

Respond! Housing Association

Mental Health & Well-Being in Respond! Estates: Vulnerability & Resilience

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Why a Respond! Study of Mental Health and Well-Being

- When Respond! was established 30 years ago in 1982 (see Extra Slide 1 at end), the term well-being was scarcely heard of. What does it mean?
- Well-being denotes the enjoyment of life (having and savouring positive experiences) but also assessing one's life as satisfactory and worthwhile (positive life satisfaction).
- Beyond that, well-being also suggests that one is well simply by being; that is why it is called well-being rather than well-doing! This is a philosophical perspective – one could even say it is the philosophical foundation of positive thinking! - which contains the apparent paradox that one can be well and still have problems.
- The idea of well-being both explains why everyone seeks it while also raising the question, 'what is it that hinders the experience of well-being?'
- Addressing that question, and from that perspective, is at the heart of the Respond! study.

Why a Respond! Study o Mental Health and Well-Being

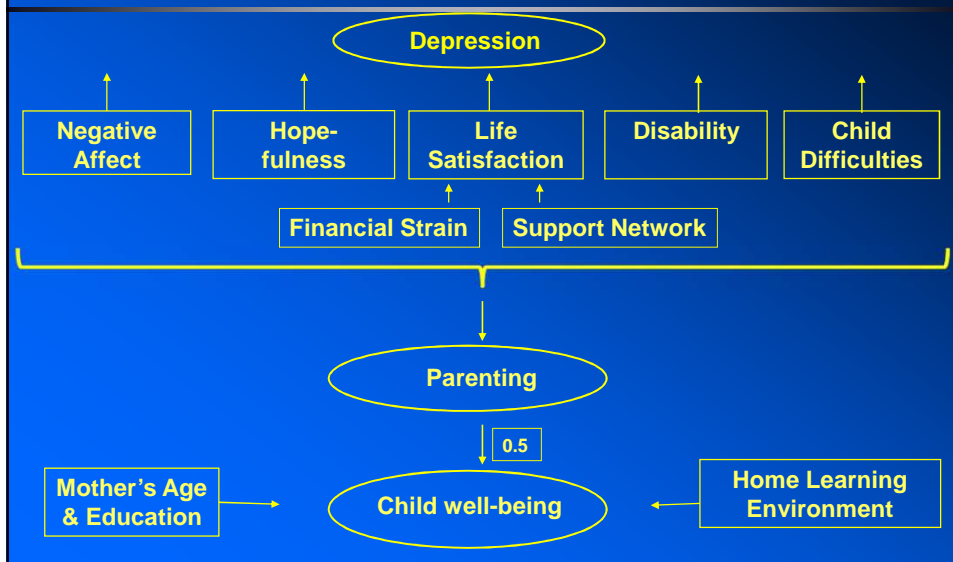
The term well-being has become popular for a number of reasons:

- Indicators of progress, especially economic, omit or mislead about the qualities which individuals and society value (quality of life, positive emotions, relationships with family and friends, trust and solidarity).
- The effect of money on the experience of well-being is not as great or as simple as people commonly believe and therefore not a good indicator of well-being generally
- In health, the 'disease model' has paid insufficient attention to what contributes to physical and mental health – and to the possibility of living a full life even without perfect health - leading to emergence of the concept of 'recovery' and the field of positive psychology
- Well-being is also important because people who are high in well-being function more effectively.
- The Respond! study touches upon all of these aspects of well-being because it analyses variation in well-being where everyone has a similar level of income and risk of poverty but vary greatly in terms of their resilience.

The Respond! Study,2008

- ✓ Based on a survey of 500 mothers, 24% of family households, across 34 out of 87; family estates
 - ✓ 100% of respondents were at risk of poverty, compared to 14% in Ireland (now 16%)
 - ✓ 40% were lone parents compared to 20% in Ireland
 - ✓ 25% were experiencing financial strain ('difficulty making ends meet') compared to 14% in Ireland (now 31% of all households and 48% of households at risk of poverty)
 - ✓ 25% reported having at least one on-going chronic health problem, illness or disability; two and a half times the rate in Ireland
- The two most important findings from the perspective of mental health and well-being are:
- ✓ rate of maternal depression was 22-30%, compared to 8-15% in GUI
 - ✓ children with difficulties was 23%, compared to 13-20% in GUI
- ✓ We now focus on maternal depression as a core indicator of mental health and well-being because it is widely recognised as the biggest risk to child development

Resilience and Vulnerability in Respond! Families



Implications - 1

- There is a substantial amount of research showing a 'social gradient' in outcomes associated with different levels of income in areas such as physical and mental health, education, employment, etc. This research is fundamental in understanding the qualities that are missing when there is in-equality.
- However, there are two limitations to the concept of 'social gradient':
 - ✓ the gradient is not linear and, for those at the very bottom of the income distribution, there is a steep decline in almost every outcome. At higher levels of income, the impact of income is progressively weaker
 - ✓ there is enormous variability and creativity in how people respond to similar life circumstances and the Respond! study shows a 'resilience gradient' between individuals and families living in broadly similar circumstances.
- The 'resilience gradient' is just as important as the 'social gradient'; in Respond! estates it is actually more important since it is what differentiates parents and children who are well from those who are not so well.
- Intervening to change the 'resilience gradient' of vulnerable families is a neglected aspect of social policy, family policy and housing policy.

Implications - 2

The findings of the Respond! study highlight some generic aspects of resilience and its counterpart, vulnerability:

- all elements of the family system are interconnected – ‘grouped’ – so that change in one creates cumulative change in all. In theory the point of intervention is arbitrary but in practice the point of intervention is always where vulnerability, of either parent or child, is experienced and expressed.
- the dependency of children on the well-being of their parents is probably the greatest source of both resilience and vulnerability in families. This is also the inter-generational link by which these qualities are transmitted from one generation to the next.
- ‘parental figures’ remain important influences on well-being beyond childhood: a large study of youth mental health in Ireland (14,000 aged 12-25) found that the strongest predictor of good mental health was having ‘One Good Adult’ in the young person’s life.
- we know that childcare is effective in promoting the development of children but the best childcare programmes have less impact than parents.
- the possibility of improving parenting – understood as a relationship with the child that is warm, responsive and authoritative – has been demonstrated through numerous programmes and working with parents similar to those in Respond! estates and social housing generally.

Implications - 3

- Respond! has developed a family support and mental health strategy in response to these findings. This is significant in a number of ways:
 - Respond! is one of the first housing providers in Ireland to link housing provision with family support and mental health services
 - addressing housing needs without also building the resilience of vulnerable parents is unlikely to improve outcomes for children.
 - Respond! is already putting into practice the type of service integration that is envisaged by the new Child and Family Support Agency to achieve the five national outcomes for children
 - it is hoped that Respond! may be foreshadowing a new model for the management of social housing, including the regeneration of housing estates, by building the resilience of parents and children
 - the Respond! model facilitates the accurate identification of need and the skills to address those needs directly or to refer them to more specialised services. This may be a more appropriate form of targeting compared to traditional area-based strategies whose effectiveness remains unproven.

Implications - 4

- The Respond! model of integrating housing and family support merits consideration by other social housing providers, most notably Local Authorities who manage nearly half of all social housing in Ireland. This would need to be led by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.
- The Respond! model also merits support from the new Child and Family Support Agency and its parent Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The new agency will have direct responsibility for delivering both family support and mental health services for children.
- The Respond! model merits support from the HSE's Community Mental Health Teams in keeping with the HSE's proposal in the 2011 mental health Consultation Document to 'develop shared specified interventions with the community and voluntary sector' (p.20).

Finally

- We began with the observation that when Respond! was established 30 years ago, the term 'well-being' was scarcely heard of.
- Similarly, the term 'recovery' was also unheard of at that time but is now one of the cornerstones of mental health policy and practice in Ireland and across the world.
- Significantly, 'recovery' resonates with the same philosophical message as well-being because it denotes the idea that a person can 'recover' a satisfying and meaningful life without necessarily having to 'recover' from their mental health problems and other difficulties - though that may also happen, and may be more likely to happen, when the person is supported to 'recover' resilience through hope, responsibility and self-advocacy.
- The ideas of well-being and recovery represent genuine progress in human understanding over the past 30 years and it is a tribute to Respond! that it is putting them into practice with the freshness of an organisation that grows younger as it gets older.

Thank you

Extra Slide 1: Ireland in 1982 & 2012

Indicator	1982	2010-2012
Population	3.4m	4.6m
Dependency ratio	70	49
Unemployment rate	12%	14%
Poverty rate (60% of median income)	28%	16%
Exports as % of imports	84%	195%
Mortgage Interest rate	16%	4%
Government Budget Deficit % of GNP	11%	13%
Government Debt as % of GNP excluding corporate debt (210% of GNP) and household debt (147% GNP)	85%	140%
Life Satisfaction based on Eurobarometer 0= not at all satisfied 1= not very satisfied 2= fairly satisfied 3= very satisfied	2.1	2.16

Extra Slide 2: Well-Being and the Recession in Ireland

'Overall, the evidence presented here points to the conclusion that the impact of the current recession on measures of life satisfaction and indices of mental health and confidence has not been very marked. The population appears to be resilient in the face of major economic hardship.'
(Professor Brendan Walsh, 2011, Well-Being and Economic Conditions in Ireland, UCD Centre for Economic Research Working Paper WP11/27)

'If one looks at psychological distress measures, Ireland from 1994 to 2001 there is no evidence for large increases in psychological well-being from the data available.'

(Dr. Liam Delaney, 2009, Well-Being Under Conditions of Abundance: Ireland from 1990-2007, Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, Vol. XXXVIII, p.215).

Extra Slide 3: Measuring Well-Being

Joseph Stiglitz, Winner of Nobel Prize in 2001

Amartya Sen, Winner of Nobel Prize in 1998:

'What we measure affects what we do; if our measurements are flawed, decisions may be distorted. The time is ripe for our measurement system to shift from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being. ... At least in principle, these should be considered simultaneously: (1) material living standards (income, consumption and wealth); (2) health; (3) education; (4) personal activities including work; (5) political voice and governance; (6) social connections and relationships; (7) environment (present and future conditions); (8) insecurity of an economic as well as a physical nature. All these dimensions shape people's well-being, and yet many of these are missed by conventional income measures'.

Daniel Kahnman, Winner of Nobel Prize in 2002:

'It is now conceivable, as it was not even a few years ago, that an index of the amount of suffering in society will someday be included in national statistics, along with measures of unemployment, physical disability, and income. This project has come a long way' (p.410).

Extra Slide 4: Love, Money & Well-Being

Daniel Kahnman, Winner of Nobel Prize in 2002

'Can money buy happiness? The conclusion is that being poor makes one miserable and that being rich may enhance one's life satisfaction, but does not (on average) improve experienced well-being' (p.396)

'It is only a slight exaggeration to say that happiness is the experience of spending time with people you love and who love you' (p.395)

Excerpts from Daniel Kahnman, Winner of Nobel Prize in 2002, Thinking, Fast and Slow, 2011, Penguin Books.

Extra Slide 5: National Outcomes for Children, 2012

Outcome Area	Outcomes for Children
1. Health	Healthy, both physically and mentally
2. Education	Supported in active learning
3. Safety	Safe from accidental and intentional harm / Secure in the immediate and wider physical environment
4. Income	Economically secure
5. Participation	Part of positive networks of family, friends, neighbours and the community / Included and participating in society

Extra Slide 6: Influences on Child Outcomes

James Heckman, Winner of Nobel Prize in 2000

'Learning starts in infancy, long before formal education begins, and continues throughout life. ... this is a time when human ability and motivation are shaped by families and non-institutional environments. Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success, just as early failure breeds later failure.'

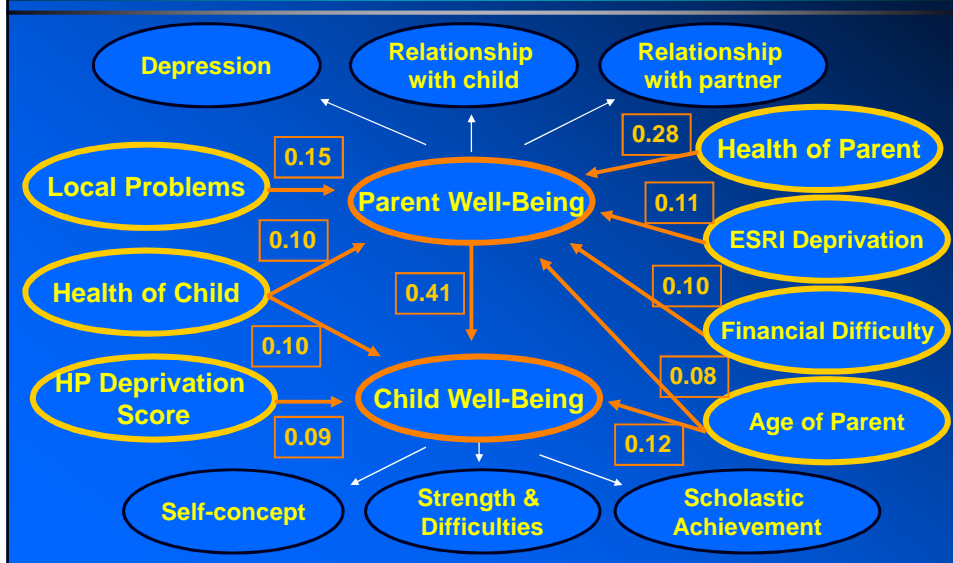
'Another continuing blind spot in the vision of most educational planners and policy makers is a preoccupation with achievement tests By narrowly focusing on cognition, they ignore the full array of socially and economically valuable non-cognitive skills and motivation produced by schools, families and other institutions.'

'In an era of tight government budgets, The real question is how to use the available funds wisely. The best evidence supports the policy prescription: invest in the very young and improve basic learning and socialization skills.'

Excerpts from James Heckman, 'Invest in the Very Young', 2011.

Extra Slide 7: Influences on Well-Being of Parents & Children Based on Growing Up in Ireland - 9-yr Old Sample

Pratschke, Haase and McKeown, 2011



Extra Slide 8: Life is more Comedy than Tragedy!

'The Great Hunger is concerned with the woes of the poor. ... The Great Hunger is tragedy and Tragedy is underdeveloped comedy, not fully born. Had I stuck with the tragic thing in The Great Hunger I would have found many powerful friends. But I lost my messianic compulsion. I sat on the bank of the Grand Canal in the summer of 1955 and let the water lap idly on the shores of my mind. My purpose in life was to have no purpose.' (Patrick Kavanagh, Collected Poems, p.xiv).

Note: The Great Hunger is not about the Irish potato famine, but famine in the poet's soul and the unrequited cravings of his mind and body. It is therefore about the famine in every soul and body. It is about the woes of everyone who is poor and, in that sense, everyone is poor. Out of this experience of being poor, the ideal of equality is born because it is what makes every-one one.

Extra Slide 9: Well-Being and Mindfulness

Mindful by Mary Oliver

Every day
I see or hear
something
that more or less
kills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle
in the haystack
of light.
It was what I was born for --
to look, to listen,
to lose myself
inside this soft world --
to instruct myself
over and over
in joy,
and acclamation.
Nor am I talking
about the

exceptional,
the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant --
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very
drab,
the daily presentations.

Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help
but grow wise
with such teachings
as these --
the untrimmable light
of the world,
the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?

From: Mary Oliver, US Poet, Why I Wake
Early.