

## Indicators of Children's Well being: What should be Measured and Why?

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Children are human beings with rights and entitlements, including the right to *well-being*. Child *well-being* encompasses quality of life in a broad sense. It refers to a child's economic conditions, peer relations, political rights, and opportunities for development. Most studies focus on certain aspects of children's well-being, often emphasizing social and cultural variations. Thus, any attempts to grasp well-being in its entirety must use indicators on a variety of aspects of well-being.

Well-being is related to values. Consider UNICEF's work on deterring young marriages. In this case, early marriages are understood as threatening a child's human rights despite being rooted in the culture of the family and local community. Hence, the definition of well-being is not determined only by local values, but by universal values as well.

Different aspects of well-being create different methodological challenges to both theory and measurement, as illustrated in this current issue. Pedersen and Sommerfeldt study children's position in armed conflicts, discussing how indicators can be developed in situations in which it is difficult to apply standard measures and methods, while estimates about numbers and quality of life are essential. These complex circumstances also illustrate a general challenge related to well-being; the need for conceptual clarification of positions and values.

Values, therefore, are the focus of the article by Casas, Figuer, González, and Malo, who examine the possible values gap between generations and its implications for measuring children's well-being.

Anderson-Moore, Lippman, Vandivere, McPhee, and Bloch approach the complex issue of developing an index of the general conditions of children. Although such indices of children well-being are becoming widespread, this article carefully analyzes the conceptual and methodological aspects, both positive and negative, of such an endeavour.

Well-being is affected by the interaction between a child's environment and his or her position and resources. Benbenisti and Astor examine this interaction within a school setting, relating indicators on various levels. Their study illustrates that the environment is

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not a common, stable system but a set of dynamic factors, producing different outcomes for different groups of children.

Finally, Korbin and Culton take us to a new dimension, that of the geographic or social unit of children's well-being. Research has increasingly focused on the neighbourhood as a social unit of measurement and intervention. Korbin and Culton present an effort to develop indicators of children's well-being in this most basic of children's environments, the neighbourhood.

Together the articles illustrate different aspects of well-being, and the correspondent development of indicators and measures. They also illustrate the complexity and the variety of well-being, and that well-being can be understood as structural conditions of children, as standards of living, and as a dynamic system in which children are an active force.

This volume is the third and last phase in a continuing effort. It complements and finalizes a series of three special volumes, all devoted to indicators of children's well-being and published as *Social Indicator Research* vol. 80(1) and vol. 83(1). We are proud that the value and quality of this current volume has maintained the very high standards of the former two. Together, the three volumes include twenty outstanding papers that have already had an impact on the field of children's well-being indicators.

The work presented in these special volumes strengthened the foundation for the continued study of such indicators. In many aspects, it facilitated the establishment of the International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI) (<http://www.childindicators.org>). The success of this effort has led to the birth of a new and promising sibling journal, *Child Indicators Research* (CIR), whose first issue is to be published in March 2008 (<http://www.springer.com/12187>).

Finally, editing these three special volumes was an enjoyable learning experience for us. We would like to express our gratitude to Einat Peled-Zaf and Hanita Kosher, who administrated this ongoing project. The staff at Springer Publishing were constant sources of support. Alex Michalos, the editor-in-chief of this journal, deserves special thanks for trusting us enough to give us this unique opportunity and for shepherding us through this complex process. Finally, we thank our colleagues, whose outstanding papers make this endeavor such a rewarding one.

We believe that these three volumes will serve as a foundation for the continued study of child well-being indicators and as our contribution to the ISCI. If this in turn contributes to the well-being of children around the world, then our efforts and work will have been more than worthwhile.