

<b>Institution:</b> University of York		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 20 - Social Work and Social Policy		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Impact of Research on Child Well-Being		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2005-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Jonathan Bradshaw	Professor	1968-2014 (Emeritus 2014+)
John Hudson	Professor	1998-present
Kate Pickett	Professor	2006-present
Stefan Kühner	Senior Lecturer	2006-2016
Gill Main	Research Assistant	2013-2015
Antonia Keung	Lecturer	2009-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>A longstanding programme of research on cross-national comparative measures of child well-being, undertaken at the University of York, has led to a range of significant impacts. At the international level, the work has influenced the development of multi-dimensional well-being measures by UNICEF in its Innocenti Report Cards. Within the UK, the work has been central to The Children's Society <i>Good Childhood</i> reports and has influenced the Office for National Statistics (ONS) measures of child well-being. Taken together, this work has facilitated an increased use of scientific evidence in national and international debates about child well-being over a sustained period, in turn facilitating widespread media coverage of child well-being debates. This coverage has further leveraged political debates and important policy changes.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Pioneering research on child well-being indicators by a range of staff in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, and other departments at York (including Kate Pickett, submitted to UoA2), has been central in major national and cross-national debates since the early 2000s. The <b>underpinning research</b> has compared national <u>quantitative</u> measures of child wellbeing across a range of domains, including material situation, health, education, housing, relationships, risk and safety, and life satisfaction <b>[A]</b>. Most significantly, it has pioneered the use of measures of subjective well-being that capture children's <i>own</i> assessments of their subjective well-being <b>[F]</b>, including children as young as eight years old. The research has supported the idea that children's well-being should be a matter of concern in its own right, captured in multi-dimensional measures of well-being, and has demonstrated the robustness and value of subjective measures of children's well-being <b>[D]</b>.</p> <p>The research concluded that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the United Kingdom performs poorly compared to similar high-income countries <b>[A]</b> and ranks towards the bottom of the league table in most domains, albeit with some improvements arising for policy agendas before 2010 <b>[B]</b></li> <li>when comparing high-income countries there is a positive association between child well-being and public spending on family benefits and family services, and a negative association with level of income inequality <b>[A][B]</b></li> <li>subjective well-being represents an important component of overall well-being - that is influenced by, but can be empirically distinguished from, material well-being <b>[D]</b></li> <li>well-being is strongly associated with the levels of material resources children have available to them, and their perceptions of their material situation in relation to others <b>[F]</b></li> </ul> <p>Peer reviewed outputs have been complemented with <b>demand-led policy work</b>. In 2005 Bradshaw <i>et al.</i> produced the first multidimensional comparative analysis of child well-being in the EU25 for the UK Presidency. This analysis was expanded to cover OECD countries for UNICEF, published in their <i>Innocenti Report Card 7</i> (2007). This was the first in this series to adopt a multi-dimensional approach, and York staff have been regularly involved in the report</p>		

card series since. At around the same time, York researchers developed and tested measures of child subjective well-being in a series of surveys for the Children's Society and together began a series of school-based surveys of subjective well-being that formed the basis of the 'Good Childhood' reports (e.g. [F]). This work, in turn, fed into *Children's Worlds*, a new cross-national survey of children's subjective well-being (first wave findings reported in [F]).

York's continued involvement in such activities reflects both the significance of the work cited here, and its ongoing development. We have expanded earlier work by developing new measures of subjective well-being and expanding its geographic reach [F]. Moreover, fruitful synergies between our child well-being indicators research and other research agendas at York have further developed this work. For example: Wilkinson and Pickett highlighted the negative association between Bradshaw *et al.*'s original child well-being index and inequality in *The Spirit Level* (2009) and more recent work has explored these links in greater depth, e.g. a pooled time series analysis demonstrating the mediated effects of income inequality on school bullying [C]. Hudson and Kühner also applied their expertise in fuzzy set methods to reanalyse Bradshaw *et al.*'s original UNICEF index [E], highlighting the approach's potential for addressing some of the limitations in index based league tables Bradshaw *et al.* had previously identified [A].

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[A] (2009) Bradshaw, J. and Richardson, D. 'An index of child well-being in Europe', *Journal of Child Indicators Research* 2(3) pp.319-351 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-009-9037-7> \*\*\* ^^

[B] (2011) Bradshaw, J. (ed) *The Well-Being of Children in the United Kingdom*, Third Edition, Bristol: Policy Press \*

[C] (2012) Elgar, F. J., Pickett, K. E., Pickett, W., Craig, W., Molcho, M., Hurrelmann, K., & Lenzi, M. 'School bullying, homicide and income inequality: a cross-national pooled time series analysis' *International Journal of Public Health* 58(2) pp.237-245 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-012-0380-y> \*\*\*

[D] (2013) Bradshaw, J., Martorano, B., Natali, L., & Neubourg, C. *Children's Subjective Well-being in Rich Countries*. Office of Research Working Paper WP-2013-03, UNICEF Office of Research.

[E] (2013) Hudson, J. & Kühner, S. 'Beyond indices: The potential of fuzzy set ideal type analysis for cross-national analysis of policy outcomes', *Policy and Society* 32(4) pp.303-317 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polsoc.2013.10.003> \*\*\*

[F] (2014) Pople, L., Raws, P., Mueller, D., Mahony, S., Rees, G., Bradshaw, J., Main, G. and Keung, A. *The Good Childhood Report 2014*. London: The Children's Society <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/80852/2/goodChildhood2014.pdf> +

\* A wide number of York staff and associates (including Bradshaw, Bloor, Rees, Skinner, Keung) produced chapters for a fourth volume of [B] in 2016.

+ An annual series that we have worked on closely with The Children's Society

\*\*\* Peer reviewed journal article ^^ Returned to REF2014

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Through the publication of a number of co-produced research reports, York research has facilitated the increased use of scientific evidence in national and international discussions on child well-being since 2007, in turn facilitating widespread media coverage. This coverage has leveraged political debates on child well-being, leading to important policy changes.

The primary impacts claimed are: (i) **informing UNICEF's international comparisons of child well-being in their *Innocenti Report Card* series;** (ii) **providing the groundwork for the Children's Society's regular reports on child wellbeing in the UK in their *Good Childhood* series.** Our underpinning research has laid the foundation for key aspects of this work and we have acted as scientific advisors to both organisations, helping them to produce analyses of child well-being that have been both impactful and scientifically responsible. Our impact has also extended beyond this, influencing national and international debates about the measurement of child well-being, including the adoption of measures of child well-being by the ONS.

The key role our research has played in the international applied scientific debate on child well-being indicators is acknowledged in the OECD's [How's Life 2015: Measuring Well-Being](#) report.

It includes a dedicated chapter on children's lives with a section documenting the key international "*initiatives on measuring child well-being*" undertaken by "*international agencies [...] academics, NGOs and research institutions*". York research was the only academic work cited. York researchers were also directly involved in some of the work undertaken by the international agencies they flagged as key (e.g. within several Unicef Innocenti report cards). The President of the International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI), also confirms the significance of York's role:

*"I can testify to the immense impact of the work done at York University [...] The novel approach of the York University research group brought to the forefront of the well-being discourse issues of subjective well-being, subjective social and economic deprivation and especially the "explaining" variances for both."* [5a]

Reflecting this, in 2019 ISCI presented its Impact Award to York in recognition of ongoing work on child well-being outcomes and, more specifically, for their contribution to the *Children's Society's Good Childhood Report* series. The announcement of the award noted: "*The essence of these reports is to highlight children's perspectives through rigorous child-centred research. It generates substantial public interest and dialogue around children's lives, and through on-going lobbying and advocacy campaigns has made a significant impact on social policy in the UK*" [5b]. Of this work, the Team Leader (Policy, Research and Public Affairs) at The Children's Society, states:

*"Without the support of the University of York, The Children's Society's research programme into children's subjective well-being would likely not exist as the well-respected and widely utilised research programme it is today. We are indebted to the University for the support it has provided over the last decade."* [3a]

York's involvement with the *Good Childhood Report* series stretches back over 15 years and has resulted in the creation of the Children's Society's 'Good Childhood Index' as a prominent measure of well-being. This has been requested for use by over 900 organisations, academics and interested parties in the last three years alone [3a]. The *Good Childhood Report* has generated widespread press coverage; for example, the 2015 report featured on the front pages of both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* and the 2020 report had a media reach of over 23,000,000 people [2b][3a]. Crucially, the Children's Society have described the studies as regularly providing "*key insights for our campaigning*" that help them to influence policy change. A key example they provide is that:

*"[evidence] on how children's well-being is affected by problem debt in the home was used extensively in our 'Breathing Space' campaign which resulted in a new government scheme for families in problem debt in England to help support them out of debt."* [3a]

York's work with The Children's Society has helped bring **children's voices into policy debates in important ways**. The 2016 Good Childhood Report was the subject of a question and an endorsement at Prime Minister's Question Time (7th September 2016), Lucy Frazer MP citing data from the report showing "*that 10% of children feel their lives have little meaning or purpose*" and asking "*What further action does she propose to increase mental health support in our schools?*", to which Prime Minister Theresa May responded by agreeing that there is 'collective concern' about the way that young people's mental health is dealt with, and adding "*I know that my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary will be looking very closely at the 'Good Childhood Report' to see what more we can do*" [3b].

In March 2018 the ONS released its national Children's Well-being Measures. These included nine indicators derived from our Children's Society data [4b][4f]. In October 2018 Theresa May committed the Government to publication of an annual 'State of the Nation' report on Children and Young People's Wellbeing that would draw together available evidence. The first report appeared in October 2019; it included a review of evidence from the *Good Childhood Report* series in Chapter 3 - 'Wider indicators on children and young people' [4c][4d].

York's national work on the development of subjective measures of child well-being with the *Children's Society* has interlinked with an international project developing such measures in a

growing number of countries, the *Children's Worlds* study. This project, emerging from meetings of ISCI and UNICEF, is an international collaborative survey project designed to fill important gaps in knowledge about children's lives through the development and collection of subjective child well-being indicators. It began as a 14-country international collaboration in 2009, and with support from the *Jacobs Foundation* it has expanded its geographic reach to include 40 countries. York is part of the core group that has led this work since the project began. The *Jacobs Foundation* describe the study as “*instrumental in bringing the topic of children's well-being to global political attention [including] in policy discussions, e.g. on European Union Level or at UNESCO and UNICEF*” [6a].

The launch of the comparative cross-national reports from *Children's Worlds* has generated substantial media coverage and policy debate [2c]. A significant gap filled by the series was comparable cross-national subjective well-being data for children in South Korea. Each study wave has highlighted significant concerns about children's lives in South Korea, placing the country towards the bottom of league tables for happiness or life satisfaction. The surveys highlighted particular dissatisfaction with school life and showed that 8-year-old children were less likely to spend time having fun with their family than in any other country in the study. This, along with new OECD data, has contributed to significant debate and policy change. It has been confirmed that the South Korean government has “*taken seriously these recent evidences of low subjective well-being of Korean children*”, developing a ‘Children's Policy Basic Plan’ that includes a vision to achieve ‘happiness’ and ‘respect’ for children in which:

*“The main policy goal the plan provided is to increase the level of Korean children's happiness up to the middle of OECD countries in 5 years. Because school and academic demands are known to be the major reason for low subjective well-being of Korean children, the plan provides the school curriculum change where children's ‘right to play’ can be protected.”* [6b]

Impact in South Korea has arisen both through measures York has developed (*Children's Worlds*) and the broad influence of the research on the uptake of subjective child well-being measures by other organisations (OECD). The ongoing development of indicators in the *Children's Society* and *Children Worlds* work is likely to extend our impact on national measures of child well-being in the UK. An expanded indicator set is being developed at present; the ONS confirms that: “*We have included 8 measures from Children's Worlds Survey in the proposed indicator set as well as 12 from The Children's Society's Household Survey*” [4a][4e].

The impact of our research on cross-national debates can also be seen in the *UNICEF Innocenti Report Card* series, the highest profile advocacy project UNICEF undertakes with respect to child well-being in high income countries [1a]. York researchers have been involved in the series regularly since 2007 and in the current REF period at least one of Bradshaw, Hudson, Kühner or Pickett have been involved in each *UNICEF Innocenti Report Card*, either as members of the scientific Advisory Board, researchers or as report card authors [1a][1b]. The Director of the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre confirms our contribution here saying:

*“The University of York's longstanding programme of research on child well-being, particularly cross-national measurement and analysis of child well-being, has played a crucial role in the Innocenti Report Card series for more than a decade... The Report Card series is UNICEF's highest profile rich country report. This series has had significant impacts on policy debates and policy itself, most notably influencing New Zealand's recent 2019 Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy.”* [1a]

Multi-dimensional league tables within the report cards, pioneered in Report Card 7 (2007) based on Bradshaw's work, are key in generating media coverage of findings, not least because it allows performance in multiple child well-being domains to be compared, and few countries do well in all domains. As such, UNICEF is able to generate tailored media coverage for each country that highlights where they need to do better for children. Worldwide media reach is extensive for each report card [2a] and tends to be particularly intense in countries that perform poorly in the overall league table, in turn opening up strong opportunities for engagement with policy makers. For example, there was particularly widespread coverage of Report Card 13

(2016) in Israel because the country came bottom of the Report Card's league table. This resulted in extended television debates with politicians and a four-page spread in the *Yedioth Aharonot* newspaper [2a]. It also prompted an emergency debate in the Labor, Welfare and Health Committee of the Knesset (Israel's parliament) which specifically focused on the report card's findings; Committee Chair, MK Elie Elalouf, said at the meeting "We knew the situation was severe and disgraceful, but we did not imagine the extent of it" [1d].

Intensified scrutiny and children's rights advocacy does not, of course, always lead to swift and direct policy change, particularly when corrective action might require significant expansion of public spending, which in turn might require the forging of a new political consensus. An example of where this has occurred is New Zealand, where a Child Poverty Reduction Act was passed in 2018, followed by a Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy in 2019 and a Wellbeing Budget that included 'improving child wellbeing' as one of six key priorities. In highlighting the challenge it needed to meet, the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy explicitly referenced report cards 12 (2014) and 14 (2017), noting that the latter "gave New Zealand an overall league table ranking of 34 out of 41" that needed to be addressed [1e]. The strategy sets its core goal in comparative terms: "that New Zealand be the best place in the world for children and young people" [1e]. Report cards published since these changes have maintained pressure for change; publication of report card 16 in 2020 placed New Zealand 35 out of 38 countries for child wellbeing outcomes, resulting in significant media attention and resulted in a press release from the Prime Minister reaffirming the government's commitment to improving outcomes [1f].

Our model of impact outlined above goes well beyond a specific project's findings influencing a specific policy change, reflecting sustained production of impactful work that has involved close collaboration with key national and international organisations over almost two decades, with the overriding goal of helping them to use scientific evidence to successfully campaign for policy changes that improve children's lives.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

**[1] International agencies:** (a) **Testimonial**, Director, Unicef Office of Research Innocenti, 28/01/21; (b) contributor pages from Unicef Report Card 12 (2014), Unicef Report Card 13 (2016), Unicef Report Card 14 (2017), Unicef Report Card 15 (2018), Unicef Report Card 16 (2020); (c) OECD (2015) *How's Life 2015? Measuring Well-Being* pages 141-43, 180-82; (d) Press release from The Knesset Labor, Welfare and Health Committee, 'MK Elalouf in response to UNICEF report on child poverty in Israel: "We had no idea how disgraceful the situation is"', 20/4/16; (e) New Zealand Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, page 12; (f) Press Release from Prime Minister of New Zealand, 'Prime Minister responds to child wellbeing report', 3/9/20.

**[2] Media evidence:** Selected media coverage: (a) Unicef Report Card 13, including 12 major UK outlets (2 frontpages) and 21 major overseas outlets (2 front pages); (b) Good Childhood Report 2015, including 7 major UK outlets (2 front pages); (c) Children's Worlds Report 2016, including 6 major UK outlets (1 front page).

**[3] Children's Society evidence:** (a) **Testimonial** from Team Leader, Policy, Research and Public Affairs, The Children's Society, 27/01/21; (b) Hansard, *Prime Minister's Questions*, 7/9/16, col 327.

**[4] ONS evidence:** (a) **Testimonial**, Quality of Life Team, Office for National Statistics 06/01/2021; (b) **Testimonial**, Quality of Life Team, Office for National Statistics 22/01/21; (c) Office for National Statistics, *Children's views on well-being and what makes a happy life, UK: 2020*, 2/10/20, Section 2; (d) Department for Education (2019) *State of the Nation 2019: Children and Young People's Wellbeing*, pages 38-40; (e) Office for National Statistics, *Children's well-being indicator review, UK: 2020*, 2/10/20, Sections 3-6; (f) ONS Children's Well-Being Measure 2018 release (data sources tab of XLS sheet).

**[5] ISCI evidence:** (a) **Testimonial**, President of International Society for Child Indicators, 11/01/2021; (b) Press notice of ISCI Impact Award 2019 for Partnership between the Children's Society and the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York.

**[6] Children's Worlds evidence:** (a) **Testimonial**, co-CEO, Jacobs Foundation, 25/01/21; (b) **Testimonial**, Professor of Social Welfare, Seoul National University, 06/01/21.