Data-Based Child Advocacy

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108.1 Introduction

Over the past century, and particularly over the past 25 years, many single-issue child advocacy groups have emerged, and more recently several groups have been formed which focus on more comprehensive child advocacy.

Internationally, many groups which focus on improving the lives of children have emerged over the past century. For example, the Save the Children Foundation has been a key player in this arena since its formation in the 1930s. Save the Children International also combines child advocacy with data in producing a very simple international index of child well-being each year.

Many religious-based groups such as World Vision, which describes itself as a Christian relief organizations established in 1947, and Child Fund International (formerly known as Christian Children's Fund), which sponsors orphanages around the world, are part of the growing child advocacy network.

Child Watch International is a group supported primary by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation that combines child advocacy and research. The Child Rights Information Network links a number of groups around the work fighting for the rights of children.

In the United States, the Children's Defense Fund was launched mid-1970s as an effort to move the well-being of children higher on the political agenda. In the 1980s, a group of child advocates around the country formed the National Association Child Advocates which later became the Voices for America's Children. Voices for America's Children is comprised of child advocate groups in nearly every state and a few big cities, and it has developed into a powerful nationwide network.

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In 1997, five US presidents joined together to launch an effort called America's Promise which was meant to see that all of America's children were given fundamental resources to thrive. That morphed into the America's Promise Alliance which now works with several dozen child-serving organizations focused on a couple key issues for children.

More recently, a foundation-funded organization called First Focus has emerged to work at the congressional level to educate members of congress and elevate children's issues on their agenda. Over the past few years, the Children's Leadership Council has emerged which attempts to organize the large number of child-serving and child-focused organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C., to work more collaboratively.

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The groups listed above are just a sample of the large number of organizations focused on child advocacy. Within the broader field of child advocacy, there has been a growing subfield which merges science and advocacy. This subfield is of special interest to the child indicator field because it specifically uses data on the well-being of children to advance the well-being of children. The remainder of this chapter focuses on this growing field generally known as data-based child advocacy.

Over the past two decades, there has been an enormous increase in the collection and use of social indicators related to children (Ben-Arieh and Frones 2007; Ben-Arieh 2008; O'Hare 2011; Brown et al. 2002, 2008; Brown and Botsko 1996; Coulton 2008; Brown and Moore 2007; Stagner et al. 2008). The child indicator movement has been fostered and enhanced by work in many sectors including philanthropy (O'Hare 2009a; Global Movement for Children 2011), government agencies (The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics 2011), civil society (Save the Children UK 2008), nonprofit organizations (Child Trends 2008), and academia (Stagner et al. 2008). In addition, the development has been driven by a mix of scholars, scientists, researchers, policymakers, journalists, advocates, and practitioners. This rich mix of providers and users and the breadth of organizations involved often means that child well-being data are employed in ways that go beyond what is typically considered scholarship. Many of these applications involve some type of advocacy activity.

The widespread use of child indicators outside of academic circles is linked to the fact that many of the regular publications of child well-being indicators over the past 20 years have been undertaken by organizations that are not primarily scholarly organizations. For example, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Save the Children UK, The African Child Policy Forum, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Foundation for Child Development have all used publications of child indicators to raise public awareness of children's issues and to improve the lives of children.

Despite this proliferation of child well-being data and its widespread use outside of academia, there are few articles in the scholarly or popular literature clearly focused on using child indicators in an advocacy context. A perusal of several recent textbooks on child indicators did not find a single article or chapter with word “advocacy” in it (Ben-Arieh and Frones 2009; Ben-Arieh et al. 2001; Ben-Arieh and Goerge 2006; Hauser et al. 1997; Naar-King et al. 2004). Although the word “advocates” appeared in one article, little information in the article is focused on use of data by advocates (Moore and Brown 2006).

Examination of the first 14 issues of the journal Child Indicators Research found only one article with the word “advocacy” or “advocate” in the title, and that article actually focused on centers in Sweden where children were suspected of being exposed to sexual or physical abuse, rather than the use of child indicators in an advocacy context (Rasmusson 2011).

Looking at the presentations made at the three ISCI conferences, I found only two papers with the word advocacy and advocate in the title (Rasmusson 2009; Carrasco et al. 2011). Neither of these focused on the use of data in an advocacy context.

While many of the articles in the text books cited above and articles in the Child Indicators Research journal are linked to advocacy-related activities (e.g., by linking indicators to public policies), none are about advocacy per se. Examining the keywords associated with all of the articles in the first 14 issues of Child Indicators Research showed that none used the word advocate or advocacy. However, a few of the keywords associated with these articles included terms that are closely linked with advocacy activity such as knowledge transfer and exchange, research utilization, using child indicators, communication, children’s rights, and children’ services. Only two articles had “public policy” as a keyword (Guzman et al. 2009; Mekonen 2010) although one other article had the term “family policy” as keyword (Adema et al. 2009).

Articles from a child indicator perspective do not cover use in child advocacy, and typically articles from a child advocacy perspective do not address the use of child indicators or data in an advocacy context (Takanishi 1978; Knitzer 1976; Dalrymple 2005).

Lists of how indicators are used seldom mention advocacy. For example, Brown and Corbett (1997) list five uses of social indicators, but use as an advocacy tool is not one of the five.

In short, there is a dearth of information about the use of child indicators in an advocacy context.

The lack of publications on the use of child indicators in advocacy is surprising because indicators are increasingly seen as important to the policy process. One widely read publication states (Eurochild 2009), “Indicators are increasingly valued as a means to interpret and present statistical data, monitor policy implementation, and provide the grounds for evidence-based policies and increased accountability.” While the child indicators field has gone through major changes in the past two decades, two prominent child researchers (Ben-Arieh and Goerge 2006, p. 21) recently wrote “. . .we argue that yet another change of focus is appropriate. We refer to the role of indicators in shaping policies and services, which requires that indicators be devised and used in ways that would extend their impact beyond building knowledge." Indeed, the movement toward more governmental accountability has stimulated broader use of child indicators (Corbett and Brown 1997).

The dearth of publications on the use of child indicators in an advocacy context is also puzzling because the major professional organization for child indicator researchers includes many goals that are related to advocacy. The increase in use of child indicators is closely related to the emergence of the International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI), an organization where scholars, researchers, advocates, and data users can discuss issues of conceptualizing, measuring, and reporting and use of child well-being indicators. Formed in 2005, ISCI now has a journal (*Child Indicators Research*), a book series, and a regular newsletter, and the organization has now sponsored three international conferences.

The stated goals of ISCI are (see http://www.childindicators.org/goals.html):

- Contribute to the well-being of all children.
- Share knowledge and experience.
- Develop standards.
- Improve data resources.
- Foster collaborative research and projects.
- Foster diversity in methodological approaches.
- Enhance dissemination of information on the status of children.
- Help organizations apply the findings to policy and practice.
- Enhance the capacity of the field in countries that are in the initial stages of producing child well-being indicators.

While many of goals put forth by ISCI focus on scholarship, there are several goals that go beyond scholarship into realms of advocacy particularly in communicating results and applying indicators to policy and practice. The content of this chapter delves into many of the advocacy goals put forth by ISCI.

This article provides an overview of how child indicators are used in a variety of advocacy contexts. Following a section providing some additional background, I provide a list of five distinct uses of child indicators in advocacy-related activity. I end with a few suggestions about how scholars can make their research findings and writing a little more appealing to public audiences that are often critical ones to reach in any advocacy activity.

108.3 Background: Child Indicators in an Advocacy Context

I believe there is a place for advocacy within the child indicator movement that is consistent with widely accepted scientific principles and practices. One of the obstacles to recognizing the use of child indicators in advocacy is the narrow view of advocacy among many scholars and scientists. In fact, I think it may be the case that child indicator experts are already more involved in advocacy activity than they may recognize.

Many scholars view an advocate as someone who argues for one side regardless of the unbiased facts. Since scientists are trained to examine the facts and then endorse the view that is supported by the facts, it is easy to understand why scientists reject this type of advocacy. But there are other kinds of advocates that take a different approach.

Data-based child advocacy is a term coined by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2003; Benjamin 2009; International Society for Child Indicators 2009, O'Hare 2007) and refers to the use of data, statistics, and science to enhance discussion and debate about topics relevant to child well-being. Advocacy in this context is often not about supporting a certain piece of legislation or a specific policy; it is about using data to elevate public understanding and public awareness of child well-being or making data more easily available to a nonscientific audience. In addition, reports are often meant to encourage decision-makers to use data for decision making rather than basing policy decisions on ideology, politics, myths, or other nonscientific basis.

It is important to recognize that advocacy does not necessarily mean adversarial. Many times advocacy involves recognizing and working with allies or other groups that have a common interest. It can also involve helping other individuals or groups, for example, by providing data, that have a goal of promoting child well-being.

I think of advocacy and science as being ends of an activity continuum. At one end, some advocates pay no attention to scientific evidence. At the other end of the continuum, some scientists pay no attention to the social consequences of their research and make no attempt to get their findings in front of public or policymaking audiences. But there are many points along the continuum where scholarship and advocacy can be combined in a way that enhances both.

I would argue that solid data is more important for child advocates than for advocates representing most other groups. In a political context, most advocates represent groups that can provide money (financial support for the next election); they can provide vocal public support and/or votes if an elected official votes or makes a decision that benefits the group engaged in advocating. Child advocates typically have no votes or money to offer elected officials. Often the only thing child advocates can offer is scientific evidence (and perhaps moral appeals). Therefore, making good data easily and readily available is a role scholars can play in the advocacy process.

108.4 Types of Advocacy Activities

Child advocacy is defined here as any activity where at least one central component is focused on improving the lives of children. Advocacy-related activities can be described and clustered many different ways, but for purposes of this chapter, I discuss five different kinds of advocacy activities:

1. Increasing public awareness
2. Making data more easily available

3. Advocating for more and better data on children
4. Goal setting and monitoring child well-being
5. Evaluating programs and policies

108.4.1 Increasing Public Awareness

I would argue that using child indicators to raise public awareness about the well-being of children is the single biggest use of child indicators in an advocacy context. Growing numbers of indicator-based reports around the world are trying to educate the public and policymakers about the levels and trends in the well-being of children.

It is commonly believed that policymakers and the public would provide more support for children if they really understood the dire circumstance facing many children. Data-based reports on children can help increase policymakers' and the public's understanding of children's issues. Moreover, using data to generate public interest in improving the lives of children can put political pressure on policymakers to enact programs to enhance child well-being.

In the words of Suzanne Hood (2006), "Regular reports on the state of children are an essential tool in raising public awareness, achieving political support for improving children's living conditions and promoting and ensuring children's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child."

In terms of raising public awareness, a key development on the international front was the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the United Nations in 1990, which fostered and promoted more measurement and reporting on child well-being around the globe (United Nations 1989/1990). This document provides a framework many countries have used to develop more and better ways to measure the well-being of their children. Moreover, Article 44 of the convention calls for regular reporting by countries that have signed the document (every country in the world except the United States and Somalia).

UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, has also produced a series of publications focused on various aspects of child well-being in developed countries. There are now nine publications in the series from the Innocenti Research Centre which began in 2000, mostly focused on measures of comprehensive child well-being among a set of developed countries.

The adoption of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals has also fostered measurement and reporting on the well-being of children around the globe (United Nations 2000). While the United Nations Millennium Development Goals project is not about children per se, some of the Millennium Development Goals, such as reducing child mortality and achieving universal primary education, are related directly to the well-being of children, and other goals, such as improving maternal health and eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, are closely related to child well-being.

In addition, the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) initiative is now in the fourth round of surveys focused on measuring the well-being of children in less developed countries (available online at http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index_24302.html). This initiative has also generated on ongoing series of publications based on measuring child well-being.

In recent years, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has undertaken a large initiative to promote the use of statistical indicators for monitoring social well-being, and children have been a very visible part of this initiative. In addition to comprehensive reports on child well-being, OECD has established a website where information can be shared and views among scholars can be exchanged (http://www.wikiprogress.org/index.php/Child_well-being).

Over the past decade, the Save the Children UK organization has produced a series for reports that use child well-being indicators to raise awareness of specific programs, and their yearly publication of the Child Development Index has become a staple publication (Save the Children UK 2008).

The development of the child indicator movement in the United States is reflected in three yearly ongoing comprehensive reports on child well-being that have emerged over the past 20 years (O'Hare 2011). The three ongoing reports are the KIDS COUNT Data Book (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2011), the America's Children Report (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics 2011), and the Foundation for Child Development's Child Well-Being Index (Foundation for Child Development 2010).

The 2011 edition of the KIDS COUNT Data Book (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2011, p. 37) reiterates the primary purpose of KIDS COUNT report, "It is our hope that the KIDS COUNT Data Book and the accompanying KIDS COUNT Data Center will help raise the visibility of children's issues on the national agenda and serve as a tool for advocates, policymakers and other to make better decisions." This quote speaks to the Foundations desire to see the KIDS COUNT data used to improve child well-being.

The KIDS COUNT report has been published each year since 1990 and has gained a lot of visibility among scholars and policymakers, in part, because the foundation has used its resources to heavily promote and disseminate the publication. Many key audiences such as state legislators and congressional staff regularly use the data in the KIDS COUNT report and say that the KIDS COUNT report has had an impact on public policy in America (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2005a, b, c, 2007; O'Hare 2008). (More information about KIDS COUNT is available at www.kidscount.org).

In 1994, staff in several US federal government statistical agencies informally initiated the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. The "forum," which now has 22 agency members, was formally established through Executive Order No. 13045, issued by President William Clinton in April 1997.

The forum's mission (Wallman 2011, p. 3) is "to develop priorities for collecting enhanced data on children and youth, improve communication of information on the status of children to the policy community and the general public, and produce a more complete data on children at the Federal, state, and local levels." The forum is involved in many activities, but the most visible is their annual report called

"America's Children: Key Indicators of Well-Being." The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics started releasing their annual report in 1997, and the most recent (2011) edition is available on line at http://childstats.gov.

According to the press release accompanying the 2011 report, (http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/press_release.asp), "The report provides statistical information on children and families in a non-technical, easy-to-use format to stimulate discussion among data providers, policymakers, and members of the public."

The Child Well-Being Index (CWI) created by the Foundation for Child Development was first reported in a peer-reviewed journal article in 2001 (Land et al. 2001). Starting in 2004, the CWI has been released each year using the same 28 indicators clustered into seven domains of well-being (Foundation for Child Development 2010). In addition, to the yearly CWI report, CWI methodology and data sources have been used to examine differences in child well-being, by gender, race, age, international differences (among major English-speaking countries), intergenerational differences, and the impact of the 2008–2009 recession on the well-being of children. The CWI framework has also been used to look at variations across states (Lamb et al. forthcoming).

The regular reporting of the CWI, and the generally successful media outreach that accompanies the release each year, has increased public awareness about trends in the well-being of American children. Every year the report has been covered by at least one large national newspaper such as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, or USA Today that reach millions of potential readers. The development of the index has also been the springboard for scholarly examination of issues related to measuring child well-being (see the assembly of papers at http://www.brookings.edu/events/2006/0510welfare.aspx).

These three annual reports collectively provide easy access to a great deal of data on the well-being of children in the United States and have raised public awareness about the well-being of children in a mutually reinforcing way.

Several other organizations have contributed to the child indicator movement in the United States (Lippman 2005; Brim 1975a, b). For example, the Washington-based nonprofit research organization Child Trends has developed an online data bank with information on numerous measures of child well-being. Child Trends also produces a regular newsletter called *The Child Indicator* as a way to help keep the child indicator community informed about developments. Each issue of The Child Indicators goes out to about 13,000 potential readers (this figure was obtained by email from David Murphey of Child Trends on October 19, 2011).

Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago is the home of the Child Monitoring Project, which provides information from early efforts to measure and monitor child well-being. The Multi-National Project for Monitoring and Measuring Children's Well-Being is an ongoing, multiphase effort to improve our ability to measure and monitor the status of children around the globe.

Over the past two decades, several countries have begun producing regular reports on the well-being of children based on child indicators. Eleven such reports are identified in Box 108.1.

Box 108.1: Country Reports

Over the past decade, several countries have begun producing regular reports on the well-being of children. Some reports are produced by government agencies, while others are produced by nongovernmental organizations within the country.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Making Progress: The Health, Development and wellbeing of Australia's children and young people: http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10653

Canadian Council for Social Development Report: The Progress of Canada's Children*:* http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2002/pcc02/index.htm

Israel National Council for the Child Report, The State of the Child in Israel: A Statistical Abstract: http://www.children.org.il/pro_articles_list_eng.asp?ProjectID=35

South African Child Gauge Report: www.ci.org.za/site/includes/content/general/gauge2007.html

Kinder Intel Report (Netherlands): www.kinderenintel.nl

Office of the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs Report (Ireland): State of the Nation's Children: www.omc.gov.ie

Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en Mexico (Children's Rights Network in Mexico): México KIDS COUNT Report/La Infancia Cuenta*:* www.infanciacuenta.org

United States Reports

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

KIDS COUNT: www.kidscount.org

Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Families Statistics

America's Children: http://childstats.gov

Foundation for Child Development's Child Well-Being Index: http://www.soc.duke.edu/~cwi/

Children's Defense Fund: http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageServer?pagename=policyareas_stateamericaschildren_2008

These reports are produced by a mix of government agencies and nonprofits or nongovernment organizations (NGOs), often with the involvement of academic scholars. They are similar in the fact that they all rely heavily on statistical indicators to provide a broad portrait of child well-being and they have all been published on a fairly regular basis over the past 10 years or more. They often serve two advocacy-related purposes: raising public awareness and making data more easily available.

Clearly, it is the intention of most, if not all, of these country reports to stimulate some type of action to improve the lives of children. A quote from the report from Israel captures a common sentiment. It says, "This report is more than just a passive portrayal or silent image of the world of children in Israel. It should serve as a vital tool in safeguarding of the rights of children in Israel and as a basis for taking action to improve their welfare" (Israel National Council for the Child Report 2007, page iii). In discussing the report from Ireland, one prominent official stated, "The State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2008, is an important resource for all those who seek to understand the experience of childhood in Ireland. As such, it will help us in our task of making Ireland a better place for children" (Andrews 2008, p. iii).

It is also notable that the production of country reports on the well-being of children is not just happening in most developed countries of the world. For example, in Mexico, the nonprofit group Red por Los Derechos de la Infancia in Mexico (Children Rights Network), funded in part by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, has produced a publication called La Infancia Cuenta en Mexico (Children Count in Mexico) for the past several years, which provides measure of child well-being for the states of Mexico (Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en Mexico 2010). A rough translation of one passage in the 2010 Book (Red Por Los Derechos de la Infancia in Mexico 2010, p. 5) says, "We hope this edition of the publication will facilitate access to the information necessary for defense and promotion of the rights of children in our country."

In recent years, the staff with the Infancia Cuenta project in Mexico have helped several other Latin American countries start to organize efforts to produce regular reports on the well-being of children (ISCI Newsletter 2009). For more information, see http://infancialatinacuenta.org/. While it is still in a very early stage of development, the child indicator movement in Latin America appears to be spearheaded by advocacy groups more than scholars.

Another country where a nongovernment agency has provided a regular publication on child well-being is South Africa, where the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town has produced a publication called "South African Child Gauge," regularly since 2005 (Children's Institute 2012). According to one source (Price 2009, p. 6), "The South African Children's Gauge, now in its fourth year of publication, has gained a reputation as an invaluable resource that monitors the country's progress in realizing children's constitutional right."

The steady growth of indicator-based reports on child well-being indentified here provides strong evidence that the use of child well-being indicators to increase public awareness is widespread and growing. Child indicators researchers and scholars will undoubtedly continue to play a role in this advocacy-related activity.

108.4.2 Making Data Easily Available

Making data more easily available to nonscientists or nonresearchers is an important advocacy-related role scholars can play (Moore and Brown 2006). Oftentimes, data on children is buried in some government agency or can only be gleaned by analyzing computer files. Such data is effectively unavailable to the public. Scholars and scientists can help make such data available to a broad public because they often know where the data are located within the government bureaucracy, they can assess the quality of the data, they know which indicators are typically more powerful, they have the computer skills needed to access the data, and they often have some presentation skills such as map making or chart making.

Growing numbers of organizations have developed publications and websites to make child indicators easily available to large audiences. While child indicator experts typically know how to find data on the well-being of children in government reports and/or website, many advocates and policymakers do not. Steps taken to make child well-being data readily available provide a new use of indicators in an advocacy context and another link between scholars and those advocating for children.

Ten or fifteen years ago, the primary way data on child well-being was made available to the public was through printed matter. This method of dissemination was covered in the previous section. But as researchers, analysts, journalists, and others have quickly moved from relying exclusively on printed products to relying more and more on the Internet. Making child indicator information easily and readily available on the Internet has rapidly increased in importance. To some extent, the role that was played by printed products 20 years ago is now being filled by web-based applications (McNutt 2007). The cost of making data available through the Internet is often (though not always) much cheaper than making it available through publications. The Internet also offers an opportunity to provide elementary data analysis tools to users. In this section, I discuss attempts to provide data through the web.

A recent description of the online KIDS COUNT Data Center (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2010) noted, "Advocates, journalists, policymakers, practitioners, and all concerned citizens can find data for planning, preparing reports, crafting policies, or identifying and addressing needs in their community." This describes the aspiration for how the Annie E. Casey Foundation hopes the data it provides will be used. The KIDS COUNT website focuses on data for states.

The Child Trends Data Bank is one such source of child indicators in the United States. The Data Bank is described as "...a one-stop source for the latest national trends and research on over 100 key indicators of child and youth well-being" (Child Trends 2011).

Chapin Hall at The University of Chicago is the home of the Child Monitoring Project which provides information from early efforts to measure and monitor child well-being (more information about the Chapin Hall Child Monitoring Project is available online at http://multinational-indicators.chapinhall.org/).

Box 108.2 provides URLs for several websites that now provide data on children.

Box 108.2 Online Resources for People Interested in Child Well-Being Indicators

Some key websites for information on children:

1. The Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT Project www.kidscount.org
2. The United States Federal Forum on Child and Family Statistics www.childstats.org
3. Foundation for Child Development Child Well-Being Indicator http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/2010-child-well-being-index-cwi
4. Child Trends Data Bank http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/

5. Chapin Hall/University of Chicago Child Monitoring Project http://multinational-indicators.chapinhall.org/
6. International Data Base at United States Census Bureau http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/
7. International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI) http://www.childindicators.org/
8. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre http://www.unicef-irc.org/
9. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre Data Base http://www.unicef-irc.org/databases/
10. UNICEF Monitoring Statistics http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index.html
11. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm
12. UNICEF: State of the World's Children (English and Spanish) http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_42623.html

108.5 Advocating for More and Better Data on Children

Another place where the interests of child advocates and the scientific community overlap is in the advocating for data needed to better measure and monitor child well-being. The vast majority of data used to measure child well-being in the child indicator field come from government sources. Scholars can lend their expertise and weight to efforts to make sure government data collection activities use the best data collection methodologies, including the most accurate and reliable measures of child well-being, and to make sure the data are made easily available in a timely fashion. Child indicator scholars generally have a lot of expertise and credibility on all of these issues.

One example where scholars have demanded more data is the National Survey of Children's Health in the United States which is currently conducted every 4 years. But given the rapid nature of some changes in the well-being of children (e.g., the recent economic slump), data is needed more often. Recent activity in the US Congress suggests that a more comprehensive set of state-level measures of child well-being may soon become available. (Senate Bill S.1151 and House Bill H.R. 2558 in the 111th Congress are recent examples of efforts to expand state-level measures of child well-being. For more information, go to www.childindicators.com).

Another recent effort in the United States involved trying to get the National Center for Health Statistics to process and release data on births and deaths more quickly. In the summer of 2011, the 2007 data were the most recent available. Advocates were successful in getting more money for the agency to achieve this goal. There was also an attempt to have the US Bureau of Labor Statistics provide more monthly unemployment data by parental status, and an effort to get the federal government to produce more state-level data more often, and to make sure all children are counted in the decennial census (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2009).

One part of Ireland's State of the Nation's Children program has involved the compilation and publication of data, drawn from multiple sources of information on children's lives in a biennial report, titled the State of the Nation's Children Report. By reporting regularly, it has been possible to generate improvements in the availability, quality, and timeliness of data. The quality of data has also been improved through interactions between the research unit and the various data holders, particularly those in service areas where the purpose of data collection is to support administrative tasks rather than to facilitate research.

Prior to the first publication of the State of the Nation's Children Report in 2006, there was very little published about the breadth of children's lives. Since the first publications, a number of Irish organizations, statutory and voluntary, have been active in publishing documents, reports, and "report cards" on children's lives in Ireland. This is a welcome development and is possible because of the many improvements in data on children in Ireland over the last 10 years.

The connection between child indicator experts and government agencies has evolved differently in different countries. In some countries, researchers already work very closely with government agencies to develop data on children. In other countries, researchers sometimes play more of an outside advocacy role (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2009).

Another example of where researchers have been instrumental in the collection and provision of critical data is the emergence of several data collection efforts that provide comparable data across many countries. The provision of such data not only has an impact in each country, there is collective impact that is achieved by enabling cross-country comparisons. A few such data collection and reporting efforts are discussed here. For more detailed information on comparable international surveys with data on children, see Brown et al. (2002).

The **Programme for International Student Assessment** (**PISA**) is a worldwide evaluation of 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance. The survey was first conducted in 2000 and then repeated every 3 years thereafter. It is coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with a view to improving educational policies and outcomes. Another similar study is the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, which focuses on mathematics and science but not reading (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Programme_for_International_Student_Assessment).

The Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) study is a cross-national research survey conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. The HBSC aims to gain new insight into and increase the understanding of young people's health and well-being, health behaviors, and their social context. Initiated in 1982 in three countries, there are now more than 35 participating countries and regions. The first cross-national survey was conducted in 1983–1984, the second in 1985–1986, and subsequently every four years using a common research protocol (http://www.nichd.nih.gov/about/org/despr/studies/behavior/HBSC.cfm).

108.5.1 Goal Setting and Monitoring

A key phrase used in child indicator world is "measuring and monitoring child well-being." The monitoring part of this phrase reflects ongoing regular reports which allow users to see if child well-being is improving or deteriorating over time and/or to see if child well-being is better for one group of children than another.

The production and use of child well-being indicators has expanded recently, in part because they provide a useful way to determine whether a country, state, or group of children is moving in a positive or negative direction (Brown and Corbett 1997). If our goal is to improve children's lives, we need to know if what we are currently doing is helping or hindering development. To the extent that children are the future, measures of child well-being foretell what lies ahead. If it is determined that we are heading in the wrong direction, the next step is advocacy by scholars and/or advocates.

For example, the America's Promise Alliance initiative uses 10 indicators as goals for its work to increase the high school graduation rate. Other studies, like Healthy People 2010 and 2020, use child indicators to monitor well-being and to signal whether we are moving in the right direction (Healthy People 2020, 2011).

108.5.2 Evaluating Programs and Policies

One of the chief aims of the child indicators movement, beyond scientific discovery, is connecting child indicators to the public policy process (Ben-Arieh and Goerge 2006). While the increased use of child indicators in the policy context is generally seen as a positive trend, it is also important to note that there are sometimes misuses of indicators in the policy context (Moore et al. 2003).

Some would argue that major changes in governance over the past few decades have increased the relevance of child well-being indicators for policymakers. There has been more interest in public accountability over the past 20 years, and this movement requires more and better data. In the US context, Corbett (2008, p. 33) says, "In short, this focus on results, public accountability, and new forms of organizing social assistance increasingly demands a much more sophisticated use of what we broadly think of as social indicators." Put succinctly, "Accountability requires counting" (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2009, p. 7), and counting (measuring) is the heart of the child indicators movement.

Indicators of child well-being are used regularly to evaluate programs. According to Ben-Arieh et al. (2001, p. 41), ". . ..indicators make possible the evaluation of particular programs and policies, especially over time. Current policies can be examined in light of past efforts and evaluation of proposed changes can be enhanced."

It is valuable to consider how indicators can be used correctly and effectively to inform public policy and program development by policymakers and advocates, as well as the public (Moore and Brown 2006; Ben-Arieh and Goerge 2006).

There are many examples of how child indicators have been used in a public policy context (Belsky et al. 2006: Bernal 2008; Cohen 1998; Whitaker 2001; Wilkinson and Pickett 2010; Jack and Tonmyr 2008; Portwood et al. 2010). I will only go into detail on a few of them here. The use of child indicators in a public policy context typically takes place at a national or state/provincial level, but they have also been used at the local level as well (McCroskey 2008).

There are several examples where indicators have been used collectively in a policy or program evaluation context (Rose and Rowlands 2010), but most uses of child indicator data within public policy evaluation involves indicators used individually. I will first describe a few uses of child well-being indices (measures use collectively) before looked at some uses of child well-being indicators used individually in a policy context.

The study by Mekonen includes a Child Friendliness Index which is used to rank all 52 African countries based on the extent to which they have child-friendly policies. They define a child-friendly government as “one which is making the maximum effort to meet its obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill child rights and ensure child well-being” (Mekonen 2010). The Global Movement for Children recently aspires to create a similar index for all countries in the world (Global Movement for Children 2011).

Several researchers in the United States have shown links between policy measures and overall child well-being in the states. For example, Voss (1995) found that social service expenditures were also very important predictors of child well-being.

In one study, authors show that states with higher tax rates (this reflects federal, state, and local taxes paid by residents) have better child outcomes than states with a lower tax rate (Every Child Matters Education Fund 2008). Another study found states that spend more on children have better outcomes (measured globally) even after taking into account potential confounding influences (Harknett et al. 2003).

Several scholars have found that more supportive state welfare policies are associated with better conditions and better outcomes for children (Cohen 1998b; Ritualo and O’Hare 2000; O’Hare and Lee 2007).

Bradshaw and Richardson (2009, p. 319) find that “There are positive associations between child well-being and spending on family benefits and services and GDP per capita, a negative association with inequality and no association with prevalence of “broken” families.”

The 2009 OECD study of child well-being in developed countries devotes a chapter to examining the relationship between child well-being and social spending across the child’s life cycle and another chapter to policy choices in early childhood (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2009). The authors found substantial variation in social spending and public policies related to children across more developed countries.

A country where a child indicator report has been widely interwoven with government activities is Ireland. Several findings from the report related to gender differences in physical activities and a growing gender gap over time resulted in a commitment by the National Children's Strategy (2000) to develop a national recreation policy for teenagers. The development of the recreation policy took place over a 2-year period and the policy "Teenspace – National Recreation Policy" was published in 2007.

In terms of a child well-being indicator being used alone, one example of a key child indicator used in public policy is linked to the major welfare reform law passed in the United States in 1996. Because child advocates were concerned that some of the policies that might be adopted by states under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 would increase child poverty, there was a provision in the bill stating that if child poverty rate in a state increased by 5 % or more, that would trigger a review by the federal government.

One of the most important roles child indicators can play is in the rational or data-based distribution of public funds. For example, the US government bases the distribution of several billion dollars in education funding (Title 1) to states and school districts each year on the basis of child poverty rates.

Other researchers use specific child indicators in evaluation, such as using teen birth rates to evaluate the effectiveness of abstinence programs and test standardized test scores to evaluate education outcomes. Reflective of a number of similar reports, The Center on Education Policy (2011) used state-level standardized test scores in American public school students to assess educational attainment differences across states and among groups of students.

A number of organizations have assembled sets of child well-being outcome measures that can be used to assess education and training programs (Child Trends undated) including some that attempt to assess the so-called soft skills that have received increasing attention (Wilson-Ahlstrom et al. 2011).

108.5.3 Communication Issues

Other chapters in this book discuss many communication issues regarding the use of child indicators, but communication is such a fundamental part of data-based child advocacy that I want to add few points here.

"Extensive resources are invested in the production of research with the anticipation that relevant findings will be understood and utilized by decision-makers to inform practice and policy" (Jack and Tonmyr 2008, p. 51). To meet such commonly held aspirations, researchers must often engage in a kind of communication that they are seldom trained for (Hanafin and Brooks 2009).

Using child indicator data to raise public awareness often means using the public media or the mass media. Since public officials typically have many groups seeking their attention, public communication is extremely important for child advocates. However, trying to reach the public with a data-focused message possesses a unique set of problems (Leibovitz 2007).

Successful advocacy often involves communicating with nontechnical or nonscientific audiences, and this requires a different approach than communicating with scholarly peers. Data-based child advocacy requires that we learn how to communicate with audiences other than scholars and researchers (Li 2011).

Working with the mass media can be a challenge for scholars. Research shows that newspaper stories about children often lack quantitative data (Kunkel et al. 2002; Haaga 2003). And the way child well-being is communicated by mass media does not always provide clear information. The need for regular fact-based reports on children is underscored by recent survey evidence which shows the public often has very distorted views of child well-being (Guzman et al. 2009). A survey which asked a representative sample of Americans about several dimensions of child well-being found that there were often large differences between the public's perception and the official data. For example, less than half the adults could correctly select the child poverty rate from three alternatives. Moreover, when adults held misperceptions about the real state of child well-being, they tended to accentuate the negative (Guzman et al. 2009; The Public Agenda 1997).

For the Annie E. Casey Foundation (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2003, p. 2), data-based advocacy relies heavily in strategic communication, which they define as "the processes by which data are transformed into information, and then knowledge, knowledge is translated into messages, and messages are tailored and delivered to multiple audiences in a way that effectively equips them to support children and youth in their own realms, and so that young people can advocate and make decisions on their own behalf."

Reaching a broad audience is important because in democracies, publically elected officials generally respond to the issues raised by the people who elect them – the public. To the extent data-based child advocates can move children's issues higher on the public agenda by informing the public about basic facts about child well-being, the more likely publically elected officials are to seek public policy solutions to children problems. Getting public and policymakers attention often means using the mass media.

The KIDS COUNT report generates between 800 and 1,200 news stories each time it is released. The Casey Foundation prints about 50,000 copies of the KIDS COUNT report each year, but the key information in the report is available to millions of readers through the media. Even though there are a large number of reports, the people who can be reached directly through the reports are limited.

More than 600 outlets ran news stories based on the release of the 2011 America's Children Report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 2011). The annual release of the CWI has garnered newspaper coverage as well as radio and television coverage and is increasingly being spread through social media (this information was provided by an email from Mark Bogosian on October 24, 2001).

Many elected officials, at least in the United States, pay close attention to what is covered by in the major newspaper in their region or districts. If children's issues are an increasing part of the news coverage, it often means children will move on the elected officials' agenda.

One group that has a done a good job working with the mass media is Red por Los Derechos de la Infancia in Mexico (Children Rights Network). Funded in part

Table 108.1 Key differences in writing for scholars and writing for the public

Issue/topic	Writing for scholars	Writing for the public
Use of jargon	Technical jargon is often used and expected in scholarly reports	Technical jargon should be minimized or terms should be clearly explained if used
Simple and user friendly	This is not necessary in scholarly writing. It is assumed that readers are already interested in and knowledgeable about the topic	Critical in writing for the public. One should not assume that the reader is familiar with the topic and/or is automatically interested in it. One has to engage the reader
Use easily understood measures	Not necessary in scholarly writing. Scholars can be expected to spend the time needed to understand whatever measures are being used	Critical in writing for the public. If readers have any difficulty understanding the measures, they are likely to stop reading
Use of public media	Seldom used in scholarly publications	Often used in advocacy publication. . . including a press release, and prepping for interviews from reporters
Producing regular updates	Scholars seldom replicate past work; they build on it	Many advocacy reports are produced regularly to increase visibility and allow monitoring of changes over time
Localizing/ personalizing information	Names of countries, states, or cities seldom given. Scholars are more likely to give the characteristics of a state rather than the name of the state. For generating generalizable results, the specific state is not important	Use of specific places can generate local interest
Timeliness of data	In scholarly publications, this is seldom a high priority. Moreover, the peer review and publication process almost guarantee that the data in an article will not be the most recent available	For the public, and particularly for policymakers, having the most recent data is critical. Elected officials who do not like the findings from a study can easily dismiss them as outdated
Lead with findings	Findings are often at the end of the report after theory, data, and methods and analysis have been discussed. Readers of scholarly reports can typically be counted on to read to the end	Key findings are early in the report and often are in the title. Many readers of advocacy reports may only read the first part of the report
Detailed methodology	Scholars are expected to provide a detailed description of their methodology	Most readers of advocacy reports are not equipped to assess the methodology. Methodological descriptions should be minimized or put in an appendix

by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, this organization has produced a publication called La Infancia Cuenta en Mexico (Children Count in Mexico) for the past several years which has provided a useful framework for child advocates and has garnered press attention every time it has been released. The good press attention is related to the strategic release events that Red por Los

Derechos de la Infancia in Mexico has organized. This includes staging the release event at a children's museum, including high-level officials and well-known public figures in the release, and working closely with the media.

Often, reports that provide a lot of descriptive child indicators are accompanied with a section that highlights one or more selected indicators or provides a theme for journalist. When researchers see 100 stories in a data-based report, journalists often see none. Therefore, providing some guidance about the most significant data is helpful.

This model is used by the KIDS COUNT report each year. In the 2011 report, for example, they featured a set of indicators showing how the recession had impacted children (The Annie E Casey Foundation 2011). The US Interagency Forum report also focuses on a special topic each year, in order to try and get more attention from the media. In the 2011 report, the US Interagency Forum focused on adolescent childbearing (The US Interagency Forum 2011). The Foundation for Child Development also uses this approach with the yearly Child Well-Being Index report. The 2010 report focuses on the impact of the recession (The Foundation for Child Development 2010). The Mexican La Infancia Cuenta report also uses this approach (Red Por Los Derechos de la Infancia 2011).

Two other tools used to reach policymakers are a press release and an executive summary. Both of these highlight the most important parts of a report and are useful for people who may not have time (or interest) in reading the whole report.

There is also an important point about credibility here. Among scholars, credibility is gained by use of proper methodology. But among those outside the scholarly world, who typically do not have the expertise to evaluate the methodology used in a study or report, credibility often comes from the organization or author issuing the report and/or the fact that it appears in the popular press.

Table 108.1 provides a summary of some key differences between writing for scholarly colleagues and writing for public consumption.

108.6 Conclusions

Despite the rapid increase in use of child indicators and the expressed interest of many scholars to see that their work has an impact, there is a dearth of articles about the use of child indicators in an advocacy context. Five different ways in which child indicator data are regularly used in an advocacy context have been identified and discussed here. Also, some of the key differences between using data in a scholarly context and advocacy context were discussed.

While child advocacy activities are not widely recognized within the child indicator research community, I believe many already engage in some forms of child advocacy. Moreover, I believe there are ample opportunities for scholars to participate in advocacy activities in ways that do not compromise their scientific principles using a data-based child advocacy approach.

Box: Key differences between writing for scholars and writing for public/policy makers

Box: Reaching a Nontechnical Audience

There are several important differences between writing for scientific peers and writing for a public audience. I just want to note a few of those here.

Publications should be simple and user friendly. When one is writing for colleagues, it is safe to assume that they are already interested in the topic and have extensive background in the subject matter. Neither of those assumptions can be made about a popular audience. One needs to write in way to engage the audience.

When writing for the public, it is important to use measures that are easily understood. This may impact on the selection of measures used, and it may also be a matter of labeling measures with less jargon. For example, instead of calling a measure a "Gini coefficient," call it a "measure of inequality." Among scientists, the term "measure of inequality" may not be a precise as "Gini coefficient," but if readers do not know what a Gini coefficient is, use of that term would eliminate your ability to communicate with the audience.

Use the public media. This might mean creating and a press release and perhaps some interviews with reporters. These are activities that are not typical of scholars but are important. Outreach to media is almost always done with advocacy-related publication but seldom done with scholarly publications.

Producing regular updates is important. In the words of Suzanne Hood, "Regular reports on the state of children are an essential tool in raising public awareness, achieving political support for improving children's living conditions and promoting and ensuring children's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" (Hood 2006). The repetition implied here is not something that scholars typically engage in.

Local information is important. Identifying countries and localities within countries (states, provinces, cities) by name helps readers connect with information.

In scholarly writing, specific pieces of geography, such as states, or provinces, or countries, are not particularly important. If a set of countries are ranked for example, it is the characteristics of the country more than the specific country that are more important from a scholarly point of view.

From a public or policymaker's perspective, the specifics are very important. If a country is at the top of a league table (or at the bottom of a league table), the leaders of the country will have to answer questions about why.

Timeliness

For scholars pursuing enduring truths or patterns, the recency of the data used in an analysis is not particularly important. If a generalizable pattern exists in data collected 10 years ago, that is fine. Moreover, the care one takes in analysis and writing up scientific results along the review process for peer-reviewed journals and books makes it virtually impossible to get out data in a timely fashion through traditional scholarly channels.

On the other hand, for the public, and particularly for policymakers, having the most recent data is critical. Elected officials who do not like the findings from a study can easily dismiss them as outdated.

Reports written for scientific colleagues almost have a certain amount of technical jargon, but reports written for the public should minimize this use of jargon or explain jargon in plain terms.

In writing for the public, it is often useful to put the main finding as the title of the publication or very early in the report... like the headline in a newspaper article. This is unlike scholarly writing where the conclusion follows the theory, data, and methods and analysis sections.

In scholarly writing, a detailed description of the methodology is expected. In writing for the public, technical methodology should be minimized or put in an appendix.

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