

# State of the child reports and indices of children's well being - an international perspective

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Presentation prepared for  
The MedChild International Conference  
**Tools for Measuring the Well-Being of Children**

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# Background

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- ❑ This short presentation is based on my personal experience as the coordinator of the multi-national project “Measuring and Monitoring Children’s Well-being” as well as on a few review studies I have conducted in recent years (Ben-Arieh et. al., 2001; Ben-Arieh & Goerge, 2001; Ben-Arieh, 2005) .
- ❑ In the project some 200 experts from more than 30 countries are trying in the last 10 years to re-define the concept of children’s well being and to find more appropriate indicators to measure it.
- ❑ Full details of the project can be found at: [http://  
multinational-indicators.chapinhall.org/](http://multinational-indicators.chapinhall.org/)

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- This growing attention can be seen in:
  - The scholarly interest in the field
  - The quantity of various state of the child reports.
  - The new efforts to develop indices of children well being.
- Here after I will present some short comments on both tools. I will further place those comments in the context of the changing field of children social indicators.

# Monitoring and Measuring children's well being – a changing field

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- In a number of studies and papers I have argued (as did others) that the field of children's social indicators has been evolving and going through a number of major shifts in the last 25 years.
  - From survival to beyond
  - From negative to positive
  - From well becoming to well-being
  - From traditional to “new” domains
  - From children as subjects of study to active participants in the effort, and
  - Toward a more policy oriented effort.



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- ❑ All searches were limited to titled volumes (monographs and books).
- ❑ All searches were limited to English language publications or other languages, only if the publication citation could be read in English.
- ❑ The key words were: Children and status; Children and state of; Children and well being; Children and quality of life; Children and indicators; and Children and welfare

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- **Final list included 199 reports!**

# State of the child reports study – Data coding

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- All reports were read, classified, coded and entered into an SPSS data file by using three groups of variables.
  - two *descriptive* variables: period of publication and geographic region.
  - seven *technical* variables: type of publisher, scope of publication, target population, time span, geographic level, unit of observation, and the publication perspective.
  - three *contents* variable: survival or beyond, positive or negative, and well being or well becoming.

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- Most of the reports were published in North America, with the other western countries contributing the second largest portion.
- The distribution among various publishers varied across regions. The western part of the world having significantly more reports by advocacy groups and academic institutions and significantly less reports by international organizations and others.

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- The majority of the reports (73.4%) are about the whole child population, and differences across regions and time periods were again small and insignificant
- More than 80% of the reports were a one time episode. Further, even though there are substantial differences in that regard across regions and periods (Eastern Europe and North-America producing more periodical reports) they were insignificant.

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- More than 80% of the reports were a one time episode. Further, even though there are substantial differences in that regard across regions and periods (Eastern Europe and North-America producing more periodical reports) they were insignificant.
- Local and regional reports are much more common in North American and the other Western countries.



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- Yet, it seems the proportion of reports using a child's perspective and/or a combined approach is growing in accordance with time and is more prevalent in western countries (even though not statistically significant).

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- Yet, it seems the proportion of reports using a child's perspective and/or a combined approach is growing in accordance with time and is more prevalent in western countries (even though not statistically significant).
- Most (82.3%) of the reports are applying an objective perspective, with insignificant differences across regions.
- However, it is apparent that in recent years, significantly more reports are either applying a subjective approach or a combined one.

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- A sole focus on either survival, negative or well-becoming is less prevalent in North America and in the Other Western countries than it is in the other regions.

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- For example, 40.9% of the reports focused solely on survival and basic needs, 66.7% focused solely on negative aspects of children lives, and 71.2% focused only on children's well becoming.
- A sole focus on either survival, negative or well-becoming is less prevalent in North America and in the Other Western countries than it is in the other regions.
- This type of focus is less prevalent in later periods of time than it was in earlier years.

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- Similarly, the report focus on positive vs. negative aspects of children's lives is correlated with the reports' period of publication, the scope, the target population and the perspectives.
- The reports' focus on children's well being vs. well-becoming is correlated with the reports' period of publication, the time span and the perspectives.

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- When looking at the three contents variables together, it is evident that three variables are statistically correlated with all of them, they are: the reports' period of publication and the two variables of the reports perspectives.
- Furthermore, all three contents variables were strongly and significantly correlated between themselves.

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- The study of the “State of Our Children” is changing!
- Our findings support earlier research showing that the field is going through 3 major shifts in types of published reports (i.e. from survival to beyond, from negative to positive, and from well-becoming to well-being). These shifts are occurring everywhere, though they may be occurring at different paces.

# What did we learn?

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- ❑ The study of the “State of Our Children” is changing!
- ❑ Our findings support earlier research showing that the field is going through 3 major shifts in types of published reports (i.e. from survival to beyond, from negative to positive, and from well-becoming to well-being). These shifts are occurring everywhere, though they may be occurring at different paces.
- ❑ Our findings further demonstrate that these shifts are correlated with changes in the “philosophy” or approach of many of the more recent reports (i.e. the incorporation of subjective perception as well as the child perspective and the usage of the child as the unit of observation).

**Where are we going from here?**

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- I would predict that the field will continue to move in the previously mentioned directions and will most likely do so at a considerably faster pace as more and more reports are published.
- I further anticipate that the continuation of the current trends demonstrated in this paper will eventually lead to the creation of a “new” role for children in the effort to measure and monitor their own well being – a role of active participants rather than of subjects for research.

# Indices of children's well being

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- ❑ Even though Miringhoff has presented an index for children's well being already in the late 80's or early 90's the focus on indices development is relatively new.
- ❑ Among others I think it is a consequence of both the growing attention to the field as well as the greater emphasis on the policy utilization.
- ❑ Indices are the answer to the "need" for simple, not complicated numbers (even if getting them is very complicated...) that can be used of monitoring the status of children.

# Indices of children's well being

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- A brief (and far from systematic) overview of the field brought to my attention 5 such efforts to develop and index of children well being:
  - Land Child Well-Being Index (CWI) in the USA
  - Bradshaw Index of child well being in the EU
  - UNICEF index of children well being in ORECD countries
  - Ben- Arie index for children's well being in Israel, and
  - The MedChild index

# Indices of children's well being

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- It is my understanding that all 5 indices share the following:
  - Aspiration to be used for monitoring
  - An effort to compose a set of indicators into one index.
  - A major problem of data availability
- However it is also my understanding that they differ in:
  - Their adherence with the trends in the field described above.
  - Their ability (and will) to tackle issues of beyond survival, positive aspects and well being of children and in particular the children "subjective" perspective!

# Indices of children's well being - conclusions

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- Without going into further details – I would conclude that:
  - The effort to develop new and sophisticated indices of children's well being is both a positive and timely effort.
  - However – for that effort to be effective it has to adhere with the development in the general field of measuring and monitoring children's well being.
  - To do that one can not settle for existing data only and a clear call for new and additional data should be heard!

# The International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI)

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Researchers, data users, child advocates, and policymakers have made considerable advances in developing and using indicators and measuring the status of child and adolescent well-being.

- These advances have been made possible by improvements in data collection and use, and collaborative efforts at the local, national, regional, and international levels. These important efforts, however, have been undertaken without the benefit of an organizing structure to support and foster collaboration, integrate findings, and coordinate and disseminate research. In short, the field is reaching critical mass without an organized professional home.
- **The International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI) offers that home.**

# ISCI Goals

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- The new ISCI brings together experts in the field worldwide to
  - contribute to the well-being of all children,
  - share knowledge and experience,
  - develop standards,
  - improve data resources,
  - foster collaborative research and projects,
  - foster diversity in methodological approaches,
  - enhance dissemination of information on the status of children,
  - help organizations apply the findings to policy and practice, and
  - enhance the capacity of the field in countries that are in the initial stages of producing child well-being indicators.



# ISCI resources

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- ❑ ISCI will host biennial global conferences, the first of which will be June 25–27, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois.
- ❑ The Society will further support and initiate regional meetings and a variety of working groups.
- ❑ ISCI's website, [www.childindicators.org](http://www.childindicators.org) will keep members informed of recent developments, research protocols, evolving data sources, and other information on the field. Sign up for a listserv to stay abreast of recent developments.
- ❑ ISCI will also publish a regular newsletter and occasional special issues of journals.

# ISCI members

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- ❑ Members of ISCI come from many countries and walks of life, including academicians and researchers, government officials, data collectors, policymakers, child advocates, data users, funders, practitioners, and journalists.
- ❑ The global character of the Society offers unique opportunities for studying and sharing knowledge as well as for seeking new partnerships and initiating studies and projects beyond the national or smaller regional networks.
- ❑ Coming together under the banner of an international society to study and use child well-being indicators offers an invaluable opportunity for collaboration, shared resources, problem-solving, support, and education.
- ❑ We hope you will consider joining this important society of scholars, policymakers, and stakeholders.