WELL-BEING AND THE FAMILY SYSTEM

A Structural Equation Model of Individual, Relational and Contextual Influences

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The central question guiding our research is:

**What influences the well-being of children and their families?**

Drawing on Ryff and Keyes (1995), we define well-being as a multi-dimensional construct situated between the individual and the social whole, comprising:

- Emotional well-being (absence of depression, internalising behaviours)
- Subjective well-being (e.g. life satisfaction)
- Relational well-being (including family and intimate relationships)
- Positive self-concept (self-esteem, self-efficacy)
- Positive work and/or study role
- Absence of symptoms or externalising behaviours
OUR APPROACH

- We situate the well-being of children within the context of the “family system”.
- We develop an integrated theoretical model of well-being and the family system, based on previous research.
- We seek robust latent multi-item measures of key concepts in this model.

- We distinguish between
  - the measurement model (items and scales used to measure key concepts),
  - the structural model (relationships between the key concepts), and
  - the risk and protective factors that constitute the context of child development.

- We use Structural Equation Modelling techniques to estimate parameters in our model – these models are well-adapted to studying the family system.
THE DATASET

Our analysis is based on the GUI 9 year-old cohort data, which has a number of strengths…

- Large sample, panel design, multiple measures, independent assessments, clustered sampling design, “ecological” approach

…but also some weaknesses:

- It does not provide detailed information on relationships (reciprocity, support, intimacy, conflict) within the neighbourhood, family or friendship group.

- It lacks a range of important measures, such as conflict between intimate partners, subjective well-being, physical symptoms, positive/negative affect, adult self-concept.

Therefore, not all of the concepts of well-being believed to be of importance can be implemented within the current analysis.
AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF CHILD WELL-BEING

Measurement Model for PCG Well-being

Measurement Model for SCG Well-being

Risk and Protective Factors

SCG Well-being

PCG Well-being

Child Well-being

Measurement Model for Child Well-being

Risk and Protective Factors
BROAD OUTLINE OF A SECOND ORDER LATENT VARIABLE MODEL

Risk and Protective Factors

Parenting
Depression
Dyadic Relationship
Parenting
Depression
Dyadic Relationship

Risk and Protective Factors

SCG Well-being

PCG Well-being

Child Well-being

Child Difficulties
Self-Concept
Scholastic Achievement
MEASURING CHILD WELL-BEING

Child Well-being

Child Difficulties
- Emotional - PCG
- Conduct - PCG
- Hyperactivity - PCG
- Peer Relations - PCG
- Happiness - PCG
- Appearance - PCG
- Popularity - PCG
- Intellectual - PCG
- Reading - PCG
- Maths - PCG
- Teacher Evaluation

Self-Concept

Scholastic Achievement

Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire
Piers – Harris II
Drumcondra
MEASURING PARENTAL WELL-BEING

PIANTA - Child Parent Relationship Scale

Positive Aspect – P1
Positive Aspect – P2
Positive Aspect – P3

Parenting

PCG Well-being

Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Consensus
Cohesion
Satisfaction

Depression

Dyadic Relationship
RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Local Problem Scale
Local Services Scale
Haase-Pratschke Deprivation Score
Health Status (Child)
Life Events (Child)
Gender (Child)

SCG Well-being
PCG Well-being
Child Well-being

Financial Difficulties
Non-Irish Ethnicity
Low Social Class
Equivalised Household Income Decile
ESRI Basic Deprivation
Low Education (PCG)
Health Status (PCG)
Age (PCG)
A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL OF CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Note 1: covariances between disturbance terms for Child Well-being and Parenting (PCG and SCG) not included in figure.

Note 2: all covariances between independent variables omitted from figure.
## INFLUENCE OF RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS ON FAMILY WELL-BEING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanatory variable</th>
<th>Child well-being</th>
<th>Primary Caregiver well-being</th>
<th>Secondary Caregiver well-being</th>
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<td>Low Social Class</td>
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<td>Health of PCG</td>
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<td>Age of PCG</td>
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<td>PCG Well-being</td>
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<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.31</td>
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SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCES ON WELL-BEING

Goodness of Fit:
N: 4,881
CFI: .951
RMSEA: .023

All effects significant at p < .05
1. The analysis confirms the importance of the mother’s well-being as a mediating factor on the child. A one unit improvement in the mother’s well-being is associated with a 0.4 unit direct improvement in child well-being.

2. In stark contrast, the direct effect of the father’s well-being on the child (.04) is almost negligible once we control for other factors.

3. A striking result is the strongly mediated effect of many contextual influences, in harmony with the ecological model of child well-being.

4. With the exception of the mother’s health and the Haase-Pratschke Deprivation Index, which have a significant direct effect on child well-being, all other socio-economic factors, including financial variables and local area problems, have a distal effect on child well-being that is mediated by the mother’s well-being.
1. The conceptualisation of well-being as a higher-order latent concept reveals itself to be a powerful and well-supported hypothesis.

2. The assumption that the well-being of children cannot be understood without simultaneously analysing the well-being of their parents is reinforced.

3. All of the key influences identified in this analysis are in line with our previous research on child and family well-being using independent data – including the finding that a unit change in maternal well-being is associated with almost half a unit change in child well-being.

4. Parents act as a buffer between economic risk factors and child well-being.

5. Socio-economic risks do influence parental well-being, and thus have a mediated effect on children.

6. The model presented here reflects the situation of two-parent families only. As we elected to study the dyadic relationships between caregivers and between caregivers and children, single parents were excluded. The next step would therefore be to focus on the primary caregiver and child, thus including single parent families.
WELL-BEING AND THE FAMILY SYSTEM

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