

CHAPTER 12

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CHILDREN'S WORLDS IN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an overview of findings for ten European countries included in the second wave of Children's Worlds – a unique international comparative study of children's views of their lives and well-being. The study asked nationally representative samples of children aged 8 to 12 about a wide range of topics. It included factual information and children's evaluations of different aspects of their lives and their overall sense of well-being. The chapter covers home and family relationships, money and economic circumstances, friends and other relationships, local area, school, time use, self, and overall subjective well-being. It highlights the diversity of childhood experiences within and between countries. There are wide variations between European countries in terms of typical family structures; in children's experiences of material deprivation; and in their daily activities. Children's levels of satisfaction with different aspect of their lives also vary substantially between countries. There are important gender differences in children's experiences and evaluations of their lives. The chapter adds to the sparse comparative literature on children's own views of their well-being and highlights directions for future research in this field.

Keywords: children; childhood; comparative research; well-being; happiness; life satisfaction; daily activities

1 INTRODUCTION

Children's Worlds is a worldwide research study on children's lives and subjective well-being. The project fills a substantial gap in international comparative research evidence on children's own views of their lives and well-being in terms of the age group (eight to 12 years old) and diverse range of countries covered. The study aims to collect solid and representative data on children's lives and daily activities and on their perceptions and evaluations of their lives. The purpose is to improve children's well-being by creating awareness among children, their parents and their communities, opinion leaders, decision makers, professionals and the general public.

The second wave of the Children's Worlds Survey (2013 to 2016) covered 18 countries (Table 1). This chapter focuses on the ten European countries that participated in that wave. A third wave is currently under way and is expected to involve 30 to 40 countries, around half of which will be in Europe. The chapter provides a brief introductory overview of the study; presents summary findings from the second wave for the European countries; and discusses the implications and potential ongoing uses of a survey of this kind.

1.1 Concepts

The thinking behind the project draws together several related strands and areas of interest. First, it aims to focus on childhood as an important life stage in its own right, rather than as a preparation for adulthood. Second, it views children as social actors – an idea that is linked to the 'new sociology of childhood' (James & Prout, 1997). Third, and following on from the previous points, the focus of the project is to gather information directly from children

Table 1: Countries participating in the second wave of the survey

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ALGERIA (WESTERN)	NEPAL
COLOMBIA (ANTIOQUIA)	NORWAY
ESTONIA	POLAND (WIELKOPOLSKA)
ETHIOPIA	ROMANIA
FINLAND	SOUTH AFRICA (WESTERN CAPE)
GERMANY	SOUTH KOREA
ISRAEL	SPAIN (CATALONIA)
ITALY (LIGURIA)	TURKEY (ISTANBUL)
MALTA	UNITED KINGDOM (ENGLAND)

about their views and experiences, in line with the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Fourth, it aims to explore a comprehensive range of topics relevant to understanding children’s experiences of childhood. Finally, the study aimed to explore the concept of children’s subjective well-being. There has been a remarkable recent growth in interest internationally in the topic of subjective well-being. However international comparative data across the full range of relevant aspects of their lives were not available from a diverse range of countries prior to the study described in this chapter.

1.2 History of the Children’s Worlds project

The project began in 2010 when a group of researchers, mainly from the International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI), held a meeting hosted by a UNICEF Regional Office¹ to discuss the potential need for the survey. The group agreed that there was an important gap in international knowledge about children’s lives, from their own perspectives, and undertook to attempt to develop and co-ordinate a study to fill this gap.

One of the products of the initial meeting was an early version of a survey questionnaire which was based on the participants’ existing research on this topic area. This questionnaire underwent two phases of qualitative testing with children in 2010 in six countries²; and in the first half of 2011 in five countries³. As a result a set of questionnaires was drawn up with separate versions for children aged 8, 10 and 12 years. These questionnaires were then used in a range of 14 countries⁴ for a large-scale pilot of the survey. Over 34,000 children participated in this first wave of the survey. The resulting data was used as the basis for a series of articles published in a special issue of Child Indicators Research in early 2015⁵ and in a report⁶. The learning from the pilot survey was used to refine the questionnaires, leading to the versions that were used in the survey described here.

Table 2: The achieved sample in each European country by age group

2	TOTAL	AGE 8	AGE 10	AGE 12
ESTONIA	3118	1076	1013	1029
FINLAND	2842	894	945	1003
GERMANY	3009	1056	1101	852
ITALY	3701	1145	1263	1293
MALTA	2584	802	840	942
NORWAY	2864	930	960	974
POLAND	3157	1021	1119	1017
ROMANIA	4104	1242	1355	1507
SPAIN	3756	1032	1057	1667
UNITED KINGDOM	3298	990	989	1319

The second wave of the project was funded by the Jacobs Foundation and consisted of a survey of over 60,000 children aged 8 to 12 in 18 countries. A complete listing of the countries is shown in Table 1. In some countries, the survey covered the whole country while in others it covered a specific region (shown in brackets in the table).

1.3 Sampling

The aim within each participating country was to obtain the most representative sample possible of children in the relevant age groups in the whole country or region of the country. For practical reasons, the only feasible way of conducting a large-scale survey with the resources available was through schools. This evidently places some limitations on representativeness of the samples.

In all countries some form of stratification was used. The stratification variables that were used varied across countries, depending on the specific context, and included economic prosperity, type of school (e.g. private / public) and population density (e.g. urban / rural). More details for each country are contained in the national reports available on the project website (<http://www.isciweb.org/>). The final numbers in the data set in each country overall and by age group are shown in Table 2.

1.4 Ethics

One of the requirements for participation in the project was to gain full ethical clearance from a relevant committee in one's own country. A set of broad ethical guidelines for the project were drawn up including the importance of (a) children having an active and informed choice in whether to participate in the survey or not; (b) appropriate measures to safeguard children's privacy, confidentiality and anonymity; and (c) a commitment to feeding back findings to participating schools.

1.5 Questionnaire content

There were three versions of the questionnaire for children around 8, 10 and 12 years of age respectively. As well as gathering some basic demographic information (age, gender, country of birth), the three questionnaires all covered the following key aspects of children's lives:

- Home and family relationships
- Money and economic circumstances
- Friends and other relationships
- Local area
- School
- Time use
- Self
- Overall subjective well-being
- Children's rights

The questions were mainly in four formats:

- Satisfaction questions that asked children how satisfied they were with different aspects of their lives on a scale from zero ('not at all satisfied') to ten ('completely satisfied')
- Agreement questions consisting of statements to which children were asked to respond on a five-point scale from 'not at all agree' to 'completely agree'.
- Frequency questions asking children how often they did certain activities – mostly on a four-point response scale referring to frequency per week.
- Factual questions, such as which people the child lived with and what material items they owned or had access to.

The satisfaction questions were asked in a different format with a shorter response scale for the youngest age group. It is not possible to combine the results for these questions across the three age groups. For simplicity, results for the satisfaction questions are only reported in this chapter for the older two age groups. All other results refer to all three age groups unless otherwise stated. Where results are referred to as statistically significant this relates to a confidence level of 99% and takes into account the complex survey designs used.

2 COMPARING THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IN THE CHILDREN'S WORLDS SURVEY

In this chapter we will compare the results between the ten European countries participating in this wave of the survey, and also make some observations about how these results compared to those for countries outside Europe. We will first cover each of the key aspects of life asked about in the survey and then address children's overall subjective well-being. For each aspect of life we will look at one or two key indicators (satisfaction-based questions) and then also review findings from more detailed questions. For the satisfaction questions we also report any significant and substantive gender and age group differences.

Table 3: Family relationships

3	SATISFIED WITH FAMILY	GOOD TIME	PARENTS FAIR	PARENTS LISTEN	FEEL SAFE
ESTONIA	9.17	78%	66%	52%	79%
FINLAND	9.26	70%	68%	68%	77%
GERMANY	9.08	56%	57%	55%	74%
ITALY	9.16	45%	62%	41%	56%
MALTA	9.22	72%	65%	58%	70%
NORWAY	9.37	81%	71%	65%	80%
POLAND	9.09	79%	74%	62%	89%
ROMANIA	9.56	64%	74%	55%	73%
SPAIN	9.15	69%	70%	57%	77%
UNITED KINGDOM	9.04	64%	68%	56%	75%

2.1 Family

Children were asked two questions about their satisfaction with family relationships – relating to ‘the people you live with’ and ‘family life’. Answers to these two questions have been averaged to provide an overall indicator of satisfaction with family relationships. Additionally, the following agreement-based questions were asked:

- We have a good time together in my family
- My parents listen to me and take what I say into account
- My parents treat me fairly
- I feel safe at home

Table 3 summarises the results for these questions. For the satisfaction indicator the mean score (on a scale from 0 to 10 is shown). For the agreement questions the percentage of children totally agreeing with the statement is given. Mean satisfaction scores with family relationships were high (above nine out of ten) in all countries, although there was some variation from the UK (9.04 out of ten) to Romania (9.56). In almost all countries, a majority of children totally agreed with each of the four statements about family life. The exception was that only 45% of children in Italy totally agreed that their family had a good time together. Italy also had the lowest levels of agreement with feeling safe at home. Children in Norway and Poland tended to have the highest levels of agreement for these statements about family life.

In Romania, girls were significantly more satisfied with family life than boys; while in three countries (Italy, Poland and Germany) there was a decrease in satisfaction between 10 and 12 years old. However all these differences were quite small (between 1% and 2%).

Table 4: Who children live with

4		LIVES WITH GRANDPARENT (FIRST HOME)	SIBLINGS	LIVES WITH MOTHER		LIVES WITH FATHER		LIVES WITH BOTH PARENTS TOGETHER	TWO HOMES
					(%)		(%)		
	ESTONIA	23	72	95	(96)	78	(82)	75	10
	FINLAND	3	79	87	(89)	86	(94)	75	12
	GERMANY	16	77	97	(98)	79	(89)	76	6
	ITALY	15	63	97	(97)	81	(89)	79	8
	MALTA	16	73	97	(97)	86	(91)	85	6
	NORWAY	6	85	97	(98)	78	(93)	76	17
	POLAND	33	72	98	–	86	–	84	
	ROMANIA	35	68	93	–	85	–	83	
	SPAIN	10	78	97	(98)	79	(88)	77	8
	UNITED KINGDOM	5	83	96	(97)	70	(79)	67	11

Note: In the 'Lives with mother' and 'Lives with father' the first percentage relates to children's only or first home, whereas the percentage in brackets also includes children who live with the parent in a second home.

In addition, the survey of the older two age groups asked children about who they lived with (Table 4). Almost all (above 97%) of children in all countries lived with their family; but children's answers paint a diverse picture of family types both within and between countries as shown in Table 4. Around a third of children in Romania and Poland had a grandparent living in their home, while in Finland only around 3% of children did so. The proportion of children living with siblings varied from 63% in Italy to 85% in Norway. Only around two-thirds of children in the UK lived in a two-parent household, compared to well over 80% in Malta, Poland and Romania. In eight of the ten European countries children were also asked if they spent time living between two homes (this usually occurred when their parents were separated) and over 10% of children aged 10 and 12 years old did so in Norway, Finland, the UK and Estonia. In these countries substantially more children lived with their father when second homes were counted, as shown in Table 4. This highlights the value of viewing children's lives from a child-centred rather than household perspective.

Table 5: Friends and peer relationships

5	SATISFACTION WITH FRIENDS	FRIENDS ARE NICE	ENOUGH FRIENDS
ESTONIA	8.71	50%	75%
FINLAND	9.17	50%	70%
GERMANY	9.08	57%	69%
ITALY	8.83	32%	58%
MALTA	8.99	54%	65%
NORWAY	9.22	62%	76%
POLAND	8.52	54%	76%
ROMANIA	8.96	53%	63%
SPAIN	8.99	59%	70%
UNITED KINGDOM	8.84	52%	64%

2.2 Friends and relationships

Table 5 shows children's responses to a question about satisfaction with friends and two agreement-based questions:

- My friends are usually nice to me
- I have enough friends

Children in Norway were the most satisfied with their friends and classmates. Children in Poland were the least satisfied with friends. In terms of the two agreement questions about friendships, children in Italy were the least likely to express wholly positive views about their friends being nice and about having enough friends.

Table 6: Material deprivation

6	GOOD CLOTHES	COMPUTER	INTERNET	CAR	MOBILE	OWN ROOM	BOOKS	MUSIC	MEAN # OF ITEMS LACKED	INEQUALITY IN ITEMS LACKED
ESTONIA	1%	5%	6%	14%	4%	28%	4%	12%	0.7	0.93
FINLAND	1%	8%	8%	3%	1%	15%	5%	2%	0.3	0.58
GERMANY	3%	19%	16%	8%	8%	11%	21%	5%	0.8	1.00
ITALY	1%	18%	13%	11%	18%	12%	10%	9%	0.7	1.04
MALTA	1%	6%	4%	6%	30%	20%	6%	15%	0.8	1.08
NORWAY	<1%	4%	3%	3%	3%	7%	3%	1%	0.2	0.53
POLAND	1%	4%	6%	10%	6%	8%	14%	10%	0.5	0.99
ROMANIA	1%	14%	21%	39%	18%	36%	12%	13%	1.5	1.60
SPAIN	2%	8%	9%	13%	45%	19%	10%	14%	1.1	1.14
UNITED KINGDOM	1%	8%	6%	13%	16%	17%	10%	5%	0.7	0.97

2.3 Material resources

Children were asked whether or not they had access to the following items:

- Clothes in good condition to go to school in
- Access to a computer at home
- Access to the internet
- A mobile phone
- Your own room
- Books to read for fun
- A family car for transportation
- Your own stuff to listen to music

Table 6 shows the proportion of 10- and 12-year-olds lacking the items in each country. Children in Norway lack hardly any items but Romanian children lack the most. These countries also had the highest and lowest levels of inequality in material deprivation. Generally, children lacked few of these items. However, the higher proportion of children lacking access to a computer and the internet at home in Germany, Italy and Romania compared to the other countries is notable.

Table 7: Feelings about money and possessions

7	SATISFACTION WITH THINGS	FREQUENCY OF WORRYING ABOUT FAMILY MONEY*			
		NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
ESTONIA	8.96	26%	43%	17%	14%
FINLAND	9.36	51%	42%	5%	2%
GERMANY	9.19	41%	42%	12%	6%
ITALY	9.33	23%	30%	31%	15%
MALTA	9.28	36%	36%	11%	16%
NORWAY	9.46	41%	42%	10%	7%
POLAND	9.27	31%	44%	14%	11%
ROMANIA	9.57	32%	35%	13%	20%
SPAIN	9.28	16%	37%	23%	24%
UNITED KINGDOM	9.17	NA	NA	NA	NA

* This question was not asked in the UK as, during piloting, children expressed the view that it was too intrusive.

Table 7 shows the answers to two other questions about children’s material circumstances – a question about satisfaction with ‘the things you have’ and a question about frequency of worrying about family money. Children in Romania were the most satisfied with the things that they have and children in Estonia were the least satisfied. It is evident from a comparison with Table 6 that the average response to this question did not necessarily match the level of material deprivation in each country.

In all countries except Finland, more than half of children said that they sometimes (or more often) worried about how much money their family had. Almost a quarter of children in Spain said that they always did so compared to only 2% in Finland. One of the interesting features of children’s responses to this question is that, in most countries, the children aged eight years old more frequently worried about family money than the older age groups.

Table 8: Local area

8	SATISFIED WITH					
	AREA GENERAL	PEOPLE	PLACES TO PLAY		SAFETY	
ESTONIA	8.53	8.03	60%	(6%)	57%	(4%)
FINLAND	8.98	8.65	52%	(4%)	62%	(1%)
GERMANY	7.82	7.54	51%	(6%)	47%	(5%)
ITALY	8.39	7.81	33%	(12%)	28%	(8%)
MALTA	8.59	7.87	41%	(16%)	42%	(11%)
NORWAY	9.36	8.58	66%	(2%)	70%	(1%)
POLAND	8.70	8.09	64%	(3%)	56%	(4%)
ROMANIA	9.27	8.63	38%	(19%)	54%	(7%)
SPAIN	8.69	8.42	59%	(5%)	58%	(3%)
UNITED KINGDOM	8.43	7.93	47%	(7%)	44%	(5%)

Note: In the rightmost two columns, the main percentage refers to children who totally agreed with the statement, the percentage in brackets is for children who did not agree at all.

2.4 Local neighbourhood

Table 8 shows children's responses to four questions about their local area. Two satisfaction questions about the area in general and the people in the area; and two agreement questions about whether there were enough places to play or to have a good time and about feeling safe when walking around in the area. For the two agreement questions the main percentage refers to children who totally agreed with the statement, and the percentage in brackets is for children who did not agree at all.

Children in Norway were the most satisfied with their local area overall, and children in Italy were the least satisfied. These patterns were similar for satisfaction with people in the area, but here children in Germany were substantially the least satisfied. There were wide variations in views of local leisure facilities. Children in Norway and Poland were most likely to hold a positive view about this (over 60% totally agreed) while fewer than 40% of children in Italy and Romania totally agreed that there were enough places to play and have a good time. More than 10% of children in Italy, Malta and Romania did not agree at all with this statement. This was a subject which children became less positive about with age, with the sharpest drop in children totally agreeing with this statement being in Estonia (from 73% of children aged 8 years old to 41% of children aged 12 years old), but drops of more than 10% also in most other European countries. There were also wide variations in feelings of safety. Around 70% of children in Norway totally agreed that they felt safe in their local area and only 1% did not agree at all. On the other hand only just over a quarter (28%) of children in Italy totally agreed with this statement, while in Malta more than one in ten (11%) of children did not agree at all.

Table 9: School

9	SATISFIED WITH SCHOOL	LIKE GOING TO SCHOOL	TEACHERS FAIR	TEACHERS RESPECT	SAFE	HIT	LEFT OUT
ESTONIA	8.16	34%	53%	41%	57%	49%	43%
FINLAND	8.57	34%	53%	48%	64%	20%	26%
GERMANY	7.96	26%	40%	41%	48%	36%	29%
ITALY	8.23	24%	45%	33%	47%	17%	37%
MALTA	8.82	50%	64%	60%	63%	44%	48%
NORWAY	8.81	45%	61%	55%	69%	31%	37%
POLAND	8.16	37%	57%	48%	64%	35%	30%
ROMANIA	9.18	61%	65%	52%	65%	40%	45%
SPAIN	8.28	40%	58%	52%	63%	41%	37%
UK	8.26	33%	50%	48%	63%	44%	54%

Overall, Norway stands out as having generally high ratings for this topic; while Italy, Malta and (to some extent) Romania have much lower ratings. There were few substantial gender variations; but a notable pattern in many countries was that children in older age groups were less positive about the facilities in their local area than were younger children.

2.5 School

Children were asked a number of questions about their views about school. The second column in [Table 9](#) shows the average of two satisfaction questions about 'life as a student' and 'school experience'. Here, again, children in Romania had the highest levels of satisfaction. Children in Germany had the lowest mean satisfaction scores (under eight out of ten). There are some striking variations here in children's responses to an agreement-type question about liking going to school. More than half of children in Romania totally agreed with this statement, compared to only around a quarter in Italy and Germany. This was a topic where children in Europe generally had more negative views than children in the eight countries outside Europe. For example over 80% of children in Ethiopia and Algeria, and over 60% in several other countries, totally agreed that they liked going to school. Responses to questions about whether teachers treated children fairly and with respect also varied widely in European countries; and here again children in Germany and Italy tended to have the least positive views. Finally, in all countries apart from Germany and Italy more than half of children totally agreed that they felt safe at school. In summary, this is an aspect of life which children in Romania and Norway were most positive about, while children in Germany and Italy were least positive.

Table 10: Self; Satisfaction with body

10	ALL	GIRLS AGE 10	BOYS AGE 10	GIRLS AGE 12	BOYS AGE 12
ESTONIA	8.15	8.50	8.82	7.28	8.01
FINLAND	8.40	8.59	8.71	7.91	8.40
GERMANY	8.05	8.17	8.77	7.08	8.22
ITALY	8.29	8.68	8.84	7.53	8.11
MALTA	8.82	8.78	8.88	8.71	8.90
NORWAY	8.26	8.70	8.93	7.34	8.28
POLAND	8.39	8.92	9.03	7.28	8.34
ROMANIA	9.3	9.43	9.35	9.27	9.33
SPAIN	8.63	8.95	9.18	8.02	8.38
UNITED KINGDOM	7.86	8.28	8.70	6.41	8.05

There were some notable variations in children's views about school across age groups. These have been covered in an analysis by Kutsar (2017) for the first 16 countries to participate in the survey, and extended by Rees (2017) for all 18 countries. In all European countries there were decreases in the percentage of children liking going to school across the age range covered by the survey. These age-related decreases were particularly strong in Poland and Estonia. School was also one of two aspects of life where there were significant gender differences in satisfaction, with girls tending to have more positive views than boys.

Table 9 also summarises responses to two questions about the frequency, in the last month, of negative peer experiences at school:

- Being hit by other children in your school
- Being left out by other children in your class

The figures in the table for these two questions refer to children who had had these experiences at least once in the last month.

There were wide variations in the proportion of negative peer experiences at school. Children in Estonia were the most likely (49%) to be hit by other children at school and this was least common in Italy (17%). Being socially excluded by classmates was more than twice as common in the UK (54%) as in Finland (26%). Published analysis (Bradshaw et al., 2017) has shown that these kind of negative peer experiences are associated with significantly lower overall subjective well-being among children, particularly in European countries. In all countries boys were more likely than girls to be hit by other children. In five countries (Spain the UK, Norway, Malta and Italy) girls were more frequently excluded by other children.

Table 11: Time use (work and learning)

11	HOUSE-WORK	CARING FOR FAMILY	TAKING CLASSES*	HOME-WORK	SPORT/EXERCISE	READING FOR FUN	WATCH TV	USE COMPUTER
ESTONIA	50	48	52	92	57	31	80	60
FINLAND	49	51	37	92	82	39	62	32
GERMANY	34	9	41	82	54	42	72	30
ITALY	33	32	36	72	44	33	76	25
MALTA	50	45	35	93	48	53	72	63
NORWAY	53	24	NA	87	59	36	78	41
POLAND	64	31	25	91	68	39	78	51
ROMANIA	67	40	21	89	60	49	77	49
SPAIN	60	50	42	87	57	43	74	44
UNITED KINGDOM	48	40	17	44	54	43	78	51

* Data was not available for this question in Norway.

2.6 Self

Children were asked two questions about self-image – regarding their body and their appearance. Here we report results for the first of these as the second was not asked in Poland. The general patterns here follow some of the other topics discussed above with Romania having the highest scores and the UK having the lowest. However one of the most striking findings from these questions highlighted in the initial comparative report on this wave of the survey is the strong gender difference in self-image in some countries.

As Table 10 shows, children's average satisfaction with their body decreased between the ages of 10 and 12 years old in most European countries while remaining relatively stable in Romania and Malta. In particular there were very substantial drops in girls' satisfaction with their bodies in the UK (1.9 points on a scale from zero to ten), Poland (1.6 points), Norway (1.4 points), Italy and Estonia (1.2 points) and Germany (1.1 points). The reasons for these patterns are not clear, but they highlight an important issue in children's sense of well-being in these countries. In addition to the lack of differences in Romania and Malta, Rees (2017) reports that there was no significant gender difference in satisfaction with self-image in most of the countries outside Europe participating in this wave of the survey.

2.7 Children's daily activities

Children in all age groups were asked how often during a week they usually spent time doing eight types of activities when not at school. The list of activities is given in Table 11 which shows the percentage of children who said that they did each activity 'Every day or almost'. There were some similarities across all or most of these ten European countries. In all countries except the UK, homework was the most common daily activity, and watching television

Table 12: Life satisfaction

12	MEAN	% LOW*
ESTONIA	8.96	3.6%
FINLAND	9.05	3.0%
GERMANY	8.82	4.0%
ITALY	8.96	2.9%
MALTA	9.08	2.9%
NORWAY	9.00	3.2%
POLAND	8.81	4.8%
ROMANIA	9.51	1.5%
SPAIN	9.02	2.7%
UNITED KINGDOM	8.66	5.7%

* A score of 4 or less out of 10.

was in the top two activities in all countries. On the other hand there were also some substantial variations. Children in Italy, Germany and Finland were much less likely to use a computer on a daily basis than children in Malta and Estonia. The proportion of children frequently doing housework also varied from around a third in Italy and Germany to around two-thirds in Romania. There is therefore some diversity in how children spend their time across countries, which may be understood with reference to specific national contexts.

There were also some fairly consistent age and gender variations in children's activities. Older children tended more often to watch television and use a computer, and less often to read for pleasure. Additionally, in most European countries girls, compared with boys, tended to do housework and read for pleasure more often and to play sports and exercise less often.

2.8 Subjective well-being

A variety of measures of the subjective well-being of children were employed in the survey. The simplest was a single question that asked 'How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?' Response options were on an 11-point scale from 'Not at all satisfied' to 'Totally satisfied'. Table 12 shows that children in all countries had high levels of satisfaction, with a small proportion having particularly low life satisfaction (a score of four or less out of ten). Children in Romania were most satisfied on average and were the least likely to have low life satisfaction; children in the UK were the least satisfied on average and the most likely to have low life satisfaction.

In the UK and Germany girls had significantly lower life satisfaction than boys (by around 3%). In all countries except Romania and Malta there was a modest but statistically significant drop in average life satisfaction between the ages of 10 and 12 years old. The highest decrease, of around 4%, was in Poland.

3 CONCLUSIONS

What can we learn from all this about child well-being in European countries? Although the subjective well-being of children is generally good, there are small proportions of children who can be described as quite miserable. And well-being varies between countries in interesting ways. Patterns across different aspects of life are fairly consistent – with children in Romania tending to be the most satisfied, followed by Finland and Norway; and children in the UK and Germany the least satisfied. The patterns for overall life satisfaction shown in [Table 12](#) are reasonably similar, for the countries shown, to those in the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey that asks children aged 11, 13 and 15 years old about their life satisfaction (Inchley et al., 2016). Romania fares relatively well in that survey also. Rees (2017) shows that, for the 18 countries in the Children's Worlds survey, there is very little association at the country level between children's life satisfaction and either adults' life satisfaction or national wealth. However, there was a significant link between children's mean life satisfaction and adults' views about social life in each country (taken from the Gallup-Healthways Global Well-Being Index). Countries where adults were more positive about their social lives tended also to be countries where children had higher life satisfaction. This link provides a potential starting point for further research on explanations of international variations in children's subjective well-being. Within Europe, the Children's World survey has also highlighted some important gender differences. Girls tend to be more satisfied with their lives at school but, in many countries, also substantially less satisfied with their self-image. Apart from children's evaluations of their lives, the survey has also provided some valuable insights into the varying context of children's lives in different European countries. These include, variations in who children live with; in their access to material items; and in the way that they spend their time.

The Children's Worlds survey has demonstrated that a school-based survey can give children a voice even as young as eight. At present there is no similar survey of children in Europe – the Health Behaviour of School-Age Children survey covers all EU countries (except Cyprus) every four years but is mainly focused on health behaviour. School-based surveys are relatively easy to organise and inexpensive. The EU is currently funding a study of the feasibility of a longitudinal survey of children. It might be feasible to add a child questionnaire to the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) at least for the countries that don't use register data.

At the time of writing, a new wave of the Children's Worlds survey is under way in a much larger number of countries, including more in Europe, and this promises to enhance the potential for cross-national analysis to identify similarities and differences in children's lives and well-being between groups of countries. The intention of this new survey is also to go further in explaining why there are such variations in children's life satisfaction and happiness both within and between countries. Ultimately it is hoped that this type of work can lead to practical messages for policy makers and practitioners concerned with improving children's quality of life and experiences of childhood.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Jonathan Bradshaw is Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at the University of York. He was founding Director of the Social Policy Research Unit and served two terms as Head of Department. His research has focused on social security policy, living standards, comparative social policy, child poverty and child well-being. He is currently the UK Coordinator for the EU Social Policy Network and drafted the two national reports on Investing in Children in 2013 and 2017. He has edited five volumes since 2001 on *The well-being of children in the UK* most recently for Policy Press (2016). He is a Trustee of the Child Poverty Action Group and Chair of their Social Policy Committee. He was appointed Commander of the British Empire (CBE) in 2005 for services to child poverty and Fellow of the British Academy in 2010.

Gwyther Rees is an Associate Research Fellow at University of York, and Research Director for the Children's Worlds project. He was formerly Research Director at The Children's Society – a national children's charity in England where his research focused mainly on two areas – child maltreatment and children's subjective well-being. He is the co-author of a book on adolescent neglect and the author of a recent book – *Children's Views on Their Lives and Well-Being: Findings from the Children's Worlds project* – published by Springer (2017) which provides an overview of the study discussed in this chapter.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, located in Geneva
- 2 Brazil, England, Germany, Honduras, Israel, Spain
- 3 Germany, Romania, South Africa, Spain and Turkey
- 4 Algeria, Canada, Chile, England, Israel, Nepal, Romania, Rwanda, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Uganda, United States
- 5 Child Indicators Research, 8, 1, 227-241
- 6 <http://www.isciweb.org/?CategoryID=176&ArticleID=108>