



The implications of social exclusion and low material resources on children's satisfaction with life domains: A study of 12 year-olds in 13 countries



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A B S T R A C T

This cross-national study tests how children who live under conditions of low material resources and social exclusion fare in their views of three life domains: Home and family, Friends and relationships and Self. Addressing the limitations of income measure, especially for children, the study uses two recently developed child-centered measures for child socioeconomic disadvantage (Gross-Manos, *in press*), in a sample of 12 year-olds ($N = 15,836$) from 13 diverse countries. Performing series of logistic regressions the study analyzed the odds of children identified by these measures as disadvantaged presenting lower satisfaction across the three life domains. The findings show that children who live with these extreme disadvantages, especially both, have much lower odds of being satisfied with these life domains, especially in the Self domain. Children who were identified as socially excluded showed lower odds of being satisfied in all three life domains, and in almost all of the countries, compared to those who live under low material resources, pointing to the importance of measuring children's social exclusion in a separate way. The findings are discussed, analyzing cross-national patterns that emerge, and some implications for social policy.

Child socioeconomic disadvantage is most commonly measured by household income, a measure that has many limitations, especially with respect to children. A recent cross-national study of 12 year-olds in 14 countries proposed two alternative measures of child socioeconomic disadvantage—Material Resources State (MRS) and Social Exclusion (Gross-Manos, *in press*), which are both child-centered measures. Material Resources State measures children's material situation using their objective and subjective evaluation, while the Social Exclusion measure is based mainly on children's assessment of the area in which they live and their school. The current study seeks to extend the use of these measures, in a similar sample, to identify what characterizes the lives of those children who have the most limited material resources and are most socially excluded in their societies. Doing this, the study addresses the limited cross-national knowledge we have on how children living under these kinds of disadvantages fare, not just in terms of general subjective or health well-being, but also in more specific domains in their lives, trying to more fully picture what they actually look like. We examine how the children in the lower deciles of these measures fare in three life domains of their well-being: Home and family, Friends and relationships, and Self (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, *in press*). As the last domain includes different important aspects in the context of children's lives (such as satisfaction with opportunities and time use) we further analyze all of its items. The study then extends the

literature by moving a step forward and examining the odds of satisfaction in these domains by whether the child's disadvantage is in having low material resources, being social excluded, or both. This analysis is undertaken both in the general sample of $> 15,000$ children, and within each country. Finally the findings are discussed referring to possible implications for social policy.

1. Literature review

The importance of studying the lives of children who are socio-economically disadvantaged is clear. Existing literature usually refers to “child poverty” and finds that it has major consequences for children's health, quality of life, and development (e.g., Bradshaw, 2002; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Evans & Kim, 2013; Oudin, Richter, Taj, Al-nahar, & Jakobsson, 2016; Wood, 2003).

Most of this literature has used household income as the primary measure. This kind of measure, while it does have the advantages of continuity and comparability, has many limitations (Gordon, 2006; Saunders & Naidoo, 2009) especially when children are the unit of observation (Adamson, Bradshaw, Hoelscher, & Richardson, 2007; Main & Bradshaw, 2012). Using a measure of income lacks comprehensiveness as it does not reflect other sources of household resources and may overlook the complex needs of families. Thus, it provides a too-

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narrow picture of people's lives that does not reflect disadvantaged circumstances in a broader sense than economic income. It is further limiting in studies of children, because it is unclear how income is distributed within the household (Main & Bradshaw, 2012; Qvortrup, 1997). Children are often unable to answer questions concerning parental income (Knies, 2011).

Thus, another limitation of the literature on children's socioeconomic disadvantage, in addition to the reliance on income measures, is that it tends to use other sources of information as proxies for the state of the child (Main & Bradshaw, 2012; Qvortrup, 1997). While only gradually being recognized as such, children are a minority group who for many years have been obscured by subsuming them under other categories. The “new” sociology of childhood suggests that childhood forms a unique social construction, and is not merely a preparatory phase for adulthood (Prout & James, 2005; Qvortrup, 1994; Qvortrup, 2002). Under this view it is claimed children should be studied as a group in its own right, serving as the unit of analysis. Accordingly, there is a need for alternative measures that evaluate children's socioeconomic disadvantage from their own point of view.

1.1. Alternative child centered measures for socioeconomic disadvantage

1.1.1. Material resources measurement

Over the past three decades the use of material resources measures has developed. Townsend (1979) pioneered a relative material deprivation index aimed at defining poverty using relative deprivation as reflecting social conditions. Townsend's measure was later refined by the socially perceived necessities indices (Mack & Lansley, 1985). However, material resources continues to be measured using a material resources index that includes common possessions that people are asked whether they possess and activities in which they engage. These measures are claimed to have the advantage of measuring economic disadvantage more directly, enabling analysis at the individual level instead of the household level (Main et al., in press). Such measures using children's reports are often used by EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (de Neubourg and UNICEF, 2012), and in OECD's PISA tests (OECD, 2013). The most common material resource index in the context of adolescence is the Family Affluence Scale (FAS). Developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), this index includes in its updated version six items that relate to family wealth. It currently asks about the number of computers and cars, own bedroom, holidays abroad, dishwasher, and bathroom (Torsheim et al., 2016).

Aside from measuring material resources using an index of income and activities, another common measure for material resources is a subjective measurement, which avoids value judgments (Kingdon & Knight, 2006). Subjective measurement by individuals of their ability to satisfy basic needs was developed to provide a description of the individual's ability to enjoy an “acceptable” life in order to address the limitations of measures solely based on income (Boarini & d'Ercole, 2006), and it is usually measured alongside these measures. The material resources measure used in this study, the Material Resources State (Gross-Manos, in press), combines both a material resources index list, with children's subjective evaluation. The advantage of the greater emphasis this measure has on children's subjective evaluations comes from the limited applicability a material resource index might have, especially in a sample of countries that differ substantially in their economic profiles (Main et al., in press). This kind of cross-national subjective measurement offers a better common denominator for comparison. Moreover, it allows an opportunity to include children's voices more explicitly (Prout & James, 2005; Qvortrup, 2002).

1.1.2. Social exclusion measurement

Social exclusion originally referred to society's most marginalized groups: those who lack basic rights and social protection (Evans,

Walraven, Parsons, van Veen, & Day, 2000). The meaning of the term has broadened over time, and today it more commonly relates to the process that denies people benefits and life quality enjoyed by the majority of society, affecting their place in the community (Lee, Murie, & Britain, 1999) and producing inequality (Levitas, 1998; Room, 1998). Furthermore, the framework of social exclusion brings together an emphasis on environmental and social contexts, focusing on one's position in relation to services and resources provided by local organizations and institutions (Lee et al., 1999; Room, 1998; Saunders, 2003).

Although social exclusion is a widely used term, in many cases its measurement was interwoven with poverty measurement (Abello et al., 2014; Levitas et al., 2007). However, some have suggested that social exclusion is a separate phenomenon from poverty and material deprivation, and it should be measured in a focused way (Gross-Manos, 2015; Saunders, Naidoo, & Griffiths, 2007). While attempts to measure social exclusion specifically are rare, it is even scarcer with regard to children and using their input (Micklewright, 2002; Ridge, 2002). In the current study we use a measure of social exclusion suggested by Gross-Manos (2015) using children's reports. The measure was found valid across 13 countries using a version that includes two dimensions: area and services, and school (Gross-Manos, in press).

1.2. Lives of children with limited material resources

When it comes to the effect of material resources deprivation on children's lives from their points of view, most of the literature focuses on the association with general measures of quality of life, subjective and health related. Material resources, as measured by Family Affluence Scale (FAS), was found to be negatively, even though weakly, associated with happiness and multiple health complaints in Scotland (Levin, Currie, & Muldoon, 2009). FAS was also associated with mental well-being, measured mostly by somatic elements, in Israeli adolescents (Walsh, Harel-Fisch, & Fogel-Grinvald, 2010), and Rajmil et al. (2013) showed that FAS is associated with health-related quality of life (measured by KIDSCREEN-10). FAS was further found to be associated with eudemonic and hedonic aspects of a well-being in adolescents from England and Scotland (Clarke et al., 2011), and with measure of life satisfaction in cross-national studies (Levin et al., 2010; Zambon et al., 2006).

Only few studies have referred to more specific and personal implications of material resources on children's lives. A qualitative study that asked children from the UK about the consequences of being deprived of certain material resources showed that children understood there is a relationship between their resources in the present and their future success, and that certain resources were seen as necessary in order to enjoy life and to develop good social relationships (Main & Pople, 2011). Also, in the UK, children who were found to be materially deprived by a social perceived necessities index were markedly less satisfied with their choices, home, future, appearance, family health, time use, self-esteem, and friends (The Children Society, 2012).

Reporting more specifically on the correlation of FAS to various aspects of quality of life (using KIDSCREEN – survey evaluating health related quality of life among European children and adolescents), a cross-national study conducted by Von Rueden, Gosch, Rajmil, Bisegger, and Ravens-Sieberer (2006) found low or medium FAS was associated with children's lower satisfaction from the parents' relationships and home life, and to adolescents' perceived lower quality of life in all dimensions, including psychological well-being, moods and emotions, peer and social support, parent relations and home life, self-perception, and autonomy. Similar findings were found for Greek adolescents with low FAS (Tzavara et al., 2012), except that the association of FAS and autonomy that was not significant.

To sum up, lower material resources was found to be associated with lower scores on general measures of children's well-being such as

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