

# **DOES MIXED METHODS RESEARCH MATTER TO UNDERSTANDING CHILDHOOD WELL-BEING?**

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Abstract: There has been a rich debate in development studies on combining research methods in recent years. We explore the particular challenges and opportunities surrounding mixed methods approaches to childhood well-being. We argue that there are additional layers of complexity due to the distinctiveness of childhood poverty. This paper is structured as follows. Sections 2 and 3 discuss the nature of mixed methods approaches and tensions. Sections 4 and 5 apply these debates to researching childhood well-being in particular. Section 6 concludes and discusses future work.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

There has been a rich debate in development studies on combining research methods in recent years. We explore the particular challenges and opportunities surrounding mixed methods approaches to childhood well-being.

Why does this matter? Children in developing countries (taking the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) definition of >18 years) account for on average 37% of the population and 49% in least developed countries (UNICEF, 2005:12). Moreover, UNICEF estimates suggest that a disproportionately high proportion of the poor—up to 50% of those living on less than \$1 per day—are children under 18 years (quoted in Gordon et al., 2004:11). To base an analysis of well-being without taking an age- or life stage-disaggregated approach would thus risk failing to understand much of the nature of well-being. In spite of this, much well-being research takes little account of the distinctiveness of childhood poverty, especially the complex linkages between their evolving physical, neurological and psychosocial capacities on the one hand, and diverse cultural constructions of childhood, on the other.

In order to better explore and capture this multi-dimensionality we argue that there a need for researchers of childhood well-being to adopt mixed methods approaches. This paper is structured as follows. Sections 2 and 3 discuss the nature of mixed methods approaches and tensions.<sup>2</sup> Sections 4 and 5 apply these debates to researching childhood well-being in particular. Section 6 concludes and discusses future work.

## **2. MIXED METHODS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

Development studies is particularly interested in mixing methods, reflecting its cross-disciplinary nature. To accept and promote cross-disciplinary approaches implies an openness to the use of all available insights to gain a better understanding of phenomena. Labels such as ‘qual-quant’ or ‘q-squared’ or ‘q-integrated’ might suggest that mixed methods simply entails taking a quantitative

method and adding a qualitative method, giving equal weight to each. However, there are numerous possible combinations, each with assumptions regarding the respective roles, relative importance and desired sequencing of qualitative or quantitative methods.

At the outset it is worth taking a step back to remind ourselves what the terms 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' are used to refer to:

- types of methodology – the overall research strategy used to address the research questions or hypotheses;
- types of methods of data collection – i.e. the specific methods;
- types of data collected – i.e. the raw data;
- types of data analysis – i.e. the techniques of analysis;
- types of data output – i.e. the data in the final report or study.

With regard to poverty research Carvalho and White characterise the quantitative and qualitative approach as follows:

The quantitative approach... typically uses random sample surveys and structured interviews to collect the data - mainly, quantifiable data - and analyzes it using statistical techniques. By contrast, the qualitative approach ... typically uses purposive sampling and semi-structured or interactive interviews to collect the data - mainly, data relating to people's judgment, preferences, priorities, and/or perceptions about a subject - and analyzes it usually through sociological or anthropological research techniques (1997:1).

Further - of course - qualitative methods can produce quantitative data (although the opposite is not true). Moser (2003), for example, has championed the need for 'apt illustration' (as compared to anecdotal evidence) through quantifiable qualitative research.

[There is a need to shift] goalposts as to the definition of robustness so that it becomes more “inclusive” of quantifiable qualitative research. Only this can ensure that social issues do not remain confined to anecdotal boxes, but provide information of equal comparability in poverty assessments (ibid:82).

As noted above there is a tendency to see mixed methods as immediately synthesizable. However, there is no guarantee that different approaches, methods or data will even be comparable. An interesting question is how does one adjudicate situations when the evidence is contradictory?

Mixing might have different functions – to enrich or explain or even contradict rather than confirm or refute, perhaps even telling ‘different stories’ on the same subject because quantitative methods are good for specifying relationships (i.e. describing) and qualitative for explaining and understanding relationships (Thomas and Johnson, 2002:1).

Brannen (2005:12-14) lists four functions of combining methods.<sup>3</sup> These are:

- elaboration or expansion (‘the use of one type of data analysis adds to the understanding being gained by another’);
- initiation (‘the use of a first method sparks new hypotheses or research questions that can be pursued using a different method’);
- complementarity (‘together the data analyses from the two methods are juxtaposed and generate complementary insights that together create a bigger picture’);
- contradictions (‘simply juxtapose the contradictions for others to explore in further research’).

One concrete example to illustrate mixing can be taken from poverty researchers who have sought to combine quantitative approaches (thought to be useful for finding out the amount of poverty and where is it) and qualitative approaches (thought to be useful for identifying the causes and dynamics of poverty). They

have done so by seeking to combine household surveys and participatory poverty assessments (PPA) case studies. Table 1 below sets out selected generic strengths and weaknesses of surveys and of PPAs.

Table 1.  
Selected Possible Generic Strengths and Weaknesses of PPAs and Surveys

	Strengths	Weaknesses
PPAs	Richer definition of poverty; More insights into causal processes; Holistic – a set of relationships as a whole, not pre-selected attributes; Scope for attention to processes as well as snap shots of the situation; Feedback loop – new/more interviews for interrogating data; Focus on context and people's experiences.	Lack of generalizability (but the sample can be made more or less representative of the population); Difficulties in verifying information; Limited systematic disaggregation; Possibly unrepresentative participation; Agenda framing by facilitators; Pitfalls in attitudinal data – arrival of a PPA team changes people's behaviour.
Household Surveys	Aggregation and comparisons possible across time and with other data sets; Reliability of results is measurable; Credibility of numbers with policy makers; Credibility of national statistics with policy makers; Allows simulation of different policy options; Correlations identify associations raising questions of causality.	Misses what is not easily quantifiable; Sampling frame may miss significant members of the population; May fail to capture intra household allocation; Assumes that numbers are objective and conclusive; Assumes that the same question means the same thing in different cultural contexts.

Sources: Appleton and Booth (2001) Carvalho and White (1997), Chambers (2001).

Combination may take place at data collection through simultaneously conducting a survey and a PPA in the same sample or at the data analysis stage by merging the results and/or synthesising the findings into one set of recommendations (see table 2).

Table 2.  
Selected Examples of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

		Function	
		Combining	Integrating
Stage of research process	Data collection	Conduct a simultaneous survey and PPA in the same sample (ideally nationally representative).	Use surveys to identify sub groups for PPAs or use PPAs to identify survey questions.
	Data analysis	Synthesize findings into one set of results or merge outcomes from mixed teams of qualitative and quantitative researchers;	Use PPAs to confirm or refute the validity of surveys (or vice versa); Use PPAs to enrich or to explain information on processes in survey variables (or vice versa);

Sources: Constructed and expanded from text in Carvalho and White (1997), Shaffer (2001), Thorbecke (2001).

At a more sophisticated level, integration might take place at the data collection stage by the use of surveys to identify sub-groups for PPAs or the use of PPAs to identify survey questions. At the data collection stage, integration could take place by PPAs and surveys confirming or refuting each other by using PPAs to confirm validity of surveys (or vice versa) or by PPAs and surveys enriching/explaining by using PPAs to obtain information on processes underpinning survey variables (or vice versa). In sum, the researcher needs to consider two questions both informed by the type of research problem, question (and/or hypothesis) under investigation. First, which is the 'dominant' method - that which will yield most of the data – qualitative or quantitative methods? Second, are methods to be mixed sequentially or simultaneously?

### **3. TENSIONS IN MIXING**

There is a perception that there is a tension between qualitative and quantitative researchers. To cite Brannen again,

quantitative researchers have seen qualitative researchers as too context specific, their samples as unrepresentative and their claims about their work as unwarranted – that is judged from the vantage point of statistical generalisation. For their part qualitative researchers view quantitative research as overly simplistic, decontextualised, reductionist in terms of its generalisations, and failing to capture the meanings that actors attach to their lives and circumstances (Brannen, 2005:7).

Perhaps this is less so in development studies where few voices vocally promoting mono-method approaches (Hentschel, 2001:75). However, even within development studies there is still a disciplinary based 'intellectual-

stereotyping' which associates, for example, economics with quantitative approaches and social anthropology and qualitative approaches. This has been questioned in itself as part of the problem as Hulme and Toye, put it thus,

to label economics as a quantitative discipline and other social sciences as qualitative disciplines lacks any fundamental justification. It seems plausible only because people confuse 'quantitative' with 'mathematical'... ..Economics is not intrinsically more amenable (or less, as many famous economists have argued!) to statistical treatment than politics or sociology or even history (2006:8).

Hulme and Toye argue that any such dichotomies as those above are unjustified and unhelpful because such dichotomies themselves are not borne out in reality but rather reflect a stylised reality and serve to merely reinforce differences. Harriss (2002), Kanbur (2002) and White (2002) all concur, that the demarcation of, on the one hand, quantitative/economics/'hard'/'rigorous' versus, on the other hand, qualitative/non-economics/'soft'/'non-economics' is a false dichotomy.

One might argue the actual tension is the *criteria to judge* what is 'rigorous', which does differ between quantitative and qualitative and across disciplines. Typically we think of reliability, replicability, generalisability and validity as criteria for the evaluation of social research. Drawing on Beck et al., (2006:7-8)'s survey quality in social policy research, such discussions of 'standards' provoke major debate, with many arguing that qualitative and quantitative approaches need be judged by different or 'alternative' criteria because 'traditional' criteria are biased towards assuming quantitative approaches are better (see table 3).

It has also been suggested that the word rigour is problematic because it is biased towards a perception of precision or of an association between objectivity and quantitative methods (David and Dodd, 2002:281). As Boaz and Ashby, (2003:7) noted, while criteria such as validity, reliability, replicability, and generalisability are the prominent criteria used to judge quantitative research these may not be appropriate criteria for qualitative research. For example,

although some might argue for replicability as a key issue in determining quality, others might argue that research is simply not replicable, not only because the context and people lives will have changed from the exact point in time the research was conducted but also a different researcher conducting the research would inevitably interact differently with the researched because they are a different person.

In short, as Beck et al., (2006:7-8) argue, because traditional criteria is biased towards quantitative approaches, alternative criteria should seek to be more inclusive (refer to Table 3). Thus, instead of thinking of 'truth' we could think of 'trustworthiness'. Further, rather than validity, we could think of credibility. Rather than generalisability we could think of transferability of context. Rather than reliability we could think of dependability, and rather than objectivity we could think of confirmability.

Table 3.  
Quality Criteria and Definitions

<i>Traditional criteria</i>	<i>Alternative criteria</i>
Validity: the extent to which there is a correspondence between data and conceptualization.	Credibility: the extent to which a set of findings are believable.
Reliability: the extent to which observations are consistent when instruments are administered on more than one occasion.	Transferability: the extent to which a set of findings are relevant to settings other than the one or ones from which they are derived.
Replicability: the extent to which it is possible to reproduce an investigation.	Dependability: the extent to which a set of findings are likely to be relevant to a different time than the one in which it was conducted.
Generalizability: the extent to which it is possible to generalize findings to similar cases which have not been studied.	Confirmability: the extent to which the researcher has not allowed personal values to intrude to an excessive degree.

Beck et al., (2006:7-8).

Patton (2002) goes further on the diversity of criteria and proposes lists of alternative quality criteria by type (see table 4). Lists include traditional scientific criteria, social constructivist criteria, artistic and evocative criteria, critical change criteria and evaluation standards and principles. Potentially all of these could appeal to parts of the Development Studies research community. The traditional scientific criteria are what we might associate with research rigour from a positivist perspective – i.e. objectivity and validity of the data. In contrast, the social constructivist criteria might be more what we associate research rigour



with from a relativist perspective – i.e. subjectivity acknowledged and embraced, and coverage of others’ perspectives. Then there are also artistic and evocative criteria such as creativity or aesthetic quality, and research which is stimulating and provocative. Patton also lists critical change criteria, noting its neo-Marxist and feminist roots. These relate to critical perspectives and increasing consciousness about injustice, sources of inequalities and injustice and representations of the perspectives of the less powerful. This has strong resonance not only with much of development studies research but also Lather’s concept of catalytic validity. The concept of catalytic validity calls for an explicit concern for social transformation. The latter goes beyond the research principle of ‘do no harm’ and calls for research

that allow[s] marginalized voices to be heard, to challenge dominant discourses and to open up alternative perspectives and courses of action... research process reorients, focuses, and energises participants towards knowing reality in order to transform it (Lather, 1986:69, 272).

Finally, there are criteria listed for evaluation standards and principles. These include criteria that are much more instrumental, for example, the utility and feasibility of a study.

Table 4.  
Alternative Quality Criteria

Traditional scientific criteria – i.e. positivist	Social constructivist criteria i.e. relativist	Artistic and evocative criteria	Critical change criteria (neo-Marxist, some feminist)	Evaluation standards and principles
Objectivity (attempts to minimize bias);  Validity of the data;  Systematic rigour of fieldwork practices;	Subjectivity acknowledged and embraced;  Trustworthiness and authenticity – fairness and coverage of others’ perspectives;	Opens the world to us in some way;  Creativity;  Aesthetic quality;  Interpretive vitality;	Critical perspectives - increases consciousness about injustice;  Identifies nature and sources of inequalities and injustice;	Utility – if not going to be useful to some audience, then no point doing it;  Feasibility – if not practically or politically do-able then no point;

Triangulation (for consistency of findings);  Reliability of coding and pattern analysis (multiple coders);  Correspondence of findings to reality;  Strength of evidence supporting causal hypotheses;  Generalisability  Contributions to theory	Triangulation (for capturing multiple perspectives);  Reflexivity and praxis - understanding one's own background and how to act in the world;  Particularity – doing justice to unique cases;  Contributions to dialogue – encouraging multiple perspectives.	Flows from self - embedded in lived experience;  Stimulating;  Provocative;  Connects and moves the audience;  Voice is distinct and expressive;  Feels 'true', 'authentic' and real'  Case studies become literary works, blurring of boundaries	Represents the perspective of the less powerful;  Makes visible the ways in which those with more power exercise and benefit from this power;  Engages those with less power respectfully and collaboratively;  Builds capacity of those involved to take action;  Identifies potential change-making strategies;  Clear historical and values context;  Consequential or catalytic validity	Propriety – fair and ethical;  Accuracy;  Systematic inquiry;  Integrity/honesty and respect for people.  Responsibility to general public welfare.
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Source: Adapted from Patton (2002:544)

#### 4. RESEARCHING CHILDHOOD WELL-BEING

Mixed methods research on childhood well-being has emerged only recently, and is still in a fledgling state. Research on childhood well-being to date has tended to mirror the broader division between quantitative and qualitative researchers within development studies. Quantitative researchers have focused on measuring the extent and causes of childhood poverty, especially infant mortality rates, child malnutrition using anthropometric data, educational attainment and achievement<sup>4</sup>, and involvement in harmful forms of child labour (recent note worthy examples might include Gordon et al, 2003; Cockburn, 2002). They have sought to grapple with the disjuncture between childhood and adult/household-level poverty, especially because traditional' proxy monetary measures of poverty

and sources of data such as income and consumption are deeply problematic for children because

- data is not collected from children themselves but carers;
- children have different needs to adults;
- children's employment may be in the informal economy;
- non-market channels may be more important in shaping childhood poverty;
- children's access to and control of income is extremely marginal and resources and power are distributed unequally within the household.

Qualitative researchers have by contrast tended to be engaged less with discourses of poverty reduction and needs, and instead focused on aspects of well-being, including care, nurture, resilience, capabilities, rights, social capital, the creation of gendered identities, opportunities for participation and decision-making etc. (note worthy examples might include White, 2002, Graue and Walsh, 1998; Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2000; Woodhead, 1999). Both approaches tend to be published in different types of journals—economics, epidemiology and development studies versus childhood studies, sociology, anthropology and gender studies—with relatively little communication between the two.

However, gradually bridges are being forged across the two disciplinary/methodological clusters, often due to policy influencing imperatives. Advocacy efforts to improve childhood well-being often rely on the power of numbers to highlight the urgency of need for 'better' policy frameworks to tackle the disproportionately high rates of poverty that children face in many developing country contexts.<sup>5</sup>

It is important, however, to point out that the availability of age-disaggregated data—which enables policy advocates to make compelling arguments about the extent of childhood poverty and therefore the urgency to act—is a relatively recent phenomenon. Before the UNICEF Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey-- initially designed to focus on maternal/child health and nutrition but subsequently

expanded to include a range of indicators on child education and child protection-  
-was initiated in the mid 1990s, there were few internationally comparative data  
sources on childhood well-being indicators.<sup>6</sup> Important data constraints still exist,  
however, particularly with regard to intra-household dynamics and their impact on  
child well-being, and policy-relevant data such as age-disaggregated budget  
outlays on child-related policies.

In addition to robust statistics, evidence-based policy efforts also underscore  
the importance of complementing broad-based survey research and quantitative  
analysis with the 'thick description' and nuanced insights of qualitative analysis.  
The latter provides an understanding of the intra-household dynamics and/or  
social processes behind the numbers, and in the case of participatory research  
also allows for an understanding of children's experiences and perceptions of  
various forms of deprivation and vulnerability.

The central argument in this paper is that in addition to the more general merits  
of mixed methods research, understanding childhood well-being can particularly  
benefit from combinations of quantitative and qualitative analysis due to the  
distinctiveness of childhood well-being.

The following discussion outlines 5 key distinctive features of childhood poverty  
that pose particular methodological challenges.

*i) Dynamic life stage*

Although universal Piaget type models of child development have been rightfully  
criticized for under-estimating the important interplay of environmental, social  
and cultural factors in shaping children's experiences of childhood, most (able-  
bodied) children do undergo certain physical and neurological transformations  
over the course of the first decades of life. Proponents of a rights-based  
approach to child well-being similarly point to *children's evolving capacities* over  
time (e.g. Lansdown, 2004).

Better understanding such dynamics and processes that might reinforce or reverse 'patterns of disadvantage or benefit' (WeD, 2003) is a matter of urgency in light of a growing body of scholarship on *life-course and intergenerational impacts of childhood poverty*. This literature emphasizes the importance of tackling childhood poverty not only in its own right but also due to possible life-course and intergenerational transmissions of poverty. There is a need to unpack "the linked set of processes that may result in, or entrench, childhood, adulthood or chronic poverty, rather than outcomes or experiences during a specific period of time" (Harper et al, 2003:3). As Sen (1999:4) argues, "...capabilities that adults enjoy are deeply conditional on their experiences as children".

ii) *Multi-dimensional and heterogeneous*

Child well-being is also *multi-dimensional* and needs to take account of the complexities of childhood biological, neurological, social and moral development (e.g. Yaqub, 2002, Ridge 2002). Children are not only more vulnerable (for physiological and psychological reasons) but also have less autonomy/power than adults in domains and decisions that affect their lives (economically, environmental health risks etc).

These universal characteristics of child development are however experienced in diverse ways as children are a *heterogeneous group* living in divergent socio-economic conditions with distinct needs and concerns. Although such diversity (e.g. based on gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality) is also true of adults, the heterogeneous impacts of age and parental status arguably heighten the variation in childhoods.

The diversity of childhoods is however not well recognized in development discourse and practice. As Wood (1985 quoted in White 2002:2) argues, "Children become 'cases' which are 'disorganised' from their own context and 're-organised' into the categories given by development intervention". Whereas there is much broader acceptance of 'gender' and 'sexuality' as social divisions that are not natural or 'god-given' but culturally constructed, recognition of *childhood*

as a *culturally constructed phenomenon*, whereby children in different cultural contexts have divergent sets of rights and responsibilities, is more recent and poorly understood outside childhood studies circles (e.g. Platt, 2003).<sup>7</sup> The general tendency is for children to be studied for what they will become rather than as social actors in their own right (Corsaro, 1997). Moreover, it is a politically charged issue.

*iii) Importance of voice*

While it is true that all socially excluded groups may lack opportunities for voice and participation, the conventional voicelessness of children has a particular quality and intensity. Children are not only legal minors, with no right to vote or to make decisions without the approval of their legal guardian select, but efforts to promote child participation notwithstanding, their denial of voice in family, school and community decisions is still viewed as 'normal' and culturally acceptable in many parts of the developing (and developed) world.

*iv) Relational nature*

In recent years scholars have paid increasing attention to the relational nature of well-being (e.g. White, 2002) and the importance of care (especially for young children and the elderly) (e.g. Folbre and Bittman, 2004, Lewis, 2002). In order to understand child well-being, exploring intra-household dynamics and arrangements of care are critical given children's greater vulnerability and reliance on (usually) adult care (Marshall, 2004). However, as research on child headed households and the gendered dimensions of child work has underscored, intra-household dynamics especially in large impoverished households often entail children, especially girls', shouldering of part of the care management burden (e.g. Kabeer, 2003). Although analyses of care dynamics usually lend themselves more readily to qualitative approaches, feminist economists are increasingly seeking to explore the impacts of intra-household

allocations of resources and power quantitatively in order to spotlight greater policy attention on the political economy of care (e.g. Folbre, 2006).

A considerable body of research evidence has emphasised the ways in which children are situated and influenced not only by their household environment, but also by their neighborhood, school and society (e.g. Becker et al., 1998; Ruel et al., 1999). Although the current emphasis in the literature on children as 'participant agents' in social relations (Mayall, 2002) who shape their circumstances and social structure is a necessary correction to conceptualisations of children as passive and targets of social intervention, it is nevertheless the case that due to unequal power and decision-making relations child well-being is more dependent on community and social influences than that of adults. As White (2002:2) argues, "Child-centred' development practice must not be 'child-only': social and economic justice for poor children must be tackled in the context of their families and communities".

v) *Macro-micro linkages*

Most often policy debates on childhood poverty focus on social policy issues such as child health, nutrition and education. However, children are frequently as (or more) profoundly affected by macro-economic and poverty reduction policies as they are by sector-specific education or health policy initiatives (e.g. Waddington, 2004). Economic policies can affect children via at least two routes: their impact on household livelihoods and their impact on financing key public services essential for child development and wellbeing, such as health and education. One example is research on the grassroots impacts of the core economic pillar of Ethiopia's first PRSP—agricultural-led industrial development—highlighted the unintended negative spill-over impacts on children. The agricultural extension policy's heavy reliance on subsistence agriculture was shown to result in an increase in children's involvement in work activities, particularly animal herding, to the detriment of their school attendance and/or time available to invest in homework and study (Woldehanna *et al.*, 2005a).<sup>8</sup>

## 5. MIXED METHODS AND CHILD WELL-BEING RESEARCH

This section now turns to a discussion of the methodological implications of the five distinctive dimensions of childhood well-being outlined above. It provides examples of research of child well-being related topics from developing and/or developed country contexts, and highlights whether the mixing of methods was used to 'initiate' (generate new hypotheses), 'expand', 'combine' or 'contradict' the findings generated through a different methodological approach. (see Table 5 below).

First, a nuanced understanding of child well-being clearly needs to pay particular attention to the temporal dimensions of child outcomes and experiences if researchers are to advance understanding about children's evolving capacities, as well as life-course and inter-generational poverty transfers. These research areas are methodologically challenging, especially as there are frequently significant longitudinal data limitations in the developing world. However, examples drawing on Northern longitudinal datasets suggest that a combination of quantitative analysis of panel data complemented by qualitative analysis of oral life histories with a purposefully selected sub-sample can be a fruitful approach to capturing both objective and subjective changes in well-being over different life stages (Holland et al, 2006).<sup>9</sup> One of the better known examples of such an approach is Thompson (2004)'s research on stepfamilies, which he argues 'brings together the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods in a middle way, using two eyes instead of one, embedded in a dichotomized approach (2004 quoted in Holland et al, 2006:13). More specifically, he combines a life course study using cross sectional analysis and individual illustrative stories drawing on a census-based national quota sample, and a study of growing up in stepfamilies, drawing a sample from the UK National Child Development Study, a quantitative longitudinal study of the birth cohort of March 1958.

Second, the multi-dimensionality of childhood well-being suggests the importance of a crossdisciplinary, mixed methods approach that includes both



quantitative and qualitative social sciences as well as the natural sciences. One of the few examples of such work is that of Yaqub (2002) who draws on research on physiological and neurological development, economic data on income and socio-welfare correlations, as well as qualitative studies on capabilities and functions (following Sen) to interrogate the thesis that poor children necessarily become poor adults. His findings underscore the fact that not only are children's capacities changing over time, but that some children and young people are also better able to cope with, adjust to and overcome adversity than others. He argues that better understanding the dynamics of resilience is critical from a policy perspective in terms of the comparison of costs of *poverty reversals* through adult interventions versus *poverty avoidance* through child interventions (ibid).

Careful ethnographic and participatory research has an important role to play in highlighting the diversity and especially the cultural constructedness of childhood. However, James et al. (1997) emphasise that such work needs to be approached in a balanced and sensitive manner in order to balance cultural relativism and universal principles. Here a mixed methods approach might be able to lend the authority, moral weight and nuanced approach James et al. (1997) advocate. For instance, quantitative survey data on the incidence of child labour can be used to draw attention to the extent to which children are involved in harmful forms of child work, while qualitative work with children can help to capture the complex ways in which children, their families and communities ascribe meaning to work and the intra-household and socio-economic dynamics that will need to be taken into account in order to eradicate exploitative forms of work in an effective and sustainable way. For example, Woldehanna et al. (2005)'s work on children's paid and unpaid work in Ethiopia is one example of such a mixed methods approach which was used for policy engagement purposes around the country's second PRSP (Jones et al, forthcoming).

Third, in order to capture the particular quality and intensity of children's conventional 'voicelessness', qualitative researchers interested in childhood have paid considerable attention to participatory research methods—both oral and

visual (e.g. play, song, drawing, photography) in order to highlight conventionally silenced children's perspectives. As Selener (1997:2) argues:

The inclusion of direct testimony in the development debate can help to make it less of a monologue and more of a dialogue, as people's testimony begins to require answers and as their voices force the development establishment to be more accountable for their actions.

So for instance, while adult researchers may emphasise children's health, nutritional and scholastic outcomes, participatory research with children suggests that equally or more important concerns often include insufficient time to play, lack of affection from family members, feelings of social exclusion by peers, shabby and/or dirty clothing (e.g. Pham and Jones, 2005).

Two key methodological implications emerge here. First, it suggests that the quantitative/ qualitative binary is perhaps too simple as it fails to distinguish between ethnographic and sociological qualitative approaches on the one hand, and participatory methods, on the other. Such an omission is additionally important as it overlooks the moral and social change functions that some qualitative research methods may fulfill. The very process of being involved in a participatory research process may open up new and potentially profound possibilities for children and how they interact in their social worlds (e.g. Jans, 2004). As Pollock (2004) argues, "qualitative methods have value over and above their ability to yield testable hypotheses or to generate new measures for verification in large datasets". Good examples of research that combine both quantitative, qualitative and participatory research methods is the CHIP work on children's educational experiences in migrating households in Mongolia (Batbaatar et al., 2004) and Young Lives research on the barriers to children's educational achievement in poor communities in rural and urban Ethiopia (Woldehanna et al., 2005b). Whereas the Mongolia research used the different research methods to address different questions in separate chapters, the

Ethiopia work sought to interweave the different sorts of data to explore multiple angles of a number of key themes (e.g. gender dynamics, parental values and attitudes, the relative importance of local authorities and service providers, children's responsibilities). As research embedded within broader policy research projects both could be seen as examples of research that have catalytic validity.

Fourth, the importance of understanding the relational dimension of childhood well-being cannot be under-estimated. However, capturing the complexities of intra-household and intra-community relations necessitates a multi-pronged methodological approach and multiple data sources. Two examples from the from the National Poverty Center at the University of Michigan provide creative solutions that could be adopted to developing country contexts. The first example tackles the influence of intra-household distribution of resources and power on child material well-being. Magnuson and Smeeding (2005)'s work on the relative impact of different sources of income, state benefits and intra-and inter-family transfers in lifting young families out of poverty drew on a nationally representative birth cohort study (Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study). They complemented their quantitative analysis with a follow up nested qualitative study involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with parents, first as couples and then individually. Whereas the quantitative data provided a robust picture of household economic trends over-time, the qualitative information was able to explore the complexities and subjectivities of co-residing with parents, including much needed financial support, but a serious loss of space, privacy and in some cases decision-making power.

The second example focuses on the role that children and young people's communities play in shaping their subjective well-being. In order to better understand the relative importance of neighborhood poverty on youth risk behaviour, Clampet-Lindquist et al. (2005) employed a combination of a longitudinal panel study and a random stratified sub-sample of retrospective qualitative interviews focusing on different dimensions of male and female youth experiences moving from highly deprived to less poor neighborhoods. This data was creatively complemented by interviews with a control group (youth who had

not moved) as well as friends of the 'movers' to explore similarities and differences in behavioural patterns. Whereas the quantitative data showed that moving had no or even a negative impact for males but not females, the range of qualitative methods were used to identify key themes (e.g. the protective role that gender norms play in keeping girls closer to the house and under greater supervision, the negative stereotypes to which young African American men are subject and react against) that the researchers used to generate hypotheses for more detailed follow up work.

Fifth, tracing the linkages between macro-level policies and micro-level incomes for children poses significant methodological challenges, particularly as age-disaggregated national level poverty data is often lacking in developing country contexts. In the Ethiopia research mentioned above, however, a mixed methods approach was used to investigate how macro-economic policy shifts impact on household livelihood strategies and different family members' labour market participation, and are in turn refracted through intra-household dynamics. Household survey panel data was used to generate hypotheses which were then explored through qualitative focus group discussions and key informant interviews in a sub-sample of purposefully selected sites. More indepth econometrics analysis was subsequently combined with a thematic analysis of the qualitative data to develop a more comprehensive and complex picture of macro-micro policy linkages. The authors sought to combine the insights from the quantitative and qualitative analyses, and for a number of themes the qualitative findings helped to unpack underlying household and community dynamics. However, several important tensions emerged. First, the in-depth qualitative research was undertaken almost three years after the quantitative data was first collected, exposing the juxtaposition of the two data sources to a time lag problem, including possible memory recall difficulties and an imperfect ability to control for interim policy interventions. Second, in opting for a combination approach the authors precluded the possibility of a more interactive discussion with readers which would be possible if the different sources of data were simply

presented and the readers were left to generate their own hypotheses and interpretations as to how they fit together.

Table 5  
Examples of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis  
on Childhood Well-being

		Function	
		Combining	Integrating
Stage of research process	Data collection	Children from migrant households' educational experiences in Mongolia (Batbaatar et al., 2004)	Impacts of poverty reduction strategies on child work and education in Ethiopia (Woldehanna et al., 2005a and 2005b)  The relative impact of different sources of income, state benefits and intra-and inter-family transfers in lifting young families out of poverty (Magnuson and Smeeding, 2005).
	Data analysis	Impacts of poverty reduction strategies on child work and education in Ethiopia (Woldehanna et al., 2005a and 2005b)	The role of neighborhood poverty status in shaping youth risk behaviour (Clampet-Lindquist et al., 2005)  Experiences of growing up in step-families (Thompson, 2004)

## 6. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Researchers interested in the challenges of mixed methods approaches can learn from a closer engagement with work on childhood well-being as its distinctiveness and complexity provides the impetus for a creative mixing of methods. In particular, these include the following:

- the quality and intensity of children's voicelessness underscores the importance of integrating not only observational and ethnographic qualitative methods but also various oral and visual participatory research approaches;

- the multi-dimensionality and heterogeneity of childhoods lends new weight to the urgency of investing in genuinely crossdisciplinary approaches;
- childhood well-being's deeply relational nature suggests that more attention is needed to developing not only better age-disaggregated data but also more sophisticated methodologies for capturing intra-household dynamics, community-child relations and macro-micro policy linkages;
- although the quality of mixed methods research is contentious, rigour can be more broadly defined to perhaps include Lather's concept of catalytic validity.

Many of the promising mixed methods approaches to childhood well-being are emerging from projects engaged in policy influencing, suggesting that a fruitful dialogue could be fostered between researchers at both the academic and policy ends of the research continuum. The common assumption (and often observation) is policy reformers like numbers. That this is the case is well documented (Appleton and Booth, 2001; White, 2002). There is a well held perception of their objectivity due to assumptions about their tangibility and quantifiability and universality. However, policy makers also listen to narratives, opening up space for qualitative approaches to be powerful too in policy work (Kanbur, 2001:2). This is likely based on the legitimacy or 'authenticity' that PPAs and other qualitative methods bring. One might hypothesise that methods matter for research impact and influence because although quantitative approaches may be popular with policy makers qualitative approaches can create stories to 'sell'. We intend to pursue this avenue of discussion in future.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Sections 2 and 3 draw on joint work between Andy Sumner and Michael Tribe, BCID.

<sup>3</sup> Further, Brannen (2005: 14) identifies twelve specific conceivable combinations as below. In each there is a 'dominant' method' (i.e. the method that gathers the majority of the data) and a non-dominant method (i.e. the method that gathers the minority of the data). CAPITALS denote the 'dominant' method (which will yield the majority of data); + denotes simultaneously occurring methods; > denotes temporal sequencing of methods.

Simultaneous research designs:

1. QUAL + quan or
2. QUAL + QUAN
3. QUAN + quan or
4. QUAN + QUAN
5. QUAL + qual or
6. QUAL + QUAL

Sequential research designs:

1. QUAL > qual or
2. qual > QUAL or
3. QUAL > QUAL
4. QUAN > quan or
5. quan > QUAN or
6. QUAN > QUAN
7. QUAL > quan or
8. qual > QUAN or
9. QUAL > QUAN
10. QUAN > qual or
11. quan > QUAL or
12. QUAN > QUAL

<sup>4</sup> Commonly researched educational indicators include rates of school enrolment for girls and boys, overage enrolment and results on standardised scholastic achievement tests.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Save the Children Fund is increasingly forging links with academics to carry out quantitative analysis on e.g. the prevalence of food insecurity and its impacts on child malnutrition (e.g. Mathys, 2004) or to measure

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the effects of different social protection policy interventions in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Devereux et al, 2005). The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets (especially vis-à-vis infant mortality, school enrolment and gender equality) as well as the linking of donor funding to progress against PRSP target indicators (and in some cases Poverty and Social Impact Analysis [PSIA]) have also heightened the need for access to rigorous quantitative analyses in order to engage in related policy debates (e.g. Marcus et al., 2002; Oxfam, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> In 2007 the UNICEF Innocenti Center published its first Report Card on children's overall well-being. It includes six dimensions of well-being: material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviours and risks and subjective well-being. However to date this scorecard only covers OECD countries. In recognition of this kind of data shortage, the ILO established a Statistical and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour that coordinates national surveys in almost 60 countries, while DFID initiated a cross-country longitudinal data collection initiative on poor children in developing countries, the Young Lives Project.

<sup>7</sup> Prout and Prout (1990)'s *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* was widely viewed as a major breakthrough in the field at the time.

<sup>8</sup> Similarly, food- or cash-for-work programmes in the absence of affordable and available childcare services have been found to encourage women and children's participation at the cost of caring time for children and/or children's education (Woldehanna *et al*, 2005a). Research on the potential impacts of trade liberalisation on Peruvian child wellbeing has served to raise the need to address the particular vulnerability of marginalised children in the context of any complementary social protection strategy developed in tandem with the recently approved Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the US. While economic simulations suggest that the much contested FTA will have an overall positive impact on Peruvian growth rates, welfare gains and losses are likely to be unequally distributed across the population and among different types of families (with or without children, male- or female-headed, etc.). This research also highlighted the fact that changes in household poverty will have uneven impacts on childhood wellbeing. In particular, children in jungle, highland and rural households are likely to experience exacerbated poverty due to an increasing demand for their or their mother's labour and/or falling household incomes (Escobal and Ponce, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Holland et al. (2006) provide a number of examples on school transitions, youth to work transitions, post-divorce life etc.