

# YOUTH IN HBSC: A view from the conference floor

*Thursday 20th July 2013 - Written by Christina Connolly*

Tam Baillie, Scotland's Commissioner for Children & Young People, started the session off by stressing the importance engaging with young people. The international group of young people then took over. They began by showing a video made by the Scottish Youth Team, documenting their six weeks of preparation for this conference. They had discussed at length which issues were most important to young people's wellbeing, and identified mental health and wellbeing as one of the most crucial. This was therefore one of the topics discussed in this session.

The first group of young people to speak talked about how technology can affect young people's mental health. They explained that social media is often used to bully or exclude young people. It was pointed out however that social media can also have a positive effect on mental health. Young people need to be taught to behave responsibly online so that they don't harm others, and also how to deal with cyberbullying if they do become a victim. School pressure is another issue that can often have a strong negative impact on the mental health of young people. High workloads and parental pressure were identified as the main problems. The weeks before exams can be a particularly stressful time for pupils, as they receive more and more work from multiple teachers.

Young people's relationships with the adults in their lives were also discussed. The HBSC study has found that it is important for adolescents to have a good relationship with their parents, yet as young people get older they report that they find it harder to talk to their parents. They are generally more likely to talk to their mothers than to their fathers. Some of the young speakers, as well as members of the audience, said that they often found it easier to talk to an older sibling instead of a parent. It was suggested that the survey could be changed in order to find out if young people were talking about their problems with someone other than a parent.

The next topic of discussion was body image, weight, and self-perceived health. They questioned why one third of young people who are a healthy weight feel that they are either too fat or too thin. The relative prices of healthy and unhealthy food were identified as an impediment to healthy eating among young people, who often do not have a lot of money.

The final issues discussed were independence and trust. These were identified by a workshop of 40-50 young people in Ireland as being very important, but they are not currently covered by HBSC. The young speakers suggested that HBSC should include questions on these topics.