



Summary of a review of Child and Youth Wellbeing data in Europe

The MYWEB project is assessing the feasibility of a European Longitudinal Study for Children and Young People (ELSCYP). The early stages of the project have included reviews of current data that relate to child and youth wellbeing as well as a review of policy on child and youth wellbeing. This briefing paper reports on the review of data .

1. Undertaking a review of data

Quantitative and qualitative studies as well as administrative data covering topics that contribute to children's/young people's well-being were gathered from all Member States in the European Union and were evaluated. This was done in order to provide an overview of existing data.

Research data from quantitative surveys and qualitative studies was collected. During the review we were particularly interested in the research methods used. For example: Were special interviewing techniques used? How were response rates to surveys improved? Which sampling method was used to reach young respondents? Answering these questions provides important input for the later stages of the MYWEB project.

Administrative data can provide valuable information on children's/young people's

well-being. It usually provides measures of objective wellbeing, provides coverage of whole populations and is regularly updated.

The following criteria were used to set the scope of the review:

- **Time period:** No data from 2008 or older should be gathered (Exception: if an older data set is considered to provide information of particular value for MYWEB).
- **Age limit:** An age range of conception to 25 years. Data which only covered subjects older than 25 years was not considered.
- **Geography:** Data should only be gathered at national level.
- **Survey type:** Where data originated from a survey data gathering was not limited to longitudinal studies, but also included cross-sectional studies.

2. Summary of main findings

From across Europe, 457 sources for administrative data and 370 sources of research data data have been gathered, covering aspects of well-being. Clearly this is not the entirety of such data in Europe but it is sufficient to provide a reasonable 'snapshot' of the current situation.

What is already covered well?

The review of research studies on children's and young peoples' well-being demonstrated that there is a large range of studies that cover the concept of well-being. A number of quantitative surveys, in particular, have been dedicated to this topic during recent years. Many have been conducted in classical survey modes such as Paper and Pencil (sometimes



carried out in school classes) and face-to-face (often combined with CAPI support). In most cases, cross-sectional studies were conducted.

Coming to qualitative surveys it is important to note that in-depth interviews and focus groups are covered well in children's/young people's well-being studies.

Administrative data contributing to illustrations of children's/young people's well-being can be considered an important source supplementing quantitative or qualitative studies. Administrative data is, in most cases, annually updated and almost always reflects the whole national population. Additionally, most administrative data sets gathered allow for an age distribution in order to consider children or young people separately.

Turning to the content of the gathered data sets, socio-demographics, economical aspects, education and health are included in many of both, survey and administrative data. Additionally, relationships to peers and parents are covered well in quantitative and qualitative research studies. The advice for combining objective and subjective measurements of well-being as it was for instance expressed by Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (2009) is followed by most of the current studies. Also, abstract concepts like happiness that are hard to measure and thus, mean a barrier in survey planning processes, are included in studies quite often.

Administrative data particularly contribute statistics on objective well-being aspects that are related to the state (e.g. figures on taxes, social benefits, unemployment, school achievements and enrolment rates and crime statistics).

Which gaps are obvious?

There are recent studies on children's/young people's well-being in all EU countries (except in Cypress and Luxembourg). However, East European (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania, Poland) and smaller (Denmark, Ireland, Malta) countries are not represented often compared to other European countries. The Netherlands and Sweden stand out in this regard. Fewer administrative data sets were reported for the East European countries mentioned above as well as Slovakia. Thus, it is of particular importance to include East European countries in future surveys on children's/young people's well-being to receive an overall European picture.

Recent well-being surveys also consider the children's/young people's views of well-being (Mason & Danby, 2011). To ensure the inclusion of this aspect, it is necessary to have qualitative studies in well-being research that can provide the basis for developing well-being concepts used in quantitative surveys. This has not been taken account of adequately in Europe so far. Instead, quantitative surveys relying on adults' conceptualisation of well-being have been more common.

Innovative survey modes that appeal particularly to young people (e.g. implementing video sequences, avatars or other web 2.0 innovations) have not been used so far in wellbeing surveys. The main reason for this is the preference of classical survey modes (Paper and Pencil, Face-to-Face). New and innovative survey modes hold several unique possibilities for surveying



young people that should be at least piloted in studies on child and youth well-being.

In both research studies and administrative data sets, topics like the environment, risky behaviour, safety, culture and participation tend not to be covered in depth. Although, these topics are covered to some extent in some data sets, detailed insights into them cannot be delivered by existing data. Especially administrative data sources lack information on indirect measurements such as the provision of free school meals or other basic needs, ICT devices in school and at home (economical), immunisation, doing sports, weight information, nutrition, breastfeeding (health), (il)literacy, learning difficulties, bullying (education), overcrowding, noise pollution and park frequencies (environment). For culture and participation even broader categories are not covered well by the existing data.

The gathered surveys have not always explored psychological aspects of well-being as has been proposed by Ryan and Deci (2000; 2001) (see also Ryff & Keyes, 1995). A number of single and multi-item scales and indices measuring well-being across a variety of domains have been developed and tested in recent years both in national and transcultural surveys (see for instance the Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale by Seligson et al. 2003, the Satisfaction with Life Scale by Diener et al. 1985 and the Personal Well-Being Index for school children by Cummins and Lau 2005). Already existing scales and indices should be taken into account within the MYWEB project, particularly ones that were especially developed for measuring children's/young people's well-being and tested in

international surveys. MYWEB will also consider the groundbreaking work done by researchers involved in the International Survey of Children's Well Being (<http://www.isciweb.org>).

3. Implications for the rest of the MYWEB project

The review of research on well-being has revealed some general problems making it difficult to evaluate a survey's quality in many cases. We often found it difficult to gather detailed methodological information on issues such as sampling methods, target sample sizes, response rates and weighting procedures. This indicates a lack of transparency in many surveys. Even in cases where members of the teams that conducted the surveys were personally contacted, not all information could be gathered. For MYWEB this result emphasizes the importance of delivering detailed methodology reports on every empirical step of developing a new survey.

The overview of various existing studies has provided valuable insights about the most promising survey designs to reach children and young people, but also about gaps in current scientific research that should be the focus of the MYWEB project. While some studies showed a very good response rate, they did not include all relevant indicators for well-being. Other studies had a good selection of indicators, but their survey design and participation rate was not as good.

Based on these comparisons with existing studies, best practice recommendations can be developed for the MYWEB pilot study, by combining the best survey designs with all



relevant indicators for children and youth well-being. These recommendations include:

- The implementation of measures capturing the psychological aspects of well-being, as well as on environment, risk behaviour, safety, culture and participation
- A focus on East European countries, since existing administrative data about children and youth well-being is incomplete in some of these countries.
- Including qualitative surveys to support the development of appropriate scales and methods for considering children's/young people's views of well-being during the development phase of a survey.
- Implementing proven scales and indices that were especially developed for measuring children's/young people's well-being
- If possible, implementing modern and interactive survey methods instead of only classical paper and pencil methods, to increase study participation and attract children's/young people's interest in the project over the course of several years

Additionally, the review of existing studies has shown the importance of testing for the feasibility of a Europe-wide longitudinal study, as the definition of youth well-being can vary considerably across different life stages.

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