

The subjective well-being of Spanish adolescents: Variations according to different living arrangements

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The SWB of children in care

- Only few researches have compared the **SWB of children in care with other groups of children** showing mix results (Muñoz & Ferrière, 2000; Poletto & Koller, 2011; Davidson-Arad, 2005, 2010)
- Various studies have found **associations between lower levels of well-being and certain problems in childhood** (e.g. depression, high-risk behaviors, suicide attempts and eating disorders) (Proctor, Linley & Maltby, 2009, Rees, 2011)
- A **lack of stability in residential and foster care** is one of the factors increasingly more accepted as disrupting the well-being of this population (Sinclair et al., 2007; Montserrat et al., 2011)
- **Less agreement** is found among studies into the well-being of **children who live with only one parent**, with more negative results standing out in the United States (OECD, 2009)

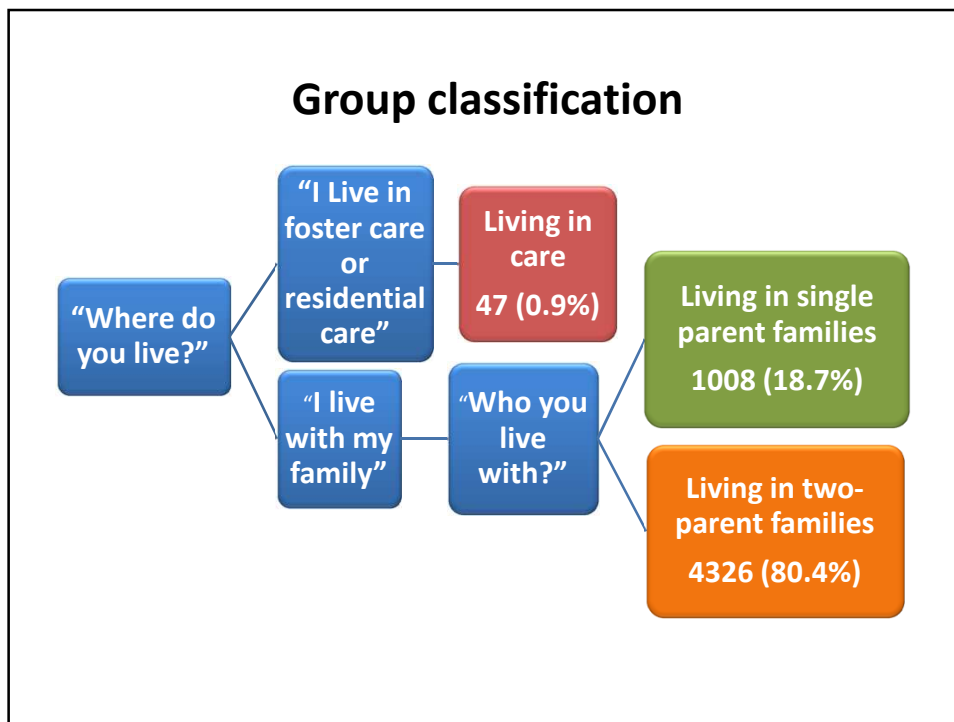
The purpose

- To examine differences in the SWB of young adolescents in three different living arrangements in Spain:
 1. Adolescents living **in care**
 2. Adolescents living **in single parent families**
 3. Adolescents living **in two-parent families**

Representative sample of Spanish 1st year students in the second compulsory education

Method and sample characteristics

- **Sampling:** secondary schools with a 1st year, and a stratified cluster random sampling was employed using a list of all relevant schools in Spain
- **138 schools** were randomly selected, with two 1st year classes included from each school
- The living arrangement of 553 adolescents (9.3%) was impossible to be classified due to missing data
- The final sample: **5381 adolescents** (mean of **age of 12.08**, SD = 0.68)
- No differences were found between those included in the final sample and those who were excluded in terms of gender, country of origin (Spain or other), school location and type of school



Instruments

- **Five life domains:** School, social relationships, leisure time, health, oneself
- **Scales:** Satisfaction (0-10), agreement (1= 'strongly disagree' to 5= 'very much agree') and frequency (1= 'never' to 4= 'every day')
- **SWB:**
 - OLS Single-item scale (0-10)
 - A short adapted 5-item version of the Student Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS, Huebner, 1991) ($\alpha=.80$)
- **Background questions:** gender, place of birth and changes in their lives in the past year

Analysis

- Due to the **notable differences between the size** of the group of adolescents in care and the other two groups, and the inequality of variances between the groups in the dependent variables, **non-parametric analyses were used**.
 - Differences between the three groups in relation to the items on SWB were assessed using the **Kruskal-Wallis test**
 - When a significant difference was found, post-hoc tests were conducted using **Mann-Whitney's U test**
- Differences among the three groups in relation to the nominal background items were examined using the **Chi-square test**

Differences in stability

	Living in two-parent families (%)	Living in single parent families (%)	Living in care (%)	Total (%)	χ^2	df
<i>Change in parents or carers (n = 5211)</i>					363.30***	2
Yes	2.3	17.0	19.0	5.2		
No	97.7	83.0	81.0	94.8		
<i>Moved house (n = 5240)</i>					208.79***	2
Yes	11.8	28.6	47.6	15.2		
No	88.2	71.4	52.4	84.8		
<i>Moved to a new area (n = 5233)</i>					93.92***	2
Yes	5.7	13.6	25.0	7.4		
No	94.3	86.4	75.0	92.6		
<i>Changed school (n = 5238)</i>					21.73***	2
Yes	36.2	41.2	63.6	37.4		
No	63.8	58.8	36.4	62.6		

** p < .01, *** p < .001

Differences in SWB

	Living in two-parent families		Living in single parent families		Living in care		H
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
<i>School</i>							
Satisfaction with homework	8.28	2.10	7.49^a	2.60	6.73^a	2.83	92.55***
Satisfaction with classmates	9.14	1.52	9.01^a	1.65	7.96^{ab}	2.69	16.26***
Agree that classmates treat me well	4.53	0.72	4.42^a	0.79	4.02^{ab}	1.20	27.03***
Agree they feel safe at school	4.46	0.81	4.36^a	0.91	4.09^a	1.07	13.35**
<i>Leisure time</i>							
Satisfaction with leisure time (index)	8.99	1.36	8.73^a	1.63	8.49^a	1.61	21.34***

^a Significantly lower than living in two-parent families.

^b Significantly lower than living in single parent families.

** p < .01, ***p < .001.

Differences in SWB

	Living in two-parent families		Living in single parent families		Living in care		H
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
<i>Oneself</i>							
Satisfaction with yourself	9.08	1.59	8.86^a	1.85	8.05^a	2.78	16.04***
Satisfaction with amount of opportunities in life	9.08	1.51	8.80^a	1.84	8.26^a	2.35	20.17***
Satisfaction with how you are listened to by adults	8.70	1.82	8.44^a	2.01	7.79^a	2.67	17.57***
Agree about feeling lonely	1.64	0.98	1.81^c	1.09	2.39^{cd}	1.40	38.10***
Agree about feeling happy	4.67	0.66	4.52^a	0.81	4.37^a	0.87	48.08***
Agree about worrying a lot	1.75	0.80	1.81	0.83	1.84	0.52	4.28
Agree optimistic about the future	4.00	1.07	4.00	1.09	3.70	1.08	4.56

^a Significantly lower than living in two-parent families.

^c Significantly higher than living in two-parent families.

^d Significantly higher than living in single parent families.

** p < .01, ***p < .001.

Differences in SWB

	Living in two-parent families		Living in single parent families		Living in care		H
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
<i>SWB</i>							
single-item overall life satisfaction	9.26	1.43	8.94^a	1.66	8.19^a	2.71	46.16 ^{***}
SLSS-5	4.32	0.69	4.07^a	0.82	3.96^a	0.98	79.93 ^{***}

^a Significantly lower than living in two-parent families.

** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Differences in SWB

	Living in two-parent families		Living in single parent families		Living in care		H
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
<i>Social relationships</i>							
Satisfaction with relationships with people in general	9.15	1.36	9.06^a	1.43	8.27^{ab}	2.23	12.68 ^{**}
Satisfaction with friends	9.30	1.41	9.26	1.46	8.36^{ab}	2.58	7.09 [*]
Agree they have enough friends	4.63	0.70	4.57^a	0.75	4.20^a	1.25	9.96 ^{**}
Agree that friends are nice to me	4.52	0.72	4.50	0.74	4.31	0.97	2.11
Frequency of having fun with friends	3.62	0.62	3.54^a	0.67	3.33^a	0.90	17.60 ^{***}
<i>Health</i>							
Satisfaction with health	9.51	1.12	9.33^a	1.42	8.76^a	2.10	19.75 ^{***}
Satisfaction with how doctor treats them	9.26	1.41	9.11^a	1.58	8.00^{ab}	2.92	13.36 ^{**}

^a Significantly lower than living in two-parent families.

^b Significantly lower than living in single parent families.

* p < .05 ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Final considerations

- The first point worth highlighting from the results is **the generally high scores obtained for SWB** in general and life satisfaction in particular
- **Lower SWB among children living in single parent families and children in care**: school satisfaction, leisure time oneself and overall satisfaction → stability
- **Differences between children in care and children living in single parent families**: social relationships and health → labelling and stability

For more reading

- Dinisman, T; Montserrat, C. & Casas, F. (2012). The subjective well-being of Spanish adolescents: Variations according to different living arrangements. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 2374–2380
- Casas, F. & Bello, A. (Coords) (2012) *¿Qué afecta al bienestar de niños y niñas españoles de 1º de ESO?* Unicef España https://www.unicef.es/sites/www.unicef.es/files/Bienestar_in_fantil_subjetivo_en_Espakua.pdf