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THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE FAMILY ENVIRONMENTS, HOBBIES,  
FRIENDSHIPS AND LEISURE TIME ON THE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND  
PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT OF FIFTH GRADE PUPILS

Master's Thesis

## ABSTRACT

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Hobbies, Friendships and Leisure Time on the Social,  
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Master's Thesis

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The purpose of this survey was to study children's leisure time, friendships and hobbies. The target group of this survey were the fifth grade pupils. Five elementary schools in the city of Hamina participated in the survey. In total there were 132 pupils in these five schools, of whom 88 pupils were able to participate in the survey.

The research was quantitative. The material was collected with a questionnaire, which included multiple choice questions and open ended questions. The themes of the questionnaire were background, family environment, friendships, hobbies and the time spent watching television or being on a computer or a game console. Children answered the questionnaire during the school day.

The results showed that majority of the children were satisfied with the amount of time their parents spent time with them. The most common leisure time activities with parents were watching television or movies together or some physical activity. Every child reported to have at least one good friend. However, approximately 30 % of the children sometimes felt lonely during leisure time. In addition, results showed that eating a meal together was not customary in every family. Even though 39 % of the children ate together with the family every day, 25 % of the children said that they eat together only one to three times in a week. Furthermore, the majority of the children were satisfied with the amount of their hobbies. In addition, the results revealed that during weekend's children are watching television or movies more than during weekdays. In addition, boys spent more time on a computer or a game console during weekends than during weekdays.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays it is quite common that hobbies are seen as something that is worth to have. Hobbies can have many positive influences on a child's overall development. For example, hobbies support child's self-esteem, independence and social skills. Hobbies can also improve a child's knowledge and other kind of skills. Concerning a child's social development, hobbies have many positive effects. Various group sports or other group activities improve child's ability to communicate with different kind of people. With hobbies a child learns that other people's opinions are important and child also learns to appreciate other people's skills. All in all, hobbies can teach the child many skills that are useful later in life. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 163-164.)

Parents are important factors in children's life as they determine the material and social living conditions within the family. Parents are responsible for the rearing and subsistence of the children. Close family relationships are extremely important for satisfying child's emotional needs. Relationships with relatives and friends expand the child's network. Without relationships a child is not able to develop. (Bardy 2009: 233.)

Friendships and being acknowledged are remarkable developmental tasks in childhood. Success in these issues tells something about child's social abilities and adaptation. Both, being acknowledged and close friendships, improve a child's positive development and protect the child from different kind of troubles in peer relationships. (Ritokoski 2010: 60.)

We are living in a society where busy schedules are common in many families. According to Paajanen (2002: 150-153) this can mean that parents do not have the strength to listen to their children's thoughts and needs. Moreover, parents may not be interested of their children's hobbies or other activities. This can weaken the child's self appreciation. In addition, children's hobbies are usually organized in the evenings, which decreases the time that family can spent together.

The purpose of this master's thesis is to study children's friendships, hobbies and the time they spent with their parents. The survey of this thesis was implemented with

cooperation with five elementary schools in Hamina. The aims of the survey was to find out what children do with their parents during leisure time, how often children are engaged in a hobby and what kind of hobbies children prefer, how many good friends children have and how often they see their friends, and also how much time children spend watching television or, being on the computer or a game console.

## 2 AIM OF THE THESIS

The aim of this master's thesis is to study common family time, friendships and hobbies. Friends, hobbies and the time spent with the parents all have some kind of influence on child's development, growth and the many different relationships in the future. These issues, along with many others, determine child's experiences of wellbeing.

The research questions

1. What are children's most common leisure time activities?
2. How much time children spend with their friends and parents?

### 3 FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

#### 3.1 Outside influence in child's wellbeing

Usually wellbeing is related to living conditions, such as housing, work and income. However, wellbeing is a diverse term and also health, social relationships and selfdom are included in to wellbeing. In addition, more commonly different kind of experiences is included in wellbeing. The relationship between wellbeing and living conditions is not easily explained. Whilst materially secured living conditions increase people's wellbeing, people's own interests and values are also relevant. Even good financial situations will not secure people's wellbeing, if there are problems in people's health or family life. However, health, friendships and family can increase people's wellbeing, even though the financial situation is less satisfying. (Karvonen, Moisio and Simpura 2009: 20)

In Finland family policy aims to create safe living environments for all children. The Government is committed to decreasing isolation and poverty in families with children and also to improve the wellbeing of the children, young people and families. During the 1990s recession many families struggled in Finland. In 1993 25 % of families with children were struggling with unemployment. Even more families were facing low incomes. Families needed to find ways to save money, and as a result some children did not necessarily have new things as much as other children. In many cases these lead to school bullying. In addition, financial problems weakened the families overall wellbeing and the relationship between the parents. Parents' ability to support their children was also lower. Children suffering due to parents' unemployment had more negative thoughts about their future than other children; they were not confident of getting a job as an adult. (Lammi-Taskula & Salmi 2010: 198.)

After the 1990s recession, the wellbeing of the Finnish children has become better. However, at the same time, among some children the situation has gone worse. This has caused sleeping problems, need for a special education and family guidance centres, mental health problems, and increased customers in child welfare. Low income is more common in single parent families and families with many children.



However, it is not uncommon for working parents to have financial problems. (Lammi-Taskula & Salmi 2010: 199.)

Employment can cause shortage in time among the family. (Lammi-Taskula & Salmi 2009: 44.) Many parents feel that they do not have enough time for their children and are worried about their coping as parents. (Lammi-Taskula & Salmi 2010: 199.) However, employment is usually necessary to guarantee subsistence. Lost time together is a reverse to obtained income. On the other hand, good parenting requires balancing material objectives, so that parents are able to invest for the time with their children. (Lammi-Taskula & Salmi 2009: 44.)

In some families the shortage of the time spent together and money can be present at the same time, whereas some other families may have plenty of time and income. However, usually different kind of mixtures between time and the lack of money, are common in families with children. According to Lammi-Taskula and Salmi (2009) nearly 66 % of mothers and every second of the father have enough time with their families, but they are having difficulties dealing with expenses. A quarter of fathers and a fifth of mothers have trouble in both time with the family and insufficient income. Approximately in one in seven families the situation is good, so the income is sufficient and the parents are able to spend enough time with their family. 5 % of the parents are managing financially well, but they are highly lacking time with their families. (Lammi-Taskula & Salmi 2009: 44.)

### 3.2 Importance of the family in child's development

The importance of the family changes during the child's development. A small child is very dependent of his or her family. Little by little, a child begins to widen the territory, curiosity grows and friendships and hobbies become more essential. At least, a family is something that a child can depend on. From the family a child can get help and comfort and solutions to problems. Close and secure adults are extremely important for the child's development. A child needs at least one adult, who is close and gives safety and stability for the child. These close relationships create the foundation of the child's self-esteem and personality. (Cacciatore 2010: 7, 11-12.) A child, who has a secure family environment, is more capable of developing good

friendships with other children. A child, who is feeling insecure, is more likely to be aggressive, for example towards schools mates. Parents' minor interest towards the child or insufficient time with the child is related to the problems of child's self-control and the shortage in social skills. (Näre 2010: 44, 51.)

In the ideal situation family is a good counterweight for the hurry and load that may be caused by school, work and hobbies. Shared hobbies, discussions, meals, playing together and other kind of ways to spent time together, are most likely to cause joy and happiness for the members of the families. In addition, reading, going to cinema or listening to music together can be satisfying for the family. (Lammi-Taskula and Bardy 2009: 61-62.)

Being available is one of the things that children are expecting from their parents when they are at home. Parents' presence is important for the children. One of the most common ways to spent time together is having a meal together. Eating a meal together has a lot of positive meanings. A child can have his own responsibilities and learn a lot, when food is cooked together. Eating together is a great opportunity for discussion and it brings the whole family together. However, eating together on weekdays is becoming quite unusual nowadays. (Pulkkinen 2002: 151-152.) 68 % of the participants of the research of The Family Federation 2001 answered that they are having meal together in 4 to 5 times in a week. At the same time one tenth of the participants said that they are having a shared meal only occasionally or never. (Paajanen 2001: 56.) Nowadays family life can be very busy and scheduled and there may not be time for shared meals and discussions (Lammi-Taskula and Bardy 2009: 61). At the same time watching television and DVDs has become one of the most popular activities within the family (Paajanen 2001:56).

When a child spends a lot of time alone in home, she or he may feel insignificant to the other family members. A child may feel alienated from the family, which can have an influence on the child's social skills. Games, television and computer become more important when a child does not get response from the family. (Cacciatore 2010: 12-13.) According to Paajanen (2001) children are spending time alone in home casually. Based on her research, 21 % of the 8 years old and 30 % of the 11 years old were home alone at least in one day a week. Those children were home alone mainly one to

two hours before parents or siblings arrive home. Every third of the 8 years old and half of the 11 years old, spend at least one evening in a week without adult's presence. (Paajanen 2001: 79.)

According to the research of The Family Federation (2001), parents' estimated that 84 % of the children spent time with their family in four to five evenings in a week. 15 % of the children spent time with their family in two to three evenings in a week and 1 % only once a week. During weekends 94 % of the children spent time with their parents often or quite often. (Paajanen 2001: 55-56.) According to Paajanen the most common way to spent time together during weekends is watching television. In addition, it is typical that parents spent time with their children by shopping and going to different kind of events. Going to library or to swimming baths is also a typical way to be with children. (Paajanen 2001: 82.)

Lastenklirikoiden kummit ry research 2008 found that 52 % of working parents spent time with their children less than two hours in a day. Every fifth parent said that they spent time with their children less than an hour per day. Based on this research 71 % of the working parents felt that they spent time with their children too little. Most common reasons for the lack of time were work, general hurry and housekeeping. 47 % of the parents tried to recompense the situation by investing for holidays. 41 % tried to recompense by investing in quality time. 17 % recompensed by buying new things for the child. (Lastenklirikoiden kummit ry 2008.)

Väljjeesiö found in her research about children and parents shared time, that 89 % of the children felt that parents spent time with them enough. On the other hand 82 % of the children said that they would like to spend more time with their parents. A quarter of the children wished that parents would be more interested in their issues and matters. (Väljjeesiö 2010: 22-24.)

It can be very difficult to determine what makes children happy. Happiness is one of the first emotions that children can recognize. Even children as young as 4 years old can feel and understand happiness. Some children need material goods to be happy, whereas some find happiness from hobbies and sport. At the same time children are constantly faced with images suggesting that slim figures, trendy fashions, expensive

toys, or other material goods are solutions to finding happiness. (Chaplin 2008: 541-543.) According to Chaplin (2008), especially during middle childhood, children value people and hobbies as the most important factors to their happiness. Middle aged children gain happiness from their family, friends, coaches and teachers, not necessarily from material things. (Chaplin 2008: 547, 559.)

## 4 CHILDREN'S LEISURE TIME

### 4.1 Importance of hobbies in child's social and physical development

Children have many ways of spending their leisure time. However, the main point of leisure time activities is that they should be relaxing, delighting and maybe even develops useful skills for the child. Nevertheless, these days children do not tend to play the original garden games that were very popular two decades ago. In a way hobbies have replaced the playing together. Still playing is a very important part of child's leisure time. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 163,165.)

Hobbies can be seen as a different kind of leisure time activities. Children's hobbies can have both positive and negative effects on children's life. Hobbies can support a child's self-esteem and self-image. Hobbies can also support a child's independence and social skills. In addition, hobbies can develop a child's knowledge and skills and to be a good counterweight to school. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 163.) By exploring different kind of hobbies, children are searching their own identity. It is usual that children try many hobbies before they find the one that they feel the most appropriate for themselves. (Paajanen 2001: 41.)

Many hobbies include an instructor, whose guiding and feedback has a remarkable role in the positive development of child's self-esteem and self-image. It is important that the instructor's feedback is supportive and realistic; so that the child's possible mistakes do not become too overwhelming. Development and learning new things enables the child to see his or her own talent in a positive way. In best case, the child can see the instructor as a safe adult who can also be a role model to the child. With a good instructor the child can learn to tolerate disappointments. All in all, this improves the child's good and safe development. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 163-164.)

Often hobbies require commitment and sustainability. Through hobbies children learn to see the world more realistic, whereas television programmes give the impression of everything being so easy. With hobbies a child learns that ability to do something may

take years and to achieve something a child needs to be patient. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 164.)

Hobbies also improve children's social development. Hobbies create child's ability to accept differences and child's ability to get by with different kind of peoples. In addition, hobbies develop child's capability to communicate. All in all, hobbies also create child's independence and responsibility. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 164.)

Child's physical development also benefit from hobbies. For example, sport hobbies create child's motor functions and coordination. Sport hobbies also maintain good physical health and teach the child to include sports into a permanent lifestyle. Playing an instrument, dancing, singing and painting improve child's motor skills and also child's self expression. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 164.)

Despite the positive effects that hobbies have, there are also some negative effects. Nowadays children's hobbies are more and more serious and goal-directed. However, children's hobbies should be based on playing and if needed, very slowly go towards more competitive targets. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 165.) It is quite natural that children like to compete against each other. When this competing is based on adults needs, it can become too aggressive and competition orientated, which can be harmful for the child's self-image. (Pulkkinen 2002: 237.) Veijanen found in her research that two out of three children had started a hobby based on their own interests. One third of the children said that they had started a hobby because their parents had encouraged it. (Veijanen 2004: 47.)

In addition, some children may have too many hobbies. That can cause stress for the child and hobbies may become joyless. Some parents may think that hobbies keep the child out of troubles. This is a wrong reason for a child to have a hobby. Children should have hobbies because of their own interests. It is worth noticing, that nowadays children begin hobbies at a much earlier age than before. In the 70s or 80s a child could start playing ice hockey or football at the age of 10. Nowadays 10 year old children are usually very experienced hobbyist. Many hobbies include different kind of groups where the children are chosen based on their skills. Sometimes children who

are not interested in competing are not able to have a hobby at all. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 166-167.) Group sports can put too much pressure on the child, when only the best players are able to play. Adults should understand that only some of the children can be top players. Therefore, if a child is humiliated for the fact that he or she is not as good as some other children that may follow the child forever. (Sinkkonen 2010: 38.)

Nowadays children's hobbies have become more and more expensive. The costs of hobbies can be as much as tens of thousands euros in a year. Not all families can afford these costs. Therefore it is important that state and municipalities offer free or reasonable costing hobbies for everybody. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 169.)

Children's electivity is dependent on their parents' time and money. Usually children are not able to go to their hobbies by themselves. Therefore, sometimes children may not be able to participate in all the hobbies they are interested in. However, among some children the situation can be quite the opposite; a child may have too many different hobbies and exercises in a week, which may be too much for the child. (Paajanen 2001: 41.)

#### 4.2 Influence of television and computer in child's social and emotional development

Middle aged child is very receptive to listening and imagination. Children who watch lots of television or who have not been read any fairy stories may have weakness in visualization. Watching television does not create own imagines. Visualization supports child's emotional development and the ability to deal with emotions. In addition, visualization protects the child and imagination improves the development of the moral sense. Watching television exposes the child for unnecessary issues. Programs are often lacking causation, which can be confusing for the child. For example, the suffering caused by the violence, is not usually shown. This kind of programs can disturb the child's basic emotions by making violence funny. This will have effects on child's emotional development. (Pulkkinen 2002: 111.)

Social media with many different possibilities is a very popular phenomenon among children at the moment. Nowadays children are being more and more active on the

internet. For example, it is quite common that children download pictures in the internet, comment on other children's pictures or take part into in some discussions online. All the time growing virtual possibilities have brought hobbies to children's homes. More and more often children have internet access in their own room. Children are using computers as a normal part of their every day life. On the internet children may be exposed to things that are not suitable for them. For example violence, killing and sex may be confusing for a child. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 169-171.)

However, it must be remembered that the environment modifies child's visions about information technology. In many ways a child is dependent on parents, friends and siblings knowledge, skills and recourses towards the information technology. In addition, the internet can offer different kind of social relationships to the child, so called virtual relationships. For example, a child whose parents are divorced can still have a close relationship with the other parent, even though the child does not live with that parent. Also different kind of discussion groups on the internet can create close friendships. (Forsberg & Pösö 2001: 196-198.) Moreover, computers can also improve for example child's problem solving skills, eye-hand coordination and reaction speed (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 165).



## 5 IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDSHIPS IN CHILD'S SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Pulkkinen (2002: 105) the time between ages 7 and 12 can be called as middle childhood. In middle childhood friendships are important. It is typical that girls create dyadic friendships, whereas boys are more comfortable in bigger groups. Whether the friendship is between two children or more, a child needs a society where she or he is important and his/her accomplishments and efforts will be recognised. Feel of belonging to somewhere will improve the child's basic safety. As a member of a society, a child will learn different kinds of rules and policies. The bases of the self-respect come from the experiences of being successful and the appreciation that other people will show. Weak social skills are a threat to the child's social development. This can cause isolation from the society or troubles with the school teacher. Instead of having a good self-respect, a child may feel inferiority. (Pulkkinen 2002: 113.)

Friendship is a phenomenon where children trust each other. Also reciprocity and positive feelings towards each other are important. In friendships the child can learn social skills, have emotional support and improve his or her self-esteem. In addition, friendships are a good way to learn to communicate, for example when children have different thoughts about something and they need to explain their own view. Within friendships a child can learn intimacy, trust and many other things that are relevant in later close relationships. Children who have at least one good and reciprocity friendship are more cooperative, are self-confident, less aggressive and have fewer conflicts with other children. (Ritokoski 2010: 61-62.)

One of the most important things that a child can learn from middle-childhood friendships is behaviour norms. In middle-childhood children often feel that the impression that they give to other children, is very important. Hence dressing, language usage and behaviour become more important. (Ritokoski 2010: 61.)

Belonging to a peer group is very rewarding for a child. From a peer group a child can learn things that are useful to a child's self-image and selfdom. Being in a group also creates child's cooperation skills and leadership skills, which can be useful later in life. In addition, as a group member a child will learn different kinds of procedures. Children will also learn to follow agreed rules. In interaction with other children, a

child will learn to understand and control their own feelings and also to understand other people's feelings. In other words, peer group trains the child to be a good member of a society. Without a peer group the child may have difficulties to learn good social skills. Rejection from a peer group is related to troubles in school, emotional problems and behavioural problems, for example aggressive behaviour. (Ritokoski 2010: 65-66.)

## 6 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SURVEY

### 6.1 Quantitative survey

Questionnaire is the most common quantitative survey method. Questionnaire is a good way to gather data from a large amount of people. One of the benefits is also that respondents can remain anonymous. However, there is a risk for low response rate. When a data is gathered with a questionnaire, it can be done for example by using telephone, e-mail, and internet or on the spot. (Vilkka 2005: 73-75.)

The questions in the questionnaire should always be relevant to the survey. Therefore, theoretical framework should be clear before the questionnaire is done. Earlier studies can be useful when planning the questionnaire. The questions in the questionnaire can be either multiple choice questions, open ended questions or hybrid questions. In multiple choice questions there are certain amount of answers and the respondent chooses the most suitable one. Open ended questions are aiming for spontaneous opinions. In hybrid questions some of the answers are given but there are also some open choices. (Vilkka 2005: 84-87.)

### 6.2 Searching the target group

The survey was carried out in March 2013. Six elementary schools in the city of Hamina were chosen to participate to this survey. A permission to implement the survey was asked in writing from the principles and the school managers. Overall five schools gave the permission to carry out the survey. The target group of the survey were the fifth grade pupils. In those five elementary schools there were altogether 132 fifth grade pupils.

The parents of the children were informed about the survey with letters. The letters were given to the pupils in schools, and the pupils were asked to give the letter to their parents. The letter included information about the survey. In addition, parents had the opportunity to forbid their child to participate in the survey. The pupils returned either positive or negative answer about the permission to their teacher. To protect the pupils' anonymity, the researcher did not see the parent's answers. Therefore, the

researcher does not know how many parents forbade their child's participation. In addition, some of the pupils lost their letter or for some reason did not show the letter for their guardians, so they were not able to participate in the research.

### 6.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire included multiple choice questions and open ended questions. Overall the questionnaire included 25 questions. The questionnaire was written in Finnish and the answers were translated in to English. The subjects of the questions were background, family time, children's hobbies, children's friendships and the time spent in the computer or watching television or movies. Table 1 shows the themes of the questionnaire.

Table1. Themes of the questionnaire

Themes of the questionnaire	Questions	Concepts	References
Background	Questions 1-4	Shared time, employment, pp. 7	Lammi-Taskula & Salmi (2009)
Family time	Questions 5-10	Self-esteem, social skills, personality pp. 8, 9	Cacciatore (2010), Näre (2010), Paajanen (2001), Pulkkinen (2002), Välijeesio (2010)
Hobbies	Questions 11-16	Self-esteem, self-image, identity, social development, physical development, pp. 10	Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi (2010), Pulkkinen (2002), Sinkkonen (2010), Veijanen (2004)
Friendships	Questions 17-21	Basic safety, self-respect, social development, communication, pp. 14	Pulkkinen (2002), Ritokoski (2010)

Television computer	and	Questions 22-25	Emotional development, imagination, pp. 13	Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi (2010), Pulkkinen (2002)
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#### 6.4 Reliability of the survey

The reliability means that the results of the survey should be repeatable and there should be no random answers. In other words, this means that if another researcher would like to do the exactly same survey, he or she should get the same results. Many things can weaken the reliability of the survey. For example, if the respondent remembers something wrong or does not understand correctly it can cause mistakes. However, this does not necessarily effect strongly to the results of the survey. The most important thing is that the researcher reacts to the possible mistakes in the survey. (Vilkka 2005: 161.)

Questionnaire seemed to be the most suitable method for this survey as the target group was the fifth grade children. The questions of the questionnaire were formulated easily to understand so that there would be no misunderstandings. In addition, questions were in a logical order, so that the questionnaire was easy to follow. The survey was implemented during a school day, which was assumed to increase the reliability. If the participants would have answered in their homes, it is possible that other people, such as parents, friends and sibling, might have influenced their answers. As the target group of this survey was 88 participants the results can not be generalized. However, the results are directional and the results give a lot of information about the children living in Hamina.

## 7 SURVEY RESULTS

### 7.1 Background

Overall 93 pupils participated to the research. Five of the questionnaires answered were defective, so those questionnaires were not included in the results. Therefore, the response rate was 66 %. From the respondents 64 % were girls and 36 % were boys. 73 % from the respondents were living together with both parents. Only one parent households reported 10 % of the respondents. 9 % of the children were living with one parent and a new spouse. Some other way, for example with grandparents or alternately with mother and father, chose 8 % of the children. 84 % of the children had siblings. In addition, the questionnaire asked about parents' employment. In 84 % of the children all adults living in the same household were employed. 13 % of the children reported that only other adult from the family is employed. In 3 % none of the adults living in the household were employed. Figure 1 presents the background of the children.

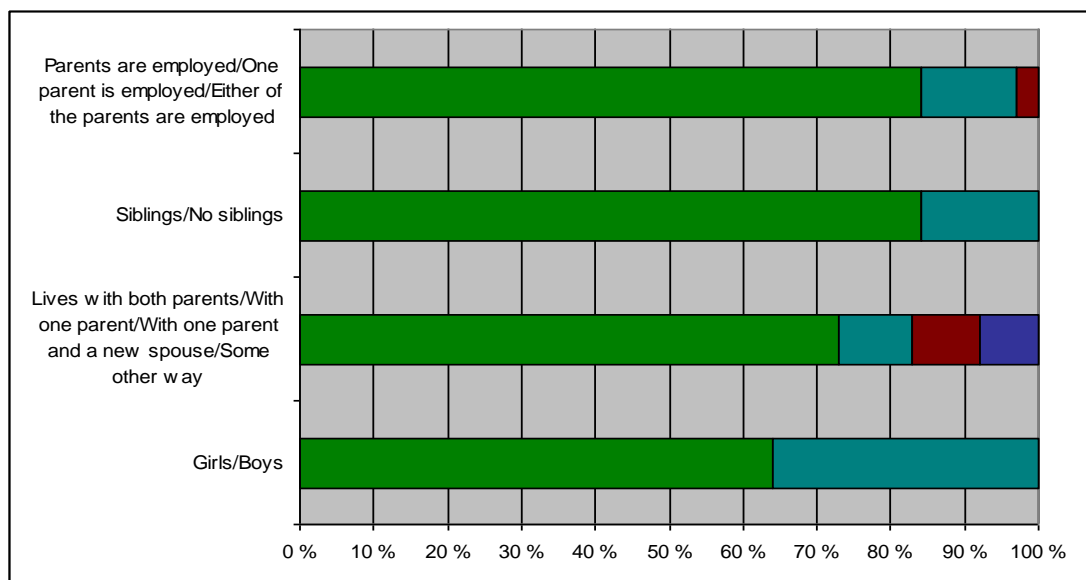


Figure 1. The background of the children.

### 7.2 Activities with parents

This subject included questions about time that children spend with their parents, about the things that children do with their parents during leisure time, about the

activities that children would want to do with their parents on leisure time, about the time spent alone in the evenings, about the help that children get from their parents and about having a meal together with the parents.

The majority of the children reported that their parents spent very much or quite a lot time with them. 23 % of the children said that parents spent time with them very much and 62 % said that parents spent time with them quite a lot. 15 % of the children said that their parents spent time with them quite a little or very little. Based on these findings it seems that majority of the children were satisfied with how much time parents spend with them. The time that parents spent with the children is presented in figure 2.

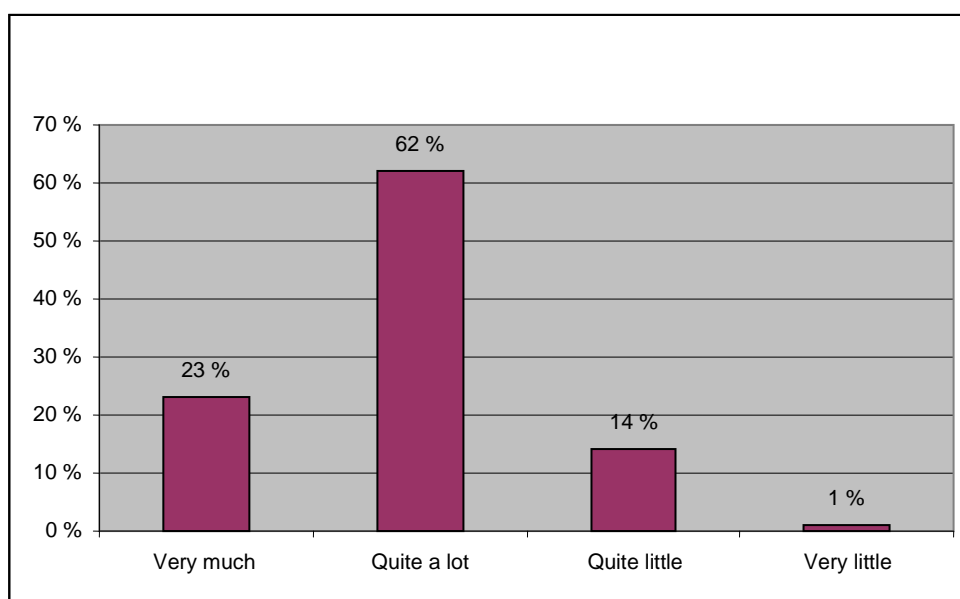


Figure 2. Children's thoughts how much parents spent time with them

Leisure time activities with the parents during weekdays and weekends were asked with open ended questions. The most common leisure time activities that girls did with their parents during weekdays were watching television or movies together (59 %), eating together (32 %) or doing some physical activity (38 %), for example swimming or jogging. In addition, girls preferred talking with their parents (21 %) and cooking and baking (20 %). On weekends the most popular leisure time activities that girls did with their parents were watching television or movies (46 %), some physical

activity (27 %), shopping (25 %) and eating together (18 %). Girls' leisure time activities with parents during weekdays are shown in Figure 3.

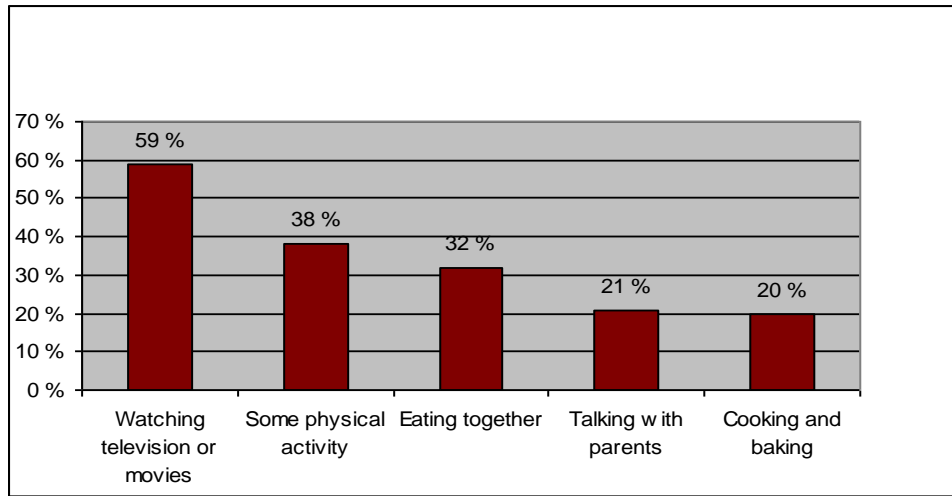


Figure 3. Girls' most popular leisure time activities with parents during weekdays

As for boys, the most common leisure time activities during weekdays were some physical activity (50 %), watching television or movies together (31 %) and eating together (25 %). Also during weekends the most popular leisure time activities that boys did with their parents were some physical activity (31 %) and watching television or movies (19%). Figure 4 shows boy's most popular leisure time activities with parents during weekdays.

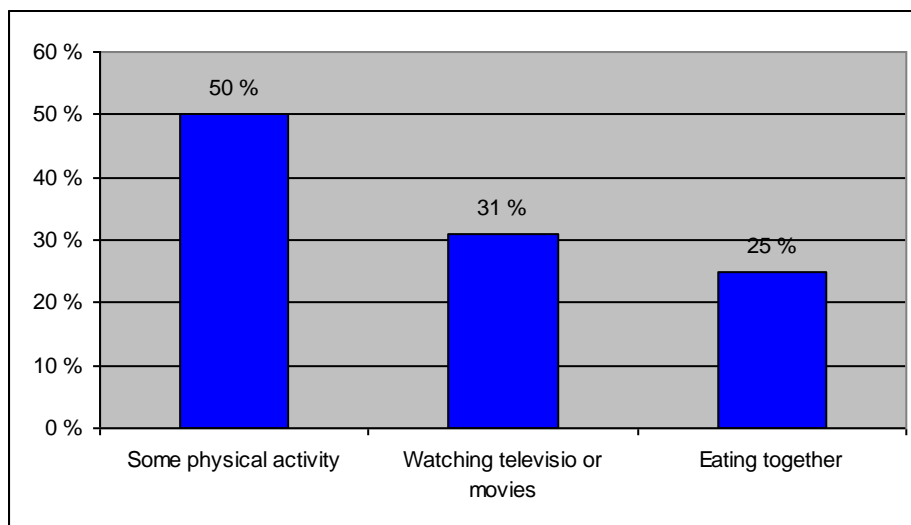


Figure 4. Boys' most popular leisure time activities with parents during weekdays



The questionnaire also asked the expectations and wishes concerning what children would like to do with their parents in leisure time. Both girls and boys reported that they would like to do more some physical activity with their parents. For example, more swimming, playing games, skiing and downhill skiing were mentioned. In addition, some children wished that their parents would participate in their hobbies more often. So even though both girls and boys mentioned some physical activity as one of the most popular leisure time activities with parents, it seems that children would like to exercise with parents even more.

The target group of this survey did not spend much time in home in the evenings without adult's presence. 52 % of the children said that they are never at home in the evenings without adult's presence. 33 % of the children reported that they are home alone in one to three days a week. 10 % of the children were four to six days in a week alone in home. 5 % of the children said that they are home alone without adult's presence in the evenings every day. Figure 5 shows how often children were home without adult's presence in the evenings.

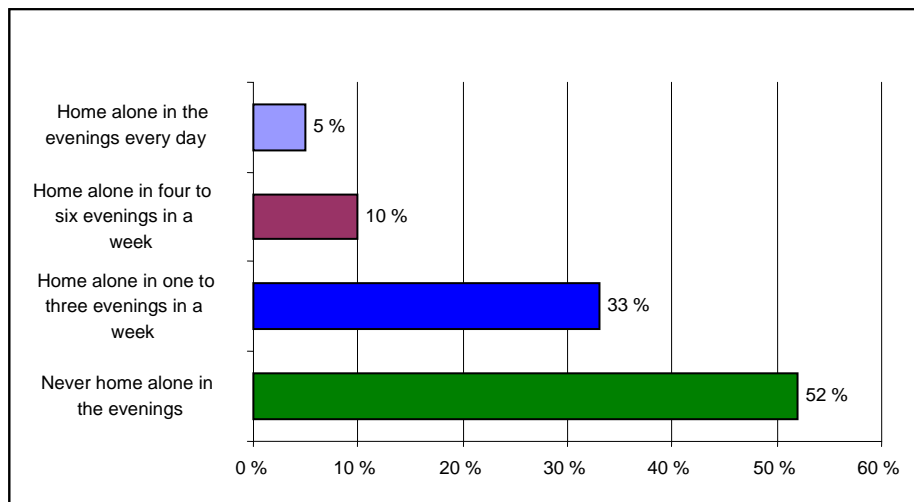


Figure 5. How often children reported to be home alone in the evenings

The questionnaire also asked do children feel that they get help from their parents when needed. 60 % of the children answered that they always get help from their parents when is needed. 36 % of the children said that they usually get help from their parents. Only 4 % answered that they get help from their parents sometimes. None of

the children answered that they never get help from their parents. Figure 6 shows children's thought about the help that they get from their parents.

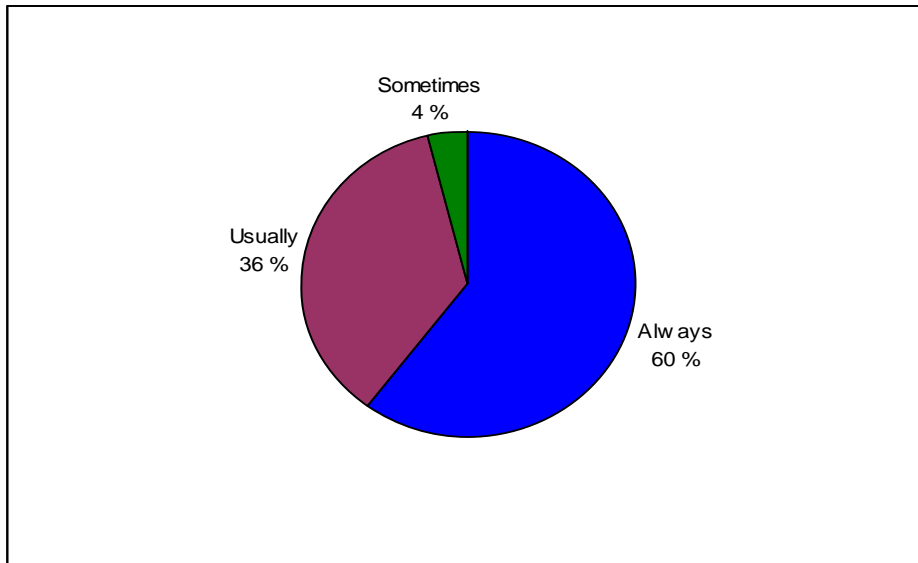


Figure 6. Children's thought about the help that they get from their parents

Having a meal together was not extremely common habit in these families. 39 % of the children reported that they eat a meal together daily. Four to six times a week reported 34 % of the children. However, 25 % of the children said that they eat together only one to three times a week. 2 % of the children said that they never have a meal together. Figure 7 shows the variation in the meals eaten together.

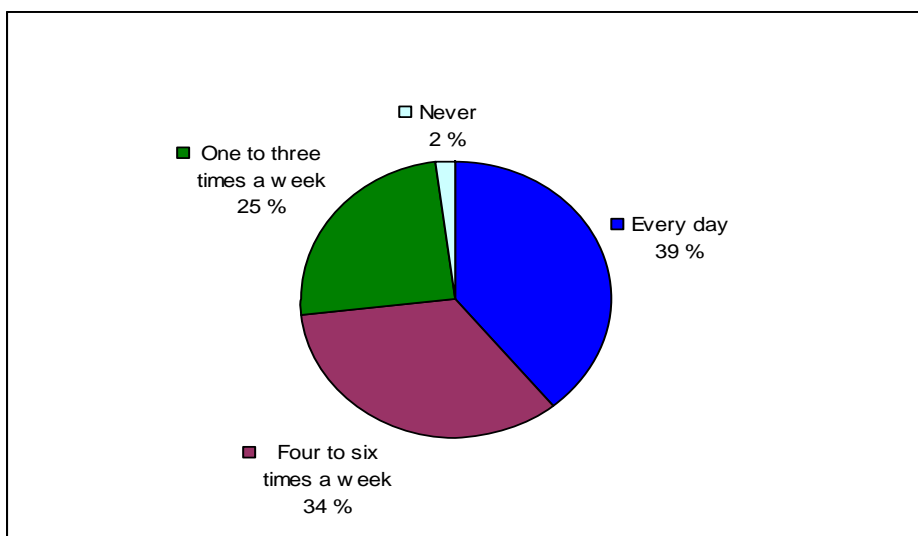


Figure 7. Frequency of meals had together

### 7.3 Children's hobbies

About hobbies the questionnaire investigated how many times per week children are engaged in a hobby, what kind of hobbies children do, do children feel that they have suitable amount of hobbies, are there some particular hobbies that children would like to start and for what reason they are not able to start that hobby. In addition, children's travelling to hobbies was asked.

Most commonly (55 %) children were engaged in a hobby in one to three days a week. 25 % of the children said that they have some hobby four to six days in a week. 10 % of the children were having a hobby every day. Also 10 % of the children answered that they have no hobbies at the moment. These results are shown in figure 8.

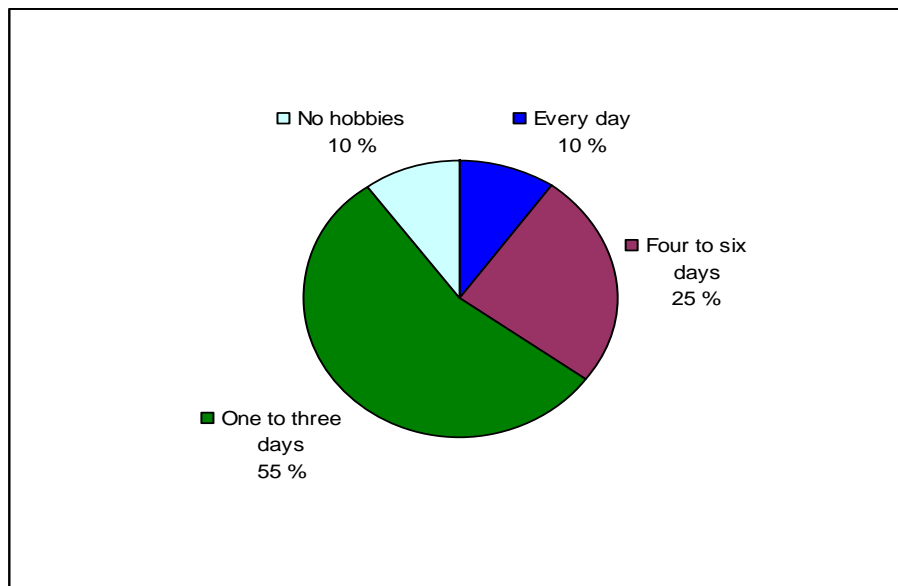


Figure 8. How many days in a week children are engaged in a hobby

The questionnaire asked what kind of hobbies children have. From individual hobbies the most popular ones among girls were playing an instrument (25 %), dancing (20 %), swimming (18 %) and riding (13 %). Among team sports the most popular sport was baseball, which 18 % of the girls reported as a hobby. In addition, handwork club (14 %), circus (13 %) and theatre (13 %) were quite popular among girls. Figure 9 shows the most popular hobbies among girls.

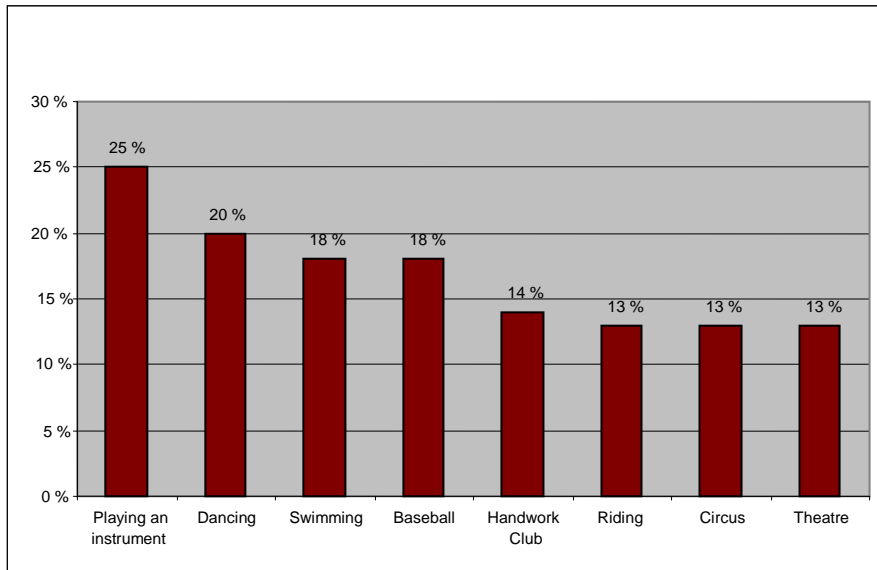


Figure 9. Girls' most popular hobbies

Boys had lot dispersion in their answers concerning what kind of hobbies they have. However the most popular hobbies among boys were downhill skiing (25 %), athletics (22 %) and football (22 %). Figure 10 shows the most popular hobbies among boys.

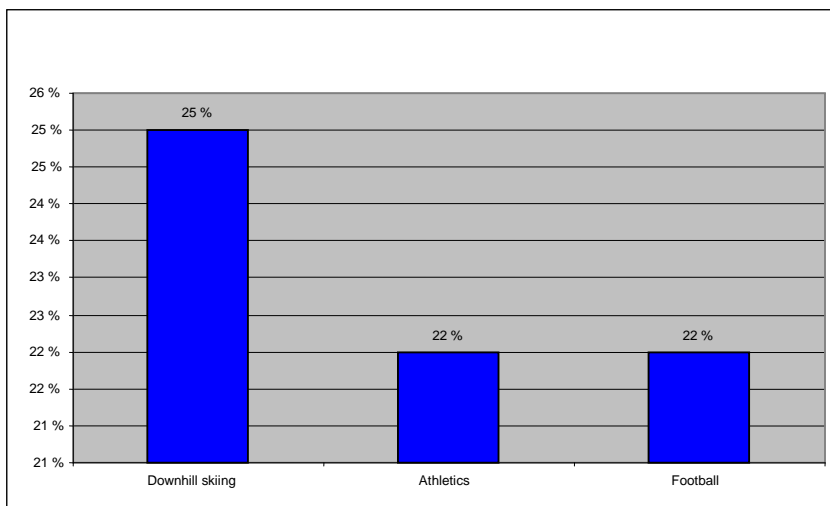


Figure 10. Boys' most popular hobbies

Majority of the children who took part to this survey thought that they have suitable amount of hobbies. 83 % of the children thought that the current amount of hobbies is convenient. Nevertheless, 15 % of the children said that they have too few hobbies. Figure 11 presents the children's thoughts about the amount of their hobbies.

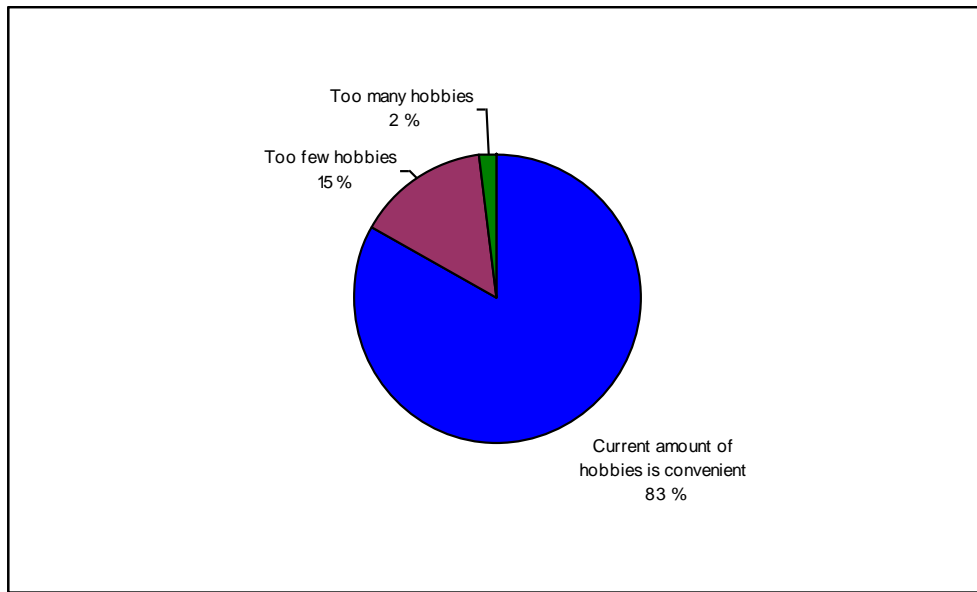


Figure 11. Children's thoughts about the amount of their hobbies

The children were asked what hobby they would like to start, if they had the opportunity. The most common hobbies that girls wanted to start were riding (16 %) and some kind of club activity (14 %). 25 % of boys were most willing to start some kind of group sports, for example ice hockey or floor ball. Moreover children were asked about the reasons why they can not start the particular hobby they would like to start. The most common reasons among girls, for not being able to start a new hobby, were not having time for a new hobby (14 %) and the hobby is too expensive (13 %). The reasons why boys could not start a new hobby were lack of time (13 %) and parents thought the hobby was unnecessary or not suitable for their child (9 %).

Furthermore, the questionnaire investigated how children travel to their hobbies. In this question many children answered more than one option. 69 % of the children said that their parents drive them to the hobbies. 43 % of the children managed to go to their hobbies some other way, such as cycling (23 %), walking (26 %) or with their friends parents (9%).

#### 7.4 Friends and the time spent with them

About children's friendships the questionnaire concentrated on how many good friends children have, if children's friends are related to their hobbies, if children feel that they have enough friends and how often children spend time with their friends on leisure time. Also how often children feel themselves lonely on leisure time, was asked.

68 % of the children reported that they have more than three good friends. Considering both gender separately, 64 % of the girls and 75 % of the boys said that they have more than three good friends. Two to three good friends reported 30 % of the children. Only 2 % said that they have just one good friend. There were no big differences on the amount of friends when girls and boys are compared together. However, it seems that it was slightly more common for boys to have more than three good friends. Figure 12 presents the amount of friends for both genders.

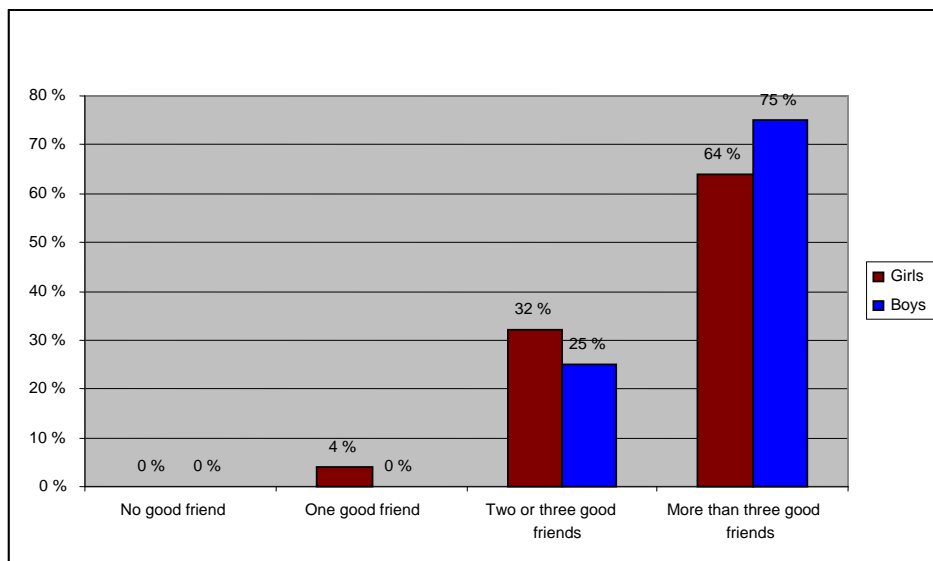


Figure 12. The amount of friends

A little over half (59 %) of the children said that their friends are somehow related to their hobbies. Majority (94 %) of the children thought that they have enough friends. Children spent time with their friends on leisure time most commonly one to three or four to six times a week. 45 % saw their friends four to six times a week and 40 % one

to three times. 14 % reported that they see their friends on leisure time every day. Figure 13 shows how often children saw their friends.

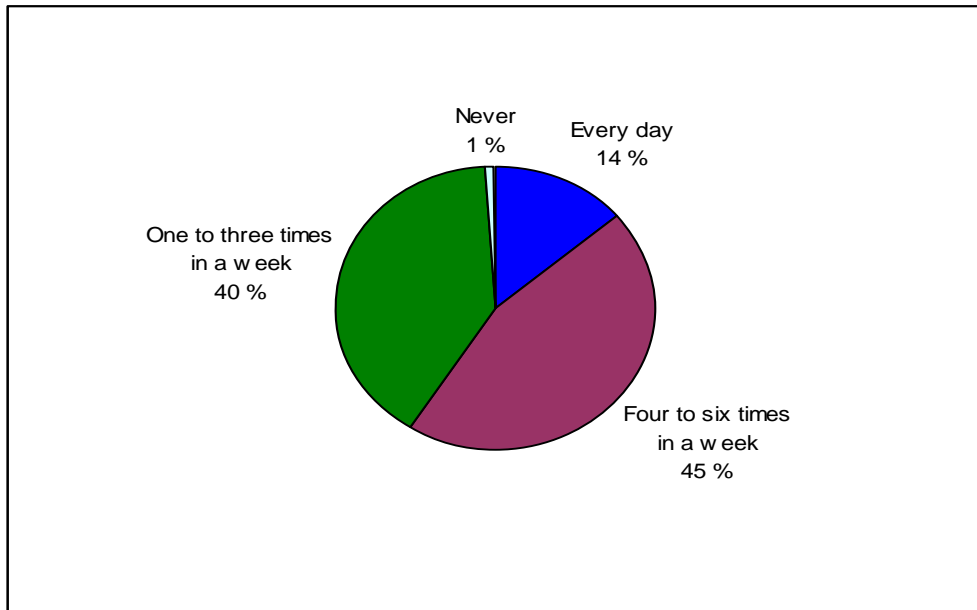


Figure 13. The times children meet their friends during a week

In addition, the questionnaire asked children about feeling lonely during leisure time. Approximately two thirds (69 %) of the children never feel lonely. 29 % of the children said that they feel lonely sometimes. 2 % of children often felt lonely during leisure time. Figure 14 presents the results of how often children felt lonely.

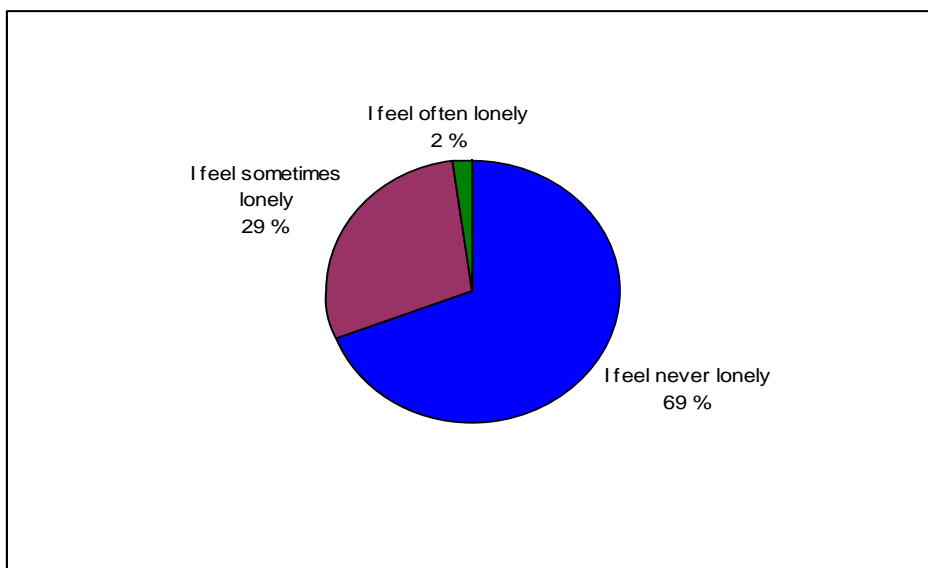


Figure 14. Children's thoughts about how often they felt lonely

### 7.5 How much time children spend watching television and on the computer

In this section the questionnaire asked how many hours children spend time watching television or being on a computer or a game console. Weekdays and weekends were asked separately. The results showed that children watch television much more during weekends than during weekdays. During weekdays 41 % of children watched television or movies two hours, and more than two hours reported 26 % of the children. During weekends 34 % of the children watched television or movies two hours, and even 49 % watched more than two hours. Figures 15 and 16 show how many hours girls and boys watch television or movies during weekdays and weekends.

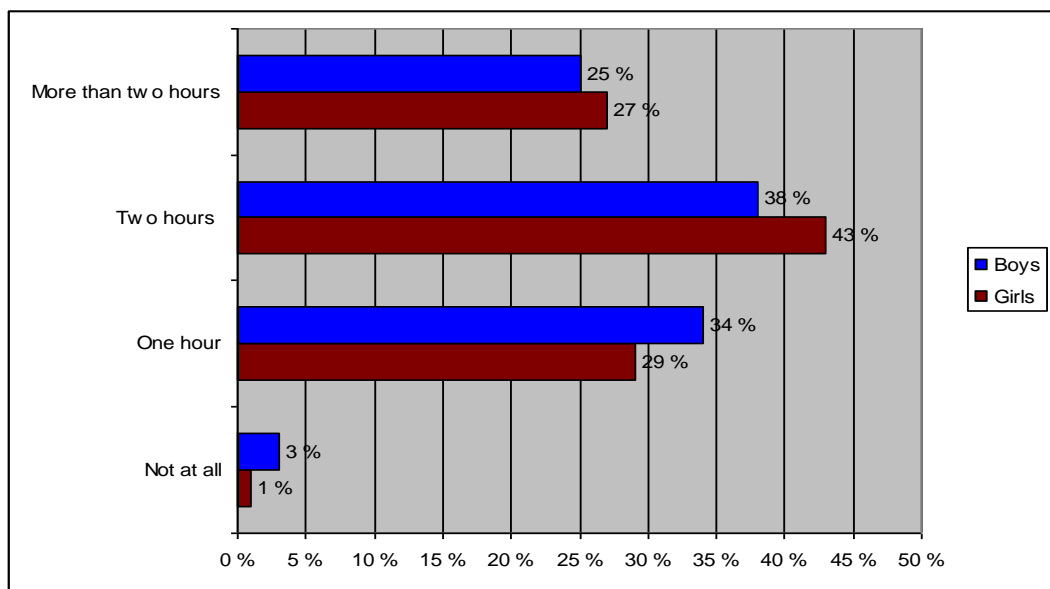


Figure 15. The amount of hour's girls and boys are watching television or movies per day on weekdays.



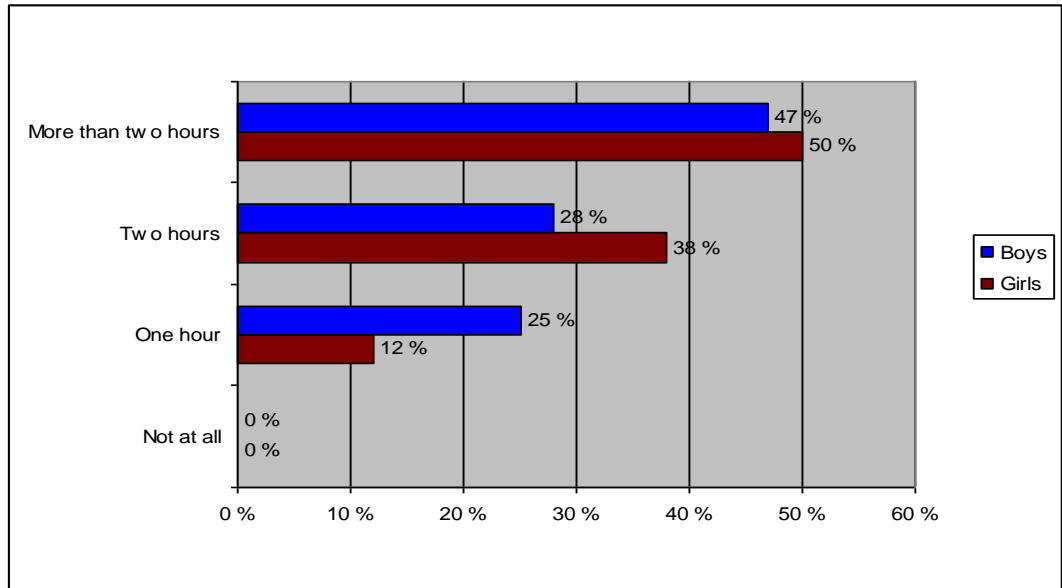


Figure 16. The amount of hour's girls and boys are watching television or movies per day on weekends.

In addition, the hours spent on a computer or game console were higher on weekends compared to weekdays. On weekdays only 10 % of the children spent more than two hours on a computer or a game console. On weekends 23 % of the children spent more than two hours on a computer or a game console. Figures 17 and 18 show how many hours' girls and boys spent time on a computer or a game console during weekdays and weekends.

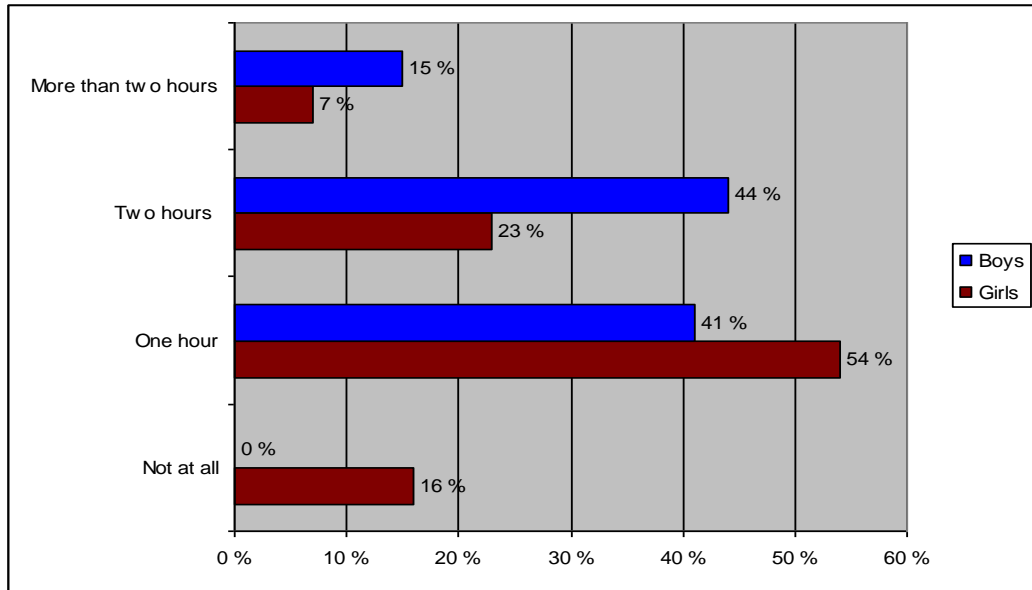


Figure 17. The amount of hour's girls and boys are spending time on a computer or a game console per day on weekdays.

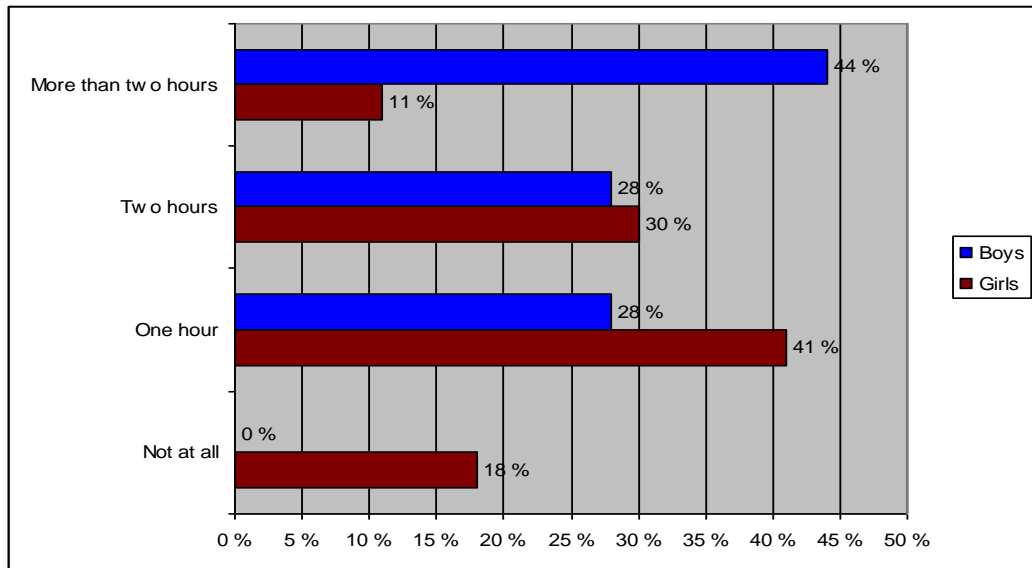


Figure 18. The amount of hour's girls and boys are spending time on a computer or a game console per day on weekends.

## 8 DISCUSSION

All children are individuals and have different kind of basis for living. However, all the children have same kind of needs and the importance of the family, friends and hobbies is significant. Family should create safety for the child and with family members a child can learn many different skills that can be useful in the future. Family creates the foundation to the child's future relationships. With friends a child can learn different kind of emotions and feelings and how to be a member of a group. In a good friendship children should have a lot of positive feelings towards each other, although disagreements are also important as they teach the child how to discuss about things and how to solve the disagreements. Hobbies can support child's physical development, social skills, independence and also child's self-image and self-esteem. In addition, through hobbies child can create new friendships.

This master's thesis concentrated on children's family environment, friendships, hobbies and the time spent watching television or being on a computer or a game console. The target group of the survey were the fifth grade pupils in five elementary schools in Hamina. The majority of the children who participated to this survey were living with both parents and also had siblings. In addition, majority of the parents of these children were employed.

The results of the survey showed that majority of the children were satisfied for how long parents spent time with them. This result is notable considering the fact that nowadays family life can be really hectic and it is quite usual that parents feel that they are not able to give enough time for their children. However, the results showed that one of the most common ways to spent time with parents was watching television or movies. Also Välijeesiö (2010: 30) found in her research that most common way to spent time with parents was watching television. Watching too much television or movies can be harmful to child's imagination and visualization, which supports child's emotional development and the ability to deal with emotions. However, watching television together with the parents can also have some positive aspects. When parents watch television together with their children parents are able to control the content of the programs. In addition, the time spent watching television or movies together can be beneficial for discussion about the day's happenings.

Meals had together have been under discussion in many places as it has become more and more unusual habit in the families. Results of this survey showed that eating together was not an every day activity in these families. Actually, 25 % of the children said that they eat together only one to three times a week. This sounds a bit worrying as it is well know that eating together has a lot of positive benefits. One of the most important things is that it brings the whole family together and it is a good opportunity for discussion. In addition, when the whole family eats together parents are able to influence their children's eating habits and in that way support healthy diet.

About hobbies the results of the survey showed that majority of the children were happy with the amount of their hobbies. However, 15 % of the children said that they have too few hobbies. Hobbies are important to child's development as hobbies can for example support a child's independence and social skills. Moreover hobbies support a child's physical development. (Kukkasniemi & Kukkasniemi 2010: 163-164.) Veijanen found in her research that most popular hobbies among children were different kind of clubs, for example cooking club and church club. Team sports were more common among boys, whereas girls preferred individual sports. Also some musical hobby was more common among girls than among boys. (Veijanen 2004: 41) The results of this survey were quite similar, as girls most popular hobbies were playing an instrument, dancing and swimming. Boys preferred downhill skiing, athletics and football. It seems that girls in this survey had more artistic hobbies as boys had athletic hobbies. Veijanen also studied how many times children go to hobbies during a week. Most commonly children went to hobbies two times a week. Girls had more hobbies than boys. On the other hand boys spent more time with their hobbies during the week. (Veijanen 2004: 43.) Similarly, in this survey most commonly children were engaged in a hobby in one to three days a week.

Extremely interesting finding of this survey concerned the friendships of the children. All children said that they have at least one good friend. All in all majorities of the children said that they have more than three good friends. Friendships are important to child's social development. In friendships the child can learn social skills, have emotional support and improve his or her self-esteem. Children who have at least one good and reciprocity friendship are more cooperative, are self-confident, less

aggressive and have fewer conflicts with other children. (Ritokoski 2010: 61-62.) However, despite of having friends quarter of the children felt themselves sometimes lonely during leisure time. This brings out the question about the quality of the friendships. Is it possible that children are friends with someone who does not necessary response to their needs? Furthermore, children saw equally often their friends one to three and four to six times in a week. If a child meets him or her friends one to three times in a week, it is quite possible that he or she feels him/herself lonely. This survey did not ask where or how children meet their friends. If friends live far away from a child's home, child needs parents support to meet friends. For example, if parents do not have time to drive child, it can be impossible to meet friends.

In this survey children were asked how much time they spent watching television or movies or being on a computer or a game console. It is recommended that children should spend altogether with television and computer no more than two hours per day. In this survey most commonly children watched television two hours per day during weekdays. However, during weekends children watched television most commonly more than two hours per day. With a computer and a game console the situation was different among boys and girls. During weekdays boys said most commonly that they spent time with a computer or a game console two hours whereas majority of the girls reported one hour. The difference between both genders was even bigger during weekends as boys spent time with a computer or a game console most commonly more than two hours and girls most commonly only one hour. Based on these results it is possible that some of these children spent time watching television or being in a computer altogether more than four hours per day. Quite often it has been under the discussion how television on computer replaces other leisure time activities and some children are being more and more little physically active. For some children this may be true. It is also quite probable that the time children spent on a computer or watching television diminishes the time that the whole family is able to spend together. Shared hobbies, discussions, meals, playing together and other kind of ways to spent time together, are important to the whole family as they bring the family together.

## 9 RECOMMENDATIONS

In this survey children reported many different kinds of hobbies. It seems that in Hamina children have many possibilities to have a hobby they enjoy. However, quite often children's hobbies require time and investments from the parents. Sometimes parents are not able to invest to their children's hobbies. Therefore, the city should remember to support children's hobbies so that all children have equal possibilities to have a hobby.

As the results showed having a meal together was not extremely common habit in these families. Maybe this is something that schools could try to change for example having a discussion about the topic when they meet all parents together. In addition, worth to discuss is the amount of children watching television or movies or being on a computer or a game console.

As mentioned before eating together is not self-evidence nowadays. In this survey 25 % of the children said that they eat together only one to three times a week. It would be interesting to find out the reasons why families do not necessarily eat together. In some families it may be because of the parents working situation or children's hobbies may be the restrictive factor. In addition, this can lead to children eating more and more for example in fast food restaurants.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate parents' reasons to forbid their children's participation to this survey. The response rate in this survey was 66 %. Some of the pupils lost their letter, but all in all approximately every third of the parents forbade their children's participation. On the other hand, is it possible that parents did not give the permission to participate to this survey, because the child asked them to do so?

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## KYSELYLOMAKE

Hyvä viidesluokkalainen!

Tässä kyselyssä on vapaa-aikaasi, harrastuksiasi, perhettäsi ja kaverisuhteitasi koskevia kysymyksiä, joihin toivon sinun vastaavan. Kaikki kyselyn tiedot käsitellään täysin luottamuksellisesti.

Valitse jokaisesta kysymyksestä se vaihtoehto, joka parhaiten kuvaa sinua. Jos kysymyksessä ei ole valmiita vaihtoehtoja, kirjoita vastaus omin sanoin vastaukselle varattuun tilaan. Kysely palautetaan nimettömänä, joten **sinun ei tarvitse kirjoittaa nimeäsi mihinkään kohtaan.**

1. Olen

tyttö

poika

2. Asun

molempien vanhempieni kanssa

äidin kanssa

isän kanssa

toisen vanhemman ja tämän uuden puolison kanssa

jotenkin muuten; miten? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Asuuko perheessäsi sisaruksiasi tai muita lapsia?

ei

kyllä; kuinka monta? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Käyvätkö samassa kodissa sinun kanssa asuvat aikuiset töissä?

kyllä

vain toinen käy töissä

ei

5. Vanhempani viettävät kanssani aikaa

- erittäin paljon
- melko paljon
- melko vähän
- erittäin vähän

6. Kerro, mitä yleensä teet yhdessä vanhempiesi kanssa arkisin:

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viikonloppuisin:

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7. Mitä haluaisit tehdä tai harrastaa yhdessä vanhempiesi kanssa vapaa-ajalla?

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8. Kuinka usein olet iltaisin kotona ilman aikuisen läsnäoloa?

- en koskaan
- 1-3 päivänä viikossa
- 4-6 päivänä viikossa
- joka päivä

9. Koetko saavasi vanhemmiltasi apua silloin kun tarvitset?

- aina
- useimmiten
- joskus
- en koskaan

10. Kuinka usein sinun perheessä syödään yhteinen ateria?

- joka päivä
- 4-6 kertaa viikossa
- 1-3 kertaa viikossa
- ei koskaan

11. Kuinka monena päivänä viikossa harrastat jotakin?

- en yhtenäkkään päivänä
- 1-3 päivänä
- 4-6 päivänä
- joka päivä

12. Mitä harrastuksia sinulla on?

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13. Minulla on harrastuksia

- liian paljon
- sopivasti
- liian vähän

14. Minkä harrastuksen toivoisit voivasi aloittaa?

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15. Miksi et voi aloittaa edellisessä kohdassa mainitsemaasi harrastusta?

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16. Millä kuljet harrastuksiin?

linja-autolla

vanhemmat kuljettavat

isovanhemmat kuljettavat

jotenkin muuten, miten? \_\_\_\_\_

17. Kuinka monta hyvää ystävää sinulla on?

ei yhtään hyvää ystävää

1 hyvä ystävä

2 tai 3 hyvää ystävää

enemmän kuin kolme hyvää ystävää

18. Useimmat ystäväni liittyvät jollain tavalla harrastuksiini

kyllä

ei

19. Minulla on riittävästi ystäviä

kyllä

ei

20. Vietän aikaa ystävien kanssa kouluajan ulkopuolella

joka päivä

4-6 kertaa viikossa

1-3 kertaa viikossa

en koskaan

21. Tunnen itseni yksinäiseksi kouluajan ulkopuolella

- en koskaan
- joskus
- usein
- aina

22. Kuinka monta tuntia päivässä olet **arkisin** tietokoneella tai pelikoneella?

- en yhtään tuntia
- yhden tunnin
- kaksi tuntia
- enemmän kuin kaksi tuntia

23. Kuinka monta tuntia päivässä katsot **arkisin** televisiota tai elokuvia?

- en yhtään tuntia
- yhden tunnin
- kaksi tuntia
- enemmän kuin kaksi tuntia

24. Kuinka monta tuntia päivässä olet **viikonloppuisin** tietokoneella tai pelikoneella?

- en yhtään tuntia
- yhden tunnin
- kaksi tuntia
- enemmän kuin kaksi tuntia

25. Kuinka monta tuntia päivässä katsot **viikonloppuisin** televisiota tai elokuvia?

- en yhtään tuntia
- yhden tunnin
- kaksi tuntia
- enemmän kuin kaksi tuntia

**KIITOS VASTAUKSISTASI!**

## APPENDIX 2

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## ILMOITUS TUTKIMUKSEN SUORITTAMISESTA

18.2.2013

Arvoisa viidesluokkalaisen huoltaja!

Opiskelen Kymenlaakson ammattikorkeakoulussa ylempää terveystieteiden tutkintoa. Teen opinnäytetyötä, jonka tavoitteena on selvittää muun muassa lasten vapaa-ajan viettoa, harrastuksia ja kaverisuhteita.

Opinnäytetyöhöni liittyvä tutkimus on tarkoitus toteuttaa useissa Haminan kouluissa. Lasten hyvinvointiin vaikuttavia tekijöitä pyrin selvittämään kyselylomakkeen avulla. Tutkimus toteutetaan koulupäivän aikana, jolloin lapset vastaavat kyselylomakkeen kysymyksiin. Kyselyyn vastaavat kaikki lapsenne koulun viidennen luokan oppilaat.

Tutkimuslomake palautetaan nimettömänä, joten tutkimukseen osallistuneiden lasten anonymiteetti säilyy koko tutkimuksen ajan. Tutkimuksen tulosten valmistuttua aineisto hävitetään välittömästi. Tutkimukseen osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista.

Tutkimus valmistuu vuoden 2013 aikana. Annan mielelläni lisätietoa tutkimuksesta ja sen suorittamisesta.

Ystävällisin terveisin,  
 Linda Metsälä

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Pyydän Teitä palauttamaan kirjeen alaosan lapsenne mukana opettajalle viimeistään 6.3.2013. Merkitkää kirjeen alaosaan annatko lapsellenne luvan osallistua tutkimukseen vai kiellättekö tutkimukseen osallistumisen.

Lapseni saa osallistua tutkimukseen

Lapseni ei saa osallistua tutkimukseen

Lapsen nimi: \_\_\_\_\_

Huoltajan allekirjoitus: \_\_\_\_\_