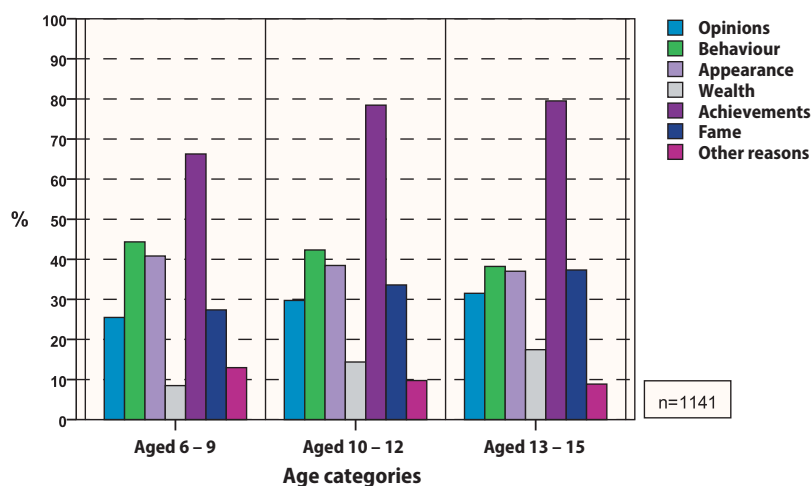
Children hold their role models in esteem mainly for what they *have achieved* – i. e. their performance (whether at work or otherwise). The weight of this factor keeps growing with age, which – quite logically – increases the weight of *wealth and fame.* The only factor the importance of which significantly declines with age among respondents is *the manner of behaviour* – i. e. things that usually show what people are like and, to a certain extent, what their character is. Why it is so will be explained quite illustratively in the following two charts. The first one summarises reasons why children would like to be like a person they know well personally. The second one shows reasons why role models known from the media have been chosen.

Chart 47: Children's reasons for respecting their role models – role models from their actual social surroundings
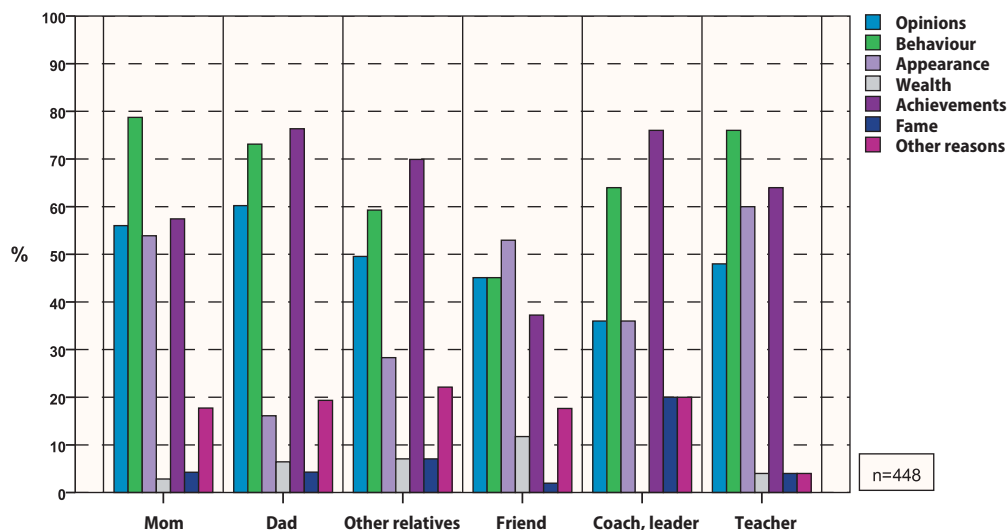
Behaviour plays a significantly bigger role in people children know well. We may even say that if such persons become role models for children, it is mainly because of their character, because of their quality as a person. This is quite clearly seen in moms as well as in teachers. An important quality in moms, teachers and friends is also their appearance. As far as friends are concerned, it is even the most frequently required quality. It is only daddies where appearance does not play a significant role. On the contrary, they are expected to perform well and due to that to achieve something. Also daddies, as children say, should have valuable opinions, if they are to be role models.
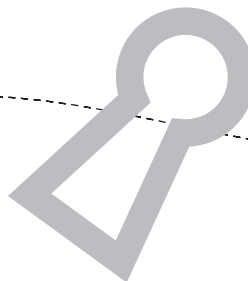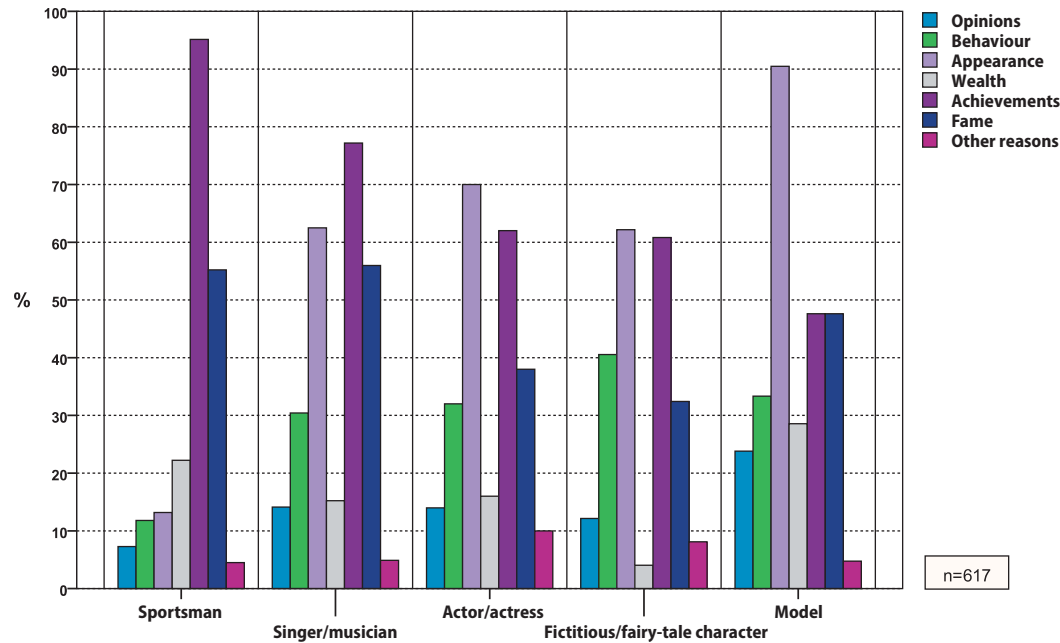
Chart 48: Children's reasons for respecting their role models – role models from the media


If the role model is a media star, it is clear at first sight that reasons are different. Performance, appearance and fame are dominating. Character qualities play a slightly more significant role in characters from fairy tales, stories and films. If this conclusion is put into correlation with the fact that it is these role models that occur most frequently in particular with older children, there is no other but to say that a significant majority of our children either have no role model or have an unreal role model they may identify themselves only in their imagination and not in real life.

What do children want to achieve in life?

The previous group of role models is closely related with the issue of life aspirations – i. e. with what people want to achieve in their lives. Children from the two older age categories could voice what they want to aspire for in the future. Their answers have been divided into nine groups and the result is shown in the following chart (including number of answers given).

Chart 49: Life aspirations of children
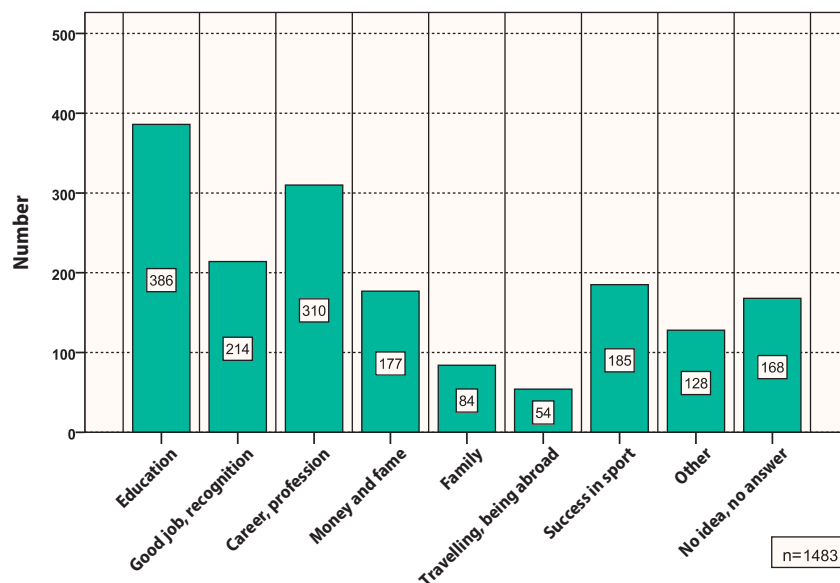
The most frequently mentioned life goals of today's children are associated with the category of ***education*** (this comprises answers such as *complete the school I am studying now, pass school-leaving examination, graduate from university, study well, have a command of foreign languages, study in general)*. These answers accounted for 25%. Another significant group of children (hardly one fifth of answers) have their future connected with a ***specific profession*** or career. Professions that have been mentioned most frequently include: physician (35), rather surprisingly – given the previous findings – also teacher (35), veterinary including working with animals (28), singer (21), model (15), pilot (12), car mechanic (9) and hairdresser (8).

Almost 13% of answers contained a wish to have a ***good and interesting work*** in the future and to find their place in life (*get acknowledgment, build up a career, be successful in certain profession, do a job they could like)*. Less than 11% of these respondents associate their life expectations with ***success in sport*** (*become a professional sportsman, be good at a specific sport, become a member of a national team/extra-league/premier league)*. The most favoured sport branch is football (54) in this respect, followed by hockey (28).

Every tenth respondent wants to be ***rich or famous*** in the future (*to have a lot of money; be able to buy whatever they want to; be popular)*. An interesting finding is that while success and recognition in society are mostly associated with practice of profession, fame is related exclusively to wealth.

A small number of respondents (5% of answers) consider their priority for the future to be their own happy family (*to have children, a nice husband, get married well*). Yet a lower number of children (3% of answers) say they would like to travel a lot in the future, and/or to study or live abroad. 11% of children failed to provide a specific answer and 8% of answers did not fit into any of the above categories.

Prior to commenting on these results you will see how life aspirations change depending on age and gender (the columns in the charts show the percentage of children mentioning the given preference; for further processing of specific character qualities only the first response is used).

Chart 50: Life aspirations of children in relation to age
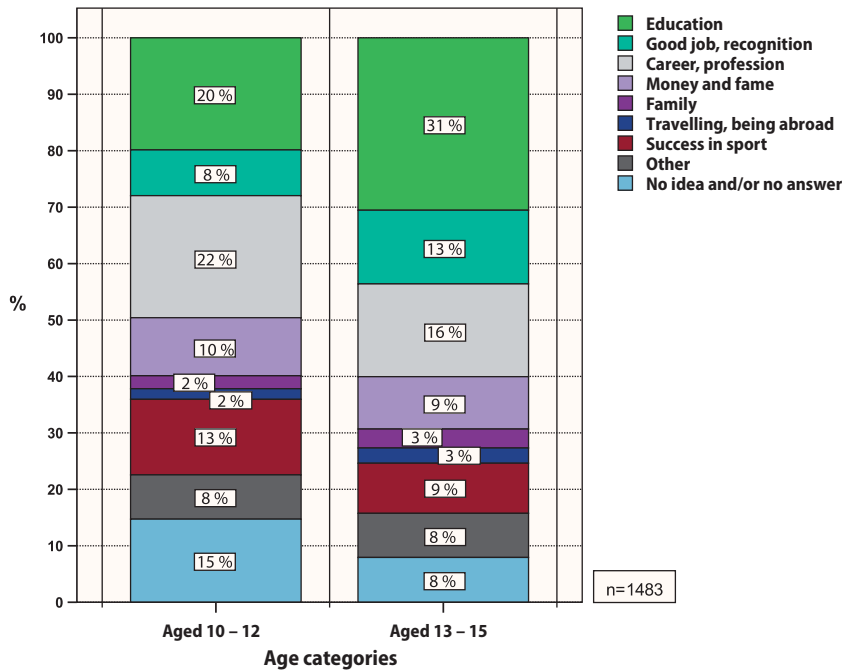
The columns show quite clearly how growing age brings about less indecisiveness, increased focus on study achievements and, oddly enough lower expectations associated with interesting job and professional employment.

Chart 51: Life aspirations of children in relation to gender
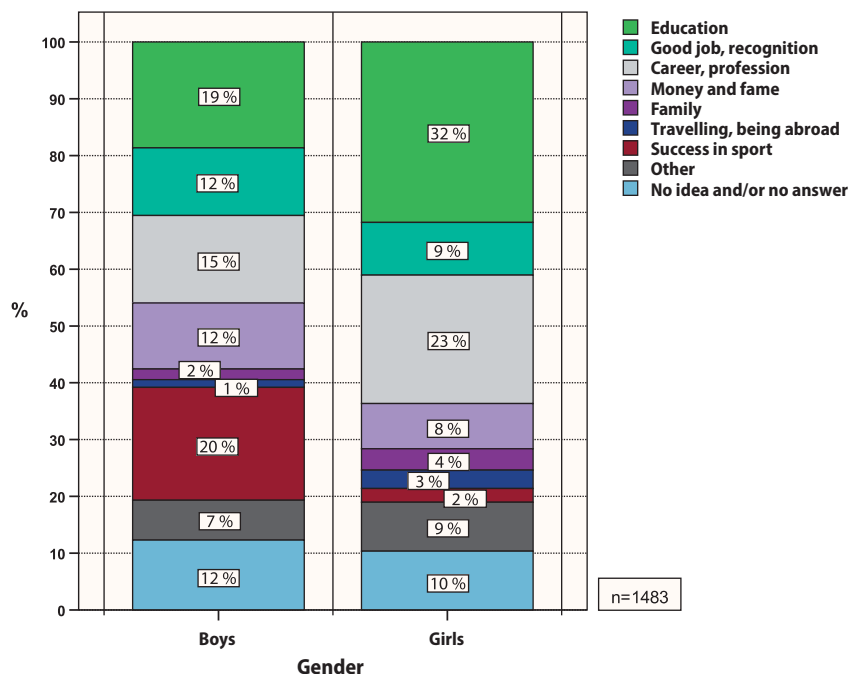
When analysing in more detail children's desires according to whether they are voiced by girls or by boys, we can quite clearly see two differences: Girls place much more emphasis on study achievements and their professional employment while boys often see their future in a sporting career (every fifth one!) and much more frequently they are lured by money and fame (confirmed by findings in the section dedicated to things that are important to them). Even though girls' inclinations are more promising at first sight their preferences lead us to the following reflection: The vast majority of children say that it is very important for them to live in a good family but they themselves do not attach great importance to the creation of a good family in their lives. Children were allowed to mention more things they would like to achieve in their life so the professional employment did not necessarily have to set aside the desire to form a good family. So the question is who will in their generation be creating those good families the major part of them long for?

Does a lie have short legs?

A more attentive reader might have been taken aback to hear that roughly half of all children believe that their parents occasionally lie even though the same parents encourage them to speak the truth. Therefore children have an ambivalent relationship in which key is who lies and to whom. However, it is hard for children (just like it is for adults) if others lie to them. Absence of lies is almost the only thing they require from their friends and what the build their friendship on.

> Jára (Age category 10 – 12): *I would mind, as the only thing, if a friend of mine lied to me.*
> Věra (Age category 10 – 12): *What I want most of all is that my friend did not argue with me and did not lie to me.*

On the other hand, if there is talk about them, older children in particular say that lying is a bad thing that should not occur too often but under certain circumstances they do lie, especially if they pursue their own profit. They lie to parents most often if they feel that they would ban them from doing an activity that they believe is beneficial for them. In particular, this applies to the passing of unorganized leisure time and coming back home late.

> Nela (Age category 13 – 15): *I also think one should not do it but sometimes it is necessary.*
> Johanka (Age category 13– 15): *I think that each of us has already told a lie. It's pointless saying that it is a wrong thing. It's perhaps needed in some situations.*
> Karolína (Age category 13 – 15): *It may sometimes come in handy but it is bad.*
> Štepán (Age category 13 – 15): *I think there's nothing wrong about it. Why not? It's stupid if it comes to light.*

It has come to light that since early childhood children have known to use a white lie. Although they do realize that this should not happen they admit that it is necessary to occasionally tell a lie to parents for their own good.

> Mikuláš (Age category 6 – 9): *I also have to bullshit sometimes because otherwise mom could get a stroke (laughing).*
> Roman (Age category 13 – 15): *I don't know, I am trying not to lie to parents, but when I get a note sent home, for example, I will tell mom that the whole situation was terrible.*
> Sára (Age category 13 – 15): *Lying is bad but sometimes it is better than telling the truth. But only in certain situations. For example, I tell mom that I am going somewhere else but knowing that there's no danger for me.*

The answers also reflected various relationships children have with their parents. Most children admit to trust more mom than dad. In particular, older girls form "alliances" with mom against daddy.

> Lenka (Age category 13 – 15): *I tell mom everything and I tell her the truth but we sometimes make up something for my dad together with mom.*
> Martina (Age category 13– 15): *If it comes in handy I tell a lie, but rather to dad, I don't lie to mom. I say everything to mommy but I don't mind telling a lie to dad because he keeps forbidding me everything. But mom knows about it.*

The oldest children do already differentiate between big and small, important and unimportant things and the resulting rule: lies are allowed with unimportant things.

Jarek (Age category 13 – 15): *Lying is not a problem for me if it concerns something unimportant. We should not lie to parents.*
Leona (Age category 13– 15): *I don't have much self-confidence so I sometimes tell a lie but only minor things.*
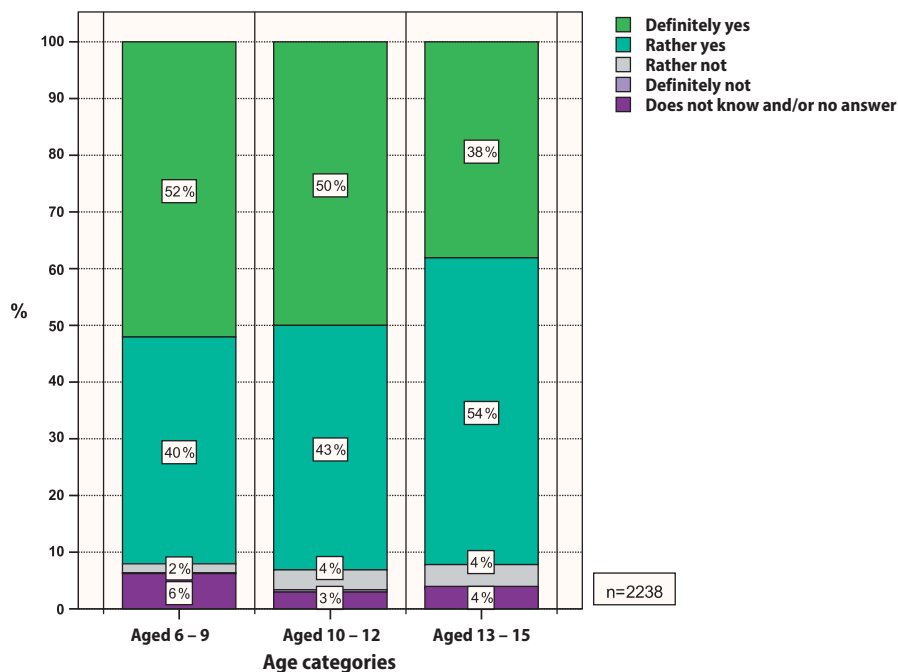
The opinion that we should not lie for the sake of our own conscience occurs only scarcely among children. This shows that transition into such stage of moral thinking is not usual at this age.

Jana (Age category 10 – 12): *I have already told a lie, but everyone must have. But in most cases I had a twinge of conscience and then I confess.*

Happiness

In conclusion of this chapter we want to ask a simple question that might be difficult to answer: *Do you think that you are happy in life?* Children were asked the same question also during group interviews and it turned out that children had difficulties giving a clear answer. However, it may be noted that the younger children are the more straightforward and simple their answers are. With growing age various "but", conditionalities and ambiguities occur. This finding is in correlation with the results of the quantitative part showing how the number of children stating to be "definitely" happy in their life declines with age. Of the total number of respondents, only four (roughly 0.2%) said to be definitely unhappy and therefore their percentage is not shown in the chart due to rounding.

Chart 52: Feeling happy in life in relation to age

Legend:
- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Rather not
- Definitely not
- Does not know and/or no answer

n=2238

Aged 6 – 9: 52%, 40%, 2%, 6%
Aged 10 – 12: 50%, 43%, 4%, 3%
Aged 13 – 15: 38%, 54%, 4%, 4%

Age categories

Also group interviews show a prevailing number of children who say to be happy. They either use this particular phrase or they say "I am happy" or "I feel fine".

> Petr (Age category 10 – 12): *All in all, I feel happy.*
> Simona (Age category 10 – 12): *Me too, everything is fine.*
> Tobiáš (Age category 13 – 15): *I don't have any problem.*
> Přemek (Age category 13 – 15): *I feel ok, I have no troubles.*
> Leoš (Age category 13 – 15): *Me too, I am happy…that I am here and so on.*

Children from the oldest age category often use a very adult answer: they are happy in spite of the problems life brings to them. Other adult-like answers include statements such as that they feel neither happy nor unhappy in life but rather somewhere in between.
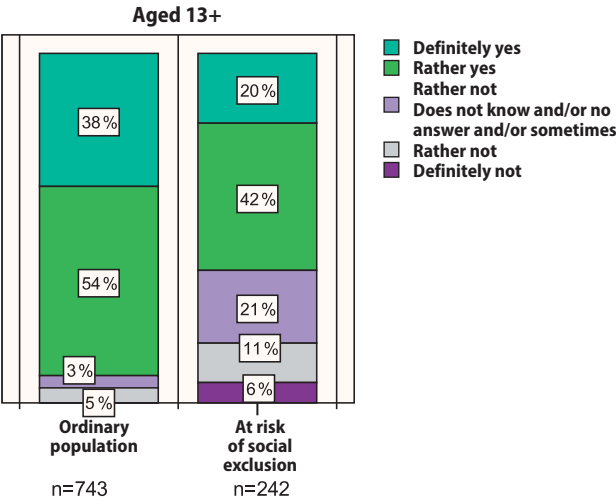
> Leona (Age category 13 – 15): *I feel happy. Problems do occur but I am happy.*
> Roman (Age category 13 – 15): *It depends on circumstances. If there are problems I feel unhappy but otherwise I am fine.*
> Karolína (Age category 13 – 15): *I think everyone has some problems but otherwise I am satisfied with my life.*
> Tonda (Age category 13 – 15): *My life is OK if dad does not want something from me. Sometimes I am happy, sometimes unhappy.*
> Jonáš (Age category 13 – 15): *If I get on well and if I am in a good mood I feel happy. If I screw up something I get into a bad mood, I feel unhappy; but then it gets sorted out in a while.*
> Martina (Age category 13 – 15): *It varies depending on the people I am with. If I am at home, I am not very happy. If I socialise with a bunch of friends or do my hobbies I am happy.*
> Ivona (Age category 13 – 15): *I am happy but sometimes I am sad rather than happy.*

Also group interviews reveal that there are children who do not feel too happy. In the youngest age group the things that prevent children from feeling happy are simple and clear: if they have to do homework on weekends or on Fridays, school in general, i. e. if they have to do things they do not like. For older children, problems become more complex; they include arguments with parents, concerns about their future studies or health problems.

When examining answers to the question whether children feel happy it needs to be taken into account that these answers do not always reflect children's real state of mind, especially from a long-term perspective. However, as illustrated in the following chart, the overall situation of these ordinary children is significantly better than of the children surveyed during one of our previous researches *(A Healthy Atmosphere in the Hobby and Informal Education*[8]*)* focusing on children at risk of social exclusion. The percentage of those who do not feel happy is six times higher there. And unfortunately they have quite compelling reasons for that…
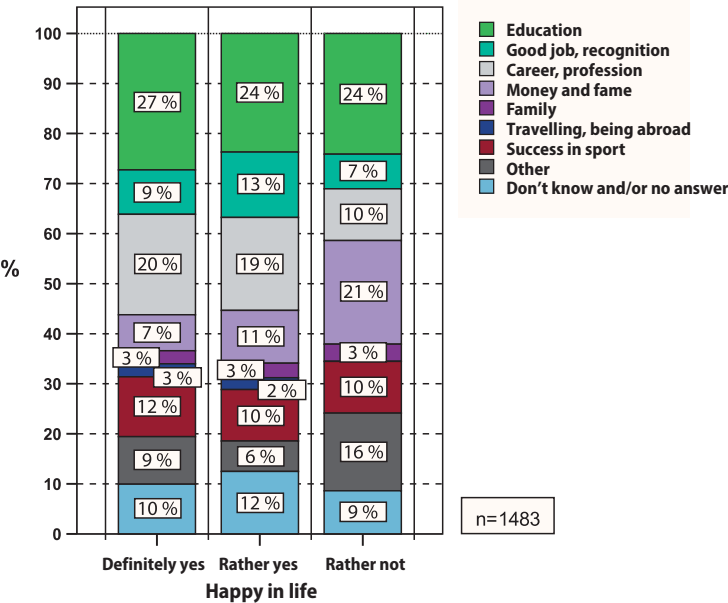
---

[8] The research focussed on the life and problems of children and young people at risk of social exclusion; respondents were users of low-threshold facilities for children and young people, conducted in 2009 – 2010. The research report is available on the website of the Keys for Life Project: www.kliceprozivot.cz and in the National Register of Researches on Children and Young People on www.vyzkum-mladez.cz.

Chart 53: Feeling happy in life – compared with the population of children at risk of social exclusion

Aged 13+

Legend:
- **Definitely yes**
- **Rather yes**
- **Rather not**
- **Does not know and/or no answer and/or sometimes**
- **Rather not**
- **Definitely not**

Ordinary population: 38%, 54%, 3%, 5% — n=743
At risk of social exclusion: 20%, 42%, 21%, 11%, 6% — n=242

Let us talk about yet another interesting circumstance, which stands between the feeling of happiness and life aspirations of children. The columns in the following chart show the percentage of children who indicated the given preference and are divided according to whether they are definitely happy, rather happy or rather unhappy. The range shows answers of children aged 10 – 15. Those who were not able to give an answer have not been included in the chart.

Chart 54: Life aspirations of children in relation to feelings of happiness in life

Legend:
- **Education**
- **Good job, recognition**
- **Career, profession**
- **Money and fame**
- **Family**
- **Travelling, being abroad**
- **Success in sport**
- **Other**
- **Don't know and/or no answer**

Happy in life

n=1483

75

As can be seen, the biggest difference between the children who feel definitely happy and those who do not feel like that lies in the fact that the less happy children long for money three times more often and almost twice less frequently they concentrate on their future profession and a good job. In the figurative sense of the word, these children expect that increased income and standard of living will change their state of mind. However, without a stronger concentration on profession and professional employment in the future it will be hardly achievable. A positive factor still remains to be a strong motivation for education, which is almost unchanged in all groups of respondents.

What are the most important findings about the inner world of our children based on their statements?

- *The vast majority of children find it very important to be surrounded with a good family and good companions/friends.*
- *For younger children it is important to study well, behave well, help others and protect nature, however, with growing age the importance of these values drops down at the expense of the desire to have a lot of money and discover the world.*
- *Traditional values that go beyond us are important for very few children: the vast majority of them do not care about God; and regarding politics, only pejorative words can be heard from most of them.*
- *The interest in "social values" (i. e. behaviour that makes good co-existence of people possible) declines in general with age while interest in external values increases (consumerism, fame); the exception to this trend being children engaged in organised leisure activities (clubs, hobby groups).*
- *Children mainly complain about wars; the younger ones do not tolerate foul language, smoking and littering. Tolerance to undesirable behaviour grows with age. Although girls are more sensitive to undesirable behaviour than boys, almost anyone finds copying off a problem.*
- *Only half of children have a role model, most frequently among "media stars" (sportsmen, singers, musicians). If children's role model is a person from their immediate surroundings (most frequently their mom), what they most appreciate about her is her character; role models from the media are recognised for their achievements, fame and/or look.*
- *Children would like to be successful in their studies, have interesting or well-paid or prestigious jobs; boys would like to excel at sports. Most children do not yet see their life ambition in creating a good family.*
- *Children admit that lying is not right but their reasons for that are quite easy to predict: fear that something will come to light, which would be even worse. Therefore, they actually do lie quite often even though they try to make difference to whom they tell a lie and why. However, they hate to be told lies.*
- *Czech children say to be happy with the exception of children coming from the backgrounds (and families) at risk of social exclusion. More than one third of these children claim not to be happy.*
- *Children who get bored are usually not happy. Children who do not engage in organised leisure activities get bored much more frequently.*
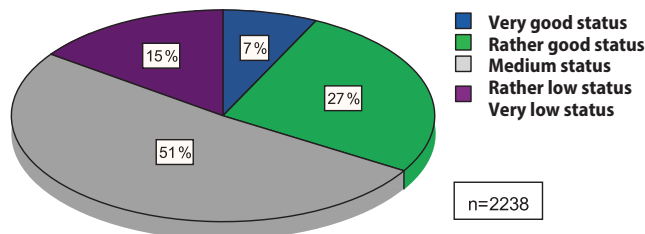
THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR

While the other chapters were meant to be part of this publication from the very beginning, this particular chapter was coming into life in the process of its writing. In our opinion, the findings themselves required it. We were aware of the fact that education of parents and the related socio-economic status of the family play an important role also in the life of children. But we did not know that its impact was so strong. For example, a long-term research programme for the international assessment of students in the OECD countries called PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) showed already several years ago that a Czech child whose mother had at least a complete secondary school with a school-leaving certificate, had seven times greater chance to be admitted to university, compared to a child whose mother was not so educated. However, what our research shows about a massive impact of the parental education and the socio-economic status of the family on children is so impressive that we have decided to discuss it in a separate chapter. We believe that implications thereof thus become more apparent, which will perhaps make it possible to adopt necessary measures limiting the threats arising therefrom for the entire society.

So, how can we describe the category of parents – from the perspective of the socio-economic status and education – of children who were respondents to the quantitative part of our research? Of course, the information from children was not decisive for the classification of families. This was a task for trained interviewers to determine, under pre-defined criteria, taking into account apartments' equipment and types of residential areas, the economic status of the families the respondents live in. From this perspective, our sample had the following composition.

Age category	Socio-economic status				
	Very high economic status of the family	Rather high economic status of the family	Medium economic status of the family	Rather low economic status of the family	Very low economic status of the family
6 – 9	48	208	377	109	13
10 – 12	68	190	373	95	12
13 – 15	46	193	394	96	13
TOTAL	**162**	**591**	**1,144**	**300**	**38**

The above information is shown in a pie chart, which combines – due to a low number and possibilities of further statistical processing – families with a very low economic status and families with a rather low economic status.

*Chart 55: Socio-economic status of families*

- Very good status
- Rather good status
- Medium status
- Rather low status
- Very low status

n=2238

We can see that half of the chart pie represents families that may be classified as "medium" in terms of their socio-economic status while the other half represents the second largest group (families with a medium economic status) and the two smallest (marginal) groups of families with a very good economic status and with a rather low or a very low economic status respectively. This result precisely corresponds to the division of families according to their wealth and income ascertained during the census – the "medium" ones belong, in terms of their income, into the "below-average" category (there are 2/3 of people in our country whose income is lower than the average wage).

As far as the family education level is concerned, we firstly distinguished four levels of education of parents for the purposes of our survey:

1. *Elementary education,* meaning a completed compulsory school attendance and also incomplete secondary level of education;
2. *Secondary education without a school-leaving certificate,* for which we use the term "complete one's apprenticeship" meaning that parents have completed a secondary vocational training school or a vocational school without a school-leaving certificate (with a certificate of apprenticeship) or a secondary school without a school-leaving certificate;
3. *Complete secondary education,* for which we use the term "school-leaving certificate", which means that parents has completed a secondary school, secondary technical school or a grammar school concluded with a school-leaving certificate or a conservatory;
4. *University education,* meaning that parents have graduated from a university concluded with at least a bachelor's degree (state examination). This group includes parents who have completed a post-secondary school concluded with a graduation exam. This is summarily called a tertiary education.

Chart 56: Education of parents
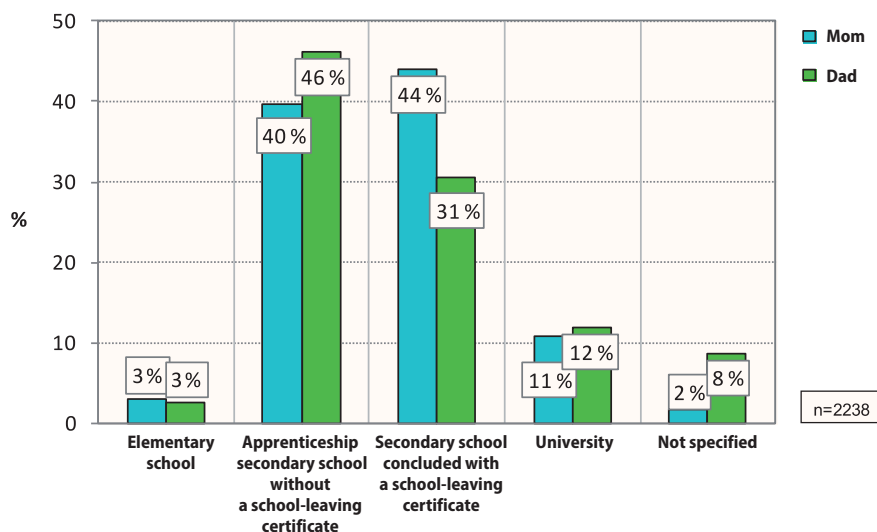
Children's answers show that Czech mothers are more educated than Czech fathers; they have achieved a higher level of education. A school-leaving certificate as a minimum level of education is possessed by about 43% of fathers compared to more than half of mothers, i. e. 55%. 40% of mothers compared to 46% of fathers have completed apprenticeship training or secondary school without a school-leaving certificate. This means that almost half of fathers in our target group do not have a complete secondary school education with a school-leaving certificate. Parents who are university graduates account for about 12% and parents with complete elementary education account for the smallest group – only around 3%.

In order to be able to apply the "level of parental education" also to situations in which parents in one family have achieved different level of education, we have created a new variable called the **"family education level"**, which always takes into account the higher education level of one of the parents. Almost half of children live in families in which at least one parent has accomplished a secondary education. This category is followed by families in which at least one parent has completed elementary education or apprenticeship. This applies to more than one third of households. University education as the highest level of education has been completed by at least one of the parents in 17% of households. The lowest number of families includes parents with only elementary education completed. Such families, however, are very few, they account only for 4%. As this fact is not statistically significant, we have merged this category with parents who have an apprenticeship certificate or have completed a secondary school without a school-leaving certificate. The above figures are clearly seen in the following chart:

Chart 57: Family education level
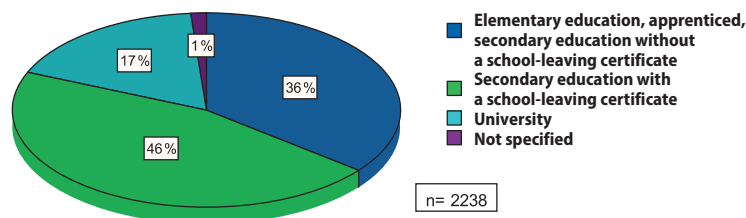
Before we demonstrate how the parental status and their education are reflected in specific areas covered in this research (family, school, leisure time, values) let us examine how the socio-economic status of the family correlates with its education level. The chart columns show family education level in proportion to status.

Chart 58: The socio-economic status of the family in relation to education level
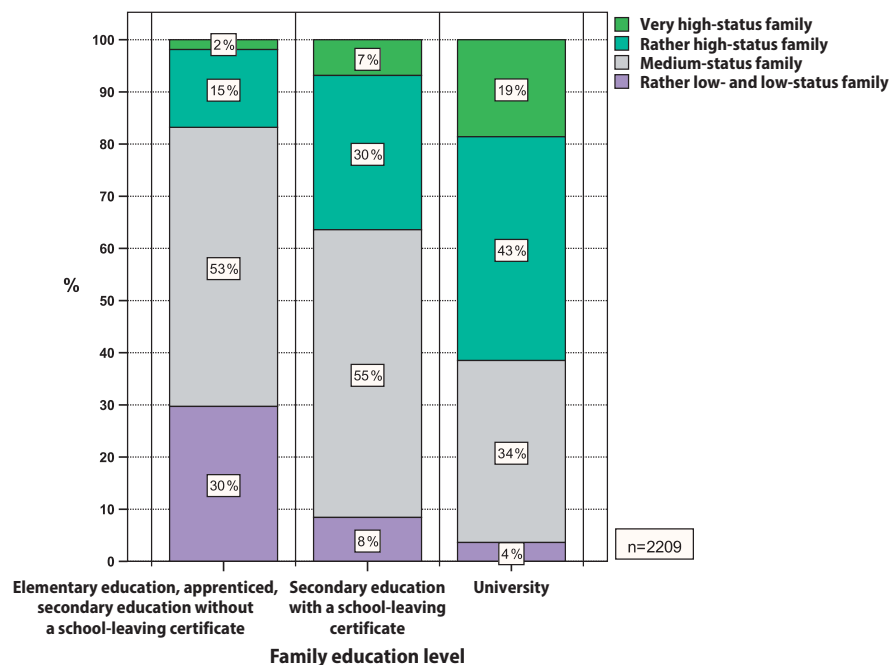
The results of the survey have confirmed a close link between the family education level and its socio-economic status. Even though we cannot generalise, there is a high probability that children whose parents are university graduates will have at least a slightly above-average socio-economic status. Therefore, it is no surprise that the above two factors (parental education and status) act in the same direction in the vast majority of children.

And now let us have a look at specific results. We will start with the impact of the socio-economic status of the family and parental education on the assessment of parents by their own children. The same will be done for school and leisure time. At the end of the chapter we will discuss the correlation between the family living standard and values of the children living in them.

Family

Mothers' and fathers' character qualities have been assessed in relation to the socio-economic status of the family, which is shown in the following two charts (the columns show the percentage of children stating that their parents have the given quality).

Chart 59: Character qualities of mom as perceived by their children in relation to socio-economic status
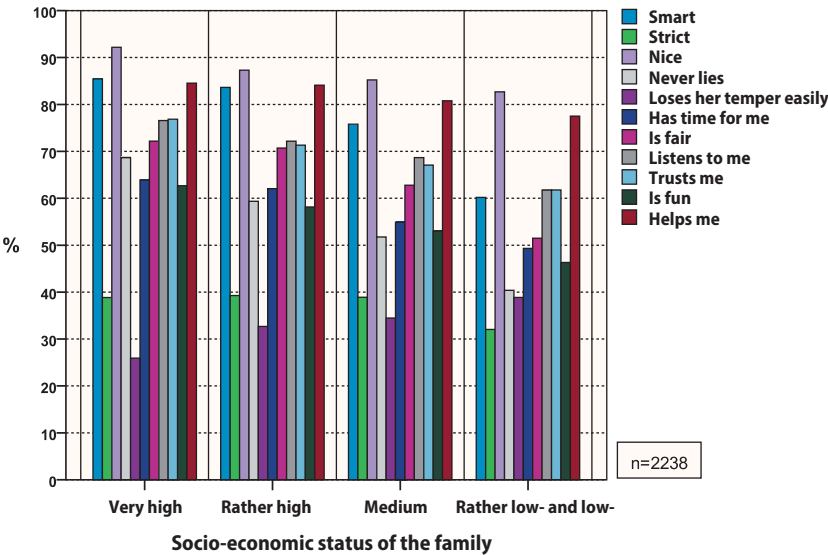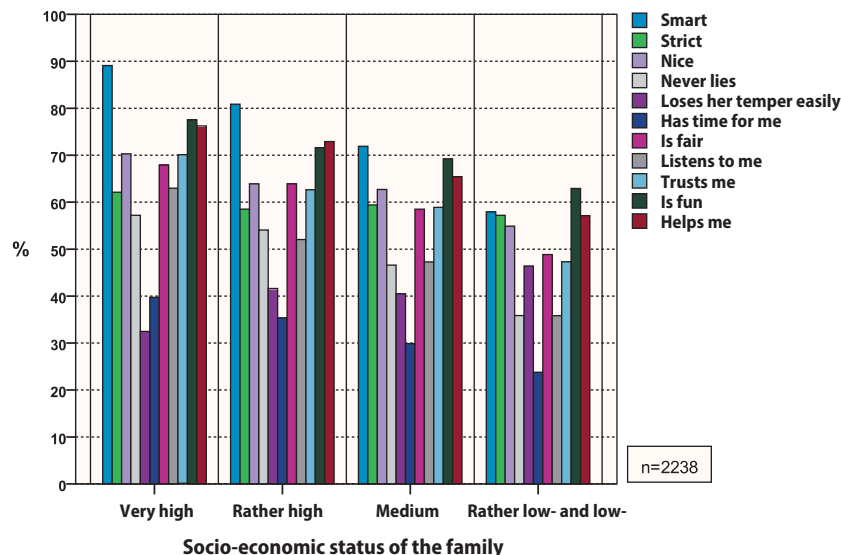
Chart 60: Character qualities of dad as perceived by their children in relation to socio-economic status

Children from very high-status families tend to see their mom more often as smart, nice, truthful, having time for them, being able to listen to them, trust and help them. The differences in perception (and in assessment) are even more apparent as far as fathers are concerned: children from well-off families compared to children from low-status (but also medium-status) families tend to see their daddy as smart, nice, truthful, fair, being able to listen to them, trust and help them, being fun and even having more time for them.

Similar results have been obtained also in relation to the parental education, even though its impact when assessing parental qualities is not as strong as the impact of socio-economic status. A daddy even though an educated one is not such a "star" for children as a daddy who ensures a good socio-economic status for the family. However, tendencies are identical in both cases with the exception of the fact that an educated father in children's opinion does not automatically mean having more time for them.

Quite surprisingly, children from low-status families less frequently see their mom as strict, compared to children from medium- or higher-status families. The reason why may be found in one of the findings of our research. It is the fact that parents with lower education and lower socio-economic status in general spend less time with children and are less interested in how their children pass their leisure time. Such families show less mutual interactions and less supervision, and therefore children from such families may believe that their mom is not strict.

The parental education level and the socio-economic status of the family are also reflected in attitudes the parents encourage their children to adopt. The correlation between attitudes and family status and parental education is manifested in the answers of children aged 10 – 15 (the chart always shows the percentage of children stating that their parents "definitely encourage" them to adopt the given attitude):

Chart 61: Parental attitudes through the eyes of children in relation to the socio-economic status of the family

Socio-economic status of the family
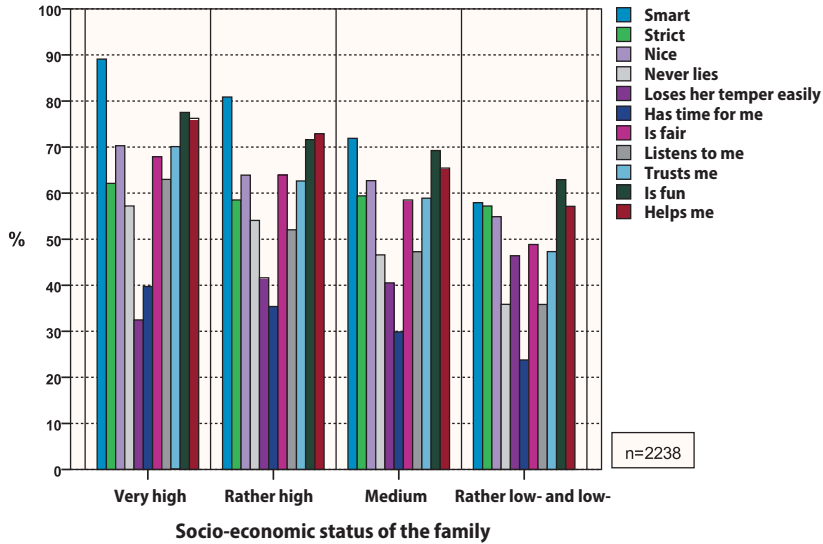
Chart 62: Parental attitudes through the eyes of children in relation to the parental education

Family education level
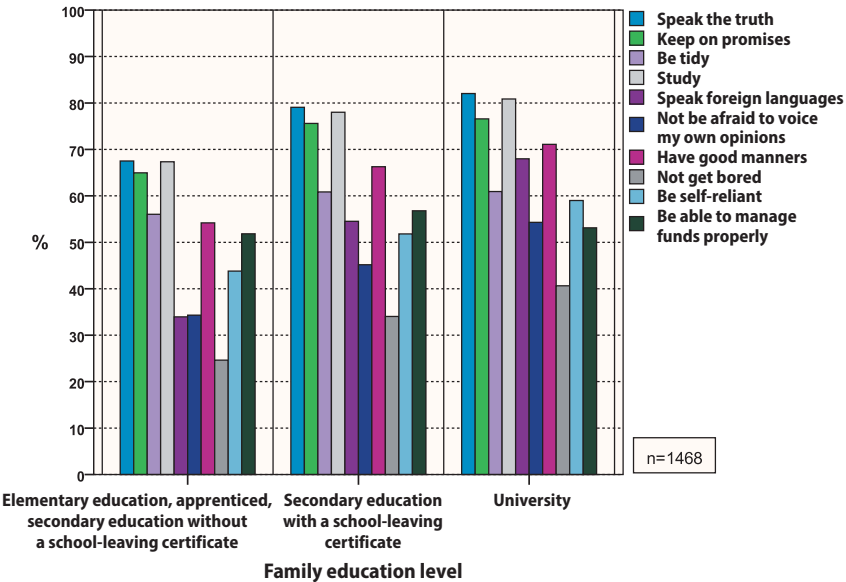
We may summarise that children from families where neither of the parents has a complete secondary education with a school-leaving certificate and, similarly also children from rather low- or low-status families are much less than other children encouraged by their parents (at least according to what children say) to have self-confidence and self-assertiveness (to study, to master foreign languages, not to be afraid to voice their opinions, be self-reliant and not to get bored), as well as to adopt moral values (to speak the truth, keep on premises) and social values (be tidy, have good manners and manage funds properly).

The aforesaid conclusions correlate with the finding that parents from rather low-status and low-status families much less shape their children's opinions and their future aspirations. It is also possible to say that children from families with at least one parent with university education feel, more often than other children, that their parents influence their behaviour to other people. We may assume that it is also related to the degree of trust children have in abilities of their parents as mentors and of those who they may confide in. The following chart shows that children from high-status families confide more often in their parents – and not only to mom but especially to daddy (twice more often than children from low-status families) and other members of the family (siblings) or relatives (the columns show the percentage of children stating that they often confide in the given person).

*Chart 63: Persons whom children confide in, in relation to the socio-economic status of the family*
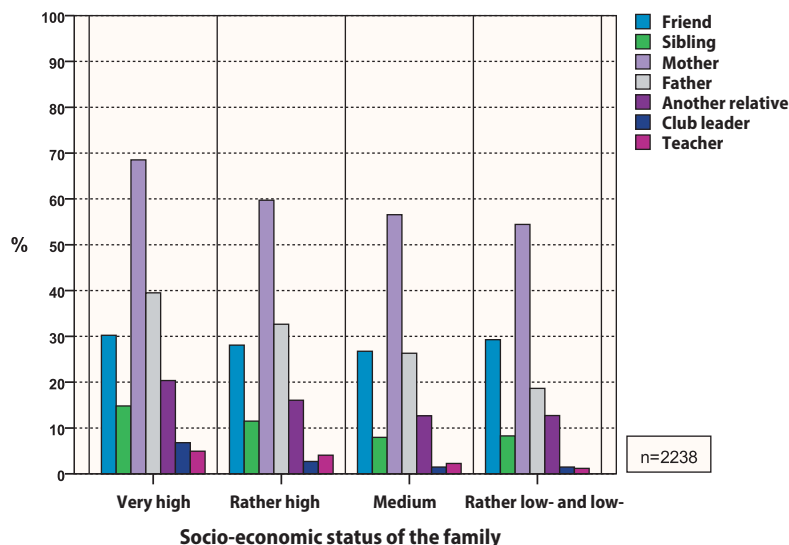
Children of parents with higher education also feel they have more privacy, in spite of the fact that their parents are more interested in their school results. On the contrary, children of parents with lower education are more often raised in rather unfavourable conditions and less harmonious relationships, which is manifested by, for example, more frequent fights in the family.

- *The higher the socio-economic status and/or the higher the parental education level, the more positive the overall assessment of parents by their children is.*
- *Children from families with a high socio-economic status and/or higher parental education trust their parents more, confide in them and in general assess positively their influence on their behaviour.*
- *Therefore, more children from families with a higher socio-economic status or children of parents with higher education are convinced that parents encourage them to adopt attitudes that fall not only under the "self-confidence" and "self-assertion" categories but also under the categories of "moral values" and "social competencies".*

School

The family status and parental education are significantly reflected in children's relationships to school and, in particular, to teachers. We have already found out that teachers are not in general assessed much positively by today's children. However, children from lower-status families assess them even worse, which is quite clearly shown in the following chart (the columns show the percentage of children stating that their class teacher possesses the given quality).

Chart 64: Personal qualities of teachers as seen by children in relation to the socio-economic status of the family
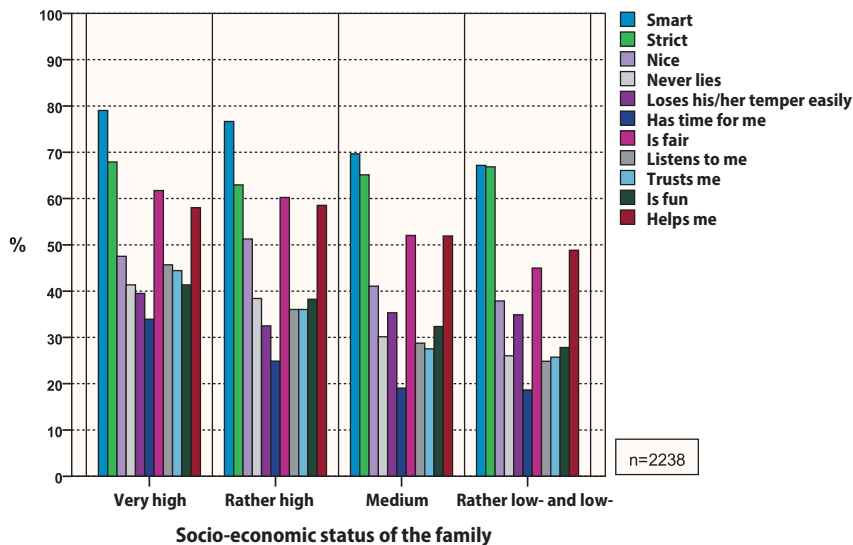
While children from very high-status or rather high-status families see their teachers as smart (almost 80% of them), fair (62%), willing to help (58%) and having trust in them (43%), children from lower or low-status families see teachers much more negatively. Only 68% consider them nice, 45% fair and 49% willing to help them. More than half of children from families with a very high socio-economic status also feel that there are nice teachers at school, compared to only 38% of children in the other group who share this opinion. An interesting and almost alarming finding for teachers is that only 25% of children from lower-status families believe that teachers themselves have trust in them.

An analysis of the parental education influence reveals similar findings, even though this factor is not as significant as it is with the socio-economic status. Children of university graduates state more often that their teachers are nice, do not lose their temper and that their teachers trust them. Compared with the group of children whose parents have lower education (elementary school, apprentice certificate, secondary school without a school-leaving certificate) they more often think that teachers are fair.

It is not difficult to understand why children of socially successful parents think of them as smart, nice, fair and speaking the truth. However, it is by far more difficult to understand why such children feel the same about teachers – and, on the contrary, why children from low-status families see their teachers in such a bad light. Our hypothesis is that more negative opinions of children who have lower-educated parents and come from lower socio-economic backgrounds results from the negative experience of their parents who perhaps were not very successful at school themselves. Lower-status families also share a generally less favourable view of society – and school as an institution constitutes an integral part of it. On the other hand, a positive relationship of children from higher-status families or children of parents who have higher education may result from a positive motivation to education of these parents or their higher demands and strictness.
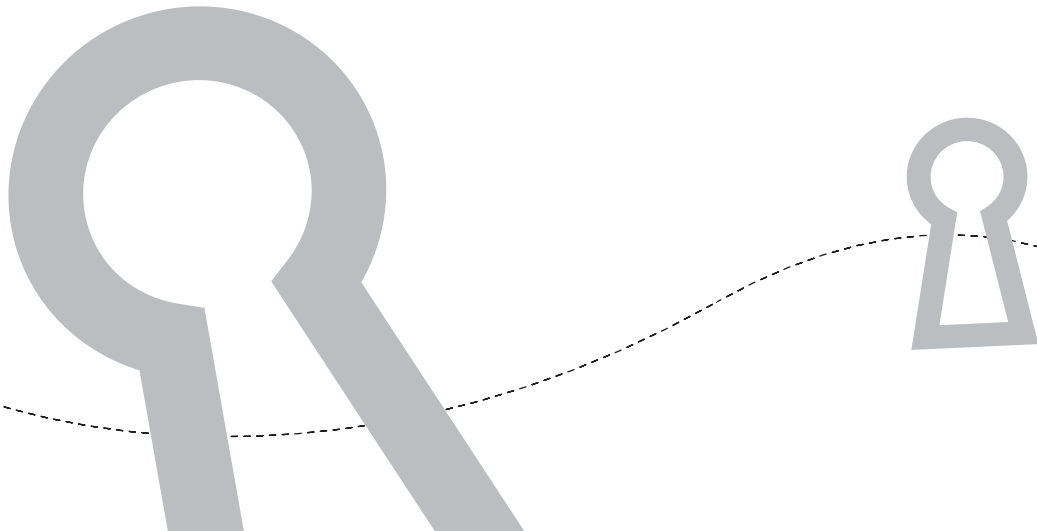
When focussing on the perception of school as a whole, then the socio-economic status of the family plays a very important role. The higher the status of the family, the better relationship to school the child has. 66% of children from very high-status families compared to only 49% of those from low-status families believe that they learn things at school that are useful for their future life. Children from lower-status families also get much more often bored at school (the columns show the percentage of children stating that they have had such experience at school).

Chart 65: Situation at school in relation to the socio-economic status of the family
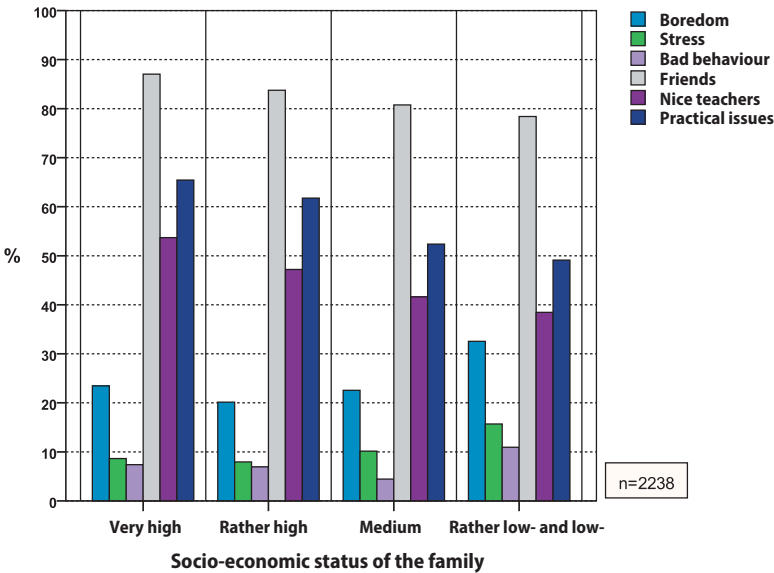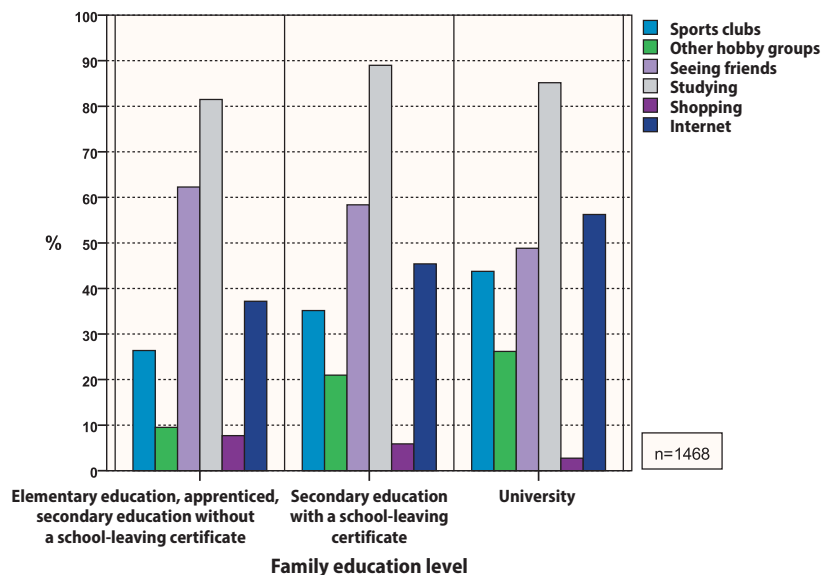

- *The higher the parental education, the higher the interest of a child in school. Such children are more convinced that the school attendance is meaningful and they are also more positive when assessing teachers.*
- *Children from lower-status families have a more negative opinion about school and they feel less comfortable there. Compared with other socio-economic groups, they get bored and experience stress more often.*

Leisure time

The parental education level and socio-economic status rank among essential factors that determine the ways children pass their leisure time. Let us first focus on the factor of parental education. While studying forms part of children's leisure time independently of the education level of their parents (which is, as a matter of fact, rather surprising), all other activities surveyed demonstrated differences.

It is clearly shown in the following chart (responses of children aged 10 – 15, the columns showing the percentage of children who perform the given activity at least twice or three times a week).

Chart 66: Leisure activities on weekdays, children aged 10 -15 in relation to parental education level

The *way* children spend their leisure time and *who* the leisure time is spent with are factors strongly influenced by the socio-economic status of the family as well as by parental education level. The higher the family status, the longer the leisure time spent with children's parents, siblings and grandparents. Children from families with a low socioeconomic status spend alone twice the amount of time spent alone by children from families with a better socioeconomic status. The reason may lie in the poor functioning of such families and insufficient co-operation between parents and grandparents. These outcomes also correlate with the finding that parents in families with a rather low or low status have a significantly weaker impact on ways their children spend the leisure time. On the contrary, the higher the education, the stronger the parental influence on children's leisure time. This situation, in turn, triggers further consequences.

The above is particularly true of children's organised leisure time. 38% of children whose parents have only elementary education or secondary education without a secondary school-leaving certificate do not attend any organised leisure activities compared to only 13% of children whose parents have a university degree. Parental education level also determines types of children's leisure activities. Though the level of education does not have any impact on sports activities, it does impact music, drama, art and craft and educational activities: the higher the education level, the higher the attendance. On the other hand, the fact that children from families with lower education background show a lower attendance rate at these activities does not necessarily result from parents' disinterest or low motivation, but may be also caused by the financial demands of such activities.

Parents who do not possess a secondary school-leaving certificate generally motivate their children less to attend sports clubs and other hobby groups. The chart shows responses of children who attend some leisure activities; the columns show the percentage of children attending the given activity/club.

Chart 67: Types of leisure activities in relation to parental education level
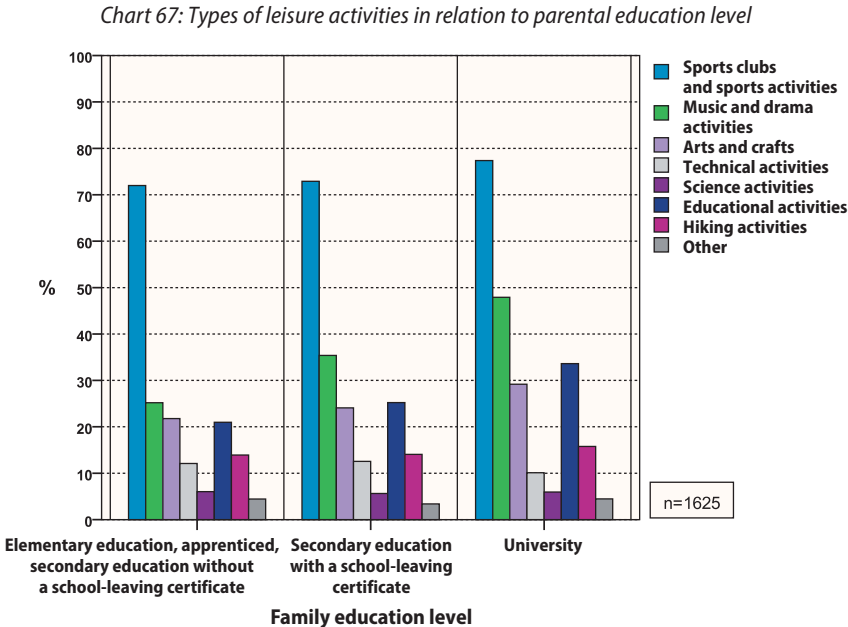
However, let us have a closer look at children's attendance of leisure-time groups and clubs, since the above-mentioned finding has deeper consequences than it may appear at first sight. Through the comparison of children's responses we have learned that parental education determines their approach to children's leisure activities. Children whose parents have only elementary education dedicate more time to unorganised activities, such as seeing friends or going out and, naturally, they spend more time in front of television. University degree holders are those who pay the most attention to filling their children's leisure time with organised activities.

The level of parental education does not significantly determine the reasons for participating in certain leisure-time activities. The only thing we can state in this connection is that children whose parents are university graduates mentioned more frequently (as one of the reasons) that it was their "parents' wish". More apparent is the influence of the socio-economic status of the family. Children from higher-status families are more motivated to attend leisure-time clubs and groups because they have good friends there, they feel (more than other children) that it is fun to be there and also it is often their parents' wish. Nevertheless, they are primarily motivated by the fact that they learn interesting things in an active way; the reason that it is their parents' wish is of secondary importance.

Children's responses have revealed a clear link between the ways of spending leisure time and the subjective feeling of happiness in their lives. Children saying that they are really happy (almost half of the respondents) are more often involved in organised leisure activities and sports as well as intellectual activities, such as book or magazine reading. The above is apparently clear to every group leader or educator upon first reading. Through leisure activities children are exposed to a variety of stimuli, including the development of social relationships, which contribute to the feeling of life fulfilment also outside these activities.

Chart 68: Children's feeling of happiness in connection with the boredom experienced during their leisure time

Feeling of boredom experienced during children's leisure time
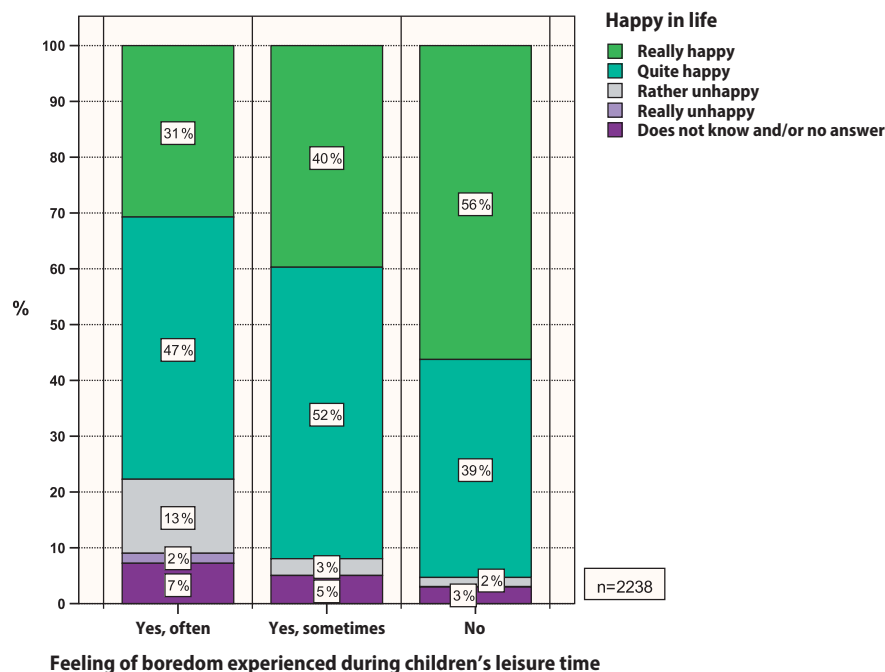
One more note should be made; an attentive reader has surely noticed that children mentioned their feelings of "boredom". If we examine boredom in connection with leisure time and the feeling of happiness, we will find an interesting link. Firstly, the feeling of happiness in life and the feeling of boredom are in inverse proportion, but there is also a relation between boredom and the way children spend their leisure time: the more children engage in sports, clubs and intellectual activities (reading or non-sporting activities), the less boredom they experience.

If children participate in organised leisure activities, they not only spend their free time in an active and meaningful way, acquire new skills and experience, (unintentionally) avoid at-risk behaviours, but also develop their social capital – a network of relationships and contacts outside their families. This experience is very useful for their future life.

- *Children from families with a low socio-economic status spend a much greater part of their leisure time alone, rather than with their siblings, parents and grandparents.*
- *Children from families with a higher socio-economic status and children whose parents have better education dedicate much more leisure time to activities in clubs and hobby groups compared to other children. Their parents also have a better awareness of their children's leisure time and stimulate them to take part in such leisure activities.*
- *Children whose parents have only elementary education are involved much more in unorganised activities, such as visiting friends, going outside, and they also spend more time watching television.*
- *Children from families with a higher socio-economic status and children whose parents have better education experience less boredom and are subjectively happier.*

Values

We have already learned that the parental socio-economic status and education determine in a substantial way all the important spheres of children's life we focused on. The impact is identical: the higher the status and education, the better for children. How did it determine the last – and perhaps the most important area? Is the proverb: "Poverty does not make one less honourable" valid at least in terms of values? Do children from more modest environment or of less educated parents hold the same position as other children or are they disadvantaged once again?

Unfortunately, our survey has clearly revealed that lower education and a lower socio-economic status are a serious handicap for the formation of a child's value orientation. This is not to be interpreted to mean that every poor child or every child from a less educated family adheres to low-quality values while children from high-status families and families where parents have university education recognise "real" values. Nevertheless, there are quite unambiguous findings that good education of parents and a good socio-economic status have a positive impact on the development of children in all aspects of the world of values examined.

What is important?

First note that for the purposes of clarity and comprehensibility the values that the respondents commented on were classified into five groups.

1. **"Social values",** i.e. to have good manners, be a good student, help others, protect nature
2. **"Appearance-related values",** i.e. to look good, have branded clothing, have a lot of money, be famous
3. **"Politics and God",** i.e. to have interest in politics, faith in God
4. **"Success in sport",** i.e. to be good at sports, be famous
5. **"Family and friends",** i.e. to have good friends, have a happy family, discover the world, have a partner.

All the above described values (including social values, appearance-related values as well as the values in the category "family and friends") are more important for children from high-status families. The appearance-related values are also essential for children from lower status families and families with a low socio-economic status. For children from economically poor families social values, success in sport and, unfortunately, family and friends are much less important.

Chart 69: Children's life priorities in relation to the socio-economic status of the family
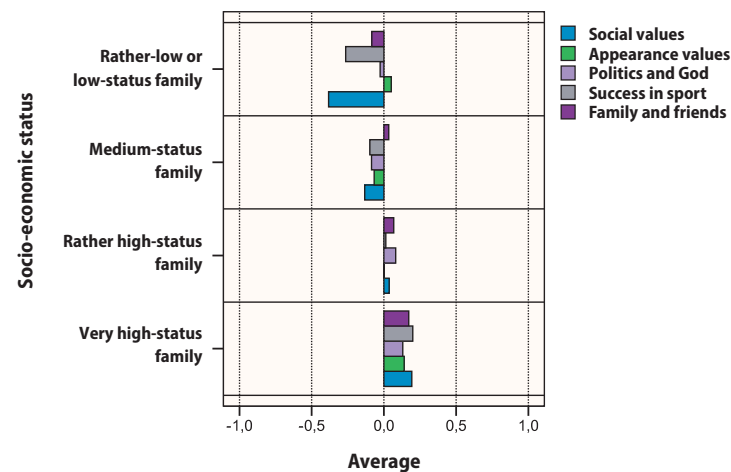
Similar findings have been found also for children whose parents have lower education. Like children from rather low-status families, these children do not find social values and their family and friends too important. On the contrary, children whose parents hold a university degree are more focused on social values and social relationships, which is the most essential to future value orientation of children both for in terms of their personal life as well as society.

Chart 70: Children's life priorities in relation to parental education level
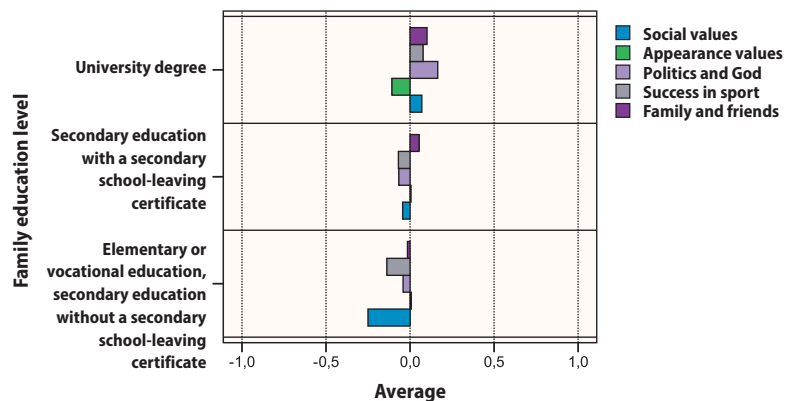
### *What children tolerate and what they mind*

Another important finding is that children from rather low-status or low-status families tolerate the majority of phenomena which bear sings of at-risk behaviour, such as smoking, using foul language and occasional lying. It is also likely that children in such families are less stimulated to properly handle the waste. However, at the same time it has been revealed that children from very high-status families tend to accept certain undesirable behaviours – they are more tolerant to cribbing and they do not mind littering around – compared to children from rather high-status families. On the other hand, they show higher intolerance to foreigners at school or in the neighbour-hood, although its level is still very low. These trends are well shown in the following chart (the columns determine the percentage of children who mentioned a strong dislike for the given phenomenon).

Chart 71: Children's tolerance in relation to the socio-economic status of their family
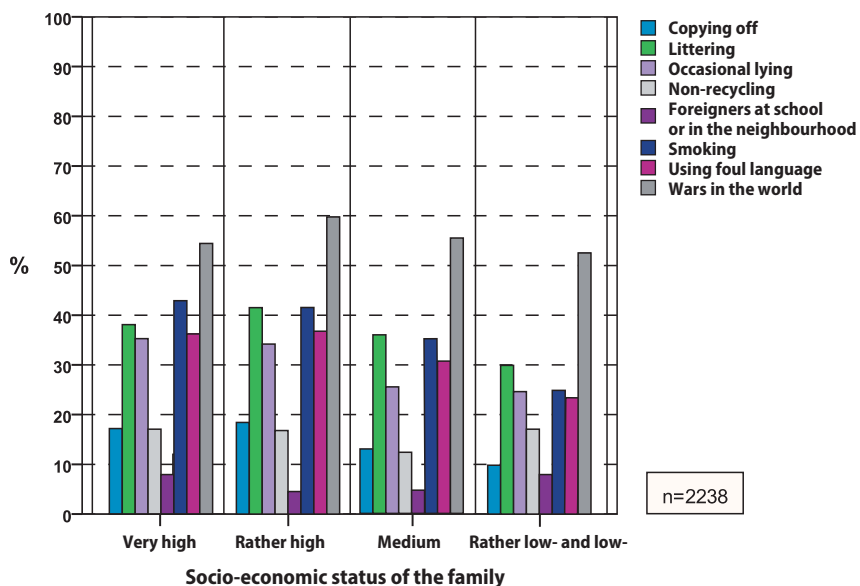
Similar outcomes have been obtained when the topic was examined from the point of view of parental education level. The better the education, the stronger the child's persuasion of the negative impact of improper behaviour. In families where neither of the parents has a complete secondary education (no secondary school-leaving certificate) children have shown significant tolerance to smoking and littering (the columns show the percentage of children with a strong dislike for the given phenomenon).

Chart 72: Children's tolerance in relation to parental education level
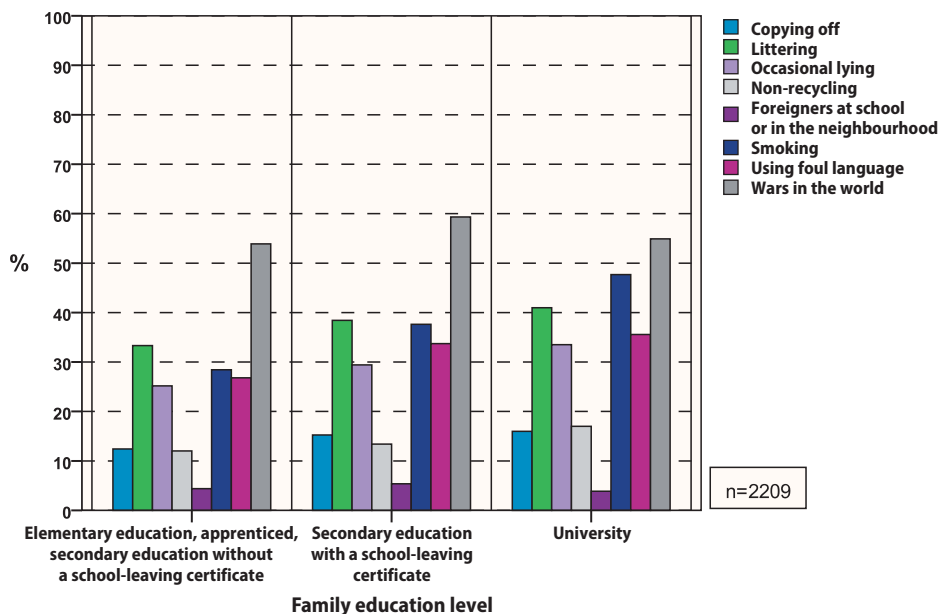
What goals do children have?

We have demonstrated that children's life orientation is significantly determined by both parent's education and their status. Now it is time to show how children's family background influences their development. This is shown in the following two charts. The first focuses on parental status (the columns show individual socio-economic levels and the percentage of children with the given ambition).

Chart 73: Children's life aspirations in relation to the socio-economic status of the family
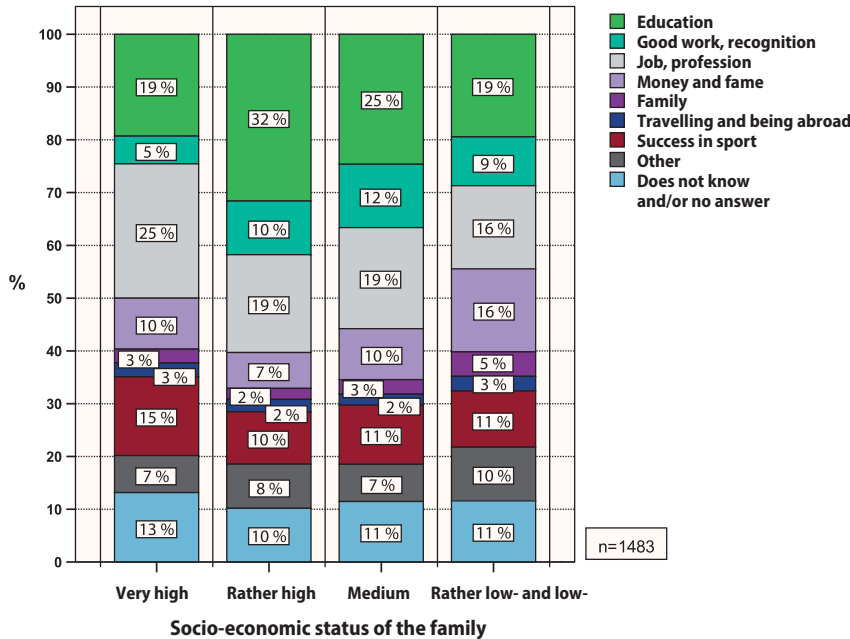
As regards their aspirations, children from high-status, medium-status and low-status families emphasise in particular education, followed by the performance of a job or profession. Children from rather low- or low-status families also mentioned money and fame. On the contrary, children from very high-status families associate their life with their job or profession, education and also success in sport.

The second chart shows the relation between children's ambitions and parental education level (the columns show particular parental education levels and the percentage of children with the given ambition).

*Chart 74: Children's life aspirations in relation to parental education level*
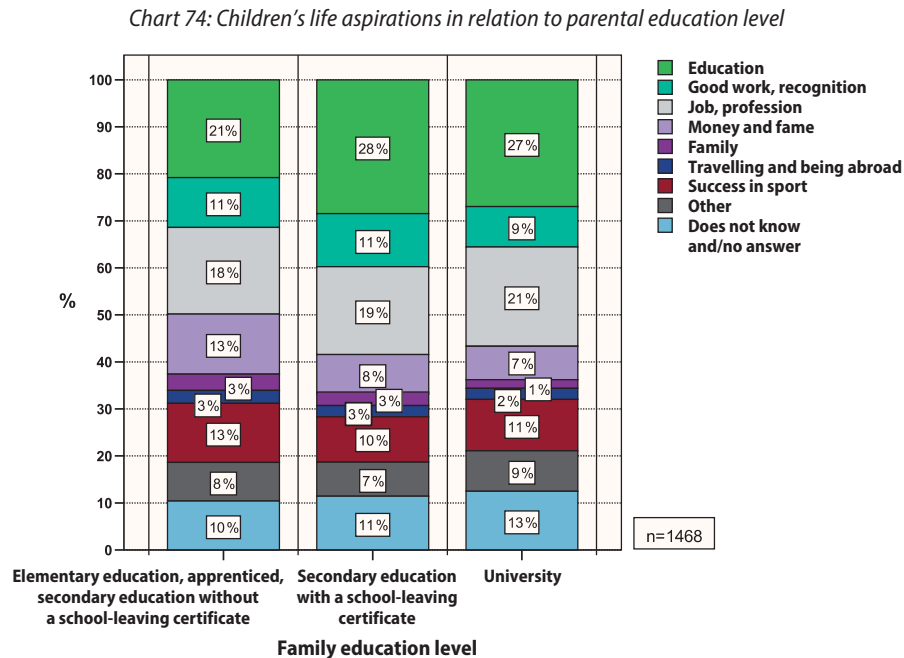
We can see that the results confirm the expectations: children from families with secondary and higher education place more emphasis on education while their ambition to be famous and wealthy is less dominant.

Happiness

The better the family status and the higher the parental education, the more the children feel really happy. On the contrary, children from families on the other end of the family spectrum were often unable to give any answer or said that they did not feel happy.

Chart 75: Feeling of happiness in relation to socio-economic status
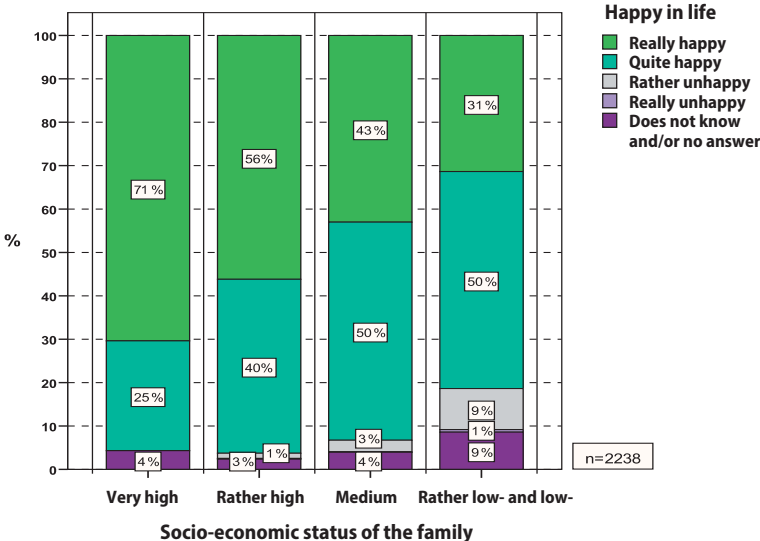
Chart 76: Feeling of happiness in relation to parental education level
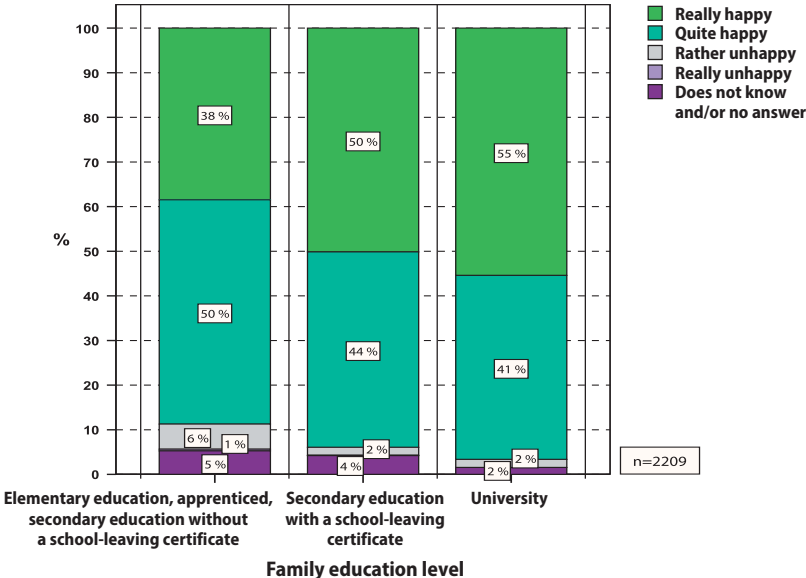
The conclusion arising from children's responses about socio-economic status and parental education level may be summarised in two sentences which, however, carry very serious consequences.

- *Good education and in the majority of cases also good material conditions in the family represent an excellent springboard and children from such families have a much better starting position practically in all aspects of life compared to other children.*
- *On the contrary, it is quite likely that a gap between children from families with a low socio-economic status whose parents only have elementary or secondary education without a secondary school-leaving certificate and other peers will keep widening – in terms of education, their social status and thus also existentially.*

Conclusion

Since particular chapters of the publication present only partial conclusions, we would now like to focus on the value orientations of children aged 6 – 15 in a comprehensive manner.

The goal of the research conducted in the years 2010 and 2011 among more than two thousand of Czech children has been to find and describe how children view the role of selected actors in certain areas of their lives, how they perceive and feel in different key environments, what their values and attitude are like, how satisfied they are in their lives and what life expectations they have.

Our findings – in particular those regarding the leisure-time structure, time spent in front of television or on the internet, the role of friends and attitudes to school – are a follow-up to the previously conducted surveys targeted at children and make their outcomes more profound. However, we have also obtained brand new and important information on families and children's preferences. As an example we could mention the findings about the weaker role of fathers compared to mothers (mother is considered the most important individual in the child's life), the absence of suitable role models that children - and in particular teenagers – could follow, the generally widespread tolerance to lies or the weak sense for transcendent values.

The research has confirmed and the data obtained has supported all eight pre-formulated hypotheses regarding the attitudes of children towards their family, school, ways of spending leisure time, media, as well as their life priorities, expectations and values. The most significant findings include:

- It has been proven that the family's socio-economic status and parental education level essentially determine children's values, their organised as well as unorganised leisure time, life priorities and attitude to life in general.
- The importance of key players in the life of a child, including the growing influence of the internet and other communication tools, changes depending on the child's age. The influence of parents, teachers and other authorities lessens as children grow and their role is overtaken by friends, who become the most important characters in children's lives. The importance of electronic communication tools is growing too. Children who spend their leisure time in an active way by joining organisations that offer "amateur" and informal education (clubs, hobby groups) are happier and more satisfied and experience less boredom than other children.
- With growing age children are more willing to accept morally wrong behaviours.

We provide some additional research conclusions obtained together with other experts specialising in children's issues that are worth considering.

It is alarming that 14% of respondents do not find their mothers to be "good". Unfortunately, this corresponds to the outcomes of other surveys targeted at the mother and child relationship during the first years of the child's life. They have discovered that approximately 20% of women are not able to be mothers their children need. They are incapable of making their children feel secure and safe. Furthermore, they do not represent a "legible" and reliable person for them. As regards fathers, as much as 37% of children do not find their fathers to be "good".

Children from families with lower education and with a lower socio-economic status are not sufficiently "equipped" with the skill of self-assertion and with moral and social values.

Independently of the type of activities we want our children to concentrate on or the area of development we want to support, it is good to start in the early school years (before the child reaches the age of 12) or even better – lay the foundations of such activities at the pre-school age.

Schools and organisers of leisure activities should pay much more attention to social relationships and their importance. Our predominantly performance- and material values-oriented society is in real need of that.

When judging the behaviour of parents and friends, children show high tolerance to undesirable behaviours, which is alarming.

Society as a whole should think more thoroughly about the ideals and role models that are presented to children and teenagers. In this respect our children live in difficult times. It is quite understandable that they tend to escape into the world of the computer and television reality where they search for a virtual identity or live the lives of series characters. They often do not trust anything, are sceptical, and resort to drugs.

We believe that this publication will bring important impulses for a public debate on children and teenagers in our society, about their needs and directions they follow. At the same time we are convinced that the outcomes of the survey will be of use not only to those working with children and teenagers, but also to other professionals for whom the survey was formerly designed. Last but not least it should also serve ordinary readers, in particular current parents of Czech children.