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How’s Life for Children?

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Main messages

• A significant number of children live in poverty and in workless households in many OECD countries…
• …and that risk of poverty has increased during the Great Recession
• Children’s experiences are also extremely diverse between genders, but across ages and socio-economic background patterns exist:
  • Health risks are substantially higher among adolescents
  • Older children’s relationships with schoolmates / parents more difficult
  • Life satisfaction and self-reported health fall as children age.
  • Children from poorer families experience lower well-being than children from richer families in almost all dimensions
• Countries with better child well-being have better adult well-being
• Data limitations, conceptual coverage and quality, remain a concern
Broad context: the OECD Better Life Initiative

- Launched in 2011 as a response to the global movement “Beyond GDP”

- Adding new and better measures; developing statistical capability and comparability
  - Key audiences: National statistical offices and policy-makers (plus interactive Better Life Index website for a wider audience)
  - Embedding broader “alternative” indicators of societies’ progress into the mainstream statistical system
The OECD well-being framework

A focus on **people** rather than the economic system or GDP

Measures **outcomes** rather than inputs and outputs

Examines both **averages** and **inequalities**

Considers both **objective** and **subjective** aspects

Concerned with well-being both **today** and **tomorrow**

Why child well-being matters

- Childhood is a unique period of human development, and a critical phase for preparing future societies to be prosperous and sustainable.

- Wealth of literature links well-being to education, and adult outcomes
  - Future of our societies

- Children’s rights matter

- Youth and radicalization
  - Education, aspirations, opportunities
Overlapping frameworks of well-being

How’s Life
- Jobs and earnings
- Work-life balance
- Social connections
- Civic engagement
- Personal security
- Subjective well-being

Doing Better for Children
- Income and wealth
- Housing conditions
- Health status
- Education and skills
- Environmental quality
- Risk behaviour
- Quality of school life
Organizing dimensions, selecting indicators

• 10 dimensions of child well-being in two groups:
  • the well-being conditions of families where children live
  • the well-being conditions specific to children that focus on the individual level

• Indicators selection as with How’s Life?:
  • face validity; focus on summary outcomes; be amenable to change and sensitive to policy interventions; be commonly used and accepted in the relevant literature; ensure comparability across countries and maximum country coverage; and be collected through a recurrent instrument

• Two more from Doing Better for Children methodology:
  • Ideally cover all children from birth to age 17 inclusive at a minimum
  • whenever possible, the child should be the unit of analysis (child-centred approach)
Results by Country: traffic lights

How’s life for children in Sweden?

- Over half of indicators in the top third!
- Strong on indicators for the conditions of families
- PISA results and civic participation are low performing areas...
- But… no country does well across the board!
Some examples: income, health and education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well-being conditions of families where children live</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income and Wealth</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Disposable income of households with children*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child income poverty*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jobs and earnings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children in workless households</td>
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<td>Children with a long-term unemployed parent</td>
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<th>Well-being conditions specific to children</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Health status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Infant mortality*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low birth weight*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-reported health status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight and obesity*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolescent suicide rates</td>
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<td>Teenage birth rates</td>
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<th><strong>Education and skills</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>PISA mean reading score**</td>
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<tr>
<td>PISA creative problem solving score**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth neither in employment nor in education or training*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational deprivation*</td>
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Income: child poverty remains high

Findings on distributions:

- By gender, difficult to determine at the household level, but girls in most countries are less likely to be educationally deprived

- Joblessness more common in single parent households

- Parents with young children have less space, and more difficulty accessing the labour market

Note: The latest available year is 2012 for Australia, Hungary, Mexico and the Netherlands; 2010 for Belgium and 2009 for Japan.

Source: OECD Income Distribution Database, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/459aa7f1-en

Percentage of children aged 0-17 living in households whose disposable income is below 50% of the median
Health: Fewer teenage births

Findings on distributions

- Girls report lower levels of perceived health, but boys are more often overweight, and at a higher risk of suicide.

- Greater FAS often means higher perceived health, lower rates of obesity.

- Poor health reporting increases with age, and reported life satisfaction falls. Older children are less likely to be obese or overweight.

Education: Literate problem-solvers

Findings on distributions

- Yet girls tend to have advantages in reading, and boys in problem solving. Girls more often NEET

- High SES, higher literacy. Low SES is associated with greater educational deprivation, disliking school. Family structure may play an indirect role…

- School children find peers less kind as the age, but reported bullying also falls

Note: Error bars represent the 95% confidence interval of the national estimate.

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Average computer problem-solving scores of 15 year-olds, 2012
Correlation between child well-being and ‘overall’ well-being
Statistical developments

• Key developments include:
  • Inclusion of additional indicators and dimensions
  • Links to a matching adult framework
  • Breakdowns by gender, social gradient, and age where possible

• Systematic testing for non-response
  • Adjustment, and checks for deviation from original estimates
For some children non-response is influenced by their abilities

Less able students are not completing important information in PISA

Source: OECD calculations, OECD PISA (various waves)
Estimates are not affected, but ranks can change.
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• But…
  • Outcomes not linked to policy responses
  • No appreciation of complementarity or tradeoffs

• And statistical challenges remain for future work…
Some conceptual / coverage concerns

- Lack of purpose built cross-national surveys
  - Children's World? MYWEB?
- Adolescent focus
- Not all data can be disaggregated
- Absence of information about duration and persistence
- Longitudinal surveys?
- Systematic exclusion of children from surveys
- Non-response on key items, selected responses (Revelin?)
- Changes to surveys over time
Some children are systematically excluded

Special educational needs
No country year-on-year differences deviate substantially from the best fit line
Future OECD Better Life follow-up

• We’re considering update child well-being indicators every 2 or 3 years in collaboration with ELS

• We may carry out in-depth analysis of the following:
  - Relationship between parental time (quality and quantity)/education and various child well-being outcomes
  - Relationship between child emotional and social development and academic skills
  - Life-time impacts of child well-being
Thanks!

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