What is Child Well-being?:
Does It Matter How We Measure It?

Presented to the National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference,
San Antonio, Texas

November 7, 2013
What is Child Well-Being?
Child well-being represents the whole child:

- Physical health, development, and safety
- Psychological and emotional development
- Social development and behavior
- Cognitive development and educational achievement
Physical health, development and safety

- Safety and physical status
- Personal life
- Competence
- Physical development
- Functioning in socially heterogenous groups

Psychological/emotional development

- Confidence
- Intellectual development
- Behavior Problems

Social development and behavior

- School Engagement
- Depression
- Contribution
- Civic life
- Empathy
- Social

Cognitive development and educational achievement

- Commitment to learning
- Healthy Diet
- Social competencies
- Positive Values
- Educational/intellectual

Connections

- Character
- Positive identity
- Social

What is Child Well-Being?: Does It Matter How We Measure It?
Kristin A. Moore
Child well-being includes well-being and well-becoming.
Child well-being needs to be assessed across ages

(An outcome at one stage of childhood is generally an input at the next stage of development.)
What is Child Well-Being? Does It Matter How We Measure It?
Kristin A. Moore
What is Child Well-Being?: Does It Matter How We Measure It?

Kristin A. Moore

Inputs
- Poverty
- Health Coverage
- Schools
- Food Security
- After-school programs

Child Outcomes
- Education
- Health
- Behavior
- Socio-emotional
Child well-being is positive as well as negative

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What does the public hear about kids?

Disability  Mortality  Morbidity
Crime  VIOLENCE  Dropouts
Teen Pregnancy  Illicit Drug Use  Cigarette Use
Bad outcomes do matter

Negative development is important
(bad is stronger than good)
But, good outcomes matter too
7 Reasons Why We Need to Focus on the Positive

- The Declaration of Independence

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”
7 Reasons Why We Need to Focus on the Positive

- The Declaration of Independence
- It’s good science
Positive indicators, such as parent/adolescent relationships, are related to better child development.
7 Reasons Why We Need to Focus on the Positive

- The Declaration of Independence
- Good science
- Necessary to fully describe children and youth
Physical Health, Development, and Safety

**Positive**
- Exercise
- Healthy eating habits
- Safety habits (seat belt, helmet)

**Negative**
- Illness
- Obesity
- Injury
Psychological & Emotional Development

**Positive**
Life Satisfaction
Hope
Empathy

**Negative**
Depression
Low Self-Esteem
Suicidal Thoughts
Social Development & Behavior

**Positive**
Civic engagement
Volunteering
Environmental Stewardship

**Negative**
Drinking
Drug use
Gang Involvement
Cognitive Development & Educational Achievement

**Positive**
- Educational engagement
- Curiosity
- Critical thinking

**Negative**
- Dropout
- Truancy
- Expulsion
Relationships

**Positive**

Positive relationship with parents
Positive sibling relationships
Positive friendships

**Negative**

Conflict
Violence
Arguments
7 Reasons Why We Need to Focus on the Positive

- The Declaration of Independence
- Good science
- Necessary to fully describe children and youth
- Can be measured well
Criticism that they are ‘soft’, ‘squishy’ or ‘gluey’ is not warranted.
Flourishing Families Project

- Funded by the John Templeton Foundation
- Developed and tested items
- Conducted a national survey
- Did psychometric analyses
Example of Constructs: Flourishing Children Constructs

Relationship Skills
- Empathy
- Social Competence

Flourishing in Relationships
- Positive relationships with parents
- Positive friendships with peers

Flourishing in School and Work
- Diligence & Reliability
- Educational Engagement
- Initiative Taking
- Thrift
- Trustworthiness & Integrity

Helping Others to Flourish
- Altruism
- Generosity

Environmental Stewardship
- Environmental Stewardship

Personal Flourishing
- Forgiveness
- Goal Orientation
- Gratitude
- Hope
- Life satisfaction
- Purpose
- Spirituality
Positive indicators can be measured well

- Strengths are more prevalent than deficits, so specificity in measurement is needed
- Positive bias in reporting of positive behaviors, which requires detailed response categories
- Use concrete items
- In scales, combine negative with positive items
- Develop items that work across subgroups
Overview of psychometric analyses

• Examined distributions of each item
• Assessed Cronbach’s alpha (internal consistency)
• Conducted confirmatory factor analyses
  o Adolescents
  o Parents
  o Jointly
  o Criteria: CFI (> .95) TLI (> .95) RMSEA (< .085)
• Examined concurrent validity
Concurrent Validity

• **Social behavior: Fighting**
  - During the past 12 months, how many times were you in a physical fight?

• **Health behavior: Smoking**
  - During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigarettes?

• **Emotional outcome: Depressive Symptoms**
  - During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?

• **Cognitive outcome: Grades (parent report)**
  - Now I would like to ask you about [his/her] grades during the LAST school year. Overall, across all subjects ([he/she] takes at school), did [he/she] get . . . Mostly A’s; Mostly B’s; Mostly C’s; Mostly D’s and lower; [His/her] school does not give these grades

• **Examined in multivariate analyses**
Constructs

Relationship Skills
- Empathy
- Social Competence

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### Social Competence (Adolescent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please indicate how much these statements describe you. (Not at all like me-Exactly like me)</th>
<th>Please indicate how often this happens. How often... (None of the time-All of the time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I avoid making other kids look bad.</td>
<td>do you get along well with people of different races, cultures, and religions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If two of my friends are fighting, I find a way to work things out.</td>
<td>do you listen to other students’ ideas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I work in school groups, I do my fair share.</td>
<td>do you control your anger when you have a disagreement with a friend?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>can you discuss a problem with a friend without making things worse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>do you follow the rules when you are at a park, theater, or sports event?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>do you respect other points of view, even if you disagree?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Alpha=0.79
- CFI= 0.986
- TLI= 0.981
- RMSEA= 0.042
## Social Competence (Parent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please indicate how much these statements describe your child. (Not at all like my child-Exactly like my child)</th>
<th>How often... (None of the time-All of the time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My child avoids making other kids look bad.</td>
<td>does your child get along well with people of different races, cultures, and religions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If two of my child's friends are fighting, my child finds a way to work things out.</td>
<td>does your child follow the rules at a park, theater, or sports event?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When my child works in groups, he/she does his/her fair share.</td>
<td>does your child respect other people’s point of view, even if he/she disagrees?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Alpha=0.62
- CFI= 0.983
- TLI=0.971
- RMSEA=0.040
What is Child Well-Being? Does It Matter How We Measure It?

Kristin A. Moore

Social Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Competence</th>
<th>Fighting</th>
<th>Smoking</th>
<th>Depression (teen report)</th>
<th>Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.14***</td>
<td>-0.28***</td>
<td>-0.10**</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fighting**
- % who get in fights

**Smoking**
- % who smoke

**Depression**
- % who exhibit signs of depression

**Grades**
- % who earn As
Generosity (Adolescents)

Please indicate how much these statements describe you. (Not at all like me-Exactly like me)

- I enjoy sharing my things with others.
- I do nice things for others without being asked.
- When I help out a friend, I expect something in return.
- If needed, I am willing to help my family by buying fewer things for myself.
- If needed, I am willing to help my family by giving up activities and trips that cost money.
- If needed, I am willing to help my family by giving up my free time to help around the house.

- Alpha=0.74
- CFI=0.997
- TLI=0.994
- RMSEA=0.045
Generosity (Parents)

Please indicate how much these statements describe your child. (Not at all like my child-Exactly like my child)

- My child enjoys sharing his/her things with others.
- My child does nice things for others without being asked. (Strongly agree-Strongly disagree)
- When my child helps out a friend, he/she expects something in return.
- If needed, my child is willing to help our family by buying fewer things for himself/herself.
- If needed, my child is willing to help our family by giving up activities and trips that cost money.
- If needed, my child is willing to help our family by giving up his/her free time to help around the house.

• Alpha=0.79
• CFI=0.997
• TLI=0.994
• RMSEA=0.065
### Generosity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generosity</th>
<th>Fighting</th>
<th>Smoking</th>
<th>Depression (teen report)</th>
<th>Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.07**</td>
<td>-0.17***</td>
<td>-0.07*</td>
<td>0.05***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Graphs

- **Fighting**
  - Quartile 1: 30%
  - Quartile 2: 25%
  - Quartile 3: 20%
  - Quartile 4: 15%

- **Smoking**
  - Quartile 1: 14%
  - Quartile 2: 12%
  - Quartile 3: 10%
  - Quartile 4: 8%

- **Depression**
  - Quartile 1: 25%
  - Quartile 2: 20%
  - Quartile 3: 15%
  - Quartile 4: 10%

- **Grades**
  - Quartile 1: 50%
  - Quartile 2: 40%
  - Quartile 3: 30%
  - Quartile 4: 20%
7 Reasons Why We Need to Focus on the Positive

- The Declaration of Independence
- Good science
- Necessary to fully describe children and youth
- Can be measured well
- **Public Perceptions**
The public sees teenagers as...

- DUMB
- RUDE

American families are...

- FALLING APART
In fact, most children are doing well

Children Ages 6-11 & 12-17 with 0-4 domains of Positive Well-Being: Health, Education, Behavior & Socio-emotional

Age 6-11
- Zero: 9
- One: 15
- Two: 19
- Three: 25
- Four: 31

Age 12-17
- Zero: 13
- One: 19
- Two: 21
- Three: 25
- Four: 23

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- Public Perceptions
- **Kids’ Perceptions**
Program recruitment and retention represent an ongoing challenge
Positive youth development

Programs that help youth build assets and work toward positive outcomes are an effective approach (more than negative didactic or shock approaches)
7 Reasons Why We Need to Focus on the Positive

- The Declaration of Independence
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- Public Perceptions
- Kids’ Perceptions
- Community Perceptions
Community perceptions

• Members of a community don’t want to be told they and their children are just problems

• Also, policies and programs need to know and build on community, family and youth strengths and assets
In sum, child well-being...

- Represents the whole child
- Includes well-being and well-becoming
- Needs to be assessed across ages
- Is an outcome and needs to be distinguished from an input
- Is positive, as well as negative
  - The Declaration of Independence
  - Good science
  - Necessary to fully describe children and youth
  - Can be measured well
  - Public Perceptions
  - Kids’ Perceptions
  - Community Perceptions
5 Reasons Why Rigorous, Accurate Measures of Child Well-being are Needed

- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends.
Firearm Deaths

Rates (per 100,000) for Homicide, Suicide, and Firearm-Related Deaths of Youth Ages 15-19, Selected Years 1970-2010

Homicide
Suicide
Firearm Related Death
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Child Abductions

Report Missing Children Ages 0-17 in 1999: Family vs. Non-Family Abductions

- **56,500** (82%)
  - Family

- **12,100** (18%)
  - Non-family
Volunteering

% of Students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 Who Volunteer At Least Once a Month, 1991-2011

- Eighth Grade
- Twelfth Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Eighth Grade</th>
<th>Twelfth Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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5 Reasons Why Rigorous, Accurate Measures of Child Well-being are Needed

- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends
- To identify negative trends and target populations at risk
% of Children Ages 2 – 19 Who Are Obese, By Age:
Selected Years 1971-2010

- Ages 2-5
- Ages 6-11
- Ages 12-19

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Obesity

% of Children Ages 2 – 19 Who Are Obese, By Age: Selected Years 1971 - 2010

Non-Hispanic white  Non-Hispanic black  Mexican American

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Non-Hispanic white</th>
<th>Non-Hispanic black</th>
<th>Mexican American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is Child Well-Being? Does It Matter How We Measure It?
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Teen births

Birth Rates (per 1,000) for Females Ages 15 to 19, by Race and Hispanic Origin, Selected Years, 1960-2011

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5 Reasons Why Rigorous, Accurate Measures of Child Well-being are Needed

- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends
- To identify negative trends and target populations at risk
- To monitor progress
Breast feeding

Percentage of Mothers Breastfeeding, by Birth Year of Infant, 2000-2010*, and Healthy People 2010 Goals

![Breastfeeding Graph]

Ever Breastfed (goal: 75%)
Breastfed at 6 months (goal: 50%)
5 Reasons Why Rigorous, Accurate Measures of Child Well-being are Needed

- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends
- To identify negative trends and target populations at risk
- To monitor progress
- To build the knowledge base
To build the knowledge base

Valid, reliable, and comparable measures of child well-being are needed across disciplines and methods, for:

- Indicators
- Surveys used for research
- Evaluation studies, and
- Performance management
5 Reasons Why Rigorous, Accurate Measures of Child Well-being are Needed

- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends
- To identify negative trends and target populations at risk
- To monitor progress
- To build the knowledge base
- To inform the public, policymakers, and the press about the status of children
  - Child well-being should be a leading indicator
  - Clear, accurate, and simple measures of child well-being
Leading indicators

Standard & Poor’s (S&P) 500
Gross domestic product (GDP)
Unemployment rate
Inflation rate
Housing starts

What should be the leading child well-being indicators?

- An index of child well-being?
But indices are worrisome

Indices often combine independent and dependent variables

Indices often do not cover all domains, especially socio-emotional well-being

Coverage of domains is often incomplete

Indices often obscure countervailing trends
What is Child Well-Being?: Does It Matter How We Measure It?

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% of Children Ages 6 – 11 Who Are Obese:
1971 - 2010

Obesity
Teen Births

Birth Rates (per 1,000) for Females Ages 15 to 19, 1960-2011

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“What gets measured gets done”

Policy makers do track trends

- They don’t read academic journal articles

  ➢ State and local data are of particular interest to policy makers
National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH)

Developed to provide indicator data for U.S. children <18 for the nation and each state

Telephone interviews with the most knowledgeable parent

Primary focus on health, but includes information on a range of child well-being constructs and on the contexts in which children grow up

Data on more than 90,000 children from 2007 (data for 2011-12 are now available)
Micro Data Indices

Children’s circumstances can be described for each individual child, across multiple developmental domains, and then aggregated

Different than macro indices, which are built from data that have already been aggregated
NSCH Index Domains

• Physical health, development, and safety

• Psychological and emotional development

• Social development and behavior

• Cognitive development and educational achievement

• Overall Well-Being
Physical Health, Development, and Safety

- Health status
- Chronic health conditions
- Health risk behaviors
- Health promoting behaviors
Psychological and Emotional Development

- Internalizing problems
- Externalizing problems
- Self-esteem, self-concept
- Coping skills
Cognitive Development & Educational Achievement

- School problems
- Learning difficulties
- Cognitive development
- Achievement
Social Development & Behavior

- Parent-child relationship
- Activity engagement
- Positive social behaviors
- Negative social behaviors
An Example: Social Development & Behavior

- **Parent-child relationship**
  - Communication

- **Activity engagement**
  - Sports; clubs; organized events
  - Volunteer, service work

- **Positive social behaviors**
  - Respect for teacher, neighbors
  - Gets along with other children
  - Tries to understand feelings
  - Tries to resolve conflicts

- **Negative social behaviors**
  - Negative behavior problems
Whole Child Indices (4 Domains)

Physical Health, Development & Safety 58%

Psychological and Emotional Development 65%

Social Development & Behavior 67%

Cognitive Development & Educational Achievement 65%

All Child Well-Being Domains 31%
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Child Well-Being for 6-11 Year Olds, by State – Cognitive Development and Educational Achievement
In sum...

7 Reasons We Need to Focus on the Positive:

1. The Declaration of Independence
2. Good science
3. Necessary to fully describe children and youth
4. Can be measured well
5. Public Perceptions
6. Kids’ Perceptions
7. Community Perceptions

5 Reasons Why Rigorous, Accurate Measures of Child Well-being are Needed:

- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends
- To identify negative trends and target populations at risk
- To monitor progress
- To build the knowledge base
- To inform the public, policymakers, and the press about the status of children
  - Child well-being should be a leading indicator
  - Clear, accurate, and simple measures of child well-being