

What Contributes to Multidimensional Life Satisfaction for Youth with Chronic Health Conditions?

Introduction

Health is considered by the World Health Organization (1948) to be 'a complete state of physical, mental, and social *well-being* and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' p.100). The emphasis on well-being beyond the physical signifies the importance of **psychosocial positivity** to one's health. One measure of this concept is **life satisfaction**. Life satisfaction has been considered a cognitive self-evaluation of the quality of one's life overall or in specific domains, such as family life or school experiences (Diener, 2000).

Population-based research (Branscombe, Daley, & Phipps, 2016) indicates that, on average, young Canadians with chronic health conditions and disabilities report **lower levels** of overall life satisfaction than youth without such problems. Studies also show youth with chronic conditions report less satisfaction in specific life domains than other youth (Gilman, Easterbrooks, & Fey, 2004; Topolski et al., 2004).

Much research has examined the factors related to global quality of life or **overall life satisfaction** for youth (Gilman & Huebner, 2003). Studies have also begun to emerge that focus on youth with chronic conditions. Emotional well-being, interpersonal support, and supportive environments are important contributors to overall life satisfaction for these youth (e.g., Chong, Mackey, Broadbent, & Stott, 2012; Emerson, Llewellyn, Honey, & Kariuki, 2012; McDougall, DeWit, Nichols, Miller, & Wright, 2016).

However, examining the factors that are related to satisfaction with **specific life domains** is an area of research that has not been given much attention, among youth either with or without chronic conditions.

Purpose of the Summary

This *Facts To Go* summarizes longitudinal research (McDougall & Wright, 2017) that was **the first** to explore the personal, interpersonal, and environmental level factors related to satisfaction with specific life domains (i.e., satisfaction with self, family life, friendships, school experiences, where one lives), in addition to life overall, for youth with chronic conditions over a one-year period. It highlights **key areas** where service providers and policy makers can focus their efforts to optimize life satisfaction within and across multiple domains for these youth.

What was Done

Baseline and Time 2 follow-up data from a study (McDougall et al., 2016) examining perceived quality of life for a sample of 439 youth with various chronic conditions (e.g., cerebral palsy, brain injury, spina bifida) aged 11 to 17 years (at study entry) were used to assess the factors related domain-based and overall life satisfaction for youth over a one-year period. Youth and one of their parents were recruited from eight children's treatment centres in Ontario, Canada.

Youth and parents completed questionnaires measuring personal, interpersonal, and

environmental variables related to everyday life at home, school, and in the community. The Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS) (Seligson, Huebner, & Valois, 2003) was completed by youth. The BMSLSS contains five items relating to satisfaction with specific life domains (i.e., 'myself', 'my family life', 'my friendships', 'my school experiences', 'where I live'), and a question about satisfaction with 'my overall life'. Six multivariate linear regression analyses were performed, each exploring the relations of the personal, interpersonal, and environmental factors measured at baseline with one of the aspects of life satisfaction assessed one year later. Study control variables included youth gender, age, household income, and the corresponding aspect of life satisfaction at baseline (for greater detail, see McDougall & Wright, 2017).

Findings and Implications

This research identified distinct factors at the **personal, interpersonal, and environmental levels** related to each life domain and overall life satisfaction for youth with chronic health conditions over one year. Factors at **all three levels** were found to be important to some aspect of life satisfaction.

Emotional well-being had a notable influence on life satisfaction in multiple domains (i.e., sense of self, friendships, school experiences), and in overall life satisfaction, over one year. That is, the more emotional symptoms youth reported, the lower their satisfaction with these aspects of their life. Youth with chronic conditions are at an increased risk for developing mental health problems, with nearly one in three experiencing co-morbidity (Schwartz, Gardland, Waddell, & Harrison, 2006). **IMPLICATIONS:** These findings support the crucial need to have **mental health services** available for these youth.

Family-related factors were also significantly related to several satisfaction domains after a

year, making clear the central role that families continue to play in these youths' lives throughout adolescence. Higher reported family support was related to greater satisfaction with self, where one lives, and school experiences. Better overall family functioning solely contributed to higher satisfaction with family life. **IMPLICATIONS: Holistic and family-centred** services that address both the youth and their families' needs are no doubt beneficial to ensure satisfaction in these life domains for youth.

Close friend and teacher support and the supportiveness of the **school environment** were important to specific and, in certain instances, somewhat surprising domains of life satisfaction after one year. Social support from close friends was solely and positively associated with youths' satisfaction with friendships. Research has indicated that 'peer relationship problems' is the most highly reported mental health issue among youth with chronic conditions (Brossard-Racine et al., 2013; Etherington, McDougall, DeWit, & Wright, 2016). **IMPLICATIONS:** As this study suggests, if youth develop close relationships with peers, they can experience life satisfaction in the area of friendships.

Social support from teachers was related to satisfaction with self. Youth benefit when teachers encourage **independence** and **self-confidence** when educating students with chronic conditions (Chung, Burke, & Goodman, 2010). Schools should be aware that teachers can contribute to these youths' sense of self and provide resources to facilitate positive interactions. A supportive school environment for these youth was linked to satisfaction with where one lives. This suggests youth put a good deal of emphasis on the life quality they experience daily not only at home but at school. **IMPLICATIONS:** These results provide support for fostering positive student-teacher relationships, peer interactions, and school culture for youth with chronic conditions.

Classmate support emerged as the strongest contributing factor to overall life satisfaction over a one-year period, underscoring the impact that social acceptance by peers and inclusion play in the lives of youth with chronic conditions. Research has found that if these youth feel a strong sense of belonging within their communities, they do not experience lower life satisfaction, even if they experience discrimination (Branscombe et al., 2016). Group membership seems to be highly protective of the well-being of youth with chronic conditions (Branscombe et al., 2016). **IMPLICATIONS:** Findings emphasize the importance of encouraging **receptive attitudes and behaviours** of typically developing youth toward peers with chronic conditions in the school environment.

Conclusion

These initial results emphasize the benefits of taking a **holistic approach** to providing services and programs that seek to enhance the life satisfaction of youth with chronic conditions across domains and overall, while at the same time remembering that **certain key factors** should be given priority when focusing on optimizing specific aspects of youths' lives. Future research is required to substantiate these preliminary study findings.

For greater elaboration of the findings and implications of this research, please read the **full published version** of this brief summary at:

<http://rdcu.be/B2Qx>

This *Facts To Go* is available online at:

<http://www.tvcc.on.ca/service/quality-life>

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