

BEYOND WELFARE: MEASURING AND MONITORING THE STATE OF CHILDREN - NEW TRENDS AND DOMAINS

Asher Ben-Arieh

(Accepted February 26 2000)

INTRODUCTION

In an era of information, it is surprising to discover how little we know about the state of our children. The lack of knowledge is far more extensive than the absence of existing data and information, which is already collected for various other reasons.

Furthermore, when we do collect data and information on the state of our children the question should be asked: What do we measure and by what means? This paper calls for a new concept of children well being. It stresses the need to reshape the field of measuring the state of children by adapting it to new shifts and trends.

In recent years a number of studies concentrated on the well being of children. Among them one should notice the studies on children quality of life (Shen and Lai, 1998) and their subjective well being (Marks and Fleming, 1999; Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999). Recent years have shown that physiological research is moving from focusing on human distress and psychopathology to happiness and life satisfaction (Terry and Huebner, 1995). It is also evident that considerable efforts were directed at studying children economic status and resources (Klasen, 1997) and that the issue of child poverty and economic resources is continually being studied (Mayer, 1997).

However this paper argues that all of those efforts, as valuable as they are in themselves are insufficient for studying the overall status of children. This is true especially since such studies are concentrating only on parts and bits of the overall picture and that many important aspects were neglected (Terry and Huebner, 1995; Andrews and Ben-Arieh, 1999). Nevertheless, such efforts as well as others (Ben-Arieh and Wintersberger; 1997; Hauser, Brown and Prosser, 1997; Bradshaw and Barnes, 1999) have undoubtedly led to the development of new domains and indicators for children's well being.

The first part of the paper addresses the need for measuring and monitoring the state of children. The next section describes the changes in this rapidly growing field and, in the third section, the tension between children's well being and "well-becoming" is analyzed. Then some "new" domains of children's well being are suggested. In the fifth part some of the costs and benefits of this effort are discussed. The sixth section suggests some lessons that may be learned from past efforts and an agenda for the future. The paper closes with some brief conclusions.

THE NEED FOR MEASURING AND MONITORING THE STATE OF CHILDREN

This section covers three arguments in favor of the need for measuring and monitoring the state

of children. This is done by leading the reader from the general concept of the power of information, through the development of social indicators and child welfare indicators in particular to the acceptance of children as an independent group. The purpose of doing so is to lay a firm foundation for the importance of measuring and monitoring the state of children and, thus, for the need, described in the paper, for rethinking and reshaping the field

The Power of Information

It is hard to disagree with the dictum that knowledge is power. This power is held by whoever manages access to the data and has the option to use it- The power of information is based on two contradictory situations. The first and positive one enables the information holder to gain power by making decisions that are based on the data he or she possesses. The second—negative situation, in contrast, enables whoever holds the information to gain power by hiding the data. In doing so, he or she can avoid criticism of decisions and prevent others from using the data for their purposes. Building the power of any data or information is contingent on both the demands for *it*, and the readiness and ability to deliver the goods. Thus, when examine efforts to measure the state of children, we are led to this conclusion; the lack of the power of information with regard to children is due to a lack either of demand or the will to collect and deliver the information, or both.

In summary, information has power. This power is based on the use of the information by its holder. The way the holder of the information uses it will shape the kind and scope of power. In order to strengthen the power of information in a 'positive' sense it is not enough to merely have access to data; there needs to be demand for information as well as a willingness to deliver the required data to policy makers.

However looked at the need for information in general, we now turns to looking into the need for information on the state of children

Why Measure the State of Children?

Answering this requires two further questions. First, why measure the social and economic state of a society? And in particular how did this practice develop and what are the possible implication of such efforts. The second question needs to ask what are the reasons for measuring the state of children independently of measuring the state of society as a whole.

Answering the first question fully is beyond the scope of this paper, but one cannot escape at least touching on it Social indicators are "Quantitative data that serve as indexes to socially important conditions of the society" (Biderman, 1966: 69). In a sense the notion of 'social indicators' is nothing but a continuation of the old human desire to develop new types of knowledge and to know more about human society (Gross, 1966).

Today the use of social indicators is widely accepted and recognized as an important tool in shaping social policies. The questions asked are no longer about whether there is a need for social indicators but, rather, about the type and quality of those used When the power of information is regarded as positive, the indicators that are used and available are updated for the growing needs of policy makers.

Unfortunately, this is not the case in the area of children's policy. There is a basic lack of indicators that can be used in this area and those that do exist are outdated and often inadequate. This situation is the result of both the negative power of information, and the lack of demand for some vital information in this field.

Nevertheless, the answer to the question stated in the beginning of this paragraph, Why measure the state of children? Is only partially answered by the human desire to know more about society. One should still show that children are an independent group, which deserve a separate policy and, thus, a separate effort to measure and monitor their state.

Children as an Independent Group

The last years have brought new attention to the field of childhood social indicators. Although UNICEF has been publishing its "State Of The World's Children" for some 20 years, significant growth has occurred in the last seven years only (Zill and Nord, 1994; Ben-Arieh, 1992; Jensen and Saporiti, 1992). This new trend in the area of social indicators is still in its infancy, and has to cope with many doubts. Debate remains around the notion that children are a unique and separate population group that deserve special children's policy, and a need for social indicators. It is particularly hard to convince skeptics that children deserve a separate policy that could, and sometimes should, differ from family policy (Qvortrup, 1994).

Support for this notion, as well as for the need to develop social indicators of the state of children, can be found in the development of the children's rights concept. This concept includes, by its nature, acceptance of the autonomy of children as well as the 'fact' that a child is an individual human being (Casas, 1997).

The growing need for information and social indicators as a vital component of planning a social policy is in many cases ignored when dealing with children. Any effort to collect data on children is hampered by the problem that children are regularly included only in data collected about families or mothers. It is evident that a number of efforts to measure and study families quality of life are being carried out (Rettig and Leichtentritt, 1999). However such efforts which concentrate on the child as a unit of observation and study are less common.

Jensen and Saporiti described "a dearth with respect to statistical data about children" (p.9) when they tried to collect data on children in 16 industrialized countries. Several attempts to collect data on children led to a common conclusion that children were not 'visible' in the Industrialized countries' systems of social accounting (Adamson, 1995). Why is this so? The answer in statistical language is a simple one; "In order to make any particular population group visible, the members of this group—in this case children—must be made the unit of observation" (Jensen and Saporiti, 1992: 9). In virtually all countries, this is not the case.

It is one of the goals of this paper to underscore the importance of accepting that children are a unique population group, which needs and deserves a unique policy to promote its well being. The best interests of the child may not only differ from the interests of his family or parents but it may even challenge it.

The effort to measure and monitor the state of children is intended to promote their well being, and to influence social and political change processes. Thus it must raise the child's stature in the policy process by emphasizing the child as a unit of observation, reflecting the child's

voice and perceptions, and enhancing children rights.

THE STATE AND THE PROGRESS OF CHILDREN'S WELL BEING INDICATORS

After arguing for the need to measure and monitor the state of children, we now move to the field of indicators of children's well being. We begin by describing the state of the field and then we identify and analyze three major shifts the field has experienced in recent years.

The State of Children Well-Being Indicators

As mentioned above, UNICEF has published its "State of the World's Children" report since 1979. This annual review of basic indicators on children's survival and development has helped create a global awareness of the need for monitoring how children fare. There have been regional initiatives, such as the "European Childhood Project" to more specifically and accurately describe quantitatively, the situation of children. Under the auspices of the European Center for Social Welfare Policy and Research, a group of researchers has developed strategies for using the child as the unit of analysis in studying and re-computing public statistics. And there have certainly been many local initiatives to address the issue of obtaining more and better factual information on the situation of children and their well being. These efforts have been initiated by researchers, public agencies and NGO's within their spheres of interest (Miljeteig, 1997).

Over the past decade there has been a growing interest in measuring the well being of children. This recent widespread interest in childhood social indicators has been partly due to a movement toward accountability-based public policy that requires increasing amounts of data to provide more accurate measures of the conditions children face and the outcomes various programs achieve. At the same time, the rapid changes in family life have also prompted an increased demand from child development professionals, social scientists and the public for a better picture of children's well being (Lee, 1997).

A review of more than 70 'state of the children' reports reveals that the material they present is organized primarily by domains or service systems. The most common are education, children as victims (of neglect and abuse), health/nutrition, day care, family structure, economic status (poverty), housing, children as offenders and deviant behavior, sexual behavior and family formation.

The 'state of the children' reports may be placed in the context of three major events that have occurred in the last six years in this field: The EuroSocial Childhood Program; the Conference on Indicators of Children's Well Being in November, 1994 at Bethesda, Maryland; and the International Project Monitoring and Measuring Children's Well Being, which took place between 1996-1998. Analysis of the reports and of those events leads to some conclusions regarding the progress and changes in the effort to measure the state of the children. Three major shifts (i.e. from survival to well being, from negative to positive and from traditional to new domains) can be identified in this field.

Major Shifts in the Field of Children's Well-being Indicators

From 'survival' to 'well being'. In recent years increased interest in the state of children, their well-being and quality of life led to a number of efforts in measuring the state of the child in different societies and countries. Those efforts contributed to a shift in the focus of measuring the state of the children. Though a large body of statistical data on the state of children had been published for quite some time, it was felt by researchers and professionals working in the field, that some new measures and indicators should be devised.

Measures such as infant and child mortality rates, school enrollment, and percentage of children, who were immunized, while still important, nevertheless seem outdated and irrelevant for measuring the well being and quality of children's lives. These measures deal mainly with survival and the basic needs of children, and are inadequate for measuring the state and quality of life of children beyond survival.

Simply using the term 'well-being' contributed to this shift. Aber argues it is time to develop indicators that go beyond the basic needs of development and beyond the phenomenon of deviance (Aber, 1997). Pittman and Irby argue for indicators and action beyond survival and prevention in order to promote youth development (Pittman and Irby, 1997). In fact, as far as childhood-related statistical information was available, it was mostly restricted to the phenomenon of deviance. Only in recent years have more appropriate indicators which aim to measure and monitor the living conditions and well being of children been developed.

From 'negative' to 'positive'. Thus, a second shift occurred. It can be seen that attention is beginning to focus on the need for 'positive' indicators of the state of the child as much as 'negative' ones. Measures of the absence of risk factors or negative behaviors are not the same as measures of the presence of protective factors or positive behaviors (Aber and Jones, 1997). Most common measures of early childhood development pertain to deficiencies in achievements, problem behaviors and negative circumstances. The absence of problems or failures, however, does not necessarily indicate proper growth and success. Realizing this was the basis of a shift toward recognizing the importance of 'positive' indicators for children's well being (Aber and Jones, 1997).

Thus, as Pittman and Irby observe, the challenge for policy researchers and advocates is to press for the development of indicators that hold societies accountable for more than the safe warehousing of children and youth. Youth development must be defined and linked securely as both a product of and a contributor to family, community and economic development (Pittman and Irby, 1997). And Resnick states that "children's well-being indicators are on the move from concentrating only on trends of dying, distress, disability and discomfort to tackling the issue of indicators of sparkle, satisfaction and well-being" (Resnick, 1995: 3).

Politically, the emphasis on negative indicators, "bad news" without contextual information, has led to speculation about causal factors and the tendency to search for blame and punishment, contributing to political polarization that has failed to serve the interests of children. Thus, the necessity for new domains of children's well being for measuring and monitoring the state of the children is becoming increasingly evident and a third shift may be discovered.

From 'traditional' to 'new' domains. The two shifts described above ultimately contributed to a third one. Until recently when measuring the state of the children, researchers concerned

themselves with measuring children's basic survival needs and focused primarily on the deviant and the negative aspects of children lives.

Looking beyond survival and at positive indicators for children's well being naturally brought into focus new domains of children well being. Moving from the enabling/risk factors domains to those of children's well-being, and especially to the life skills and children culture domains is the result of the shifts from 'survival' to 'well-being' and from 'negative' to 'positive' which, in turn, led to the shift from 'traditional' to 'new' domains.

No doubt, the effort to develop and learn from and about children has come a long way since the seventies when the first steps were taken. There is now enthusiastic recognition of the need for measuring and monitoring the state of the children. The benefits to be gained from the use of good measurement tools are becoming increasingly evident.

The following sections this paper concentrates on possible "new" domains and the costs and benefits of an intensive updated use of them. But before doing so, attention is given in the next section to a new dispute that is rising in the field.

WELL-BEING OR WELL-BECOMING?

On the basis of the trends and shifts described above, a new issue is arising and an interesting dispute should be considered regarding the tension between, on the one hand, the school of thought which emphasizes the need to concentrate on children's future well-being (i.e. preparing children to a productive and happy adulthood) and, on the other hand, the school of thought which emphasizes "Childhood as a stage in and of itself" and the need to concentrate on present well-being of children.

As the title of this part of the paper suggests, the term 'wellbeing' has been adjusted in order to describe present well being. While the term "well-becoming" is used to describe a future oriented focus. The Danish sociologist Yens Qvortrup laid the basis for looking at children's well being from an intergenerational perspective. In Qvortrup estimation "The conventional preoccupation with the so-called "next generation" is, however, basically a preoccupation with adults, which is not wrong as such; as a student of childhood, however, I dare venture an interest as well for present childhood as well as future childhood" (Qvortrup, 1997).

Similarly, Richard de Lone's argues that children are instrumentalised by the forward looking perspectives in the sense that their "good life" is postponed to adulthood; and, until then, they have—as children—to do with opportunities rather than provisions (DeLone, 1979)

Accepting the arguments of Qvortrup and others as to the need to concentrate on the well being of children does nor mean denying the relevance of an interest in how children develop and become adults. The question is, however, if the forward looking perspective is child centered—a point strongly advocated for in the first parts of this paper. On this basis, one could argue that focusing on preparing children to become citizens suggest that they are not citizens during childhood, a concept which is hard to accept along with the belief in children's rights. What is needed is to find out to what extent children, by virtue of the fact that they are not seen as citizens, enjoy the same rights and privileges as other citizens in society; or the extent to which an adult-centered society is keeping them in a moratorium of non-citizen-status.

It is not uncommon to find in the literature reference to the importance of raising adults who

will be creative, ethical and moral members of community. But, by doing so are we not denying that children are already members of community, are creative, are ethical and moral beings? Of course we all want children to grow up and become good partners, good parents, and other roles could easily be added. But the point is that these roles have nothing to do with child-centered perspectives. We are talking about adult roles of children, hence we are talking about children's well becoming.

The *main* question is: do well being and well becoming necessarily contradict each other? The answer would most probably be that, even if there is not always a contradiction, we cannot rule out the possibility. For instance, Blake has presented evidence in support of the hypothesis that the smaller the family (single or with two parents) the higher the probability that children will perform well in school and succeed educationally, socially and economically as adults (Blake, 1989). This may be true, but what does it tell us about the quality of life for children before they reach adulthood? It might well happen, and often does, that children have a high preference for a sibling or two. Unfortunately, that might jeopardize their outcome prospects! So here is a contradiction, and which of the indicators should we choose?

This paper argues in favor of choosing the child-centered indicator and rather for methodological reasons. In most cases there is simply no need for us to choose the well-becoming perspective. Since the best way for securing children a good future is to provide them with a good quality of life as children. In other words, we should be more concerned with child happiness and, by doing so, we will enhance the chances of adult happiness.

Our interest in finding out about provisions for children is very important, but again, not only with regard to their well-becoming. If we discover what children are provided with in terms of economic provision, health, educational opportunities etc., as children, why is it so necessary to think in terms of their adulthood? It seems safe to suggest that to the extent children are generously provided with these resources, their chances for a good adulthood are very good.

Furthermore, by focusing on well becoming, there is a risk that we do not come to terms with possible conflicts between adulthood and childhood—or, if you like, children's and adults' interests. How can we assume that they coincide? There may be a good chance that parents' and children's interests do overlap, but this is still far from saying children's interests are the same as those of adults in general.

We can consider a forward looking perspective as an important one if it concentrates on the future of childhood, i.e. indicators should be given priority in order to make sure that children of tomorrow come to lead a decent life. In this case we are still child-centered, even if we are dealing with children in the future. But this is quite different from being concerned with children's well becoming.

But not only this kind of a future oriented perspective is relevant. Although the emphasis in monitoring children's well being ought to shift to the study of children's everyday lives (including the phenomenology of such experience), this does not mean we should exclude the forward-looking view of the 'next generation'. There is an obvious legitimate societal interest in the healthy socialization of children, and children themselves obviously have a clear interest in the provision of resources in a way that will maximize their future choices.

Both perspectives (children as persons today and children in their future status as older children and ultimately as adults) are legitimate and necessary, both for social science and for public policy. It seems appropriate to maintain a dual perspective, one that is forward-looking as well as one that honors the life world of children as children. But since the perspective that

focuses on children's well-being has been under-emphasized in existing international indicator efforts, there is place for some major contributions to be made by developing new measures of well-being that derive from this perspective.

Having discussed the shifts and trends in the field of children's well-being indicators and the looming dispute between well being and well becoming, we now consider five possible domains of children well being.

POSSIBLE DOMAINS OF CHILDREN WELL-BEING

It is becoming clear that if a measurement of children's well-being is to serve a monitoring function, it must have enduring importance in various cultures and include short- as well as long-term measures. To be comprehensive, the effort should balance measures across various domains of children's lives and be carefully constructed to include current and historically excluded sub populations of children (e.g., those with disabilities; indigenous, minority, very poor, or isolated populations; separated from families; homeless, refugee, or immigrant).

In this part of the paper five possible domains of children's well being are presented; civil life skills, personal life skills safety and physical status, children activities, and children economic status. All of them are based on the following principals:

1. Child-centered domains should focus on indicators that can be measured at the level of the child rather than on characteristics of the service system or other social institutions.
2. They should concentrate on well being and on the actual situation of children rather than on potentially available resources or opportunities.
3. Child-centered domains should take into account the inter-generational perspective.

Civil Life Skills

In democratic cultures, children can develop social and civic responsibilities even in the early years, learning cooperation and participation in their small environments and gradually expanding their contributions as citizens as their environments expand with their evolving capacities. Indicators in this domain should measure the extent and level to which children have acquired or exercise self-expression, knowledge about and participation in legal and civic procedures respect for the rights of others, and diversity.

Personal Life Skills

Children must learn skills to contribute to their own well being, including self-esteem and assertiveness and the capacity to learn and work. These areas can be assessed through culturally-relevant measures of education and achievement including the ability to initiate and maintain social interactions, the extent and level of self esteem, self-efficacy and other emotional

capacities, work-related skills and the ability to maintain a healthy life style, and skills required to be a wise consumer.

Safety and Physical Status

Surveys of children and youth in many cultures often reveal their primary concern is their "safety". Millions of children are in threatening circumstances due to family violence, community violence, sexual exploitation, war and civil conflict, drought and famine, or their own institutionalization, homelessness, or refugee status. Even more children are threatened by inadequate health or mental health care. Measures can determine the extent of children living under such conditions and the children's' perceptions and expectations regarding their physical status and safety.

Children's Activities

Across political jurisdictions and cultures, children engage in work, play, creativity, consumption, social interactions, and other activities that are analogous to adult activities yet qualitatively different. To better understand the lives of children from a child-centered perspective and to enable their self-fulfillment, empowerment, and life satisfaction, measures must be developed to assess their activities. Children are active in their families, among peers and community groups and in various social institutions such as schools, informal education, recreation, and information networks. Indicators in this domain may relate to the extent of engagement in activities, the nature of the activities, places in which these activities take place, and the children's' perceptions of the relative importance and contribution of the different activities.

Children's Economic Status

The impact of the economic conditions on children and their lives cannot be ignored. The economic resources available for children play a critical role in enabling children to develop in all of the above domains and in realizing their full potential. Indicators in this domain should measure the extent to which economic resources are available and can be mobilized by the children themselves. Indicators may relate to the extent to which resources are available to children and also to the situation of children relative to the general population and other age groups. Another aspect, which may be measured, is the distribution of economic resources within the family.

All five suggested domains and their indicators suffer from methodological problems. Those problems affect cross-cultural and jurisdictional comparability, and require further work to adapt the measures for monitoring. Administrative data, such as school reports, birth certificates, and child protection reports, are relatively inexpensive to gather. Census or survey data exist in all but the poorest countries and can provide rich detail about the context in which children live.

Primary research has addressed critical questions about specific aspects in children's lives, such as the causal linkages and mediating factors among life conditions and child status. And finally, qualitative research methods are increasingly being applied to studies of children's lives.

The suggested domains and their indicators should adequately portray the range and diversity of children's experiences by examining disaggregated data as well as central tendencies. Quantifiable and qualitative measures should address children's behaviors and the structures of which they are a part. They should be grounded in theory and research that meets the tests of valid and reliable measurement (Moore, 1997).

Finally, the selection of the indicators in the suggested domains must also be guided by principles that address the purpose and scope of the measuring and monitoring process as well as accuracy of measurements. Thus, we now move to discussing the possible costs and benefits of any effort to measure and monitor children's well being.

MEASURING THE WELL BEING OF CHILDREN: COSTS AND

BENEFITS

There are costs involved in measuring the well being of children; measuring and monitoring children's well-being is expensive. The lack of knowledge as to the cost-effectiveness of such efforts alone is enough to deter people from going to the effort of devising indicators. This paper argues against such notions. The development of indicators for children's well being is not necessarily more sophisticated or expensive than that invested in the measurement of other economic or social factors, which are measured on a regular, basis.

Costs

One danger and possible weakness in developing indicators for children's well being is the tendency of researchers to go to extremes. On the one hand, some indicators try to capture the whole complexity of the well being of children; in doing so, they drown in an ocean of details, indicators and sub-indicators. The consequences are a totally impractical effort in measuring the State of the child. On the other hand, and due partly to the cost factor, there is a tendency to look for readily accessible, existing data when devising indicators rather like looking for the lost coin under the lamp instead of where it really is (Haveman, 1995).

Another weakness of children's well-being indicators is in the situation where too much attention is given to measurement rather than to the practical work of fostering children's well-being. The effort of measuring the state of the child will be worthwhile only if it actually contributes to the children's well being.

Benefits

On the other hand, there are positive aspects to measuring the well being of children. An ongoing effort to measure and monitor the state of children enables societies to see their achievements, inform their policy, introduce accountability, galvanize and reward effort, and be a means by which sustained pressure can be brought to bear for the fulfillment of political promises (Adamson, 1995). Many different benefits may be gained from measuring the state of children.

A few of them are presented and discussed here..

Enhancing knowledge. Measuring the state of children can expose new and important information that would otherwise remain hidden. This information may enhance professional knowledge concerning childhood and children. Research has found that statistical knowledge is one of the most used and useful types of knowledge (Blumer, 1986). The information gained from such an effort should not only be of a general descriptive nature. Knowing about the state of children may also enable us to identify specific groups of children - those that are in distress or are deprived in comparison with other groups of children, as well as those who are well to do. It is important to know about the state of both groups of children; knowing about the deprived groups may help to develop new policies and ideas to promote their well being. Knowing the state of those children who are well to do can enrich our knowledge regarding what works in giving children better lives. In conclusion, data collected by measuring the state of children can help build a basis for discussion about the needs, programs, priorities, achievements of children and directions for the future.

Providing tools for better planning. Knowledge and information are the base for planning any service or policy. Such knowledge, when dealing with children, cannot be obtained without making children the focus of the data and information collection process. Measuring the state of children may provide planners with new perspectives. For example, it can provide a view of children's living conditions different from that reported by adults. It can also help illuminate the relative position, and needs, of children in comparison to other age groups in society. Finally, it can highlight children's contributions to society and, by doing, so can provide an "economic" rationale for investing more resources in children (Jensen and Saporiti, 1992; Wintersberger, 1994). Knowing the state of children also means knowing the problems and needs of both the entire child population in a society, and that of specific groups of children within it. Any planning of services, programs or policy for children will have to take into consideration the deprived groups of children, as well as the gaps and problems in the services and opportunities' children face. Knowing the state of children is an essential tool for any such planning.

A good example is knowledge about the state of children in different geographical areas within nations and internationally and within different population groups. Good planning can result in differential resource allocation that addresses the problems and needs of each city or population group. Monitoring the state of children can facilitate comparison of their well being over time. Such comparison is essential if we want to know if children's well being has improved or deteriorated, and in order to plan policy in accordance with those trends.

Making monitoring possible. Knowing the state of children and even planning the best policy and services for children is not enough. Monitoring the implementation of policy, programs and services is no less important. A constant process of measuring the state of the children may serve as a vital tool for monitoring both the state of the child and the policies, services and programs that seek to improve children's lives. Monitoring of children's indicators enables a society to see

its achievements and rate of progress in general and among its different sectors.

Comparisons can also be drawn between its own progress and that of other societies. During the World Summit for Children this was recognized as a vital part of the plan for action: "Each country should establish appropriate mechanisms for the regular and timely collection, analysis and publication of data required to monitor relevant social indicators relating to the well-being of children" (Adamson, 1993: 3). Children's well-being indicators enables to check more precisely than in the past the consequences of policy on the national and local level and to compare the situation of children in different places and societies. Doing so may make possible the necessary adjustments and changes each policy and plan needs in order to remain relevant and adequate to the needs of children.

Enabling better evaluation. Good indicators of children's well being are essential for evaluating policies, services and programs for young children. The importance of evaluation is widely accepted. A good, reliable set of indicators of the well-being of children could enable a set of goals for any intervention program, to evaluate the program's outcomes and achievements, and to make the necessary adjustments in the next stage in order to achieve the overall goals.

Action-focused measuring. Measuring for the sake of knowing, planning and even monitoring, is not enough. Measuring the state of the children is, and should be, done for the sake of improving the state of children. The knowledge gained from such an effort should primarily be action focused. The Israeli experience, for example, has shown that by publishing an annual State of the Children report, one can generate public awareness that will lead to practical actions on behalf of children.

Perhaps the best example of knowing the state of the children for the sake of constructive action is the ongoing monitoring effort of UNICEF regarding the State of the World's Children. The UNICEF effort to describe the living conditions and survival of children over the last 20 years has led to a series of practical steps on behalf of developing countries. The outcomes have been surprisingly good, resulting in many countries doubling their immunization and school enrollment rates and cutting by half their under-five and infant mortality rates (Adamson, 1995).

There can be no doubt that the effort to measure the state of children is a beneficial one (cost considered). The task of any professional, who works and cares for children, should be to find the way to make the most of these benefits. In the next section an agenda for future work in regard to children well-being indicators is discussed

AN AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

As mentioned previously, the effort to measure and monitor children's well being, although in its infancy, is not totally new. The final section of this paper deals first with some lessons learned from worldwide efforts and second with some prospects for the future of measuring and monitoring children's well being.

Any attempt to influence social policy is contingent upon the pressure and political power that can be manifested by those wanting to influence change. Influencing children's policy is no different. Efforts to improve the living conditions of children must be based on a general

perception of children as a separate and deserving population group. Thus, putting children at the center of social policy and of collecting data is vital for improving their lives. Those who seek to make the best of the benefits gained from measuring the state of the children should bear in mind three possible future prospects.

Enhancing Public Awareness

Making the best of the effort to measure the state of the children should include an effort to raise public awareness. This can be achieved by using simple and clear indicators, and publishing those indicators and any information regarding the state of children (Miringoff and Opdycke, 1993). Regularly publishing a 'state of the children' report is a first and important step on the road to raising public awareness. Using clear and understandable indicators is another step. Finally, working closely with the media and making children an issue is a further step (Adamson, 1995).

Using Measurement as a Tool for Advocacy

Dealing with public pressure and especially with political arguments requires the use of advocacy. Child policy, like any other policy, is an outcome of politics. Measurements of the state of children should be basic to the demands for better policies and services. Making them visible can provide a strong weapon for advocating changes and improvement in the state of children.

The Fordham Institute for Innovation in Social Policy in New York has gone a long way in this direction. It is concentrating its effort in building a single composite indicator of the state of children. The composite indicator should permit the comparison of the state of children in different geographical areas, communities and nations. The comparison will be clear and visible and thus, can be a powerful tool for any advocacy attempt (Miringoff, 1990; Miringoff and Opdycke, 1993).

But one does not have to build a single composite indicator in order to utilize the advocacy benefits of measuring the state of children. It is possible to use a measurement for advocacy when the measurement is based on several clear and visible indicators. A good example is the North Carolina Advocacy Institute's annual report on the well being of children in the different state regions. The comparison uses 16 indicators, divided into four major domains; health, education, social security and physical security (N.C. Child Advocacy Institute, 1993).

In fact, most of those who are involved in efforts to measure the state of children around the world tend to agree on the need to use measurements as a tool of advocacy for and on behalf of children in order to improve their living conditions (Adamson, 1995).

Using Indicators of Children's Well Being for Evaluation

In a time of budget difficulties we should make sure that the money we invest in our children's well being is invested wisely. Children's well-being indicators should be an important tool for

monitoring and evaluating the success and failure of policies and services. They should enable us to check more precisely than in the past the consequences of policies or services, and they should enable us to ensure that services and programs for children are cost-efficient. Good indicators for children's well being are essential. Good indicators are needed in order to set goals and design programs for children's well being, as well as to evaluate the achievement of those goals

CONCLUSION

Measuring the state of the child is a small but important aspect of accepting children as a separate population group with its own rights, needs and contribution to make. Children should be the focus of collecting data and information as part of the effort of putting children in the focus of social policy. Doing both are essential for knowing about the living conditions of children and improving them when and where it is necessary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author, the coordinator of an international group appreciates the ideas and information shared by his fellow group members for this article.

REFERENCES

- Aber, I. L. and S. Jones: 1997, 'Indicators of positive development in early childhood: Improving concepts and measures', in R.M. Hauser, B. V. Brown and W. R. Prosser (eds.), *Indicators of Children's Well-Being* (Russell Sage Foundation, New York), pp. 395-408.
- Aber, I. L.: 1997, 'Measuring child poverty for use in comparative policy analysis', in A. Ben-Arieh and H. Wintersberger (eds.), *Monitoring and Measuring the State of Children—Beyond Survival*, Eurosocial Report No. 62 (European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna Austria), pp. 193-207.
- Adamson, P.: 1995, *The State of the World's Children 1995* (UNICEF, New York).
- Adamson, P.: 1995, *The Progress of Nations* (UNICEF, New York).
- Andrews, B. A, and A. Ben-Arieh: 1999, 'Measuring and monitoring children's well-being across the world', *Social Work* 44, pp. 105-115.
- Barnhorst, R, and L.C. Johnson (eds.): 1991, *The State of the Child in Ontario* (Oxford University Press, Toronto).
- Ben-Arieh, A.: 1992-1997, *The State of The Child In Israel - A Statistical Abstract Hebrew* (The National Council for the Child, Jerusalem).
- Ben-Arieh, A.: 1992, 1994, *The State of The Child in Israel - A Statistical Abstract* (The National Council for the Child, Jerusalem).
- Ben-Arieh, A, and H. Wintersberger (eds.): 1997, *Monitoring and Measuring the State of Children—Beyond Survival*, Eurosocial Report No.62 (European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna, Austria).
- Biderman, A. D.: 1966, 'Social indicators and goals', in R.A. Bauer (ed.), *Social Indicators* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA), pp. 68-153.

- Blake, J.: 1989, *Family Size and Achievement* (University of California Press, Berkeley).
- Bradshaw, J. and H. Barnes: 1999, 'How do nations monitor the well-being of their children', in *Child Well-being in Rich and Transition Countries: Conference Papers Luxembourg Income Study, Luxembourg*.
- Bulmer, M.: 1986, 'The policy process and the place in it of social research', in M. Bulmer (ed.), *Social Science and Social Policy* (Allen and Unwin, London), pp.3-30.
- Casas, F.: 1997, 'Children's rights and children's quality of life: Conceptual and practical issues', *Social Indicators Research* 42, pp.283-298.
- Center for the Study of Social Policy: 1993, *Kids Count Data Book 1993* (Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington, D.C.).
- Citizens' Committee for Children: 1993, *Keeping Track of New York City's Children* (Citizens' Committee for Children, New York).
- De Lone, R. H.: 1979, *Small Futures: Children, Inequality, and the Limits Liberal Reform* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York).
- Gross, B. M.: 1966, 'Preface', in R. A. Bauer (ed.), *Social Indicators* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA), pp. ix-xviii.

- of Children - Beyond Survival, Eurosocial Report No. 62 (European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna, Austria), pp.101-112.
- Resnick, M.: 1995, 'Discussant's comments', in *Indicators of Children's Well-being: Conference Papers Vol. II* (University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty special Report Series, Madison, WI).
- Rettig, K. D. and R.D Leichtentritt: 1999, 'A general theory for perceptual indicators of family life quality', *Social Indicators Research* 47, pp.307-342'
- Shen, S.M. and Y.L. Lai:1998, 'Optimally scaled quality-of-life indicators', *Social Indicators Research* 44 pp. 225-254.
- Terry, T. and E. S. Huebner: 1995, 'The relationship between self-concept and life satisfaction in Children', *Social Indicator Research* 35, pp.39-52
- Wintersberger, H.: 1994, 'Costs and benefits - the economics of childhood', in J. Qvortrup, M. Brady, G. Sgritta and H. Wintersberger (eds.), *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics* (Avebury, Vienna).
- Zfill, N. and C. W. Nord: 1994, *Running in Place: How American Families are Faring in a Changing Economy and an Individualistic Society* (Child Trends, Inc, Washington DC).

AUTHOR'S BIO

Asher-Ben-Arieh (Ph.D.) is the Associate Director for Research and Development at the Israel

Beyond Welfare: Measuring and Monitoring the State of Children—New Trends and Domains

National Council for the Child and a Lecturer at the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work at the Hebrew University at Jerusalem.

Currently he is an International Research Fellow at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

University of Chicago
Chicago, IL 60637
USA