

CUWB Panel 4: VULNERABILITY AND INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS: THE POLITICS OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

***Full Name of the Panel Organiser:**

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Theme

- Child poverty, inequality and child welfare research

Subtheme

- Rights of children and adolescents

Summary of the panel

The concept of vulnerability is becoming increasingly recognised in research on children and child well-being. It is promoted as a concept that provides a complex understanding of the child that focuses on the relationality, relatedness and vulnerability of the subject in their bodily, physical and social constitution. The papers in this session develop this promise by examining different dimensions of vulnerability and its relationality. A key dimension of this relationality are intergenerational generations, a key political dimension of vulnerability most relevant for children's well-being. The papers in this session explore this relationality, as evident in shared parenting arrangements, creating safe spaces for children, protection and vulnerability as alternative concepts in understanding the experience of children in out-of-home care; in climate change politics; and in negotiating cultural identity across intergenerational boundaries.

Paper 1

Title: Vulnerability is created from above: children of separately living parents speak about visiting order practices

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Abstract:

Thematic importance: This presentation will combine a children's rights approach with understandings of children's vulnerability. It focuses on children's perceptions.

Introduction and objectives: In Estonia shared parenting is stressed in family policies. The study demonstrates the bias between parental access rights regulation rhetoric and children's experiences of commuting between parents, by taking the child's best interest as the launching point.

Method: The data are drawn from semi-structured interviews with eight children aged 9-13 years, who commute between separately living parents after parental divorce or separation. The interviews were carried out in early 2021 and analysed using the method of qualitative content analysis.

Results: The analysis revealed several problematic aspects of practicing visiting orders by children: instead of realising the child's best interest, following the visiting orders by

children accumulates vulnerability that is expressed in their decreasing subjective well-being. Subjective well-being decreases if there are lasting conflicts between parents, if their decision to separate or divorce is not communicated to the child and children feel that their opinions are not taken into consideration when deciding over the visiting order. Both, the inflexibility of conflicting parents and rigidly fixed access rights agreement regulation ('the visiting order') do not support the child's best interest in terms of subjective well-being and changing needs. Thus, the presentation will demonstrate the accumulation of child vulnerabilities from above.

Conclusions and implications: Children feel confusion about their parents' separation. Children need more explanation from separating or divorcing parents about their decision; they also expect that the visiting orders could flexibly follow their changing needs and preferences and are negotiated. Most of all children expect that their parents resolve their conflicts and are able to engage in friendly joint parenting. Parents need more awareness of children's right of participation and should develop their conflict regulation skills. Child protection workers and judges in family issues should listen to children and take their opinions into consideration.

Key words: child vulnerability, children's rights, parenting rights, commuting children, child well-being

Paper 2

Title: Children, environment and subjective well-being: Intergenerational relations and tensions

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Abstract:

The focus of this paper is on young children's moral and physical engagement with the environment as a likely precursor for grievance-based activism, as exemplified in youth engagement in climate change protests. The research draws on a multinational collaboration as part of the *Children's Understandings of Well-being: Global and Local Contexts* study, where children were asked about important relationships, places, things and times to their well-being. Together, across the two sites approximately 200 children and young people, 6-16 years of age, participated in the research, across multiple-stages. Drawing on our research, we highlight what children tell us about the impact of the environment, both natural and built, on their well-being. One aspect that emerged from the research in both Australia and England, was the importance of the natural environment and the possibilities for experiencing well-being that nature provides. We outline the differences in what constitutes 'nature' in the two different contexts and how these localised experiences of green spaces and nature interconnect with more imagined idyllic

notions of ‘the countryside’ (England) and ‘the bush’ (Australia). We focus on children’s discussions of the importance of sustainability, of beauty in nature, of natural environments facilitating important relationships. We also describe their concerns over the decline of urban environments and dangers they experience in the built environment. We place these discussions in the context of children and young people’s experiences of ontological anxiety as an impetus to environmental activism. Further, we consider the evidence regarding children’s political agency around environmental matters and its role as an important touchpoint for intergenerational conflict and solidarities. We point to a disjuncture between these findings and the way adult discourses of childhood innocence and vulnerability predominantly frame policies on children’s environments in both countries.

Paper 3

Title: One Kid Two Worlds: The Well-being of Children from Ghanaian Homes Living in the United States

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Abstract

This phenomenological study aims to describe the well-being experiences of children in the United States who are living in a Ghanaian household, defined as a home with at least one parent who is an immigrant from Ghana, West Africa. The purpose was to identify the ways in which children manage the potential mismatch between their Ghanaian home culture and the dominant U.S. culture. Ghanaian collectivist cultural norms are quite divergent from mainstream U.S. culture, which is marked by individualistic and competitive norms. Ghanaian culture is rich with traditions and expectations related to a hierarchical power structure. It is intertwined with Christianity, and is expressed through food, music, dance, interpersonal norms, communication styles, focus on family, and hospitality.

Participants in this study included eleven children between the ages of nine and seventeen and their parents from urban neighborhoods in Maryland, United States. The researchers followed the *Qualitative Study of Children's Well-being: U.S* interview protocol, adapted from Fattore, Fegter, & Hunner-Kreisel (2014); Fattore et al. (2018). The interview protocol consisted of questions about children's interests, education, family, and what makes them happy. The protocol also consisted of a mapping activity in which children drew a map of what makes them feel well; children were then asked to explain their map. Adjustments were made to the interview protocol to align with the phenomenon being

studied. Questions about culture were added to the protocol to explore how the participants experienced their culture and well-being.

Interviews were transcribed, and codes were developed following inductive phenomenological analysis procedures. Analyses led to the generation of one main theme and seven sub-themes. The overall theme developed was *culture intersects with well-being*, and the sub-themes, representing aspects of this intersection, included:

1. Cultural Connectedness and Self-identification
2. Authoritarian Parenting Style (with a hint of Authoritative)
3. Sense of Safety
4. Interpersonal Relationships
5. Cultural Alignment and Misunderstandings
6. The Church and the Culture
7. Productivity and Responsibility

Although these children are not living in Ghana, they had a strong ethnic identity that connected them with Ghanaian culture. Interactions with their parent(s), friends, and the church continue to support cultural practices and maintenance, impacting their well-being in ways that make them feel happy, safe, and excited, but also mad and ignored. They had some misunderstanding of cultural norms and practices, which were sometimes at odds with those of their broader environment and relationships. Although their strong ethnic identity positively affected their well-being, it also had subtle adverse effects, such as feeling unheard and restricted at times by parents and elders. Some children also experienced bullying related to race and ethnicity (e.g. their skin tone and name), but cultural connectedness served as a protective factor for them. This study highlights the ways in which children navigate between two cultures, with implications for their well-being. Future work should more deeply explore the comparisons and contrasts between the home and dominant culture that influence children's experiences of well-being.