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DOES MIXED METHODS RESEARCH MATTER TO UNDERSTANDING CHILDHOOD WELL-BEING?

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SUMMARY
There has been a rich debate in development studies on combining research methods in recent years. We explore the particular challenges and opportunities surrounding mixed methods approaches to childhood well-being. We argue that there are additional layers of complexity due to the distinctiveness of children's experiences of deprivation or ill-being. This paper is structured as follows. Sections 2 and 3 discuss the nature of mixed methods approaches and tensions. Sections 4 and 5 apply these debates to researching childhood well-being in particular, in both Northern and Southern contexts. Section 6 concludes and discusses future work.

Keywords: Development studies; mixed-methods in research; research quality criteria; childhood well-being

Related readings:
Brannen, J. (2005), 'Mixed Methods Research: A Discussion Paper', ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper, December.

Hulme, D. and Toye, J. (2005), The Case for Cross-Disciplinary Social Science Research on Poverty, Inequality and Wellbeing, GPRG Working Paper No. 1, Downloaded on 1 August from http://gprg.econ.ox.ac.uk/pubs/workingpapers

Kanbur, R. (ed.) (2003), Q-Squared: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods of Poverty Appraisal, Washington, DC: Permanent Black.

Thompson, P. (2004). Researching family and social mobility with two eyes: some experiences of the interaction between qualitative and quantitative data. International Journal of Social Research Methodology, Volume 7, Issue 3 July 2004, 237 - 257

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a rich debate in development studies on combining research methods in recent years. We explore the particular challenges and opportunities surrounding mixed methods approaches to childhood well-being.

We recognise that definitions of 'well-being' are contested in the literature, and that there is also an active debate on differences between poverty and well-being. In this paper, we focus on well-being (or the lack thereof, which we term 'deprivation' or 'ill-being'), which includes the complex inter-linkages and cultural construction of definitions of poverty. However, we are also of the view that the distinction between the two concepts is perhaps overdrawn – many contemporary definitions of poverty go beyond income-based definitions of poverty and include more socio-cultural and psychological dimensions of deprivation, including rights based definitions which conceptualise poverty as encompassing a lack of voice, a lack of participation in one's community, and the absence of being listened to.

It can be argued that the value added or comparative advantage of a well-being lens (over a 'traditional' poverty lens) is that it:

- addresses what people feel (their emotions and experiences) as well as what they can do and be;

- is more respectful as it is based on what people can do/be/feel, rather than deficits in what they can do/be/feel (and related issues of labelling);

- expands the focus from the body/physiology to include mind/psychology;

- is based on current experience rather than future 'well becoming' (a poverty focus orientates toward future well-being, i.e. education to literacy, food to being healthy, etc);

- is grounded in local cultural contexts and specificity of experience;

- emphasises in particular 'new' areas including autonomy, enjoyment/fun, relatedness and status.

The relevance to children of using a well-being lens is that it:

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- focuses on what children feel about what they can do and be;
- respects children's feelings about what they can do and be;

- expands the focus to include children's physiology and psychology;

- is based on children's current experiences;

- emphasises the importance of local cultural context and specificity in construction of childhood well-being;

- addresses 'new' areas of well-being particularly important to children - autonomy, enjoyment/fun, relatedness, and status.

Why does this all matter? Children in developing countries (taking the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) definition of people under the age of 18) account for on average 37 percent of the population and 49 percent in least developed countries (UNICEF, 2005:12). Moreover, UNICEF estimates suggest that a disproportionately high proportion of the poor - up to 50 percent of those living on less than $1 per day - are children under 18 years (quoted in Gordon et al., 2004:11). To conduct an analysis of well-being without taking an age -or life stage-disaggregated approach would thus risk failing to understand much of the nature of well-being. In spite of this, much well-being research takes little account of the distinctiveness of children's experiences of deprivation or ill-being, especially the complex linkages between their evolving physical, neurological and psychosocial capacities on the one hand, and diverse cultural constructions of childhood, on the other.

In order to better explore and capture this multi-dimensionality we argue that there is a need for researchers of childhood well-being to adopt mixed methods approaches. This paper is structured as follows. Sections 2 and 3 discuss the nature of mixed methods approaches and tensions[1]. Sections 4 and 5 apply these debates to researching childhood well-being in particular. Section 6 concludes and discusses future work.

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[1] Sections 2 and 3 draw on joint work between Andy Sumner and Michael Tribe, BCID and in particular Sumner and Tribe (2008).

MIXED METHODS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Development studies is particularly interested in mixing methods, reflecting its cross-disciplinary nature. To accept and promote cross-disciplinary approaches implies openness to the use of all available insights to gain a better understanding of phenomena. Labels such as 'qual-quant' or 'q-squared' or 'q-integrated' might suggest that mixed methods simply entails taking a quantitative method and adding a qualitative method, giving equal weight to each. However, there are numerous possible combinations, each with assumptions regarding the respective roles, relative importance and desired sequencing of qualitative or quantitative methods.

At the outset it is worth taking a step back to remind ourselves what the terms 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' are used to refer to:

- types of methodology – the overall research strategy used to address the research questions or hypotheses;
- types of methods of data collection – i.e. the specific methods;
- types of data collected – i.e. the raw data;
- types of data analysis – i.e. the techniques of analysis;
- types of data output – i.e. the data in the final report or study.

With regard to poverty research Carvalho and White characterise the quantitative and qualitative approach as follows:

> *The quantitative approach… typically uses random sample surveys and structured interviews to collect the data - mainly, quantifiable data - and analyzes it using statistical techniques. By contrast, the qualitative approach … typically uses purposive sampling and semi-structured or interactive interviews to collect the data - mainly, data relating to people's judgment, preferences, priorities, and/or perceptions about a subject - and analyzes it usually through sociological or anthropological research techniques* (1997:1).

Qualitative methods can also produce quantitative data, although the opposite is not true. Moser (2003), for instance, has championed the need for 'apt illustration' (as compared to anecdotal evidence) through quantifiable qualitative research.

> *[There is a need to shift] goalposts as to the definition of robustness so that it becomes more "inclusive" of quantifiable qualitative research. Only this can ensure that social issues do not remain confined to anecdotal boxes, but provide information of equal comparability in poverty assessments (ibid:82).*

Her work on violence in Colombia and Guatemala, which quantifies and categorises insights from participatory research with hundreds of urban poor people, was designed to break down the divide between researchers and policymakers and make information about the complexities of people's experiences "*accessible to more policymakers not only within the research countries but also in a broader context*" (2004: 3)[2].

As noted above there is a tendency to see data from mixed methods approaches as immediately synthesizable. However, there is no guarantee that different approaches, methods, or data will even be comparable. An interesting question is how does one adjudicate situations when the evidence is contradictory?

Mixing might have different functions – to enrich or explain, or even contradict, rather than confirm or refute. It may even tell 'different stories' on the same subject because quantitative methods are good for specifying relationships (i.e. describing) and qualitative for explaining and understanding relationships (Thomas and Johnson, 2002:1).

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[2] Holland and Abeyasekera's forthcoming work on 'participatory numbers' is another innovative approach to producing quantitative data from qualitative methods. See also Mayoux and Chambers (2005).

Brannen (2005:12-14) lists four functions of combining methods[3]. These are:

- elaboration or expansion ('the use of one type of data analysis adds to the understanding being gained by another');
- initiation ('the use of a first method sparks new hypotheses or research questions that can be pursued using a different method');
- complementarity ('together the data analyses from the two methods are juxtaposed and generate complementary insights that together create a bigger picture');
- contradictions ('simply juxtapose the contradictions for others to explore in further research').

One concrete example to illustrate mixing can be taken from poverty researchers who have sought to combine quantitative approaches (thought to be useful for finding out the amount of poverty and where is it) and qualitative approaches (thought to be useful for identifying the causes and dynamics of poverty). They have done so by seeking to combine household

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[3] Further, Brannen (2005:14) identifies twelve specific conceivable combinations as below. In each there is a 'dominant' method' (i.e. the method that gathers the majority of the data) and a non-dominant method (i.e. the method that gathers the minority of the data). CAPITALS denote the 'dominant' method (which will yield the majority of data); + denotes simultaneously occurring methods; > denotes temporal sequencing of methods.

Simultaneous research designs:
    1. QUAL + quan or
    2. QUAL + QUAN
    3. QUAN + quan or
    4. QUAN + QUAN
    5. QUAL + qual or
    6. QUAL + QUAL

Sequential research designs:
    1. QUAL > qual or
    2. qual > QUAL or
    3. QUAL> QUAL
    4. QUAN > quan or
    5. quan > QUAN or
    6. QUAN > QUAN
    7. QUAL > quan or
    8. qual > QUAN or
    9. QUAL > QUAN
    10. QUAN > qual or
    11. quan > QUAL or
    12. QUAN > QUAL

surveys and case studies from participatory poverty assessments (PPA). Table 1 below sets out selected generic strengths and weaknesses of surveys and of PPAs.

Table 1. Selected Possible Generic Strengths and Weaknesses of PPAs and Surveys

	Strengths	**Weaknesses**
PPAs	Richer definition of poverty; More insights into causal processes; Holistic – a set of relationships as a whole, not pre-selected attributes; Scope for attention to processes as well as snap shots of the situation; Feedback loop – new/more interviews for interrogating data; Focus on context and people's experiences.	Lack of generalisability (but the sample can be made more or less representative of the population); Difficulties in verifying information; Limited systematic disaggregation; Possibly unrepresentative participation; Agenda framing by facilitators; Pitfalls in attitudinal data – arrival of a PPA team changes people's behaviour.
Household Surveys	Aggregation and comparisons possible across time and with other data sets; Reliability of results is measurable; Credibility of numbers with policy makers; Credibility of national statistics with policy makers; Allows simulation of different policy options; Correlations identify associations raising questions of causality.	Misses what is not easily quantifiable; Sampling frame may miss significant members of the population; May fail to capture intra household allocation; Assumes that numbers are objective and conclusive; Assumes that the same question means the same thing in different cultural contexts.

Sources: Appleton and Booth, (2001) Carvalho and White (1997), Chambers (2003).

Combination may take place at data collection through simultaneously conducting a survey and a PPA in the same sample, or at the data analysis stage by merging the results and/or synthesising the findings into one set of recommendations (see Table 2).

Table 2. Selected Examples of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

		Function	
		Combining	**Integrating**
Stage of research process	**Data collection**	Conduct a simultaneous survey and PPA in the same sample (ideally nationally representative).	Use surveys to identify subgroups for PPAs or use PPAs to identify survey questions.
	Data analysis	Synthesise findings into one set of results or merge outcomes from mixed teams of qualitative and quantitative researchers.	Use PPAs to confirm or refute the validity of surveys (or vice versa); Use PPAs to enrich or to explain information on processes in survey variables (or vice versa).

Sources: Constructed and expanded from text in Carvalho and White (1997), Shaffer (2003), Thorbecke (2003).

At a more sophisticated level, integration might take place at the data collection stage by the use of surveys to identify sub-groups for PPAs or the use of PPAs to identify survey questions. At the data collection stage, integration could take place by PPAs and surveys confirming or refuting each other (e.g. using PPAs to confirm validity of surveys, or vice versa), or by PPAs and surveys enriching/explaining each other's findings (e.g. using PPAs to obtain information on processes underpinning survey variables, or vice versa). In sum, the researcher needs to consider two questions, which are both informed by the type of research problem, question, and/or hypothesis under investigation.

First, which is the 'dominant' method - that which will yield most of the data - qualitative or quantitative methods?
Second, are methods to be mixed sequentially or simultaneously?

TENSIONS IN MIXING

There is a perception that there is a tension between qualitative and quantitative researchers. To cite Brannen again,

> *quantitative researchers have seen qualitative researchers as too context specific, their samples as unrepresentative and their claims about their work as unwarranted – that is judged from the vantage point of statistical generalisation. For their*

> *part qualitative researchers view quantitative research as
> overly simplistic, decontextualised, reductionist in terms of its
> generalisations, and failing to capture the meanings that actors
> attach to their lives and circumstances* (Brannen, 2005:7).

Perhaps this is less so in development studies where few voices vocally
promote mono-method approaches (Hentschel, 2001:75). However, even
within development studies there is still a disciplinary based 'intellectual-
stereotyping' which associates, for example, economics with quantitative
approaches, and social anthropology with qualitative approaches. This has
been recognised as part of the problem; Hulme and Toye put it thus,

> *to label economics as a quantitative discipline and other social
> sciences as qualitative disciplines lacks any fundamental
> justification. It seems plausible only because people confuse
> 'quantitative' with 'mathematical'… …Economics is not
> intrinsically more amenable (or less, as many famous
> economists have argued!) to statistical treatment than politics
> or sociology or even history* (20058).

Hulme and Toye argue that these dichotomies are unjustified and unhelpful
because they are not borne out in reality, but reflect a stylised reality and
serve to reinforce differences. Harriss (2002), Kanbur (2002) and White, H.
(2002) concur that the demarcation of, on the one hand,
quantitative/economics/'hard'/'rigorous' versus, on the other hand,
qualitative/non-economics/'soft'/'non-economics' is a false dichotomy.

One might argue the actual tension is the *criteria to judge* what is 'rigorous',
which does differ between quantitative and qualitative and across
disciplines. Typically we think of reliability, replicability, generalisability and
validity as criteria for the evaluation of social research. Drawing on Becker
et al.'s survey on quality in social policy research (2006:7-8)', discussions of
'standards' provoke major debate, with many arguing that qualitative and
quantitative approaches need be judged by different or 'alternative' criteria
because 'traditional' criteria assume that quantitative approaches are better
(see Table 3).

It has also been suggested that the word 'rigour' is problematic because it is
biased towards a perception of precision and assumes an association
between objectivity and quantitative methods (David and Dodd, 2002:281).
As Boaz and Ashby (2003:7) noted, while criteria such as validity, reliability,

replicability, and generalisability are the prominent criteria used to judge quantitative research, these may not be appropriate criteria for qualitative research. For example, although some might argue for replicability as a key issue in determining quality, others might argue that research is simply not replicable, not only because the context and people's lives will have changed from the exact point in time the research was conducted, but also because a different researcher conducting the research would inevitably interact differently with the participants.

In short, as Becker et al., (2006:7-8) argues, because traditional criteria are biased towards quantitative approaches, alternative criteria should seek to be more inclusive (refer to Table 3). Thus, instead of thinking of 'truth' we could think of 'trustworthiness', validity could be replaced by credibility, generalisability by transferability of context, reliability by dependability, and objectivity by confirmability.

Table 3. Quality Criteria and Definitions

Traditional criteria	*Alternative criteria*
Validity: the extent to which there is a correspondence between data and conceptualisation.	Credibility: the extent to which a set of findings are believable.
Reliability: the extent to which observations are consistent when instruments are administered on more than one occasion.	Transferability: the extent to which a set of findings are relevant to settings other than the one or ones from which they are derived.
Replicability: the extent to which it is possible to reproduce an investigation.	Dependability: the extent to which a set of findings are likely to be relevant to a different time than the one in which it was conducted.
Generalisability: the extent to which it is possible to generalize findings to similar cases which have not been studied.	Confirmability: the extent to which the researcher has not allowed personal values to intrude to an excessive degree.

Becker et al., (2006:7-8).

Patton (2002) goes further by proposing lists of alternative quality criteria by type (see Table 4). His criteria include 'traditional scientific', 'social constructivist', 'artistic and evocative', 'critical change' and 'evaluation standards and principles'. Potentially all of these could appeal to parts of the Development Studies research community. The traditional scientific criteria are what we might associate with research rigour from a positivist perspective – i.e. objectivity and validity of the data. In contrast, the social

constructivist criteria might be rigorous from a relativist perspective – i.e. subjectivity acknowledged and embraced, and coverage of others' perspectives. Then there are also artistic and evocative criteria such as creativity or aesthetic quality, and research which is stimulating and provocative. Patton also lists critical change criteria, such as participatory learning approaches, noting their neo-Marxist and feminist roots. These relate to critical perspectives and increasing consciousness about injustice, sources of inequalities and injustice, and representations of the perspectives of the less powerful. This has strong resonance not only with much of development studies research but also Lather's concept of catalytic validity. The concept of catalytic validity contains an explicit concern for social transformation. It goes beyond the research principle of 'do no harm' and calls for research that

> *allow[s] marginalized voices to be heard, to challenge dominant discourses and to open up alternative perspectives and courses of action…research process reorients, focuses, and energises participants towards knowing reality in order to transform it* (Lather, 1986:69, 272).

Finally, there are criteria listed for evaluation standards and principles. These include criteria that are more instrumental, for example, the utility and feasibility of a study.

Table 4. Alternative Quality Criteria

Traditional scientific criteria – i.e. positivist	Social constructivist criteria i.e. relativist	Artistic and evocative criteria	Critical change criteria (neo-Marxist, some feminist)	Evaluation standards and principles
Objectivity (attempts to minimize bias);

Validity of the data;

Systematic rigour of fieldwork practices;

Triangulation (for consistency of findings);

Reliability of coding and pattern analysis (multiple coders);

Correspondence of findings to reality;

Strength of evidence supporting causal hypotheses;

Generalisability;

Contributions to theory. | Subjectivity acknowledged and embraced;

Trustworthiness and authenticity – fairness and coverage of others' perspectives;

Triangulation (for capturing multiple perspectives);

Reflexivity and praxis - understanding one's own background and how to act in the world;

Particularity – doing justice to unique cases;

Contributions to dialogue – encouraging multiple perspectives. | Opens the world to us in some way;

Creativity; Aesthetic quality; Interpretive vitality;

Flows from self - embedded in lived experience;

Stimulating;

Provocative;

Connects and moves the audience;

Voice is distinct and expressive;

Feels 'true', 'authentic' and real';

Case studies become literary works, blurring of boundaries. | Critical perspectives - increases consciousness about injustice;

Identifies nature and sources of inequalities and injustice;

Represents the perspective of the less powerful;

Makes visible the ways in which those with more power exercise and benefit from this power;

Engages those with less power respectfully and collaboratively;

Builds capacity of those involved to take action;

Identifies potential change - making strategies;

Clear historical and values context;

Consequential or catalytic validity. | Utility – if not going to be useful to some audience, then no point doing it;

Feasibility – if not practically or politically do-able then no point;

Propriety – fair and ethical;

Accuracy;

Systematic inquiry;

Integrity/honesty and respect for people;

Responsibility to general public welfare. |

Source: Adapted from Patton (2002:544)

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RESEARCHING CHILDHOOD WELL-BEING

Mixed methods research on childhood well-being has emerged only recently, and is still in a fledgling state. It has tended to mirror the broader division between quantitative and qualitative researchers within development studies. Quantitative researchers have focused on measuring the extent and causes of childhood poverty, especially infant mortality rates, child malnutrition using anthropometric data, educational attainment and achievement[4], and involvement in harmful forms of child labour (recent noteworthy examples might include Gordon et al, 2004; Cockburn, 2002). They have sought to address the disjuncture between childhood and adult/household-level poverty, especially as traditional' proxy monetary measures of poverty and sources of data such as income and consumption are deeply problematic for children for the following reasons:

- data is not collected from children themselves but their care givers;
- children have different needs to adults;
- children's employment may be in the informal economy;
- non-market channels may be more important in shaping childhood poverty;
- children's access to and control of income is extremely marginal and resources and power are distributed unequally within the household.

Qualitative researchers have, by contrast, engaged less with discourses of poverty reduction and needs, and focused instead on aspects of well-being, including care, nurture, resilience, capabilities, rights, social capital, the creation of gendered identities, opportunities for participation and decision-making etc. (noteworthy examples include White, S. 2002; Graue and Walsh, 1998; Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2000; Woodhead, 1999).

Both approaches tend to be published in different types of journals - economics, epidemiology and development studies, versus childhood studies, sociology, anthropology and gender studies - with relatively little communication between the two. However, gradually links are being forged across the two disciplinary/ methodological clusters, often due to policy influencing imperatives. Advocacy to improve childhood well-being often relies on the power of numbers to highlight the need for 'better' policy

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[4] Commonly researched educational indicators include rates of school enrolment for girls and boys, overage enrolment and results on standardised scholastic achievement tests.

frameworks to tackle the high rates of deprivation faced by children in many developing countries.[5]

It is important, however, to point out that age-disaggregated data, which enables policy advocates to make compelling arguments about the extent of childhood deprivation and therefore the urgency to act, has only recently become available. Before the initiation of the UNICEF Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey in the mid 1990s (initially designed to focus on maternal/child health and nutrition, but subsequently expanded to include indicators on child education and child protection) there were few internationally comparative data sources on childhood well-being.[6] Important data constraints still exist, however, in relation to the impact of intra-household dynamics on child well-being, and age-disaggregated budget outlays on child-related policies.

In addition to the development of robust statistics, evidence-based policy efforts also underscore the importance of complementing broad-based survey research and quantitative analysis with the 'thick description' and nuanced insights of qualitative analysis. The latter provides an understanding of the intra-household dynamics and/or social processes behind the numbers. In the case of participatory research it also enables an understanding of children's experiences and perceptions of various forms of deprivation and vulnerability. This is critical as it shifts policy debates from preparing for children's future 'well becoming' to working towards their current 'well-being' (Ben-Arieh, 2006).[7]

The central argument in this paper is that the distinctiveness of children's well-being means research on this topic in particular benefits from mixing methods and combining quantitative and qualitative analysis.

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[5] For instance, Save the Children Fund is increasingly forging links with academics to carry out quantitative analysis on topics such as the prevalence of food insecurity and its impacts on child malnutrition (e.g. Mathys, 2004) or the effects of different social protection policy interventions in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Devereux and Marshall, 2005). Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets, the linking of donor funding to progress against PRSP target indicators, and in some cases Poverty and Social Impact Analysis [PSIA] have also heightened the need for access to rigorous quantitative analyses in order to engage in related policy debates (e.g. Marcus et al., 2002).

[6] In 2007 the UNICEF Innocenti Center published its first Report Card on children's well-being. It includes six dimensions of well-being: material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviours and risks, and subjective well-being. Currently, the scorecard only covers OECD countries; however, the ILO established a Statistical and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour that coordinates national surveys in almost 60 countries, while DFID initiated a cross-country longitudinal data collection initiative on poor children in developing countries, the Young Lives Project.

[7] We are grateful to Laura Camfield for this observation.

The following discussion outlines five distinctive features of childhood deprivation that pose particular methodological challenges.

i) Dynamic life stage

Although universal Piaget type models of child development have been rightfully criticised for under-estimating the important interplay of environmental, social and cultural factors in shaping children's experiences of childhood, most (able-bodied) children undergo certain physical and neurological transformations over the course of the first decades of life. Proponents of a rights-based approach to child well-being similarly point to *children's evolving capacities* over time (e.g. Lansdown, 2005).

Gaining a better understanding of dynamics and processes that might reinforce or reverse patterns of disadvantage or benefit is a matter of urgency in the light of a growing body of scholarship on *life-course and intergenerational impacts of childhood poverty.* This literature emphasises the importance of tackling childhood poverty not only because of its current impact, but also its effect across the life-course and between generations. There is a need to unpack "the linked set of processes that may result in, or entrench, childhood, adulthood or chronic poverty, rather than outcomes or experiences during a specific period of time" (Harper et al, 2003:3). As Sen (1999:4) argues, "…capabilities that adults enjoy are deeply conditional on their experiences as children".

ii) Multi-dimensional and heterogeneous

Child well-being is also *multi-dimensional* and needs to take account of the complexities of childhood biological, neurological, social and moral development (e.g. Yaqub, 2002, Ridge 2002). Children are not only more vulnerable (for physiological and psychological reasons) but also have less autonomy/power than adults in domains and decisions that affect their lives (e.g. economically, environmental health risks etc).

These universal characteristics of child development are, however, experienced in diverse ways as children are a *heterogeneous group* living in divergent socio-economic conditions with distinct needs and concerns. Although such diversity (e.g. based on gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality) is also true of adults, the heterogeneous impacts of age and parental status arguably heighten the variation in childhoods.

The diversity of childhoods is not well recognized in development discourse and practice. As Wood (1985 quoted in White, S. 2002:1096) argues,

"Children become 'cases' which are 'disorganised' from their own context and 're-organised' into the categories given by development intervention". Whereas there is much broader acceptance of 'gender' and 'sexuality' as social divisions that are not natural or 'god-given' but culturally constructed, there is little recognition of *childhood as a culturally constructed phenomenon* outside childhood studies circles (e.g. Platt, 2003)[8] and this is a politically charged issue. The general tendency therefore is for children to be studied for what they will become rather than as social actors in their own right (Corsaro, 1997).

iii)   Importance of voice

While it is true that all socially excluded groups may lack opportunities for voice and participation, the conventional voicelessness of children has a particular quality and intensity. Children are legal minors, with no right to vote or to make decisions without the approval of their legal guardian. Despite efforts to promote child participation their denial of voice in family, school and community decisions is still viewed as 'normal' and culturally acceptable in many parts of the developing (and developed) world.

iv)   Relational nature

In recent years scholars have paid increasing attention to the relational nature of well-being (e.g. White, S. 2002) and the importance of care (especially for young children and the elderly) (e.g. Folbre and Bittman, 2004, Lewis, 2002). Exploring intra-household dynamics and arrangements of care are critical in understanding child well-being, given children's greater vulnerability and reliance on (usually) adult care (Marshall, 2003). However, as research on child headed households and the gendered dimensions of child work has underscored, intra-household dynamics (especially in large impoverished households) often entail children, usually girls, shouldering of part of the burden of care (e.g. Kabeer, 2003). Although analyses of care dynamics usually lend themselves more readily to qualitative approaches, feminist economists are increasingly seeking to explore the impacts of intra-household allocations of resources and power quantitatively to attract greater policy attention to the political economy of care (e.g. Folbre, 2006).

A considerable body of research evidence has emphasised the ways in which children are situated and influenced not only by their household

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[8] James and Prout (1990)'s Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood was viewed as a major breakthrough in the field at the time.

environment, but also by their neighbourhood, school and society (e.g. Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Ruel et al, 1999). Although the current presentation of children as 'participant agents' in social relations who shape their circumstances and social structure (Mayall, 2002) is a necessary corrective to conceptualisations of children as passive and targets of social intervention, it is nevertheless the case that the well-being of children is more dependent on community and social influences than that of adults. As White, S. (2002:1103) argues, "'Child-centred' development practice must not be 'child-only': social and economic justice for poor children must be tackled in the context of their families and communities".

v)Macro-micro linkages

Policy debates on childhood deprivation typically focus on social policy issues such as child health, nutrition and education. However, children are often as profoundly affected by macro-economic and poverty reduction policies as they are by sector-specific education or health policy initiatives (e.g. Waddington, 2004). Economic policies can affect children via at least two routes: impact on household livelihoods and on the financing of key public services that are essential for child development and wellbeing, such as health and education. One example is research on the grassroots impacts of agricultural-led industrial development in Ethiopia (the core economic pillar of its first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper or PRSP), which highlighted the unintended negative spill-over impacts on children. The agricultural extension policy's heavy reliance on subsistence agriculture was shown to increase children's involvement in work activities, particularly animal herding, to the detriment of their school attendance and/or time available for homework and study (Woldehanna *et al.*, 2005a, see also Escobal and Ponce, 2005 for the detrimental effects of the Free Trade Agreement or FTA in Peru).

MIXED METHODS AND CHILD WELL-BEING RESEARCH

This section now turns to a discussion of the methodological implications of the five distinctive dimensions of childhood well-being outlined above. It provides examples of research on child well-being related topics from developing and/or developed country contexts, and highlights whether the mixing of methods was used to 'initiate' (generate new hypotheses), 'expand', 'combine' or 'contradict' the findings generated through a different methodological approach (see Table 5 p23).

First, a nuanced understanding of child well-being clearly needs to pay particular attention to the temporal dimensions of child outcomes and experiences. This is necessary if researchers are to advance understanding about children's evolving capacities, as well as life-course and inter-generational poverty transfers. These research areas are methodologically challenging, especially as there are frequently significant longitudinal data limitations in the developing world. However, examples drawing on Northern longitudinal datasets suggest that a combination of quantitative analysis of panel data with qualitative analysis of oral life histories from a purposefully selected sub-sample can be a fruitful approach to capturing both objective and subjective changes in well-being over different life stages (Holland et al, 2006).[9] One of the better known examples of such an approach is Thompson (2004)'s research on stepfamilies, which he argues 'brings together the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods in a middle way, using two eyes instead of one, embedded in a dichotomized approach' (2004 quoted in Holland et al, 2006:13). More specifically, he combines a life-course study using in-depth interviews and mental health histories from adults who grew up in stepfamilies. Holland uses a census-based national quota sample, and data from a quantitative study on coping strategies used by adults and children living in stepfamilies, taken from the quantitative longitudinal UK National Child Development Study (initiated in the 1950s). This mixed methods approach enabled Thompson to identify key life moments linked to experiences in stepfamily environments that were largely missed in the quantitative surveys but shed valuable new insights on quantitative data patterns.

Second, the multi-dimensionality of childhood well-being suggests the importance of a cross-disciplinary, mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative social sciences with insights from natural sciences. One of the few examples of such work is Yaqub (2002) who integrates scientific research on physiological and neurological development, economic data on income and socio-welfare correlations, and qualitative studies on capabilities and functions (following Sen) to interrogate the thesis that poor children necessarily become poor adults. His findings underscore the fact that children's capacities are changing over time and some children and young people are better able to cope with, adjust to and overcome adversity than others. He argues that gaining a

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[9] Holland et al. (2006) provide a number of examples on school transitions, youth to work transitions, post-divorce life etc.

better understanding of the dynamics of resilience is critical from a policy perspective in terms of the comparison of costs of *poverty reversals* through adult interventions versus *poverty avoidance* through child interventions (ibid).

Careful ethnographic and participatory research has an important role to play in highlighting the diversity and especially the cultural constructedness of childhood. However, James et al. (1997) emphasise that such work needs to be approached in a balanced and sensitive manner in order to balance cultural relativism and universal principles. Here a mixed methods approach might be able to provide the authority, moral weight, and nuanced approach that James et al. (1997) advocate. For instance, quantitative survey data on the incidence of child labour can be used to draw attention to the extent of involvement in harmful forms of child work, while qualitative work with children can capture the complex ways in which children, their families and communities ascribe meaning to work, and the intra-household and socio-economic dynamics that need to be taken into account to eradicate exploitative forms of work in an effective and sustainable way. For example, Woldehanna et al. (2005a)'s work on children's paid and unpaid work in Ethiopia is one example of such a mixed methods approach, which was used for policy engagement purposes during the country's second PRSP (Jones et al, forthcoming).

Third, in order to capture the particular quality and intensity of children's conventional 'voicelessness', qualitative researchers interested in childhood have used participatory research methods such as play, song, drawing, and photography to highlight conventionally silenced perspectives. As Selener (1997:2) argues:

> *The inclusion of direct testimony in the development debate can help to make it less of a monologue and more of a dialogue, as people's testimony begins to require answers and as their voices force the development establishment to be more accountable for their actions.*

So for instance, while adult researchers may emphasise children's health, nutritional and scholastic outcomes, participatory research with children suggests that insufficient time to play, lack of affection from family members, feelings of social exclusion by peers, and shabby and/or dirty clothing are equally important concerns (e.g. Pham and Jones, 2005).

Two key methodological implications emerge here. First, it suggests that the quantitative/ qualitative binary is perhaps too simple as it fails to distinguish between ethnographic and sociological qualitative approaches on the one hand, and participatory methods on the other. This omission also it overlooks the moral and social change functions that some qualitative research methods may fulfill. The very process of being involved in a participatory research process may open up new and potentially profound possibilities for children and change how they interact in their social worlds (e.g. Jans, 2004). As Pollock (2005) argues, "qualitative methods have value over and above their ability to yield testable hypotheses or to generate new measures for verification in large datasets". Good examples of research that combine both quantitative, qualitative and participatory research methods is the Childhood Poverty and Research Centre's (CHIP) work on children's educational experiences in migrating households in Mongolia (Batbaatar et al., 2005 and Young Lives research on the barriers to children's educational achievement in poor communities in rural and urban Ethiopia (Woldehanna et al., 2005b). Whereas the Mongolia research used the different research methods to address different questions in separate chapters, the Ethiopia work sought to interweave the different sorts of data to explore multiple angles of a number of key themes (e.g. gender dynamics, parental values and attitudes, the relative importance of local authorities and service providers, children's responsibilities). Both studies were embedded within broader policy research projects so could be seen as examples of research with catalytic validity.

Fourth, the importance of understanding the relational dimension of childhood well-being cannot be under-estimated. However, capturing the complexities of intra-household and intra-community relations necessitates a multi-pronged methodological approach and multiple data sources. Two examples from the National Poverty Center at the University of Michigan provide creative solutions that could be adapted to developing country contexts. The first tackles the influence of intra-household distribution of resources and power on child material well-being. Magnuson and Smeeding's (2005) work on the relative impact of different sources of income, state benefits, and intra-and inter-family transfers in lifting young families out of poverty drew on a nationally representative birth cohort study (Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study). They complemented their quantitative analysis with a follow up qualitative study involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with parents, first as couples and then individually. Whereas the quantitative data provided a robust picture of household economic trends over time, the qualitative research explored the

complexities and subjective effects of co-residing with parents, where much needed financial support was balanced against loss of space, privacy, and in some cases decision-making power.

The second example focuses on the role that children and young people's communities play in shaping their subjective well-being. In order to better understand the relative importance of neighborhood poverty on youth risk behaviour, Clampet-Lindquist et al. (2005) employed a combination of a longitudinal panel study and a random stratified sub-sample of retrospective qualitative interviews. These focused on different dimensions of male and female youth experiences in moving from highly deprived to less poor neighborhoods. The data was creatively complemented by interviews with a control group (youth who had not moved), as well as friends of the 'movers' to explore similarities and differences in behavioural patterns. Whereas the quantitative data showed that moving had no or even a negative impact for males (but not females), the qualitative methods identified key additional themes such as the protective role that gender norms play in keeping girls closer to the house and under greater supervision, and the negative stereotypes to which young African American men are subject and react against. The researchers then used these themes to generate hypotheses for more detailed follow up work.

Fifth, tracing the linkages between macro-level policies and micro-level incomes for children poses significant methodological challenges, particularly as age-disaggregated national level poverty data is often lacking in developing country contexts. The Ethiopia research mentioned above used a mixed methods approach to investigate how macro-economic policy shifts impact on household livelihood strategies and different family members' labour market participation, and how their effects are in turn refracted through intra-household dynamics. Household survey panel data was used to generate hypotheses which were then explored through qualitative focus group discussions and key informant interviews in a sub-sample of purposefully selected sites. In-depth econometric analysis was subsequently combined with a thematic analysis of the qualitative data to develop a more comprehensive and complex picture of macro-micro policy linkages. The authors sought to combine the insights from the quantitative and qualitative analyses, and for a number of themes the qualitative findings helped to unpack underlying household and community dynamics. However, several important tensions emerged. First, the in-depth qualitative research was undertaken almost three years after the quantitative data was first collected, exposing the juxtaposition of the two data sources to a time lag

problem, including possible memory recall difficulties and an imperfect ability to control for interim policy interventions. Second, in opting for a combined approach, the authors precluded the possibility of a more interactive discussion with readers, which would be possible if the different sources of data were simply presented and the readers were left to generate their own hypotheses and interpretations as to how they fit together.

Table 5. Examples of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis on Childhood Well-being

		Function	
		Combining	Integrating
Stage of research process	Data collection	Children from migrant households' educational experiences in Mongolia (Batbaatar et al., 2004)	Impacts of poverty reduction strategies on child work and education in Ethiopia (Woldehanna et al., 2005a and 2005b) The relative impact of different sources of income, state benefits and intra-and inter-family transfers in lifting young families out of poverty (Magnuson and Smeeding, 2005).
	Data analysis	Impacts of poverty reduction strategies on child work and education in Ethiopia (Woldehanna et al., 2005a and 2005b)	The role of neighborhood poverty status in shaping youth risk behaviour (Clampet-Lindquist et al., 2005) Experiences of growing up in step-families (Thompson, 2004)

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Researchers interested in the challenges of mixed methods approaches can learn from a closer engagement with work on childhood well-being as its distinctiveness and complexity provides the impetus for a creative mixing of methods. In particular, these include the following:

- the quality and intensity of children's voicelessness underscores the importance of integrating not only observational and ethnographic qualitative methods, but also various oral and visual participatory research approaches;

- the multi-dimensionality and heterogeneity of childhoods lends new weight to the urgency of investing in genuinely crossdisciplinary approaches;
- the deeply relational nature of children's wellbeing suggests that more attention should be paid to developing not only better age-disaggregated data, but also more sophisticated methodologies for capturing intra-household dynamics, community-child relations and macro-micro policy linkages;
- the quality of mixed methods research is still contentious, however, rigour can be more broadly defined, for example, by including Lather's concept of catalytic validity

Many of the promising mixed methods approaches to childhood well-being are emerging from projects engaged in policy influencing, suggesting that a fruitful dialogue could be fostered between researchers at both the academic and policy ends of the research continuum. A common assumption is that policy reformers like numbers, and this is well documented (Appleton and Booth, 2001; White, H. 2002). Numbers are commonly perceived as objective, due to their tangibility, quantifiability, and assumed universality. However, policy makers also listen to narratives, opening up space for qualitative approaches to also influence policy (Kanbur, 2002:2). This is partly due to the legitimacy or 'authenticity' brought by PPAs and other qualitative methods. One might hypothesise that methods matter for research impact and influence because although quantitative approaches are currently popular with policy makers, qualitative approaches can create stories to 'sell'. We intend to pursue this avenue of discussion in future.

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