Material Life Circumstances And Children’s Subjective Well-Being: Cross-National Comparisons of 16 Countries

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The project’s questionnaire and data is freely available to interested researchers www.isciweb.org
Outline

• Research background
  – Material situation and happiness - the general debate.
  – The shortcoming of income measure
  – Material resources measurement
  – Social exclusion concept

• The ISCWeB Survey
• The developed measures
• Findings
• Conclusions, limitations and implications
Material Situation and Happiness - The Easterlin Paradox

• Statistically significant association between income and subjective well-being (the common measure of happiness) - but weaker than expected.

• **SWB remained almost flat** in United States and Japan whose economies grew strongly in the decades following the World War II.

• Affluent industrial societies with similar levels of income per capita have very different levels of SWB.
Possible Explanations

• The “Absolute” Explanation - income matters to SWB only to the level of satisfying a basic standard of living. Some evidence show stronger correlation in developing countries.  
  * This suggested threshold have not been found.

• The paradox does not exist we refer to income inequality instead of income, which is claimed to be a better predictor for SWB.
  * Results are mixed.
Why to study this association in children?

• Though widely studied among adults - the relationship between material situation and happiness is hardly examined among children.

• Children should be treated as a unique social category and examined as a group in its own right - the New Sociology of Childhood.

• Happiness is considered an appropriate aim of social policies.
The Shortcomings of Income Measurement

- **Accuracy** - does not count all the resources and special needs of the household.
- **Arbitrary** - the rationale for the decision of its position is limited, and it is some time fixed for long periods of times.
- Not really connected to poor people reality, does not really tell us **what poverty mean**.
- **For children** – we do not really know how income is distributed within the household and children can not tell us about their household’s income.
Alternative Measures

1. Material Resources Measurement
   - Resources/deprivation indices.
   - Subjective perspective of Material Resources.

2. Social Exclusion
Material Resources/Deprivation Indices

- Deprivation indices are list of common possessions and activities that people are asked whether they have or lack.
- Main advantage: allow analysis at the individual level and not at the household level - thus drawing on actual living standards.
- Examples for adolescents: Family Affluence Scale (FAS), EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), OECD’s PISA.
Subjective Perspective of Material Resources

• Measures collecting the individuals’ subjective appreciation of their material state and their own ability to satisfy basic needs.
• Important in the context poverty - as it avoids the value judgment.
• Usually combined with other more “objective” measures.
The Concept of Social Exclusion

Originally referred to the *most marginalized* groups in society; those who lack basic citizenship rights and fall outside the social protection system. Over time, the meaning broadened:

(1) *Environment and social context* - one's position in relation to services and resources provided through organizations and institutions.

(2) *Relational nature* - aspects of inadequate participation and lack of social integration.

(3) *Process* - what produces inequality? the dynamics and experiences that are part of a disadvantage life.
Why study Social Exclusion?

• Multiple definitions make it difficult to operationalize.
• It has been claimed social exclusion is a separate phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2008).
• Limited research focus exclusively on measuring social exclusion (not mixed with poverty or material deprivation).
• Advantages:
  – Broaden the concept of poverty.
  – Gives place to other aspect in the disadvantaged reality.
  – Brings forward the relationship between individual and society.
Existing Literature on the Association with SWB

• Some indications for a positive low association between material resources (FAS) with mental health and life satisfaction of adolescents.

• There are findings who show positive association between perspectives of children on their schools, local facilities and services to their SWB.
The Association of Country’s Economic Indices with Children’s SWB

• There are mixed results regarding the association of GDP per capita (economic performance) and Gini coefficient (country’s inequality).

• The relationship between FAS and life satisfaction was found to be steeper in more unequal income countries.
Study Aims

1. To examine the validity of a measure of Material Resources State (MRS) cross-nationally.
3. To test and compare the association of MRS and Social Exclusion with subjective well-being.
4. To evaluate the effect of countries’ economic indices on these associations.
Data and Sample


- The ISCWeB survey gathered data from over 53,000 children aged 8, 10, and 12 through representative samples from 16 countries: A representative sample of the entire country or federal region.
  - The entire country: England, Estonia, Ethiopia, Israel, Nepal, Norway, Romania, South Korea, Malta.
  - Federal region: Algeria Colombia, Germany, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Turkey.

- Vary different region of the world. GDP range 573-97307, Gini 26-63.
Twój dom rodzinny i asoby, z którym mieszkasz

5. Czy zadajesz się z pięknymi zastanowami?
- W domu często się bawić
- Mam w domu miejsce do Twoich
- RóżActs lub specjalnych interesów, które mogą być

6. W domu często się bawić
- Tak
- Nie

7. Mam w domu miejsce do Twoich
- Tak
- Nie

8. RóżActs lub specjalnych interesów, które mogą być
- Tak
- Nie
Data collection in Nepal
The Study Sample

• In this study we use the 12 years olds sample (N=19,212)- in order to bypassed concerns about cognitive maturity and also had the best data available in terms of missing values.
• School-based sampling method.
• Structured, anonymous, self-report questionnaire.
The Measures
Material Resources State (MRS)

- Combines a Material Resources Index (MRI) of items children reported having and a component of subjective perspective on material resources.

- The MRI referred to nine items:

  1) Clothes sufficiently good for school.
  2) Access to a computer.
  3) Access to internet.
  4) Mobile phone.
  5) TV.
  6) Own room.
  7) Books to read for fun.
  8) Family car or transportation.
  9) Personal device for listening to music.
Subjective Components

• Item asking - how satisfied children were with what they have. Scale ranging from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied).

• Item asking how often the child worried about money. Scale ranging from 0 (never) to 3 (always).

MRS was then calculated as an average of the MRI and these two items on a scale of 0-10.
MRS Validity

• Exploratory Factor Analysis found the three component loaded on the same variable MRI 0.79, satisfaction with what you have loaded 0.5, and frequency of being worried about money loaded 0.78.
• Together they explain 49.6% of the measure variance.
• This was tested across all 16 countries (expecting loading of at list 0.4).
  – Only in Spain one part loaded on a different variable.
  – In Colombia one item loaded a bit less (0.36)
• MRS correlated positively with GDP r=0.339. (internal validity)
Social Exclusion Measurement

- The original measure (Gross-Manos, 2015) followed Middleton and Adelman (2003) and included three dimensions: school, area and services, participation in social activities.

- Confirmatory Factor Analysis using SEM showed better fit for a model with only two dimensions: school ($\alpha=0.737$), area and services ($\alpha=0.777$).

- Fit statistics: $\chi^2=1918$, df=31, p-value=0.000, NFI=0.96, TLI=0.943, CFI=0.961, and RMSEA =0.059.

- The model was tested in all countries and found to have a good enough fit in all except South Africa.
Social Exclusion Measurement

Diagram showing nodes and edges connected to represent social exclusion measurement.
Subjective Well-Being Measures

Subjective Well-Being Measures

• *SLSS* - cognitive measure of life satisfaction developed by Huebner (1991). Four Items (such is “My life is going well”) 11-point agreement scale. \( \alpha = 0.91 \)

• *Core Affect* – the positive affect measure asking children how much they felt different feelings during the last two weeks: happy, satisfied, relaxed, active, calm, and full of energy. 11-point scale. \( \alpha = 0.872 \)
Findings
### Mean scores for main measures

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<th>Material Resource Index (MRI)</th>
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## Correlation and Countries Economic Indices

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## Linear Regression Explaining SWB Variance by MRS

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## Linear Regression Explaining SWB Variance by Social Exclusion

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Percent of Variance explained by Social Exclusion\MRS(other variables controlled)

- SLSS
- Core Affect

R Square Change of Social Exclusion
R Square Change of Resource State
Discussion and General Conclusions
The Measures

• The MRS and Social exclusion - generally valid across almost all countries – despite the large variability of the countries culturally and economically.

• Surprisingly, the School dimension was negatively (though very low) associated to the MRI and GDP.
  – Number of economic developing countries scored very high for this dimension. Encouraging... but – it uncovers some of the complexities of social exclusion measurement.
  – Material deprivation and social exclusion are claimed to be separate phenomena - do not necessarily correlate.
  – As the idea of social exclusion is a lot about services provision in a society, it is important that school will be part of children’s social exclusion measurement.
Data collection in Ethiopia
Data collection in Nepal
Association with SWB

• As expected lower material resources (MRS) and social exclusion were found to be associated with higher SWB in both measures.

• Social exclusion was able to explain much higher portion (20%) of SWB than MRS (3/6%) even after controlling for demographic variables and countries’ economic indices.

• Point to the important potential contribution the social exclusion framework might have.
Countries’ Economic Indices and SWB

- GDP and Gini correlate low to SWB and in unclear pattern.
- They contribute to the regression but vary low (2-4%).
- Only the correlation of SWB with MRI was found to be stronger for less equal/lower GDP countries.
- The MRS and Social Exclusion actually correlated lower in those countries.
- While this support limitedly the Esterline paradox, it seems that once broader perspective income is considered, reflecting the consequences of living in the margins of a society – the paradox does not excites.
The Association Cross-nationally

- The stronger explanation ability of social exclusion is apparent across all countries.
- Still the contribution of the measures differ quite dramatically across countries.
- Different cultural and social contexts as well as upbringing - affect one’s notion of a happiness - the Conceptual Referent theory.
- There are some interesting national patterns – but they are complex to explain. For example:
  - Germany and Colombia – not a big difference in the contribution of MRS and Social Exclusion.
  - South Korea – very low SWB and Social Exclusion compared to MRS.
Limitations

• No income measure to compare (no adults sample).
• Secondary analysis – limits the measures’ items.
• Limitation in reliability test for MRS.
• Adding more objective component to social exclusion measurement.
Implications for Social Policy

• The important place social exclusion was found to have in children’s SWB show it should be measured in a specific way despite the complexities.

• The EU is occupied for several years with measuring social exclusion.

• In the UK material deprivation is part of the national measurement for 20 years.

• SWB measures can help priorities social policy. Some countries consider to measure SWB annually.
Thanks for Listening!

Further information about Children’s Worlds
Website: www.isciweb.org
E-mail: (Project Co-ordinator) Hanita Kosher
hanita.kosher@mail.huji.ac.il