



The Attractions and Pitfalls of Working on Wellbeing

Sarah C. White, University of Bath

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Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities

Canterbury Christ Church University



Introduction

- Being, becoming and belonging
- Ubiquity of wellbeing – and child wellbeing within this
- Advocacy of wellbeing – as a way to learn about or promote the interests of children
- Introduce some of the thinking on wellbeing and our ‘wellbeing pathways’ research
- Reflection on children as subject – and what this might mean for thinking on wellbeing

The attractions of wellbeing



- Positive
 - Holistic
 - Person-centred
- Positive:
 - Emphasises what people have, can do or hope for; rather than problems, deficiencies or what they lack
 - Motivates and energises
 - Anti-stigma: 'Public assistance programmes "target" the poor, not only for aid but for hostility. Such remedies, to be sure, provide needed material aid. But they also create strongly cathected, antagonistic group differentiations.'

Nancy Fraser (1997: 25)

Holistic



- Setting conventional material indicators in the context of other things that matter to people

Person-centred.....

- Signature emphasis on subjective (people's own perspectives in their cultural context)
- Rather than social category (child) it is cross-cutting ties (my family) by which people define their identity and which shape practical options and entitlements



But what is 'Wellbeing'...?

- Social Policy: Objective lists:
- E.g. Bradshaw (1995) '12 key areas of children's lives':
demography, child poverty, health, lifestyle, mental health, children's time and space, child maltreatment, children in and leaving care, child care, children and crime, education, and housing
- External assessment according to objective criteria
- How different to established approaches?



Psychologists: Subjective well-being (SWB)

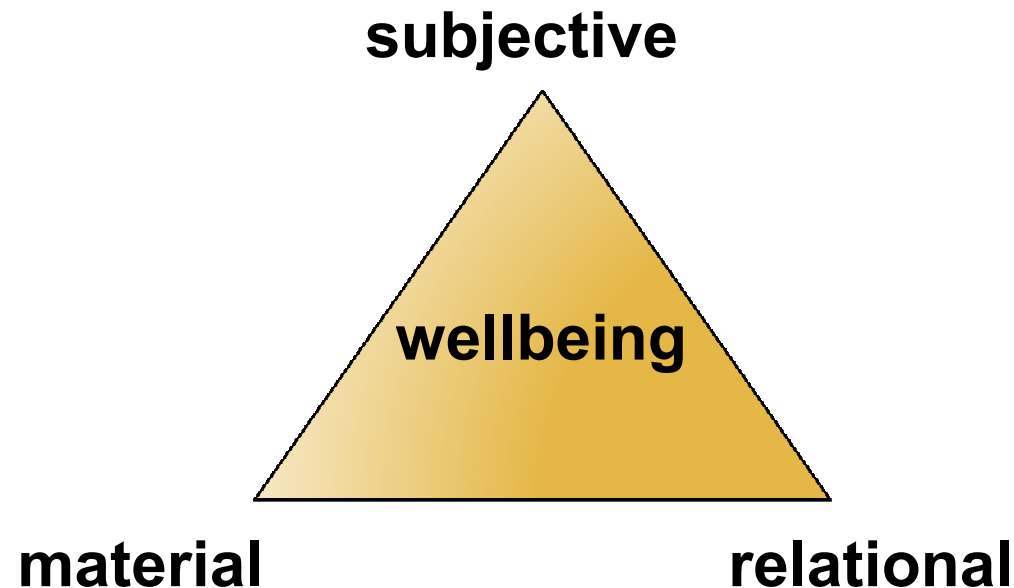
- Satisfaction (thinking) + Happiness (feeling) **'hedonic'**
- Main measures 'satisfaction with life scale' (Diener et al., 1985) and Positive and Negative Affect Scale, PANAS, (Watson et al., 1988). Also variations on these.
- Functioning and fulfilment **'eudaemonic'**
- SWB derives from satisfaction of 'basic psychological needs' (autonomy, competence, relatedness) Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000)
- 'Psychological wellbeing' comprises 6 components of 'positive psychological functioning' (self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth (e.g. Ryff, 1989)



Dimensions of Wellbeing

‘An ideal society would be one in which “*bhat, kapor o shonman niye shukhey thakbo*” ’

[we live in happiness with rice, clothes and respect]
(Bangladesh - Siddiqi 2004: 50)





From Dimensions to Domains

‘Wellbeing is experienced when people have what they need for life to be good.’

Material:

- Economic resources
- Local environment
- Physical health

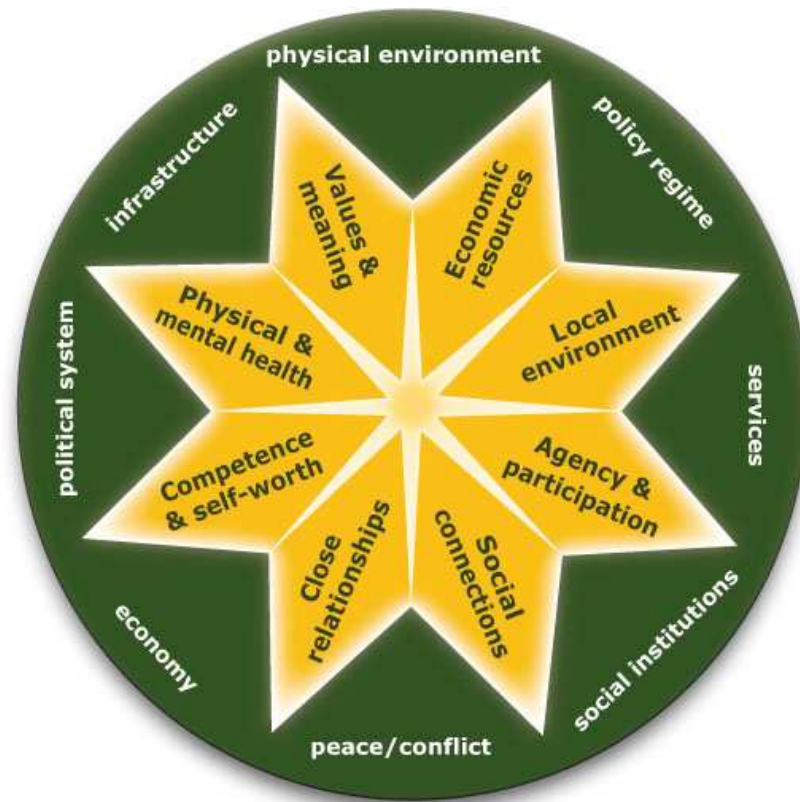
Relational:

- Agency and Participation
- Social connections
- Close relationships

Subjective:

- Values and Meanings
- Competence and self-worth
- Psychological health

Our model of wellbeing



- Eight domains (closely interacting)
- Wider environment which enables or constrains wellbeing
- Wellbeing as a process which emerges through interaction:
 - between the different domains
 - between the person and those important to him or her
 - between the person and the broader environment
- Model should thus be seen as dynamic, rather than static, with flow and interchange between its different elements
- All of this is culturally embedded



Layering objective and subjective wellbeing

- Enabling environment (what's out there)
(objective account of collective provision)
- What people think of what's out there
(subjective reflection on collective provision)
- What people can get of what's out there
(objective wellbeing – personal)
- What people think of what they can get
(subjective reflection on objective wellbeing)
- What this all means for how people are in themselves (subjective wellbeing)

For example.....

Concerning schooling:

- **Enabling environment**
 - Availability/quality of schools
 - **Objective wellbeing:**
 - Whether a child is/has gone to school, to what level
 - **Subjective reflection on objective wellbeing:**
 - Perception of quality or utility of schooling received
- **Subjective wellbeing - how schooling enable/disable you**
 - Confidence in abilities as a result of schooling



- International partnership: Bath and Brunel Universities; three NGOs - Oxfam Hong Kong, Hodi (national - Zambia), Chaupal (local - India); GB Pant Social Science Research Institute (India); Bath based and local researchers in the field
- ‘Remote’ rural communities
- Sociology of development and psychology
- Two rounds of fieldwork, 3-4 months each, in each country



(2x) 700 respondents across Zambia and India: 300 couples (husbands and wives separately) and 100 women heading households



The Project

- To explore how poverty affects wellbeing and how different constellations of wellbeing in turn affect people's movements into and out of poverty
- ESRC/DFID funded, 2010-2013
- To explore how wellbeing may be incorporated in development practice



NOT to make statements about levels of wellbeing, or to compare these between 'Zambia' and 'India'



Project methods

- Community profiles to assess general resource environment
- Survey including subjective and objective questions
- Statistical tests to assess the validity, consistency, and reliability of our model of wellbeing
- In-depth case studies to gain a deeper understanding



Importance of group process within team, regular de-briefing and discussion, to maintain support, develop staff, and ensure data quality/richness



Challenges

- For testing the model (factor analysis) need more abstract questions which capture an aspect of a common concept; for people to answer, however, it is much easier if the questions are more specific and tangible
- Aspirations an important aspect of wellbeing, but questions about future prospects brought the response 'who can tell what the future will hold?'
- Cultures of expression vary in the extent to which they are direct or indirect: many of these things are not matters where people would normally speak directly about themselves, but indicate and imply through more general statements: 'the life of a woman!'
- Many of the statements about self are difficult: negative statements may be feared to attract the evil eye; comparisons with others may be seen as invidious; professing pride in one's own achievements is seen as inappropriate



What about children's wellbeing?

- Approach designed to give a general framework which is customised by context - in principle all the domains are relevant to and adaptable for use with children
- Process of grounding it is of value in itself - e.g. mapping out significant relationships - participatory
- Child-centred does not mean child-only
- Interaction between, not containment within 'sectors'
- Importance of transition and transformation: becoming not just being



Political Pitfalls

- Preoccupation of affluence?
- 'Poor but happy' – welfare rationing?
- Flight from material provision
 - Psychosocial (and particularly psychological) becomes all
- Individualism:
 - ideologies of individual choice and responsibility;
 - political climate of more state intrusion, less state support



Pitfalls for research

- Normative narratives, exclusionary and illusionary
- Too positive: **need recognise fears not only hopes**
- Too holistic (**how can you take everything into account?**)
- Focus on values and person-centredness can blunt analysis of power : **need recognise the process(es) of wellbeing are always political – in how defined and who benefits**
- Wellbeing is not culture/context neutral!
This applies not just to responses, but to the cultural and ideological embedding of concepts, methods and instruments.
- Dominance of concern with measurement can crowd out attention to substance, concepts and meaning: **qualitative is vital complement to quantitative**



But the potential....

- New perspectives on what matters – generating new energy and vision, upending received wisdom of ‘business as usual’
- In institutions – like schools – how different would things be if the wellbeing of children and teachers were really the central concern?
- In giving a new perspective on policy: paying attention to how programmes are implemented and the terms of interaction between clients and staff



Thanks!

To the Wellbeing Pathways Team whose work this presentation reflects:

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