An Ecological, Relationship-Based Model of Children's Subjective Well-Being in 11 Countries

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Children’s Subjective Well-Being

- Children’s self-assessment of their own lives
- Important indicator of developmental health and well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2010; Casas et al., 2013)
- Individual and contextual factors with geographic and cultural variation contribute to children’s subjective well-being (Broberg, 2012; Dinisman & Rees, 2014; Legace-Suguin & Case, 2010)
An ecological, relationship-based model of children’s subjective well-being recognizes the bidirectional influences between children, their contexts (including home and family, life and neighborhood, school, and peers), and their well-being (indicated by life satisfaction, mental health and self-image, Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Lawler et al., 2015a, 2015b; Newland et al., 2014; Newland et al., 2015)
Children’s Worlds: International Survey of Children’s Well-Being

- Children’s Worlds collects representative data from numerous countries on 8, 10, and 12 year old children’s perceptions of their own lives as measures of their subjective well-being, $N=34,500$ (Dinisman & Rees, 2014) [http://www.isciweb.org/](http://www.isciweb.org/)
- Validity and reliability of the measures are well-established (e.g. Casas & Rees, 2015)
- The US Principal Investigators for Children’s Worlds are at the University of South Dakota
- US sample of children, $n=1,800$
Variables Tested as Predictors of Children’s SWB

- Age, gender, number of residences, residential status
- Home environment, family relationships, parent involvement
- Family financial resources, life stress, neighborhood quality
- Teacher relationships, school climate, school satisfaction
- Peer relationships
Variables Included as Indicators of Children’s SWB

- Life Satisfaction
- Mental Health
- Self-Image
Model Development, Step 1: 12 Year Olds in Rural US Communities

Subjective well-being for children in a rural US community (7th graders/12 year olds, \( n = 149 \), pilot data). Regression and bootstrap analyses found that male gender, number of residences, school satisfaction, and family, teacher, and peer relationships predicted 1 or more of the subjective well-being indicators: life satisfaction, mental health, and self-image (Newland et al., 2014).
Model Development, Step 2: 10 and 12 Year Olds in Rural US Communities

Predictors of subjective well-being for children in rural US communities (10 and 12 year olds, \( N = 1,286 \)). Regression and bootstrap analyses showed that all variables significantly predicted 1 or more SWB indicator(s), but the strongest and most consistent predictors were family, teacher and peer relationships, as well as gender (male), school climate, and school satisfaction. There were some differences in prediction across age groups (Newland et al., 2015).
Model Development, Step 3: 12 Year Olds: US & 10 Other Countries

Predictors of subjective well-being for 12 year old children in the US ($n = 784$) and 10 other countries: Algeria, Brazil, Chile, England, Israel, Romania, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Uganda (randomly selected $n = 784$). Regression analyses found that all variables significantly predicted 1 or more SWB indicator(s), but the strongest and most consistent predictors were family, teacher and peer relationships, as well as gender (male), school climate and satisfaction, and neighborhood quality, with differences between samples (Lawler et al., 2015a)
Children’s Worlds: 12 Year Olds in 11 Countries
Predictors of subjective well-being for 10 year old children in the US (n = 502) and 10 other countries: Algeria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Israel, Nepal, Romania, Rwanda, South Korea, and Uganda (randomly selected n = 502). Regression analyses found that all variables except gender significantly predicted 1 or more SWB indicator(s), but the strongest and most consistent predictors were family, teacher and peer relationships, as well as school satisfaction and neighborhood quality, with differences between samples (Lawler et al., 2015b).
Children’s Worlds:
10 Year Olds in 11 Countries
International Relevance

- Across 11 countries, relational, school, gender, and neighborhood variables were the strongest predictors of children’s well-being at 10 and 12 years old.
- Teacher relationships were inversely related to child well-being in both the 10- and 12-year-old US samples and in the 10-year-old international sample, suggesting that children who are struggling in school may seek out teachers for support.
- Findings strongly suggest the relevance of an ecological, relationship-based model of children’s subjective well-being in examining international samples of children.
Limitations

1. Cross-sectional design
2. Representativeness of samples
3. Samples may not be compatible
4. Self-report data
5. Lower levels of internal reliability on Home Environment and School Climate scales
6. Possible selection bias and underrepresentation of some groups, e.g., at-risk children not purposively sampled
7. Differences between countries not fully explored (see Casas & Rees, 2015; Rees & Dinisman, 2015)
Implications

• An ecological, relationship-based model of children’s subjective well-being provides a framework for assessing children’s well-being in various cultural and environmental contexts

• Additional research using the ecological, relationship-based model within and between countries is warranted (and is in progress)

• Qualitative research is needed to triangulate the findings and add “voices” to these data (also in progress)
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References