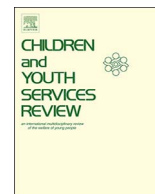




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## Contextualizing subjective well-being of children in different domains: Does higher safety provide higher subjective well-being for child citizens?

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### ABSTRACT

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children are born with civil, political, social and economic rights. However, children's ability to exercise their citizenship rights and practices depend on which country context they live in. Within the limits of this article we want to explore how children's subjective well-being is affected by the level of safety provided within the larger country context by using data collected by the consortium of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being. The question we elaborate is whether there is a relationship between the welfare context and subjective well-being of children with respect to different domains, and whether age and gender play a role. We first cluster welfare contexts with selected indicators from international reports among the selected countries of the Children's World Survey from high to low safety provided for children. Then, by referring to the existing literature, we propose six domains for analyzing children's subjective well-being: Health; Material conditions; Education; Risk and Safety; Relationships, and Self-perception. By analyzing each domain we ask whether there is a linear relation between the levels of safety welfare contexts and the subjective well-being of children in different domains and whether this hypothetical relationship exists after controlling for the age and gender of participants. According to our findings, high and medium welfare contexts provide higher subjective well-being in the domains of 'material' and 'risk and safety'. Girls have lower subjective well-being in the low safety welfare context compared to boys. We also find that in the domains of education and relationship, girls' subjective well-being is higher than boys in every safety welfare contexts. Last but not least we also find that the high safety welfare context has a lower average in the self-perception domain and also there is gender difference, girls compared to boys are less satisfied with themselves.

### 1. Introduction

Developments in the childhood literature recognize the importance of regarding "children as citizens" (Jans, 2004; Kjørholt, 2008; Lister, 2007, 2008) and criticize the common understanding of regarding children only as future citizens. All children are born with civil, political, social and economic rights (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child–CRC, 1989). However, children's ability to exercise their citizenship rights and practices evolves as they grow and learn, depending on which country context they live in. Membership,

participation, rights, responsibilities are all aspects of citizenship, thus within the limits of this article we want to explore how children's well-being is affected by the level of safety provided within the larger country context. The data collected by the consortium of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB)<sup>1</sup> showed that there are significant differences, as well as similarities, in the levels of subjective well-being of children between and within participating countries. These differences are visible in almost every domain of well-being. Some of these differences are attributed to demographic factors, such as age and gender. We therefore want to analyze whether variations

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<sup>1</sup> The International Survey of Children's Well-being (<http://www.childrensworlds.org>) provides important comparative data on children's perception of their well-being. See Rees and Main (2015) *Children's views on their lives and well-being in 15 countries: An initial report on the Children's Worlds survey, 2013–14*. York, UK: Children's Worlds Project (ISCWeB) and the special issue of *Child Indicators Research*, Volume 8, Issue 1, March 2015, Child subjective well-being: Early findings from the Children's Worlds project. We would like to thank Jacobs Foundation for supporting this comparative research.

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among the subjective well-being levels between the participating countries may be explained by state's policies towards children with respect to citizens' rights and practices. Previous studies about the relationship between the welfare state and subjective well-being give clues about how child well-being may differ across different welfare contexts (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Lapinski, Riemann, Shapiro, Stevens, & Jacobs, 1998; Patek & Radcliff, 2008; Radcliff, 2001). The question we elaborate within the limits of this article is whether there is a relation between the welfare context and subjective well-being of children with respect to different domains, and whether age and gender play a role.

The well-being of children is embedded in a socioeconomic context. We therefore ask the question, to what extent subjective well-being is affected by the welfare context they live in, especially with regard to direct and indirect policies that shape children's lives by providing high to low safety which we call as safety welfare contexts for children (SWC). Is there a relation between the welfare context and subjective well-being of children for different domains? In relation to this argument, we intend to analyze subjective well-being and objective well-being conditions (welfare provisions affecting children directly or indirectly) in relation to each other. The subjective well-being is depicted in the Children's Worlds Survey as the state of well-being where children evaluate their lives through self-reported well-being. However, children's perception of the different parts of their lives takes place in a particular context, in a web of relations, where socioeconomic security and safety in relation to welfare issues have an impact on their perception of subjective well-being and their evaluation of different domains of life. In this context, built on the multinational study on subjective well-being (Children's Worlds Survey), we aim to generate a discussion and put forward new questions regarding the relation of subjective well-being and objective conditions. In order to follow this line of argument, utilizing the comparative subjective well-being data that we depict from the study, we will look for the answers to the questions: Does the subjective well-being of children differ in different domains depending on the welfare context (welfare provisions affecting children directly or indirectly) of a country? To what extent do the social welfare provisions of health, education and social security with respect to expenditures, access and coverage have a positive and/or negative impact on the subjective well-being of children in a particular context? Finally, does this relation differ in each domain, based on age and gender?

In our analysis of the relationship between subjective well-being and the welfare context, we want to bring together the literature on child well-being, subjective well-being and welfare regimes. As the value of a well-being approach lies in its power to combine both subjective and objective well-being, we try to look at the participant country contexts and the subjective well-being stated by the children in order to understand how this link works. In the next section we will provide a review of these different literatures. Following that, we will elaborate on our clustering of welfare contexts (with selected indicators from international reports) among the selected countries of the Children's Worlds Survey. Then, by referring to the existing literature, we propose six domains for analyzing children's subjective well-being, and by analyzing each domain we ask whether there is a linear relation between the levels of safety welfare contexts and the subjective well-being of children in different domains and whether this hypothetical relationship exists after controlling for the age and gender of participants.

## 2. Safety welfare context for children's wellbeing: does higher safety provide higher subjective well-being?

The multinational study that deals with comparative subjective well-being is a product of a rich child well-being research that has developed in the last decade. Child well-being indicators have been used widely in recent years to understand the quality of life of children

in different settings (Axford, 2008; Ben-Arieh, 2009; Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2009; Ben-Arieh et al., 2001; Bradshaw, Hoelscher, & Richardson, 2006b; Hauser, Brown, & Prosser, 1997; OECD, 2009; Richardson, Hoelscher, & Bradshaw, 2008; Uyan-Semerci et al., 2012). The theoretical and normative developments in the area of childhood have played an important role in the development of child well-being indicators (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2009).

The extensive and comparative use of the national statistics of countries has led to comparative studies in the research communities. At the same time, the child's subjectivity became an important phenomenon in this process. Taking children as active agents constructing their well-being (Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2007; Uyan-Semerci & Erdogan, 2016) has influenced the research process. In this framework, the shifts in the field of study of child well-being are from child welfare to child well-being; from negative aspects to positive aspects of well-being; from well-becoming to well-being; from traditional indicators to new child-centred domains; and from adults to children (Ben-Arieh, 2010).

The study that we will build our analyses upon is a pioneering work in providing comparative data on the subjective of the well-being of children, and includes 15 countries. In this multinational study, the focus of the empirical research was on *subjective well-being*, where children are encouraged to evaluate their lives through a self-reported process. The approach of the study in relation to an understanding of subjective well-being was that it incorporated evaluations of children's lives as a whole as well as asked children to report on particular domains of their lives (e.g. family life, school experience etc.).

### 2.1. Subjective well-being and welfare

There has been a growing interest in the field of subjective well-being over the last few decades. There is now significant research that has focused on the subjective well-being of adults in relation to economic development, welfare regimes, democratic cultures, etc. (Diener & Tay, 2015; Lapinski et al., 1998; Patek & Radcliff, 2008; Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009). Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi argue that subjective well-being relates to life satisfaction and happiness reported by individuals and objective well-being relates to socioeconomic conditions, access to health and education, other welfare conditions should be dealt together in order to understand how individuals are doing in a particular socioeconomic context (2009, p. 15). While economic development is important for well-being, there are other issues, like the level of conflict in a society, that have an impact on subjective well-being. The nations with higher conflicts score lower subjective well-being (Diener & Tay, 2015). In another study that employs Esping-Andersen's welfare state typologies (1990), the relation of unemployment and subjective well-being was compared among the regimes. The study suggests that unemployed do better in social democratic countries where welfare state policies are more developed in tackling the needs of the unemployed (Lapinski et al., 1998). Other empirical research demonstrates that welfare state generosity has a major impact on the happiness and life satisfaction of individuals (Patek & Radcliff, 2008).

There is an ongoing discussion in the literature as to whether we should utilize welfare or well-being as concepts to understand the life conditions of individuals. Some researchers argue that well-being should take the place of welfare as a focus of concern for social policy (Wood & Newton, 2005). Wood and Newton even go further in their analysis, arguing that the concept of well-being regimes should replace welfare regimes. However, do we need to replace the concepts to provide robust analysis? What is the interrelation of these concepts? Taylor (2011) refers to the interdependence of well-being and welfare. He argues that well-being has thick and thin dimensions. The thick dimension addresses the interpersonal relations, whereas the thin dimension refers to social relations in a wider context of welfare. He argues that the welfare provisions provide a context (composed of wider social relationships) for the well-being of the thin dimension:

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