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CHILDREN'S SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING IN LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

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Children's Subjective Well-Being in Local and International Perspectives.

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Dear readers,

Estonia acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. This brought the obligation to regularly review the situation of children in the country. The first publication *Children in Estonia* on the well-being of children was published in 2000, dedicated to the 55th anniversary of the United Nations. It was the first time that both the objective and subjective well-being of children were discussed. Chapters on marriages and structures of households, children's health, education, poverty, etc., gave an overview of objective well-being based on official statistics. Subjective well-being topics focused, however, on the data collected from children by cross-sectional studies, such as alcohol and drug consumption of children and youth, dangers in sexual behaviour, and awareness of children's rights.

Eight years later, in 2008, Statistics Estonia published *Lapsed. Children*. The publication gave an overview of objective well-being topics involving children and youth, such as births, education, and safety. In 2013, came the publication *Laste heaolu. Child Well-Being*, which drew on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as the normative framework for child well-being. During the publication process, it became ever clearer that it is necessary to develop child well-being indicators and continuously monitor children's well-being. At the time, a group of experts were working on the concept of measuring child well-being and published *Lapse heaolu mõõtmise käsitlus* [Approach to measuring child well-being], which offered child well-being indicators for official statistics.

Six years have passed since the last publication and it is once again time to look at how children are doing. This time, the authors have focused on children's subjective well-being, on data collected from children, and their international comparison, while there are also topics focusing on just Estonian children.

The development of child well-being indicators has become very important across the world, which is why four authors from outside Estonia were invited to contribute to the publication. These authors are key figures of the International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI) and in their articles they discuss the development of child well-being indicators from a broader perspective, including the international comparison of data on children, the need for the collection of qualitative data besides quantitative data, and the importance of conducting longitudinal studies in addition to cross-sectional studies.

The publication includes four articles from Estonian authors. The analyses are based on small qualitative studies, official statistics, datasets of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being as well as new data from the study of children's rights and parenting in Estonia. The aim of the publication is, on the one hand, to show the complexity of understanding children's subjective well-being and, on the other hand, the need to include indicators based on data collected from children in official statistics. Assessments and considerations based on children's own experiences make a major contribution to understanding the situation of children, sending messages to policy-makers for improving children's situation as well as fulfilling the obligations arising from the convention.

Thank you to all who contributed to this publication!

Enjoy the read!

Dagmar Kutsar and Kadri Raid

Editors

ARE ALL CHILDREN VERY HAPPY? AN INTRODUCTION TO CHILDREN'S SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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The history of children's subjective well-being (SWB) studies started from the social indicators movement in social sciences with the adoption of the concept of *quality of life.* While SWB research was focused only on adults for decades, the birth of the child indicators movement was grounded on new epistemological and methodological approaches. Advances in the children's SWB studies in the last decades include increased use of representative samples, improvement of measurement instruments and international comparability, identification of groups or clusters of children significantly below the national SWB mean scores, developments in qualitative and longitudinal data collection, and the use of child indicators to improve childhood policies.

Introduction

During the emergence of the social indicators movement in the 1960s, social sciences minted the concept *quality of life* and defended that its evaluation requires the articulation of objective and subjective indicators (Land & Michalos, 2017). In the debates at the heart of this movement, the objectivity of scientific positivism was argued. Collecting only objective data offers a highly biased view of social reality and has very serious negative political consequences. It may happen that objective and subjective data on the same phenomenon are inconsistent. For some years, the discussion was focused on the question of who is wrong. However, the debates led to the conclusion that a different answer is possible: perhaps nobody is wrong! Perhaps different observers (i.e., social agents, stakeholders) have a different perspective on the same phenomenon. Social phenomena are complex: social reality includes discrepancies and disagreements between observers. For example, experts evaluating a hospital using objective indicators conclude that the hospital is functioning very well. But when surveying user's evaluations, it becomes evident that the users are mostly dissatisfied because they consider that they have not been treated well, properly informed, and so on, and therefore, the next time they need treatment they will look for another hospital. "Who is right?" becomes a question of no scientific interest and of no practical relevance. The important question is why different social agents evaluate the same phenomenon in a completely different way. For a mayor of a municipality who gets the survey results on citizens' satisfaction with the city and discovers that they are mostly unhappy, it is irrelevant whether the citizens are objectively wrong. If we ignore discrepancies (i.e., experts are always right and citizens are always wrong), the analysis of social phenomena becomes seriously biased. Almost a hundred years ago, Thomas and Thomas (1929: 572) formulated their famous theorem: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."

The word *statistics* comes from Old Latin *ratio status* = reason of state = the national interest. Social indicators are statistics to support decision-making. They were already used in Old Egypt (Bauer, 1966; Casas, 1989). Subjective social indicators started to be incorporated into modern national statistical systems in the mid-20th century. Their use and number have been slowly growing as their scientific, social and political relevance has become obvious. Even more recently, information on people's happiness has been incorporated into a few national statistical systems.

In February 2008, the President of the French Republic, Nicholas Sarkozy, because of his dissatisfaction with the available statistical information on the economy and society, created the *Commission sur la mesure des performances économiques et du progrès social* (Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress). It is worth pointing out that Recommendation 10 of this Commission stated that, "Measures of both objective and subjective

well-being provide key information about people's quality of life. Statistical offices should incorporate questions to capture people's life evaluations, hedonic experiences and priorities" (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009: 16). Sarkozy ordered the collection of this kind of data by its national statistical institute in 2010, and only one year later, Cameron did the same in the United Kingdom.

Since 2012, different international organizations have also been involved in collecting subjective well-being (SWB) data as social indicators. The WHO Regional Office for Europe published three reports on the topic only that year (WHO Regional Office for Europe 2012a, b, c). In the third publication, experts reported that the following areas of agreement had been reached:

- Well-being is multidimensional.
- General well-being includes objective and subjective elements.
- Health contributes to well-being and well-being contributes to health.
- Well-being can be seen as a concept and entity in itself (with health as both a determinant and an outcome), and as a composite of various elements (e.g., health, relationships, etc.)
- For setting specific targets, the WHO Regional Office for Europe should describe well-being using both its objective and subjective elements.
- The Regional Office for Europe needs to consider reporting subjective well-being, and countries should begin to collect such information.

The office also proposed a definition of well-being for use by WHO: "Well-being exists in two dimensions, subjective and objective. It comprises an individual's experiences as well as a comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values" (WHO Regional Office for Europe 2012c: 1).

The OECD acknowledged the need to develop social indicator systems at the beginning of the 1980s. They did not want to fall behind in the new international debates and also published several reports on well-being (OECD Statistics Directorate, 2012; OECD, 2017), including its own guidelines to evaluate SWB (OECD, 2013). The OECD also started collecting data on children's SWB with the PISA test[1]. However, the first to study children's subjective well-being was the WHO by means of the survey Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC).[2] Later came the international research project titled International Survey of Children's Well-Being (also shortened as ISCWeB and Children's Worlds[3]), organized by the International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI). The results of this survey are discussed in this publication.

It is also of interest that since 2012 (with the exception of 2014) the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network has supported the annual publication of *World Happiness Report*. These reports have made outstanding contributions to the international debates as pioneers in analyzing (adults') data from more than 150 countries in all continents.

In these reports, the concept *quality of life* attributed importance to people's experience of their own lives and life conditions – and gave equal or more value to these experiences and to people's aspirations than to material or objective living conditions, as defined by experts (Casas, 1996). Social indicators were first associated with program evaluation, because they allow getting a baseline of the indicators that are sensitive to change, in order to check positive changes after the action or intervention program is implemented. *Positive social change* is a new concept that is offered to substitute the old ambiguous *development* and is intended to include what people think is positive for them. Program evaluation implies previous definition of goals for positive change.

There is no doubt that after centuries of cumulating knowledge, social sciences know a lot about things going wrong (disease, infirmity, social and mental problems, maltreatment, etc.). However, we must humbly recognize that studying positive phenomena and positive social dynamics (i.e.,

[1] www.oecd.org/pisa/
[2] www.hbsc.org
[3] www.isciweb.org

health, quality of life, SWB) is still a young field of scientific research and there is still much to learn – even if we have made a lot of effort to increase scientific knowledge of positive phenomena in recent years. Much more is known about objective indicators than about subjective indicators.

Our present understanding of subjective well-being (SWB): What about children?

We have accumulated a lot of knowledge about SWB during the last decades from research on adults, but we are still not sure whether most of the findings can also be applied to children and adolescent populations (Ben-Arieh, Casas, Frønes, & Korbin, 2014; Casas, 2016a). Probably the biggest challenge of studying quality of life is still collecting data and analyzing its psychosocial (i.e., subjective) components. Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976) proposed defining such components as "perceptions, evaluations and aspirations of people in relation to their own lives". Many authors at present define such components as subjective well-being (SWB). It is likely that the most shared theoretical agreement on SWB at present is the tripartite theory: SWB is the result of articulating high positive affect, low negative affect and high positive evaluations of own life (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Arthaud-Day, Rode, Mooney, & Near, 2005; Metler & Busseri, 2017).

Bradburn's (1969; Bradburn & Caplovitz, 1965) studies were among the first contributions that tried to clarify the complex functioning of SWB in humans: they pointed out that positive affect does not always inversely correlate with negative affect. In other words, humans can feel at the same time happy and unhappy with some aspects of their lives. More recently, the core affect theory by Russell (2003) enriched the debate by suggesting that there was tension not only between positive and negative affect, but also between active and passive affect.

Researchers have invested still much more time to get evidence-based results useful to understand how positive evaluations on SWB happen, i.e., how the cognitive components of SWB work. A large share of all efforts has been devoted to research on global life satisfaction. Nowadays we know, for example, that in general, except in some of the poorest countries of the world, SWB displays a so-called optimistic bias. When we analyze the answers to questions on happiness, life satisfaction or SWB, we observe that at population level, the mean scores are not 5 on a 10-point scale, but rather between 7 and 8. In other words, the distribution of data is statistically non-normal and the Gauss bell is flattened on the right side, which brings statistical complications for the data analysis. Optimistic bias seems to be even higher among children than among adults.

Another well-supported evidence from research is that SWB seems to function under the homeostatic principle: we tend to revert to our baseline after some time whenever any positive or negative event has an impact on our lives (i.e., we win the lottery or have a serious traffic accident). Only exceptionally, in the face of highly stressful life events, our homeostatic system may become unable to compensate for the situation, and as a consequence, we may fall into mental health problems, particularly depression. Additionally, a cultural homeostasis has also been observed: our happiness and life satisfaction may offer stable but different answering styles depending on the socio-cultural environment we live in (Cummins, 2010). Whether homeostatic theory tenets apply to children is a pending major test of their validity (Cummins, 2014).

Finally, different kinds of psychometric instruments to measure SWB are available – some better capturing the affective dimensions and some others the cognitive dimensions of SWB. Two most frequently used types of cognitive measures are easily identifiable: *context-free* scales, using rather general items (e.g., "How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?"), and *domain-based* scales, asking about the satisfaction with different aspects or domains of one's life (e.g., "How satisfied are you with your friends?"). There is repeated evidence that the two kinds of scales usually display moderate to high correlation, but they do not measure the same, because they seem to be sensitive in different ways to diverse environmental characteristics, offering slightly different results depending on the context of data collection. In recent years, various scales have been adapted to children and adolescents, validated, and their comparability has been analyzed, which means that important advances are made in this field (Casas, 2017).

New epistemological and methodological approaches: The child indicators movement

There was almost no investigation on SWB of children populations until the end of the last century, when according to some authors the child indicators movement was born due to a change of mentality among international researchers in relation to children's and adolescents' lives. Ben-Arieh (2008; Ben-Arieh, Casas, Frønes & Korbin, 2014) summarizes these changes in the confluence of the following new dynamics: data collection moves from survival and basic needs statistics to also include statistics on development and well-being; from negative to positive constructs; incorporating children's rights data and beyond, in order to include data on development and aspirations; from focusing only on *well-becoming* (children's future) to focusing on *well-being* (children at present, as present citizens); and from adults' perspective to collecting data from the perspective of the child (see the article by Ben-Arieh in this publication).

The new mentality makes new discussion topics emerge in the international arena.

- Could (subjective) information given by children and adolescents have any relevance at a macrosocial level?
- Are subjective data from children and adolescents valid and reliable?
- Should we systematically collect certain self-reported information from children and adolescents to understand better the social changes involving them?
- Could data collected from children and adolescents be useful for political decision-making?
- Which subjective indicators based on data provided by children and adolescents would be of most interest?

A careful analysis of these questions and the subsequent debates shows that the questions are the same that 40 years earlier, at the beginning of the social indicators movement, were raised about the collection of subjective indicators from adults. Substituting *children and adolescents* in each of these questions by *adults*, takes us back to the debates of the 1960s. We needed 40 years to think about the same topics in relation to children populations. (Casas, 2011)

The mentality change brought about consensus in the international arena. Granting children rights is one thing, providing them with an environment in which they can attain their highest potential is quite another thing. Children require an atmosphere where they feel good about their lives, can follow their own predispositions and are prompted to bring out the best in them. One of the most important factors in assessing whether a particular environment is conducive to children attaining their best potential is the perception of their own subjective sense of well-being. This is best done by asking children directly and by allowing them to give an assessment of their well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2008).

Only recently in the history of social sciences, we started to collect children's and adolescents' self-reported data to be analyzed from macrosocial perspectives. There is long tradition (in psychology, pedagogy, pediatrics, etc.) of collecting data from children; however, a feeling of social and political relevance of such data has often been missing in most societies. Additionally, when children and adolescents have been asked for their own perceptions and evaluations, very often the data have not been as expected (Casas, 2011). Sometimes there have been doubts about the reliability of data, at other times, there have been doubts about the reliability of informants – the only evidence being that researchers did not have previous experience asking them.

New research on children and adolescents involves a change in the researchers' attitudes, based on new epistemological considerations.

- Children and adolescents are key informants and also experts on their own lives.
- As a group of social agents, children may agree or disagree with adults on their perceptions and evaluations of their shared living environment. The key question,

once again, is not “Who is right?”, but “Why two social agents disagree on their perceptions of the same social phenomena?”

- In order to learn about the quality of children’s lives, we have asked them about their subjective well-being (SWB) and we have given credibility to their answers.

Using representative samples

Subjective indicators are usually obtained from survey-based data collection, and surveys require representative sampling. Data obtained from representative samples of children have traditionally been rather scarce and available in very few countries. Why are children so often ignored by large-scale, general population surveys? According to Scott (1997), there are at least four distinct causes:

- the inertia of practice;
- the tendency to accredit adults with greater knowledge, experience, and power;
- interviewing children viewed as too problematic to be worth the possible pay-off;
- ignorance or perhaps half-truth: children are commonly believed to lack the communication, cognitive and social skills that are the prerequisite of good respondents.

When it comes to children’s SWB, for many years the only source of data at international level has been the survey Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC). In fact, most data analysis and lead tables included in publications of international organizations on children’s SWB (for example, UNICEF’s Report Cards) are based on that database. The SWB indicator included in the HBSC is a single-item scale – the Cantril’s Ladder (Cantril, 1965). It has been pointed out that using only one single-item scale for comparative purposes is a too weak solution. Multiple-item scales are much more robust measures.

Instruments measuring children’s subjective well-being (SWB) and its international comparability

In the second wave of the Children’s Worlds project, the following items were included in the questionnaire in order to analyze children’s SWB, with all its scales modified to 0–10 scores in order to make them more sensitive and capture more variance (Rees & Main, 2015):

- 29 items on satisfaction with different domains and aspects of own life;
- a single-item scale on overall life satisfaction (OLS);
- a single-item scale on happiness with overall life (HOL);
- 6 items on affect (3 positive and 3 negative affects; 2 previous weeks);
- a short modified version (5 items) of the context-free Student’s Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS) (Huebner, 1991);
- a modified version (7 items) of the domain-based Personal Well-Being Index – School Children (PWI-SC) (Cummins & Lau, 2005);
- a modified version (5 items) of the domain-based Brief Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS) (Seligson, Huebner, & Valois, 2003).

Thanks to the data provided by this international research project, it became possible to test reliability, validity and comparability of the multi-item psychometric scales for all involved countries using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by means of structural equation modelling (SEM) (Casas, 2017). CFA is used to assess the construct validity of a measurement model (i.e., a psychometric scale). SEM is a multivariate technique that seeks to explain the relationship between multiple variables (even unobservable or “latent”), including the measurement errors in the model. It takes

advantage of psychometric and econometric knowledge, and its foundation lies in factor analysis and multiple regression analysis.

When using the same model with different groups (i.e., samples from different countries), it is necessary to examine the degree to which the models are equivalent across groups (i.e., comparability). In order to compare meaningfully the statistics across groups (i.e., the mean of a latent variable), measurement invariance is required. Three steps are required to check for measurement invariance: (a) *configural invariance* (unconstrained variables); (b) *metric invariance* (constrained factor loadings); (c) *scalar invariance* (constrained loadings and intercepts). Metric invariance allows meaningful comparison of correlations and regressions. Scalar invariance allows meaningful comparison of the latent means.

With the 8-year-olds group, we used five emoticons instead of 0–10 scales. Emoticons are categorical variables of an ordinal scale. However, in some occasions, categorical variables in psychometric scales are treated by psychometricians as continuous variables, because it has been shown that results of the analysis are very similar. This frequently happens in traditional statistical techniques (i.e., ANOVA, MANOVA) as well as in SEM analysis. AMOS program allows analyzing whether results of a categorical variable are very different from results of a continuous variable through Bayesian estimation (Arbuckle, 2010; Byrne, 2010).

No item of our scales shows a normal distribution. Values present positive asymmetric skewness and positive kurtosis and, therefore, high multivariate kurtosis. For that reason, bootstrap corrections are used.

Children significantly below the national SWB mean scores

The answer to the question “Are all children very happy?” is clearly negative: although, in general, most children are very happy (their evaluations display an optimistic bias), and their mean scores are higher than for adult population, NOT ALL children are very happy. We need to identify categories or clusters of children with significantly lower SWB scores than normative mean scores for the overall population. There are different goals for doing so. First, to improve life satisfaction of those that are doing the worst is a political and social responsibility and challenge. Second, it is a good strategy to reduce inequalities, which is one of the challenges of international organizations at present. Third, it is known that it is almost impossible to improve SWB of people who are already very happy; however, we have empirical evidence that it is much more realistic to improve SWB of the most unhappy (Cummins, 2010; 2014).

As pointed earlier, different psychometric scales may offer slightly different results in countries, despite the fact that they display moderate or high correlation among them. In Spain, in order to avoid the problem of the sensitivity of each scale to different contexts, we decided to construct a composite index based on the mean scores of the summed up values of the SWB measures used. Using the composite index, we could identify subgroups of children displaying significantly higher or lower values than the mean of the overall population. Some of the identified groups were expected, but others were not. For example, among those with significantly lower levels of SWB are children that (Casas, Bello, González & Aligué, 2013):

- are in care in the public child protection system;
- do not receive pocket money;
- have parents who did not finish primary education;
- report that at home no adult is in paid employment;
- do not have access to ICT (information and communication technology);
- perceive their family as less or much less wealthy than other families;
- do not feel safe;
- feel that they cannot participate in decisions made at home;
- have lived with different parents or carers during the last year.

The next challenge is to identify the subgroups of children in each country whose SWB compared to other children is much lower.

Using qualitative data on children's SWB

In order to better understand children's answers, particularly the unexpected ones, research cannot be grounded only on quantitative answers to questionnaire items. We also need qualitative information, children's explanations of studied phenomena, which means that multi-method approaches are required.

However, the main challenge is to accept children as active agents in research projects. Children can be advisers to their researchers and can help to better design a questionnaire or even a whole research project (Casas, González et al., 2013). Children can be extremely helpful in explaining their answers by means of, for example, focus groups. More children should participate in multi-method international projects to make progress in improving children's lives. Accepting children as advisers and active agents in research investigating children's well-being has also the deep meaning of recognizing the rights of children to social participation as established in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the documents of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (Davey, 2010).

In Spain, qualitative data collection was developed in order to analyze how 10–15-year-old adolescents define their own perceptions of well-being and the factors influencing it at their age. Ten focus groups were organized, two from every age group. One group of every age included the students with the lowest, and the other one, with the highest scores in SWB according to their answers to previously administered psychometric scales. The views of the participating adolescents were explored using content analysis (González-Carrasco et al., 2018).

In general, children mention both positive and negative elements in the definition of what well-being is. According to children, well-being has to do with both affect and attitudes. Relations with family and friends are key factors for well-being. Differences in the information provided display variations according to age and scores in SWB in some cases. Children scoring lower in SWB tend to refer more to relationships with friends and to basic needs covered, while these scoring higher tend to refer more to family relationships and to report not having problems (González-Carrasco et al., 2015; Navarro et al., 2017). Results can contribute to both social policy design and appraisal, as long as they provide an in-depth understanding of how SWB works at these ages.

Using longitudinal data on children's SWB

Longitudinal studies involve repeated measures of the same individuals over a period of time. Longitudinal data about children's or adolescents' SWB evolution is rather scarce. A one-year follow-up study was conducted on a sample of 940 Spanish adolescents aged mostly 10–15, in order to explore the extent to which their SWB changes year to year, and whether these changes are the same for both genders regardless of the instrument used. Participants responded to the same four SWB instruments (psychometric scales) twice, with an interval of a year in between. A decrease in the levels of SWB was identified from ages 11–12 onwards, the decrease in girls being more marked. Multiple-item, domain-based scales (Brief Multidimensional Student's Life Satisfaction Scale and Personal Well-Being Index) are more sensitive than single-item scales (Overall Life Satisfaction and Happiness Taking into Account Overall Life) in detecting this decrease (González-Carrasco et al., 2017a).

Using the same sample, another study was developed, in which participants were classified according to the changes they had experienced in their SWB, measured by means of two single-item scales: overall life satisfaction (OLS) and happiness with overall life (HOL). A range of multinomial logistic regression models were employed to determine which factors lead to such differences. Results showed that when OLS is considered, the factor contributing most to an increase in SWB is family self-concept, while the one contributing most to its decrease is

(dis)satisfaction with the family. When HOL was taken as the dependent variable, the most important factor in predicting an increase in SWB was "being valued in the future according to the amount of money I have", with life optimism being the most important factor in predicting its decrease. Only three indicators (the importance of being valued in the future according to the amount of money I have, feeling happy at home and satisfaction with myself) contributed to explaining both boys' and girls' models when OLS was used as the dependent variable, while only one indicator (satisfaction with standard of living) was shared in both boys' and girls' models when HOL was the dependent variable (González-Carrasco et al., 2017b).

The evolution of positive and negative affect and its relationship with cognitive measures of SWB were the subject of another study, based on a five-year longitudinal data collection involving 1,696 children aged 10–18 in Catalonia (Casas, González-Carrasco, Boulahrouz, & Crous, 2018). The results showed that the mean scores for positive affect and all SWB indicators decreased with age, while an asymmetrical increasing-with-age trend for negative affect occurred. Mean scores for positive and negative affect and all SWB indicators tended to moderately predict next year's scores, being weaker with more years in between. Relationships among affect and SWB cognitive indicators, including mediation effects, varied over a 5-year period. While some variables had a stable effect on each other, others had increasing, decreasing or fluctuating effects.

From data analysis to policy implementation

What really matters is not only measuring. Firstly, the key question "How to improve children's subjective well-being?" needs to be answered. What to measure can only be decided once there are answers to this question. Do we want to improve the SWB of ALL children? Or perhaps, more realistically, do we prefer to start by improving the SWB of children with the lowest SWB? After developing action to improve well-being, how can we be sure our action was successful? Evidence-based program evaluation is needed.

In recent years, some researchers have pointed out that Western research has been very focused on some of the children's social problems, while some subgroups of children have been left behind or even forgotten from well-being research. For example, there is evidence that children in care, particularly in residential care, have significantly lower SWB than the mean population in many countries, but very little research has been conducted on their SWB (Llosada-Gistau, Montserrat, & Casas, 2014). This is also the case, for example, with children of migrant parents and children involved in bullying.

What really matters for children's well-being provides a scientific, political and social challenge. These three dimensions need to be approached and articulated. From the scientific perspective, children's subjective well-being is a very young field of research, and we must recognize that we still know too little about its characteristics and determinants, particularly in a cross-cultural perspective. Few resources are devoted to research in this field, because up to now it has not been a political or social priority. We need more science-based proposals of the most relevant subjective indicators of child well-being in order to prioritize their data collection.

From a political perspective, childhood policies are not a priority in many societies: politicians have much more "important" questions to face, and budgets to invest on children are usually planned for their *well-becoming*, not for their *well-being* (Ben-Arieh et al., 2001) – children may be important as future citizens, but usually not as citizens in the present. How can we push politicians to invest more on our children for their present well-being? That may depend a lot on how important children are for civil society in public life and for the overall adult population. In societies where children belong only to private life (i.e., to the family), public childhood policies are usually very irrelevant. Only the public opinion that the whole society must invest a relevant part of public budgets (i.e., of their taxes) for the well-being of the youngest generation will pressure politicians to implement plans consistent with the idea that children matter for the whole society (Casas, 2016b).

Because SWB of children and adolescents is such a recent research topic and in many countries there is as yet lack of information drawn from representative samples, human and social sciences

face a number of major theoretical and empirical challenges. A very important one is giving an appropriate theoretical explanation to the cumulative evidence that in many countries SWB seems to be continuously decreasing throughout adolescence, particularly between 12 and 16 years of age (Holte et al., 2014). In Western countries and in South Korea, part of this decrease seems to be related to the decrease in satisfaction with one's body and self-image (particularly among girls), school related aspects (particularly among boys), and the area children live in. If such results are confirmed by future research, important political challenges appear on the horizon.

Final reflections

To better understand the determinants of children's and adolescents' SWB, and therefore, for better decision-making and action in order to improve the well-being of the younger population, or of subgroups of them, longitudinal studies are needed. To get that kind of data is a major challenge and should be a scientific priority, which requires adequate funding. In order to stimulate more international scientific debates focused on children's well-being, availability of databases including data from as many countries as possible is a key topic.

If we are able to reach agreement on what matters for children's well-being in the society, including for SWB as children themselves understand it, it will be much easier to prioritize what to measure. However, we face a vicious circle: if we do not start measuring, debates about which are the best measures will be too narrow because of our lack of scientific tradition with these kinds of measures (Casas, 2016b). We need empirical evidence on children's points of view from as many countries as possible to enable a broad international debate. And for that purpose we need young people to be involved in our research, to be considered active social agents who have the capacity to advise and improve research and actions to improve our societies.

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THE WELL-BEING OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN: LESSONS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL SURVEY OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

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The article starts with examining the basis for the changing concept of children's well-being, discusses the importance of children's own perceptions, and moves on to present a unique challenge to study children's well-being across the globe. Furthermore, it presents the potential of such studies and looks in depth into the issue of children's subjective well-being and its variance across religions and cultures. The article ends with prospects for the future.

The changing concept of children's well-being

The concept of children's well-being is changing. Scholars have termed this a transition from *child welfare* to *child well-being* (Kamerman, Phipps, & Ben-Arieh, 2009). The changes are evident in a number of specific shifts (Ben-Arieh, Casas, Frønes, & Korbin, 2014). In article 1 of this publication, Casas elaborates on these changes and developments. Here, it should be re-emphasized that the new concept of children's well-being clearly calls for children's involvement in any study of their life and activities. However, studies of children's well-being have seldom included children's participation, particularly in comparison with similar research on adults' well-being (Huebner, 2004). Indeed, researchers are only starting to listen to children, discover their opinions and evaluations and recognize that the children's points of view may be different from those of adults. They are coming to an understanding that it is no longer clear who is right, adults or children, and that perhaps the question of rightness is not the right one. If the concept of children's well-being goes beyond survival, includes the positive and negative aspects of their life and considers them as citizens at the time being, then including children and their own perspectives in research on their well-being is an obligation. Indeed, incorporating children's subjective perceptions is both a prerequisite and a consequence of the changing field of measuring and monitoring child well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2005).

Children's well-being and its implications for research

The "new" sociology of childhood calls for looking on childhood as a social phenomenon and as a stage in itself (Christensen & Prout, 2005; Qvortrup, 1991). Similarly to the gender movement, it calls for an understanding that children around the world share a common feature of being children regardless of the differences in religion, nationality, ethnicity, socio-economic status and more.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for respecting children and their rights and accepting them as human beings already in their childhood, regardless of any differences between them or between them and adults. The *quality of life* perspective calls for studying children's subjective well-being (SWB) among all children and, by nature of the concept, from the children's perspective.

Finally, numerous studies have shown that children's perspectives constantly differ from those of adults at large as well as from their caregivers' and even their parents'. All of the above are summarized here into a call to study children's well-being across religions, nationalities, socio-economic statuses, gender and cultures. The article further calls to study it from the perspective of children and in a way that respects them and acknowledges their status as full citizens.

The International Survey of Children's Well-Being

The International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB) – Children's Worlds is a global effort to study children's well-being in as many countries as possible among children of ages 8, 10 and 12, utilizing children's own perceptions and focusing on their life at the present and in the past.

This ambitious research project aims beyond the effort to enrich our knowledge about children's well-being. Its goals are to include children's voices in the research and policy discourses, to enable better policies and services for children based on deeper knowledge of children's lives, and accepting children as a social group, which cuts across various other sociological boundaries.

ISCWeB history

In 1996, a group of researchers met in Jerusalem to discuss how to better measure and monitor children's well-being (Ben-Arieh & Wintersberger, 1997). This meeting developed into a multinational project called "Measuring and Monitoring Children's Well-Being – Beyond Survival" (Ben-Arieh et al., 2001). This project later led to the establishment of the International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI).

In 2009, a group of researchers, mainly from the ISCI, held a meeting hosted by UNICEF to plan the first-ever International Survey of Children's Well-Being. The outcome of this meeting was a pilot survey that was tested and piloted in the summer and autumn of 2010 in the following countries: Brazil, England, Germany, Honduras, Israel, and Spain. In late 2010 and 2011, the researchers discussed and analyzed the pilot and designed a new and better survey. The improved survey and questionnaires were used in 14 countries as a large-scale deep pilot (Wave 1, 2010–2011). About 34,500 children from the following countries participated in the survey's first wave: Algeria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, England, Israel, Nepal, Romania, Rwanda, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Uganda, and the USA.

Based on the experience and results of the first wave and with the support of the Jacobs Foundation, the next phase of the study (Wave 2, 2013–2014) was launched. It included a large-scale survey among a representative sample of at least 1,000 children in each age group (8, 10 and 12) in 18 countries (Algeria, Argentina, Colombia, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Israel, Italy, Malta, Nepal, Norway, Poland, Romania, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, and Turkey).

In 2017, the third wave (Wave 3, 2017–2019) began, this time with almost 40 participating countries from all over the world[1]. It includes again a representative sample of at least 1,000 children in each age group (8, 10 and 12) in each country. The Children's Worlds survey is the most wide-ranging and diverse study ever conducted internationally on children's lives from their own perspectives.

ISCWeB method (Wave 2, 2013–2014)

Three versions of the questionnaire were created (one for each age group). They covered the following key aspects of children's lives: basic characteristics (age, gender, country of birth); living situation, home and family relationships; money and economic circumstances; friends and other relationships; local area; school; time use; self; overall subjective well-being; and children's rights. The questionnaires for the age groups 10 and 12 also covered recent changes in children's lives and qualities aspired to in the future.

The question items fell into four basic types.

- Fact-based items (e.g., age, gender, household possessions).
- Agreement items. These consisted of statements (e.g., "I feel safe at home"). In most cases, children were asked to respond on a 5-point scale labelled "I do not agree", "Agree a little", "Agree somewhat", "Agree a lot", "Totally agree". There was also a "Don't know" option. Some of the agreement items in the questionnaires for 10- and 12-year-olds used an 11-point (0 to 10) scale with the end points labelled "Not at all agree" and "Totally agree".

[1] For a full list of countries see: http://isciweb.org/?CategoryID=175.

- Frequency items. These mostly consisted of questions about various aspects of time use, but also included experiences of bullying and worries about the family's economic situation. These items were all on a 5-point scale with descriptions of frequencies relevant to the topic (e.g., "Rarely or never", "Less than once a week", "Once or twice a week", "Every day or almost every day").
- Satisfaction items. These consisted of questions about satisfaction with various aspects of life and with life as a whole (including some known psychometric scales). In the questionnaires for 10- and 12-year-olds, these items all used an 11-point (0 to 10) response scale with the end points labelled as "Not at all satisfied" and "Totally satisfied". The length of the questionnaires (total number of items to answer) had been determined through the pilot process and, as a result, contained fewer items for younger age groups. In total, there were 112 items in the questionnaire for 12-year-olds, 104 items for 10-year-olds, and 73 items in the questionnaire for 8-year-olds.

Translating the questionnaires was a major challenge. To ensure that the various translated versions of the questionnaire were compatible, each country started with the standard English version of the questionnaires. These were translated into the relevant languages and then translated back into English. Each back-translated English version was compared with the original English version in order to highlight any discrepancies.

The representativeness of the sample was yet another major challenge. For practical reasons, it was decided to run the survey through schools. This evidently excluded children not attending school (i.e., special education, home-schooled, and minority children). Even so, considering the age range covered by the survey, there is compulsory education and high school attendance in all participating countries. Therefore, a school-based sampling method included the majority of children from each age group in each country.

Finally, for practical (resource-based) reasons, the sample only included a part of the country in seven countries: Algeria, Colombia, South Africa, Spain, Poland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

So what did we learn?

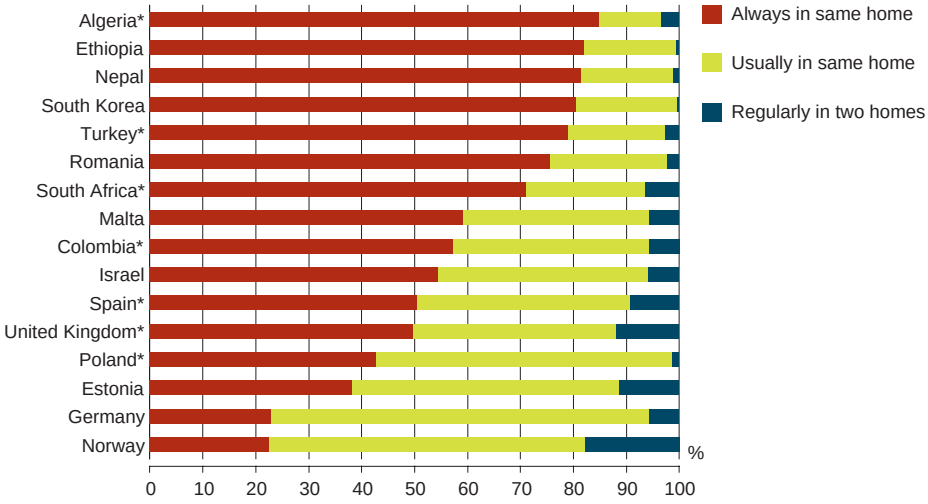
Discussing all the findings from a survey with more than 100 items and administered among ca 60,000 children in 18 countries is beyond the scope of this article. Hence, only a small fraction of the findings of Wave 2 data collection (2013–2014) are presented here.[2] The data are divided into two blocks. First, descriptive data on children's context of living and socio-economic situation are presented. Then, the concept of children's subjective well-being (SWB) and its variance across cultures and religions is explored.

Children's household composition and economic situation

Figure 1 shows the basic living arrangements of children in different countries of the world. Especially in Western countries, the composition of the households where children live is becoming a major focus of public attention. Research is abundant about the significance of living arrangements for children's well-being, especially in regard to social policies and services. The Children's Worlds findings are based on asking children in how many homes they live, which highlights major differences between countries. The data clearly show that while the two-home phenomenon (children commute between the homes of their separated or divorced parents) is relatively common in Central and Northern Europe, it almost does not exist in other parts of the world where separation and divorce of parents are not common.

[2] For the full report of the survey's second wave see www.isciweb.org.

Figure 1. Living arrangements of children by country, 2013–2014

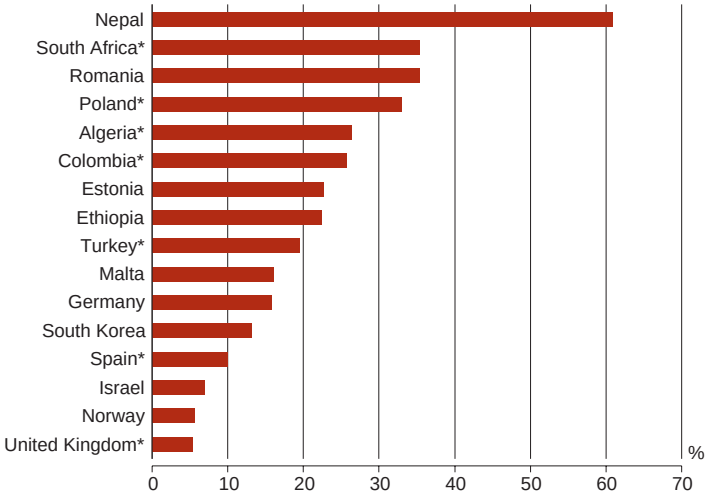


* Regional representative sample

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

The context of children's lives is supplemented by Figures 2 and 3, showing the composition of households in regard to three-generation households and living with siblings. Once again, it is evident that children live in different types of families in different countries, which in turn needs to lead to different policies and services. Such differences are more commonly used in policies in regard to living with siblings but are rather scarce in regard to multiple-generation families. Yet, the findings show that the percentage of children living in multi-generational families is above 25% in six countries and below 10% in only three.

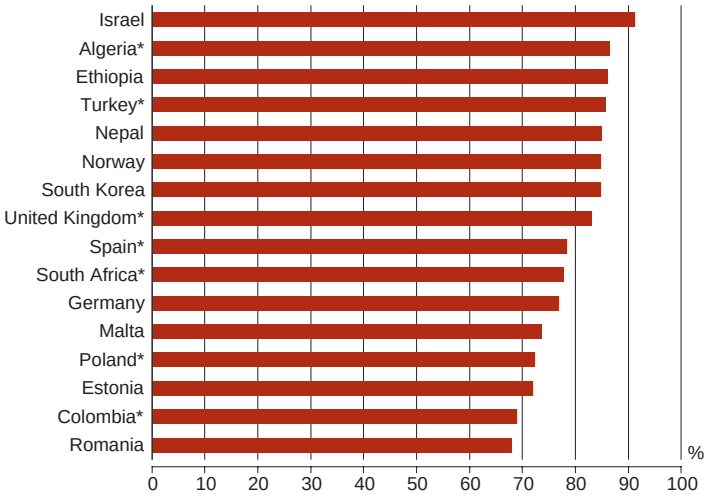
Figure 2. Children living with grandparent(s) by country, 2013–2014



* Regional representative sample

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Figure 3. Children living with sibling(s) by country, 2013–2014



* Regional representative sample

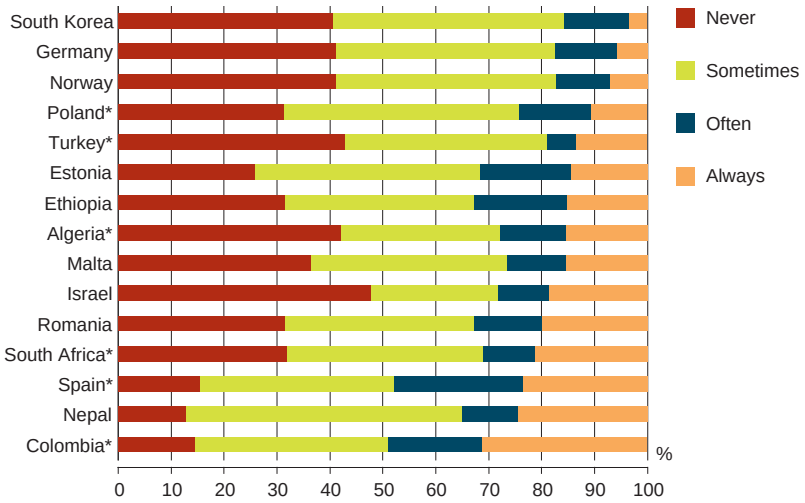
Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Both diagrams are descriptive and show differences in the composition of households where children live in different countries. Yet, one must realize the importance of this picture and its relevance for social policies around the globe. Dominant notions in family and children policies are unmarried couples or two-household families due to divorce where children split their time between the two parents and their homes. This notion has gained support from a number of "international" studies focused on OECD or European and North-American countries. ISCWeB as an international study that includes a number of developing and Asian and African countries shows a different picture. In most of the world, the "regular" nuclear family, in which there is a mother and father, is the most prevalent, and "new" families, such as formed by divorce or remarrying, or two unmarried cohabiting adults, or two adults who are not both the mother and the father, almost do not exist.

Child poverty

Ample data collected on child poverty and socio-economic situation are based on adults' perceptions and economic measures, accompanied by the belief that children do not necessarily understand their family's economic situation. The Children's Worlds study clearly shows that children have a view on the economic status of their family and are worried about it at different levels across countries. This is a first-of-its-kind empirical and quantitative support to other studies showing that children care and are involved in their family's economic situation. Especially striking is the large proportion of children who are worried about money in some countries and the fact that many of these countries are indeed in the midst of an economic crisis, especially unemployment (e.g., Spain), which supports the notion that children's views are reliable (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Children's answers to the question "How often do you worry about how much money your family has?" by country, 2013–2014



* Regional representative sample

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Satisfaction with life and subjective well-being

The scientific analysis of subjective well-being (SWB) comprises how people evaluate their own lives. These evaluations include people's emotional reactions to events, their moods, the judgments they form about their fulfilment, overall life satisfaction and in specific domains of their lives (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). In other words, when looking at children's SWB, this means measuring how children evaluate their lives as a whole and with regard to particular aspects of life. Studies of personal well-being show that SWB does not show a normal Gaussian distribution. Rather, most people tend to respond above the neutral point, owing to an optimistic bias in personal well-being (Casas, 2011; Kutsar, Raid, & Soo, 2018). Similarly to those findings, most children and adolescents view their overall lives positively (Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Kutsar, Raid, & Soo 2018). While a homeostatic characterization of children's SWB was evident in different studies, so did considerable variance in children's SWB.

Yet, individual socio-demographic factors tend to explain very little of the variance in children's SWB (Casas, 2011; Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2016). Further, while there is extensive literature on international comparisons of adults' SWB, there has been relatively little discussion about cultural differences in children's SWB (Casas & Rees, 2015). Partly, this is because of the lack of data and large-scale surveys. In fact, most studies of children's SWB have taken place in specific countries or a single country (Dex & Hollingworth, 2012; Rees & Dinisman, 2015).

Moreover, most of our knowledge and evidence relevant to the cultural factors of children's SWB is limited to Western cultures, which account for 10% of the world child population (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014). The outstanding exception is the study Children's Worlds, which provides the first international comparative dataset on children's subjective well-being across the full range of aspects of their lives.

Overall SWB, religion and culture

Religion is a very important variable of culture that has rarely been examined with regard to SWB. Groups of people who share religious identity share cultural models and in fact are members of the same culture (Cohen & Hill, 2007). Few studies have addressed the relation between culture, religion and religiosity and SWB among children, and among them, the vast majority have taken place in the USA and in Germanic languages speaking samples, where the beliefs in God tend

to be Western-Christian beliefs. The extent to which these results apply more generally to other Christian populations is not clear, let alone how they apply to other religions such as Islam or Judaism (Tiliouine, Cummins, & Davern, 2009).

Although there are almost no studies in this area, our assumption is that religious affiliation is a cultural variable and that there are cultural differences between children's SWB across countries' religion groups. For example, if there are differences in children's SWB between Western individualistic cultures vs collectivist cultures, the same can be expected with regard to Western religion versus non-Western religion (i.e., between Western Christians and Eastern Christians). The findings presented here are among the first looking at how children of different religion groups evaluate their SWB.

Due to methodology restrictions, it was not possible to examine directly how the religious affiliation of the child influences his or her SWB (we do not have individual level data on religion). Instead, given the limited evidence base of cross-national comparative data on children's SWB, the purpose of the following is to contribute to the knowledge on cross-national comparisons of children's self-reported SWB, focusing on the dominant religion in the country where the child lives (classification was made by the author; see Table 1).

Table 1. Children aged 10 and 12 by religion group*, 2013–2014

Religion group	Number	%
Western Christians	18,985	51.0
Eastern Christians	4,790	12.9
Muslims	5,081	13.7
Jews	1,330	3.6
Hindus	1,978	5.3
Asian Christians / Buddhists	5,035	13.5
Total	37,199	100.0

* Western Christians – Colombia, England, Germany, Estonia, Malta, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Spain; Eastern Christians – Ethiopia, Romania; Muslims – Algeria, Israel, Turkey; Jews – Israel; Hindus – Nepal; Asian Christians / Buddhists – South Korea

Table 2. Student Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS) ratings for children by religion, means, and percentages with high (100) and low (<50) satisfaction

Religion group	Mean score (SD)	Low satisfaction (<50), %	High satisfaction (100), %
Western Christians	85.5 (19.0)	6.1%	28.2%
Eastern Christians	88.4 (17.0)	4.5%	34.9%
Muslims	87.8 (19.4)	6.1%	44.2%
Jews	87.8 (18.9)	5.1%	36.6%
Hindus	82.3 (17.2)	4.7%	20.4%
Asian Christians / Buddhists	77.4 (21.4)	11.3%	22.8%

Based on earlier works, the Student Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS)[3] was chosen for international comparisons due to its better validity for such comparisons (Casas, 2016), and the similar pattern of SWB variance across religions (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017). Three measures were calculated for the SLSS scale: mean and frequencies of high and low level of satisfaction. Table 2 presents the results: the larger percentages of children who reported the highest level of satisfaction are evident among Muslims, Jews, and Eastern-Christian children. Asian-Christian and Buddhist children tend to report higher rates of low life satisfaction. The mean scores for each religion group reveal a similar picture.

[3] SLSS was tested using a 5-item scale: "My life is going well"; "My life is just right"; "I have a good life"; "I have what I want in life"; "The things in my life are excellent". Items ranged between 0 "Not at all satisfied" to 10 "Totally satisfied". The total marking of the scale was converted to a 0–100 scale.

To compare the effect of religion on SWB, we conducted a one-way ANOVA test. An analysis of variance showed that the effect of religion on SLSS was significant, F (5; 35,762) = 221.326, $p < 0.0001$ with very small effect size $\eta^2 = 0.03$, implying that only 3% of the variance in the overall life satisfaction is accounted for by religious affiliation. A post-hoc comparison using the Games-Howell test revealed a higher level of SLSS among Eastern Christians, Jews, and Muslims (with no significant difference between them), followed by Western Christians, Hindus, and Asian-Christian/Buddhist children (with significant differences between them). Although a small effect size reveals the total variance, using Cohen's *d* effect size for pair comparisons reveals medium effects for some of the groups.[4] When comparing religion groups against each other, a gap between the level of children's SWB is evident for all religious groups.

In addition, children's satisfaction with a number of specific items was studied (see Table 3).[5] The two groups of children who reported the highest satisfaction with different aspects of their family and home are Jews and Muslims, followed by Eastern-Christian children.

Table 3. Satisfaction with house and family life by religion, percentages with high (10 out of 10) and low (<5 of 10) satisfaction

	House		People who live with you		Other people in your family		Your family life	
	Low satisfaction, %	High satisfaction, %	Low satisfaction, %	High satisfaction, %	Low satisfaction, %	High satisfaction, %	Low satisfaction, %	High satisfaction, %
Western Christians	4.1	62.9	3.9	68.2	4.6	62.7	8.3	66.4
Eastern Christians	4.1	66.8	4.2	69.8	6.2	62.2	3.8	69.6
Muslims	4.3	75.9	3.6	80.0	8.3	65.5	2.5	86.3
Jews	3.4	65.0	2.3	75.2	2.4	74.1	2.2	73.7
Hindus	8.5	63.0	10.5	51.8	13.9	47.5	5.5	63.8
Asian Christians / Buddhists	2.9	52.1	2.5	61.3	1.9	65.7	2.9	54.1

We conducted a one-way MANOVA test to test the differences between the religion groups with regard to the satisfaction items. The test revealed a significant multivariate main effect for religion, Wilks' Lambda = 0.958, F (10; 75,012) = 162.671, $p = 0.000$, with very small effect size $\eta^2 = 0.02$, implying that only 2% of the variance in the satisfaction items is accounted for by religious affiliation. This means that there is a small variance between the religion groups with regard to satisfaction with home and family life.

The first aim was to examine possible variations in children's satisfaction with different life domains as well as with life as a whole across different religion groups. The results indicate that religion has a very small effect on the SWB of children and barely explains the variance. Yet, some results merit further discussion regarding the religion variable. First, significant variations emerged when looking at the frequencies of the extreme answers of children for low and high satisfaction. Larger percentages of Jewish, Muslim, and Eastern-Christian children scored high-level life satisfaction, while Hindu and Asian-Christian/Buddhist children scored the smallest percentage of such high levels. Furthermore, Asian-Christian/Buddhist children scored higher percentages of low-level

[4] Jews – Hindus $d = 0.51$; Jews – Asian-Christians/Buddhists $d = 0.30$; Jews – Western Christians $d = 0.12$; Muslims – Hindus $d = 0.30$; Muslims – Asian Christians / Buddhists $d = 0.25$; Muslims – Western Christians $d = 0.12$; Eastern Christians – Hindus $d = 0.36$; Eastern Christians – Asian Christians / Buddhists $d = 0.57$; Western Christians – Eastern Christians $d = 0.26$; Western Christians – Hindus $d = 0.17$; Western Christians – Asian Christians / Buddhists $d = 0.4$; Asian Christians / Buddhists – Hindus $d = 0.25$

[5] Children were asked how satisfied they were with the following: "The house or flat where you live"; "The people who live with you"; "All the other people in your family"; "Your family life". Items ranged between 0 "Not at all satisfied" to 10 "Totally satisfied".

overall life satisfaction. These results gained support from the effect size (Cohen's *d*) of the pair comparisons: the effect size of the differences between Jews, Muslims, and Eastern Christians, and between Hindus and Asian-Christian/Buddhist children stand at the medium level.

A similar pattern was evident concerning satisfaction with the family. Larger percentages of Jews, Muslims, and Eastern Christian children scored the highest level of satisfaction for most of the items of satisfaction with family. Furthermore, larger percentages of Hindu children scored a low level of satisfaction with family.

These results have some important implications. First, they show that children from Eastern religions (Jews, Muslims, and Eastern Christians) are happier than children from Western religions (Christians, both Catholics and Protestants). These findings contradict what we know about cultural differences in SWB among adults from Western *versus* non-Western culture (see Kim, Shimmack, & Oishi, 2012; Deaton, 2008; Diener & Diener, 1995) and, thus, support again the claim that studying children's well-being must be done from the children's perspective. Furthermore, the SWB of children from Eastern religions does not have a homogenous pattern, as Jewish, Muslim, and Eastern-Christian children are happier than Hindu and Asian-Christian/Buddhist children.

The results strengthen the need for further examinations of the factors influencing the SWB of children, as they seem to be different from the factors that affect the SWB of adults. For example, researchers assume that individualistically oriented cultures, such as Western culture, lead to a greater emphasis on personal achievement and positive self-concepts as routes to happiness; while the more collectivist orientation, such as Eastern culture, puts a stronger focus on inter-relatedness and social harmony, which weakens SWB (Uchida, Norasakkunkit & Kitayama, 2004). If we take religion as an aspect of the culture, the results indicate that these cultural factors that influence adults' SWB do not necessarily influence children's SWB in the same way.

Therefore, the question to study is, "What makes children from certain religion groups happier or unhappier?" Based on cultural features of the different religions, we can make some assumptions about the possible reasons for this gap. For example, Islam and Judaism are considered collectivist religions. These religious cultures value social connections as an integral element of religious life. Islam and Judaism are also religions where there is greater involvement in religious services and duties (Dagan, 2005). The services and duties lead to greater involvement with other people in the community. Furthermore, both Judaism and Islam emphasize community and social networks (Cohen, Hall, Koenig, & Meador, 2005; Cohen & Hill, 2007). We can surmise that the strong social connections that characterize these religions can raise children's SWB. One more point to consider is the possible relation between the household composition in different cultures (as presented above) and the SWB of children.

The results of the study help also identify which groups of children have a low level of SWB and tend to be less happy. Children who tend to have a low level of well-being are the focus of social services and those who strive to improve the well-being of children and reduce misery among them. We know today that lower SWB among children may suggest special vulnerability and risk (Rees et al., 2010), and low life satisfaction is associated with psychological, social, and behavioral problems (Park, 2004). Furthermore, children with lower life satisfaction have been found to suffer significantly more from bullying, conflict with their families, and the feeling that they do not have enough friends or money (Rees, Goswami, & Bradshaw, 2013). At the same time, SWB appears to act as a buffer against a variety of negative outcomes including psychological disorders, serving not only as a key indicator of positive development but also as an enabling factor that promotes and maintains optimal mental health (Park, 2004). This strengthens the need for social services to identify children with low levels of SWB. We have to learn what makes certain groups of children less happy, and help plan and design policies and interventions that can reduce children's misery and increase their well-being.

In the current study, more unhappy children were found among Asian-Christian/Buddhist and Hindu children. These findings are consistent with other studies that found people in East-Asian nations less happy. Several explanations were suggested to these findings but all were directed

towards adults. In regard to children, Lee and Yoo (2015) found that children from South Korea have the lowest level of SWB, because they have a lower level of self and freedom to choose. However, further studies examining these groups of children are needed to reveal the factors that reduce their SWB.

Prospects for the future

Children are citizens of today; the concept of their well-being goes beyond mere survival and has to include positive aspects as well as their current activities and life. For decades, children's well-being was measured by the provision of their minimal and basic survival needs. Due to social and academic shifts, this perception started to change and ideas such as child development, current well-being and personal perspective on one's life became a legitimate way of thought and focus for research. These changes in turn led to the realization that children's well-being must be studied through children's perspectives and based on their own life experiences.

The establishment of the International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI) and the International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB) enabled us to turn the spotlight on children's subjective well-being in the global context for the first time. The findings presented here are only the tip of the iceberg in understanding children's cultures and current childhoods. Yet, even the few context items presented above shed light on the fact that the children's world is different from that of adults. Indeed, such efforts need to continue and expand. Especially interesting and promising is to explore children's context of living with reference to their religion or the culture that they live in.

In particular, efforts to measure children's SWB need to expand. It would be safe to argue that we have reached a point where the need to measure children's SWB is recognized. One can also assume that we know how to measure it in a reliable way. However, we are far behind in understanding what influences children's SWB and especially what explains the variance. In this article, the potential of religion and culture as one such factor was demonstrated. However, the road ahead in understanding the factors influencing children's SWB is long. Yet, one thing is already clear – children care and have a say about their lives, well-being, families, and rights. It is our obligation to listen to what they have to say.

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CHILDREN'S FEELINGS OF SAFETY AND THEIR SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

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Feeling safe is one of the most fundamental requirements for people's sense of well-being. The article explores children's feelings about safety at home, at school and in their neighbourhoods in the 18 countries that participated in the second wave of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds (ISCWeB). It highlights variations between countries in the extent to which children feel safe and in which environments they feel more or less safe. It also identifies variations in feelings of safety within each country according to gender, age group and family economic circumstances. This is an under-researched topic in comparative international research on children's lives. The findings presented provide important insights on this topic and point the direction for future research.

Introduction

The issues of safety and protection are often included in frameworks of basic human needs and of well-being. The importance of safety is also explicitly or implicitly addressed in declarations of human rights, including children's rights. Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child relates to protection from all forms of violence and a number of its other articles focus on aspects of protection from exploitation, abduction, trafficking and armed conflicts. The UN Sustainable Development Goals include a specific target (16.2) to end all forms of violence against children.

The extent to which these rights and goals are upheld and achieved needs to be assessed through regular monitoring. Progress has been made in measuring children's safety internationally using objective indicators. For example, UNICEF's Report Card 11 (UNICEF Office of Research, 2013), comparing child well-being in rich countries includes indicators of infant and child mortality, and exposure to bullying and violence. It also includes the homicide rate as an indicator of violence in the child's environment.

It is less common for comparative international research to gather children's perspectives on safety. Yet, people's feelings about their safety are important, in addition to objective indicators, in order to understand their sense of well-being. It is well-established, for example, that trends in people's fears about crime are not necessarily linked to trends in actual crime rates (Rader, 2017).

This article summarises the perspectives of over 60,000 children aged 8 to 12 years in 18 countries about their safety at home, at school and in their neighbourhood. The information is taken from the second wave (2013–2014) of the Children's Worlds survey – the largest and most diverse global effort to gather children's own views about their lives and well-being. It compares children's sense of safety across countries, and also, within countries, according to their age, gender and material circumstances. It draws out key messages from the findings and highlights the importance of understanding children's feelings of safety within specific contexts rather than in the abstract. It explores the relationship between children's feelings of safety and their overall well-being.

The analysis utilises the full cleaned dataset which is weighted to be as representative as possible of the school population in each country. It is also balanced so that each age group is equally represented in pooled analysis. In this article, differences noted as statistically significant indicate a confidence level of at least 99% based on robust standard errors that take account of clustering within schools. Levels of missing data for the variables used in this analysis were below 5% for all three questions about safety in each country. Missing cases are excluded from the percentages quoted.

Children's views about their safety: Overview

The survey included three questions asking children about how safe they felt in different environments – at home, at school and in the neighbourhood where they lived. Each question consisted of a statement – e.g., "I feel safe at home". Children were asked to say how much they agreed with each statement on a 5-point scale, labelled "Not at all agree", "Agree a little", "Somewhat agree", "Agree a lot" and "Totally agree". These questions were included in different parts of the questionnaire related to home, school and the neighbourhood.

Table 1 shows the percentage of children who "totally agreed" that they felt safe in each environment in each country. It also shows how each country ranks on each question.

- In all but one country, more than half of children totally agreed that they felt safe at home. The exception was Ethiopia where only 49% of children did so. The highest level of safety was in Poland* where 89% of children totally agreed.
- In all but four countries – Italy*, Germany, South Korea and Ethiopia – more than half of children totally agreed that they felt safe at school. The highest feelings of safety at school were in Algeria* (73%).
- In general, the percentage of children totally agreeing that they felt safe in their neighbourhood was lower than for safety at home and school – averaging around half across the 18 countries. Children were most likely to feel totally safe in Norway (70%) and least likely in South Korea (19%).

Table 1. Children who totally agreed that they felt safe at home, school and in the neighbourhood by country, 2013–2014

	Home		School		Neighbourhood	
	%	Country rank	%	Country rank	%	Country rank
Algeria (Western)*	71.0	12	72.6	1	55.1	8
Colombia (Antioquia)*	79.1	5	69.5	3	55.5	7
Estonia	79.5	4	56.7	13	57.3	5
Ethiopia	48.8	18	49.7	15	39.2	15
Finland	77.1	6	64.1	7	62.3	2
Germany	74.2	10	48.1	17	47.2	10
Israel	80.4	2	62.2	12	59.5	3
Italy (Liguria)*	56.2	15	46.9	18	28.0	17
Malta	69.7	13	63.0	10	42.3	14
Nepal	51.9	17	51.2	14	43.4	12
Norway	80.2	3	69.3	4	70.2	1
Poland (Wielkopolska)*	88.7	1	64.0	8	56.3	6
Romania	73.2	11	65.4	6	54.5	9
South Africa (Western Cape)*	65.6	14	65.8	5	35.1	16
South Korea	55.9	16	49.1	16	18.7	18
Spain (Catalonia)*	76.8	7	63.5	9	57.5	4
Turkey (Istanbul)*	76.3	8	69.5	2	42.4	13
United Kingdom (England)*	74.6	9	62.7	11	44.5	11
Average	71.1		60.7		48.3	

* Regional representative sample

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

There was a hierarchy of feelings of safety in different contexts. In no country did children feel substantially safer at school than at home (the difference was 1% or 2% in favour of school in Ethiopia and Algeria); and in no country did children feel substantially safer in their neighbourhood than in school (there was a very small gap in favour of the neighbourhood in Estonia and Norway).

Within this broad picture there were three patterns.

- Equally safe at home and school, but less safe in the neighbourhood were Nepal, Ethiopia, Algeria* and South Africa*.
- The safest at home, less safe at school and least safe in the neighbourhood were Colombia*, Romania, Turkey*, Malta, Spain*, Italy*, Poland*, the UK* and South Korea.
- The safest at home, and equally less safe at school and in the neighbourhood were Israel, Estonia, Germany, Finland and Norway.

The differences are striking in some cases. Roughly equal percentages (around 70%) of children felt totally safe at home in Algeria* (Group 1 above), Malta (Group 2) and Germany (Group 3). But children in Algeria* felt much safer at school (73%) than in Malta (63%) and Germany (48%). Children in Algeria* felt least safe in their neighbourhood but still at a higher level (55%) while Germany (47%) and Malta (42%) were more similar.

These differences in feelings of safety across different environments can inform a better comparative understanding of children's experiences of childhood. While children tended to feel less safe in their neighbourhood than in other contexts across almost all countries, this does not explain the very low levels of safety in the neighbourhood in South Korea (19%) and Italy* (28%). Similarly, while children feel roughly equally safe at home and at school in Nepal and the three countries in Africa, there are differences of more than 10% in the countries in Group 3 and in some countries in Group 2. It will require a detailed contextual knowledge of each country to understand these patterns in more detail. But it is only through international comparisons of this kind that countries can begin to identify what is perhaps fairly common and what is less common in children's experiences of different aspects of their lives in a particular country.

It is also worth considering the other extreme of responses to these questions – children who did not agree at all that they felt safe in each environment. The percentage who fell into this category ranged from around 1% in Spain* to 12% in Ethiopia for home; around 2% in Norway to around 8% in Ethiopia for school; and around 1% in Finland to around 25% in South Africa* for the neighbourhood. In most countries, the proportion of children not agreeing at all with these statements was quite low and margins of error on the estimates are large. Nevertheless, these would still suggest that there are substantial numbers of children not feeling safe in the whole child population aged 8 to 12 in these countries.

Differences in feelings of safety by age, gender and material circumstances

Looking at differences in children's feelings of safety according to their gender, age group and material circumstances provides some important additional insights. In terms of material circumstances, the analysis makes use of a set of eight items designed to measure children's material deprivation. This approach (e.g., Main & Bradshaw, 2012) has been developed to provide a measure of material circumstances that can be self-reported by children, who often will not be able to provide information about traditional family economic indicators such as household income, parental occupation and so on. The items asked about ownership of or access to were: clothes in good condition to go to school in; a computer at home; the internet; a mobile phone; own room; books to read for fun; a family car; equipment to listen to music. The number of items each child lacked was calculated to form a score from zero to eight, with a high score indicating a higher level of deprivation. The analysis here makes use of a summary measure (see Rees, 2017) which divides the children in each country into three groups having fewer than the average (median)

number of items, the median number, and more than the median number [1]. For example, in Algeria the median number of items was four: so the low deprivation group lacked three or fewer items, the medium deprivation group lacked four items and the high deprivation group lacked more than four items. The cut-off points for these groups vary, and therefore, are not directly comparable across countries. However, this measure is suitable for within-country comparisons as presented here. The full set of eight deprivation items were only asked in the 10- and 12-year-olds' surveys, so the analysis on material deprivation only includes these two older age groups.

Safety at home

The first aspect of safety to be looked at is children's feelings of safety at home. Researchers in the United Kingdom have found that while the large majority of children feel safe at home, those who do not are at particularly high risk of low well-being (Pople et al., 2014). A summary of children's responses in the Children's Worlds to the statement "I feel safe at home" – the percentage totally agreeing according to gender, age group and level of deprivation is presented in Table 2.

- There were few gender differences in feeling safe at home. In three countries – South Africa*, Colombia* and Estonia – girls were significantly more likely to feel totally safe than boys.
- Feelings of safety at home tended to increase a little with age – significantly so in seven countries. In four countries, the percentage of children totally agreeing with the statement was more than 10% higher at the age of 12 than at the age of 8 years. In only one country – South Africa* – did older children tend to feel less safe at home than younger children, although this pattern was not statistically significant.
- Feelings of safety tended to be lower among more deprived children in all countries. The average difference across all countries in totally agreeing with the statement between the low deprivation and high deprivation groups was around 10%. In all but five countries (Israel, Nepal, South Africa*, Romania and Finland), this difference was statistically significant.

[1] Median scores were zero (Estonia, Finland, Italy, Norway, Poland, South Korea, UK), one (Germany, Israel, Malta, Romania, Spain), two (Colombia, South Africa, Turkey), four (Algeria, Nepal) and seven (Ethiopia). In countries where the median was zero, the following groups were formed: low deprivation lacked zero items, medium deprivation lacked one item and high deprivation lacked more than one item.

Table 2. Children's feelings of safety at home by gender, age group and material deprivation, 2013–2014

	Gender, %			Age group, %				Material deprivation[a], %			
	Female	Male		8-year-olds	10-year-olds	12-year-olds		Low	Medium	High	
Algeria*	71.0	70.8		58.7	76.7	77.6	§	80.8	77.8	72.2	§
Colombia*	81.4	76.4	§	77.6	79.6	80.0		85.7	77.8	75.4	§
Estonia	82.1	77.0	§	77.2	78.6	82.5		84.1	82.8	71.1	§
Ethiopia	50.8	46.8		44.5	54.4	47.6		56.0	48.2	42.6	§
Finland	78.0	76.6		70.4	78.4	82.1	§	83.4	77.3	78.0	
Germany	75.8	72.6		70.2	78.5	73.8	§	82.1	73.2	69.9	§
Israel	82.2	78.9		75.2	79.4	86.4	§	88.1	82.7	79.6	
Italy*	57.6	55.1		54.3	57.1	57.3		61.7	60.8	49.7	§
Malta	69.3	70.5		65.4	69.3	74.4		77.8	71.6	63.7	§
Nepal	51.3	52.6		44.0	54.7	57.0		60.6	54.0	54.4	
Norway	80.0	81.0		74.1	80.2	86.2	§	86.0	77.9	78.4	§
Poland*	89.3	88.2		86.5	89.9	89.6		92.9	87.5	83.1	§
Romania	73.1	73.3		76.1	71.1	72.5		75.7	74.2	70.6	
South Africa*	68.7	61.9	§	71.1	61.8	63.9		66.1	61.5	60.5	
South Korea	55.1	56.6		54.9	59.1	53.5	§	60.0	50.5	47.7	§
Spain*	76.9	76.6		77.3	76.8	76.4		80.0	79.6	70.9	§
Turkey*	77.3	75.4		70.8	78.3	79.6	§	85.1	80.8	73.2	§
United Kingdom*	76.0	74.3		68.8	77.6	77.3	§	81.6	75.9	71.6	§

[a] The material deprivation analysis only covers the 10 and 12 years old age groups for which this measure was available.

* Regional representative sample – see Table 1 for details.

§ Statistically significant difference between the previous rows based on a 99% confidence level.

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Safety at school

School is a major part of most children's lives, and it is therefore not surprising that research has found a link between feelings of safety at school and children's subjective well-being (Valois, Zullig, Huebner, & Drane, 2001; Huebner et al., 2014). This section focuses on children's responses to the statement "I feel safe at school". The percentage of children totally agreeing with this statement according to gender, age group and level of deprivation is presented in Table 3.

- Girls tended to feel a little safer at school than boys. However, the differences were not large. The highest gender gaps were in Spain* (9%) and Israel (7%). There was no country where boys felt significantly safer than girls.
- In contrast with the home environment, feelings of safety at school tended to fall with age. The average drop in feeling totally safe from 8 to 12 years old was 14%, and in six countries, it was over 20%. It was quite common for the drop to be larger between 10 and 12 years old than between 8 and 10 years old. This may reflect the ages at which children change school (at around 11 years old in around half of the countries). Nepal showed a unique pattern – with feelings of safety increasing across age groups.
- There was a tendency for children with higher levels of deprivation to feel less safe at school, and these differences between children were statistically significant in four countries – Turkey*, Israel, Germany and the United Kingdom*. The largest gaps (more than 10%) were in Germany and Israel. Differences at a school level would be an interesting area for future research.

Table 3. Children's feelings of safety at school by gender, age group and material deprivation, 2013–2014

	Gender, %			Age group, %				Material deprivation[a], %			
	Female	Male		8-year-olds	10-year-olds	12-year-olds		Low	Medium	High	
Algeria*	75.1	69.9	§	77.9	77.0	62.9	§	72.8	66.0	67.9	
Colombia*	71.1	67.2		78.5	71.2	58.7	§	68.0	64.9	63.2	
Estonia	59.7	54.3	§	67.4	58.7	44.3	§	55.2	51.1	45.7	
Ethiopia	52.8	46.5	§	49.6	53.7	45.8		54.4	46.3	45.6	
Finland	66.5	61.1		68.5	64.2	59.7		64.8	63.9	55.8	
Germany	50.8	47.0		55.2	52.3	37.2	§	50.5	43.7	38.3	§
Israel	65.3	58.4		68.4	57.9	60.3		65.3	56.3	54.6	§
Italy*	48.0	44.8		57.8	47.3	35.8	§	41.8	41.7	42.8	
Malta	62.7	63.0		66.8	62.1	60.3		64.5	63.3	57.2	
Nepal	52.9	49.6		44.5	51.2	57.9	§	55.8	56.7	53.4	
Norway	68.7	70.3		73.2	67.5	67.5		70.5	56.9	66.1	
Poland*	66.2	62.0		75.0	64.4	52.8	§	61.1	55.3	56.1	
Romania	65.9	64.0		72.6	68.6	55.1	§	62.9	62.6	60.9	
South Africa*	68.0	62.9		72.3	66.7	58.4		66.6	58.7	59.8	
South Korea	47.8	50.0		56.7	55.9	34.7	§	47.7	40.3	41.0	§
Spain*	65.3	56.8	§	72.2	69.7	48.5	§	55.7	58.9	57.1	
Turkey*	70.2	68.7		75.1	71.4	62.1	§	70.7	71.2	62.8	§
United Kingdom*	62.3	60.0		70.9	68.7	48.5	§	59.4	59.4	55.8	

[a] The material deprivation analysis only covers the 10- and 12-years old age groups for which this measure was available.

* Regional representative sample – see Table 1 for details.

§ Statistically significant difference between the previous rows based on a 99% confidence level.

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Safety in the neighbourhood

Finally, children were also asked how much they agreed with the statement "I feel safe when I walk around in the area I live in". Several previous studies (e.g., Adams & Savahl, 2016; Ben-Arieh & Shimon, 2014) have demonstrated the importance of feeling safe in the neighbourhood for children's quality of life. Table 4 presents the same type of analysis for children's feelings of safety in their neighbourhood.

- Here, gender differences were in the opposite direction to those for school. Girls tended to feel less safe than boys – significantly so in half of the countries. The largest gender gap was in Malta (over 10%).
- There was a tendency for feelings of safety in the neighbourhood to fall with age. The exceptions were Nepal where 10- and 12-year-olds felt a little safer (45%) than 8-year-olds (40%) and Poland* where there was no clear age pattern. The largest drops in feeling totally safe in the neighbourhood between 8 and 12 years old were in South Africa* (18%), Spain* and Estonia (both 17%).
- Levels of deprivation were significantly linked to feeling safe in the neighbourhood in 10 countries. The average gap across countries between children with low and high deprivation was 9%. This gap was particularly high in Turkey* (21%).

Table 4. Children's feelings of safety in their neighbourhood by gender, age group and material deprivation, 2013–2014

	Gender, %			Age group, %				Material deprivation[a], %			
	Female	Male		8-year-olds	10-year-olds	12-year-olds		Low	Medium	High	
Algeria*	50.9	58.8	§	62.5	55.5	47.4	§	56.8	50.1	44.4	§
Colombia*	54.5	55.9		61.7	56.4	48.4		57.7	53.2	45.9	§
Estonia	56.0	58.7		64.7	60.0	47.2	§	57.7	52.5	41.5	§
Ethiopia	40.6	37.6		43.3	39.7	34.5		41.7	35.2	27.2	§
Finland	60.0	64.6		63.9	66.1	57.0		63.2	59.7	51.7	
Germany	44.2	50.7	§	47.4	49.4	44.8		51.4	50.0	37.0	§
Israel	57.5	61.3		63.2	59.8	55.6		65.4	55.1	56.4	§
Italy*	23.7	31.9	§	33.5	29.4	21.3	§	26.0	27.4	22.5	
Malta	36.3	47.3	§	46.3	43.9	36.7		44.9	36.3	35.8	§
Nepal	44.7	42.1		40.4	45.0	44.8		44.4	46.8	43.4	
Norway	66.3	74.8	§	71.3	71.0	68.2		72.6	61.1	59.8	
Poland*	52.0	60.8	§	55.2	58.4	55.3		61.3	53.0	52.6	§
Romania	52.5	55.9		59.8	53.2	50.5	§	51.7	50.7	52.9	
South Africa*	30.6	39.2	§	44.9	33.5	27.0	§	32.9	31.1	26.3	
South Korea	15.6	21.9	§	22.7	21.9	11.3	§	17.7	14.7	13.1	
Spain*	52.1	59.5		65.2	59.7	47.9	§	52.4	54.6	48.8	
Turkey*	42.0	42.5		49.7	41.5	36.4	§	50.6	39.8	29.2	§
United Kingdom*	40.8	46.7	§	48.5	45.1	40.1		47.5	38.5	36.5	§

[a] The material deprivation analysis only covers the 10- and 12-years old age groups for which this measure was available.

* Regional representative sample – see Table 1 for details.

§ Statistically significant difference between the previous rows based on a 99% confidence level.

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Children's views of safety within context

The above descriptive overview of variations by age, gender and deprivation provides an indication that each aspect of safety has some distinct patterns, which were reasonably consistent across countries.

- There was little gender difference in feelings of safety at home, but girls tended to feel a little safer than boys at school while they generally felt less safe than boys in their neighbourhood.
- Older children tended to feel more safe at home than younger children, but less safe at school and in their neighbourhood.
- Higher deprivation was associated with lower safety in all three aspects, but tended to be more closely linked with safety at home and in the neighbourhood than at school.

This brief summary raises questions about whether it is useful and realistic to think about safety as a unified concept from children's perspectives. The relevance of this question is also supported by further analysis.

- Reliability coefficients were calculated for a scale made up of the three safety items. The results do not suggest that the items fit very closely together. The highest Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.60 in Ethiopia and the lowest was 0.33 in South Africa*. In Ethiopia, the correlation coefficients (Spearman) between the three pairs

of variables were all between 0.3 and 0.4 suggesting moderate relationships. In South Africa*, they were all between 0.14 and 0.21.

- Children were also asked in the survey to indicate their level of satisfaction with safety in general, on a scale from zero ("Not at all satisfied") to 10 ("Totally satisfied"). The three specific safety questions reviewed above "explained"[2] between 7% and 42% of the variation in children's satisfaction with safety in the 18 countries. The explanatory power tended to be substantially greater in the high-income countries than in the low- and middle-income countries.

These additional findings suggest that children have distinct feelings about safety in different contexts and that these can vary quite substantially. For example, a child may totally agree that they feel safe at home while not at all agreeing that they feel safe at school and having mixed feelings about safety in their neighbourhood. While it is evident that this is a possibility, the low levels of correlation between children's feelings of safety in these different contexts suggest that this type of variability is a common and important phenomenon. Given these patterns, how can the hypothetical child above taking account of their differing feelings in different environments come to an overall evaluation? Is a question about overall safety too abstract, either for children or for adults, given the different environments in which they commonly spend time in their daily lives?

These are important questions that require further exploration. However, even if it is meaningful to ask about feelings of overall safety, it is clear from the analysis that this is not sufficient. It is important also to look deeper into how safe people feel in different environments. This is confirmed, for example, by the different directions of age differences in children's feelings of safety at home compared to at school or in the neighbourhood.

The difference in the extent to which the questions about safety in three different environments predicts children's overall feelings of safety across countries also raises a question of whether important questions are being missed. For example, perhaps in some contexts, children also consider the broader environment within their region or country as being important factors in evaluating their overall feeling of safety. This is a topic for further qualitative exploration with children in different contexts.

Safety and subjective well-being

The final section considers the extent to which children's feelings of safety at home, at school and in their neighbourhood predict their overall sense of well-being. This analysis uses a set of four questions designed to assess children's life satisfaction derived from a longer set originally proposed by Huebner (1991). The questions were statement-based as follows – e.g., "My life is going well", "My life is just right", "I have a good life" and "The things in my life are excellent". Children were asked to respond to each statement on a scale from zero ("Not at all agree") to ten ("Totally agree"). The measure consists of the sum of children's answers to the four questions. This measure has been shown by Casas (2017) to be broadly acceptable for undertaking statistical comparisons across countries of the strength of associations of various factors with children's overall life satisfaction.

Regressions were run to assess the added power of the three questions about safety in different contexts in explaining variations in children's life satisfaction, after taking account of children's gender, age group and level of material deprivation. As the material deprivation index is only available for 10- and 12-year-olds, this analysis only relates to those two age groups.

- All three questions about safety made a significant contribution to predicting children's life satisfaction in all 18 countries.
- The explanatory power of the questions ranged from around 4% in Romania to over 30% in Finland and Norway. There was an apparent pattern of explanatory power

[2] Using linear regression, 10- and 12-year-olds only, after taking account of age, gender and deprivation

being greater in high-income countries than in low- and middle-income countries. This pattern would need to be verified in a larger sample of countries.

The analysis suggests that children's feelings about safety are significantly related to their overall sense of well-being. However, the nature of this link cannot be inferred from this analysis. It is not clear, for example, whether feelings of safety influence life satisfaction or vice versa. It is also possible that there is no direct influence in either direction and the links are due to other factors not included in the analysis. The varying strength of the links, in addition to the evidence identified earlier, raises the question of whether safety as a concept is more important in some countries than others; or whether the questions currently asked do not adequately capture children's feelings about safety in some countries, either due to issues of language or because they do not focus on the most important aspects of safety from children's perspectives.

Conclusions

Feeling safe is an important aspect of quality of life. There is a shortage of international comparative evidence on children's subjective perceptions of their safety. This article has summarised important new information from a survey of children aged 8 to 12 in a diverse set of 18 countries. The ability to compare findings across countries provides valuable insights, which can be useful for the goal of improving children's quality of life in each country. For example, the sharp decreases in children's feelings of safety in their neighbourhood as they get older in some countries can be contrasted with the lack of age patterns in others.

While many children felt totally safe at home, at school and in their neighbourhoods, others did not. This included a small minority of children who did not feel at all safe in one or more of these environments. Given the fundamental importance of a feeling of safety, this kind of evidence is potentially valuable in monitoring children's quality of life and the extent to which their rights to protection are being met.

The findings suggest that feelings of safety in different contexts vary in different ways by gender, as children get older and also according to material circumstances. Further, the analysis indicates that there was not a very close association between children's feelings of safety in each context – they might feel totally safe in one environment and not at all safe in another. These findings raise doubts about whether safety can be regarded as a meaningful overall concept in terms of children's subjective experience.

Finally, while each aspect of safety was significantly associated with children's overall sense of well-being, the strength of this link varied substantially between countries. This raises important questions about whether there are other dimensions of safety – beyond home, school and the neighbourhood – that we should ask children about in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of their subjective experiences.

These findings from the second wave of the Children's Worlds study contribute to an under-researched topic. They will be built on through the third wave of the study, which includes substantially more countries. The questionnaire for this wave also asks children about the extent to which they feel that their country is a safe place to live, and also about instances of violence in school and in the neighbourhood. The findings also raise important issues which could be usefully explored through qualitative research with children, in order to develop a better understanding of how children perceive and experience issues of safety in their daily lives.

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THE VALUE OF QUALITATIVE COMPARATIVE RESEARCH FOR QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ON CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING: METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS AND EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS

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Research obtaining children's perspectives on their well-being has contributed insights into how children define and experience different aspects of their well-being. The article discusses the potential contribution of this research to quantitative research in the field. It is demonstrated by discussing a multinational qualitative study of children's well-being and providing findings from this study, of children's *own places and spaces*, to demonstrate how qualitative research can inform the interpretation of quantitative data.

Introduction

There are several large international studies on children's well-being that are quantitative and use standardised surveys to implement the principle of comparability (UNICEF, 2013; OECD, 2009; Andresen & Ben-Arieh, 2016). These studies examine children's well-being along multiple dimensions, and are especially valuable in profiling differences in children's well-being within and across nations. However, what these findings mean, why these differences exist and how they relate to local and cultural contexts continue to generate discussion and analysis. Such insights are often difficult to garner from the data obtained from these quantitative studies.

This paper discusses the value of international comparative qualitative research on children's well-being. We first outline some developments in child well-being research and demonstrate that such developments, while increasing knowledge on children's well-being, also raise new issues regarding the status of children's participation, the value of *voice* in child well-being research and the utility of the nation-state for understanding children's well-being. We then go on to outline a study that confronts some of these issues through a multinational qualitative approach – the Children's Understandings of Well-being: Global and Local Contexts project (herein referred to as the CUWB study). We draw upon data gathered for this project, i.e., on the value of having one's own space, to demonstrate how qualitative research can contribute to understanding quantitative findings on children's well-being.

Research on child well-being

Research on children's well-being is an expanding international, inter- and transdisciplinary field that has developed significantly in the last decades (e.g., Fattore, Fegter & Hunner-Kreisel, 2019; Fattore, Mason & Watson, 2016; Andresen & Betz, 2014; Ben-Arieh, Casas, Frønes, & Korbin, 2014). The growing interest in child well-being reflects developments over the last two decades in children's rights discourses and in the sociology of childhood, which position children as social actors and as a distinct social group with their own particular needs, rights and ideas about the good life (e.g., Andresen, 2013; Hunner-Kreisel & Kuhn, 2010). These developments have raised new questions regarding epistemological and methodological approaches in this area, as the field engages with increasingly diverse research perspectives.

As research on child well-being has shifted its focus from survival to well-being, normative and political stances have come to the fore (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014). This raises the question of how we can suitably define child well-being – as a normative construct, as a subjective assessment or as an open concept to be delineated through empirical research. Thus, the development of theoretical constructs requires a more explicit clarification of the normative premises that underlie what is considered *good* (see Fegter, Machold & Richter, 2010). Further challenges are linked to the integration of children's perspectives and their understanding as social actors. This participation agenda raises ethical, theoretical and methodological challenges, including how children can be meaningfully engaged in the research process, for example, as research participants only, or involved in research design, conduct and analysis, and what are the ethical implications of this kind of involvement (see Stoecklin & Bonvin, 2014).

An additional concern emerges from critiques within the new childhood studies that children's perspectives should not be construed as representing *authentic* children's voices but as reflecting the norms, values and commonly held ideas of the social contexts in which children live (e.g., Hunner-Kreisel & Kuhn, 2010). For research on child well-being, this issue is particularly relevant in the discussion of adaptive preferences deriving from the Capabilities Approach as a theoretical frame for child well-being: children also adapt their ideas and assessments of well-being to *objective* affordances in their life (e.g., Fegter & Richter, 2014; Hunner-Kreisel & März, 2019). A related challenge is how we can understand children's well-being in globalisation conditions. For example, whether there are shared or different meanings and experiences of well-being across multinational contexts? Can we identify global phenomena, for instance, citizenship status, child migration or media use that are relevant to children's perceptions and experiences of well-being? How are the values that children hold linked to global but also local contexts?[1]

The value of qualitative research on children's well-being

A large body of research exists at national and multinational levels that focuses on the subjective well-being (SWB) of children. While emphasising subjective perceptions, this approach is methodologically characterised by the use of quantitative measures that include cognitive and affective evaluations of global and local dimensions of SWB. These have been taken up in a remarkable number of settings, with the flagship study being the International Survey of Children's Well-Being, otherwise known as the Children's Worlds study (ISCWeB).

Despite focusing on children's assessments of subjective well-being (SWB), one of the critiques of this approach is that indicator frameworks do not adequately reflect children's evaluations of their own lives (Fattore, 2019). The measures used are generally based on the standardised ones important to researchers from theoretical perspectives, to which individual children are asked to respond. Where this means adjusting adult scales for use by children, such approaches are unable to take account of the pertinence of the adult-determined items to children.

The subjective turn in child well-being research has, however, established the critical importance of obtaining children's evaluations of their lives. In emphasising that children are best placed to assess their SWB, quantitative studies have provided a foundation for qualitative studies of children's well-being. The qualitative studies work from children's narratives and practices to reconstruct children's understandings, perceptions and experiences of what is important to their well-being. In so doing, they provide insights into what constitutes well-being and the factors contributing to well-being for children. These studies confirm that children prioritise some areas of well-being similar to those used as domains in SWB studies. However, they also extend and provide alternative knowledge about well-being to SWB research.[2] These studies demonstrate the

[1] For a more detailed discussion of some of these issues, see Fattore, Fegter & Hunner-Kreisel, 2019, and the papers devoted to the CUWB study in the *Child Indicators Research*, 2019, *12*(2).

[2] For example, see Adams, Savahl, Florence, & Jackson, 2019; Ahmed & Zaman, 2019; Akkan, Müderrişoğlu, Semerci, & Erdoğan, 2019; Brockevelt, Newland, Cerny, & Lawler, 2019; Cefai & Spiteri Pizzuto, forthcoming; Fattore, Mason & Watson, 2016; Fegter, 2014; Fegter, forthcoming; Fegter & Mock, 2019; Hunner-Kreisel & Bohne, 2016; Hunner-Kreisel & März, 2019; Kutsar, Soo & Mandel, 2019; McAuley, 2018; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019; Stoecklin, 2019; Tonon, Benatuil, Laurito Molgaray, forthcoming.

value of qualitative approaches to help inform quantitative findings in research more generally. For instance, some of the general strengths of qualitative research are that:

- It occurs in natural settings, usually involving collecting data at the site of the participants. Therefore, qualitative research can take into account contexts as important data, whereas quantitative research attempts to control or exclude the influence of context.
- It often uses multiple types of data, such as interviews, observation and analysis of existing artefacts. This contributes to capturing a wide range of aspects of a phenomenon through data on a topic, contributing to analytical richness of the research.
- It often attempts to understand what meaning a topic or social phenomenon that is being studied has for participants. In this sense, it contributes to understanding actors' perspectives.
- It aims to develop a complex picture of what is being studied based upon understanding the multiple factors that are usually involved in a situation (Becker 1998; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

While one of the strengths of quantitative research is that it involves large samples that allow statistical generalisation, qualitative research aims to develop constructs or concepts that may be able to make sense of a broad range of social phenomena. The ability to develop theoretical concepts from qualitative data (using theoretical heuristics as sensitising concepts) is largely due to good qualitative research that richly describes what it is studying. This *thick description* within context, or reconstructions of patterns of the social, makes connections between concepts become more apparent. This interconnection then allows complex theories to be developed, where multiple connections between concepts rather than linear cause and effect between two variables, are possible.

Children's Understandings of Well-being: Global and Local Contexts – premises and research framework of a multinational comparative study

The multinational study Children's Understandings of Well-being: Global and Local Contexts (CUWB) examines how children conceptualise and experience well-being from a comparative and global perspective. The study aims to interrogate from children's perspectives the meanings of well-being and how children experience and conceptualise dimensions of well-being. The study explores via a comparative analysis the importance of local, regional, national but also translocal contexts (e.g., social, political and cultural) for these meanings and experiences. The central questions guiding the project are:

- How do children conceptualise and experience well-being? What dimensions of well-being are significant for children?
- What concepts are most important for children's well-being from children's perspectives?
- How do these meanings and experiences relate to national, local and cultural contexts?

A network of researchers across the globe who have deep knowledge of their local and national contexts participate in the study and undertake qualitative fieldwork within their country. The project currently includes research teams from Africa (Algeria and South Africa), South East Asia (Azerbaijan, India, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore), Australia, Europe (England, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland, Spain, Turkey), the Middle East (Israel), North America (Canada, the United States) and South America (Argentina, Chile).

The main objective of the study is to determine from a comparative qualitative perspective the significance of different contexts for understandings and experiences of well-being. This includes assessing whether the nation-state is a useful organising framework. Related to this comparative aspect, the study also seeks responses to the following research questions:

- What are the shared and different topics within and across the national groups?
- In which ways are the meanings/concepts that underlie these topics different or shared within and across national contexts? For example, do we find that the same topics, such as love or safety, have different meanings? Or do different topics reflect shared meanings?
- What is the relative significance of local, regional, national and/or translocal contexts (e.g., social, political, cultural) for these topics and underlying concepts of well-being?

The study is designed around a core set of modules and principles that are replicated across the study sites. These include participation of children aged 8 to 14 years of age, an ethnographic component documenting the fieldwork setting and completion of several fieldwork stages. These provide a baseline methodology utilised and adapted by all research teams, and thus, a platform for dialogue regarding the utility of such a methodology across contexts. The research stages are summarised in Table 1 and discussed further on.

Table 1. Methodology of Children's Understandings of Well-being: Global and Local Contexts

Stage one: Exploring children's concepts of well-being	
Aim	**Method**
■ To gain narratives about what is important for children in their everyday experiences. ■ To determine the topics and meanings/concepts central to experiences of well-being. ■ To see how these relate to children's social and cultural contexts.	■ Interviews with children about important places, people, activities and so on from their perspective. ■ Map exercise to explore children's own experiences of well-being.
Stage two: Exploring existing and reconstructed well-being concepts	
Aim	**Method**
■ To determine in more detail how well-being topics and concepts are understood and experienced within and across national contexts. ■ To understand in more detail the meaning of existing concepts of children's well-being from the perspectives of children.	■ Interviews with children based on stage one interviews. ■ Interviews with children on their understanding and experiences of existing well-being concepts.

Stage one: Exploring children's concepts of well-being

Stage one involves qualitative interviews with children about important places, people, activities and so on from their perspective. The purpose of this stage is to work reconstructively from children's narratives to identify key topics and concepts regarding what is important to their well-being, as experienced in their everyday contexts. In this stage, children are invited to draw a map of what is important in their life. The parameters of this exercise are kept open, but to illustrate, children can be invited to depict on their map places, people and objects of importance to them. This then serves as a basis for an unstructured interview where children discuss their choices and the interviewer follows the direction the child takes.

Using a concept of *space* as understood by the child in constructing the map, the premise of this stage is exploring what is important and what makes children feel well or good in everyday life. As much as possible the parameters of the map are determined by the participants: developing the map is child-led rather than directed by the researchers. The activity, therefore, provides a representation of a particular point of view (as explained and interpreted by the participants), a manifestation of the young person's way of looking at, experiencing and talking about the world.

Stage two: Exploring existing and reconstructed well-being concepts

Stage two aims to explore children's understandings of the concepts that have arisen in the first stage in a more detailed way, and also children's understandings of some of the salient domains and concepts used in the Children's Worlds study.

Questions are developed using the key topics and concepts from the first stage and introduced as points of discussion in the second stage, allowing the participants to prioritise and elaborate on their stage one discussions. This can lead to further exploration of the significance of what children have discussed in the first stage. Researchers can point out particular sections of transcript from the first stage and prompt the participants to further comment and explanation.

Beyond this, there is significant scope for study partners to include methodologies and components, which are of particular relevance to individual researchers in their local contexts. This has led to some innovative research practices, including the use of new technologies in the research process and development of a variety of child participatory techniques.

Cross-national comparisons as providing context-sensitive analysis of concepts of well-being: children's *own places and spaces*

In this section, we use an example from children's discussions of their own places and spaces to demonstrate the value that taking a qualitative approach has for contributing to understanding children's well-being and also complementing the insights provided by quantitative studies. Place has an effect on how well-being is understood and experienced (Coulton & Spilsbury, 2014: 1307). The effect of place on children's well-being has been highlighted by the Children's Worlds study. It shows the relevance of aspects of the built and natural environment and community characteristics for children's subjective well-being. For example, measures of satisfaction with neighbourhood characteristics, the local natural and built environment as important dimensions of children's subjective well-being have been demonstrated to vary across nations (e.g., Crous & Bradshaw, 2017; Dinisman et al., 2017; Rees, 2017). However, what does, for example, sharing a bedroom or being confronted with high traffic volume actually mean from children's perspectives and how do they link it to their subjective well-being? Besides the knowledge (gained by quantitative studies) that one's well-being may be good, reduced or even bad, qualitative research can provide thick(er) description or allow a reconstruction of patterns of how children give meaning to these experiences, how they evaluate them and relate them to their daily life, future plans or wishes and dreams. For example, in a qualitative study by Akkan et al. (2018) on neighbourhood effects on children's well-being in Istanbul, processes of gentrification were found to be extremely important both for providing *objective* opportunities for children within their local space – an example was overcrowding of accommodation and maintenance of public play areas – and how experiences of these specific neighbourhood characteristics framed children's understandings of well-being.

Through qualitative investigation they were able to show how social and economic inequalities between neighbourhoods are significant to children's experience of well-being.

In the CUWB study, place and space emerged as a critical aspect affecting children's experiences of well-being from their perspectives. For one 12-year-old girl (referred to here as B) living in a small flat in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, with her 10-year-old sister and parents, space is a relevant topic that she links with the concepts of autonomy, agency and self-concept. Her family home comprises three rooms: two bedrooms and a living room, which incorporates the entrance and the kitchen. She shares her bedroom with her sister. This room is small and has no window. When asked what her biggest wish would be, if she had a magic wand and could change anything, she tells the interviewer:

> I would change my room. […] There is mom's stuff. I would like a big wardrobe that you can put everything in. A big one with lots of shelves. I would like to change it. The whole furniture of the room. […] And our room doesn't get the sun. So, I would swap pink with purple, everything purple.

This quote demonstrates several aspects relevant to having a room of one's own, which are implicitly differentiated by the girl. B speaks of having her own room, and at the same time tells us that she wants to change it, mentioning her mother's stuff in the room, a missing cupboard to store everything in, that the room has no sun light and that it is not painted in a colour she likes. B does not mention the fact that she shares the room with her sister – other aspects are obviously of more relevance. What we learn from this case is that having a room of one's own is not necessarily about possessing a room of one's own. It might also be, as in this case, about being able to implement one's ideas about how the room should be furnished, the colour of the walls, whose things are allowed in the room and where, thus determining the room's characteristics according to aesthetic and functional norms. Making such decisions can be seen as a way to differentiate the self and gain some agency within the generational order of the family (here represented by her mother's things in her room).

We can compare this sequence with that of K, an 11-year-old girl from Geneva[3]. After the divorce of her parents, K had to adjust to new living arrangements, including living with her stepmother whom she does not especially like but tolerates. According to Stoecklin, to cope with the situation, K uses her bedroom to engage with peers using information and communication technologies:

> (When I'm at home) I sing a lot. I'm often on my computer too. … I spend a lot of time using electronic devices (…) like the computer, the I Pad, or the telephone. (…) I don't share too much with my family. I chat on WhatsApp with my friends. Sometimes I watch movies. I'm not all the day long on my telephone. There are, of course, moments when I do something else, like drawing or something like this. I like drawing, too, even if I don't draw very well (Stoecklin, 2019: 14).

The objective social conditions between B and K are vastly different, K coming from a comfortably middle-class household in one of the wealthiest parts of the world. This is evident in her access to resources, which B does not have – her own room, electronic devices and so forth. Yet, the importance and relevance of space for the processes of self-making is similar in both cases – in the case of B, in imagining herself as determining the interior arrangements of a bedroom according to her own preferences, and in the case of K, as a means of asserting "agency in dealing with stressful events" (Stoecklin 2019: 14).

A third example is from a day care centre in Germany (see Fegter, 2014). The first two examples showed how a topic (of having your own room at home) is linked to similar concepts (of agency and self-making in relation to others), but with differences that can fruitfully be analysed as referencing different social and cultural contexts. The third example, however, shows how the same or similar concepts can also emerge in the form of different (spatial) topics[4].

[3] K's experiences are part of the research undertaken by Daniel Stoecklin. The data are published in Stoecklin, 2019.

[4] The data are from the ethnographic research project Learning Spaces – Practices and Perceptions of Children living in the Central Railway Station District of Frankfurt am Main. This research was funded by the Research Centre IDeA and undertaken by Sabine Andresen and Susann Fegter between 2011 and 2014 (see Andresen, Fegter, Iranee, & Bütow, 2016; Fegter, 2014).

Edna, a primary-school aged girl asks a researcher, who is doing ethnographic fieldwork at the day care centre, if she wants to play with her in her secret passage. The researcher recounts:

> We leave the dining area together, pass through the playground, and go outside, turning to the right through the main entrance in the direction of the passage to the school. There are high bushes growing between the iron gate and the side door. Much of the ground is covered with fallen leaves. There is an empty space between the bushes and the outside wall of the day care centre; it looks to me like a hollow. At one point, between two bushes, Edna pushes the branches aside. She says, "That's the door." She goes into the hollow space while I remain outside until she tells me that I should follow her. A boy runs past the bush and looks toward Edna. Edna stands behind the branches, glances toward him, and says, "Nothing, nothing, there's nothing there" while waving her arms. The boy carries on running past. Edna starts to explain the secret passage to me. On the right, directly by the door is the coat rack (a fir branch). Edna moves on to another place where there are only a few branches and it is possible to get through to the path. She says that it is the second entrance. Edna points with her finger to a place between these doors and says that that's where the couch is. Next to the second door, Edna points to the shrubs and says, "You can put things in there." (While she describes *her home*, I get the feeling that Edna is not addressing me explicitly; it is more as if she is explaining things to herself.) A length of tree root is propped up against the wall. Edna takes this and, while looking toward the wall, says, "And that's for hitting somebody." She strikes the wall with the tree root before letting it fall. She says, "That is my secret passage; it's nobody else's."

Already in her invitation to play with her in the secret passage, Edna had used a possessive pronoun, addressing an exclusive invitation to what is also an exclusive place: *her secret passage*. Those who know about it differ from others through their knowledge. In describing it as her secret passage, Edna is asserting an ownership through which she, in turn, distinguishes herself from others and marks her exclusive claim to the space. From this position, she claims control of access to the place. She is the one who invites certain people and sends others away. When the boy approaches, she shoos him away, saying "Nothing, nothing, there's nothing there." Thus the "secret passage" turns out to be a practice for generating her own space, where she controls access and by doing so differentiates and relates herself from and towards others, and where she determines what the interior arrangements are ("That is the door," "That's where the couch is," "You can put things in there"). It is a living-room that Edna produces performatively, a living space that she shapes and creates by pointing out its features. It is also a process of self-making, if we understand that the showing of something is also a showing of oneself – as, for example, the phenomenological philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels points out – a showing of a self that first emerges within a process of differentiating and outlining our ideas, preferences and understandings (Waldenfels, 2004).

Similar aspects are also evident in the first two examples. When B talks about her room and her wish to change it, it is to determine how it looks, who should access the space and whose things should be in the space. Similarly, K describes herself as autonomously choosing between different media-related activities in her room and actively controlling access to who is involved ("I don't share too much with my family").

Thus, determining how the space looks like inside, what activities can occur within the space and controlling access to space by deciding who (or whose things) are allowed, emerge from different children's narratives as relevant concepts that constitute the meaning of *having one's own room* and are relevant for processes of agency and self-making in different social and cultural contexts.

What these qualitative examples also show is that having one's own room – valued by children and thus relevant for their understanding of well-being – is by no means necessarily a physical room at home, nor does it necessarily require that siblings or other people cannot share the room. Rather, these valued spaces are characterised by children being able to determine access, arrangements and activities that occur within them, establishing either close or distant relationships to others,

including family members and peers. These spaces can be a place shared with a sibling or a hidden passage under trees in the corner of a day care centre.

Processes of digitalisation of childhood add a further level of complexity to these understandings and experiences of having one's own room or space. In a study undertaken in Israel, Nadan and Kaye-Tzadok (2019) describe the importance of the *virtual arena*, meaning children's use of online and digital technologies as a space through which children construct self-identity. They outline both the risks and opportunities that this virtual arena creates for children from the perspective of self-making. When children discuss the risks digital technologies pose, the lack of adult intervention is evident. The absence of adults thus implicitly constructs the virtual arena as children's separate *own space* in the context of generational orders. However, they also found that the children in the study appreciated adult support to manage difficult situations that arise in the virtual arena. For example, they included this discussion in their research:

> Participant 1: On WhatsApp, they are blaming this kid and starting to bug him, and his parents don't know if they don't check their kid's phone. If the parents don't know, that will affect the way the kid behaves in school and his personality will be ruined.
>
> Participant 2: Right. For example, that happened in our class, and the principal now checks our WhatsApp, because it's really not nice, and they are always calling the kid mean names and cursing him, and behaving badly, while in front of the teacher they act like angels. (11–12-year-old Muslim-Arab girls, middle socioeconomic status) (Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019: 11)

Such data can help us understand the importance of having one's own space, whether physical or virtual, for children's well-being. The emerging concepts of well-being as having a place of one's own (see also Fegter, 2014) turn out to be embedded here in various social contexts: the urban environment of different cities. For example, many residents of Baku are not able to afford rents for flats big enough for a family of four (Valiyev, 2014), while in Geneva, accommodation affordability is mediated by the overall economic security of its citizens and the context of declining birth rates. Moreover, the notion of one's own space as a private space is being fundamentally challenged and transformed through the use of digital technologies. Another context, evident in all four examples, is generational order, in which children's needs are often not considered as important as those of adults.

Conclusion

Place and space as analytical concepts provide a means to identify and understand the spatiality of other aspects of well-being, such as autonomy, agency and self-concept. Furthermore, they provide us with a means to analyse inter-generational relations and how adult-centred structures in a society often do not take into account children's interests, but rather aim at controlling children and limit their self-determination. Despite drawing upon examples where children live in vastly different circumstances, we have demonstrated that through the analytic of place and space, a shared category of well-being can be identified, having some degree of self-determination over space as significant to self-making. However, by providing rich descriptions of these children's experiences using a qualitative approach, we can also point to how this well-being concept (self-determination over space as significant to self-making) is discussed and experienced differently in different locations, indicating the importance of social inequalities for children's well-being. We have also demonstrated that the processes of digitalisation also challenge locality-based concepts of space.

While objective characteristics of places and spaces are without doubt relevant and important for children's well-being (e.g., experiences of overcrowding, quality of space, access to resources such as clean water, infrastructure or information technologies), an exclusive focus on these objective characteristics overlooks the social dynamics that link the characteristics of places to well-being – such as the importance of these places as spaces for self-making and gaining agency for emotional regulation. A qualitative approach can demonstrate how well-being is conceptualised

and experienced, how this is embedded in social contexts and how these factors and processes are an assemblage that interact at multiple levels (see Fattore, Fegter & Hunner-Kreisel, 2019). With respect to cross-national comparisons, the nation is only one analytical category potentially relevant for understanding children's well-being. At the same time, the relevance of other dimensions of the social order, like generation, class, race and gender are also evident. It shows how an individual's concept of the self might be constructed through specific experiences within, for example, the city (as a specific context), and how city-based experiences are connected to regional or national dimensions.

Furthermore, our example highlights, rather than attempting to identify the linear direction of these factors (e.g., global effects on local conditions), that these are perhaps better understood as simultaneous processes influencing each other, which can be reconstructed and analysed using qualitative exploratory case studies (see Fattore, Fegter & Hunner-Kreisel, 2019).

Thus far, the study stages have been used and adapted in various ways by the research teams to account for the complexity of local research contexts. For instance, some teams have used the orienting questions as the starting point for ethnographic fieldwork, which has continued over several months. Others have run the stages as full-day or half-day workshops, prioritising children's understandings of existing concepts. Other teams have focused on the quality of school life, for example. However, all have utilised a methodology that has started from children's everyday experiences to develop narratives about what is important for them and to determine concepts central to experiences of well-being from children's perspectives (see the special issue of *Child Indicators Research* on the CUWB study, 2019, volume 2).

Through this methodology, the study is attempting to be sensitive to value orientations and explicitly analyse how value orientations are constructed as part of enacting cultural contexts. Allowing direct participation of children in the study attempts to capture the richness of experiences of well-being, what it means and how it is constituted from children's perspectives. The study explores what domains of well-being are important to children through a focus on children's own practices, and situates these practices within complex networks of relations and institutions, including the familial, peer, educational and political-economic.

The study design therefore attempts to provide a unifying platform for common fieldwork practice and epistemological approach regarding children as research participants. However, the study encourages interdisciplinary and multinational dialogue regarding methodological processes, analytical perspectives and interpretation. The potential and complexities of multinational and interdisciplinary practice have, therefore, been at the forefront in the study design and proposed study activities.

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SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND REALISATION OF RIGHTS IN CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS

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The rights of the child are human rights and cannot be dissociated from the well-being of the child. This article concerns children's perceptions and awareness of their rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in an international comparison. In addition, it is analysed how the rights of 12- and 14-year-old children in Estonia are realised and related to their assessments of well-being. Changes in the realisation of rights will also be explored. This article uses data from the second (2013)[1] and third waves (2018)[2] of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds (ISCWeB), as well as a 1997 study on children's health and living conditions.

Introduction

30 years have passed since the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted. Almost all countries in the world (196) have acceded to the convention. Estonia joined in 1991, assuming the obligation to bring legislation into line with the provisions of the convention and to develop and ensure children's rights and well-being measures. The Convention on the Rights of the Child aims to protect children's rights and to ensure that governments and adults consider children as full rights-holders. Children's rights cannot be separated from their well-being. This has been confirmed by several authors (e.g., Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017; Kutsar et al., 2019), having found that realising children's rights increases their satisfaction with life. The purpose of this article is to analyse the perceptions of children from two aspects: general awareness of one's rights and how the realisation of rights is linked to the evaluation of life satisfaction.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child encompasses a wide range of human rights, including political, economic, social, cultural, and civil rights. The convention is guided by four general principles: the prohibition of unequal treatment and discrimination, the right of the child to life and development, the primacy of the child's best interests, and the right to participation (Reynaert, Desmet, Lemrechts, & Vandenhole, 2015). These principles form the overarching philosophy of the convention and are a standard for child-friendly society, so that children can grow in a safe environment, develop in all respects and use their abilities (Petrén & Hart, 2005). It is important that no child is treated worse than others or unfairly, but that all children are treated with respect and dignity. All children have the same rights regardless of their sex, age, ethnic origin, nationality or other characteristic (Article 2 of the convention). In considering the child's best interests, it is important to listen to the child and take his or her opinion into account.

The articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are often classified in three partially overlapping groups of rights called 3P (*provision*, *protection* and *participation*) (Verhellen, 2000). The rights to provision mean that children have the right to be cared for, right to health, healthcare, decent living conditions, and education (Alderson, 2008). The Estonian Child Protection Act (Lastekaitseseadus, 2018) provides that family is a natural environment for the child to grow and parents have the primary responsibility for ensuring the development, well-being, and rights of the child. Children have the right to know their parents and experience their care. Parental love and support helps children feel good and safe at home as well as to perform and be confident in other environments, including school. The right to education does not only mean that children have access to formal education but also an opportunity to develop their mental, physical, and other talents in different (educational) environments. According to the philosophy of the convention, the child is not only a passive recipient of care and teaching, but is open to changes in the society

[1] The second wave of Children's Worlds (ISCWeB) was supported by the Jacobs Foundation.
[2] The third wave of Children's Worlds (ISCWeB) in Estonia and the publication of the article is supported by the Estonian Research Council (PUT1530).

and an active influencer of one's development (Petrén & Hart, 2005). Every child has his or her interests and preferences according to age. The role of the family, school and society at large is to enable children to realise their potential for development.

The second type of rights includes the rights to protection. According to the convention, children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence, neglect, injury, abuse, economic and sexual exploitation at home, school or elsewhere (Articles 19, 32 and 34). Children have the right to grow without physical punishment, as it reduces human dignity and conflicts with the principles of bodily integrity and equal treatment (Newell & Hammarberg, 2005). Corporal punishment that is also prohibited by the new Estonian Child Protection Act (Lastekaitseseadus, 2018) may harm the child's emotional, mental and physical health as well as be unjust and degrading. In addition to the prevention of violence, the convention also establishes the need for intervention and assistance measures. Every abused child has the right to receive (psychological) assistance and support to recover from the maltreatment.

A third group of rights is related to participation, which is one of the most innovative parts of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 states that children have the right to express their views in all matters concerning their own life. Children also have the right that other people not only listen to them, but also take their views seriously and consider them (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017). The inclusion of rights to participation in the convention implied emergence of a new approach to the child. The new approach views a child not as a dependent receiver of help and an object in need but as a subject and a social actor who is, in accordance with age, competent to decide on matters affecting his or her life (Skelton, 2007; Qvortrup, 1991). Just as providing protection and care, participation is also a process, not an individual event. This means asking for the views of children and engaging them in family, school, and community life. Children are not only future adults but also young people with their ideas, wants, and needs. Listening to and taking into account their views will increase their well-being and enable them to develop into self-confident competent adults.

This article is based on the principle that children are competent to assess to what extent their rights are realised. First, the analysis focuses on how aware children are of their rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child across countries. The data are mainly drawn from the second wave of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds (ISCWeB), which were collected in 2013–2014. The survey focused on how satisfied 8-, 10- and 12-year-olds were with different aspects of their lives and included a few questions on children's awareness of their rights. The survey was conducted in 18 countries all over the world, a total of 61,232 children participated. Around 1,000 children of each age group participated in each country. The countries used either a national or a regional representative sample. In addition, the article describes the extent to which 8–12-year-old children in Estonia were aware of their rights in 2018, when the third wave of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being was organized in Estonia.

Secondly, the article addresses how children in Estonia perceive the rights listed in the convention to be ensured in their lives and how the realisation of rights is linked to their evaluation of well-being at home, in school, and among friends. Estonia's data on the realisation of children's rights come from two studies. Children's assessments of the fulfilment of their rights were first measured in 1997 in a study on the dependency of children's health on living conditions in different regions of Estonia (Peters, 1999), where 1,568 children aged 14 participated. In order to identify changes over time, the same questions were included in the 12-year-olds' questionnaire of the third wave of Children's Worlds. In Estonia, 1,079 students aged 12 took part in the study. The set of questions on the realisation of rights was unique in the Estonian questionnaire, so a cross-country comparison cannot be made.

Estonian children's assessments of the awareness and realisation of the rights are analysed by gender and the language of instruction at school. The children who participated in the survey studied either in Estonian or Russian or in language immersion classes. Language immersion is a form of study enriching bilingual (Estonian and Russian) education, meant for better acquisition of Estonian as the official language. In addition to language classes, Estonian language is studied

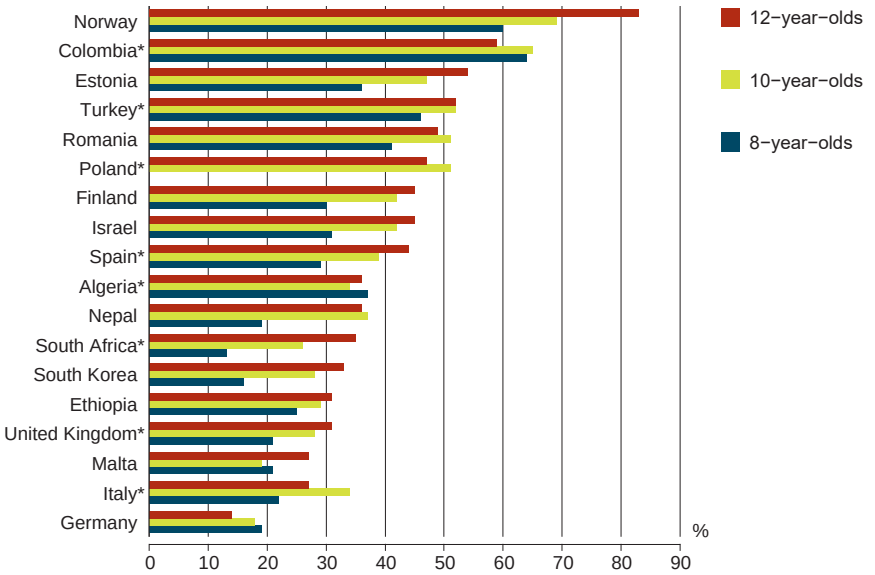
in some subject classes, and it accounts for at least one third of the 6th grade study programme. The children of language immersion classes who participated in the ISCWeB survey were predominantly Russian-speaking.

Awareness and respect of rights in children's perceptions

The effectiveness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child depends on how widely known, understood, and applied are the rights of the child stipulated in the convention (Rajani & Petrén, 2005). Countries that have ratified the convention must inform both adults and children of its principles. The media as well as NGOs and educational institutions play an important role in promoting the rights of the child. According to the national curriculum for basic schools in Estonia (Vabariigi Valitsuse ..., 2011), introduction of the rights of the child is a topic in human and civic studies. Next, it is examined how many children in Estonia and in other countries are aware of the convention, and to what extent in children's opinion adults take these into account.

Figure 1 shows that the proportion of children who have heard of the convention varies between countries about five times. Norway and Colombia are the only countries where more than half (59–83%) of children in all age groups are aware of the convention. Conversely, in some countries, the share of such children does not reach one third (Germany, Malta, the United Kingdom, and Ethiopia). In most countries, children who are aware of the rights of the child constitute over a half or almost a half of the participants in the study (Figure 2). Children in Norway and Colombia but also in Nepal, Turkey, and Poland know the rights the most (67–77% of children between the ages of 10 and 12). In the United Kingdom, compared to other countries, less children (33–39 %) are aware of their rights. A comparison of Figures 1 and 2 reveals that there are more children who are aware of their rights than those aware of the convention. This result is to be expected: the convention is a transnational political document addressed rather to adults than children. At the same time, children's awareness of the rights derives from their everyday practises, for example, from classroom discussions.

Figure 1. Agreement with the statement "I know about the Convention on the Rights of the Child", 2013–2014

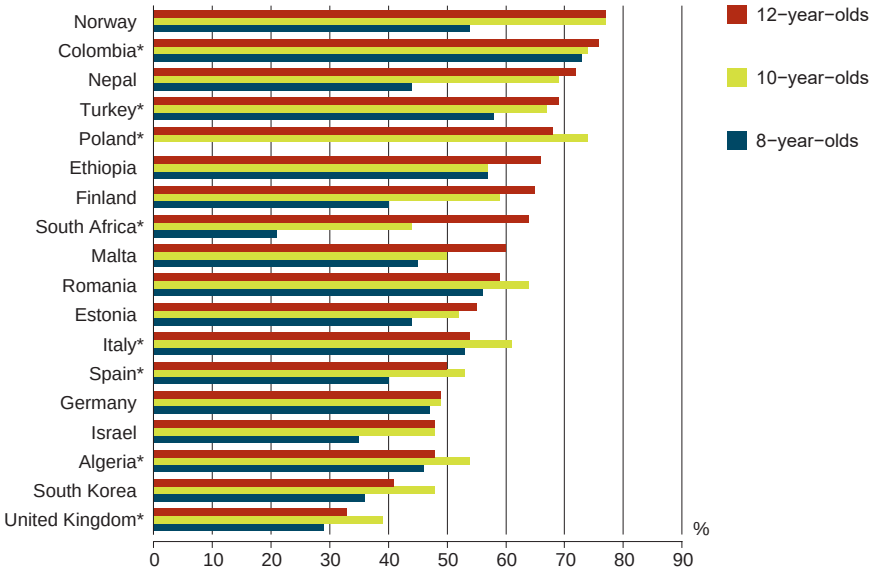


* In Poland, this question was not asked from 8-year-olds. In the countries marked with an asterisk, a representative regional survey was conducted, while the rest of the countries used a representative national sample.

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

As a rule, the share of children who are aware of children's rights and the convention increases with age. In all countries, 8-year-olds have evaluated their knowledge of the rights lower than older respondents. In most cases, the awareness of the convention and the rights among children aged 10 and 12 is quite similar. In some countries (e.g., South Africa and Malta), there are more children who are aware of children's rights in the older age group, but in some countries among 10-year-olds (e.g., Italy, South Korea, and Poland). The results reveal a wide variation across countries, which needs further examination. The findings show that for many children the convention is still a strange and abstract concept which they have not heard about or do not understand clearly. It is possible that when discussing children's rights (in particular with 8-year-olds), the name of the complex framework agreement is not mentioned, or children have simply forgotten it. It is also unknown how understandably children's rights are explained to children.

Figure 2. Agreement with the statement "I know what rights children have", 2013–2014

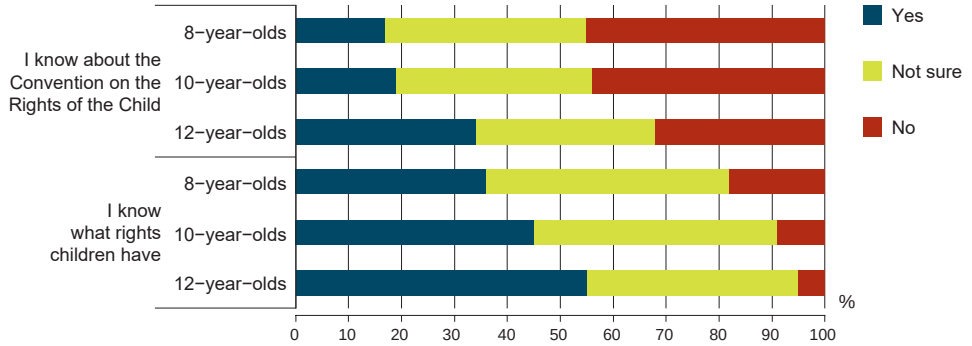


* In Poland, this question was not asked from 8-year-olds. In the countries marked with an asterisk, a representative regional survey was conducted, while the rest of the countries used a representative national sample.

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

In 2013, children in Estonia ranked third among countries in terms of awareness of the UN convention, but were close to the average for awareness of children's rights (Figures 1 and 2). Comparing the answers of children in Estonia to these two questions, it appears that among 8- and 10-year-olds there were slightly less of those who had heard about the convention than children who knew their rights (5–7 percentage points). Among 12-year-olds, the proportion of children who had heard of the convention and were aware of their rights was almost the same. However, comparing the responses of children in the 2013 and 2018 waves, a decrease in the awareness of the convention is noticeable: in 2013, the percentages of Estonian children who had heard of the convention reached from 36% among 8-year-olds to 54% among 12-year-olds, however in 2018, the same shares were 17% and 34% (Figure 3). The proportion of children aged 12 who knew the rights of the child was the same in both years, but among younger children this share had also fallen by 7–8 percentage points. In Estonia, awareness of the rights was also evaluated in the study of children's rights and parenting in 2012 and 2018 (Karu, Turk, Suvi, & Biin, 2012; Anniste, et al., 2018), which showed as well that the percentage of children who had heard about children's rights fell mainly among younger children. In 2012, for example, 83% of students in the second stage of study (grades 4–6) stated that they had heard of the rights of the child, six years later the share of such students was 55%.

Figure 3. Children's awareness of their rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Estonia, 2018

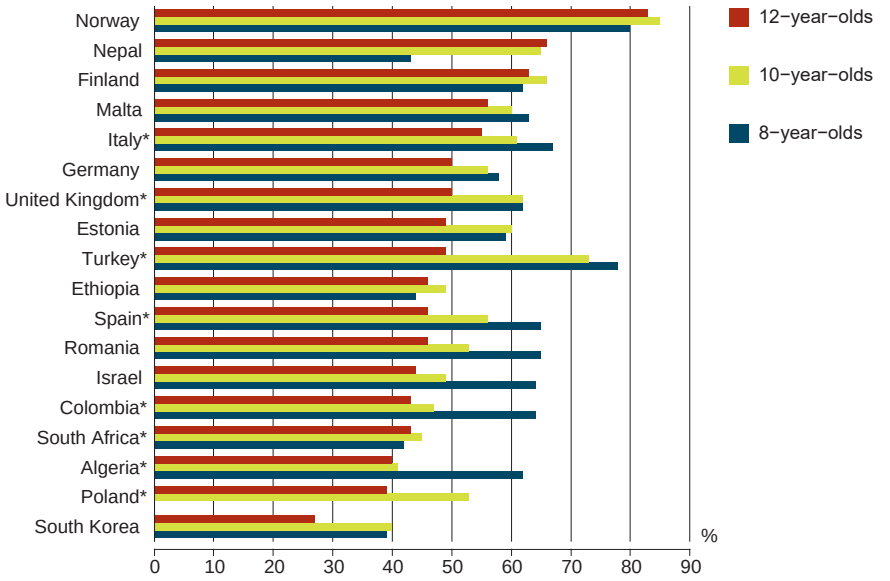


Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

The analysis of Estonian data from the 2018 Survey of Children's Well-Being revealed some differences by gender and language of instruction at school. Compared to girls, there were more boys who claimed to be aware of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Such children made up 21% of 8-year-old boys and 15% of 8-year-old girls. For children aged 12, these shares were 38% and 31%, respectively. Children studying in Russian and in language immersion classes answered more frequently than those studying in Estonian that they knew of children's rights and the existence of the convention. For example, 30% of 12-year-olds studying in Estonian had heard of the convention, whereas the shares of such children in language immersion and Russian-language classes were 36% and 43%, respectively. 51% of children of the same age group studying in Estonian were aware of children's rights, this percentage for children in language immersion classes was 60%, and 62% for the children studying in the Russian language.

Figure 4 presents children's answers to an attitudinal question of whether adults in their country respect children's rights. Norway exceeds other countries – more than 80% of children in Norway believe that adults in their country take children's rights into account. At least half of the children aged 8–12 years in Finland, Malta, Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom agree with the statement as well. However, in South Korea and South Africa, there were less children who answered "Yes". Algeria, Colombia, Israel, Romania, Spain, and Turkey stand out with great age differences: the youngest respondents agree with the statement more often than older participants. A similar pattern appears in children's responses in Estonia. In 2018, this question was asked only from 10- and 12-year-old children, using a slightly different scale. 47% of 10-year-olds fully agree that adults in Estonia take children's rights into account compared to 25% of those aged 12. Quite a lot of children could not answer this question (15% and 11%, respectively).

Figure 4. Agreement with the statement "I think in my country, adults in general respect children's rights", 2013–2014



* In Poland, this question was not asked from 8-year-olds. In the countries marked with an asterisk, a representative regional survey was conducted, while the rest of the countries used a representative national sample.

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

The previous comparisons indicate that children may not really have a clear understanding of the convention. It can also be assumed that in the case of awareness of rights and assessment of adults, children may incline to respond as is socially desirable, in particular when the general awareness of rights is low and it is uncomfortable for them to admit it.

Children's assessment of the realisation of rights and the relationship with subjective well-being

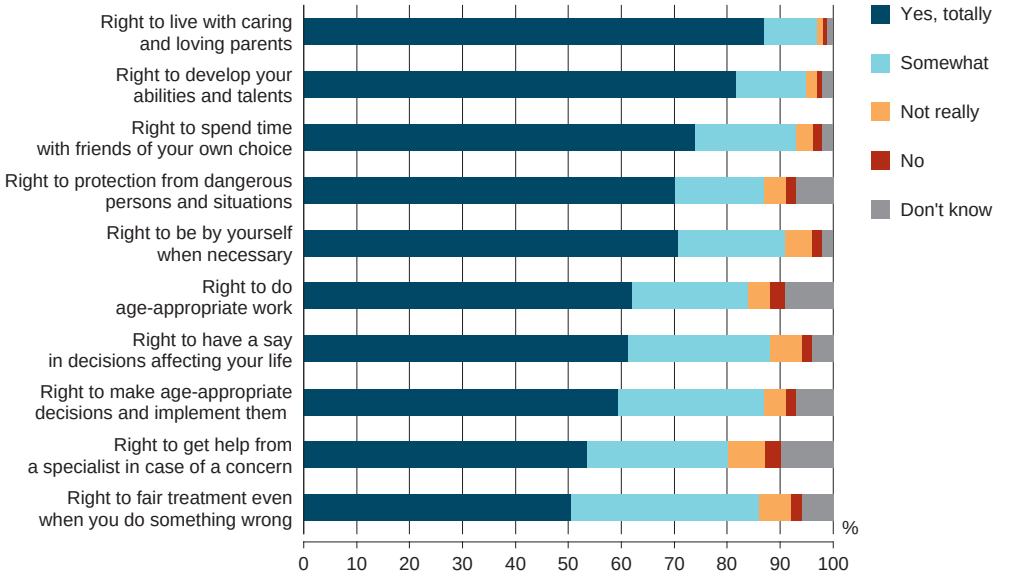
In the following, it is analysed based on Estonian data, to what extent children's rights are realised in their lives. Specifically, data from the International Survey of Children's Well-Being collected in 2018 are used to examine the evaluations of 12-year-olds (grade 6) on the realisation of rights and compare to the data from twenty years ago when similar questions were asked from 14-year-old children (grade 8). It is also analysed how 12-year-olds' assessments of the realisation of rights are related to their responses to the statements "I have a good life" and "I think in my country, adults in general respect children's rights".

In both 1997 and 2018, children considered that **the right to live with caring and loving parents** to be realised the most (Figures 5 and 6). The realisation of the right is also reflected in the children's evaluations concerning home, friends and school. Children evaluated the most highly family relationships (Figure 7). It was found that the majority of 12-year-olds felt safe and good at home; 82% of children agreed that family members cared about them and more than two thirds found that family members would help in case of concerns. The more caring and nice the home environment is in child's perception, the more he or she feels that the right to live with supporting and loving parents is fulfilled (Table 1 shows the highest correlations between well-being indicators regarding family relationships and the assessments of the realisation of rights).

The realisation of **the right to develop one's talents and abilities** ranked second in children's evaluations in both survey years. An international comparison showed that, compared to children

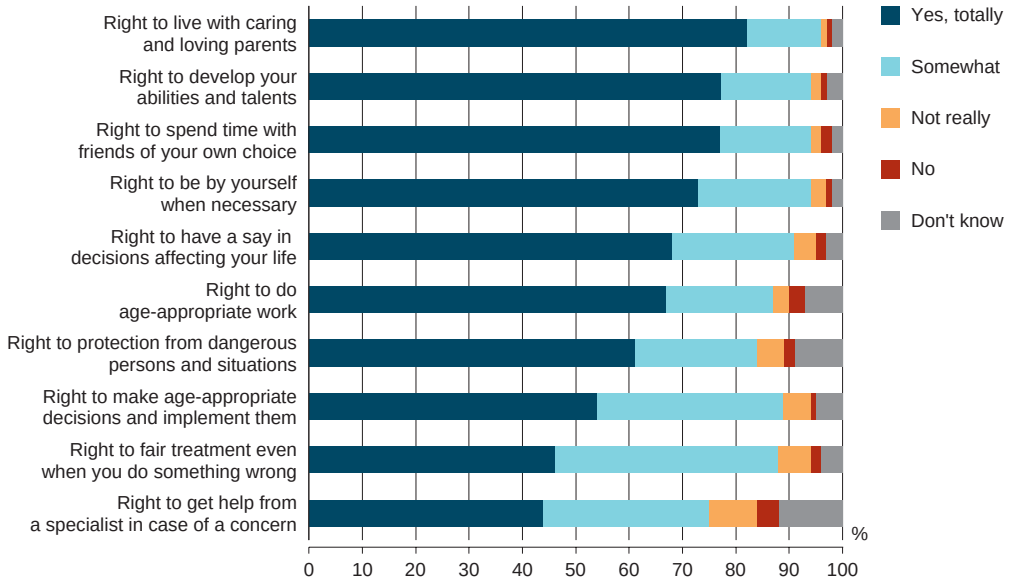
in other countries, children in Estonia are the most active in extra-curricular education (Rees & Main, 2015). In addition, the education system in Estonia supports every child's chance to get a good education, regardless of the child's origin (Santiago, Levitas, Radó, & Shewbridge, 2016).

Figure 5. Assessments of the realisation of rights among 12-year-old children in Estonia, 2018



Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

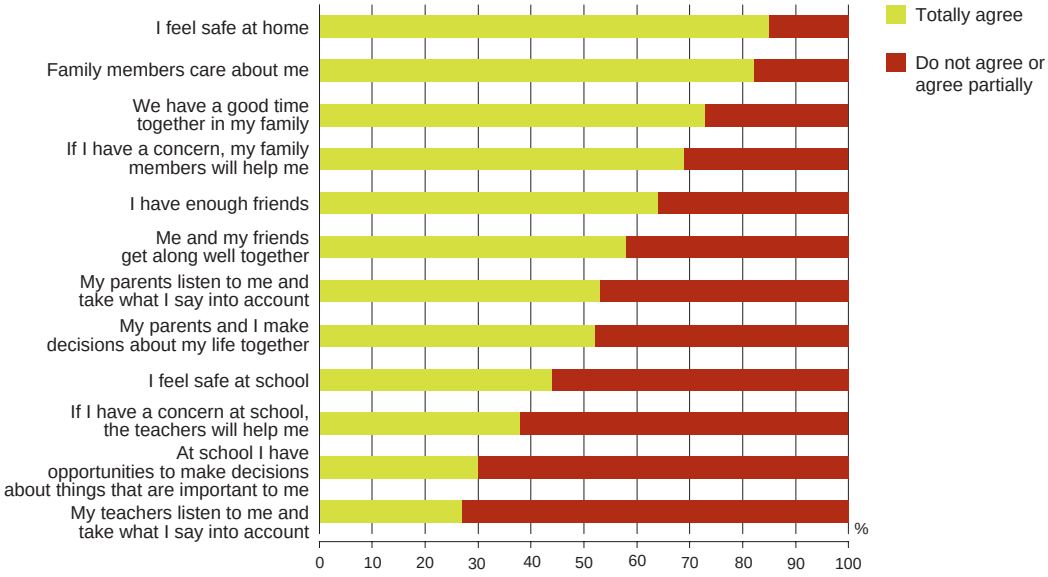
Figure 6. Assessments of the realisation of rights among 14-year-old children in Estonia, 1997



Source: Study on the dependency of children's health on living conditions in different regions of Estonia

The right to spend time with friends of one's own choice had the third highest level of realisation in both 1997 and 2018. Figure 7 shows that almost two thirds of children have enough friends and more than half get along well with friends. 76% of children who met their friends outside school at least once a week considered this right as realised. Of children who did not meet with friends outside school, 54% evaluated the right to be together with friends as fulfilled. Having friends is important, as it helps the child to learn to create and maintain relationships, to cooperate and resolve conflict situations, and provides a sense of trust, closeness, and belonging (Erwin, 1998). Friends are not only companions who are fun to spend time with, but they also help in case of concerns (Mayall, 2000). The quality of friendships has an impact on the child's well-being, and thereby, on the realisation of rights. The 2018 International Survey of Children's Well-Being proved that if a child had many friends and got along with them well, the child evaluated that the right to be together with friends was realised (see Table 1). Warm and pleasant relationships with friends and family are the main sources of well-being also for 8-year-old children (Kutsar et al., 2019).

Figure 7. Expression of the realisation of rights in 12-year-old children's assessments on home, friends and school in Estonia*, 2018



* The children' assessments were measured on a 5-point scale: 0 – Do not agree, 1 – Agree a little, 2 – Agree somewhat, 3 – Agree a lot, 4 – Totally agree. Scale points 0–3 have been summed up in the figure.

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

In 1997, 61% of children agreed that their **right to be protected from dangerous persons and situations** was fulfilled. In 2018, the share of such children had increased by 10 percentage points. It is possible that children's evaluations reflect changes in the society in twenty years, including more media coverage of violence and integration of the topic into school curricula, anti-bullying activities at school (such as KIVA and TORE programmes), prohibition of physical punishment of children, priority in national policies to reduce and prevent child abuse[3]. For example, the share of adults who condemn physical punishment has increased. While in 2009 around a half of adults were against the idea that physical punishment of a child is sometimes inevitable, in 2016, the share of people who disagreed with this statement had reached 62% (Turu-uuringute AS, 2016). The share of children who had fallen victim to bullying by other students has also decreased,

[3] The reduction and prevention of violence against children, including bullying, sexual abuse and internet violence, has been one of the objectives of the Estonian Development Plan for Reducing Violence for 2010–2014 and Strategy for Preventing Violence for 2015–2020.

particularly among 13-year-olds (Aasvee et al., 2016). The absence of violent situations and a sense of safety bolster the perception of the realisation of rights. For example, in the International Survey of Children's Well-Being in 2018, 77% of the children who had not experienced bullying evaluated that their right to be protected from dangerous situations was ensured. Of the children who had been bullied more than once, 68% responded the same. The children who felt safe on their way to school considered their right to protection to be ensured more (78%) than the children who reported that their way to school was not very safe or not at all safe (58%). Correlation analysis (Table 1) showed that children feel protected when they have above all supportive and caring families, followed by friends, and teachers. Getting help from family members, listening to children's views, and making decisions together are significantly correlated to the feeling of being protected from danger. Therefore, supportive and inclusive parents have the primary role in ensuring the well-being and safety of children.

Table 1. Correlation between the realisation of rights and evaluations regarding home, friends, and school,* 2018

	Right to live with caring parents	Right to spend time with friends of your own choice	Right to protection from dangerous persons and situations	Right to have a say in decisions affecting your life	Right to make age-appropriate decisions and implement them	Right to get help help from a specialist
I feel safe at home	0.21	0.20	0.23	0.19	0.20	0.15
Family members care about me	**0.35**	0.23	**0.25**	**0.28**	**0.25**	0.22
We have a good time together in my family	**0.35**	0.14	0.21	0.18	0.18	0.23
If I have a problem, my family members will help me	**0.33**	0.22	**0.31**	**0.28**	**0.26**	**0.27**
I have enough friends	0.14	**0.27**	0.16	0.17	0.14	0.15
Me and my friends get along well together	0.11	**0.26**	0.15	0.18	0.11	0.08
My parents and I make decisions about my life together	**0.30**	0.20	**0.28**	**0.30**	**0.27**	**0.29**
My parents listen to me and take what I say into account	**0.27**	**0.25**	**0.31**	**0.34**	**0.29**	0.24
I feel safe at school	0.15	0.20	0.19	0.21	0.24	0.18
If I have a problem at school, my teachers will help me	0.12	0.14	0.16	0.21	0.18	0.23
At school I have opportunities to make decisions about things that are important to me	0.11	0.22	0.14	0.23	0.21	0.15
My teachers listen to me and take what I say into account	0.12	0.17	0.18	0.20	0.16	0.12

* All correlations are statistically significant at the level of $p < 0.001$. Stronger correlations are marked in bold (Spearman $r > 0.24$).

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds, data of 12-year-old children in Estonia

The right to be by yourself when necessary. Approximately 70% of children could be on their own when they needed it (Figures 5 and 6). According to the UN Convention, every child has the right to personal life. This means that the child must be guaranteed privacy in all circumstances, also within the family. Privacy is important for the development of dignity and independence. This allows the child to rest and, for example, do school work in a peaceful setting. According to the International Survey of Children's Well-Being in 2018, 90% of children had a place at home to study quietly. Most of the children who had such a place considered the right to be by oneself as realised.

The right to participation. Compared to the rights of the provision group, other rights to participation, including those which are among the fundamental principles of the UN Convention, were less ensured. In 2018, the share of children who thought that they could do age-appropriate work, contribute to decision-making about their own lives, and make and carry out age-appropriate decisions was 60–62% (Figure 5). In 1997, around two thirds of children stated that they could work and participate in making plans about their life (Figure 6). At the same time, the right to make age-appropriate decisions and to implement them was considered as realised by about a half of 14-year-old children. In 1997 and 2018, a small difference (5–7 percentage points) in considering the first two rights as realised could be due to age difference of the children involved in the study: 14-year-olds are more likely to have work experience or have thought about working compared to children a couple of years younger. Parents may also allow older children to participate more in making decisions about their everyday lives.

More modest realisation of participation rights in comparison with other rights is not unique to Estonia; also in other countries, children consider that protection and provision activities by adults are more frequent than involving children and listening to their views (see Kutsar et al., 2019; Mayall, 2000). At the same time, Estonia's position in cross-country comparison is not good. The results of the 2013–2014 International Survey of Children's Well-Being showed that Estonia ranked 11th out of 16 countries in terms of how much parents listen to their children and take account of their opinions (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017). However, concerning listening to children's views at school, Estonia was in the last position.

In 2018, children's assessments of well-being in Estonia followed a similar trend. Every second child totally agreed that parents listened to them and considered their opinions (Figure 7). The same share of children made decisions concerning their lives together with their parents. Enabling children to make decisions and taking their views into account was less common at school (27–30%). In Estonia, the modest involvement of children in school matters was also confirmed by the results of the study on children's rights and parenting (Anniste et al., 2018; see also the article by Turk & Sarv in this publication). The study found that the majority of 10–18-year-olds mostly or always had a say (86–88 %) in issues concerning themselves, including the choice of clothes and friends, leisure activities, engaging in hobby and sports clubs, but many children could not express their opinions on matters related to school. For example, only a quarter of children could express their views on which rules should apply in school and when to have tests. Less than a fifth of children had a say about homework and choice of school meals, but only one tenth could always do this. According to the children's rights and parenting study (Anniste et al., 2018), the majority of adults consider children to be competent persons: 92–96% believed that children are clever and have their own opinion, which is important to consider. It appeared from the above that children's experiences clearly diverge from the assessments of adults. Therefore, children's chance to participate actively and decide is more rhetorical; in practice, it is more common at home than at school.

The right to get help from specialists in case of a concern. It is noticeable that children receive quite little support from specialists. 54% of children in 2018 and 44% in 1997 responded that they could get help from a specialist when they had a concern. One in ten children (13% in 1997) considered that this right was rather not realised or not realised at all. The same proportion of children could not answer the question. It can be assumed that children who answered "no" or had no opinion were not aware of the possibilities of receiving help or had had unpleasant experiences.

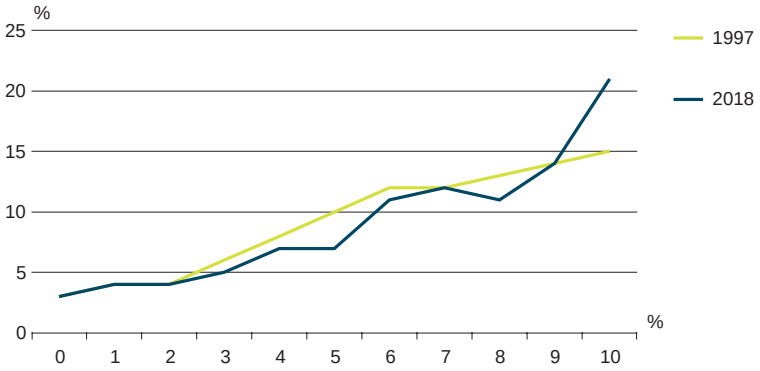
The right to professional assistance was more realised for the children whose family members are supportive and helpful and who make decisions concerning their lives together with their parents. Receiving help from specialists is also linked to getting support from teachers when a child is worried. The results of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being conducted in 2018 show that parents rather than teachers are more likely to help in the case of problems. Only 38% of children totally agreed that teachers would help if they have a concern at school.

The right to be treated fairly even when you do something wrong was one of the least realised rights: only 46–51% of children said that they are treated fairly even when they have done something wrong. The results of the 2013–2014 ISCWeB for age 12 showed that children are treated more fairly at home than at school. 64% agreed that parents treat them fairly, while 44% of children thought that about teachers. Fair treatment is an important indicator of well-being: if children feel that their teachers and parents are fair to them, they are more satisfied with family, school, and life in general compared to the children who do not experience fair treatment (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017).

The link between the realisation of rights and the child's gender and language of instruction at school. It appeared that boys were slightly more critical about the realisation of rights. The biggest difference was in fair treatment: 46% of boys and 55% of girls considered this right ensured in 2018. In addition, compared to girls, there are fewer boys who can develop their abilities (85% and 77%, respectively) and receive help from a specialist in case of a concern (58% and 50%). The opinions of children who studied in different languages were more similar than the evaluations of boys and girls. There were, however, statistically significant differences in the case of three rights. Children studying in the Estonian language believed more that the right to express their views was ensured (65%), compared to children who studied in language immersion classes (57%), and in Russian (55%). There were also more children studying in Estonian who could be together with friends of their own choice (78 %). Of the children studying in Russian and in language immersion classes, 68% considered this right realised. On the other hand, the right to receive help from a specialist was more ensured for children in language immersion (60%) and Russian language classes (59%) than for children studying in Estonian (50%).

General realisation of rights in children's perceptions. We calculated a summa index which shows how many rights a child considers ensured. In 2018, a fifth of the children believed that all ten rights in the questionnaire were realised in their lives. It is six percentage points more than twenty years ago (Figure 8). In both survey years, three out of hundred children did not report any right to be fully realised. In both years, every fourth respondent considered eight to nine rights ensured; less than half of the rights were fulfilled for every fifth child. The right to live with caring parents and to develop one's abilities was mostly ensured in the lives of children even when several other rights were not. The right to fair treatment and professional support was not fulfilled in the eyes of many children who considered 7–9 other rights realised. In 2018, compared to boys, there were slightly more girls who had all their rights ensured (18% and 24%, respectively), while in 1997, the trend was slightly opposite.

Figure 8. Number of rights realised in children's assessments*, 1997 and 2018

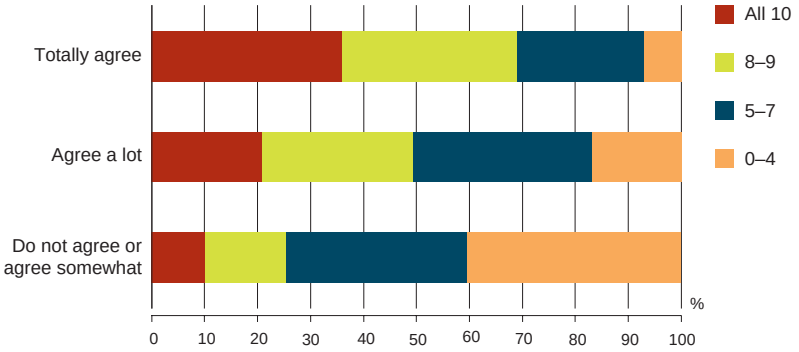


* 10 means that all rights are realised in the child's life (i.e., chose answer "Totally agree" for all 10 rights). 0 means that, in the opinion of the child, none of the rights listed in the questionnaire are fully realised.

Source: Study on the dependency of children's health on living conditions in different regions of Estonia (1997) and the International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds, 2018 data for Estonia

The general level of the realisation of rights is significantly related to children's assessment of how much adults in Estonia take into account children's rights (Figure 9). The children who totally agreed that adults take children's rights seriously were more likely to consider their rights realised (69% had 8–10 rights fulfilled). In contrast, those children who thought that adults do not particularly respect their rights considered many rights as not realised. For example, every fourth of them had 8–10 rights fulfilled, while 40% had a maximum of four rights ensured.

Figure 9. Agreement with the statement "I think in my country, adults in general respect children's rights" according to the number of rights realised,* 2018

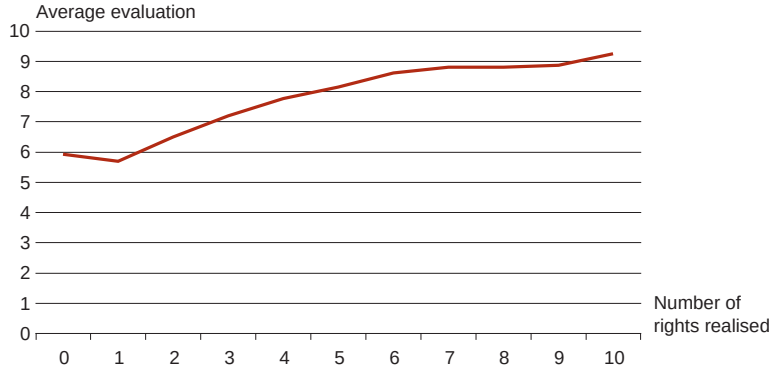


* The agreement with the statement was studied on a 5-point scale: 0 – Do not agree, 1 – Agree a little, 2 – Agree somewhat, 3 – Agree a lot, 4 – Totally agree. Scale points 0–2 have been summed up in the figure.

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds, 2018 data for Estonia

Children's rights are not separated from their well-being. The more children's rights are realised, the better children feel. The children who had all studied rights realised in their lives agreed most with the statement "I have a good life" (Figure 10). For example, 73% of such children totally agreed that their life is good. The children who said that 7–9 rights were ensured also considered their lives quite good (average near 9 points out of 10). However, children with fewer than seven rights ensured agreed significantly less with the statement "I have a good life".

Figure 10. Children's average evaluation of the statement "I have a good life" according to the number of rights realised,* 2018



* Children's average evaluation of the statement "I have a good life" was studied on an 11-point scale: 0 – Not at all agree, 10 – Totally agree.

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-being – Children's Worlds, 2018 data for Estonia

Conclusion

Awareness of children's rights and their full implementation in the society guarantees the well-being of children. This article assessed to what extent children's rights are known and how they are realised from the children's perspective. It emerged that the awareness of children's rights and of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child varies greatly from country to country. Norway stands out as a positive example – it has the most children who are aware of their rights and adults who care about their rights in the children's opinion. The proportion of children who knew their rights is higher in several countries outside the European Union (e.g., Colombia, Nepal, and Turkey), but there are more European children who believe that adults respect children's rights.

Children in Estonia consider the rights to provision most realised. The majority of children think that they live in a safe home with caring and supportive parents and can sufficiently develop their talents and abilities. Children consider the right to protection from dangerous people and situations realised to a larger extent than the right to receive specialist support in the case of a concern. Probably, some children do not know where to get help or they have been disappointed with the help they have received and do not trust adults (unknown to them). It is, therefore, necessary to discuss how to better inform children about the possibilities of assistance and which types of support are the most suitable to them.

According to children, participation and decision-making rights are much less realised in their lives than the rights to provision. Within the family, children's views are listened to quite a lot and children can participate in decision-making about their lives, but at school this practice is less common. Only half of children consider the right to fair treatment as one of the fundamental human rights principles to be ensured in their lives. The assessments of children show that the Estonian society offers children care and protection from danger, but listening to them and taking into account their views are still not particularly accepted by adults. There is also a lack of life skills to understand children at critical moments.

From the children's perspective, the realisation of the most studied rights has not significantly changed in the past twenty years in Estonia. In 2018, children perceived only the rights to protection more realised than a few decades earlier. The realisation of the participation rights appears to be linked to the age of the child: 14-year-olds believe more that they have the opportunity to do age-appropriate work and make decisions than children a couple of years younger.

While the majority of children consider that most of their rights are realised, every fourth has only a few rights ensured. The realisation of rights is reflected in the well-being of children. The more rights are ensured, the better is the subjective evaluation of children about their quality of life. Adults are responsible for ensuring children's rights and well-being. The more adults respect children's rights, the more children perceive their life as good and their rights as realised.

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CHILDREN'S SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

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Children's interest in learning and academic success are linked to their subjective well-being at school. The article observes how 8–12-year-old children in Estonia assess the helpfulness of teachers and other students, their support, children's decision-making opportunities, listening to children's views, and safety at school. It also gives an overview of how satisfied students are at school and how their satisfaction is related to, for example, the location, size, and language of instruction of the school. The article uses the data from the second[1] and third wave[2] of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds (ISCWeB) and school statistics from the Estonian Education Information System.

Introduction

According to Layard and Hagell (2015: 116), schools in some countries have become exam factories, placing too much emphasis on educational success and paying less attention to children's well-being. Layard and Hagell have introduced the concept of a *school for well-being*. This is a school where a supportive and safe learning environment is considered most important and all parties (child, parent, and teacher) contribute to improving the overall well-being. Providing education is not only a matter of the future, not just the preparation of future specialists, but it also means the daily life of students and the school staff. Children spend a considerable part of their growth and development period at school, and this environment will inevitably have a significant impact on their feelings. As stated in the Estonian national curriculum for basic schools (Põhikooli riiklik õppekava, 2018), the learning environment comprises intellectual, social, and physical environment. Development-friendly learning environment is characterized not only by safe premises and facilities but by relationships as well. According to the curriculum, the school atmosphere should be trusting and friendly, provide help and support in case of learning difficulties and personal concerns. Children should also be encouraged to express their views and, if possible, these should be taken into account. The school should be a model of a democratic society that prioritizes human rights and equal treatment (ibid.). Contrary to the views of Layard and Hagell (2015), there are already available regulations in Estonia that lay down consideration of children's well-being at school.

International comparative surveys indicate that the quality of education in Estonia is very high. The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment; OECD, 2016) test results show that Estonian students are academically successful, especially in natural sciences, and Estonia is at the top of the country rankings. At the same time, children themselves do not evaluate their satisfaction with the school as highly. For example, students in Estonia complain about a heavy study load. According to the 2013–2014 data of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being (Rees & Main, 2015), compared to children in other countries, there are more 8–12-year-olds in Estonia who do homework every day. The survey Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) showed that almost every third 11-year-old and more than half of 15-year-old students felt pressured by schoolwork (Inchley et al., 2016). The share of Estonian children who considered studying stressful is higher than the average of the 42 surveyed countries. It appears in Estonia that the older the students are, the less they like going to school (Inchley et al., 2016; Kutsar & Kasearu, 2017). For example, in the International Survey of Children's Well-Being, 57% of Estonian children aged 8 years expressed that they like going to school, giving the answer "totally agree" (Kutsar & Kasearu, 2017). In the 6th grade, though, only 13% of children answered this way, and girls' ratings declined more than boys' with the increase in age.

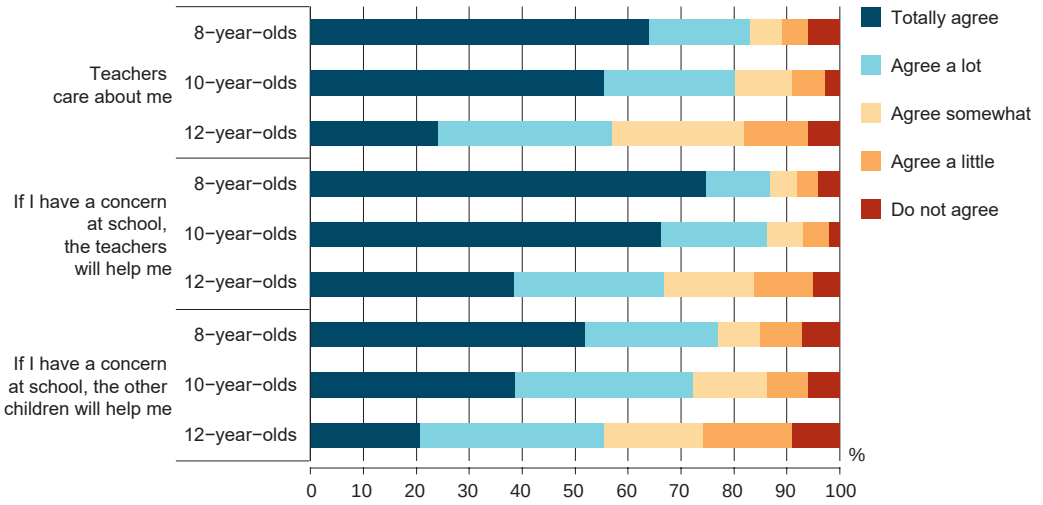
[1] The second wave of the survey Children's Worlds (ISCWeB) was supported by the Jacobs Foundation.
[2] The third wave of Children's Worlds (ISCWeB) in Estonia and the publication of the article is supported by the Estonian Research Council (PUT1530).

This article explores how students assess different aspects of well-being at school and how their evaluation is linked to the formal indicators of the school (location, size, the language of instruction). Children's assessments are a message to educational innovators and could be of interest to the authors of educational and research strategy for the period 2021–2035. The analysis is based on Estonian data from the third wave (2018) of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds. In total, 3,150 children from 40 schools in Estonia participated in the survey. The sample included 1,058 students from the second grade (mainly 8 years old), 1,013 in the fourth grade (mainly 10) and 1,079 students from the sixth grade (mainly 12). The results of the 2018 survey are compared with Estonian data from the second wave of the same study collected in 2013–2014. At that time, 3,118 children aged 8–12 years participated in the survey.

Care, safety, and participation at school in children's assessments

Help and care at school. According to Layard and Hagell (2015), in the *school for well-being*, teachers, instead of criticizing, praise and encourage children and openly talk with them about their problems and concerns. They also notice children in need of help and provide support to them. The evaluations of Estonian children up to the age of 10 showed that a large proportion of them think that teachers care and help in case of concerns. Children at the age of 8 were particularly positive: 64–74% of them totally agreed with the statements that teachers care about and help them when they have problems (Figure 1). There were slightly fewer 10-year-olds who were in this position. However, among 12-year-olds, the share of children who fully agreed with these statements was around a half of that of 8-year-olds. Approximately one-tenth of younger students and around a sixth of 12-year-olds agreed a little or totally disagreed that teachers care and help.

Figure 1. Students' assessments of care and help at school in Estonia, 2018



Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Figure 1 shows that in all observed age groups, teachers were more caring and helpful than other students. It also emerged that children were more likely to share their concerns with teachers, while they felt less cared about by them. The evaluations of getting help from teachers and fellow students as well as feeling cared about decreased with age, and were evaluated the lowest by 12-year-olds. However, more than one third of the oldest students were confident in getting support from teachers. At the same time, they could rely less on other students: only a fifth of 12-year-olds were confident about receiving help. It is noteworthy that there were considerably fewer boys

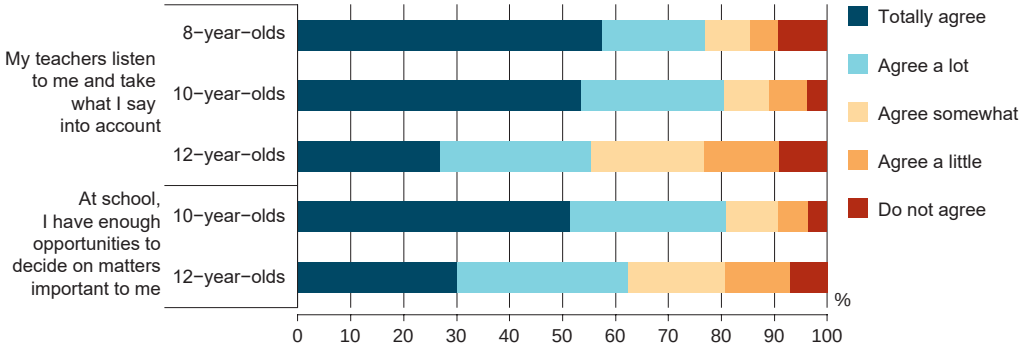
than girls who found that teachers care about them. The greatest difference was evident in the estimates of boys and girls aged 8 years.

It is possible that the relatively lower confidence level of children aged 12 (in grade 6) in teachers' support and care is influenced by the transition from one level of school to another. Children study in primary school with the same teacher until the end of the third or fourth grade, depending on the school. At this stage, the main subjects are predominantly taught in the same classroom throughout the school year by the class teacher. Frequent contact with the teacher ensures stability, which could be an important factor in the safety and well-being of younger children. In the next stage of study (from grade 4 or 5), a change takes place: subjects are taught by different teachers and in different classrooms. The previous close relationship between the child and the teacher decreases, while contact with subject teachers might be more superficial, which in turn could reduce the level of school satisfaction.

Taking children into account and involving them in decision-making. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is important to involve children, dependent on their age and maturity, in making decisions on matters that affect them at school. It is essential to ask the opinion of the child and to take it into account. This approach is also the basis for a democratic school and treating the child as an active social actor. Children's participation is not only important for moral and normative reasons, but it also increases their well-being (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017), their self-esteem, and supports the development of cognitive and social skills (Lansdown Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014).

More than half of children aged 8 and 10 fully agreed with the statement that teachers listen to them and take what they say into account (Figure 2). There was a similar share of 10-year-olds who thought that there were sufficient opportunities at school to decide on matters important to them. Compared to younger children, among 12-year-olds, there were considerably fewer children who totally agreed (27–30%) that teachers listen to them and they have the opportunity to decide. The result seems to be contradictory: it would be logical that the older the children are, the more they should feel as participants. It is unlikely that younger children are favoured, but rather older children are more critical and expect to be treated as equal and mature partners as well as be involved in making decisions on matters concerning themselves and school.

Figure 2. Student's assessments of being listened to and decision-making opportunities at school in Estonia*, 2018



* 8-year-olds were not asked to evaluate the statement "At school, I have enough opportunities to make decisions about things that are important to me".

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

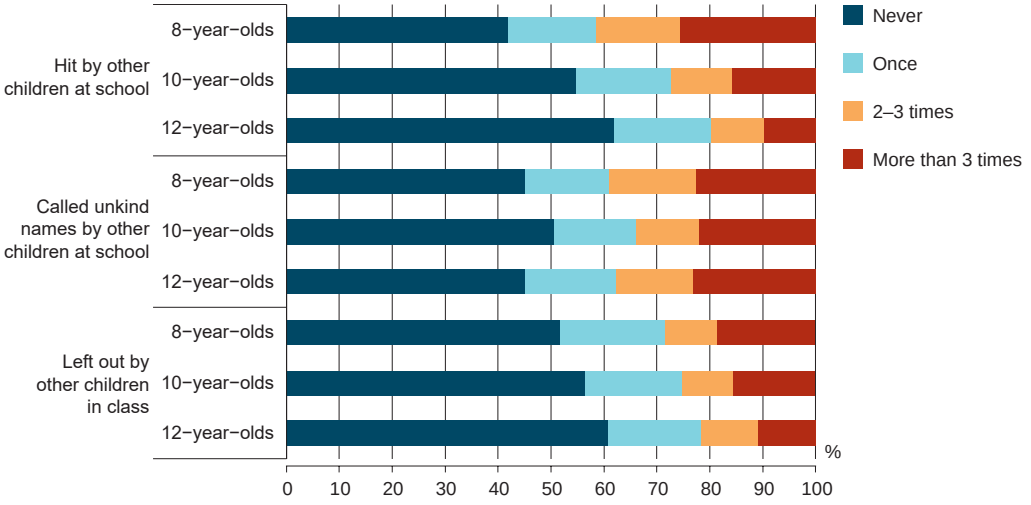
It appears from international and Estonian surveys (e.g., Anniste et al., 2018; Rees & Main, 2015; article by Turk & Sarv in this publication) that children in Estonia do not consider themselves sufficiently involved in decision-making concerning school life, and their opinions are not taken into account that much. A comparison of the results of the 2018 and 2013–2014 surveys of Children's

Worlds show that the assessments of children aged 8 and 10 are stable, but the opinions of 12-year-olds have become even more critical. Specifically, over the four years, the share of 12-year-olds who believe that teachers take their views into account has decreased from 39% to 27%. This change may reflect an increase in children's awareness of their right to participation and recognition of their sense of agency.

Safety. The feeling of safety is an important human right and a source of children's subjective well-being (González-Carrasco et al., 2018; Kutsar et al., 2019b). If the child perceives school as safe, he or she will like school more (Kutsar & Kasearu, 2017). A child feels well at school if the school building and the way to school are safe and the school relationships are safe. According to the 2018 Children's Worlds survey, approximately two-thirds of children aged 8 and 10 felt completely safe at school. Among 12-year-olds, there were fewer children who felt completely safe (44%). One in ten 8-year-olds and one in five 12-year-olds felt either a little or somewhat safe at school. 3–6% of students did not feel at all safe at school. Children's assessments of school safety have not changed significantly compared to 2013 (for a discussion of children's safety evaluations by country, see the article by Rees in this publication).

International studies show that Estonia is one of the countries where the share of children who have experienced bullying at school is above average (Inchley et al., 2016; Rees & Main, 2015). According to the results of the Children's Worlds survey, about 70% of children aged 10 and 12 and 78% of those aged 8 had been hit, called names and/or left out at school in Estonia at least once during the previous month (Figure 3). The youngest children reported hitting the most (59%), while the proportion of older children who had been hit was significantly lower. The share of students who had been left out also fell with age, while the prevalence of being called names was more or less the same between the age groups. A comparison with the 2013–2014 survey shows that the share of children with the experience of having been hit has remained at a similar level, but being called names frequently (more than three times per month) had doubled in four years.

Figure 3. Children's experiences of being bullied at school in previous month in Estonia, 2018



Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

There are significant gender differences in school bullying. In each age group, there are considerably more boys than girls who have been hit and called names. The largest differences were evident in the responses of 10-year-olds: 25% of boys had been hit more than three times in the last month compared to 9% of girls.

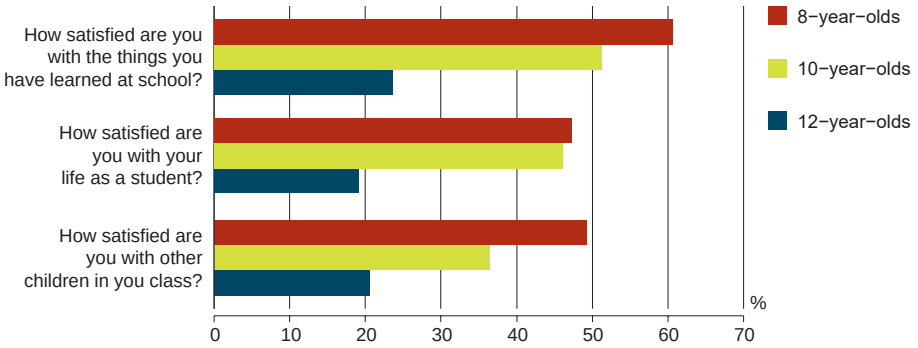
The feeling of safety and bullying at school are very closely linked: bullied students also evaluate schools as less safe. Of 10-year-old children who have not been bullied at school, 82% consider school very safe, but among the bullied ones, such children make up 56%. The safety problem also extends to the way to school. Almost half of the children aged 8 and 10, and 40% of children aged 12 felt very safe on their way to school. However, it is worth noting that one in ten 12-year-olds and a fifth of the youngest children did not feel safe getting to school. 8-year-old children in larger Russian-language schools and rural schools considered their way to school less safe. In the case of children living in the countryside, this result is expected in particular when the child has a long way to school, travels alone, and spends time waiting for the bus. The safety of the way to school needs to be further studied, as it can be a serious source of stress for small children. At the same time, the way to school may be unsafe also for those children who are subject to bullying, as they may be bullied also on the way to school (Kutsar, Soo, & Mandel, 2019a).

Students' satisfaction with school. Satisfaction with going to school covers evaluations of the content of teaching and the grades received, the school environment, the quality of teaching, and the relationships between teachers and students. Three indicators related to going to school are discussed here: satisfaction with the things learned, satisfaction with classmates and satisfaction with one's life as a student. As 8-year-old children were asked to estimate their satisfaction on a shorter scale than older children (5-point scale vs 11-point scale), only the share of the maximum estimates is presented in Figure 4. The largest number of children gave maximum ratings to the things learned, which shows that students appreciate the knowledge and skills they acquire at school. More than half of the children aged 8 and 10 were totally satisfied with the things they had learned, while 12-year-olds were significantly more critical. A qualitative survey of students in the 6th grade (Kutsar, Soo & Mandel, 2019a) revealed that children expect that teachers would appreciate more children's understanding of what they learn and put less emphasis on grades. It can be assumed, therefore, that if the teacher values understanding of the content, it builds children's confidence. It makes a child feel more valued than just the grade, which shows formal success.

A similar age difference was also found in children's satisfaction ratings on their lives as a student. In two younger age groups, one in two, and among 12-year-olds, one in five students were totally satisfied with their lives as a student. The older age group included the most students who were not at all or little satisfied with their lives as a student (12%) (scale points 0–4); there were 6% of such children among 10-year-olds.

Based on the PISA test and the Children's Worlds survey, it can be said that the level of teaching in Estonia is very good, but students may not appreciate it in the same way. Because of the heavy study load, children may perceive school as an obligation rather than an opportunity. It appeared from the focus groups of 6th graders, that the amount of homework is a cause of bad feelings towards school (Kutsar, Soo & Mandel, 2019a). According to children, doing homework in the evening and the weekend cut into their free time, communication with friends, and engaging in hobbies. Students found that teachers are not interested in their opinions but rather in covering the curriculum (ibid.). The demands of studies, pressure, and the lack of the feeling of involvement and participation are likely to reduce students' satisfaction with their school experience.

Figure 4. Share of students answering "Totally satisfied" to questions about well-being at school in Estonia*, 2018



* The satisfaction ratings of 8-year-olds were on a 5-point scale (0 – Not at all satisfied, 4 – Totally satisfied), and those of 10 and 12-year-olds on an 11-point scale (0 – Not at all satisfied, 10 – Totally satisfied).

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

8-year-olds were the most satisfied with their classmates. There were considerably fewer children among 10-year-olds and especially among 12-year-olds who were totally satisfied with other students (Figure 4). Satisfaction with other students is related to school bullying. For example, 36% of 12-year-old children who during the last month had not experienced any form of bullying mentioned in the survey questionnaire were very satisfied with their peers. Only 15% of children who had been victims of bullying at least once were totally satisfied with other students. A similar pattern was also found in other age groups, with the answers of 8-year-olds showing it the least. This also helps to explain an inconsistency in the survey results: 8-year-old children have been bullied more compared to older children, but at the same time, their satisfaction with classmates was on average better. It is likely that younger children still feel quite good about school and other students, and bullying has not yet influenced their views. As children get older, negative experiences may accumulate and be expressed in more critical evaluations of both other students and the school.

Relationship between school characteristics and student satisfaction evaluations

A document of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 titled School Network Programme 2016–2019 (Eesti elukestva õppe strateegia 2020; Koolivõrgu programm 2016–2019) stresses that demographic change must be taken into account when organizing the network of general education schools and sets the objective of access to basic education close to home. At the same time, a decrease in the number of school-age children is the reason why school owners (mostly local municipalities) cannot ensure education quality. Also, schools with a low number of students have difficulty offering teachers a full work-load. These factors, in turn, have led to the closure of schools. Due to a general reduction in the number of students, the use of space is inefficient in many school buildings. By 2020, the target is that the area per student in general education schools, excluding dormitory and sports facilities, should be as close as possible to 10 m² (initial level at the start of the programme was around 15 m²).

As there is a high proportion of Russian-speaking population in Estonia, a language immersion programme has been in use for a long time – it allows learning a language, in addition to language classes, in subject classes. Language immersion gives children with other home languages the opportunity to learn a foreign language through activities in a foreign language environment (Innove). By the end of 2017, 63 kindergartens and 37 schools with more than 10,000 participants had joined the Estonian language immersion programme. In the following, the links between the school characteristics described above and students' satisfaction are observed.

Aggregate variables to measure student satisfaction. Student satisfaction is analysed on the basis of three composite measures (indices): overall satisfaction with school, satisfaction with teachers, and students' overall life satisfaction.

To measure **overall satisfaction with school**, an index was created, which summed answers to three questions on an ordinal scale (for 10 and 12-year-olds, 0 – Not at all satisfied, … 10 – Totally satisfied; for 8-year-olds, 0 – Not at all satisfied, ... 4 – Totally satisfied). The questions were "How satisfied are you with your life as a student?", "How satisfied are you with the things you have learned at school?", and "How satisfied are you with other children in your class?").

Index of satisfaction with teachers was calculated on the basis of responses to the items "My teachers care about me", "If I have a problem at school, my teachers will help me" and "My teachers listen to me and take what I say into account". A 5-point scale was used for all age groups (0 – I do not agree, ... 4 – I totally agree).

In order to describe **students' overall life satisfaction**, the CW-SWBS (Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale) was used, which shows cognitive subjective well-being and is based on the student's life satisfaction scale by Huebner (1991). The index brings together six statements "I enjoy my life", "My life is going well", "I have a good life", "The things that happen in my life are excellent", "I like my life" and "I am happy with my life", to which 10 and 12-year-olds answered on an 11-point scale (0 – Not at all agree, ... 10 – Totally agree) and 8-year-olds on a 5-point scale. All indices have been converted to a scale from 0–100. Responses with data gaps have been omitted from the indices. Due to the difference in the original scales of school and life satisfaction indices, the answers of 8-year-old respondents are not directly comparable to those aged 10 and 12.

The average and median values of each of the three indices reflecting students' satisfaction assessments are generally high (Table 1). The average value of indices was over 80 points out of 100, excluding 12-year-olds' satisfaction with school and teachers, which ranged from 65 to 75 points. Children are most satisfied with their life in general, with the median value of this index for each age group at least 90 points. This means that, apart from school, other important indicators have an impact on well-being, such as family, friends, hobbies, pets, etc. Life satisfaction was assessed quite similarly in each age group. In evaluations related to school, 12-year-olds were critical: for example, the median value of evaluations given by 12-year-olds to teachers was 25 points lower than that of younger children. The higher standard deviation of 12-year-olds compared to 10-year-olds shows that their estimates vary more than in the case of younger children. This is particularly evident in the assessment of teachers. The reason for the higher standard deviations in the estimates of children aged 8 is that the original scale had less scale points.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of satisfaction indices in Estonia*, 2018

	School satisfaction index			Index for satisfaction with teachers			Overall life satisfaction index		
	8-year-olds	10-year-olds	12-year-olds	8-year-olds	10-year-olds	12-year-olds	8-year-olds	10-year-olds	12-year-olds
Number of respondents	1,025	997	1,058	836	826	902	982	975	1,055
Mean	81.2	85.1	74.9	82.8	83.1	65.2	85.1	87.9	81.3
Standard deviation	19.2	16.9	18.7	25.4	22.2	27.1	20.5	18.5	21.3
Lower quartile	75.0	80.0	63.3	75.0	75.0	50.0	79.2	85.0	73.3
Median	83.3	90.0	80.0	91.7	91.7	66.7	91.7	95.0	90.0
Upper quartile	100.0	96.7	90.0	100.0	100.0	83.3	100.0	100.0	100.0

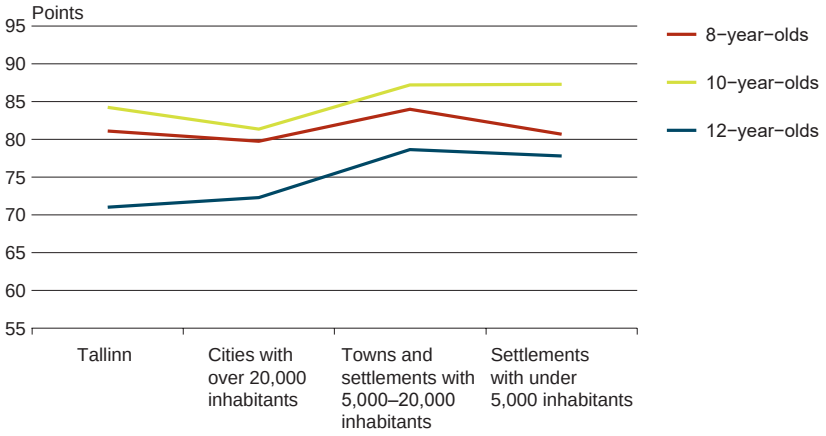
* All satisfaction indices are on a scale of 0–100. The table shows the number of children who replied to all of the questions used for the index. Due to the difference of original scales, school satisfaction and life satisfaction indices for children 8 years of age are not comparable to those of 10 and 12 years of age.

Source: International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Relationships between student satisfaction and school's formal characteristics

Location of the school. First, it is observed to what extent the size of the school location[3] is linked to the aggregate variables of student satisfaction. The location of the school can have an impact on school-related opportunities (e.g., extra-curricular activities, teaching staff), the size of the school, and the commute to school (e.g., commuting time). Significant differences in satisfaction estimates emerged in two older age groups (the statistical significance of the differences in average values have been tested here and in the following by the Scheffe test, $p < 0.05$). Figure 5 shows that 12-year-old children in Tallinn and larger cities are on average less satisfied with school compared to children in towns and rural settlements. It also appeared that estimates are higher than average for children aged 10 who are studying in towns with up to 20,000 inhabitants and smaller settlements but lower for children in larger cities, except for Tallinn.

Figure 5. Students' average assessment of school satisfaction by type of settlement in Estonia, 2018

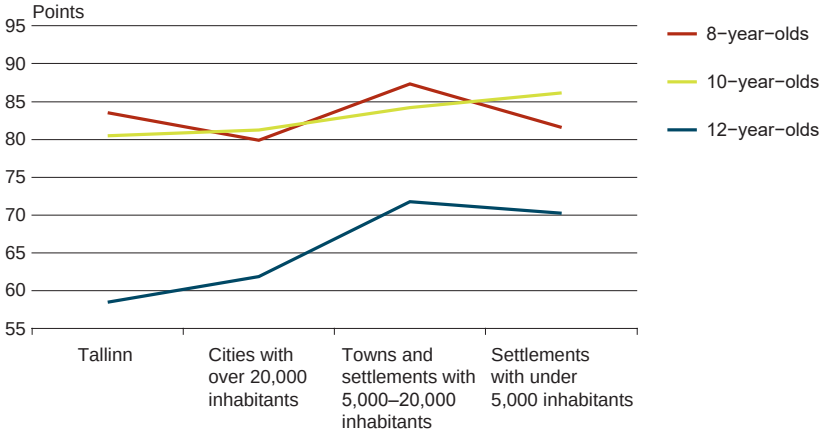


Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

The satisfaction scores that at least 10-year-old students gave to teachers are inversely related to the size of the settlement (Figure 6). The evaluations of children aged 12 are particularly contrasting. For example, the average index of satisfaction with teachers for 12-year-olds in Tallinn is 58 points out of 100, while for those studying in settlements with 5,000–20,000 inhabitants, it is 72. Figure 7 shows that 10- and 12-year-old children studying in settlements with 5,000–20,000 inhabitants are also the most satisfied with their lives. The average satisfaction ratings of children aged 8 in different types of settlements do not differ significantly. Children in city schools are generally more critical about the classroom climate, suggesting that it is easier for teachers to create a good study atmosphere in smaller localities, where the schools are also smaller and children and teachers have a closer personal relationship.

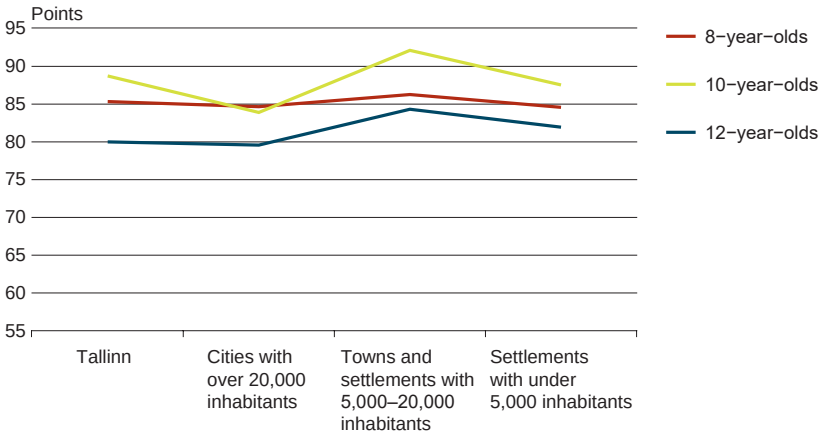
[3] The size of the school location settlement is divided into four categories: the capital Tallinn (16% of schools included in the population; 33% of the total number of students), other cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants (11% of schools and 18% of students), towns and settlements (predominantly county centers) with 5,001–20,000 inhabitants (10% of schools and 16% of students), and schools in settlements with 5,000 and less inhabitants (62% of schools, 33% of pupils). The share of schools is even higher in the last group, but very small schools (classes with less than 10 students) have been excluded from the survey for the purpose of the optimal research process.

Figure 6. Students' average assessment of satisfaction with teachers by type of settlement in Estonia, 2018



Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Figure 7. Students' average assessment of overall life satisfaction by type of settlement in Estonia, 2018



Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

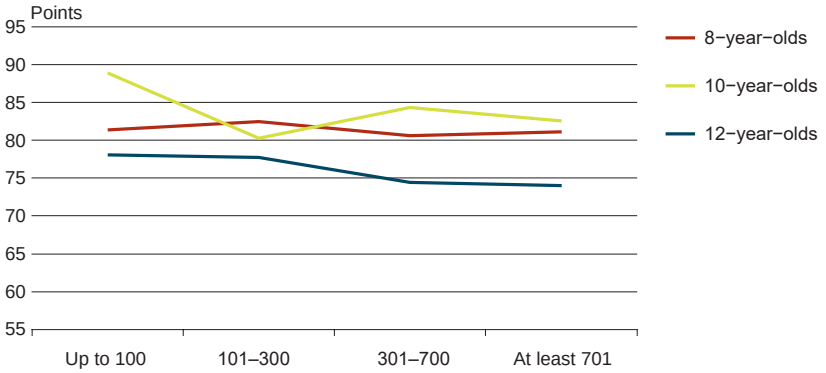
To sum it up, students in smaller settlements tend to be satisfied with school, teachers, and their lives in general. The school network programme for years 2018–2021 (Koolivõrgu programm 2018–2021), which reflects the development directions of Estonia's educational policy, refers to a need to reduce the number of (basic) schools based on the number of students. As a result, basic schools would increasingly be concentrated in larger population centres.

Size of the school. Figure 8 shows that the average school satisfaction assessments of 12- and especially 10-year-old children in small schools (up to 100 students) are higher than for other school types[4]. Yet, these differences on the level 0.05 cannot be considered statistically significant mainly for the reason that compared to larger schools fewer children from small schools participated

[4] School size is divided into four groups based on the number of students: up to 100 students (34% of the total population of schools, with a total of 6% of students), 101–300 students (28% of schools, 14% of students), 301–700 students (21% of schools, 28% of students), and at least 701 students (18% of schools, 50% of students).

in the survey. However, the scores of children aged 10 in schools with 101–300 students are considerably lower than for those studying in larger and smaller schools. There were again no differences in the scores of 8-year-olds: the average school satisfaction index for students in schools of different sizes was 81–82 points.

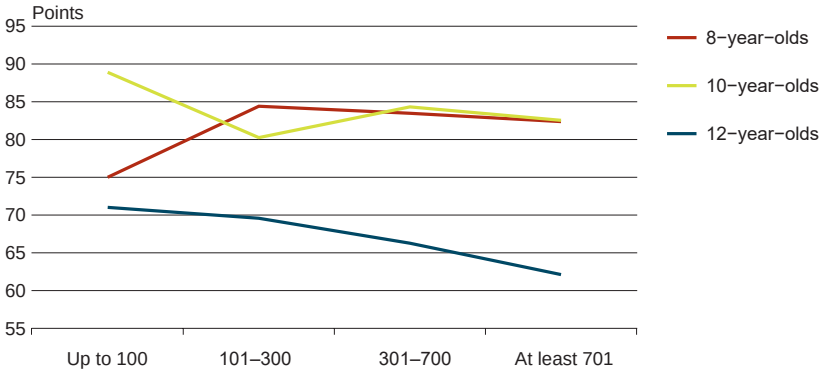
Figure 8. Students' average assessment of school satisfaction by number of students in school in Estonia, 2018



Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

There is no statistically significant relationship between the index for satisfaction with teachers and the school size in any age group. Nevertheless, the level of satisfaction is slightly higher for 10- and 12-year-olds in small schools compared to children in schools with a higher number of students (Figure 9). At the same time, the assessments of children aged 8 years are the opposite: compared to larger schools, there are fewer children in small schools (up to 100 students) who are satisfied with their teachers.

Figure 9. Students' average assessment of satisfaction with teachers by number of students in school in Estonia, 2018

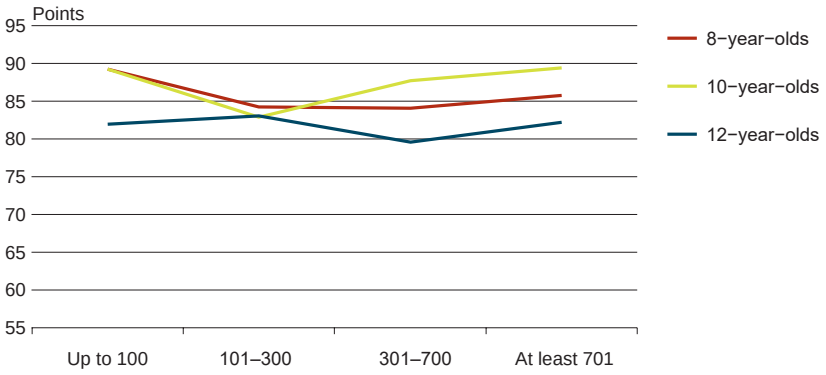


Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

The average life satisfaction evaluation of children in schools of different sizes does not differ greatly. Only children aged 10 in schools with 101–300 students are less satisfied with their lives (average index value 83 points) than children of the same age studying in larger schools and those attending schools with under a hundred students (average 89 points). Figure 9 shows that the

satisfaction score for children aged 8 and 10 in the smallest schools and for children aged 10 and 12 studying in the largest schools are slightly higher than for other school types.

Figure 10. Students' average assessment of life satisfaction by number of students in school in Estonia, 2018

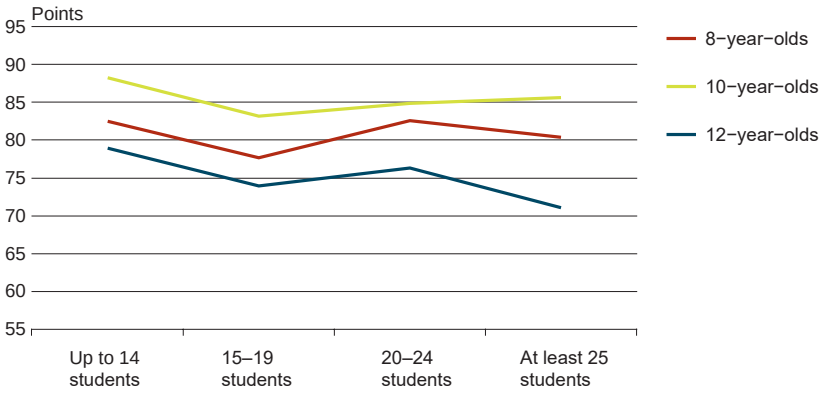


Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Class size. According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act (Põhikooli- ja gümnaasiumiseadus, 2018), the maximum number of students in a basic school class is 24. At the same time, the school owner has the option to establish both lower and higher size limits. The results of this analysis show that the principle *smaller is better* applies in the case of 12-year-old children. In particular, children in the smallest classes (up to 14 students) are much more satisfied with school than students in larger classes (Figure 11)[5]. Their average satisfaction index score is 79, while those studying in classes with at least 25 students have a score of 71. The average satisfaction ratings of children in classes with 20–24 students are significantly higher than for those children in classes with at least 25 students. Although there were no significant differences in other age groups, there is a tendency that the level of school satisfaction for children aged 10 in small classes is on average higher than for those who study in a class with more students.

[5] Class sizes were divided in the following way: up to 14 students, 15–19 students, 20–24 students, and at least 25 students. Among the three age groups examined by the authors, classes with at least 25 students account for 18% of all classes and 33% of students. Classes with 20–24 students account for 23% of all classes and 35% of students. Classes with 15–19 students (13% of all classes) account for 15% of students. Classes with up to 14 students constitute 46%, with 17% of all students.

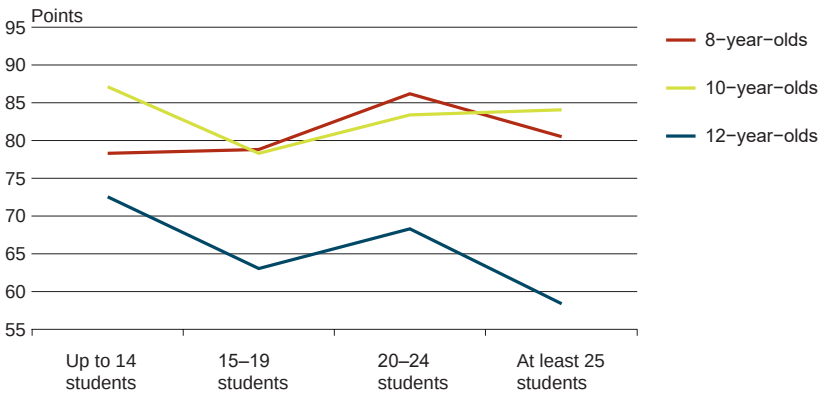
Figure 11. Students' average assessment of school satisfaction by class size in Estonia, 2018



Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

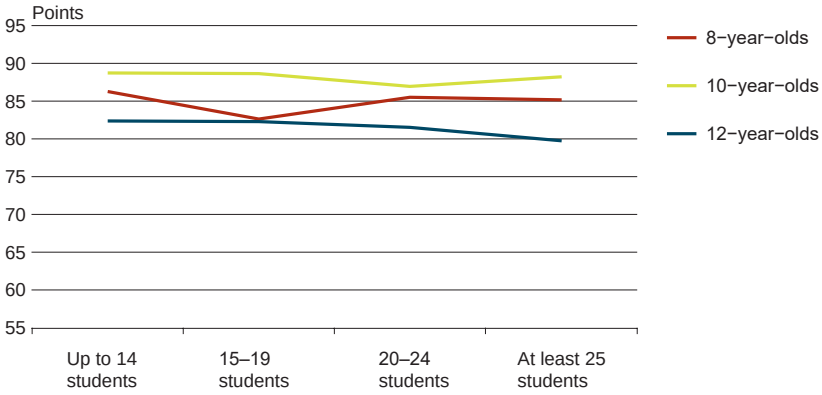
As with school satisfaction, the level of satisfaction with teachers among children aged 12 and 10 is higher among those in smaller classes (Figure 12). The average satisfaction score for 12-year-olds was 73 points among students in classes with 14 children, but lower (73 points) in the case of children studying in large classes (at least 25 students). The average estimates for children aged 8 years and older did not differ much. Moreover, the general trend of these average scores does not support the claim that students in smaller classes are more satisfied. As can be expected, the size of the class is not related to the overall life satisfaction of children, as this index encompasses more than just what happens at school (Figure 13).

Figure 12. Students' average assessment of satisfaction with teachers by class size in Estonia, 2018



Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Figure 13. Students' average assessment of life satisfaction by class size in Estonia, 2018



Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

The average higher level of satisfaction with school and teachers among 12-year-olds in small classes is also confirmed by correlation analysis, which was used to examine the links between satisfaction evaluations and other school size indicators. Statistically significant negative correlations indicate that the fewer students there are in basic school and per teacher, the more 12-year-olds are satisfied with both the school and teachers (Table 2).

It also appeared that the smaller the number of children in class per teacher, the more satisfied are 12-year-olds with their life in general ($r = –0.09$, $p < 0.01$). For children aged 8, there were no statistically significant correlations ($p < 0.05$). In the case of 10-year-olds, the number of students in basic school is related both with school and overall life satisfaction (negative correlations, $p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Correlations of 12-year-olds' satisfaction with school and teachers and school size indicators in Estonia, 2018

	School satisfaction index		Index for satisfaction with teachers	
	Pearson correlation coefficient	Number of respondents	Pearson correlation coefficient	Number of respondents
Students per teacher in basic school in academic year 2017/2018	–0.11**	1,066	–0.10**	902
Number of students in basic school in academic year 2017/2018	–0.09**	1,058	–0.13**	902

** $p < 0.01$

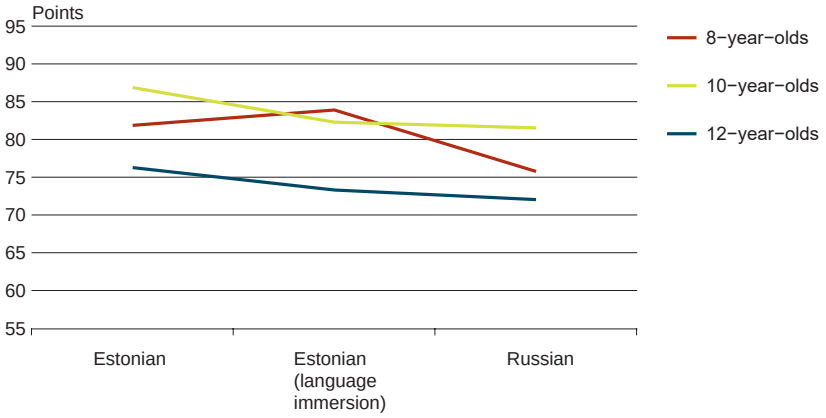
Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

In conclusion, it is important to note that students in smaller schools and classes are more satisfied, especially in the case of 12-year-old students. The exception is 8-year-olds, whose level of satisfaction does not differ according to the size of the school or class. A larger class clearly means additional tasks for teachers: they must take into account the individuality of children and notice their problems, and the job requires more skill in creating and maintaining personal contact with children. This concerns in particular subject teachers who move between different classes. At the same time, the higher scores of children aged 8 may result from greater stability for them in the school environment: their communication with the class teacher is more frequent and relationships closer, in addition, one's own classroom builds confidence and a sense of safety. These results

coincide with other analyses, where 8-year-olds give the most maximum scores, while with age, children's assessments become more similar to those of adults (the average is between 7 and 8 on an 11-point scale) (Kutsar, Raid, & Soo, 2018).

Language of instruction of the class[6]. Figure 14 shows that 12- and 10-year-old children studying in Estonian are more satisfied with school than children studying in the Russian language. On average, the highest rating of school satisfaction (87 points) was given by 10-year-old students in classes with Estonian as the language of instruction, while the score was 82 points for children studying in language immersion classes and in Russian. The satisfaction ratings of 8-year-olds studying in Estonian and in language immersion classes are both quite high (82–84 points), while children studying in Russian are on average less satisfied with school (76 points).

Figure 14. Students' average assessment of school satisfaction by language of instruction in Estonia, 2018

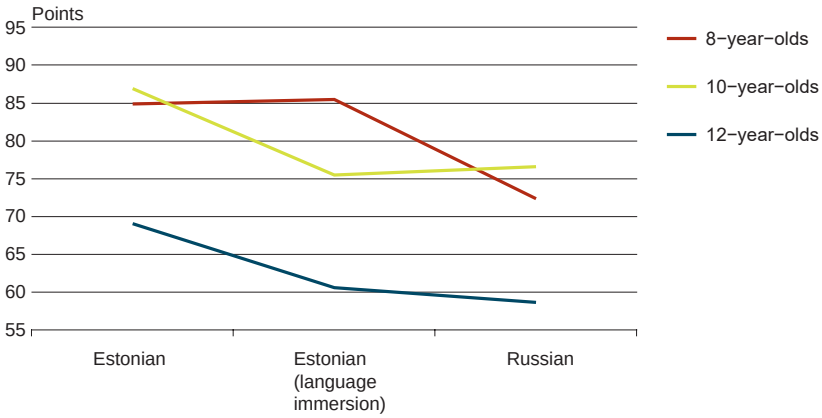


Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Students aged 10 and 12 studying in Estonian are on average more satisfied with teachers. The average scores of students in language immersion and Russian language classes are about ten points lower (Figure 15). Estimates of satisfaction with teachers given by 8-year-olds are similar for children studying in Estonian and in language immersion classes (85 points), while their ratings are significantly higher than for children studying in the Russian language (72 points).

[6] According to the Estonian Education Information System, in 2017/2018 academic year, 5.6% of basic school students studied in language immersion classes. Of children in grades 2, 4, and 6, Estonian was the language of instruction for 76.2% and Russian for 17.9%. 5.4% studied in language immersion classes and 0.5% in other languages (English, Finnish; these were not included in the Children's Worlds Survey).

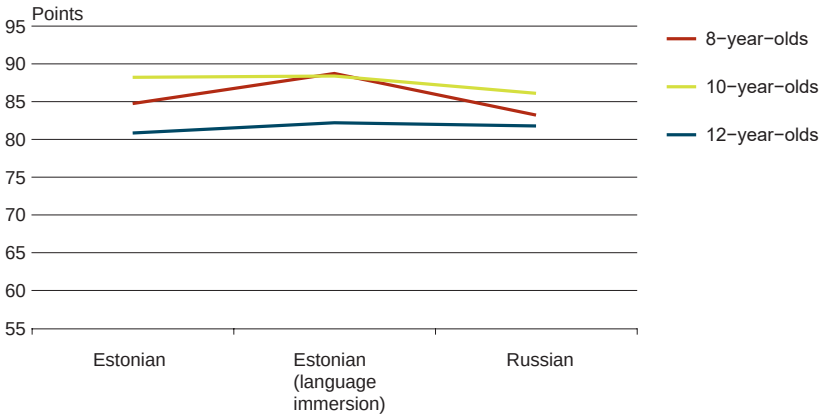
Figure 15. Students' average assessment of satisfaction with teachers by language of instruction in Estonia, 2018



Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

The level of overall satisfaction with life among children aged 10 and 12 is quite similar for students in classes with different languages of instruction; the average index value differs by 1–2 points (Figure 16). Among 8-year-olds, the most satisfied with their lives are students in language immersion classes (average 89 points); the scores of children studying in Estonian and Russian are 4–6 points lower.

Figure 16. Students' average assessment of life satisfaction by language of instruction in Estonia, 2018



Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Overall, among 10- and 12-year-olds, children studying in Estonian are more satisfied with school and teachers, both in comparison with students studying in Russian and (at times) with those in language immersion classes. On the other hand, satisfaction estimates of 8-year-olds in Estonian and language immersion classes are similar. Overall life satisfaction is even higher for children in language immersion programmes, which may be linked to their home background. It could be assumed that parents who enroll their children in language immersion classes tend to be more active and enterprising. As children in language immersion programmes are a very important target group for the future development of the education system in Estonia, further research is

needed to identify the factors influencing their satisfaction. This idea is also supported by an analysis of the knowledge and skills of students in schools of Estonian and Russian language of instruction (Täht et al., 2018).

Physical environment of the school. The level of satisfaction with school and teachers for children aged 12 is significantly, though not strongly, related to the physical characteristics of the school (Table 3). The more floor area there is in the school per student, the more spacious are gyms and the more computers there are, the more positively children assess their school and teachers. However, the Estonian school network development programme provides for reducing school floor area per student (Koolivõrgu programm 2018–2021). Reducing floor area should be approached with caution, in particular in the younger classes, as the limited space may, for example, increase bullying (physical bullying is most common at this age, as described earlier). However, older students also need different types of space, for example, where to spend time during breaks, move around, play and be alone when necessary.

Table 3. Correlations between 12-year-old students' satisfaction assessments and school's physical environment indicators in Estonia, 2018

2017/2018	School satisfaction index		Index for satisfaction with teachers	
	Pearson correlation coefficient	Number of respondents	Pearson correlation coefficient	Number of respondents
School floor area per student, m^2	0.07*	1,058	0.07*	902
School's gym floor area per student, m^2	0.06*	1,058	0.08*	902
Number of computers and smart devices available for students per student	0.10**	1,058	0.10**	902

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

Source: Estonian Education Information System and International Survey of Children's Well-Being – Children's Worlds

Conclusion

Most students aged 8–12 in Estonia are generally satisfied with school. Student assessments of the quality of education are better compared to social relations in the school. In the students' view, teachers tend to help and support rather than take children's opinions into account. For most children up to age 10, teachers and other students are caring and help them in case of concerns. Compared to younger children, among 12-year-olds, there are significantly fewer children who trust their peers and teachers, with almost a fifth thinking that they are not cared about enough at school. It could be assumed that they might need more attention from school support staff.

12-year-olds are significantly more critical than younger students about their decision-making and participation rights at school. Over a quarter of 12-year-olds feel that they are listened to by teachers and have ample opportunity at school to decide on matters of relevance to them. One in five believes that their opinions are not taken into account at all or are considered only a little. Therefore, students think that they are not sufficiently encouraged to express their views and their views could be taken into account more, which is an important component of supportive learning environment.

Most children, more so 8- and 10-year-olds than 12-year-olds, feel very safe at school. The sense of safety is undermined by school bullying, which is quite common among students in Estonia, compared with other countries. It emerged that younger children are more exposed to bullying than older students. Unfortunately, according to the Children's Worlds survey, bullying has not

decreased with time and the share of those who have been called names has even increased. Because of unsafe relationships, students are less satisfied with their peers, and this also reduces the joy of going to school. This partly explains the considerable reduction in children's school satisfaction after 4th grade (see also Kutsar & Kasearu, 2017).

On average, the children who are more satisfied with school and teachers are the ones who go to schools with a smaller number of students and in smaller settlements. Children studying in smaller classes also rated school more positively. If there are fewer children per teacher in the classroom, the teacher has more time and opportunity to pay attention to each child, i.e. to maintain personal contact. This increases trust and makes students feel that teachers care about them and help when necessary. While children studying in Estonian, Russian and in language immersion classes are fairly evenly satisfied with their lives, their school satisfaction scores differ. Among 8-year-olds, students studying in Estonian and in language immersion classes have higher school satisfaction. In the case of 10- and 12-year-olds, the satisfaction ratings of children studying in Estonian are higher than the ones studying in Russian, and in some cases also the assessments of children in language immersion classes.

Therefore, children in Estonia think of school quite positively, but the rather sharp decrease in school satisfaction by 6th grade is concerning. However, for educational policy makers and practitioners, it is an important challenge to ensure that a *school for well-being* is not just a complex concept on paper, but would also be reflected in children's daily school experience.

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WHEN TRADITIONAL MEASUREMENT PRACTICES FAIL: WHO ARE THE CHILD'S FAMILY?

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How to define *family* is one of the central methodological issues of social surveys. In statistics, besides the concept of family, the concept of *household* is used. The article gives an overview of the households where children live today and focuses on what family means to them. The aim is to use children's understandings to add a new perspective to the traditional approach of family and household.

Introduction

This article was motivated by the experience gained from the pilot survey of the International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB) – Children's Worlds[1] in spring 2017. It appeared that it was unexpectedly difficult for children to answer some seemingly simple questions about their household.

For example, one of the survey questions was "How many people usually live in your home (including yourself)?". A 10-year-old girl then asked the interviewer: "My father works in Finland and is away a lot. Do I include him?". The interviewer recognised that to measure a household as a unit is not such an easy task at all. For this child, are there one or more households?

The question "How many adults that you live with have a paid job?" made a 12-year-old boy doubt: "Three. My mother, father and stepfather. Can I include my stepfather?". The researcher admitted that the borders of households are not always clear, there could be at least movement of money between households of separated parents and partial pooling of funds. Moreover, could a father and stepfather share a household in terms of income?

After reading the question "How many rooms are there in your home?" an 11-year-old girl asked the interviewer: "I live part of the time with my mother and part of the time with my father, do I count rooms in both homes?". The pilot study showed that surprisingly many children lived in very spacious conditions – it is likely that they had two homes that both made sense to them.

The aim of this article is to give examples of the understanding of family and household as social phenomena, challenging also the traditional statistical approach. Firstly, it is shown how common are families with children as defined according to the concepts used in official statistics, followed by a focus on empirical relationships of family and household on the basis of smaller studies conducted in Estonia. Due to the specific theme of the publication, the focus in the article is on children's understandings of family, as children are the ones who most frequently move between different households.

Household and family in statistics

Back in the day, statistical studies of families were necessary to gain administrative overviews, for example, how many people get married, how many children are born, and how many people die. The first population censuses in Europe go back to the beginning of the 19th century, in Estonia a population census took place in 1881. The population structure had previously been documented in church records, and a regional census had been organised in 1867–1870. The State Statistical Central Bureau of Estonia was established for the development of the statistical system in 1921. A

[1] The third wave of Children's Worlds (ISCWeB) in Estonia and the publication of the article is supported by the Estonian Research Council (PUT1530).

census was organised in 1922, in which the major innovation was to differentiate *household* (more or less as today's household) and *family* (in the sense of today's nuclear family). It was stated that household is a demographic term which actually may not coincide with family (Tiit, 2011).

As the European Community developed, the need for common statistics and similar social indicators increased. The central coordinator of these became Eurostat, established by the European Economic Community in 1958. However, the collection of common statistics on family came against social, cultural, political, and economic traditions as well as national policies and ideologies, which are described in more detail by Hantrais and Letablier (2014). In Estonia, internationally harmonised data have been collected since the restoration of independence in 1991. By 1997, Statistics Estonia had adopted most of the definitions developed by Eurostat. Since the 2000 Population and Housing Census, the statistics collected by Statistics Estonia have been recognised as internationally comparable (Kutsar & Tiit, 2000).

The collection of internationally comparable statistics on families is based on the concepts of household and family. *Household* is defined as a group of people who live in a common main dwelling (at the same address) and share joint financial and/or food resources and whose members consider themselves to be one household. Household can also consist of one member only, while family starts with two household members. *Family nucleus* comprises a couple, a couple with a child or children, or a single parent with a child or children. Couples may be partners of the same or different sex, who are either married or registered partners or live together. A family nucleus may, for example, also consist of grandparents with grandchildren (Tiit, 2011: 79–80). This definition allows us to statistically identify families living in the same dwelling and related as a couple or (grand)parents and children.

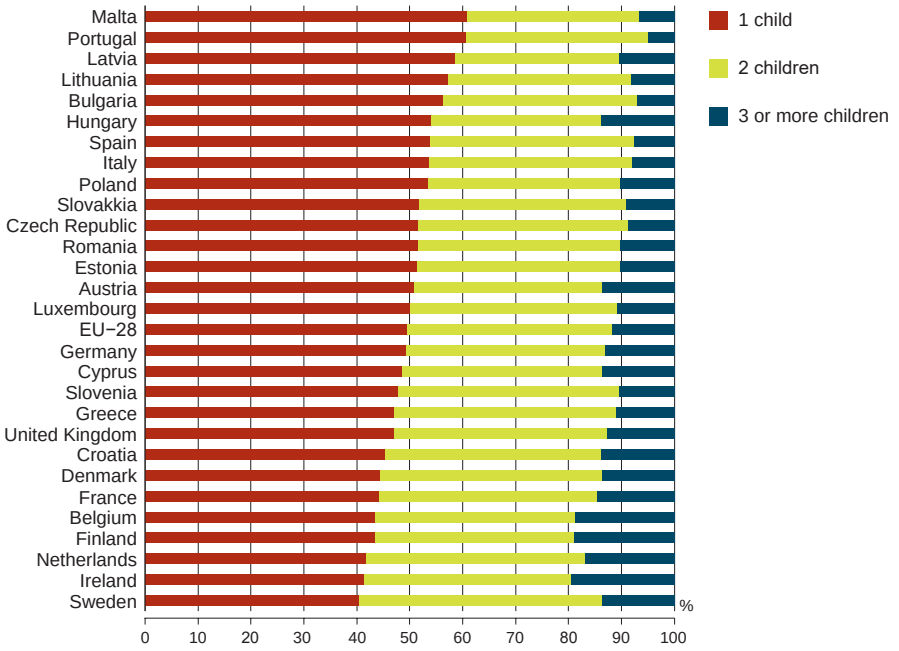
However, it has become clear that such a family nucleus is only one of the many types of family, and therefore, the attempt to unequivocally define family has failed. Family researchers have found that there is no universal definition of family, mainly due to its multifaceted nature. According to Trost (1999), family can be defined theoretically, based on its function, phenomenologically, or descriptively, and empirically. In the formal definition of household, the household members are asked about the household's subjective composition, but subjectivity plays an even greater role in the definition of family. A family may not be limited to the family nucleus or a specific household. Similarly, the subjective membership of a family may change as a result of a life event (members are added to or removed from the family unit) and may also differ in the view of the members of the same family. The conditions for defining one's own family may also vary. Thus, there may be people living in the household who do not belong in the subjective family, and in the family, there might be those who do not belong in the subjective household. In addition, people move from one household structure to another during their lives. There might be several such changes either increasing or decreasing the number of family members.

Households with children in traditional statistical approach

Usually in statistical surveys, a household member defines the membership of the household. This is the case, for example, in the EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)[2], which is the basis of the overview of households with children. According to the survey, households with children accounted for almost a third of all households in the European Union in 2017, and a quarter in Estonia. By differentiating households with children based on the number of children (Figure 1), it emerges that half of the households in the European Union have one child. The share is highest in Malta (61%) and lowest in Sweden (41%). Estonia is close to the European Union average (51%). The share of households with two children is fairly similar for the European Union as a whole and Estonia: 39% and 38%, respectively. However, the largest proportion of households with two children is in Sweden (46%). Households with three or more children account for 10% in Estonia and slightly more in the European Union (12%). The highest proportion of such households is in Ireland (accounting for 20%).

[2] In EU-SILC, all persons aged less than 18 are considered as dependent children, plus those economically inactive aged 18–24 living with at least one of their parents.

Figure 1. Share of households by number of children in European Union countries, 2017



Source: Eurostat

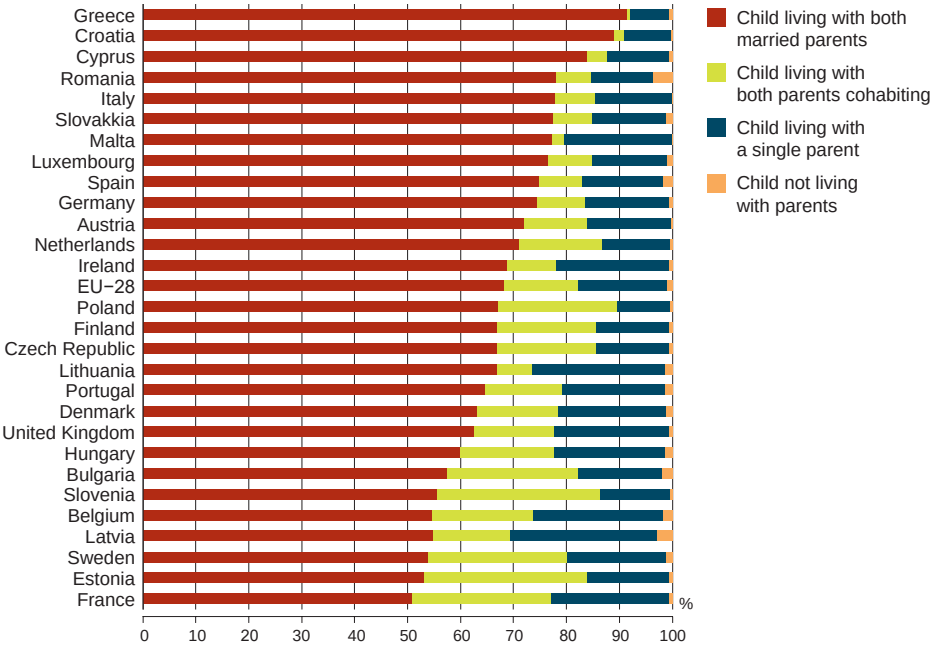
The following statistical overviews are based on the concept of nuclear family, and it is observed in which household structures children lived in the European Union countries in 2017. It is not differentiated here whether children lived with biological or step-parents. Figure 2 shows that the majority of children are raised in households with married parents (68%). The highest proportion of children living in households with married parents is in Greece (92%) and the lowest in France (51%). In Estonia, 53% of children live in households where the parents are married, ranking Estonia second lowest in the European Union.

In the European Union, 14% of children are raised in households with parents cohabiting. The highest proportion of children raised in such households is in Slovenia and Estonia (31%), twice the European Union average. However, the lowest share of children living in households with cohabiting parents is in Greece (less than 1%). Compared to other European Union countries, in Estonia, less children live in households with married parents and more in households with cohabiting parents.

17% of children are raised in single parent households in the European Union. The highest share is in Latvia (28%) and the lowest (8%) in Greece. In Estonia, the proportion of children living in single parent households is 16%, which is slightly below the European Union average.

While the majority of children live with their parent(s), children are also raised by other people. Less than 1% of children in the European Union did not live in the same household with their parents. Children lived separately from their parents most often in Romania (4%) and the least often in Italy and Malta (0.1%). The proportion of such children was close to 1% in Estonia.

Figure 2. Share of children living with their parents by type of household in European Union countries, 2017



Source: Eurostat

The family structures shown in Figure 2 are a snapshot of the measurement moment incorporating invisible structural diversity and its change. If one of the parents moves away from the family, they form separate households, and quite often there will be a new family nucleus formed. Living at times with one parent and another parent, children move between households (and family nucleuses). There is two-way traffic between the households now: besides the child commuting between the two households, also funds for the child's maintenance and the child's time are shared.

Blended family types are more common these days. A blended family may include a child whose sister or brother lives away with the other biological parent, but a half-sister or half-brother lives with the child. In addition, there might be other children of the biological parent who live somewhere else but are still in close contact with the child. In this example, the child is part of a large network of people, which consists of both biologically, semi-biologically and non-biologically related people whom the child could subjectively consider as members of his or her family.

The next section looks at children's opinions about what they regard as family and what are the main factors that make a composition of people a family.

Who are the family in the child's view?

Marika Roots (2010) adapted Jan Trost's and Irene Levin's (Levin, 1990; Levin & Trost, 1992) questionnaire "What is Family?" to the Estonian situation. She asked 104 students aged 12–13 years which composition of people makes a family in their view. The children were given lists of people according to the methodology of Trost and Levin and were asked whether they think these people constitute a family. Children were also asked to explain their answers.

The study found that while married people raising biological children are undeniably a family, the legal basis may not be the sole criterion for defining family. If a couple has cohabited for years and has children in common, only 7% of children do not consider it sufficient to call this group of

people a family. The remaining 93% gave a variety of reasons for why this composition based on cohabitation and children is family. For example, a boy said, "... yes, in some sense they are still a family, because marriage is not really such a big thing, but they have two children instead of marriage and have been together for as much as ten years". A girl said, "... because love and being together are most important, not whether it is written on paper that you are a family...". However, children value marriage as a source of security: a boy said, "... yes, for example, then the mother or father start dating a strange man or woman, but if you are married, you have made a pledge not to date, and then it is much more secure." Therefore, a sense of security and good relationships are also a basis for considering a group with family characteristics as family.

Over time, expected changes take place in family structures. For example, if a brother or sister becomes an adult and starts living on one's own, the vast majority of children still consider them as belonging to the same family. However, if one of the parents moves away, it is not an expected change in the context of family development. Defining family, therefore, also becomes more difficult for children. Children face a dilemma concerning the legal boundaries of family (marriage and divorce of parents), biological and normative boundaries (a real parent should live together with children), and spatial boundaries (living together or separately). It is these boundaries that expose traditional attitudes in children's assessments: a boy said, "... in principle, the family broke apart when moving to the other end of the city." A girl said "... is not [a family], because the mother and father are divorced." Another boy explained; "... yes, they are, because the mother and father do not get along well, but I think that Tiit [the child's name] gets along quite well with the mother and father ... if there were no children, the mother and father would be who knows where, would not speak to each other, but children sometimes bring the mother and father together and then they talk a little bit." Thus, in the opinion of children, a biological link maintains the family's membership, but divorce (breaking of the legal boundary) can end it.

Often new household members (a partner or new spouse of the parent) come into a child's life after the separation of parents and other children may join the family as well. A study carried out by Roots (2010) shows that considering a new member of the household as family depends on living in the same household, but the nature of the relationship between the child and the new person plays an even bigger role: a girl said, "… yes, mother is the mother of all the girls ... yes, he [her partner] is not their real father, but he is still a family member ... he sort of took the father's place and they have a daughter with the mother." For some children, biological relationship is a major determinant of family boundaries, and therefore, a new adult living in the family is not considered as part of the family. A boy said, "... no, because this new man is not the father of the children and then it's just a mother and two children and some stranger." However, for a child, a half-sister or half-brother coming into the family might be a determining factor that makes the household a blended family.

The study by Roots (2010) showed that parents' marriage is an important factor in the definition of family, but parents' cohabitation is equal to it if biological relationships exist (e.g., (half-)sisters or -brothers). It was also found that the large variety of family compositions gave rise to normative confusion. It was most difficult to identify a biological parent or a new partner of a biological parent who had left the family as a family member. Here, the addition of a half-sister or half-brother (biological relation) as well as personal relationships are the decisive factors. According to Trost's (1999) approach to family, children define family based on experience, in the light of common social norms, their observations, and unique relationships.

The following provides a closer look into how children define their subjective family and how it relates to the meaning of household.

Who are the family of a child living in a blended family?

If there are changes in the child's family, for example, one of the parents moves away and starts a new family, the question arises as to whether the child has one or more families. The concept of family itself rather refers to a whole. According to Levin (1994), the children of separated parents

indeed understand family differently. The child may think that he or she belongs in the mother's, father's or both families, but may also fall in-between without directly belonging to either. For example, a boy who participated in the survey carried out by Roots (2010) lived with her mother, with her mother's spouse, and their child, and visited his father's new family occasionally. He explained his answer about blended family: "... I don't know, actually it is not family, because if the mother and father have separated, you are still like in another family and not everybody is related to you and almost everybody is a stranger." It is known that living in the mother's family, the boy is the only one with a different surname, which may be one of the reasons why the child considers himself a stranger in the new family composition.

According to Marsolini (2000), a blended family is a three-part network: it includes the current family, the former family of the parent, and the former family of the new partner. Therefore, a blended family does not function independently but in relation to the former families or households of the family members. According to Cheal (2007), blended families require re-construction of family boundaries and consensus on this between the members.

Eva Mägi (2016) asked five children aged 7–14 about family boundaries in blended families, by applying the method for determining family structure developed by Irene Levin (1990) and Levin and Trost (1992). It turned out that the child's family are the people who provide the child emotional security and with whom they have close relationships. As a result, the father who lives separately as well as the mother's new partner or spouse who lives with the child may fall outside family boundaries. The research of Mägi (2016) revealed that changes in household composition cause stress and confusion in the child, as well as a loss of feeling safe. For example, one boy living in a blended family described separation from his father: "We have started to communicate less often, and he also moved away. Then I visited him sometimes, but now he has a child with his new wife, so she is my half-sister, but I don't like her much, and that is why I don't go there." The father no longer belongs to the boy's family, and he also has not yet accepted the mother's new partner, saying: "I hope that if he stays living with us, I get to know him better and he will become closer to me. /... / He could be more open and talk to me more, because right now he is very quiet and timid. He could go to places more often with me and my mother." It seems that the child is prepared to accept the new member of the household into his subjective family once the relationship with the new member has become closer.

There is less confusion for a child living in a blended family if the child's parents who live separately can solve their issues in a peaceful manner and communicate in a friendly way. Children value family as a well-functioning network that transcends the boundaries of a single household and encompasses several family nucleuses. For example, a child living in a blended family who actively engaged with his separately living father stated: "I like living in that family. I like that everyone loves each other and doesn't fight. That is why it is the best family, I would not change anything!"

Family as a network

Swiss family researcher Eric Widmer and his colleagues have studied the subjective family definitions of adults and older people. In their study, they showed the process of reassessment of family boundaries after partners started to live separately. It became clear that there are people who try to maintain former ties as much as possible and keep the former partner in their family, while leaving the new partner outside. However, it is more common that adults who have started a blended family consider their family to be the people they are currently living with (Castrén & Widmer, 2015). The authors found that women are less inclusive than men, i.e., when adjusting family boundaries, they focus on the new nucleus, excluding the members who left the household. Separation and creation of a blended family means a reorganisation of family relationships for the adult (starting a new family unit), but the child prefers continuation of the biological family in two families nucleuses. Therefore, the child might include among family members people who are not biologically related or are semi-related and belong to more than one household and family nucleus. In this way, the child creates a network of blended family(s) which has flexible boundaries,

supported by the child's movement between several family units or parts of the network (lives in a blended family, interacts with the separately living parent or his or her (blended) family).

It seems that traditional norms and values associated with a family nucleus (mother, father, child(ren)) and heteronormativity of the society as a whole hamper the development of the family as a network and amplify the unacceptance of a presumed family member. For example, in the study of Mägi (2016), the participating children from blended families found it difficult to consider two fathers, biological and "social", simultaneously their family members. Here, the children answered more based on household membership: a family member is a person you live with. However, two persons of the same sex who are parents of a different type (the child's parent and the mother's or father's partner) may ideally coexist, or instead of a non-biological father, a biological father might re-join the family after living separately for some time. Castrén and Widmer (2015) found that the establishment of family boundaries for children is often driven by the mother who lives with them, when she is unfriendly in words and actions towards the parent living separately and limiting communication with the father.

Anneli Djakiv (2018) interviewed eight children aged 12–13 whose parents lived separately about their families, applying Eric Widmer's qualitative method for studying family networks (Castrén & Widmer, 2015; Widmer & La Farga, 2000). The children were first asked to name everyone with whom they lived, then who belonged to the family, and to answer interview questions. The children then drew family relationship cards. It appeared that children's family networks are very different: they can involve only one household but also include people from several households, related both biologically and non-biologically, and pets, who may not even live with the child every day. In his presentation at an international conference, Eric Widmer commented on the inclusion of pets as subjective family members (more often in the case of children and older people), "Pets offer stable love."

In Djakiv's study, for example, Kadri (aged 13) had a broad and well-functioning family network. She lived with her mother, sister and cat, but her family included also a father who lived away but with whom she spent time each week, and grandmother and grandfather with whom she also interacted a lot. She added two friends as family members who she said were like sisters to each other. Kadri included the cat and a rabbit living at the grandparents' place also into her family network as confidants whom she occasionally told her concerns. Mari (aged 12), who lived together with her mother, stepfather, two sisters, and soon-to-be-born half-sister, said that her family members were also her real father who lived separately, a grandmother, and uncle's family. Her father had been violent towards her mother, so the mother did not want to communicate with him. The father only supported Mari financially and she found more comfort in the step-father than in her real father, which is why Mari considered the step-father more important in her life and definitely as a family member. The father and stepfather had never met, as far as Mari knew. Mari's family network seems to function well, but the different parts of the network are scattered and not connected much. (Djakiv, 2018)

In another example from Djakiv's study (2018), Paul (aged 12) lived with his mother, and his family network was much smaller and less supportive compared to the previous examples. Paul pointed out that his family included a mother, a father who lived separately, two adult sisters, grandparents, and an uncle. Paul said that the father and one of the sisters did not communicate with him, although Paul would have liked it, and the grandmother's cat that had been important for him had died. It is likely that the father and at least one of the sisters had excluded Paul from their subjective families but Paul still kept them in. However, a child's family as a network may also be limited to one household. An example of this is Annika (aged 12) who during the study lived with her mother, and had a brother, and three pets. She considered it important that her mother and brother cared about her, helped with concerns, listened to her, and tried to understand. As regards pets, Annika explained that taking a pet means that it will become a member of the family. Annika communicated rather little with her father who lived separately and did not consider him as a member of the family, even though he supported her financially. Through the support received, the households of Annika and his father were linked.

In sum, while biological relations are important for children when defining family, the close relationships between family members are even more important.

Conclusion

In international statistics, there is a fixed definition of family, which is based on household structure and function. Subjective family, on the other hand, is experiential and may differ from the family nucleus approach used in statistics. Comparative statistics show that nowadays children grow up in a wide variety of families. Therefore, today, families are diverse and complex, and the definition based on the agreed methodology might only partially reflect reality.

The family can also be looked at empirically, studying people's subjective family compositions. The perception of belonging to a family is subjective and changes over time, which means, in particular, that the family membership of the same person may be different at different times. Moreover, the subjective family boundaries of people living in the same household may not fully coincide. For example, a child's subjective family can have more than one nucleus; a family member who has left might still be in the subjective family; some people with whom a person lives (e.g., parents or partners) may not fall in the subjective family boundaries, or someone who does not live with the family is a member of the subjective family (e.g., a former spouse and his or her relatives). Family members may include friends and helpers (both of the same and different sex) and pets. Not only a family, but also a household, may expand outside its boundaries when some means are shared, for example, due to children moving regularly between parents' separate households and financial support.

Widmer and La Farga (2000) underline that in household surveys it is no longer enough to simply focus on an individual household, but new methods should be found that allow expanding the analysis to a wider family context, where the observed household acts as a network. Widmer and La Farga propose developing new methods for measuring social networks which would make it possible to examine complex family formations, in particular after a separation or divorce of parents. Coming back to the introduction of the article, it is to be expected that children find it confusing to answer simple questions about household. This should be taken into account in studies organised with children in the future.

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CHILDREN'S RIGHT OF PARTICIPATION FROM CHILDREN'S AND ADULTS' PERSPECTIVES

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Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides for the right of the child to express his or her views and opinions on matters affecting the child. This paper discusses children's participation rights and studies the attitudes of children and adults on asking children's opinion. In addition, it includes analyses of children's experiences of involvement in different areas of life. The empirical basis for this article are the 2012 and 2018 data of the study of children's rights and parenting in Estonia.

> "Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them."
>
> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry *The Little Prince*
> (Katherine Woods' translation, 1943)

Introduction

In recent years, in order to ensure the rights of the child, there has been a growing focus on the right of children to participate in decision-making processes. For example in policy-making, the need to involve children and young people in both the public sector and citizens' initiatives is emphasised more often. A key issue, however, has been a knowledge gap in how to encourage children to participate and be involved in policy-making (Roberts, 2003). The inclusion of children and young people in a survey can be seen as being given the opportunity to have a say on the issues that affect their lives. In the introductory article to this publication, Ferran Casas refers to a change in research focus, giving more and more consideration to seeking the opinion of children and adolescents and studying their experiences. The view of children as future citizens, i.e., as giving valuable input only as adults, is wrong (see, e.g., Jans, 2004). As Casas notes, children are experts on their own lives, and therefore, their opinion should always be sought in matters relating to the lives of children and young people.

This article builds on the child's right of participation (Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child), i.e., the right of the child to express his or her views and opinions on matters relating to the child. It examines the attitudes of children and adults about asking for the child's opinion. There is interest in the practical experience of children having a say in different areas of life. The empirical basis for the article are the 2012 and 2018 data of the study of children's rights and parenting. The child is treated both as a present and future citizen. On the one hand, the results of the study provide an indication of the present participation rights of children in Estonia through the attitudes and experiences supporting children's involvement. On the other hand, the current experience has an impact on the future, i.e., the possibility for children to participate in the decision-making process builds responsibility, activeness and democratic attitude. Competence evolves from practical experience throughout life (James & James, 2008: 35–36). Therefore, these experiences and skills are also important in the future and make it possible to assess how both parents and the society as a whole have managed to prepare children for independent living.

The following analysis reveals important similarities and differences in the evaluations of children and adults as well as by gender, providing input for policy-makers, professionals working with children, parents, and the general public. However, if adults' and children's evaluations of the living environment or some of its aspects differ, the validity of the opinion of one or the other group should not be called into question, but rather it is important to analyse why the two target groups perceive or feel about the same phenomenon differently.

Children's and parenting monitoring in Estonia

The survey on children's rights and parenting has been organised in Estonia twice, in 2012 and 2018. The main methodology and topics were developed prior to the 2012 survey. The topics of both waves were: the rights of the child, the image of the child, the child in need, parenting and disciplining, communication between children and parents, children's hobbies and leisure time, and children's evaluations of everyday life. Depending on the survey year and age of the respondent, the questionnaire consisted of 38–45 questions or a set of questions. Both children and adults answered the questionnaires in either Estonian or Russian. For the survey, representative samples were drawn on the basis of Estonian regions, the age of the inhabitants, children's school year (grades 4–11/12, predominantly 10–17 years old) and ethnic nationality (Estonian and other). The sampling ensured by additional conditions that adults who had children under 18 were represented (at least 50% of the respondents). The questionnaires of the first and second wave were different and the results are, therefore, not entirely comparable. Although the main questions and topics were the same, the survey method was changed, the questionnaire was adapted and minor changes were made to the samples.

The first survey was carried out in 2012 using paper questionnaires. Children filled in the questionnaire in a classroom, the form for adults was filled in at home during a personal interview. An electronic questionnaire was prepared for the last survey and adults answered it in a way that was most convenient for them (choosing the place, time and means by which to reply to the questionnaire). Children responded to the web questionnaires in computer classrooms. For younger children (grades 4–6) responding took place in a smaller group with interviewer's support. Personal interview was combined with filling in the electronic form: children responded to the questionnaire in a small group of up to five children and the interviewer was available when technical or content questions arose. Older children answered more independently, usually with the whole class in a computer room. A trained interviewer was also ready to help and explain when needed.

All internationally accepted best practices (ESOMAR code) were followed to ensure children's rights during the survey. In addition to notifying the legal guardian of the child about the survey and its objectives, it was considered important that the children themselves can also give their consent or refusal to participate in the survey. For children, the purpose and organisation of the survey were explained in a simple and understandable way. After a child was informed about the survey's content and objectives, when entering the survey environment the child was first able to agree or refuse to participate in the survey. The child could take back the consent at any time by stopping to answer.

In the 2012 survey, a total of 998 children participated across Estonia, of whom 45% were boys and 55% were girls. There were 1,000 adult respondents, of whom 64% were women and 36% were men. 44% had a minor child. The survey was commissioned by the Government Office in cooperation with the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and the Ministry of Social Affairs and it was funded from the smart decisions fund (European Social Fund).

In the 2018 survey, 1,110 children participated across Estonia. 48% were boys and 52% were girls. The total number of adults in the sample was 1,248, of whom 53% were women and 47% were men, and 48% had also a minor child. The 2018 survey was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and supported from the European Regional Development Fund programme "Strengthening of sectoral R&D" (RITA) activity 2 "Support for knowledge-based policy formulation". Both the 2012 and 2018 survey were carried out by Praxis Centre for Policy Research.

The article discusses an important topic of the children's rights and parenting survey, which is the involvement of children in decisions relating to their day-to-day lives. One block of questions (9 statements) presented to both children and adults was about the importance of listening to the child and taking the child's opinion into account as well as the need for children to have a say in areas relating to the child's life circumstances. The relevant categories included the child's personal life circumstances and environment (the child's clothing, leisure time, but also whether

medical personnel should explain to children issues related to sickness and treatment), family and home (family vacation, place of living, including the child's home in case of separation of parents, home rules), school life organisation, issues relating to children in local government procedures and legislation. The questions measuring attitude were on a scale of "Completely agree" or "Rather agree" to "Rather disagree" or "Completely disagree"[1]. In the analysis, answers "Completely agree" and "Rather agree" are considered agreement and answers "Rather disagree" and "Completely disagree" together are considered disagreement, but where appropriate are also distinguished.

The children were also asked about their experience of involvement in the same areas as the statements measuring attitudes. The experience of the child was examined using 16 statements, e.g., how often they have been able to have a say about choices in personal communication, living circumstances and arrangements, home and family matters, school life organisation and also in establishing places for spending leisure time. The response options to each of the statements were as follows: "I always have a say", "I usually have a say", "Sometimes I have a say and sometimes I don't", "I don't usually have a say", "I don't want to have a say".

In addition to the frequency of children having a say, the article also discusses by topic children's evaluation of their experience of involvement. All those who chose one of the following answers were identified as respondents with an experience of being involved: "I always have a say", "I usually have a say" and "Sometimes I have a say and sometimes I don't". Different topics come into a child's life with different intensity, and as a result, sometimes besides the frequency of experience, the existence of experience is more telling. We were able to describe this well by summing the responses. A more detailed overview of the methodology of the study of children's rights and parenting as well as the questionnaire can be found in the survey report (Koppel et al., 2018).

The importance of the right of participation and opinion of the child

It is important to pay attention to the right of participation of children and young people, taking into account the child's view, in order to ensure the well-being and protection of children in society (more narrowly in the family, at school, at local government level, etc.). By listening to the child and considering the child's opinion, adults can decide what is best for the child and which of the child's rights are most important to protect. Taking the child's position into account does not mean that it takes precedence and the child has the exclusive right to decide. It is important for a child to understand that his or her opinion has affected the final decision. Clarification and dialogue are, therefore, essential when children are involved, so that the child would understand the decision bases. Such involvement and taking into account the views of children is also in line with the fundamental principle of democracy, according to which the voices of different social groups must be heard and taken into account. This is linked to citizens' participation in the implementation of their rights and fulfilment of their obligations in the community, involving also the weaker groups in the society. Children's views are important both now and in the future. The child becomes an adult over years and through practice, including practicing voicing their views and making decisions about their lives. Thus, in order to be an active citizen, participate and contribute in the society, this competence must be developed through practice starting in childhood (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010; Karu, Turk, Biin, & Suvi, 2012).

The modern understanding, which also ties in with the principles of the child's right of participation and positive parenting, sees the child as an independent, active, and competent actor in social life (Meyer, 2007; Harper, Jones, & Tincati, 2010; Johnny, 2006). Taking into account the child, including the child in the decision-making process, and thereby giving the child responsibility will ensure the child's diverse development, preparing the child to become an independent, active, responsible, and respectful adult.

[1] The surveys were not translated into English. The survey statements and scale items have been translated for the purpose of this article.

There are also problems with regard to the child's participation and views. For example, while the right to care and protection are taken into account, the child's right to act and participate independently are disregarded. This is mainly due to the perception of a child as somebody who makes irrational and irresponsible decisions and who does not have knowledge or experience. Ensuring the rights of care and protection are, as if, opposed here to the child's right of participation (Brennan, 2002). For example, a parent does not hear which hobby or sport the child wants to get involved in and feels that his or her choice is better for the child.

In accordance with the concepts of child as an active and competent individual, care, and protection of the child do not take precedence over or contradict the child's right to participate. Guaranteeing the rights of the child should always follow the principle of the best interests of the child, which attributes equal importance to the child's need of independence and participation (Lockyer, 2008; James & James, 2004; Howe & Covell, 2005; Lansdown, 2005). Of course, it is important to consider the child's age when observing all the rights of the child. Toddlers cannot be expected to have a similar degree of independence as teenagers, and taking care of children of different ages is not the same either.

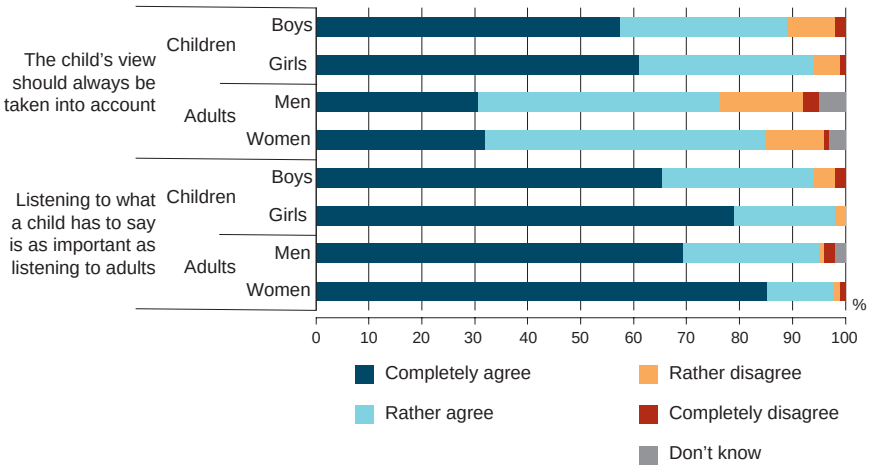
Adults play an important role in ensuring the rights of the child. The level of development of the child is different depending on age, which means that the child's maturity level has to be taken into account. Based on the child's age-related readiness, he or she can take part in the decision-making process or decide on his or her life and environment (friends, relationships, family, home, school, hobbies, home, etc.). Primarily, it is the adults who have given the child an opportunity to express views and influence decisions. It depends on the social attitudes on the rights of the child, personal parenting experiences, and on the social arrangements that guarantee the rights of the child (e.g., informing children about their rights and the exercising of rights, opening up opportunities for children to be involved at different levels, legal assistance opportunities for children). Parents are the most important in ensuring the rights of the child, but also teachers, coaches, and other adults who are often in contact with the child should follow. Adults are those who shape the practice of considering the child's views: on the basis of the child's age, they create opportunities for the child to have a say and decide, and they explain and justify the relationships between taking into account and decision-making. (Karu et al., 2012)

What do adults and children think about listening to children and their participation in decision-making?

The basis for good communication is listening to one another. A society where children and adults take each other's opinion into account, requires in the first place a positive attitude that it is important to listen to both sides. In the study of children's rights and parenting, adults and children were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement "Listening to what a child has to say is as important as listening to adults". The majority (97%) of adults agree (answers "Completely agree" or "Rather agree") that listening to children is just as important as listening to adults (Figure 1). This position emerged clearly as 78% of the respondents fully agreed with this statement. In 2012, 94% of adults agreed with the same statement. Thus, the number of people who think that listening to children is as important as listening to adults has increased, and children and adults quite agree on this (96% of children considered these of the same importance). Compared to the 2012 survey, the attitude of children as regards this statement has remained the same.

It is worth noting that agreement with the statement "Listening to what a child has to say is as important as listening to adults" displays a gender gap (Figure 1). Girls agree more confidently than boys that listening to children is as important as listening to adults: 19% of girls answered "Rather agree" and 79% "Completely agree", while 29% of the boys rather agree and 66% agree completely. This gender gap does not seem to be dependent on age, because the attitudes of women and men seem to be similar to the attitudes of girls and boys. 26% of men and 13% of women rather agree that listening to the child is as important as listening to adults, while the shares of those who fully agree with this statement are 70% and 86%, respectively.

Figure 1. Agreement of men and women and boys and girls* with statements about listening to children and taking their views into account, 2018



* Grades 4–11, aged mostly 10–17.

Source: Study of children's rights and parenting

When analysing attitudes using the statement "The child's view should always be taken into account", which is somewhat similar but emphasises children's opinion even more, we can see that the gender gap appears here as well. 90% of boys agree with this statement as well as 95% of girls. Of adult men, 77% are in agreement, and of women, 85%. The more favourable attitude among women towards considering the views of the child is again evident.

The opinion of parents[2] is slightly closer to the opinion of children compared to other adult respondents: 33% of parents "completely agree" and 51% "rather agree" with the statement, the percentages for adults without children are 30% and 48%. However, in the case of this statement, it can still be observed that there is a difference between the views of adults and children (ten percentage points more supportive), which is also somewhat expected. In agreeing with the statement that "The child's view should always be taken into account" children express an opinion concerning themselves (I want my opinion or the opinion of other children to be taken into account). For adults, agreeing with the statement requires taking on an inclusive role: on the one hand, taking into account the position of the child requires the adult to believe that it is necessary and, on the other hand, the ability to seek and take the child's opinion into account. A certain degree of criticism might also be justified here, as the statement may be too general and in particular adult respondents may interpret "take into account" in different ways.[3] Concerning the statements on the inclusion of children or more generally the rights of the child, adult and child respondents have some different views: children's answers are more based on "I want (to have a say)" and probably the presence of the question "How?" is not as strong. Adults, however, answer about children, seeing themselves more as includers, as in "I have to / I should take into account (ask, listen, weigh, etc.)". As the one who leads action or as the person responsible, an adult may also be more likely to have a question, "How to do it?".

[2] At the time of the survey, 48% of adult respondents were raising a child under 18 years of age. They are considered as parents in the analysis. Other adults who were not raising a minor child at the time are considered non-parents in the analysis (although they may, for example, have a grown-up child).

[3] The organisers of the survey have been asked whether taking into account the child's view means that decisions should be made according to the child's wishes? Although "take into account" ("arvestama" in Estonian) is not meant in the above sense, it cannot be excluded that some respondents may also have understood it in this way and responded accordingly. The formulation of the question was based on inclusion and "take into account" was meant as discussing issues with the child, including reflecting how the child's opinion was considered (as well as why it was not possible to act according to the child's wishes). The basis is the following explanation of the word "arvestama" – consider someone or something, take seriously, take note as an important factor or circumstance; be caring or attentive towards somebody or something (Eesti keele seletav sõnaraamat; translation from Estonian).

Comparing the responses of children and adults, we see differences and similarities in attitudes, which are primarily descriptive, such as willingness to be involved and involve. However, from a different point of view of the respondents, the differences should not be interpreted as contradictory, but first as an opportunity for development.

Asking the child's opinion on topics in different areas of life

Both adults and children were asked about different areas of life to learn more about when adults and children consider it important to ask for the views of children. It appears that both adults and children emphasise the right of children to have a say on issues that are directly related to the child's everyday activities and family life (Figure 2). The majority of adults believe that when making decisions about the child's room, school, clothing, leisure time, etc., the opinion of the child must always be sought: 93% of the respondents chose the answer "Rather agree" or "Completely agree". 95% of children chose the same answers. However, it can be seen from these questions that the children themselves are slightly more than adults convinced about their need of involvement. Adults also agreed that children should be able to have a say in decisions affecting the whole family. However, there were more children who considered it important (81% of adults and 86% of children answered "Rather agree" or "Completely agree"). The views of parent respondents were closer to the children's opinion and they agree with the statement more than other adults (84% of parents answered "Rather agree" or "Completely agree").

There are greater differences in the opinions of children and adults on more general aspects of life. For example, 74% of children believed that they should have a say in the formulation of laws concerning children, but only 56% of adults thought so (no difference was found between parents and other adults). Children also considered their involvement in school issues more important (81%) than adults (76%). Parents, however, were more convinced that children should have a say in school life: 80% answered "Rather agree" or "Completely agree". 89% of children considered it necessary that illnesses and treatments are explained to them, whereas 82% of adults thought the same.

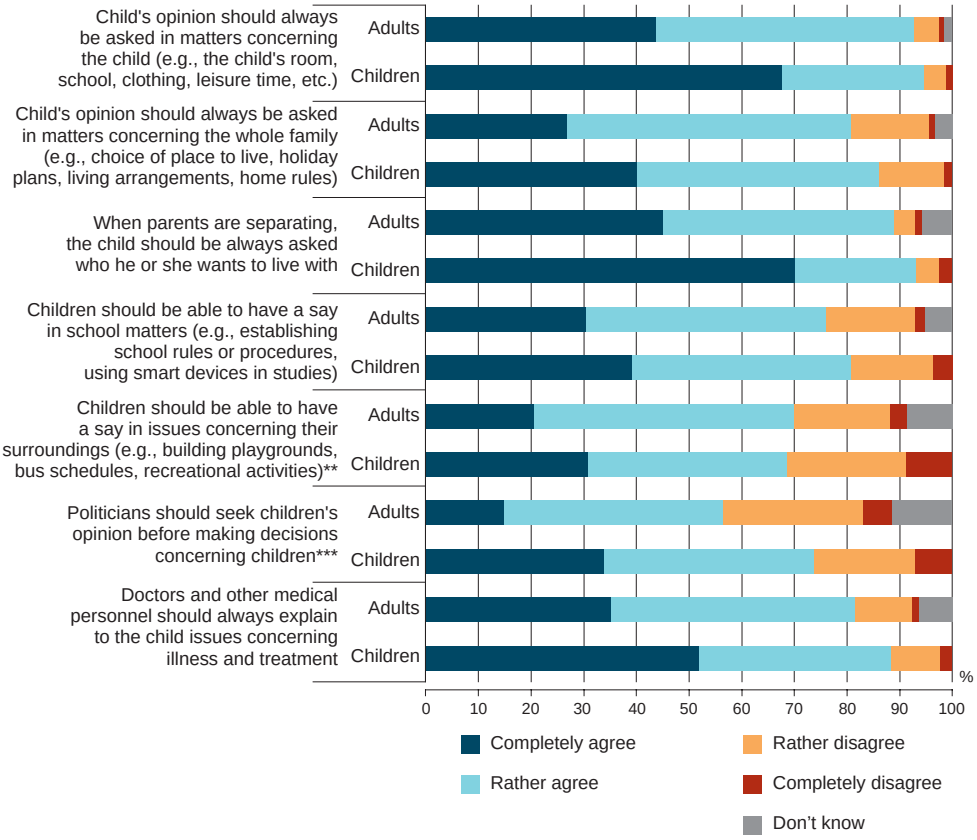
It can, therefore, be concluded that the less personal and the more general the questions concerning children's involvement were, the less adult respondents there were who considered the children's right of participation important in these matters. Moving from the individual to a more general level, there was also an increase in the number of respondents who did not know (answering "Don't know") whether children should have a say in these issues. The same can be said about children's own responses: in matters that do not directly affect their everyday life (such as participation in child-related issues at municipal level or in the formulation of laws), children were more hesitant as regards their need of involvement. Comparing the views of children and adults, we see that children agree more in their evaluation of the need to have a say compared to adults, including on issues that are also more general than the daily life of the child. It is likely that the practice of involving children in more general issues, ranging from those affecting the whole family to the formulation of laws, is only evolving, and therefore, more hesitation here is also understandable. Children are likely not so concerned about how they could have a say, but rather simply express an opinion on the importance of their voice in these matters.

By the gender of the respondent, there are also differences in the evaluations about the extent to which children should have the right to have a say on child-related issues. In more general questions about attitudes (listening to the child and taking the views into account), the gender gaps were more noticeable, however, the views of men and women or girls and boys do not differ that much in specific issues. In children's responses, it can be noted that by topic there is a discrepancy in when boys or girls are more confident ("Completely agree"). Boys, for example, are more confident that politicians should ask children's views before making decisions relating to children (37% of boys and 30% of girls answered "Completely agree") and children should be able to have a say in school matters (41% of boys and 37% of girls "completely agree"). Girls agree more than boys when the questions concern the child's personal life, such as the child's room, school, clothing, leisure time (74% of girls and 62% of boys "completely agree") or family decisions

(for example, if the parents are separating, it is always necessary to ask the child's opinion on who the child wants to live with – 74% of girls and 66% of boys answered "Completely agree"). On the other hand, when observing all those agreeing ("Completely agree" and "Rather agree"), large differences do not appear between boys and girls.

Adults also have a number of topics where the gender gap is clearly defined. For example, in the matters of personal life or family decisions, compared to women, five percentage points less men consider it important to ask for the child's opinion. Such a result was somewhat predictable, because as indicated above, more women (85%) than men (77%) supported asking the child's opinion (statement "The child's view should always be taken into account"). The share of women who consider that children should have a say at municipal level on aspects relating to children (e.g., playgrounds, bus schedules, recreational activities) is as much as nine percentage points bigger. In general, women's and girls' and men's and boys' attitudes are similar by gender, but it is noteworthy that compared to men, boys considered it more important to have a say at local level in issues relating to children, and were not similar to men in this respect.

Figure 2. Children's* and adults' level of agreement with statements, 2018



* Grades 4–11, aged mostly 10–17.

**The statement for adults was slightly different: "Children should be able to have a say at municipal level in aspects related to children (e.g., playgrounds, bus schedules, recreational activities)".

*** The statement for adults was slightly different: "Children should be able to have a say in the formulation of laws concerning children."

Source: Study of children's rights and parenting

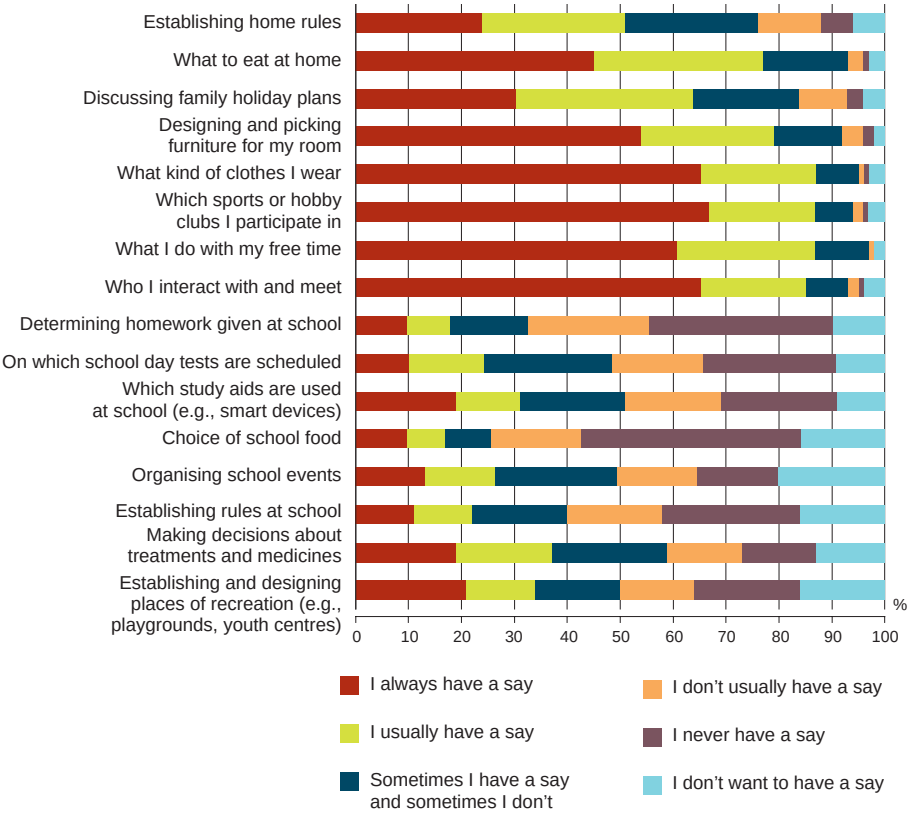
Children's experiences of involvement

When comparing adults' attitudes and children's experiences of involvement in decision-making on issues to do with their lives, it appears that while the attitudes of adults (including parents) are quite supportive, this is not reflected in children's experiences. The survey showed that most children (86–88%) can usually or always have a say in everyday issues directly impacting the child (e.g., leisure activities, choice of sports and hobby clubs, clothing and interaction partners) (Figure 3). It is important to note that children have a strong interest in having a say on these topics and those who do not want to have a say constitute only 2–4%. But the larger the community the decisions affect (although the child is an important member of the community), the fewer children say that they can voice their views. This is already apparent in family matters, where in practice parents are more likely to decide. For example, when designing a child's room, making family vacation plans or establishing home rules, a large proportion of children can usually or always have a say (52–79%), but less than when making decisions which affect children more personally as described above. However, children also want to have a right of say on these family matters: only 2–6% of the respondents indicated that they do not want to have a say on these issues. By comparing children's experiences with adults' attitudes, it is important to note that, although evaluations seem to show adults' support to taking the child's view into account and children too rather want to have a say on these subjects, the involvement and consideration of children may not be so natural and customary in everyday life, and this is also reflected in the children's responses.

Moving from the family to the wider community, we can see that children are even less likely to have a say in school: only 17–34% of children can always or usually participate in discussions on organisational school issues (e.g., meals, events, rules). Children have had the least say in the choice of food at school: only 17% of children have had a say in this. However, it is also significant that 9–20% of children said that they do not want to have a say in school life (Figure 3). Children spend a very large proportion of their time in school, which is a supportive environment for learning and also for social development. The development and taking into account the views of children could be significantly more important in school than the results of this survey show. Outside the home, school is an important environment where children gain the first experience of involvement and voicing their opinion, and can exercise their right of participation.

Boys' and girls' answers on their experiences of having a say vary. It is notable that, in the case of most statements, boys have more often than girls answered that they do not want to have a say (for all statements, compared to girls, 3–10 percentage points more boys have chosen the answer "I don't want to have a say"). In the boys' and girls' experiences and desire of involvement, slight differences also appear in issues close to the child. For example, 4–5% of boys do not wish to have a say about their clothing or room, while this share for girls is 1%. In general, 83% of boys and 93% of girls usually or always have a say about their clothing. In the design of their room, boys (75%) have somewhat less experience of having a say than girls (82%). The most diverse are girls' and boys' opinions on being involved in school topics. For example, 25% boys and 15% of girls do not want to have a say about school events, while 27% of girls and 25% of boys usually or always have a say on this topic.

Figure 3: Children's* answers to the question "How often do you have a say in decisions that are relevant to your life?", 2018



* Grades 4–11, aged mostly 10–17.

Source: Study of children's rights and parenting

It is also noteworthy that while for a number of topics there are more boys than girls who do not want to have a say, there are still issues where boys have more participation experiences. For example, on the topic of school life, such as which study aids to use (e.g., smart devices), 29% of boys have always or most of the time had a say compared to 20% of girls. 10% of boys and 8% of girls do not wish to have a say in this matter. Gender roles can be reflected here and it can also be that for technology questions boys' opinions are asked more frequently than girls'. Boys are even more divided when it comes to topics such as planning tests at school, scheduling the day for taking a test, and the choice of school meals. On the one hand, boys have spoken out more on these topics: 19–29% of boys have always or usually had a say on this subject, which is 5–7 percentage points more than girls. There are also more boys (6–7 percentage points) than girls who do not want to participate in these discussions. Girls, on the other hand, are more likely to have an influence on home and family matters. For example, when planning a family vacation, 68% of girls have always or mostly had a say, compared to 59% of boys. For establishing home rules, the percentages are 56% and 47%, respectively. 80% of girls and 74% of boys have (always or usually) been able to have a say about what to eat at home.

Children were also asked in the survey, "Has it ever happened that you wanted to have a say about a topic or situation, but your opinion was not asked or listened to?" A large proportion of children (77%) replied affirmatively, including more boys (81%) than girls (72%). It is to be expected that many children also have negative experiences of involvement. It is curious that boys feel more so

than girls that their views are not asked about or listened to. At the same time, there were more boys who do not want to have a say on certain topics. It can be assumed that it might be necessary to approach boys differently, in order to activate them to express their opinions more. There is also a question of how much the experience of having a say helps to achieve a stronger voice.

Summary and discussion

The article started with a quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's book *The Little Prince*, which captures the theme of this article and reminds us that children see the world differently. Adults should be aware that their own meanings and opinions cannot be imposed on children. On the contrary, in addition, the opinion of the child must be sought.

Children's experiences of involvement suggest that they differ in different living environments and roles when interacting with adults. It appeared that children usually have a say in issues that affect the child, there are fewer experiences of being listened to in matters affecting the whole family, and even less so in topics relating to school or society in general. Children's experiences coincide to a degree with their own expectations of having a say as well as with adults' evaluations of children's involvement: the further the discussion topics are from the child's personal life and family, the less adults and children feel that the children's opinion is important. However, children's evaluations of their own experience showed that they are willing to participate more than they are currently allowed to.

In matters of school life, the experience of children having a say is unexpectedly rare. It is surprising that up to one in five children do not want to have a say on issues related to school. The question arises as to whether the lack of positive participation experience could discourage children from speaking their minds? While the survey did not examine why this is the case, literature on the participation of children in the school environment suggests that problem areas in ensuring the right of participation may have to do with the fact that school is still a fairly authoritarian institution, where the child's opinion is not particularly appreciated. Thus, Devine (2002) has found that "a child-centred" school environment considers more "the needs of the child" (i.e., the adult takes care of the child's needs) than the child's right of participation (i.e., the child is involved in decision-making and guides the learning process). Wyness (1999) has also noted that when there is talk of "a child-centred approach in education", it is more a rhetoric and does not mean in practice that children would be given space for autonomy and guiding the learning process. We also likely have little experience involving children in broader social decisions as well as in designing the closer living environment, which is why less adults and children feel that children's views on these issues should be sought. Thus, many do not understand why children should be able to have a say at this level, but it can also be assumed that adults have no experience or skills to involve children. For example, 76% of adults and 81% of children agreed that children should have a say in school life (e.g., establishing rules, use of smart devices in schoolwork), but it emerged that only one in four children had a say in setting school rules or on which day tests should be scheduled.

The 2017 local government elections were the first in Estonia where young people aged 16 and 17 could vote. Of the approximately 24,000 young people of this age, 59% participated in the local elections, which exceeded the overall voter turnout (53%) (Pealinn, 2018). Actually, an even greater turnout of young people was expected and they were criticized for being too passive. On the other hand, it should be taken into account that young people were given such an opportunity for the first time and with the higher-than-average turnout, young people confirmed their desire to have a say in local life. Lowering the voting age signaled young people that their vote counts and their opinion is sought. The results of the survey presented in this article suggest that young people's turnout could be significantly higher if they had more opportunities to have a say at home, at school, and in the society at large.

The differences in boys' and girls' attitudes and experiences are also noteworthy: boys and girls are interested in somewhat different topics and among boys there are more of those who say they do not want to have a say on a topic. Perhaps it could be asked in a follow-up survey whether

asking for an opinion or forms of inclusion are equally good and interesting for boys and girls, and do we have opportunities for all children equally and at different levels (family, school, society at large)?

How to use the results of the study of children's rights and parenting? Or more specifically, what can be concluded from the results described in the article? It can certainly be said that in matters relating to children, it is not enough to examine them only from the perspective of adults, as children's evaluations of their own lives are just as important. The evaluations of children and adults complement each other and help to paint a clearer picture of the situation both for people working with children and policy-makers.

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