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CUHK Releases Main Study Results of Child Health Behaviour
Hong Kong Students Are Below International Health Standards

The health condition of Hong Kong students is below international standards and is an issue that warrants attention. These are the Hong Kong survey results of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) 2020 Main Study conducted by The Hong Kong Centre for International Student Assessment (HKCISA) of the Institute of Educational Research and the Centre for Youth Studies of the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), and released today (7 June).

From June to December 2020, the HKCISA and the Centre for Youth Studies randomly selected 5,307 students of age 11, 13 and 15 from 21 primary and 19 secondary schools for a questionnaire survey on quality of health. Results show that Hong Kong students are lower in life satisfaction and self-rated health compared to international standards, and their psychological symptoms are more severe than physical symptoms.

Survey results: Current status of Hong Kong schoolchildren's health

Hong Kong students score 6.97 points on the life satisfaction scale, which is lower than the 7.80 points of the HBSC average. About 18% of them are very satisfied with their current life (9-10 points), which is much lower than the HBSC percentage of 36%. About 9% are dissatisfied (0-4 points), which is higher than the HBSC percentage of 7% (**Figure 1**). Only 16% of Hong Kong students rate their health status as "excellent", which is far below the HBSC percentage of 36%. The proportions of Hong Kong students who rate themselves as in "fair" and "poor" health are 32% and 4% respectively, both of which are higher than the HBSC percentages of 12% and 2% (**Figure 2**).

Hong Kong students' psychological symptoms are more severe than physical symptoms. About 34% to 42% of students feel low or nervous, are irritable or bad-tempered, and have sleeping difficulties at least once a week (**Figure 3**), and about 14% to 18% have headache, stomach ache, backache and feel dizzy at least once a week (**Figure 4**). Compared with the HBSC percentages, Hong Kong students are less likely to have physical symptoms, but more likely to have psychological symptoms, especially feeling low. Furthermore, Hong Kong students' life satisfaction and self-rated health decrease with age, while their physical and psychological symptoms increase with age (**Figure 5 and 6**).

Health inequity among Hong Kong schoolchildren

Hong Kong girls do not differ significantly from boys in average life satisfaction (**Figure 7**), but their self-rated health (2.72 points) is significantly lower than that of boys (2.81 points). As for physical and psychological symptoms, the average indices of Hong Kong girls (6.68 points and 9.85 points respectively) are significantly higher than those of boys (6.09 points and 9.01 points respectively), indicating that the condition of girls is more serious than that of boys. In addition, the higher the family socio-economic status, the higher the student's life satisfaction and self-rated health (**Figure 8 and 9**). On the other hand, family socio-economic status has no significant effect on physical and psychological symptoms (**Figure 10**).

Relationship between family factors and students' health

Regarding family communication, students who find it easy to talk to their parents have higher life satisfaction and self-rated health, and fewer physical and psychological symptoms (**Figure 11**). Family support is also positively related to life satisfaction and self-rated health; the higher the level of family support, the higher the student's life satisfaction and self-rated health, and the fewer the physical and psychological symptoms (**Figure 12**).

Relationship between physical activity and students' health

The data shows that schoolchildren who do exercise for three to seven days a week have significantly higher life satisfaction and self-rated health, and have fewer physical or psychological symptoms (**Figure 13**). Doing exercise can improve physical and psychological conditions. However, currently 61.6% of Hong Kong students are not able to participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity for three days a week. Of those, 22.5% of students do not participate at all, and 20.6% and 18.5% participate only for one to two days a week respectively (**Figure 14**).

Students' online communication and the effects of social media use

Social networks are the major tools for Hong Kong students to communicate with their peers. About half of Hong Kong students (53%) have online contact once or more a day and 15% have online contact with close friends almost all the time every day. Excessive reliance on social networks may lead to addiction problems (**Figure 15 and 16**). According to the survey results, the problem of social media addiction among Hong Kong schoolchildren is not serious (only 7.5%). However, it is found that the average life satisfaction and self-rated health of problematic social media users are significantly lower, while their physical and psychological symptoms are significantly more (**Figure 17**).

About the HBSC

Co-ordinated by the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe, the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) is a cross-national study conducted every four years. It aims to investigate the health behaviour and well-being of 11, 13 and

15-year-old students and related factors, including family and social contexts, and to compare the physical and mental health of young people at different stages and in different countries. The HBSC is now participated in by over 40 countries and regions. This is the first time that Hong Kong has participated in the HBSC Main Study, which can serve as a benchmark for assessing Hong Kong students' health. This study was supported by the Public Policy Research Funding Scheme from the Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (Project Number: 2019.A4.057.19B).

Figure 1. Life Satisfaction of Hong Kong Students and HBSC Average

Life satisfaction	Hong Kong	HBSC Average
9 – 10 points (10 points: Best possible life)	18.4%	36.4%
7 - 8 points	46.3%	40.7%
5 - 6 points	26.7%	16.2%
0 - 4 points (0 point: Worst possible life)	8.6%	6.7%

Figure 2. Self-rated Health of Hong Kong Students and HBSC Average

Self-rated health	Hong Kong	HBSC Average
Excellent	15.5%	36.3%
Good	49.3%	50.2%
Fair	31.5%	11.8%
Poor	3.7%	1.6%

* The minor discrepancy in the total percentage is due to rounding of numbers.

Figure 3. Proportion of Students Who Had Psychological Symptoms Once or More a Week in the Last 6 Months (Hong Kong versus HBSC Proportion)

	Feeling low	Irritability or bad temper	Feeling nervous	Difficulties in getting to sleep
Hong Kong	39.8%	41.9%	39.3%	34.1%
HBSC Average	29.3%	40.5%	38.3%	32.3%

Figure 4. Proportion of Students Who Had Physical Symptoms Once or More a Week in the Last 6 Months (Hong Kong versus HBSC Proportion)

	Headache	Stomach ache	Backache	Feeling dizzy
Hong Kong	17.7%	13.9%	14.4%	16.5%
HBSC Average	29.9%	20.3%	22.1%	17.4%

Figure 5. Life Satisfaction of the Overall Population of Hong Kong and Different Age Groups/ Grades of Hong Kong Students
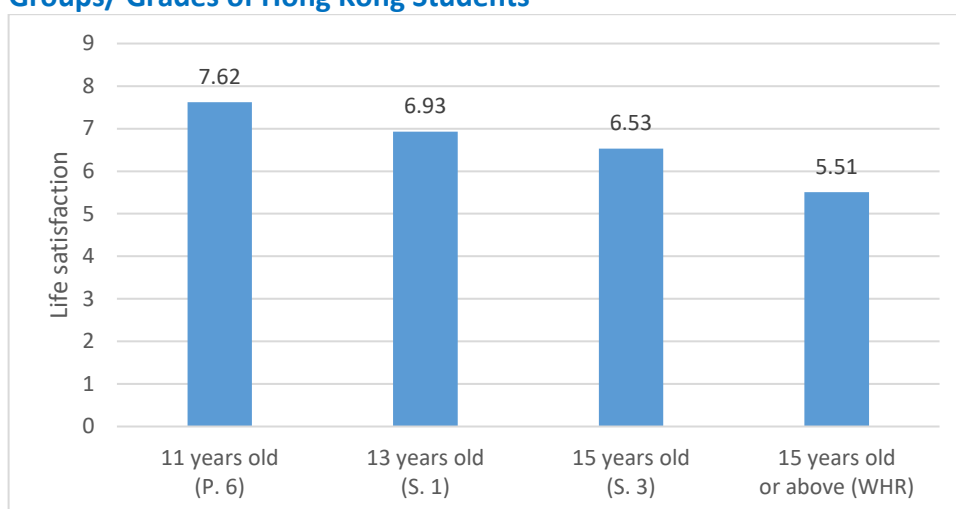
Figure 6. Health and Well-being Indices of Hong Kong Students at Different Ages/ Grades

| Health and well-being indices	Age 11 (P.6)		Age 13 (S.1)		Age 15 (S.3)		Total	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Life satisfaction	7.62	1.81	6.93 #	1.82	6.53 ##	1.80	6.97	1.86
Self-rated health	2.95	0.71	2.78 #	0.74	2.61 ##	0.76	2.77	0.75
Physical symptoms	5.52	2.50	6.34 #	3.07	7.07 ##	3.46	6.38	3.13
Psychological symptoms	9.23	4.28	9.22	4.32	9.79 #	4.30	9.42	4.31

Note: The different number of "#" indicates that there is a significant difference between the age groups. Self-rated health ranges from 1 to 4 points. One point represents poor. Four points represent excellent. Physical and psychological symptoms range from 4 to 20 points. The higher the index, the more the symptoms.

Figure 7. Health and Well-being Indices of Hong Kong Students of Different Genders

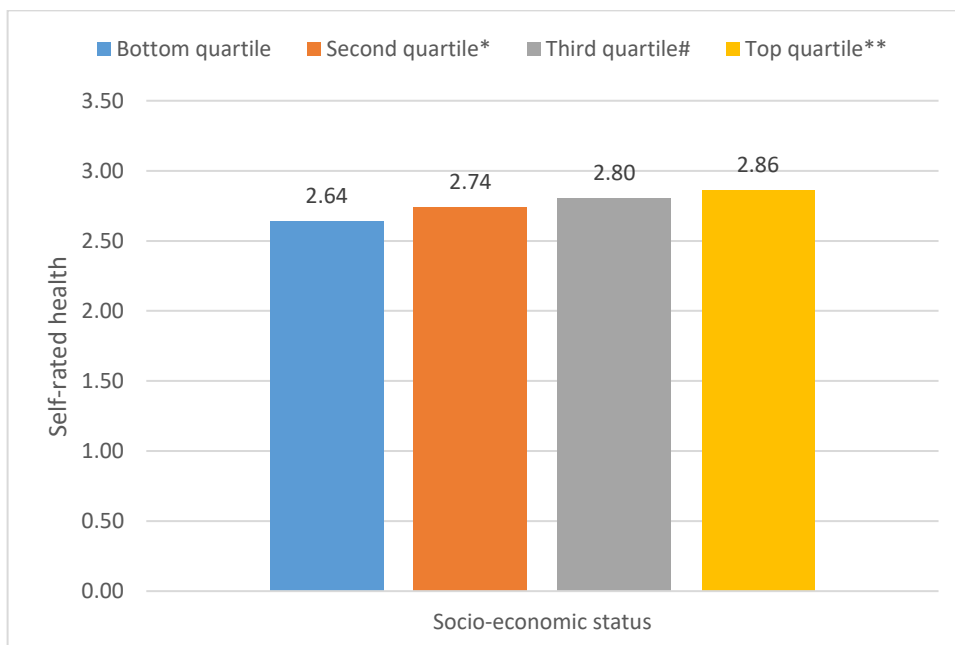| Health and well-being indices	Boys		Girls	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Life satisfaction	7.00	1.88	6.95	1.83
Self-rated health	2.81 ***	0.77	2.72	0.73
Physical symptoms	6.09	2.97	6.68 ***	3.28
Psychological symptoms	9.01	4.23	9.85 ***	4.36

*** $p < 0.001$

Figure 8. Relationship between Family Socio-economic Status and Life Satisfaction of Hong Kong Students
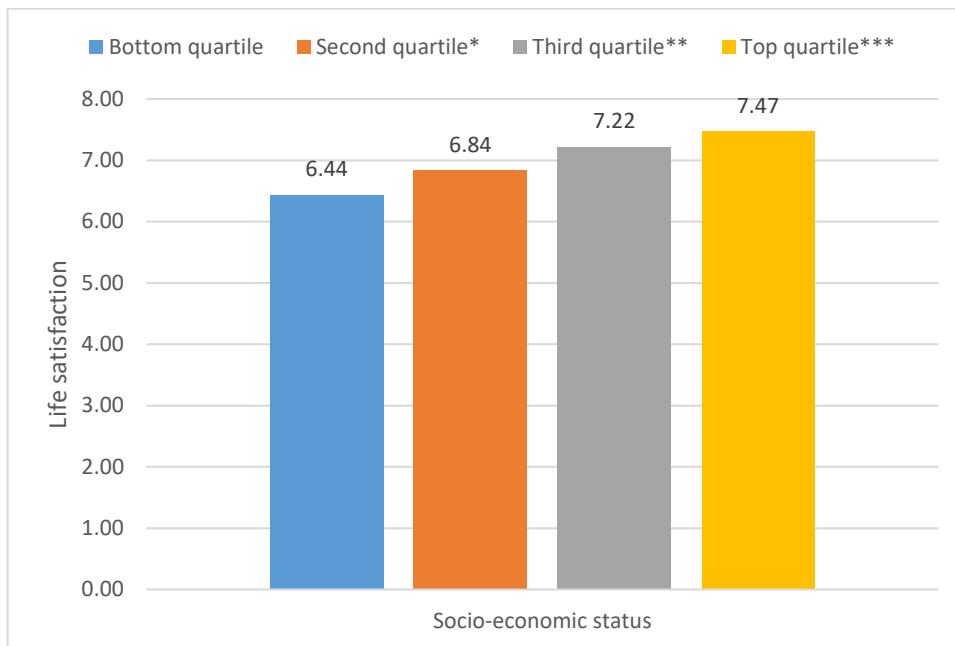
Note: The different number of "*" indicates that there is a significant difference between the quartiles.

Figure 9. Relationship between Family Socio-economic Status and Self-rated Health of Hong Kong Students

Note: The different number of "*" indicates that there is a significant difference between the quartiles. There is no significant difference between the quartile marked with "#" and the quartiles marked with "*" and "**".

Figure 10. Health and Well-being Indices of Hong Kong Students with Different Family Socio-economic Status

Health and well-being indices	Bottom quartile		Second quartile		Third quartile		Top quartile	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Life satisfaction[1]	6.44	1.92	6.84 *	1.82	7.22 **	1.76	7.47 ***	1.65
Self-rated health[2]	2.64	0.78	2.74 *	0.73	2.80 #	0.74	2.86 **	0.73
Physical symptoms	6.39	3.23	6.49	3.18	6.35	3.06	6.35	3.05
Psychological symptoms	9.48	4.46	9.43	4.27	9.49	4.30	9.38	4.21

Note: 1. The different number of "*" indicates that there is a significant difference between the quartiles.
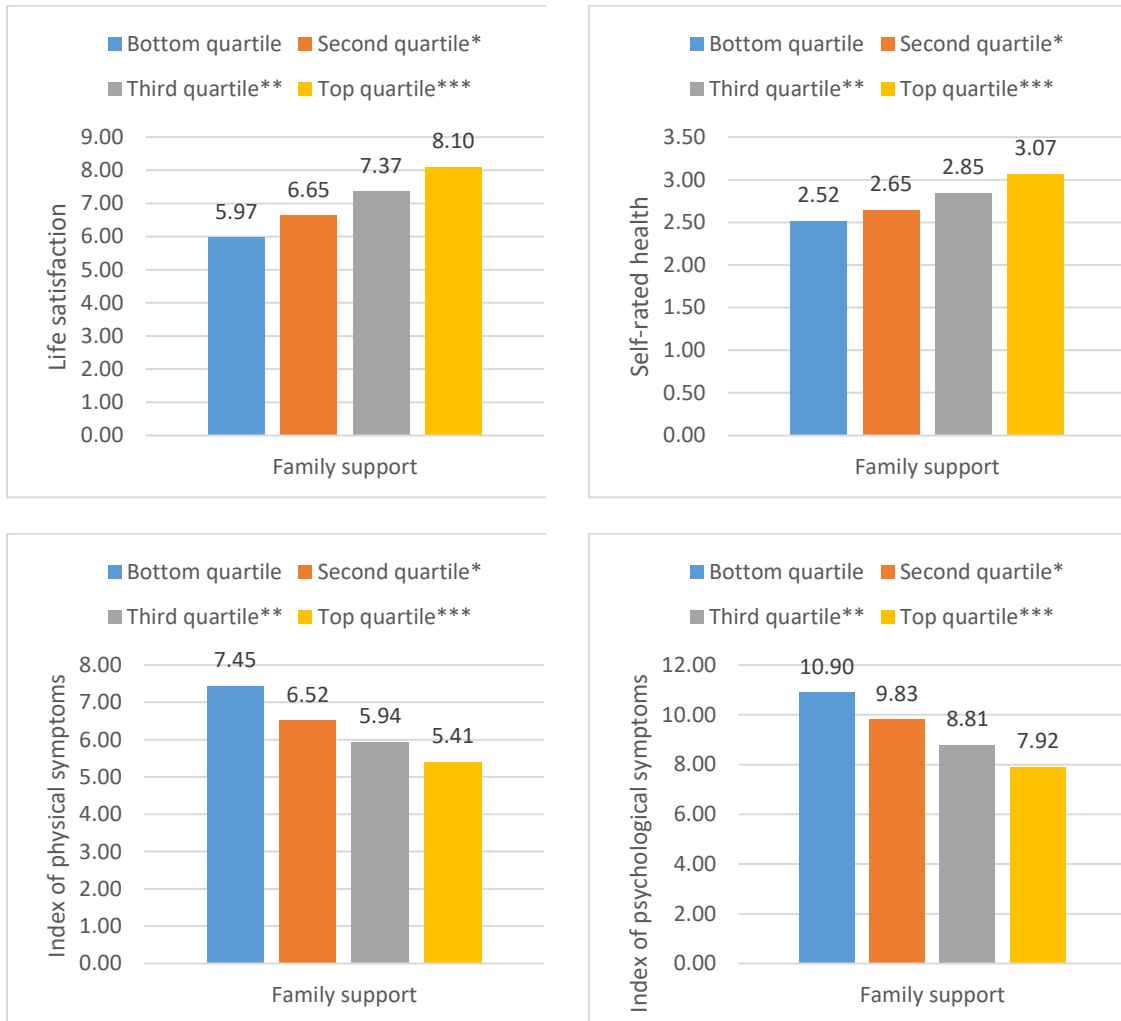2. The different number of "*" indicates that there is a significant difference between the quartiles. There is no significant difference between the quartile marked with "#" and the quartiles marked with "*" and "**".

Figure 11. Health and Well-being Indices of Hong Kong Students Who Perceived Different Ease of Communication with Parents

Health and well-being indices	Difficult / very difficult to talk to father		Easy / very easy to talk to father		Difficult / very difficult to talk to mother		Easy / very easy to talk to mother	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Life satisfaction	6.28	1.87	7.39 ***	1.67	5.95	1.92	7.30 ***	1.68
Self-rated health	2.54	0.76	2.89 ***	0.71	2.48	0.78	2.85 ***	0.72
Physical symptoms	7.27 ***	3.57	5.86	2.70	7.55 ***	3.76	6.01	2.80
Psychological symptoms	10.94 ***	4.49	8.57	3.94	11.48 ***	4.60	8.79	4.00

*** $p < 0.001$

Figure 12. Relationship between Family Support and Health and Well-being Indices of Hong Kong Students

Note: The different number of "*" indicates that there is a significant difference between the quartiles.

Figure 13. Health and Well-being Indices of Hong Kong Students with Different Levels of Physical Activity

Health and well-being indices	Participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day for 0-2 days a week		Participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day for 3-7 days a week	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Life satisfaction	6.77	1.86	7.31 ***	1.80
Self-rated health	2.64	0.75	2.96 ***	0.71
Physical symptoms	6.48 **	3.23	6.20	2.97
Psychological symptoms	9.71 ***	4.37	8.94	4.17

** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Figure 14. Students' Participation in Physical Activity (At Least 60 Minutes of Physical Activity in One Day) (Hong Kong versus HBSC)
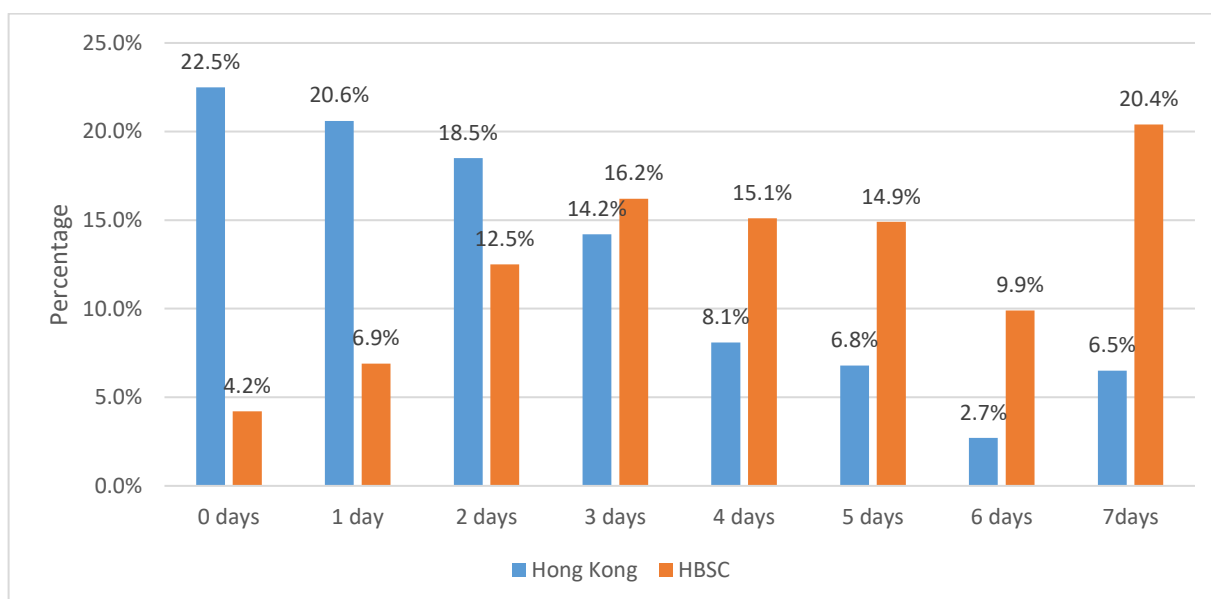
Figure 15. Hong Kong Students' Intensity of Online Communication with Friends

	Several times a week or less	Once or more a day	Almost all the time every day
Close friend(s)	25.5%	52.9%	15.2%
Friends from a larger friend group	43.7%	38.7%	8.4%
Friends that students got to know through the Internet but didn't know before	51.6%	16.7%	6.0%

Note: The remaining percentages fall into the category of "don't know/doesn't apply".

Figure 16. Count of "Yes" Responses by Hong Kong Students to the Nine Questions Related to Social Media Addiction
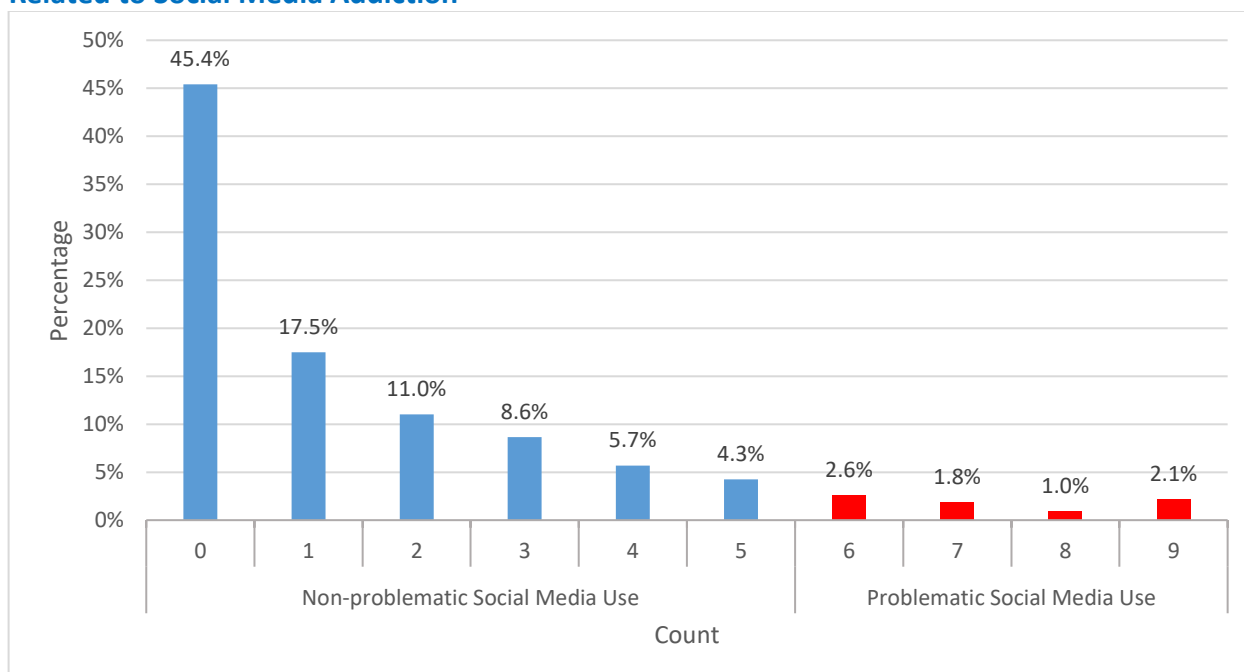
Figure 17. Health and Well-being Indices of Hong Kong Students Who Are Problematic Social Media Users and Those Who Are Not

Health and well-being indices	Non-problematic social media users		Problematic social media users	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Life satisfaction	7.02 ***	1.82	6.38	2.10
Self-rated health	2.78 ***	0.74	2.55	0.83
Physical symptoms	6.27	3.04	7.71 ***	3.85
Psychological symptoms	9.20	4.20	12.03 ***	4.72

*** $p < 0.001$