

Comparing children's lives and well-being



The Whats Whys and Hows of learning from children

Asher Ben-Arieh

Paul Baerwald School of Social Work, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
The Haruv Institute, Jerusalem

benarieh@mail.huji.ac.il

Why is learning from children important?

The changing context of child welfare

Recent changes and shifts in our understanding of children's well being

How did the view towards children changed?

New normative and theoretical advancements.

Changes in the technical and methodological ability to study children's well-being

What can we learn from children?

Children's worlds- A comparative view



Changing Contexts

Or **Why** should we learn from children

The way we understand well-being today is different than what we thought in the past.



The First Shift - From Survival and Basic Needs to Development and Well-Being

- Much attention has been paid to children's physical survival and basic needs – and for good reasons. The result was the focus on saving children.
- Infant and child mortality, school enrollment and dropout, immunizations, and childhood disease are all examples of measures of well being in regard to basic needs.

But now the definition of well being moved from supplying minimums, as in saving a life, to a focus on quality of life.



The Second shift - From Negative to Positive

- The **absence** of problems or failures does not necessarily indicate proper growth and success.
- Understanding well being as absence of risk factors or negative behaviors is not the same as focusing on **protective factors** or **positive behaviors**.

The challenge is to develop a concept that holds societies accountable for more than the safe warehousing of children and youth.



The Third Shift - From Well-Becoming to Well-Being

- In contrast to the **immediacy** of *well-being*, well-**becoming** describes **a future focus** (i.e., preparing children to be productive and happy adults).
- The conventional preoccupation with the next generation is a preoccupation of adults.
- Focusing on preparing children to become citizens suggests that they are not citizens during childhood.

Both perspectives are legitimate and necessary. However, the emergence of the child-centered perspective, introduced new ideas and energy to the child well being concept:

Anyone interested in children and childhood should also be interested in the present as well as future childhood.



The Fourth Shift –

Incorporating children rights and beyond

- Although inspired and to some extent guided by the child rights movement, the new concept of well being goes **beyond the concept of rights**.
- Perhaps the most crucial difference is the standard used to measure children's status. **Children's well-being** is normally focused on **what is desired**, but **rights monitoring** addresses **legally established minimums**.
- Monitoring rights and monitoring well-being also share a focus on child-centered indicators, ones that can be measured at the level of the child. Such indicators draw attention to the actual situation of children.



The Fifth Shift - From an adult to a child perspective

When these changes were taken into account, efforts to study children's well-being had to ask the following questions:

What are children doing?

What do children contribute?

What do children need?

What do children have?

What do children think and feel?

To whom or what are children connected and related?

Answering such questions demanded a better picture of children as human beings in their present life including the positive aspects of it. To better answer such questions, the field had to focus on **children's daily lives, which is something children know most about.**



But **How** did it happen?

I would argue that this change in context is the consequence of two major sources:

- **New normative and theoretical advancements.**
- **Changes in the technical and methodological ability to study children's well-being.**

I will now turn to discuss these sources of change.



“New” Normative and Theoretical Approaches

Theories and normative approaches to children welfare abound. Many have contributed to the changing context and many more continue to do so.

Yet, I singled out three such approaches that influenced the changing child welfare context, these include:

The ecological theories of child development

The normative concept of children’s rights

The new sociology of childhood as a stage in and of itself



New Methodological and Technical developments

Just as new theories contributed to the new context of children's well being, three methodological perspectives have done the same:

The call for using the child as the unit of observation

The emerging importance of subjective perspectives

**The expanded use of administrative data and the
Growing variety of data sources.**



What can we learn from children?



The research

- 1 General information: Children's Worlds
- 2 How do we compare SWB?
- 3 How do children's SWB differ across countries?
- 4 Discussion



Data collection in Nepal



Children's Worlds is a world-wide research survey on children's subjective well-being and daily activities.

Pilot 2011-2012

- ~ 35,000 children
- Ages 8, 10 & 12
- 14 countries.
- Goal was 1,000 kids per age group per country
- Convenience sample
- Included countries with less children
- Not all countries had the 3 age groups



Extended pilot 2011-2012 : Non-representative samples

of participants

| Country | 8 y.o | 10 y.o | 12 y.o | total |
|--------------------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| Algeria | 594 | 435 | 428 | 1457 |
| Brazil | 1173 | 1293 | 1005 | 3471 |
| Canada | 261 | 144 | - | 405 |
| Chile | 1052 | 693 | 827 | 2572 |
| England | - | - | 1141 | 1141 |
| Israel | 1034 | 992 | 998 | 3024 |
| South Korea | 2746 | 2652 | 2602 | 8000 |
| Nepal | - | 295 | - | 295 |
| Romania | 1041 | 927 | 1354 | 3322 |
| Rwanda | - | 295 | - | 295 |
| South Africa | - | - | 1002 | 1002 |
| Spain | - | - | 5727 | 5727 |
| Uganda | - | 1000 | 1035 | 2035 |
| USA (South Dakota) | 522 | 502 | 784 | 1808 |
| Total | 8423 | 9228 | 16903 | 34554 |

Full Survey 2013-2104

- **54,000** children. ~ **18,000** per age group
- **15** countries from different continents, varied cultures, diverse religions, distinct development and different types of welfare states.
- A representative sample of the entire country or federal region.
 - **The entire country**: England, Estonia, Ethiopia, Israel, Nepal, Norway, Romania, South Korea.
 - **Federal region**: Algeria (El Bayedh , Tlemcen and Oran), Colombia (Antioquia), Germany (Thuringia, Hesse, Baden-Wurttemberg and North Rhine-Westphalia) Poland (Wielkopolska), South Africa (Western Cape), Spain (Catalonia), Turkey (Istanbul).



Full Survey 2013-2104

- Sample was based on mainstream schools, and therefore did not include special education schools and etc.
- Sampling strategy varied from country to country, subject to the characteristics of each.
- To ensure the quality of the sample each sample plan, prepared by the local teams, was reviewed and approved in advance by a 'sample committee' comprised of four experts.



Full survey 2013-2014 – representative samples.

of participants

| Country | 8 Y.O | 10 Y.O | 12 Y.O | Total |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Algeria | 1385 | 1216 | 1359 | 3960 |
| Colombia | 1003 | 1071 | 1007 | 3081 |
| England | 990 | 989 | 1319 | 3298 |
| Estonia | 1131 | 1034 | 1033 | 3198 |
| Ethiopia | 1000 | 1000 | 1000 | 3000 |
| Germany | 1069 | 1143 | 851 | 3063 |
| Israel | 1004 | 1030 | 954 | 2988 |
| Nepal | 1073 | 1073 | 1073 | 3219 |
| Norway | 977 | 1033 | 1000 | 3010 |
| Poland | 1078 | 1156 | 1038 | 3272 |
| Romania | 1422 | 1424 | 1561 | 4407 |
| South Africa | 1032 | 1109 | 1143 | 3283 |
| South Korea | 2323 | 2323 | 2607 | 7253 |
| Spain | 1066 | 1082 | 1717 | 3865 |
| Turkey | 1045 | 1079 | 1029 | 3153 |
| Total | 17598 | 17762 | 18691 | 54051 |



Various Subjective Well-being Measures

- **Happiness**

How happy have you been during last 2 weeks (1 item, 0 to 10 point)

- **Life Satisfaction**

- Student Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS, 4 items, 0 to 10 point)

- Personal Well-being Index School Children (PWI, 9 items, 0 to 10 point)

- **Positive Affect**

Russel's Core Affect (short-version, 6 items, 0 to 10 point)



Three different approaches to comparisons

What should we compare?

Inequalities of
well-being

Means or
mean ranks

% with low
well-being

Linked to three different goals

Reduce
inequality

Increase average
happiness or
satisfaction

Reduce
misery



Are comparisons meaningful?

Linguistic issues: Do words, phrases, statements and questions mean the same in different languages?

Cultural response issues: Do children (and people in general) tend to respond differently to the same types of response options in different countries or cultures?

Research on adult subjective well-being has attempted to tackle these issues through several means, including:

- Demonstrating correlations between macro indicators and mean national subjective well-being. But do we have enough countries and what are the salient macro indicators?
- Using 'anchoring vignettes' within questionnaires. For the future?



Where does that leave us?

Comparing means (or % with low well-being or inequalities) between countries is potentially useful, if we can explain the reasons for variation

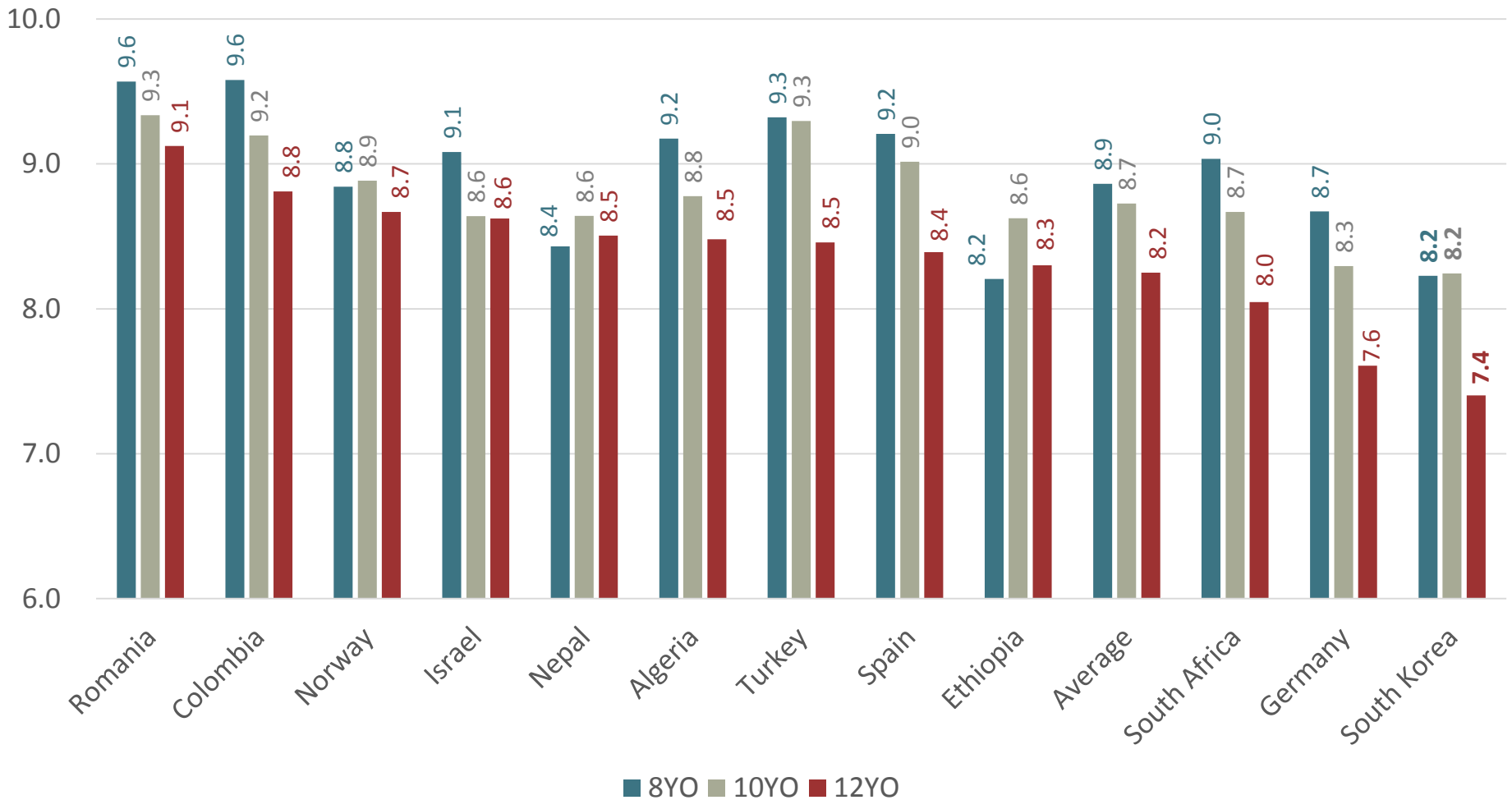
But, in addition:

- We can use the mean scores in other useful comparative ways
- Most (80% to 90%) of the variation is within countries not between countries, so we can look at that in a comparative way too
- There are other types of comparative analysis we can do including:
 - Looking at relative positive and negative aspects of life
 - Looking at sub-group differences
- There are other important topics covered in the survey – bullying, time use, children's rights.

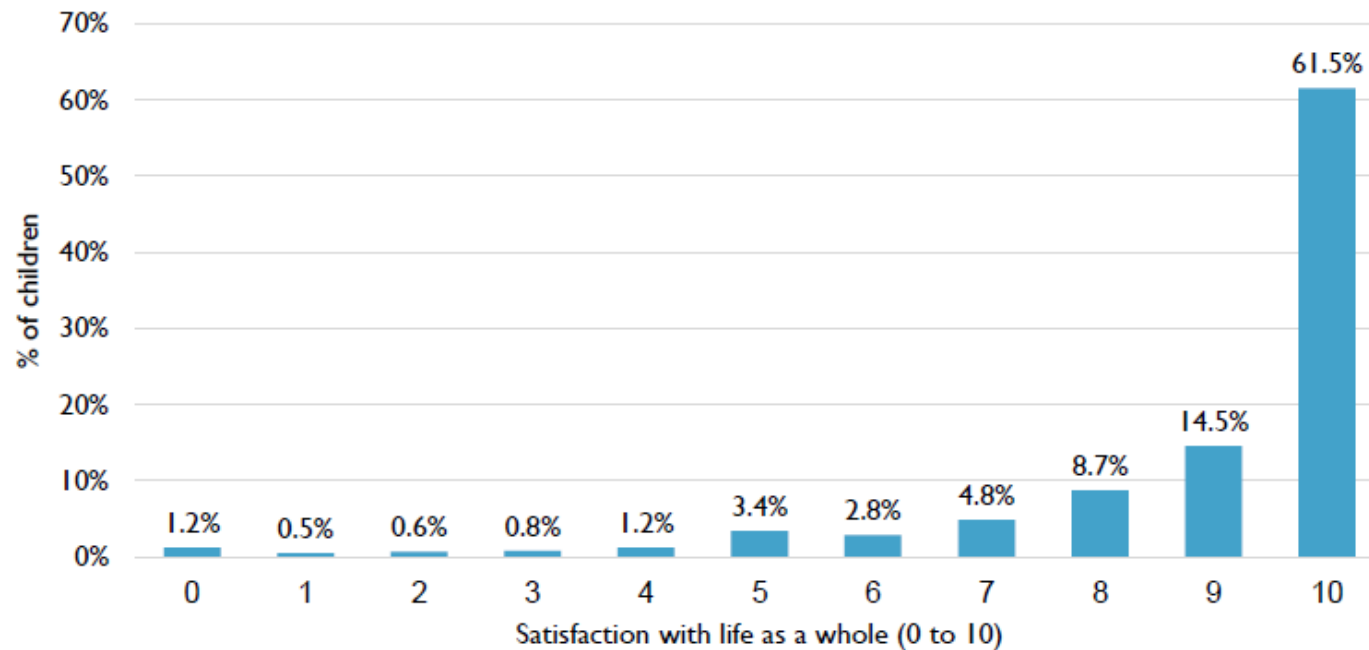


Happiness: (1 item, 0-10, 11point scale)

(Overall, how happy have you been feeling during the last two weeks?)



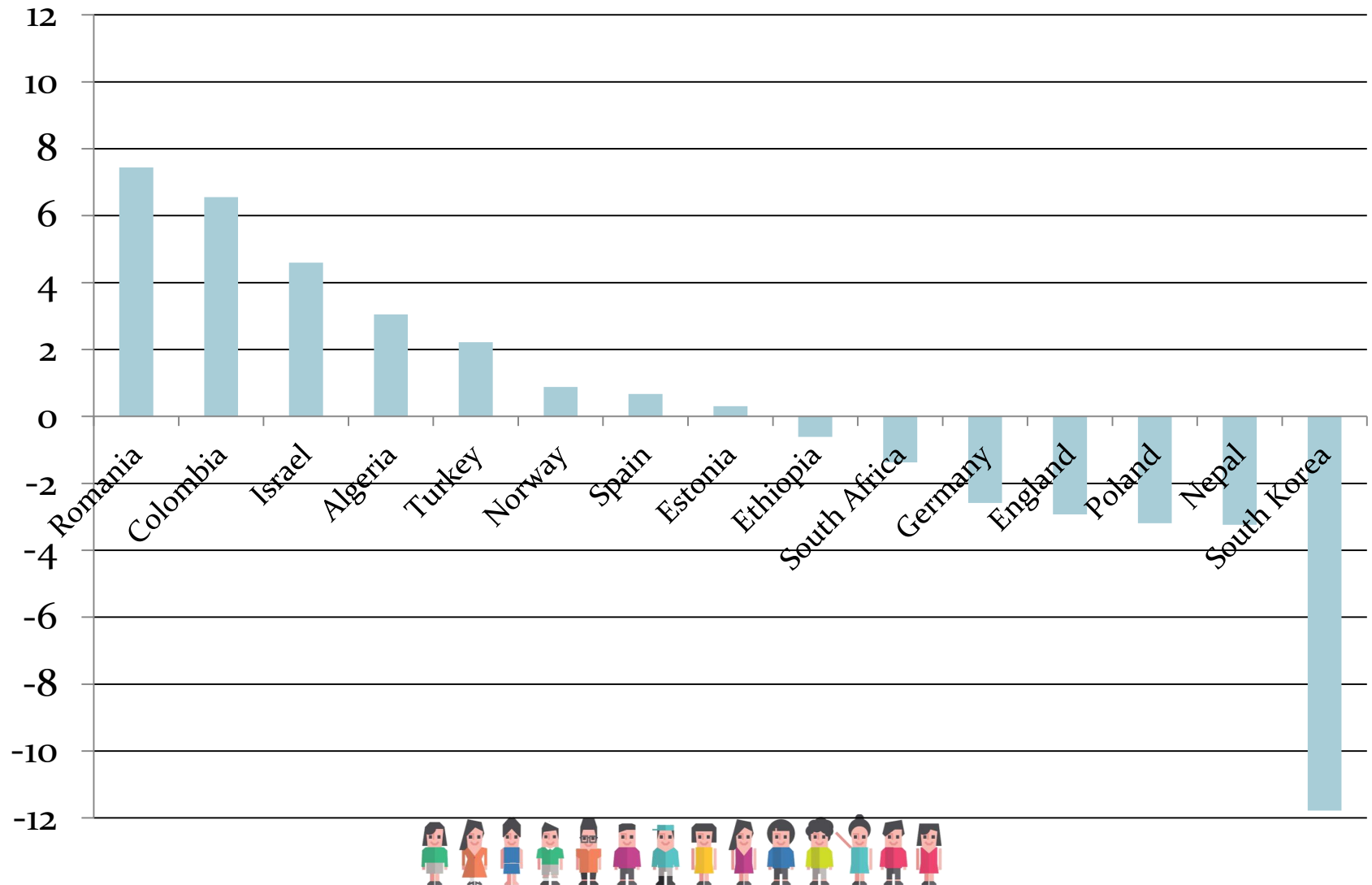
Distribution of life satisfaction



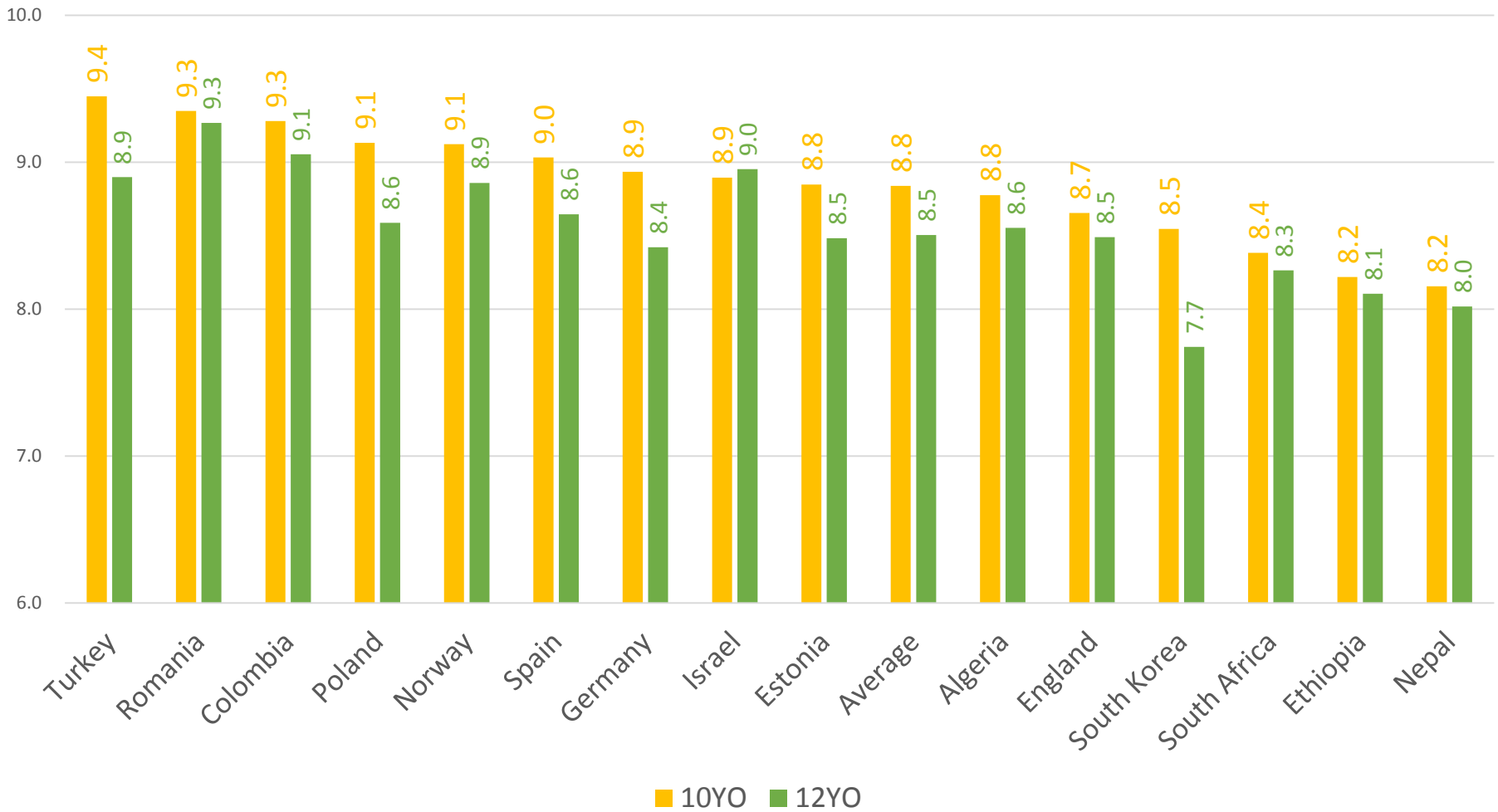
12 year-old

Life as a whole

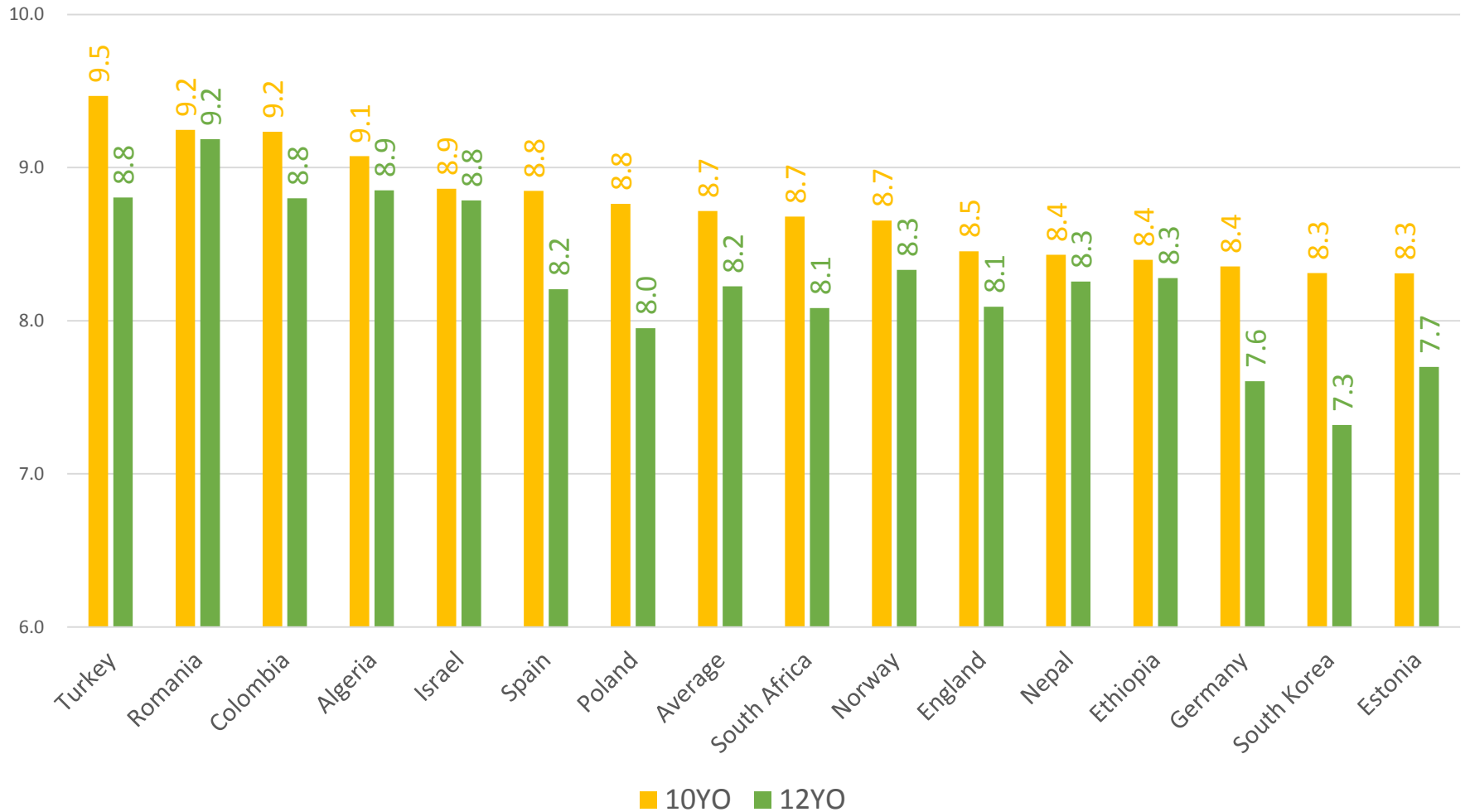
Comparison with the average of the total sample



Life Satisfaction: PWI (9 items, 0-10, 11point scale)



Emotion: Positive Affect (6 items, 0-10, 11point scale)



Domain Comparison:

Various Subjective Well-being domains

Domain Satisfaction

- GDSI: General Domain Satisfaction Index (29 item, 0 to 10 point)
- Eight Domains

Satisfaction with...

Self

Area of Living

Family and home

Interpersonal Relationships

Time management

School

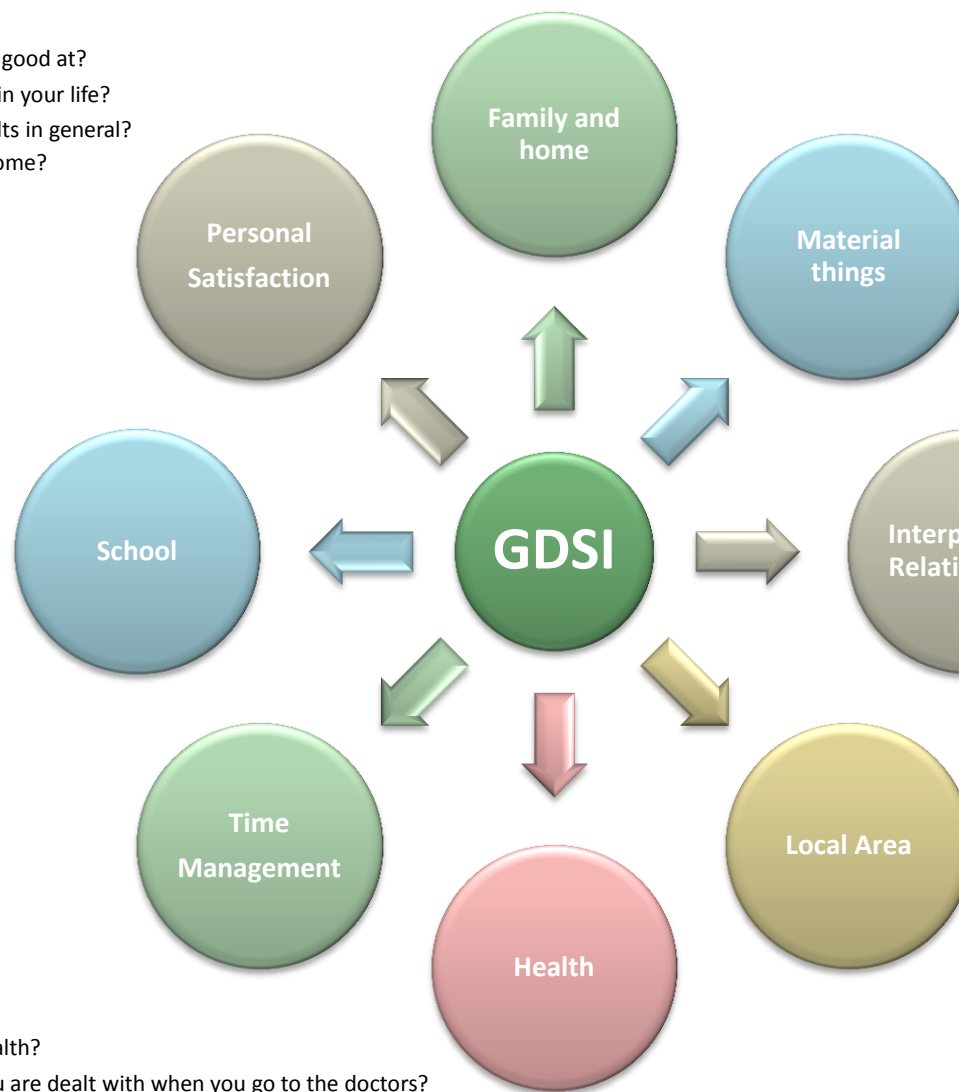
Health

Material Things



GDSI

General Domain Satisfaction Index at a glance



The freedom you have?
The amount of choice you have in life?
The way that you look?
Your self-confidence?
How safe you feel?
With the things you want to be good at?
What may happen to you later in your life?
How you are listened to by adults in general?
Doing things away from your home?

The house or flat where you live?
The people who live with you?
All the other people in your family?
Your family life?

How satisfied are you with all the things you have?

Your friends?
The people who live in your area?
Your relationships with people in general?

The local police in your area?
The outdoor areas children can use in your area?
The area where you live in general?

Your health?
How you are dealt with when you go to the doctors?

Other children in your class?
Your school marks?
Your school experience?
As a Student?
Things you learned?

How do you use your time?
What do you do in your free time?



Dependent variables

| Scale | Definition | Items |
|-------|--|---|
| SLSS | <p>Adapted version of the Student Life Satisfaction Scale</p> <p>11-point scale, from 'Not all agree' to 'Totally agree' is used. 4 items.</p> | <p>◆ Here are five sentences about how you feel about your life as a whole. Please tick a box to say how much you agree with each of the sentences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• My life is going well• My life is just right• I have a good life• I have what I want in line |



Independent variables

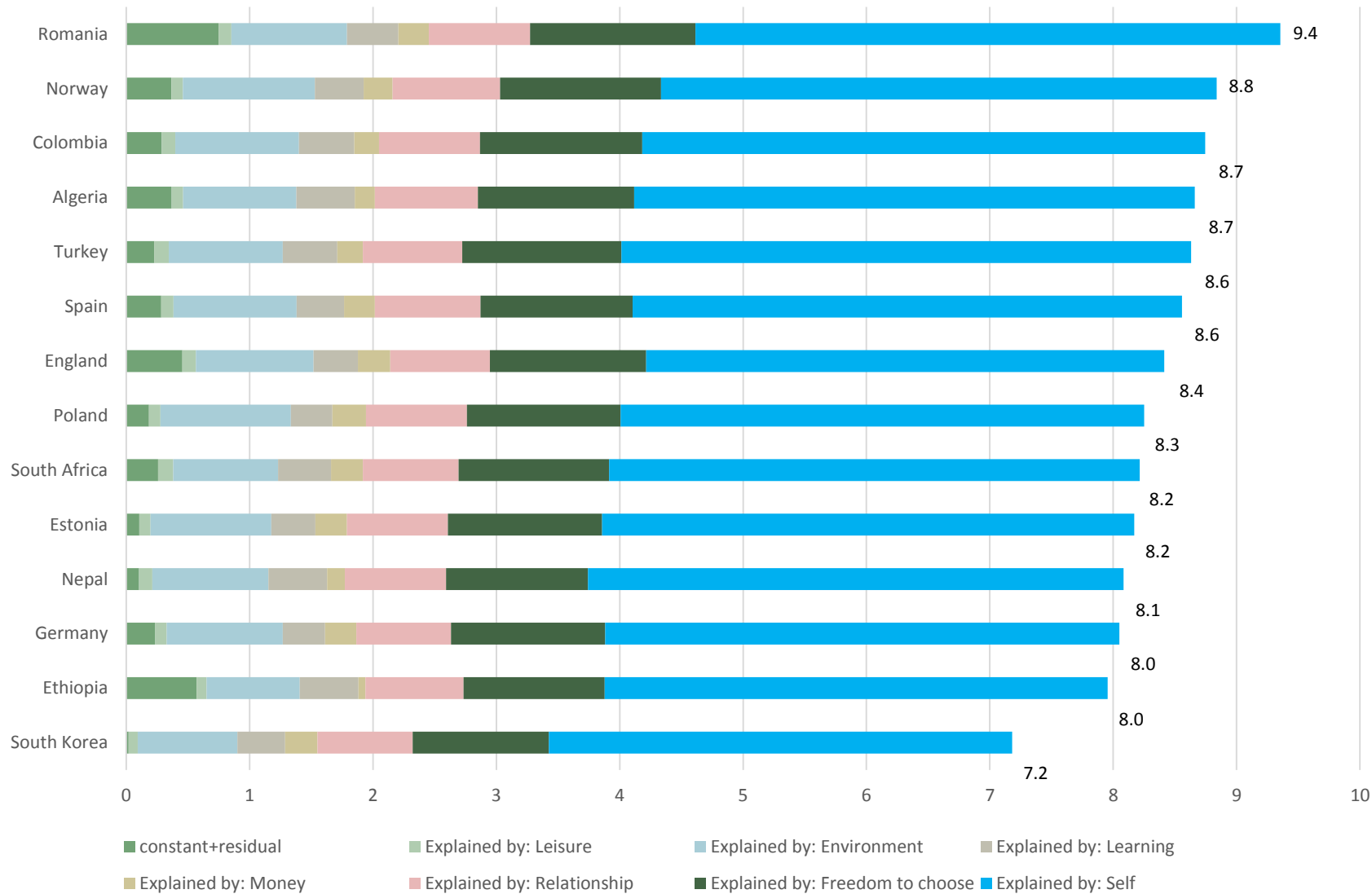
| Domains | Definition | Items |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Self | Have a positive view of themselves and an identity that is respected | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like being the way I am • I am good at managing my daily responsibilities • People are generally pretty friendly towards me |
| Environment | Have a safe and suitable home environment and local area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In my area there are enough places to play or to have a good time • I feel safe when I walk around in the area I live in • I feel safe at home • I feel safe at school • I have quiet place to study |
| Learning | The condition to learn and develop | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel that I am learning a lot • I like going to school |
| Leisure | Have opportunities to take part in positive activities to thrive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in organized leisure time activities (like youth movement, scout, ...) • Playing sports or doing exercise • Taking classes outside school time on matters different than at school |
| Money | Have enough of what matters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothes in good condition to go to school in • Access to computer at home • Access to Internet • Mobile phone • Your own room • Books to read for fun • A family car for transportation • Your own stuff to listen to music • A television at home that you can use |
| Relationships | Have positive relationships with family and friends | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My parents (or the people who look after me) listen to me and take what I say into account • My friends are usually nice to me • My parents (or the people who look after me) treat me fairly • My teachers listen to me and take what I say into account • My teachers treat me fairly |
| Freedom to choose | Have enough choices for time use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have enough choice about how I spend my time |

Results of GDSI at a glance

| | FAMILY AND HOME | MATERIAL THINGS | INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS | THE AREA OF LIVING | HEALTH | TIME MANAGEMENT | SCHOOL | PERSONAL SATISFACTION | GDSI |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------|-----------------|--------|-----------------------|--------|
| Romania | 115.79 | 110.49 | 116.31 | 114.29 | 115.60 | 118.94 | 112.48 | 116.54 | 115.05 |
| Norway | 109.26 | 108.88 | 116.77 | 122.35 | 108.20 | 102.74 | 109.04 | 104.19 | 110.18 |
| Colombia | 107.99 | 107.91 | 99.85 | 102.70 | 108.35 | 113.96 | 108.48 | 113.12 | 107.79 |
| Israel | 105.68 | 108.67 | 108.63 | 103.34 | 111.85 | 108.13 | 105.45 | 109.53 | 107.66 |
| Turkey | 109.90 | 100.74 | 104.19 | 102.51 | 104.38 | 105.19 | 100.11 | 108.61 | 104.45 |
| Spain | 102.18 | 104.83 | 110.92 | 103.65 | 107.33 | 102.76 | 94.55 | 99.95 | 103.27 |
| England | 101.84 | 104.72 | 102.74 | 103.26 | 95.90 | 99.05 | 95.34 | 94.64 | 99.69 |
| Poland | 100.59 | 103.69 | 94.08 | 105.33 | 96.28 | 97.51 | 89.47 | 101.21 | 98.52 |
| Algeria | 102.51 | 85.59 | 99.79 | 87.77 | 99.90 | 94.07 | 110.04 | 103.59 | 97.91 |
| Estonia | 99.03 | 100.61 | 98.01 | 96.97 | 94.61 | 99.88 | 91.36 | 97.67 | 97.27 |
| Germany | 97.44 | 102.53 | 93.90 | 96.27 | 99.20 | 100.89 | 84.32 | 96.93 | 96.43 |
| South Africa | 93.27 | 98.99 | 84.10 | 86.25 | 100.44 | 96.31 | 102.07 | 96.10 | 94.69 |
| Nepal | 80.12 | 98.26 | 89.68 | 96.92 | 91.74 | 89.95 | 108.69 | 84.48 | 92.48 |
| Ethiopia | 80.87 | 73.38 | 93.57 | 91.81 | 90.42 | 93.93 | 107.21 | 93.96 | 90.64 |
| South Korea | 93.53 | 90.71 | 87.47 | 86.55 | 75.80 | 76.68 | 81.41 | 79.48 | 83.95 |



Decomposition of SWB by countries (SLSS)



Different level of influences to ‘determine’ children’s SWB

‘Weak’ factors

Learning

Money

‘Moderate’ factors

The ‘unexplained’

Leisure

Environment

Relationship

‘Strong’ factors

Freedom to choose

Self



Data collection in Ethiopia



A few more issues..



Is it about age?

8 year-olds

- The version for children aged 8 was shorter
- Satisfaction items were phrased in term of happiness ('How happy you feel with...')
- A scale of emoticons was used for the these items



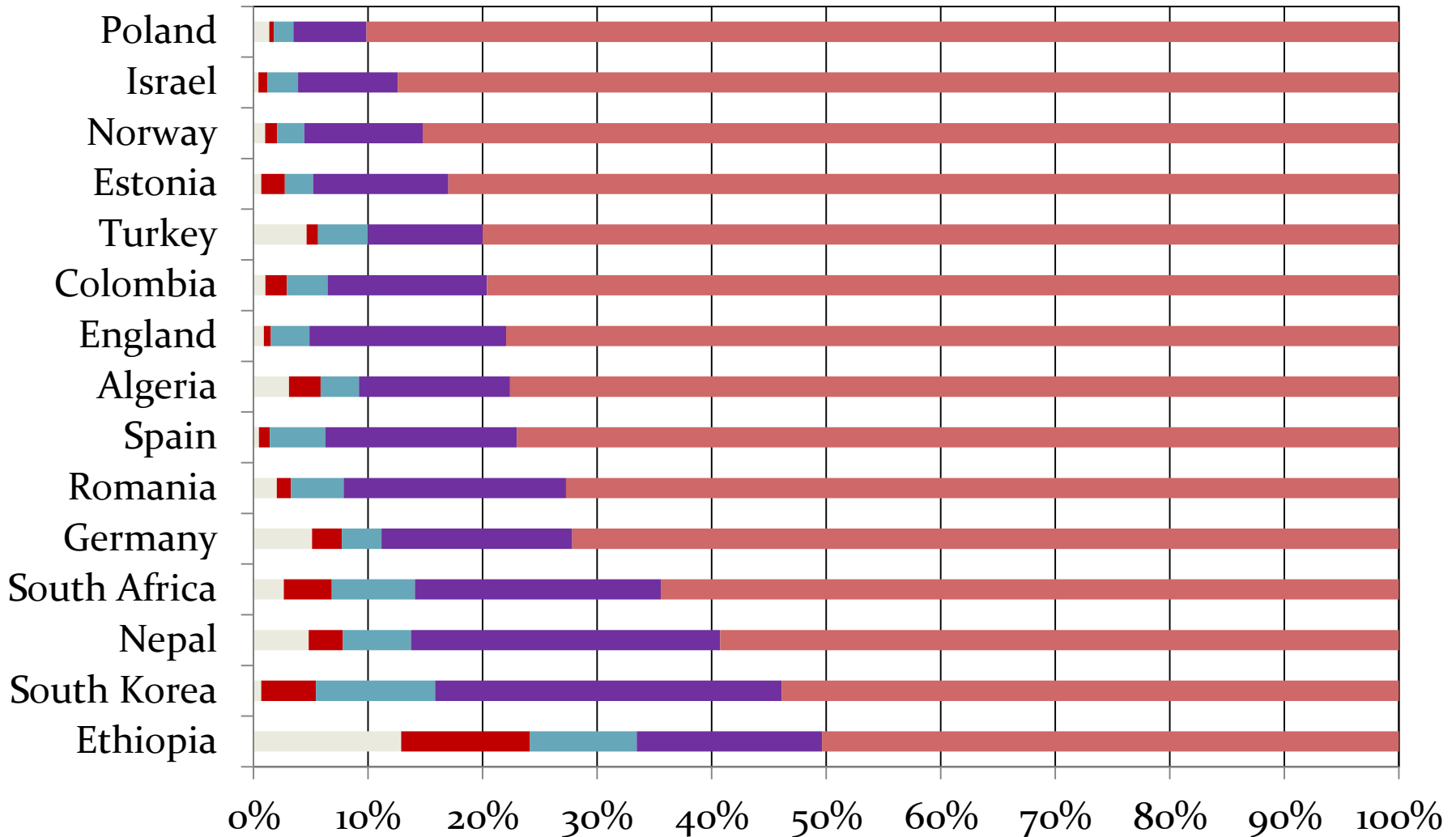
Your home and the people you live with



12 year-olds

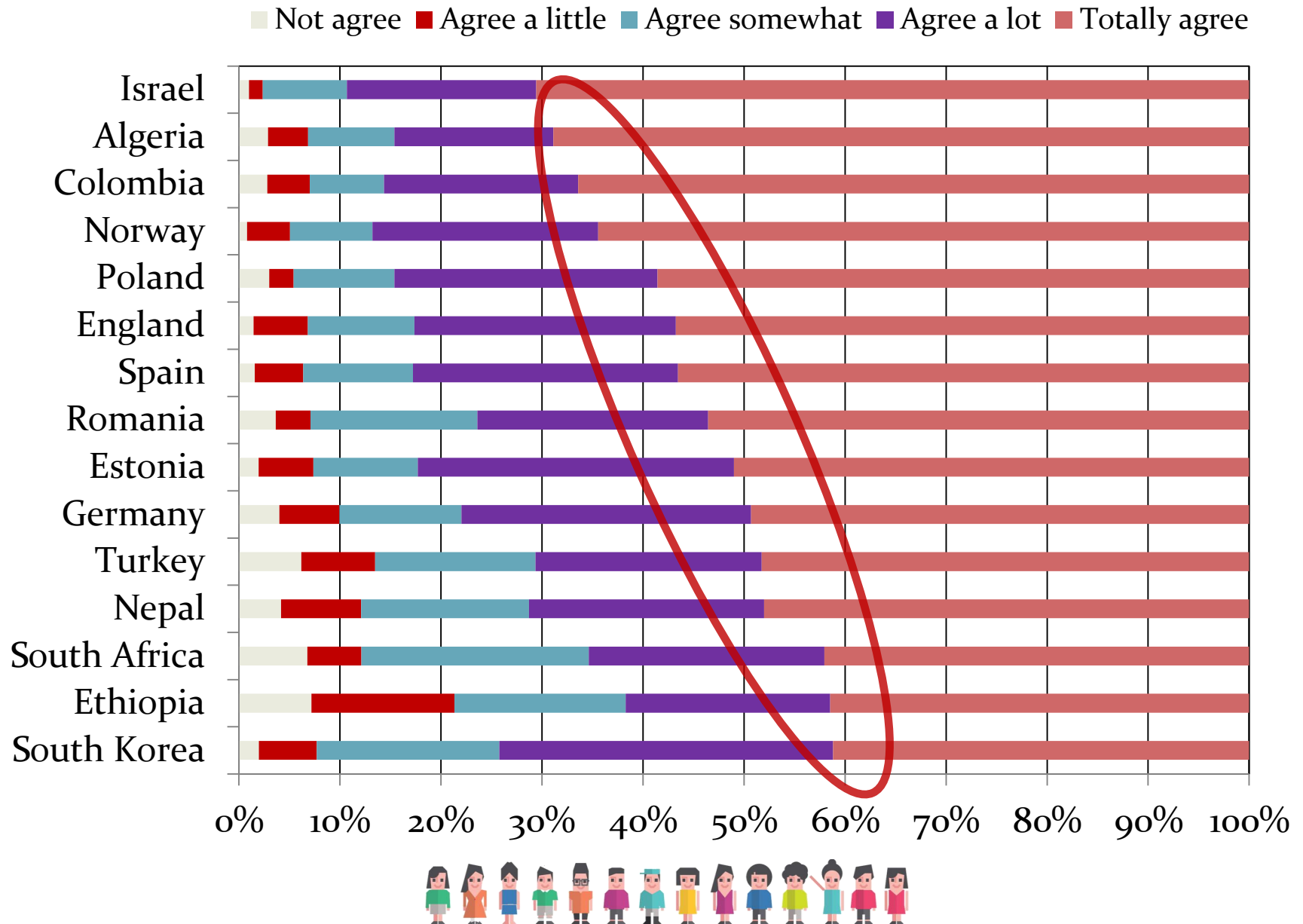
I feel safe at home

Not agree Agree a little Agree somewhat Agree a lot Totally agree

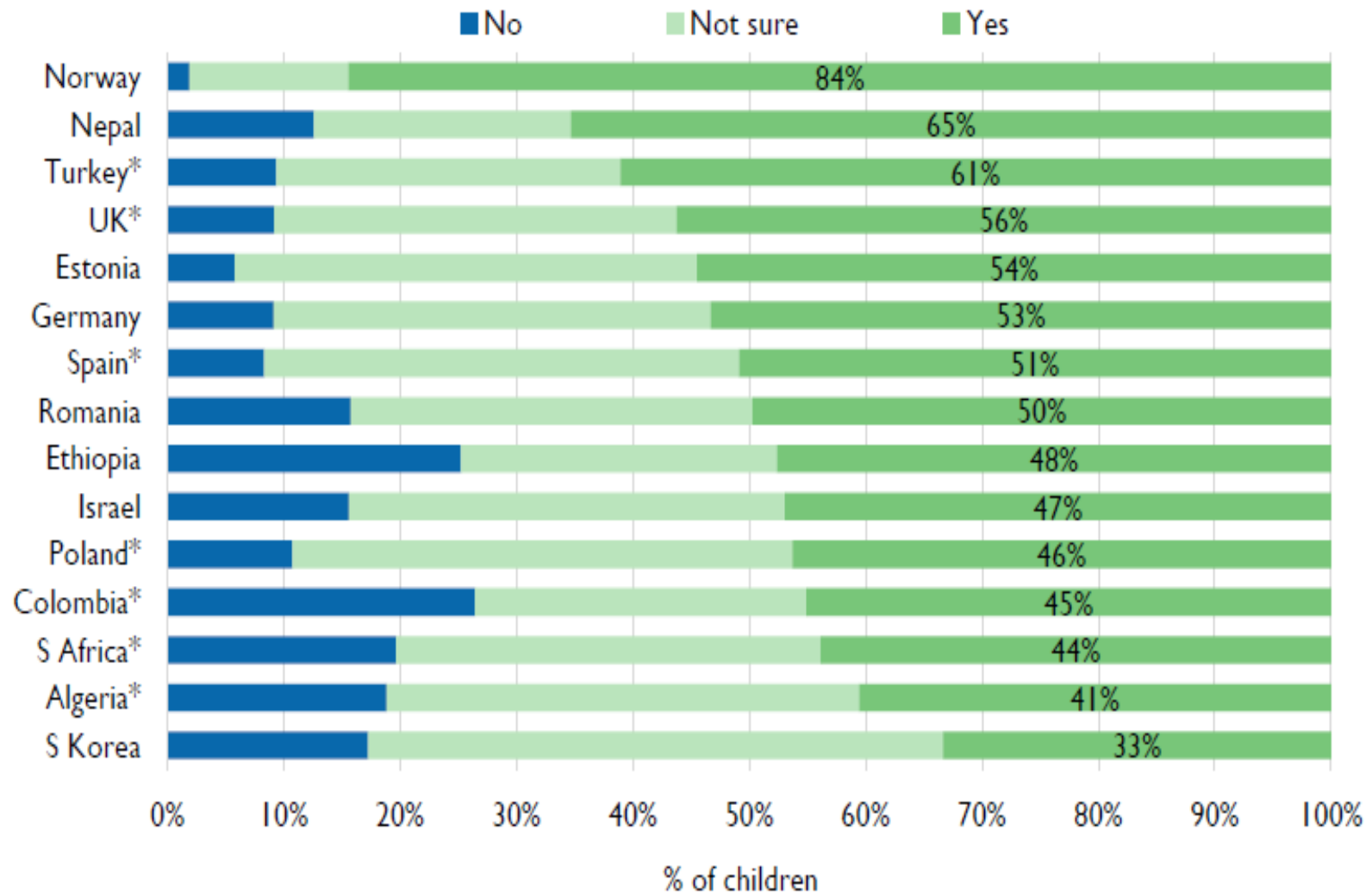


12 year-olds

My parents listen to me and take what I say into account

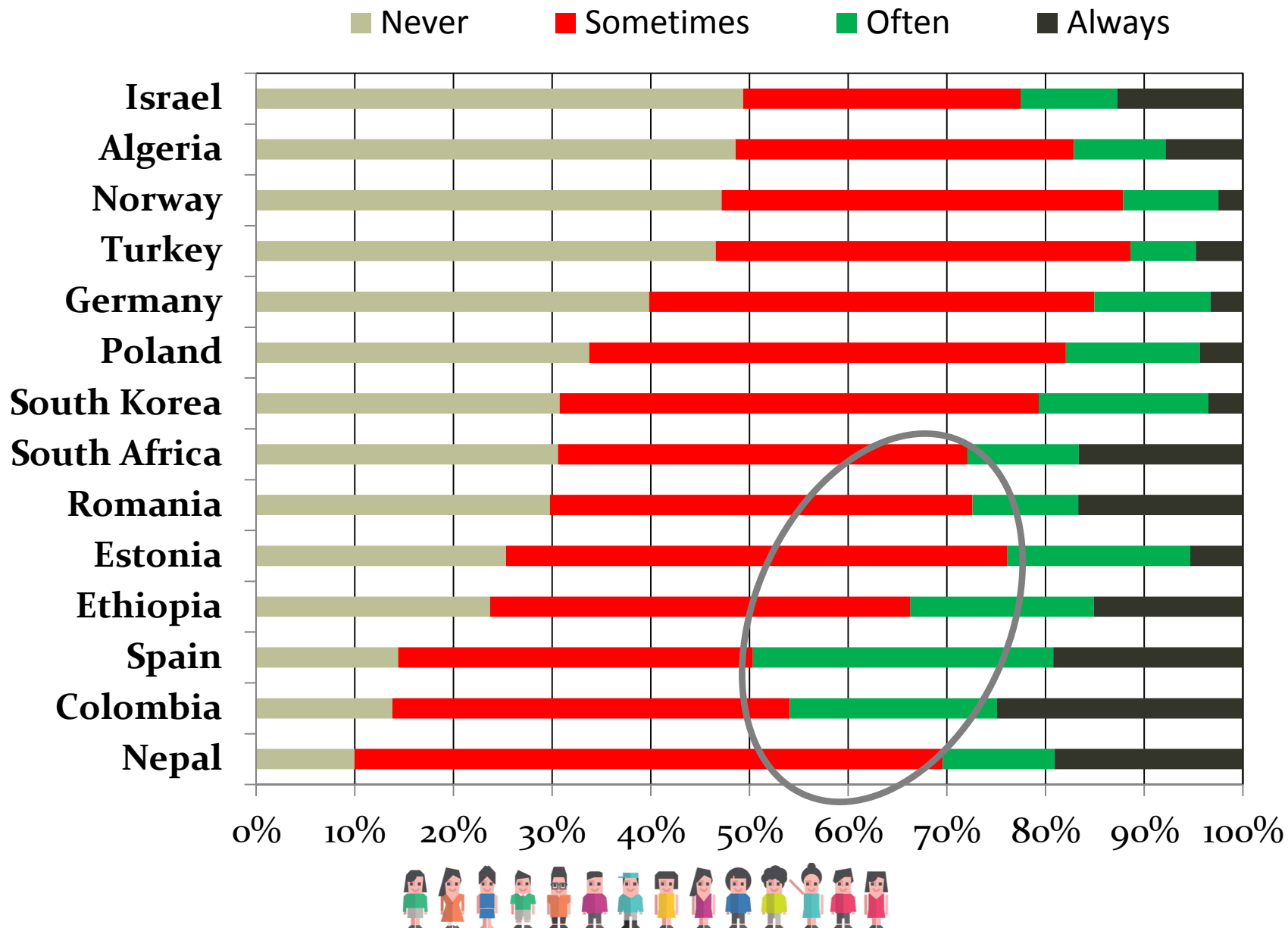


Do adults respect children's rights?

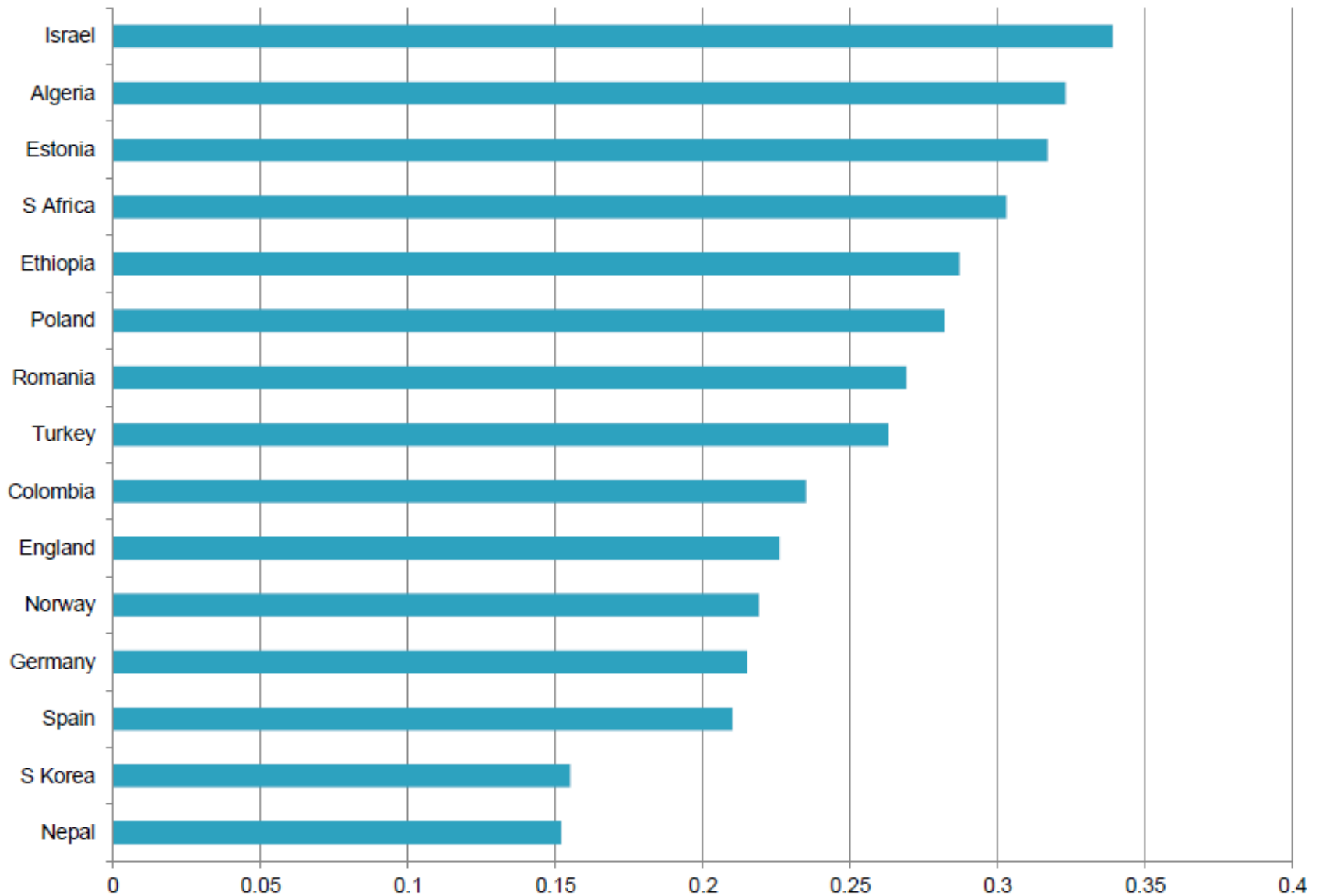


Money and things you have

How often worry about how much money family has



% of variance in PWI explained by lacking material items (beta coefficients)

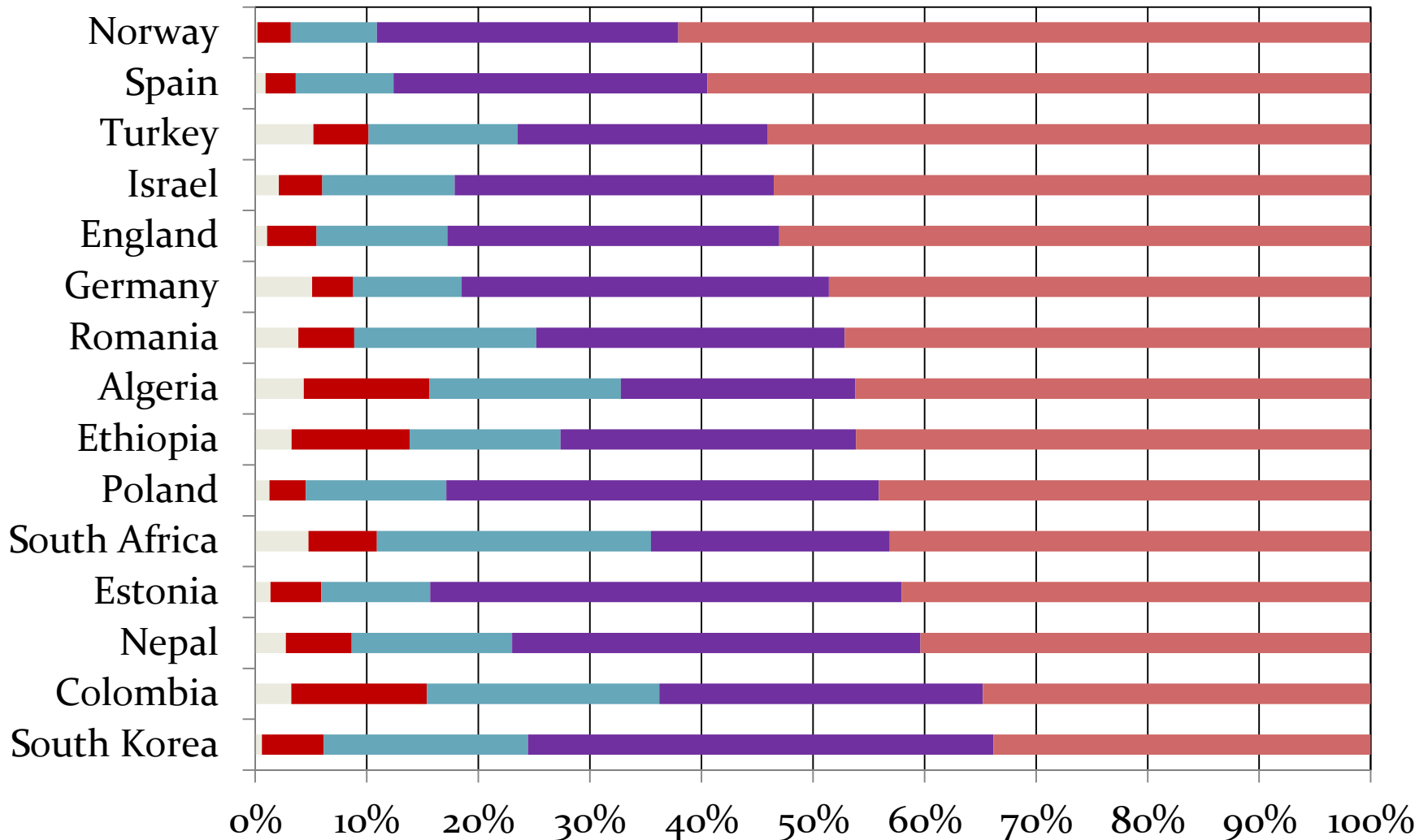


Your friends and other people

12 year-old

My friends are usually nice to me

Not agree Agree a little Agree somewhat Agree a lot Totally agree

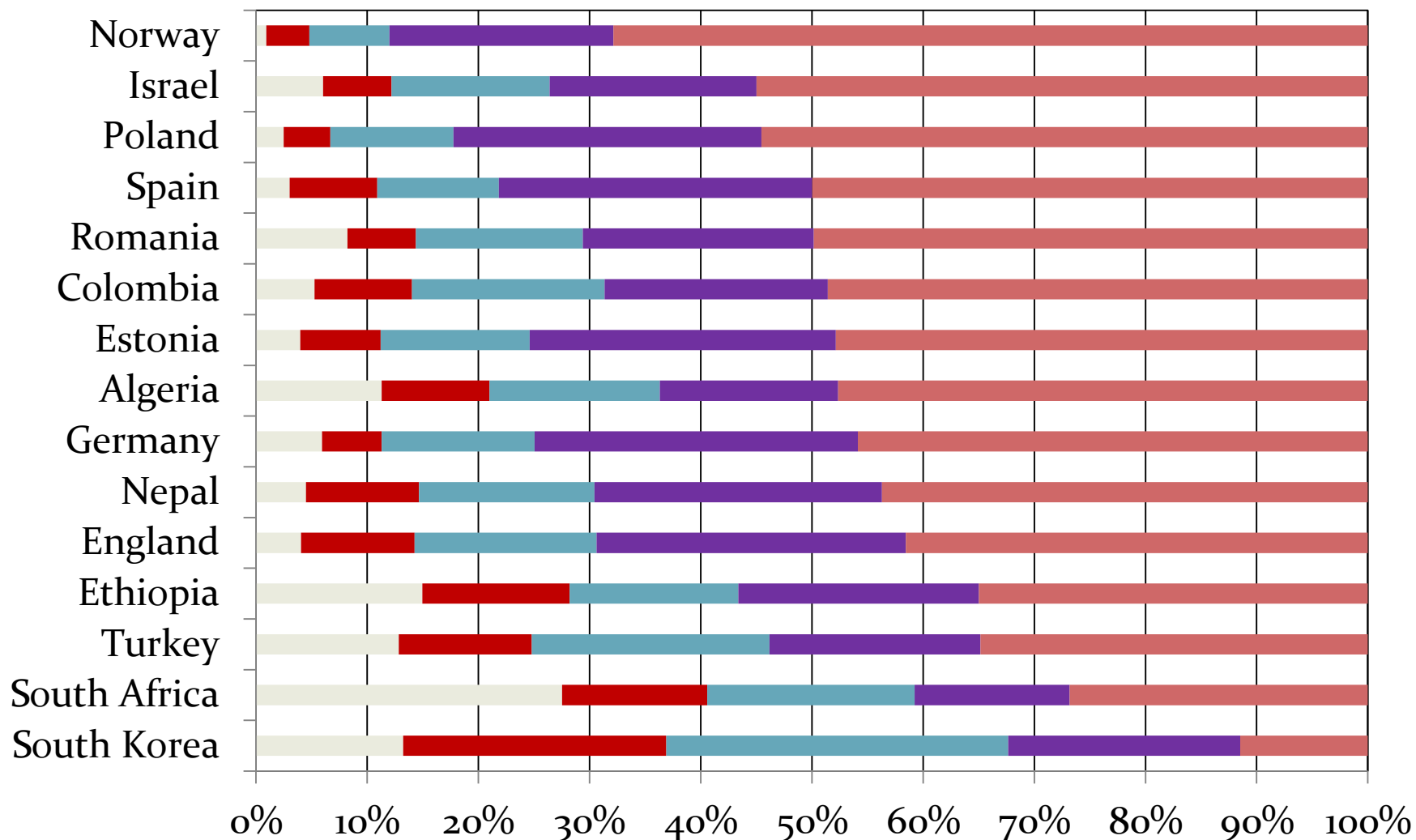


The area you live in

12 year-old

I feel safe when I walk around in the area I live in

Not agree Agree a little Agree somewhat Agree a lot Totally agree



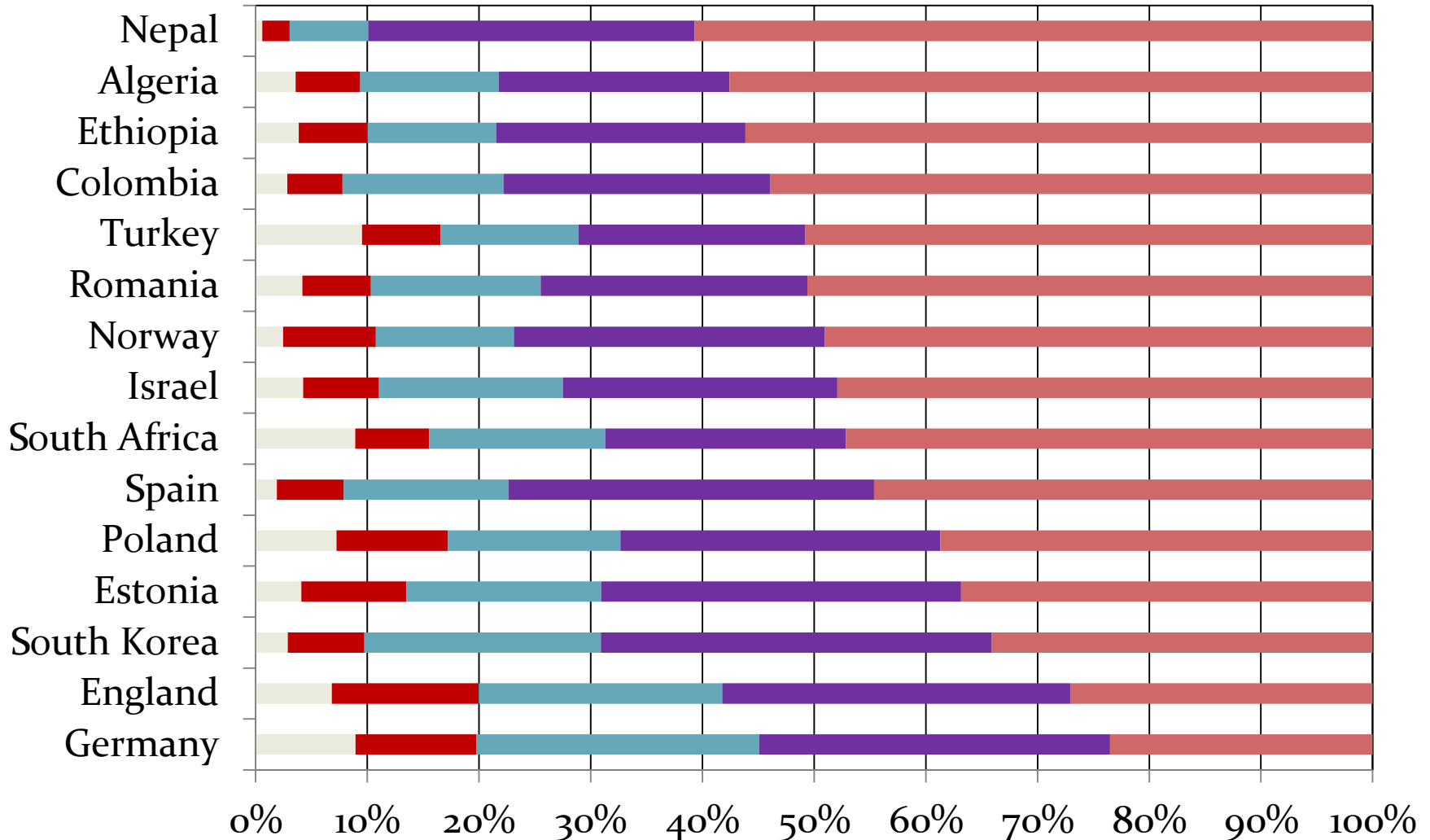
School



12 year-old

My teachers treat me fairly

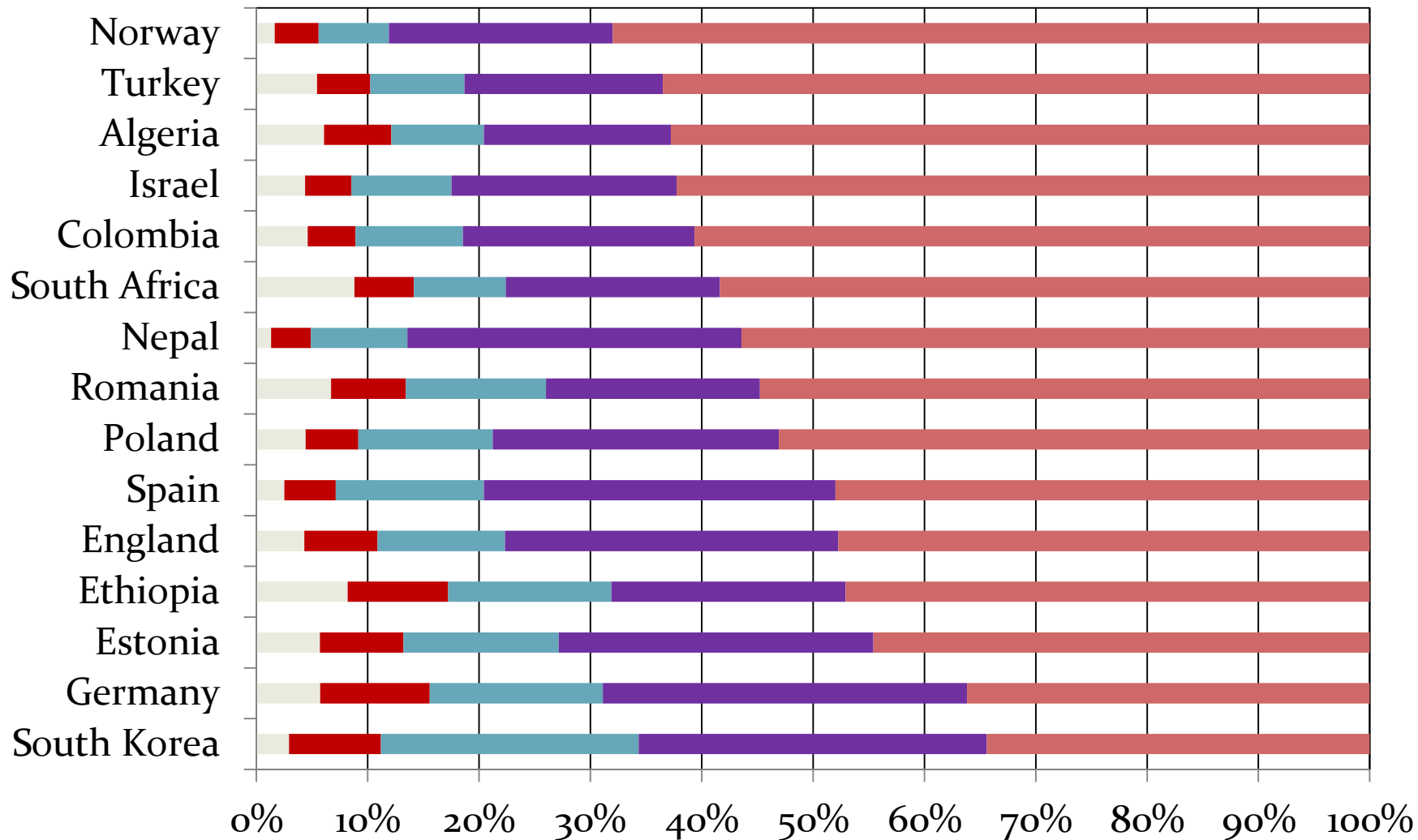
Not agree Agree a little Agree somewhat Agree a lot Totally agree



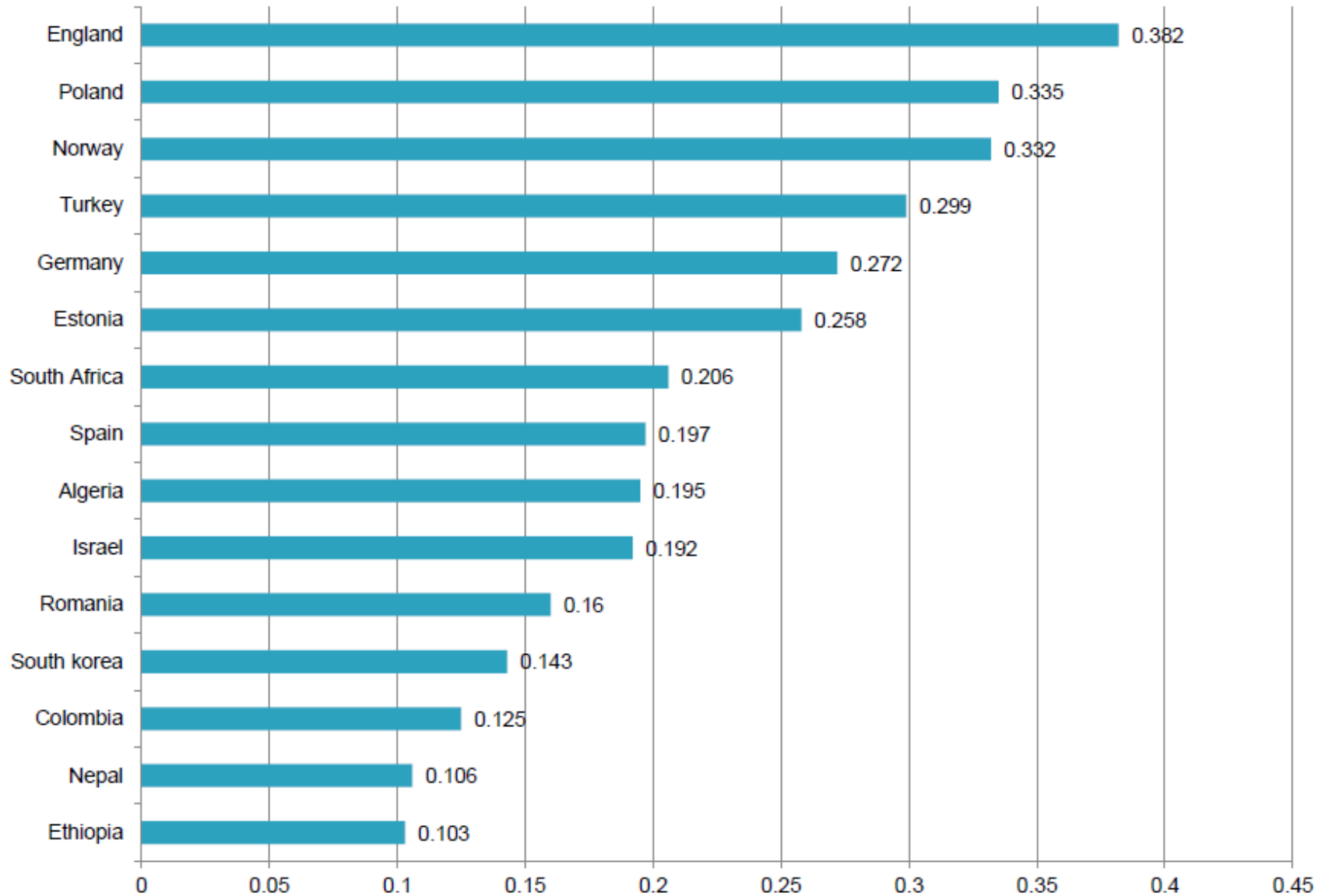
12 year-old

I feel safe at school

Not agree Agree a little Agree somewhat Agree a lot Totally agree



Contribution of bullying to SWB



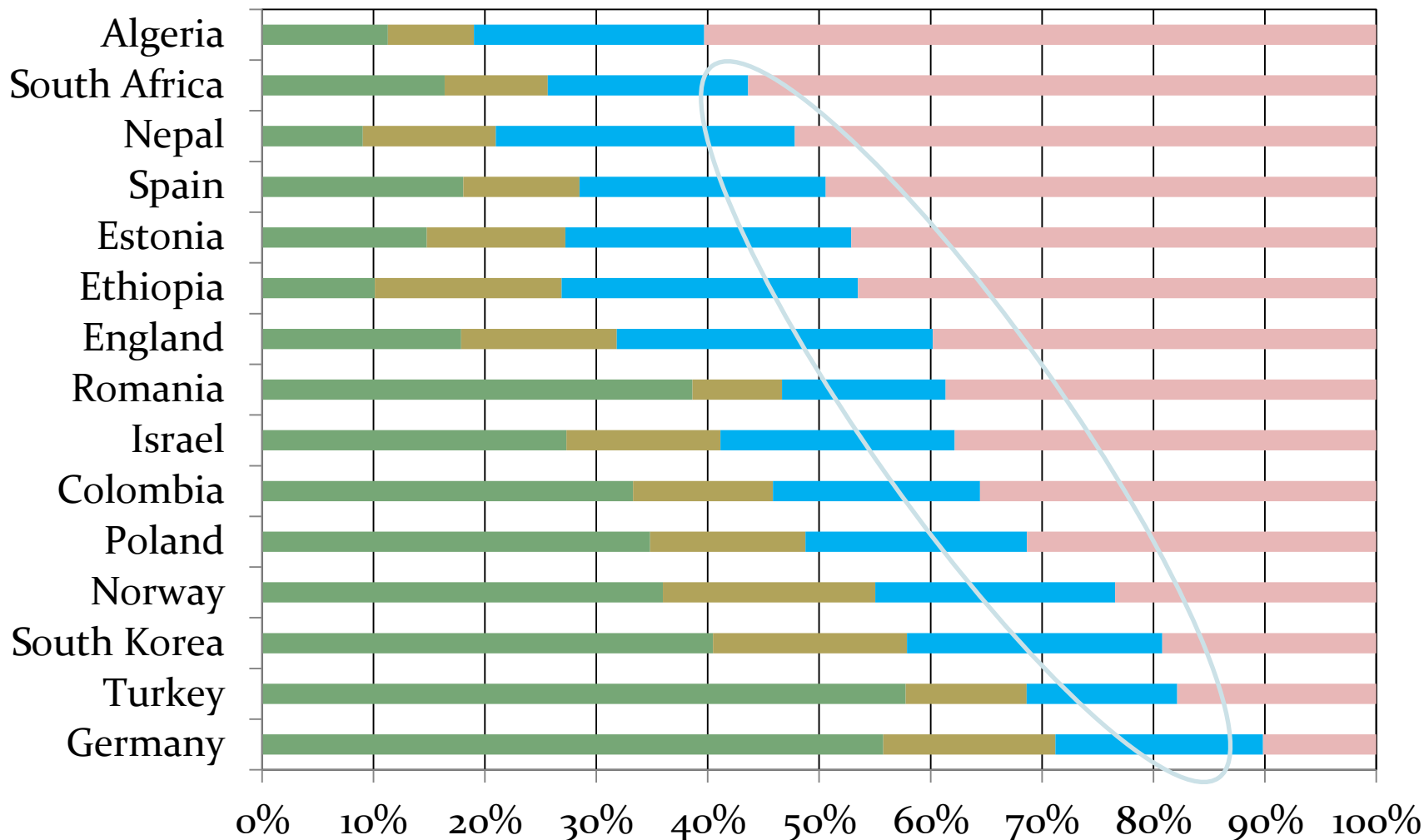
Your activities and satisfaction



12 year-old

Taking care of family members

■ Rarely or never ■ Less than once a week ■ Once or twice a week ■ Everyday or almost everyday



Discussion



Discussion

The results showed that the variations of children's SWB exist across countries.

- South Korea, Nepal, and Ethiopia's children reported low level of SWB consistently.
- But, why?



What needs to be done?

- If children's well being is our goal – we need to discover what promotes or harms it.
- Our data set enabled us to explore the variance in children's well being and what is associated with it.
- Findings were surprising



The characteristics of children's well being

- The variance in children's SWB is barely explained by socio-demographic variables.
- It is better explained by variables that measure children's relations and perceptions.
- This is a new and growing area of research.
- Initial studies found three strong predictors of children's SWB:
 - **Bullying**
 - **Perception of safety**
 - **Respect for children and inclusion of their voice**



children tell us that we need to focus on ensuring their safety, reducing violence and fostering better family and social relations.



Thank you very much!



Asher Ben-Arieh

Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, The
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

www.isciweb.org