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Child social exclusion

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ABSTRACT

Social exclusion has been defined as a lack of resources, an inability to participate and a low quality of life. There have been a number of attempts to study the social exclusion of adults and at a country level. This paper attempts to operationalise the concept for children and comparatively using data derived from the Children's Worlds Survey of 12 year old children in 16 countries. It does this by adapting the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix. Variables are selected to present sub-domains and combined using standardised scores. The results for the 16 countries are compared for each sub-domain. Analysis of the overlaps between the sub-domains is undertaken using the pooled sample and for four selected countries. The material and economic resources sub-domain explains more of the variation in the other elements of social exclusion but by no means all. Being excluded from social resources seems to be less associated with other types of exclusion in all countries. Experiences of social exclusion in childhood are linked more strongly in some countries than others and in some sub-domains than in others and these variations need further investigation. There may be limits to the extent that social exclusion can be compared across such a diverse set of countries but a multi-dimensional approach provides a more complete picture than an exclusive focus on material deprivation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Literature review and contextualisation

Comparative studies of the well-being of children in rich countries began by focussing on the well-being of children mainly using adult reported data on household income poverty and material deprivation (Cornia & Danziger, 1997; UNICEF, 2000). Then, because it was felt that this provided too narrow a perspective on children's lives, scholars began to introduce a multi-dimensional perspective using indicators derived from administrative sources and the PISA and HBSC surveys of children, to represent a variety of additional domains of well-being – health, education, relationships, behaviour, housing and subjective well-being (Bradshaw, Hoelscher, & Richardson, 2007; UNICEF, 2007).

Social exclusion emerged in the 1990s into the discourse on poverty and living standards from France (*sociale exclusion*) (Bradshaw, 2004). Early advocates (Room, 1995) argued that it expanded income or expenditure based measures of poverty, to include multi-dimensional disadvantage and provided a more structural and dynamic perspective. Initially it was greeted with suspicion, especially by Levitas (1998), who drew attention to the political and ideological baggage that it had picked up. It was developed as a concept by social scientists, probably mainly because of their dissatisfaction with purely income measures of poverty. Social exclusion (and inclusion) became a theme of the European Union with 'Poverty and Social Exclusion targets' being set for 2020.

Various attempts were made to operationalise social exclusion in empirical research (Gordon et al., 2000; Burchardt, Le Grand, & Piachaud, 2002; Pantazis, Gordon, & Levitas, 2006) and eventually Levitas et al. (2007) developed the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix (B-Sem). They proposed a 'working definition' of social exclusion:

"Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole." (p. 25)

Their framework (subsequently modified slightly) contained 11 sub-domains, grouped into three domains:

- Resources,
- Participation and
- Quality of life.

This framework was used empirically in a series of studies for the

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UK Cabinet Office exploring multi-dimensional social exclusion across the life course including families with children (Oroyemi, Damioli, Barnes, & Crosier, 2009) and young people (Cusworth, Bradshaw, Coles, Keung, & Chzhen, 2009). Main and Bradshaw (2014) also analysed the social exclusion of families with children in the UK Poverty and Social Exclusion survey 2015. However, all these studies were based on household surveys and adult respondents.

The first and only person to have attempted to operationalise social exclusion using a survey of children is Gross-Manos (2015) following Middleton and Adelman (2003) and using the Israel data on 12 year olds from the first pilot phase of the Children's Worlds survey. Starting with twenty two items related to social exclusion, then using factor analysis, she reduced these to three domains relating to school, area and services, and participation in social activities. She explored the association between these domains and a deprivation index based on child reported lack of items and then related this to subjective well-being (Gross-Manos & Ben-Arieh, 2016). Gross-Manos' measure is reliable only when omitting the participation in social activities dimension.

This paper builds on that work using the second wave of Children's Worlds data on 12 year olds funded by the Jacobs Foundation. In this article child social exclusion is compared in the first 16 countries to complete the survey and using a different methodology and conceptual framework. The Children's Worlds survey is described elsewhere in this special issue. We have focussed on the 12 year olds and not on the 8 and 10 year old samples because there are important questions that were only asked of 12 year olds and we wanted to avoid possible problems with response sets (especially in Turkey at younger ages). The work could be adapted and replicated for the younger groups.

The conceptual framework is the B-Sem index which sees social exclusion operating in the three domains: resources, participation and quality of life, with each represented by a number of sub-domains, represented by a number of indicators (see Appendix A). We have adapted the original B-Sem sub-domains to take account of the lives of children, and also taking into account that not all the elements of the B-Sem index could be represented by the indicators available in Children's Worlds. So, for example, in the material and economic resources sub-domain, instead of using income or bills or borrowing money as indicators, a material deprivation index asked of children was used, as well as satisfaction with all the things that they had, and the number of adults in the house with a paid job. In the participation domain, the sub-domains (economic, social, cultural, education and skills, and political and civic participations) have been dropped out and instead a global domain called participation has been used, because of the lack of questions about different kind of participation in the Children's Worlds survey. Crime has been dropped as an indicator from the original quality of life domain.

1.2. The aims of the study

Taking into account the literature review and the context presented above, this article has the following objectives:

1) To operationalise child social exclusion in empirical research adapting the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix (Levitas et al., 2007);
2) To examine how the instrument works across 16 countries;
3) To explore the associations between the sub-domains;
4) And to evaluate (overall and by country) the risk of being a materially deprived and also excluded in different sub-domains.

2. Methods

The process started by selecting indicators which prima facie were relevant to each sub-domain. So, to take an example, for the material and economic resources sub-domain there are a set of deprivation items: clothes in good condition to go to school in, access to a computer at home, access to the Internet, mobile phone, books to read for fun, family car for transportation and own stuff to listen to music. These seven deprivation indicators were assessed for scalability using Cronbach's alpha. This was found to be satisfactory - alpha = 0.797. They were then combined into a single index by weighting each item by the proportion of respondents in the pooled sample who had the item – this is known as prevalence weighting (Bradshaw, Holmes, & Hallerod, 1997). So for example each respondent lacking a computer was given a score of 77.3 – the proportion having a computer in the pooled sample. Then the weighted scores for each item were standardised as z scores and the z scores summed and averaged for each individual. (An alternative if we had been doing intra country level analysis would have been to take the national ownership rates as the weights for different countries, but here we are attempting comparative analysis and this needs a common threshold for all countries.)

For the two other indicators in the material and economic sub-domain we first established a threshold to produce a binary variable. So for the indicator of the number of workers in the household it was no workers versus 1 or more workers. The proportion in the pooled sample with one or more workers became the weight. Satisfaction with the things you have was scoring 5 or less on the 11 point Likert scale. These weighted scores were also standardised using z scores and then the z scores for the three indicators (deprivation, workers and satisfaction) were averaged to produce an individual score for each child.

Within each sub domain the scalability of the indicators was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and the correlation matrix was assessed to ensure indicators were operating in the same direction but that the associations were not too high to indicate redundancy.

2.1. Resources domain

The resources domain includes

- material and economic resources;
- access to services and
- social resources.

Fig. 1 presents the country results for the **material and economic resources** sub-domain with countries ranked by their overall sub-domains' scores. Not surprisingly Ethiopia has the highest (worst) scores in the material and economic resources sub-domain. More surprisingly (given their GDPs) Estonia ranks after Norway and above England and Germany with the lowest scores. This is because children in Estonia are less likely to be dissatisfied with the things they have – despite having a higher score on deprivation. South Korean children also have low satisfaction given their deprivation levels.

This exercise was repeated for the two other elements in the Resources Domain – five indicators were combined to represent **access to services** and eight indicators combined to represent **social resources**.

Fig. 2 gives the results for the **access to services** sub-domain. There is some information lacking for different countries. Where there was missing data, overall scores were produced using the average of the scores for the indicators available. In the access to services sub-domain scores are less different between countries than with the material and economic resources sub-domain. Algerian and S Korean children are the worst performers on this sub-domain, with high dissatisfaction with outdoor areas for kids to play and how they are dealt with by doctors. It can be observed that Norwegian and Spanish children are most happy with the access to services, despite Spain being one of the countries with low satisfaction with school. Children in Colombia and S Africa are the least satisfied with their local police.

Fig. 3 shows Norway at the top of the ranking again in the **social resources** sub-domain, followed by Romania, Spain and Malta, similar to the previous sub-domain. Children from S Africa, Ethiopia and Nepal reported high dissatisfaction with most of the indicators from this sub-domain, showing low levels of social resources. Surprisingly (given it is