

# **A Child's Sense of Well-being: Developing Well-being Indicators from a Child Standpoint**

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- **Overview of child well-being indicators**
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# Approaches to measuring children's well-being

- **Objective approaches** adopt material indicators to measure the social conditions of populations.
- **Subjective approaches** rely on an individual's assessments of their quality of life.
- Most monitoring frameworks combine both. For example OECD 2017:
  - *Objective indicators*- child income poverty, living in a home without basic facilities, infant mortality rates, PISA reading scores and homicide rates
  - *Subjective measures*- self-reports on health status, quality of relationships and overall life satisfaction
- Frameworks have mainly focused on child development outcomes in which knowledge is sought *about* children's well-being. Emphasises deficits and problematic behaviours.

# Children's Understandings of Well-being study

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Based on children's perspectives of what they consider important to their well-being and their experiences of well-being.

## **Investigators:**

Tobia Fattore, Jan Mason, Elizabeth Watson

## **Research participants:**

- 126 children, aged 8-15 participated in up to 3 stages
- Rural- Urban dimensions
- Stratification across aggregate income levels

## **Stages**

- Stage 1: Explore children's ideas about meanings and experiences of well-being in everyday life.
- Stage 2: In-depth explorations of themes raised in Stage 1.
- Stage 3: 'Well-being Projects'.

# Indicators from a child standpoint:

## Some examples

Domain / Theme	Indicator Concept
<b>Agency</b>	
<i>Agency as self-determination</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have the opportunity to engage in decision-making about day-to-day interactions in which the child is involved.</li> <li>• Children have opportunities to influence, organize, coordinate and control aspects of their everyday life.</li> <li>• Children have opportunities to express opinions in public discussion and in formal decision-making.</li> </ul>
<i>Agency as making a difference within relational contexts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extent to which significant adult–child relationships, are characterised by respectful engagement, which provide a basis for negotiating everyday decisions.</li> <li>• Opportunities are available for children to exercise individual capabilities as relevant to everyday contexts.</li> <li>• Children have opportunities to develop individual capabilities in everyday contexts, as an expression of becoming competent.</li> </ul>

# Indicators from a child standpoint:

## Some examples

Domain / Theme	Indicator Concept
<b>Security and Safety</b>	
<i>Ontological Security</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children have opportunities to access physical environments that facilitate freedom and enjoyment.</li><li>• Degree to which local environments are experienced by children with a fear-free disposition and sense of inclusion.</li></ul>
<i>Safety at Home</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Degree to which care relationships are safe.</li><li>• Degree to which the physical features of the home facilitate a sense of safety.</li><li>• Children have personal spaces within the home that foster a sense of security.</li></ul>
<i>Safe Public Spaces</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Degree to which public environments facilitate opportunities for children's autonomous exploration.</li><li>• Children have the opportunities deal with risks as encountered in everyday situations, in a supported manner.</li></ul>

# Indicators from a child standpoint: Some examples

Domain / Theme	Indicator Concept
<b>Self and Identity</b>	
<i>Moral Self</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have opportunities to develop their capabilities as moral agents.</li> <li>• Degree to which children are supported in the moral dilemmas they encounter.</li> </ul>
<i>Families as sites of dialogue, affective solidarity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Degree to which families are experienced as a site of trust and intimacy.</li> <li>• Degree to which children engage in 'other-oriented activities' in the family that are associated with a sense of belonging.</li> </ul>
<i>Friends, mutual acceptance and belonging</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have some close friendships in which they experience a sense of intimacy and closeness, in which they can trust to share their inner thoughts and feelings.</li> <li>• Children have some friendships in which they experience a sense of belonging and in which they can gain validation of their sense of self.</li> </ul>

# Some features of children's well-being

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## i) Children's understandings of well-being differ from popular, scientific and policy discourses

- *Children's agency*: formal participation v practices of agency in everyday life.
- For example:
  - Having the opportunity to engage in decision-making about day-to-day interactions important to the child.
  - Children have opportunities to influence, organize, coordinate and control aspects of their everyday life.
  - Children have opportunities to express opinions in public discussion and in formal decision-making.



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## **i) Children's understandings of well-being differ from prevailing popular, scientific and policy discourses**

- *Children's safety*: child protection and risk aversion v ontological insecurity, trust, negotiated engagement with risk and structural inconsiderateness towards children.
- For example:
  - Children experience a sense of ontological security, based on trust in and dependence upon those tasked with their care.
  - Opportunities to access physical environments that facilitate a sense of freedom and enjoyment.
  - Local environments are experienced by children with a fear-free disposition and sense of inclusion.

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## **i) Children's understandings of well-being differ from prevailing popular, scientific and policy discourses**

- *Children's sense of self: developmental milestones* v processes of identity-construction that centre on the self as moral, purposeful and authentic.
- For example:
  - Opportunities to develop their capabilities as moral agents.
  - Children are supported in the moral dilemmas they encounter.
  - Families are experienced as a site of trust and intimacy in which children feel their self-identity is given recognition.
  - Families provide a site in which negotiations around children's changes in self-identity can occur in a fear-free manner.

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## ii) Well-being as social and relational

- Importance of emotions for well-being. Consistent with hedonic well-being (e.g. fun, pleasurable activities, health).
- However, also emphasis on an interweaving of complex emotions – such as joy with frustration or sadness with happiness.
- These emotions act as a reaffirmation and expression of the importance of close social ties.
  - Extent to which significant adult–child relationships, are characterised by respectful engagement.
  - Children have opportunities to develop individual capabilities in everyday contexts, as an expression of becoming competent.
  - Children have opportunities to negotiate with their carers the boundaries of ‘safety’.
  - Children have the opportunities to deal with risks encountered in everyday situations, in a supported manner.

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## iii) Well-being and well-becoming

Children distinguished between:

- Practices that enable them to experience well-being in the present (well-being)
- Practices that contribute to well-being in the future (well-becoming)
- Practices associated with children's own aspirations, imaginings and definitions of their future.

Tension between these three concepts. For example *moral self*, premised on the development of capabilities and the *authentic self*, which relates to children developing a sense of themselves as being a unique and worthy individual.

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## **Children's understandings differ from current discourses**

- Current policy and service frameworks do not adequately reflect children's understandings and experiences of well-being.
- Potential to reframe policy guidelines, service frameworks and outcome measures to include children's understandings of well-being.

## **Well-being as social and relational**

- Importance of developing and maintaining significant relationships.
- Relationship-centred practice, where relationships are characterized by experiences of trust, respect and inclusiveness.

## **Well-being and well-becoming**

- Service frameworks should be mindful of how children experience the provision of the service and how service delivery factors impact on children's quality of life in the day-to-day.
- Include the significance of children's own aspirations and sense of purpose for their well-being.

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**Thank you!**

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