

Measuring well-being, some problems and possibilities

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UNICEF report (2007)

- Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries. A comprehensive assessment of the lives and well-being of children and adolescents in the economically advanced nations
- 6 dimensions of well-being: material well-being; health and safety; education; peer and family relationships; behaviours and risks; and young people's subjective sense of well-being.
- 40 sets of indicators relating to children's lives and children's rights
- UK finds itself 'in the bottom third of the rankings for five of the six dimensions reviewed'

1. What is well-being?

- WHO 1946: health as a 'state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'.
- Linked to public health and health promotion
- But no clear definition – increasingly used, detached from health, in New Labour policy documents. Pervasive.
- Happiness/positive emotions. Interdisciplinarity. A problem for economists?
- Individualised. responses (therapeutic) → medicalisation of individual children's problems (Coppock, Ecclestone)
- Is it a way of not talking about 'welfare' & responsibilities of states?

Some problems

- Developmentally-based assumptions
- Culturally loaded
- Choice of indicators appears selective
- Linguistic matters

Relationships

- Proportion of children in lone/step families
- Eating main meal with parent(s) (Finland)
- Time parent(s) spend 'talking to you'
- 'Kind and helpful' friends?
- Example:

- "The report presents a sad picture of relationships with friends, which are so important to children"
- Not much more than 40% of the UK's 11, 13 and 15-year-olds find their peers "kind and helpful", which is the worst score of all the developed countries" (Guardian 14 Feb 2007).
- Classmate support: Most of the *pupils in my class(es)* are *kind and helpful*/ Agree a lot/agree a bit/neither agree or disagree/disagree a bit/disagree a lot (WHO HBSC questionnaire)

3. UN CRC and rights-talk

- Selective reading of UN CRC - focus on provision rights
- 'takes note of the child's right to be heard and to this end incorporates a dimension that is based solely on children's own subjective sense of their own well-being [sic]' (p40)
- Ennew: the right to be properly researched.
- Article 17: and the Oslo Challenge (1999)

- Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child (UN CRC Art 17 (a))
- To work ethically and professionally to sound media practices and to develop and promote media codes of ethics in order to avoid sensationalism, stereotyping (including by gender) or undervaluing of children and their rights (Oslo Challenge, MAGIC 1999)

Discussion

- Is the comparison (competition) between countries helpful?
- Can we compare welfare states with neo-liberal societies re: children?
- Adult preoccupations vs. children's experiences/well-being
- Can it be done as cross-cultural comparative level?

Conclusions

- Media reports – impact on children.
- Children's well-being rarely discussed in context of adults' well-being,
- Or in understandings of structural, political and economic constraints on children's lives.

Suggestions

- Care needed in defining 'well-being'
- Caution in reporting research relating to children
- Involving children in defining well-being could enhance research
- Combine approaches – surveys and in-depth research
- Greater understanding needed of UN CRC