From Child Welfare to Children Well-being: What can we learn from children?

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What do I want to talk about?

• The changing context of child welfare
• Recent changes and shifts in our understanding of children’s well being
• What can we learn from children
Changing Contexts

• The way we understand well-being today is different than what we thought in the past
• The changes are universal but they occur at different paces in different places.
Changing Contexts

• The children themselves are “pushing” toward a new concept.

• In fact I would argue that the changes can be summarized by a number of shifts.

• Studies have found that these shifts are indeed happening all over the globe, even if at different paces.
The First Shift - From Survival and Basic Needs to Development and Well-Being

• Much attention has been paid to children’s physical survival and basic needs – and for good reasons. The result was the focus on saving children.

• Infant and child mortality, school enrollment and dropout, immunizations, and childhood disease are all examples of measures of well being in regard to basic needs.

• But now the definition of well being moved from supplying minimums, as in saving a life, to a focus on quality of life.
The Second shift - From Negative to Positive

• The absence of problems or failures does not necessarily indicate proper growth and success.

• Understanding well being as absence of risk factors or negative behaviors is not the same as focusing on protective factors or positive behaviors.

• Thus, the challenge is to develop a concept that holds societies accountable for more than the safe warehousing of children and youth.
The Third Shift - From Well-Becoming to Well-Being

• In contrast to the immediacy of well-being, well-becoming describes a future focus (i.e., preparing children to be productive and happy adults).

• The conventional preoccupation with the next generation is a preoccupation of adults. Although not a necessarily harmful view, anyone interested in children and childhood should also be interested in the present as well as future childhood.

• Focusing on preparing children to become citizens suggests that they are not citizens during childhood.

• Both perspectives are legitimate and necessary. However, the emergence of the child-centered perspective, introduced new ideas and energy to the child well being concept.
The Fourth Shift - Incorporating children rights and beyond

• Although inspired and to some extent guided by the child rights movement, the new concept of well being goes beyond the concept of rights.

• Perhaps the most crucial difference is the standard used to measure children’s status. Children’s well-being is normally focused on what is desired, but rights monitoring addresses legally established minimums.

• Monitoring rights and monitoring well-being also share a focus on child-centered indicators, ones that can be measured at the level of the child.

• Such indicators draw attention to the actual situation of children.
When these changes were taken into account, efforts to study children’s well-being had to ask the following questions:

- What are children doing?
- What do children need?
- What do children have?
- What do children think and feel?
- To whom or what are children connected and related?
- What do children contribute?

Answering such questions demanded a better picture of children as human beings in their present life including the positive aspects of it.

To better answer such questions, the field had to focus on children’s daily lives, which is something that children know the most about.
The Sixth Shift - changing geographical focus

- Recent years have shown a growing interest in focusing on communities and neighborhoods as the context of children’s well-being, and the need to focus policies and programs in these areas.

- There has been an accompanying increase of interest in the level at which data on children’s well-being should be collected, and in the necessity for such data in planning, policymaking, and evaluation.
But why did it happen?

I would argue that this change in context is the consequence of two major sources:

- new normative and theoretical advancements.
- changes in the technical and methodological ability to study children’s well-being.

I will now turn to discuss these sources of change.
“New” Normative and Theoretical Approaches

- Theories and normative approaches to children welfare abound. Many have contributed to the changing context and many more continue to do so.

- Yet, I single out three such approaches that influenced the changing child welfare context, these include:
  - the ecological theories of child development;
  - the normative concept of children’s rights; and
  - the new sociology of childhood as a stage in and of itself.
New Methodological and Technical developments

- Just as new theories contributed to the new context of children's well being, I would argue that three methodological perspectives have done the same:
  - the call for using the child as the unit of observation;
  - the emerging importance of subjective perspectives; and
  - the expanded use of administrative data and the growing variety of data sources.
So what can we learn from children?

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Background

• *Children’s Worlds* is a world-wide research survey on children’s subjective well-being and daily activities.

• The purpose is to improve children's well-being by creating awareness among children, their parents and their communities, but also among opinion leaders, decision makers, professionals and the general public.

• The study aims to collect solid and representative data on children’s lives and daily activities, their time use, and in particular on their own perception of their well-being.

• By determining the degree of children’s well-being in as many countries as possible, we hope to raise awareness to children’s well-being and their life situations and to influence government policies and services.
Extended Pilot 2011-2012

- ~ 35,000 children
- Ages 8, 10 & 12
- 14 countries.
- Goal was 1,000 kids per age group per country
- Convenience sample
- Included countries with less children
- Not all countries had the 3 age groups
## Extended pilot 2011-2012: Non-representative samples. # of participants

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<td>16903</td>
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Full Survey 2013-2104

• 54,000 children. ~ 18,000 per age group
• 15 countries from different continents, varied cultures, diverse religions, distinct development and different types of welfare states.
• A representative sample of the entire country or federal region.
  – Federal region: Algeria (El Bayedh, Tlemcen and Oran), Colombia (Antioquia), Germany (Thuringia, Hesse, Baden-Wurttemberg and North Rhine-Westphalia) Poland (Wielkopolska), South Africa (Western Cape), Spain (Catalonia), Turkey (Istanbul).
Full Survey 2013-2104

• Sample was based on mainstream schools, and therefore did not include special education schools and etc.

• Sampling strategy varied from country to country, subject to the characteristics of each.

• To ensure the quality of the sample each sample plan, prepared by the local teams, was reviewed and approved in advance by a 'sample committee' comprised of four experts.
Data collection in Nepal
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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<th>10 Y.O</th>
<th>12 Y.O</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>17598</td>
<td>17762</td>
<td>18691</td>
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</table>
Data collection in Ethiopia
What did we ask?

- Questions about frequency of activities
- Satisfaction scales of life in large and specific domains or factors
- Agreement scales with status and events.
- Socio-demographic characteristics
How did we ask it?

• Three versions of the questionnaire were created, one for each age group.
• Questionnaires differ in length; the questionnaire for age 12 is the longest while the questionnaire for age 8 is the shortest.
• Three types of scales – agreement, satisfaction, and frequency – were used to measure each of the aspects of children’s lives.
• In the 8-years-old version, a scale of emoticons was used for the satisfaction items and these items were phrased in term of happiness (‘How happy you feel with...’).
How did we ask it?

• *Frequency*: of activities in last week, month and year

• *Agreement scales*: five-point unipolar agreement scale was used. Children could also choose to answer 'Don't know' which was then coded as missing data.

• *Satisfaction scales*: 11-point scale, with 0 denoting ‘not at all satisfied’ and 10 ‘totally satisfied’.

• Response scale for the satisfaction items in the 8 year-olds questionnaire consisted of five emoticons (from a sad face to a happy face), for the data coding the scale was converted to a 0-4 scale.
Which topics did we cover?

- You – age, gender, place of living
- Your home and the people you live with
- Money and things you have
- Your friends and other people
- The area where you live
- School
- How you use your time
- More about you
- How you feel about yourself
- Your life and your future

In addition, several well-known SWB psychometric scales are used in the questionnaire, both context-free and domain-specific
Some initial thoughts

• Almost 90,000 kids ages 8, 10 & 12 from 21 countries, various religions, cultures and languages were comfortable with 95% of the questions we asked.

• The only problematic domain was family formation. For example you can not ask an Arab child if his mother lives with a boy friend...
Data collection in Nepal
Overall subjective well-being

• The survey included 29 questions about children’s satisfaction with different aspects of their life
• A question about satisfaction with life as a whole (0-10)
• Six questions about positive affect in the last two weeks (0-10)
• Short version of Huebner’s Student Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS) (5 items, 0-10)
• Cummins and Lau’s Personal Well-Being Index-School Children (PWI-SC) (7 items, 0-10)
• Huebner’s Brief Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS) (5 items, 0-10)
• All multi-item scales have been converted to 0 to 100 for comparison purposes
How satisfied are you with...

Area where you live  Average of satisfaction items

South Korea  South Africa  Germany  Ethiopia  Algeria  Nepal  Poland  England  Estonia  Turkey  Spain  Israel  Colombia  Romania  Norway
12 year-old

How satisfied are you with...

School experience
Average of satisfaction items

South Korea
Nepal
Germany
Ethiopia
Estonia
South Africa
Poland
England
Spain
Algeria
Turkey
Israel
Norway
Colombia
Romania
Life as a whole
Comparison with the average of the total sample
Your home and the people you live with
12 year-olds

I feel safe at home

- Not agree
- Agree a little
- Agree somewhat
- Agree a lot
- Totally agree

Country: Ethiopia, South Korea, Nepal, South Africa, Germany, Romania, Spain, Algeria, England, Colombia, Turkey, Estonia, Norway, Poland, Israel, Algeria, England, Colombia, Turkey, Estonia, Norway, Poland, Israel, Ethiopia

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
My parents listen to me and take what I say into account

12 year-olds

South Korea
Ethiopia
South Africa
Nepal
Turkey
Germany
Estonia
Romania
Spain
Poland
Norway
Colombia
Algeria
Israel
Not agree
Agree a little
Agree somewhat
Agree a lot
Totally agree

12 year-olds
How satisfied are you with...

- The house or flat where you live
- The people who live with you
- All the other people in your family
- Your family life

Countries: Romania, Algeria, Turkey, Colombia, Israel, Norway, Estonia, Poland, Spain, England, South Africa, Nepal, Germany, South Korea, Ethiopia.
Money and things you have
How satisfied are you with all the things you have?

<table>
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<td>7.2</td>
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</table>
How often worry about how much money family has

12 year-old

Nepal

Colombia

Spain

Ethiopia

Estonia

Romania

South Africa

South Korea

Poland

Germany

Turkey

Norway

Algeria

Israel

Never

Sometimes

Often

Always
Your friends and other people
My friends are usually nice to me

- Norway
- Spain
- Turkey
- Israel
- England
- Germany
- Romania
- Algeria
- Ethiopia
- Poland
- South Africa
- Estonia
- Nepal
- Colombia
- South Korea

Year-old

Not agree Agree a little Agree somewhat Agree a lot Totally agree
How satisfied are you with...

- Your friends
- The people who live in your area
- Your relationships with people in general

Countries: Romania, Norway, Turkey, Israel, Algeria, Spain, England, Poland, Colombia, Estonia, Germany, Ethiopia, South Africa, South Korea, Nepal
The area you live in
I feel safe when I walk around in the area I live in

12 year-old

South Korea
South Africa
Turkey
Ethiopia
England
Nepal
Germany
Algeria
Estonia
Colombia
Romania
Spain
Poland
Israel
Norway

Not agree | Agree a little | Agree somewhat | Agree a lot | Totally agree
How satisfied are you with...

- The local police in your area
- The outdoor areas children can use in your area
- The area where you live, in general

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</table>
School
12 year-old

I feel safe at school

- Not agree
- Agree a little
- Agree somewhat
- Agree a lot
- Totally agree

Countries:
- Norway
- Turkey
- Algeria
- Israel
- Colombia
- South Africa
- Nepal
- Romania
- Poland
- Spain
- England
- Ethiopia
- Estonia
- Germany
- South Korea

Percentage distribution across countries.
How often hit by other children in school

12 year-old

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Once</th>
<th>2 to 3 times</th>
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<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How often left out by other children in your class

- Never
- Once
- 2 to 3 times
- More than 3 times

12 year-old

South Korea

Israel

Germany

Algeria

Spain

Ethiopia

Poland

Turkey

Norway

Estonia

Romania

Colombia

South Africa

Nepal

England
Your activities and satisfaction
Taking care of family members

- Rarely or never
- Less than once a week
- Once or twice a week
- Everyday or almost everyday

Countries:
- Algeria
- South Africa
- Nepal
- Spain
- Estonia
- Ethiopia
- England
- Romania
- Israel
- Colombia
- Poland
- Norway
- South Korea
- Turkey
- Germany

Legend:
- 0% to 10%
- 10% to 20%
- 20% to 30%
- 30% to 40%
- 40% to 50%
- 50% to 60%
- 60% to 70%
- 70% to 80%
- 80% to 90%
- 90% to 100%
12 year-old

How satisfied are you with...

- Your health
- The way that you look
- Your self-confidence

Graph showing satisfaction levels for different countries.
10 and 12 years old

- Questionnaires were very similar
- Responses were similar
- The age phenomenon in regard to children's subjective well being is worth noticing
- When children grow up they are less satisfied with life - on all scales!
Is it about age?

Student Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS)

10 years old

12 years old

Romania
Turkey
Spain
Colombia
Norway
Israel
Poland
Germany
England
Estonia
South Africa
Nepal
South Korea
Ethiopia
8 year-old

- The version for children aged 8 was shorter
- Satisfaction items were phrased in term of happiness (‘How happy you feel with...’)
- A scale of emoticons was used for the these items
I feel safe at home

8 year-old

- Nepal
- Ethiopia
- South Korea
- Algeria
- England
- Germany
- Turkey
- South Africa
- Israel
- Colombia
- Norway
- Romania
- Spain

Not agree | Agree a little | Agree somewhat | Agree a lot | Totally agree
---|---|---|---|---
Poland
Estonia
Spain
Romania
Norway
Colombia
Israel
South Africa
Turkey
Germany
England
Algeria
South Korea
Ethiopia
Nepal

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
8 year-old

My parents treat me fairly

- Not agree
- Agree a little
- Agree somewhat
- Agree a lot
- Totally agree

Countries and their responses:
- Poland
- Romania
- Colombia
- Spain
- Norway
- Israel
- Algeria
- South Africa
- Estonia
- England
- Ethiopia
- Germany
- South Korea
- Turkey
- Nepal
How happy you feel with...

- The house or flat where you live
- The people who live with you
- All the other people in your family

Countries: Turkey, Romania, Poland, Spain, Norway, Colombia, Estonia, Germany, South Korea, Algeria, Israel, England, South Africa, Nepal, Ethiopia.
I have enough friends
I like going to school

8 year-old

- Not agree
- Agree a little
- Agree somewhat
- Agree a lot
- Totally agree

Countries:
- Algeria
- Ethiopia
- Colombia
- Romania
- South Africa
- Turkey
- Spain
- Norway
- Estonia
- Poland
- Israel
- Nepal
- South Korea
- England
- Germany

Percentage distribution across countries.
I feel safe at school

8 year-old

Nepal
Ethiopia
Germany
South Korea
Israel
Estonia
England
Turkey
South Africa
Romania
Spain
Norway
Poland
Colombia
Algeria
So what does it all means?

- Children know how to reliably describe their life.
- Their perspective is different than ours.
- Children know what they need.
- We as social workers are obliged to promote their well being
- In order to do it we need more data and we need to talk with children
What do we need to do?

• If children’s well being is our goal – we need to discover what promotes or harms it.
• Our data set enabled us to explore the variance in children’s well being and what is associated with it.
• Finding were surprising
The characteristics of children’s well being

- The variance in children’s SWB is barely explained by socio-demographic variables.
- It is better explained by variables that measure children’s relations and perceptions.
- This is a new and growing area of research.
- Initial studies found three strong predictors of children’s SWB:
  - Bullying
  - Perception of safety
  - Respect for children and inclusion of their voice
The characteristics of children’s well being

• All three are well within the realm and goals of the social work profession
• To fulfill our mission as social workers we need to promote children’s well being.
• The children tell us that to do so we need to focus on ensuring their safety, reducing violence and fostering better family and social relations.
Thank you very much!

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