

What have young people with economic disadvantage said about "wellbeing"?



Economically disadvantaged young people prioritised family and friends as important for a good life, and in group work the least important domain for wellbeing (similar to most groups) was the domain of money. However some respondents did desire more money to buy status goods such as I-pads and labelled clothing, and a number of issues emerged related to material deprivation. Many in the group appeared to come from large blended families with complex living arrangements, and some talked about tensions among extended family members who had once been close but become estranged; tensions clearly upsetting and expressed with a sense of loss and sometimes bewilderment. Discussions about family in this group tended to focus on health issues such as close relatives who were disabled, chronically ill, or who had died (similar to the Aboriginal cohort). Most believed that rules and guidance were important and should be determined by parental figures. They believed that rules needed to be balanced by choice but rarely expressed particular arenas where they felt they should have increased choice or autonomy. When queried about whether or not money was important for living a good life, most stressed that while money was required for basic needs, *'a house, and your shoes, and your roof'... 'for all your clothes'*, it could not provide access to relational wellbeing: *'money can't buy you happiness'*, *'you can buy a house but you can't buy any friends'*. While these generalized ideas framed young people's thinking, many spoke about various material deprivations including a lack of food security (an issue also for a number of Aboriginal participants), and one described a really good day as one where you would *'get free food'*. Food shortages were described as occurring before paydays and as a stressor that arose when work was intermittent, and some were clearly anxious about a lack of money in the household—witnessing parents balancing one necessity against another was something they took on in expressing their own needs.

It's like some kids are scared and they leave the lights on, they have to pay more money for, like, the bills when they do that, then they miss out on getting food if they have to pay more money for the bills.

Like many others, this group saw internet access as a necessary resource for social connections. This was particularly the case for girls in the older bracket (11-14 years). One noted that “the internet equals happiness”, and while most had computers and ipads in their households, internet access was often intermittent and had to be negotiated with other household members. Where Facebook was seen as a fun networking tool, at times the girls conveyed internet habits that could (if unsupervised) lead to vulnerable scenarios, such as recording “confession videos” and taking “selfies”. Material deprivation also impacted on respondent’s health, with one girl discussing her sore back due in part to sleeping on an old and broken bed (which she chose to gain privacy from her many brothers in a rather full house). Some referred to parents on work cover and/or disability pensions, and understood that money was tighter when parents were not in the workforce. Friends were prioritised as a source of wellbeing and friendships were discussed in terms of support and for sticking up for one another. Like others, this group differentiated between good and bad friends—naming unpredictability and back-stabbing as the chief characteristics of bad friends. Good health was understood as a contributor to wellbeing in general terms: healthy eating and exercise, and a preventive concern for avoiding ill-health was conveyed, particularly toward corrosive forms of addiction such as smoking, drinking, and taking drugs. While avoiding drugs and drinking seemed to repeat common cautionary slogans, smoking impacted more immediately on these young people’s lives, discussing family members with lung cancer or who were at various stages of giving up smoking. In many instances, respondents related their own health to that of family members who were prone to hospitalization for heart and lung issues or diabetes. A variety of attitudes toward school were conveyed and, where most could see that education was an asset for later life: *“You have to get an education”... “So you don’t end up living alone in a caravan with two cats!”* many also viewed school as a necessary chore. Bullying at school or by school students in the neighbourhood appeared to be a significant issue and the transition to high school appeared intimidating. A number from large families felt that older siblings could protect them from bullying, notwithstanding indications that their older siblings had been bullied themselves.