



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
WELLINGTON
TE HERENGA WAKA

Children's wellbeing measurement: More than just kids play

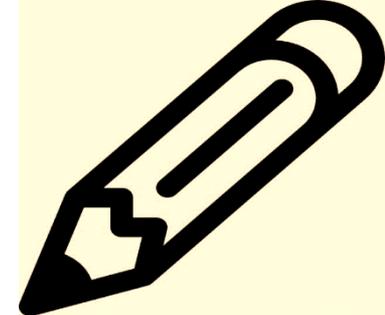
Presentation to Better Start: Child Wellbeing Workshop
5 May 2021

Arthur Grimes

Victoria University of Wellington &

Motu Research / Endeavour fund public housing grant

Outline:



- **Alternative wellbeing policy approaches**
 - Subjective wellbeing approach (utilitarianism)
 - Capabilities & related approaches
- **6 country policy experiences (based on adult wellbeing)**

Bhutan	Australia
France	Wales
UAE	New Zealand
- **Child wellbeing measurement examples (NZ & intl)**
- **Possible directions forward**

'Wellbeing' = 'Welfare' (SOED)

There is good government when those who are near are made happy, and when those who are afar are attracted

Confucius (c500 BC)

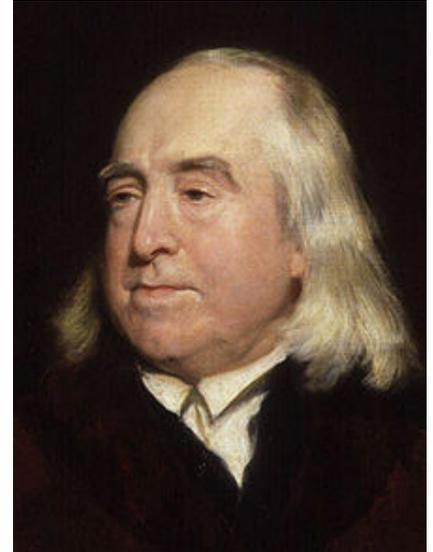


- **Welfare**: “good fortune, happiness, or well-being”
- **Well-being**: “The state of being or doing well in life; happy, healthy, or prosperous condition; welfare.”
- **Subjective wellbeing (SWB)**:
 - **Evaluative (utilitarianism; e.g. life satisfaction)**
 - **Hedonic (affect; e.g. happiness, anxiety)**
 - **Eudaimonic (e.g. life purpose)**

Evaluative wellbeing (Bentham, Wollstonecraft, JS Mill, ... Singer, Pinker, Easterlin, Veenhoven, Diener, Layard, ...)

Two common evaluative SWB questions:

- *“All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?”*
- *“Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?”*

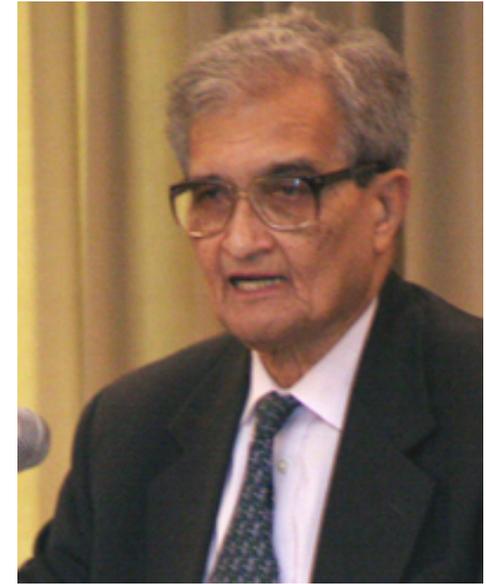


Capabilities approach [Sen, Nussbaum] plus multi-dimensional poverty approach [Alkire, Foster]

- Policies designed to improve people's *capabilities* (in order to improve their *functionings*) across various *domains*, e.g.:
 - Skills
 - Health
 - Safety
 - ...

Multi-dimensional poverty (MDP) approach:

- Set minimum thresholds for each domain



Country examples

Bhutan: 1972

- Gross National Happiness, based on MDP approach (but low SWB)



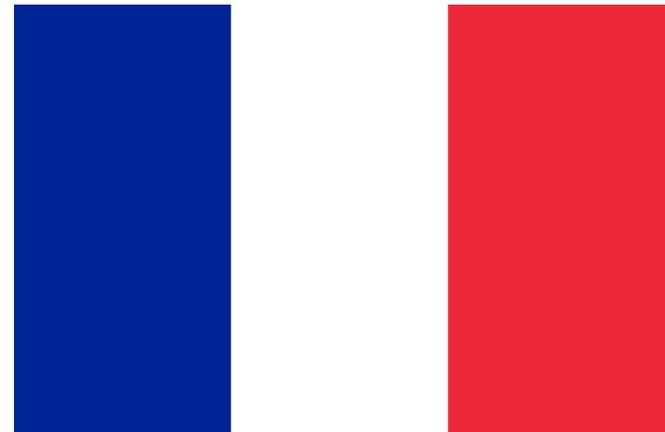
Australia: 2004

- Utilitarianism/capabilities synthesis (but framework abandoned)



France: 2015

- New Wealth Indicators (legislated but largely ignored)



Country examples (cont)

Wales: 2015

- Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (7 goals plus sustainability, with accountability mechanisms)



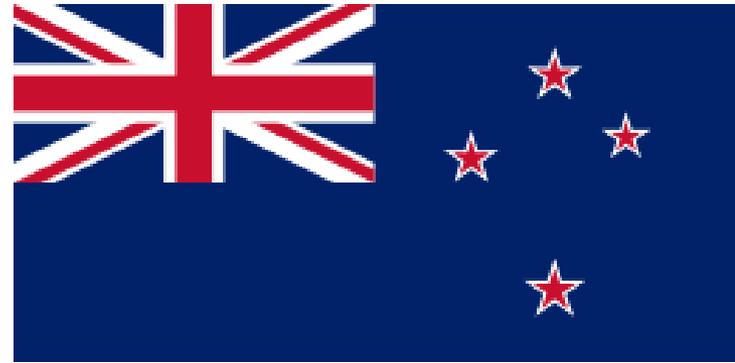
UAE: 2017

- Utilitarianism base (amidst horrific human rights abuses)



New Zealand: 2018/19

- LSF is capabilities (dashboard) based; also have child poverty targets

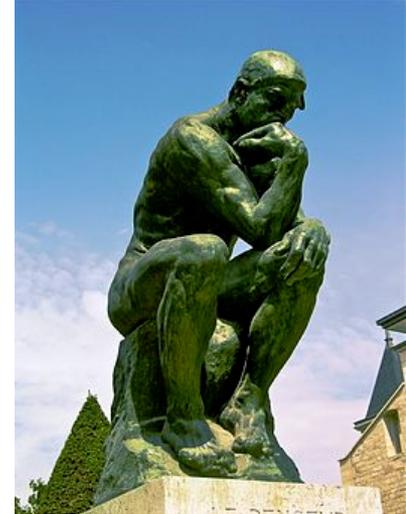


Conclusions on national (adult) approaches

Most national wellbeing policy approaches have been failures

Key problems have been:

1. Dashboard approaches do not help prioritisation
2. No (or few) accountabilities to achieve specific targets



Child wellbeing measurement



International:

1. Children's worlds ($\approx 8, \approx 10, \approx 12$ yrs)
2. PISA (15 yrs)

New Zealand:

1. Youth 2000 series ($\leq 13 - \geq 17$ yrs)
2. What about me (12-18 yrs)
3. GUiNZ (longitudinal)
4. GSS/ Te Kupenga (≥ 15 yrs)
5. Child Poverty reduction Act (& measures)

Children's worlds



- Worldwide research survey on children's SWB
- Separate questionnaires for ≈ 8 , ≈ 10 , ≈ 12 yrs (suitable for each age-group)
- Each covers:
 - The home and people they live with
 - Money and things they have
 - Relationships with friends and other people
 - The area where they live
 - School
 - Health
 - Time management and leisure time
 - Self

Children's worlds: example from 8 yr old survey

20. How happy you feel with...



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The freedom you have? 	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Your health? 	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The way that you look? 	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Your own body? 	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What you do in your free time? 	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How you are listened to by adults in general? 	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How safe you feel? 	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Your life as a whole? 	<input type="checkbox"/>				

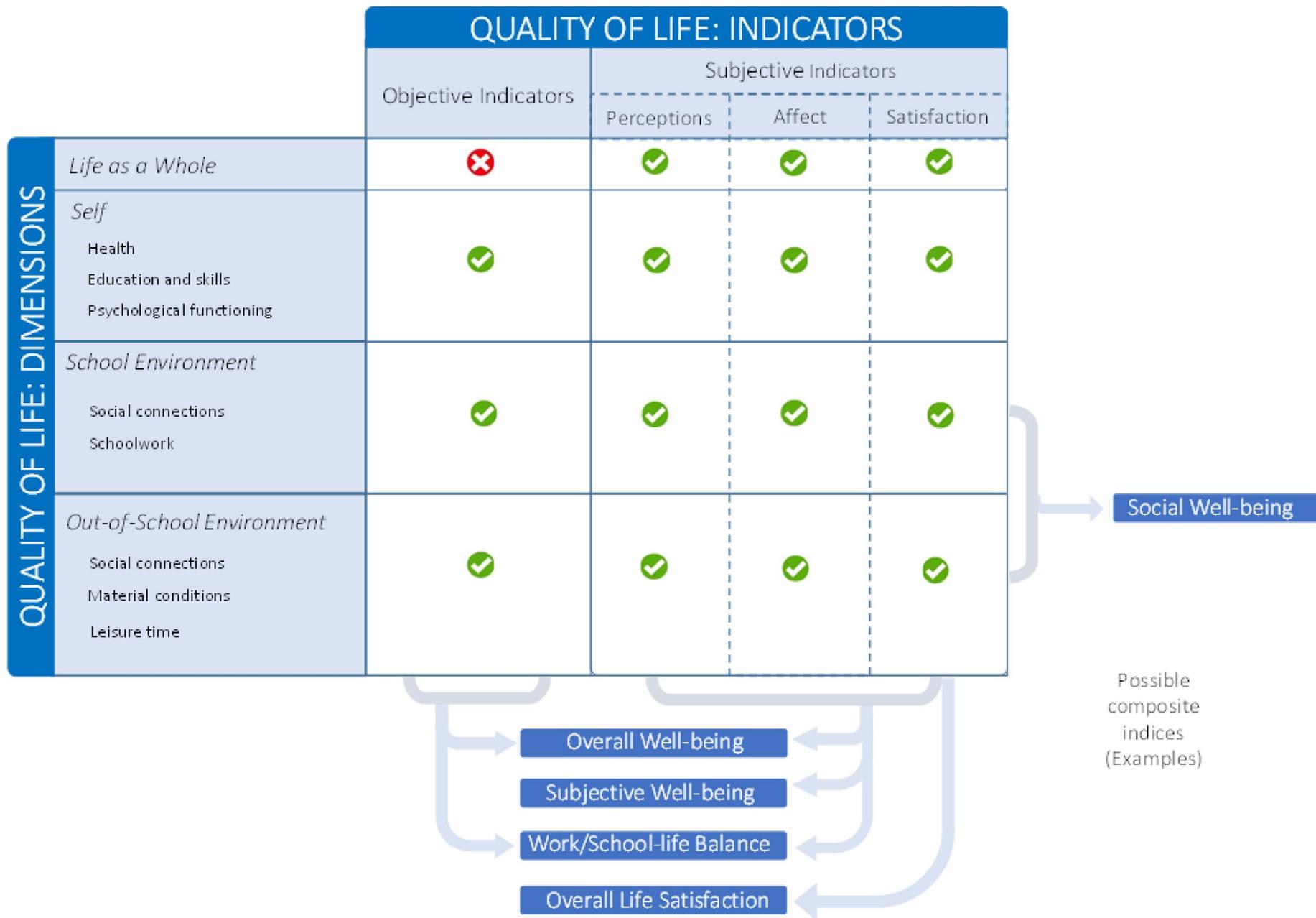
- Survey covering 77 countries
- Education focus
 - plus material and subjective wellbeing + ...
- SWB question: (since 2015):

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?

- Sliding bar ranging 0-10 from 0, not at all satisfied to 10, completely satisfied

- Not asked in NZ in either 2015 or 2018 !!
 - but apparently scheduled for 2021 survey

OECD PISA wellbeing measurement framework



Youth 2000 series

Youth19 Rangatahi Smart Survey

- Secondary school students: 2001, 2007, 2012, 2019
- Comprehensive set of questions
- Wellbeing measures include:
 - WHO-5 (mental health)
 - RADS-SF (depression)
 - Prevalence of good wellbeing (WHO-5) decreased between 2012 and 2019 (from 76% to 69%)
 - Proportion of young people with symptoms of depression increased from 13% (2012) to 23% (2019)
- **Time series like this are vital for understanding wellbeing trends of children and adolescents**

What about me

whataboutme.nz
The biggest survey of your generation



- 14,000 young people aged 12-18 (similar to Youth 2000)
- Comprehensive set of questions
- Wellbeing topics include:
 - **how they feel about life overall** – satisfaction with life, physical and mental health, if they feel they belong, accepted and safe
- Unclear whether this is a one-off or repeated survey

GUINZ



- Growing Up in New Zealand
- Longitudinal survey with >6,000 participants
 - antenatal
 - 9 months
 - 2 years
 - 54 months
 - 6 years
 - 8 years ...
- 8 yr wave included time use diary with information about:
 - how and where the children spent their time
 - who they were with
 - how they were feeling during this activity

General Social Survey (GSS) & Te Kupenga (TK)

- GSS is survey of population aged 15+ years including personal and family wellbeing

We carry out the General Social Survey (GSS) to provide information on the well-being of New Zealanders aged 15 years and over. It covers a wide range of social and economic outcomes, and shows how people in different groups within the New Zealand population are faring

- TK is survey of Māori population aged 15+ years including personal and whānau wellbeing

Te Kupenga is Tatauranga Aotearoa Stats NZ's survey of Māori wellbeing. A post-censal survey of almost 8,500 adults (aged 15 years and over) of Māori ethnicity and/or descent, Te Kupenga gives an overall picture of the social, cultural, and economic wellbeing of Māori people in Aotearoa

Child Poverty Reduction Act (& measures)

- Ten measures reported annually by Govt Statistician
- Measures specify % of children living in NZ households in various categories defined by:
 - Low income: <40%, <50%, <60% of median equivalised disposable household income, both **before and after housing costs**
 - Material hardship
 - Severe material hardship
 - Poverty persistence

Where to from here?

Approach



- Detailed measures are very useful for specific purposes
 - And for research
- Adopt a few clear target measures to focus policy
 - Child poverty measures are an example (though <10 please!)
 - Could be supplemented by WHO-5 plus SWB question
 - Need to cover different age-groups
 - Some should be internationally comparable (+ others for specific groups)
- Assign accountabilities to achieve the targets

Where to from here?

Data



- Many measures already collected in NZ
 - Mostly for 12+ years
- Only GUiNZ looks at <12 years for NZ
 - but not with comparable data to overseas
- NZ has avoided major international comparable collections
 - Children's World & PISA
- Opportunities:
 - Ensure consistent measures across NZ surveys for 12+ yr children
 - Ensure NZ participates fully in PISA survey measures
 - Survey younger children's wellbeing via Children's World questionnaires