

Measuring predictors and prevalence of Benevolent Childhood Experiences in English adolescents: Evidence from the #BeeWell study

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Background: Adolescent mental health concerns are increasing globally, yet research has predominantly focused on risks rather than strengths. Benevolent Childhood Experiences (BCEs), the positive relationships and opportunities that promote wellbeing and represent protective factors central to resilience theory. However, little is known about their prevalence and predictors among young people in the United Kingdom. This study investigates the structure and distribution of BCEs using data from 120,645 adolescents (Years 7–11; 291 schools) across two large English regions participating in the #BeeWell survey.

Methods: Ten #BeeWell items were mapped to the Narayan et al. (2018) BCE framework. Multiple imputation was used to address missing data, and exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to test latent dimensions. Multiple regression models examined associations with gender and sexual orientation, ethnicity, socioeconomic indicators (free school meals and Index of Multiple Deprivation), special educational needs (SEN), and school year.

Results: BCEs were found to be common but unequally distributed. The most prevalent experiences were having free time (92.7%) and positive home environments (87.1%), while self-esteem and strong staff relationships were least frequent. A four-factor structure emerged: school connectedness, parent/carer support, home and community support, and psychosocial wellbeing, with excellent model. BCEs were fewer among LGBTQ+ youth, girls, those with SEN, pupils eligible for free school meals, and those living in deprived areas. Asian and Black pupils reported higher BCEs than White peers, whereas Chinese pupils reported fewer.

Conclusion: Although conducted in England, these findings have broad relevance for youth wellbeing systems internationally, including Australia, where similar structural inequities shape adolescents' access to protective experiences. Promoting equitable access to everyday positive experiences: belonging, trusted relationships, safe community spaces, and opportunities for enjoyment, should therefore be a core focus of youth health policy and practice.