

Child Well-Being Longitudinal Study in China



China has the world's second largest child population at 309 million, accounting for 24 percent of the country's population. This is the very first study to develop a descriptive understanding of children's well-being in contemporary China. Given the increasing income disparity facing the country, these findings can help us understand the factors that promote and inhibit children's optimal healthy development and have implications for the future of China's society.

The NYU-ECNU Institute for Social Development at NYU Shanghai started the effort with a pilot study in Shanghai, China, with approximately 2,200 first-grade children (with an average age of seven). We are planning to collect longitudinal information on these 2,200 children during their elementary school years (to fifth grade). In the medium- and long-term, the Institute would like to develop a depository to house cutting-edge scholarly research on the well-being of children to inform public policy-making. In future years, we plan to expand our data collection to the other parts of China and Asia that have large number of Chinese (e.g., Hong Kong, Taiwan), and we also hope that many research institutes sharing the same interests of ours will join in this endeavor in understanding the protective and risk factors as well as the mechanisms and contexts that contribute to children's positive development.

THE BIG PICTURE

Our 2,200 first-grade children were reported to have healthy social and emotional well-being and an average or above average academic performance, but boys and children from low-income families or rural *hukou* status families had somewhat worse well-being. In addition, these 2,200 children tended to be in good health, but a noticeable proportion of them were considered to be overweight or obese, and this may be particularly true for boys and children from top-income families. In understanding the contexts for which these children were growing up, we looked at their family and school environments, two contexts considered the most important in young children's life. In general, our 2,200 first-grade children were raised in a family with happily married parents in their mid-thirties who are gainfully employed, but with long weekly working hours. Their annual family income put our children right at about middle-income status both objectively and subjectively. Our parents viewed their children in a positive light and provided nurturing parenting behavior. Not surprisingly, academic learning was emphasized for this generation of children. Homework was reported for every school day; in addition, a good proportion of children attended many extracurricular activities (e.g.,

tutors on academic subjects, sports, drawing, dance, and piano lessons). Parents hold very high educational expectations for their children (e.g., achieve master's degree or above). And parents ensured to attend every parent-teacher conference that was called for by the school.

Children tended to attend schools with a large student body that are served by educated and experienced school administrators and teachers who strive to provide an academically rigorous curriculum. Schools also provided many services to their students and families during the school year as well as during summer break. Most of the schools were equipped with adequate facilities in terms of classrooms, libraries, and computer rooms. In contrast, most of the schools did not have facilities such as auditoriums, gymnasiums, or multi-purpose function rooms. Both school administrators and classroom teachers agreed they provided a positive school environment and learning environment for both the teachers and students to learn and grow everyday. Our teachers were very satisfied with their current teaching career.



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