child well-being indicators: theory and practice

OR

What can we learn from Children?

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האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים

מכון חרוב (ע"ר)
The Haruv Institute (R.A.)

Well-being is a “new” and broad term

:Which is replacing the limited perspective of earlier terms such as

Welfare **“Standard of living”** **GDP**

- What does the term include?

Subjective feelings | Happiness | Life conditions | Self-fulfillment

Opportunities for growth | Balance between pleasure and pain

How is the concept changing?

The First Shift -
From Survival and Basic Needs
to Development and Well-Being

Much attention has been paid to children's physical survival and basic needs – and for good reasons. The result was the focus on saving children.

Now the definition of well being moved
from supplying minimums, as in saving a life,
to a focus on quality of life.

The Second shift -
From Negative to Positive

- The **absence** of problems or failures does not necessarily indicate proper growth and success.

- Therefore, we want to also focus on **protective factors** or **positive behaviors**.

The challenge is to develop a concept that holds societies accountable for more than the safe warehousing of children and youth.

The Third Shift -
From Well-Becoming to Well-Being

- Two axels- **Well-becoming** describes **future** focusing on preparing children for happy and productive adulthood life,

  as opposed to the immediacy **well-being**, focusing on the well-being of the child in **the present**.

- Focusing on the child's well-being in the present doesn't abolish the relevance of the development of the child towards his adulthood. Even so, focusing on preparing the children towards their citizenship means that they aren't citizens during childhood.

Anyone interested in children and childhood should also be interested in the present as well as future childhood.

The Fourth Shift - Incorporating children rights and beyond

- Although inspired and to some extent guided by the child rights movement, the new concept of well being goes **beyond the concept of rights**.
- Perhaps the most crucial difference is the standard used to measure children's status. **Children's well-being** is normally focused on **what is desired**, but **rights monitoring** addresses **legally established minimums.**

But HOW did it happen?

I would argue that this change in context is the consequence of two major sources:

- **New normative and theoretical advancements.**
- **Changes in the technical and methodological ability to study children's well-being.**

I will now turn to discuss these sources of change.

“New” Normative and Theoretical Approaches

Theories and normative approaches to children welfare abound. Many have contributed to the changing context and many more continue to do so.

Yet, I singled out three such approaches that influenced the changing child welfare context, these include:

The ecological theories of child development

The normative concept of children’s rights

The new sociology of childhood as a stage in and of itself

New Methodological and Technical developments

Just as new theories contributed to the new context of children's well being, three methodological perspectives have done the same:

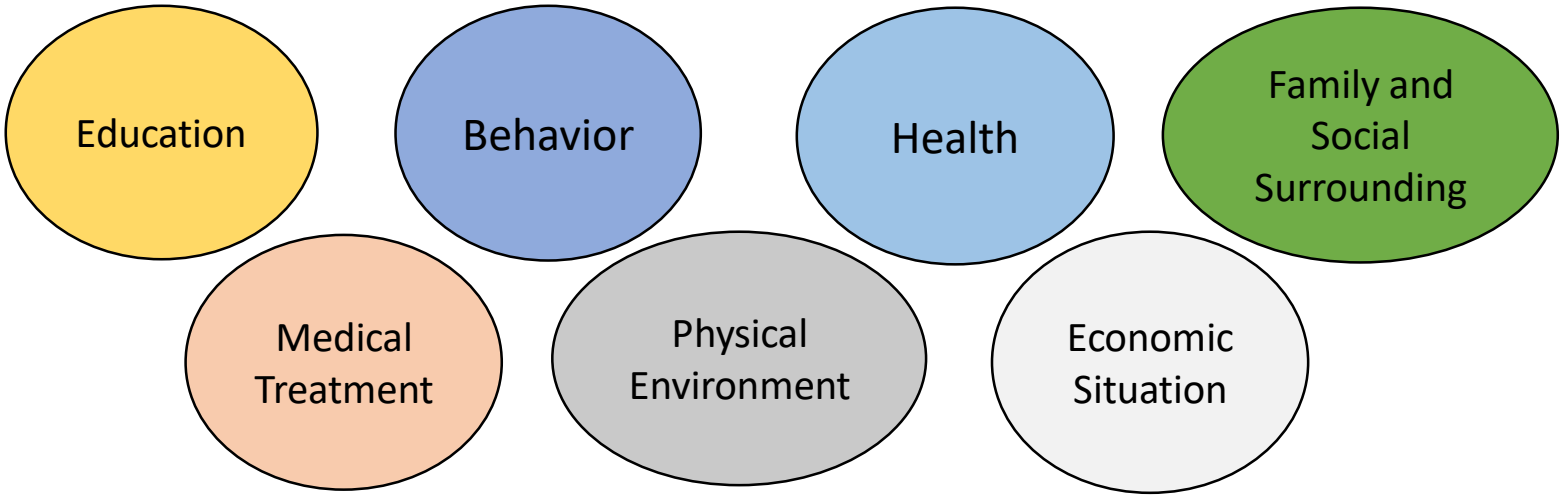
The call for using the child as the unit of observation

The emerging importance of subjective perspectives

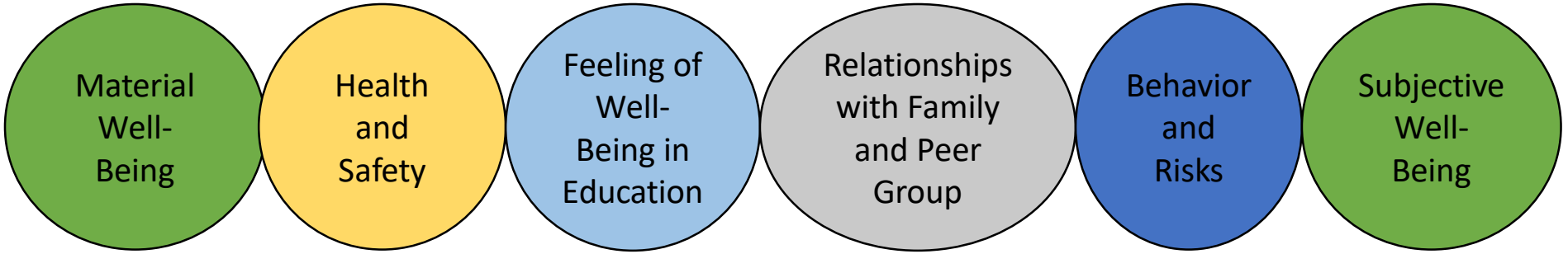
The expanded use of administrative data and the Growing variety of data sources.

Examples of aspects of Well-Being

Key national indicators on well-being for American children



UNICEF's Innocenti Report Card 7



The special place of Subjective Well-Being

- Most researchers now-a-days agree that well-being includes a subjective factor - this factor has an affective part which is related to **“happiness”** and a cognitive part which is related to **“life satisfactory”**.
- The most important question today is: Do countries need to develop policy aimed towards rising the subjective well-being of their citizens? If so, what kind of policy will it be?

- A subsequent question is how can we study the subjective well being and what is the role of children?

What can we learn from children?

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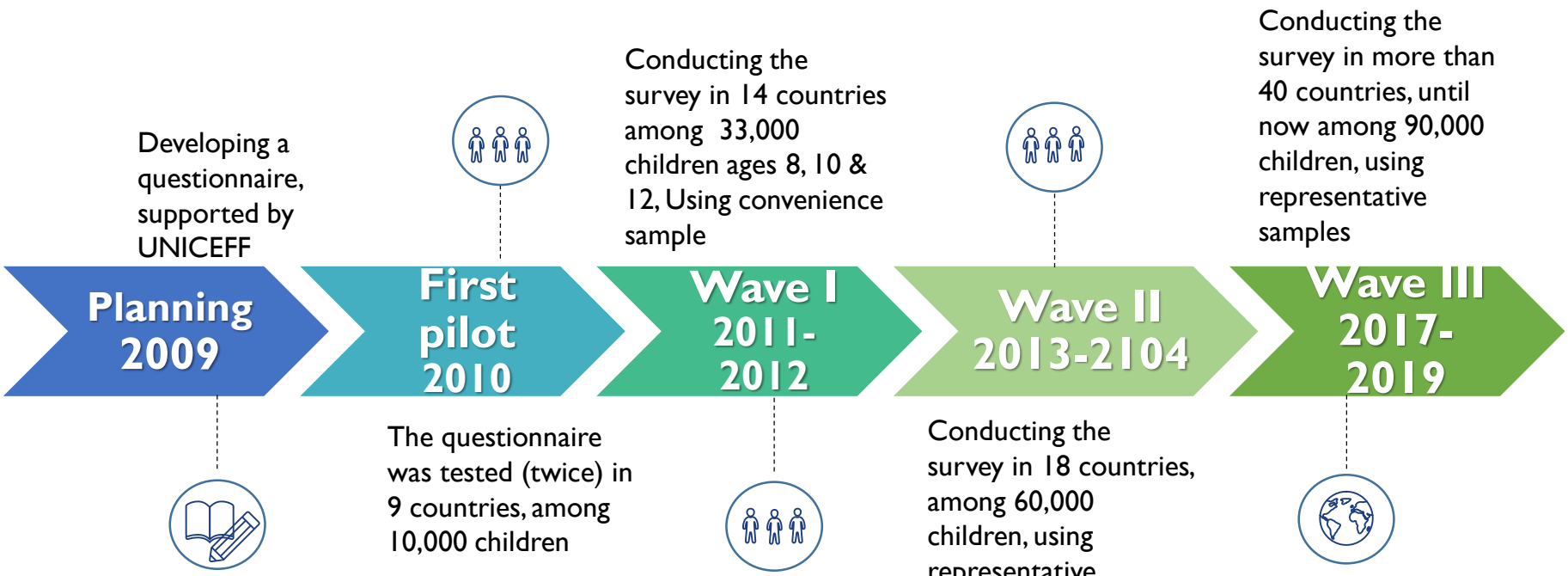
Objectives of the Study

- To examine the levels of children's subjective well-being and Quality of life across countries
- To examine the correlates of children's SWB
- To understand variations of children's SWB across the countries

- To study children's daily life and activities

Data collection in Nepal

The Project's Phases



Participants per Country

First Wave	
Algeria	1,450
Brazil	2,298
Canada	383
Chile	2,558
England	1,141
Israel	2,973
Nepal	253
Romania	3,296
Rwanda	295
South Africa	1,002
South Korea	7,973
Spain	5,727
Uganda	2,035
USA	1,799
Total	**33,183**

Second wave			
Algeria	3,676	Nepal	2,953
Colombia	2,816	Norway	2,864
Estonia	3,118	Poland	3,157
Ethiopia	2,877	Romania	4,104
Finland	2,842	South Africa	3,188
Germany	3,009	South Korea	7,467
Israel	2,800	Spain	3,756
Italy	3,701	Turkey	3,024
Malta	2,584	UK	3,298
Total 61,234			

Total no. of children 94,417 from 24 countries

Countries of The Third Wave (41!)

Albania	Algeria	Argentina	Bangladesh	Belgium	Brazil	China	Chile
Croatia	Estonia	Finland	France	Germany	Greece	Hong Kong S.A.R	Hungary
India	Indonesia	Ireland	Israel	Italy	Ivory Coast	Malaysia	Malta
Namibia	Nepal	Norway	Poland	Portugal	Romania	Russia	South Africa
South Korea	Spain	Sri Lanka	Switzerland	Taiwan	Vietnam	England	USA
Wales	Vietnam						

The Third Wave Status: Two Phases of Data Collection

Data collection has been completed including data cleaning and weighting among 22 countries

1 Albania
2 Algeria
3 Bangladesh
4 Belgium
5 Estonia
6 France
7 Germany
8 Greece
9 India
10 Indonesia
11 Israel
12 Malaysia
13 Malta
14 Nepal
15 Norway
16 Poland
17 South Africa
18 South Korea
19 Sri Lanka
20 Taiwan
21 Vietnam
22 Wales

Data collection will end soon (until the 15th of July)

1 Argentina
2 Brazil
3 Chile
5 Croatia
6 Finland
7 Hong Kong S.A.R China
8 Hungary
9 Ireland
10 Italy
11 Ivory Coast
12 Namibia
12 Portugal
13 Romania
14 Russia
15 Spain
16 Switzerland
17 Turkey
18 England
19 USA

Our Sample (after data cleaning)

	8yo	10yo	12yo	All
Albania	-	1176	1163	2339
Algeria	1185	1137	1054	3376
Bangladesh	241	946	1012	2199
Belgium	1134	1112	1076	3322
Estonia	1058	1013	1079	3150
France	-	2184	-	2184
Germany	945	829	1524	3298
Greece	-	822	-	822
India	994	946	977	2917
Indonesia	7444	7680	7999	23123
Israel	1487	1637	1465	4589
Malaysia	967	994	-	1961
Malta	567	648	752	1967
Nepal	-	1004	1041	2045
Norway	604	801	817	2222
Poland	974	1195	1157	3326
South Africa	-	3415	3699	7114
South Korea	3170	3203	3432	9805
Sri Lanka	-	1154	1221	2375
Taiwan	1342	1356	1532	4230
Vietnam	930	946	1080	2956
Wales	-	959	1668	2627
Total	**23042**	**35157**	**33748**	**91947**

4,256 children have been deleted during data cleaning

Scope of the Samples

- 24 countries - a representative national sample
- 17 countries - a representative sample of one region/bit city

Algeria	West Algeria	**Ireland**	Cork
Argentina	Buenos Aires	**Italy**	Liguria Region
Belgium	Flanders	**Nepal**	Province No. 3
Brazil	South and southeast	**Russia**	Tyumen region
Chile	Concepción and Santiago	**Spain**	Catalonia
China	Guangdong	**Sri Lanka**	3 regions
France	Nantes, Paris and Rouen	**USA**	South Dakota, Ohio, Maryland, Kentucky
Greece	the periphery of Epirus	**Vietnam**	North Vietnam
India	Kolkata		

Measures

The study covers the following key aspects of children's lives:

- Basic characteristics (age, gender, country of birth)
- Home and family relationships
- Money and economic circumstances
- Friends
- Local area
- School
- Time use
- Self
- Children's rights
- Overall subjective well-being

We asked about:

- Frequency of activities or events
- Satisfaction scales
- Agreement scales
- Socio-demographic characteristics
- Description questions

CHILDREN'S WORLDS
INTERNATIONAL SURVEY OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING (ISCWeB)

Three different approaches to comparisons

What should we compare?

Inequalities of well-being

Means or mean ranks

% with low well-being

Linked to three different goals

Reduce inequality

Increase average happiness or satisfaction

Reduce misery

Are comparisons meaningful?

Linguistic issues:

Do words, phrases, statements and questions mean the same in different languages?

Cultural response issues:

Do children (and people in general) tend to respond differently to the same types of response options in different countries or cultures?

Research on adult subjective well-being has attempted to tackle these issues through several means, including:

- Demonstrating correlations between macro indicators and mean national subjective well-being. But do we have enough countries and what are the salient macro indicators?
- Using 'anchoring vignettes' within questionnaires. For the future?

Where does that leave us?

Comparing means (or % with low well-being or inequalities) between countries is potentially useful, if we can explain the reasons for variation

But, in addition:

- We can use the mean scores in other useful comparative ways
- Most (80% to 90%) of the variation is within countries not between countries, so we can look at that in a comparative way too
- There are other types of comparative analysis we can do including:
- Looking at relative positive and negative aspects of life
- Looking at sub-group differences
- There are other important topics covered in the survey – bullying, time use, children's rights.

Data presented today

- **Data**: ISCWeB 3rd wave data (10 YO dataset)

- **Participants**: about 34,000 students across 22 countries. Participant countries were Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Israel, Malaysia, Malta, Nepal, Norway, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Vietnam and Wales (the U.K.).

Dependent variable: CW-SWBS

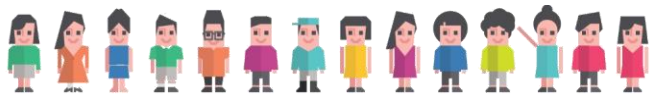
- CW-SWBS (Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale)
  - 6 items measuring cognitive subjective well-being

- **Now please say how much you agree with each of the following sentences about your life as a whole.**

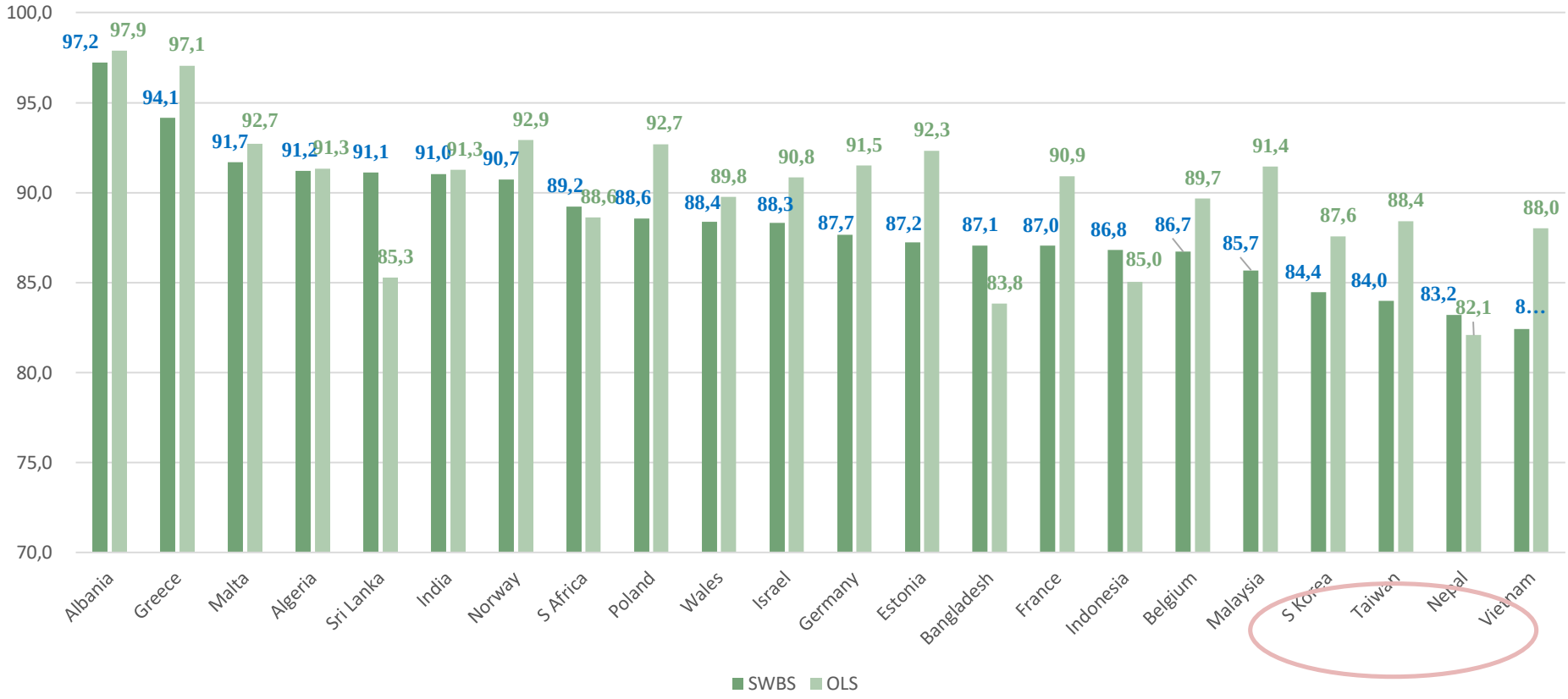
(These questions use a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means that you do not agree with the sentence at all and 10 means that you agree with it completely.)

	0 = Not at all agree										10 = totally agree
I enjoy my life	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My life is going well	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I have a good life	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The things that happen in my life are excellent	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I like my life	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I am happy with my life	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Dependent Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
SWBS (Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale)	33,841	0.00	100.00	87.7853	17.85335



Children's SWB across countries



Asian bias?

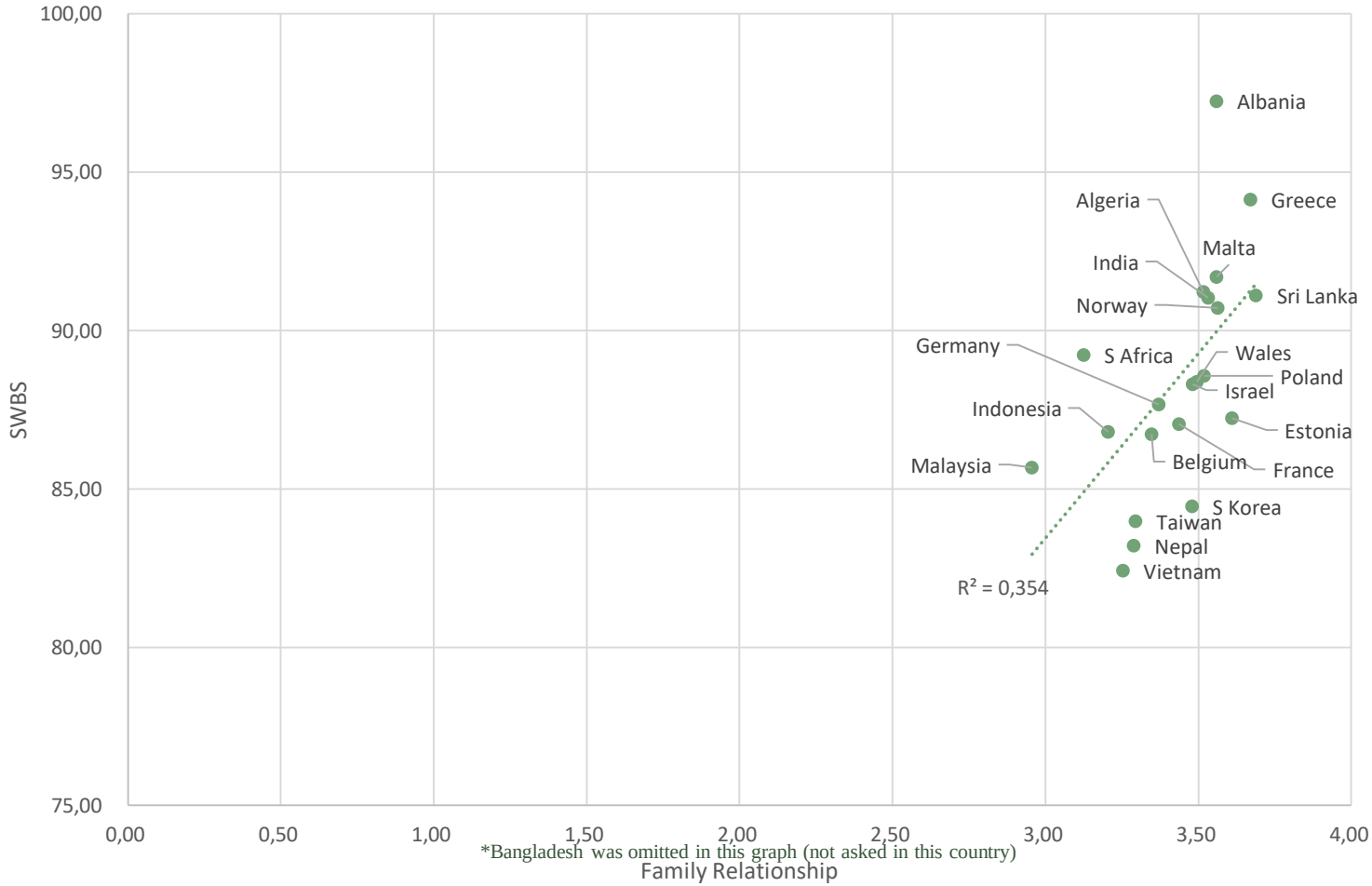
Independent Variables: Family, School, and Community

Domain	Sub-domain	Items	Note
Family	Family Relationship	• There are people in my family who care about me • We have a good time together in my family • My parents/carers listen to me and take what I say into account	Mean items (0-4)
	Home Safety	• I feel safe at home	Single item (0-4)
	Access Materials	• Whether has: ①Clothes in good condition to go to school in, ②Enough money for school trips and activities, ③ Access to the Internet, ④Equipment/things for sports and hobbies, ⑤Pocket money / money to spend on yourself, ⑥Two pairs of shoes in good condition, ⑦Mobile phone, ⑧Equipment/things you need for school	Sum items (0-8)
School	Peer and teacher Relationship	• I have enough friends • My friends are usually nice to me • Me and my friends get along well together • My teachers care about me • My teachers listen to me and take what I say into account	Mean items (0-4)
	Bullying	• How often: ①Hit by other children in your school, ②Called unkind names by other children in your school, ③Left out by other children in your class	Sum 3 binary items (0-3)
	School Safety	• I feel safe at school	Single item (0-4)
Community	Community Safety	• I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in	Single item (0-4)
	Area To Play	• In my area there are enough places to play or to have a good time	Single item (0-4)
Demography	Sex	• Boy or Girl (Boy=1, Girl=0)	(0-1)

Independent Variables: Family, School, and Community

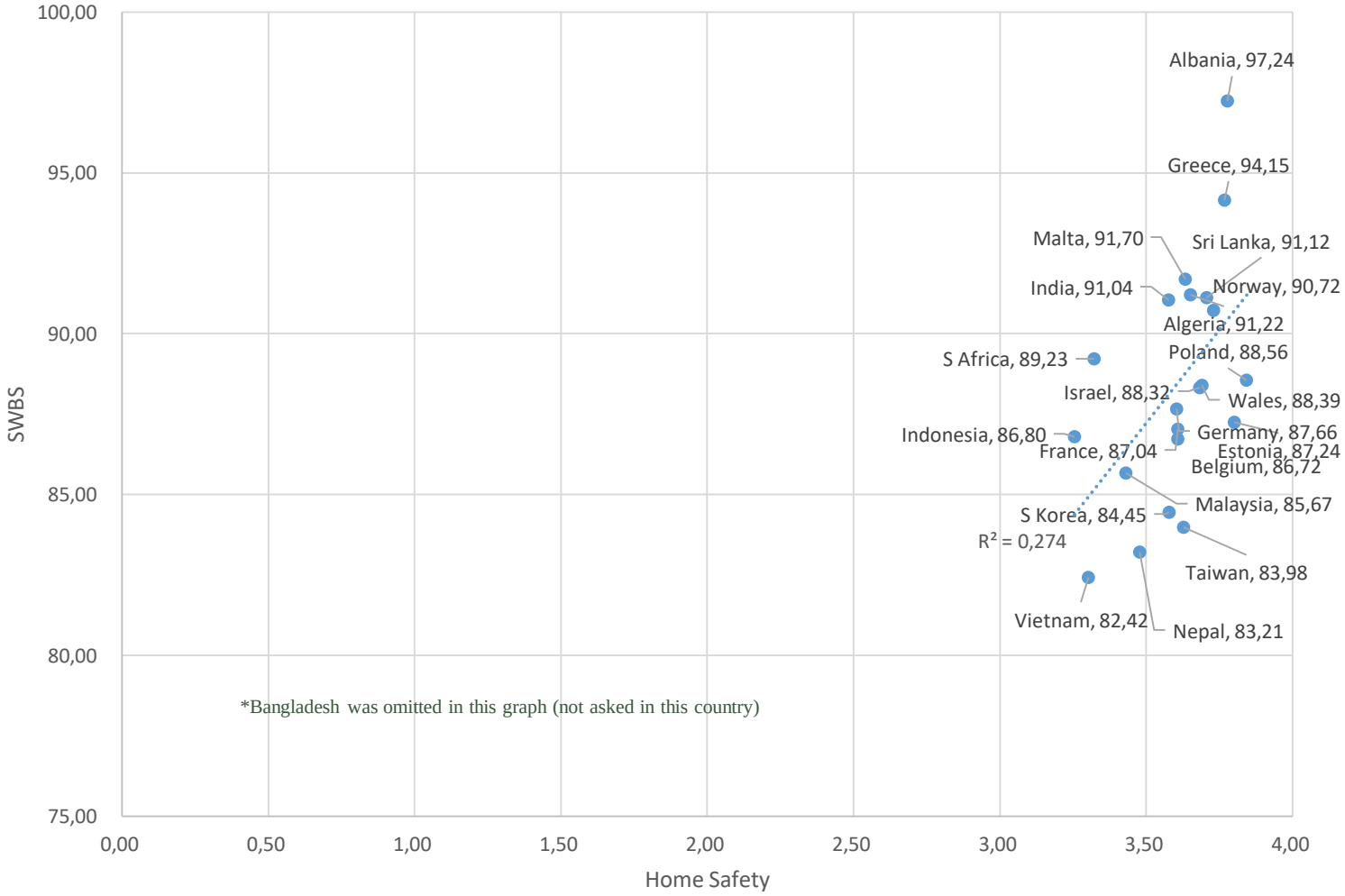
Domain	Sub-domain	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
Family	Family Relationship	33,714	0.00	4.00	3.3660	.79397
	Home Safety	32,488	0.00	4.00	3.5236	.89302
	Access Materials	34,776	0.00	8.00	6.5357	1.74491
School	Peer and teacher Relationship	33,917	0.00	4.00	3.1482	.81720
	Bullying	34,248	0.00	3.00	1.1518	1.08897
	School Safety	31,254	0.00	4.00	3.2255	1.14358
Community	Community Safety	31,589	0.00	4.00	2.9588	1.22813
	Area To Play	30,728	0.00	4.00	3.0191	1.26038
Demography	Sex (Boy=1, Girl=0)	34,694	0.00	1.00	.4930	.49996

Independent Variables by countries : Family relationships

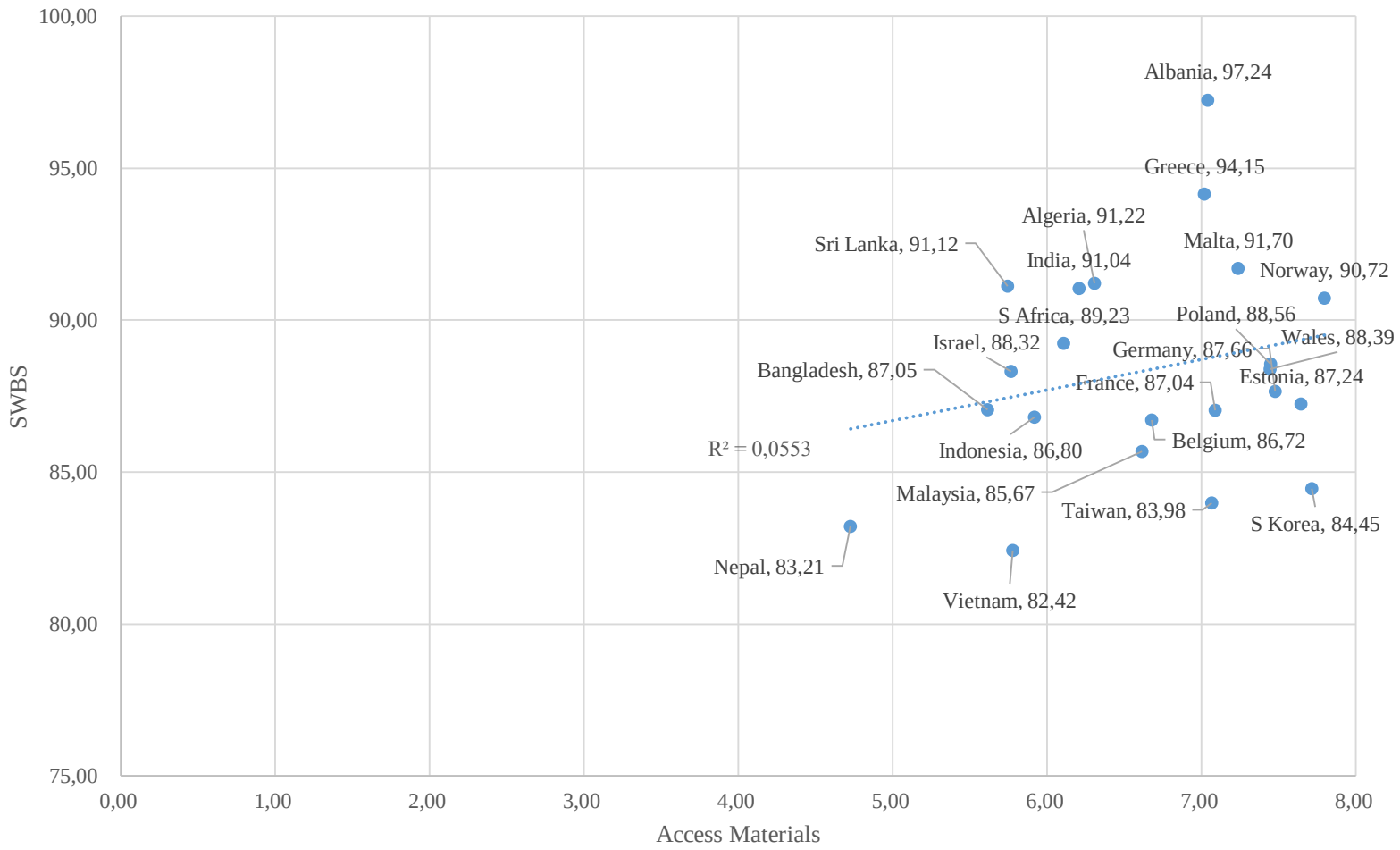


*Bangladesh was omitted in this graph (not asked in this country)

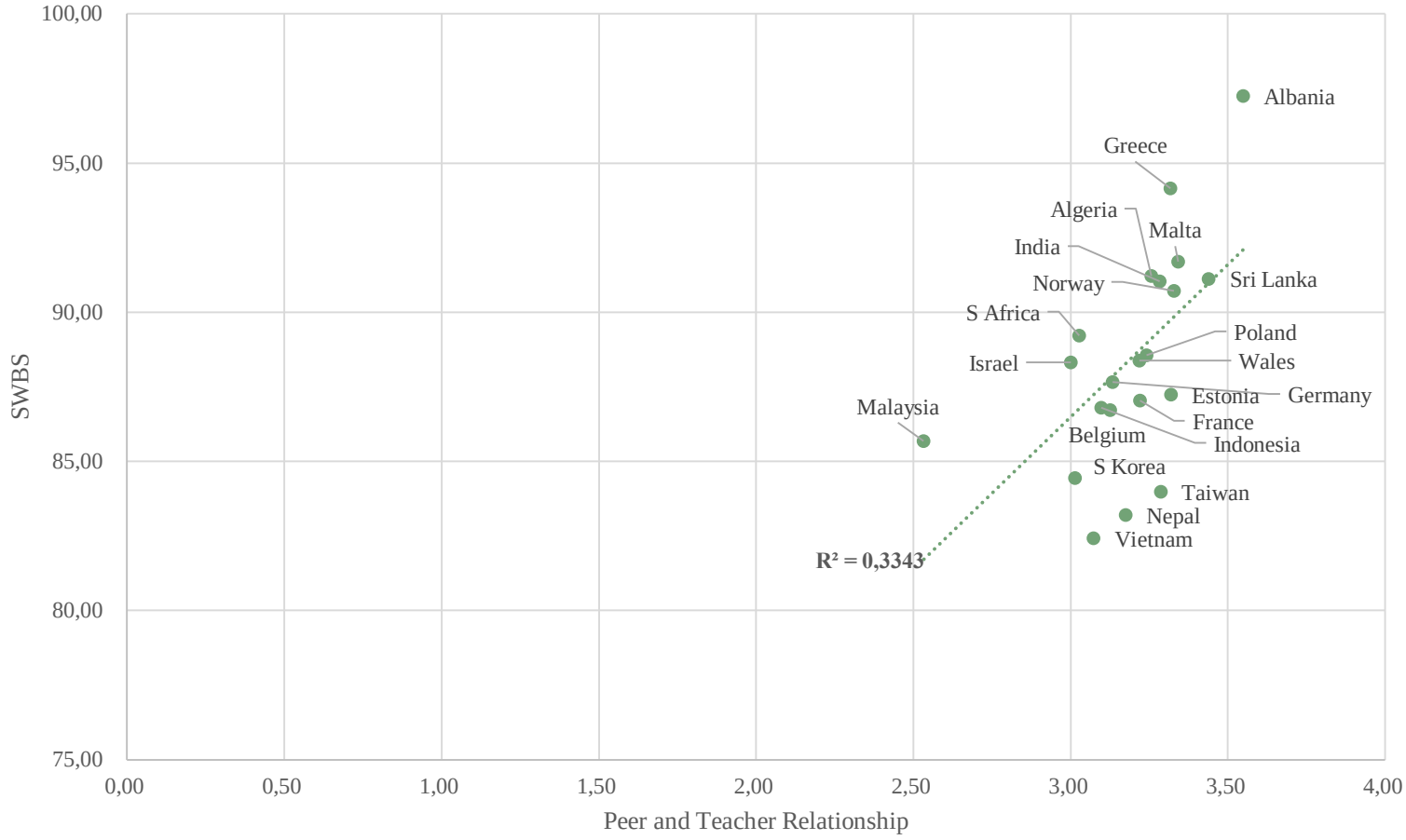
Independent Variables by countries : Home Safety



Independent Variables by countries : Access Materials

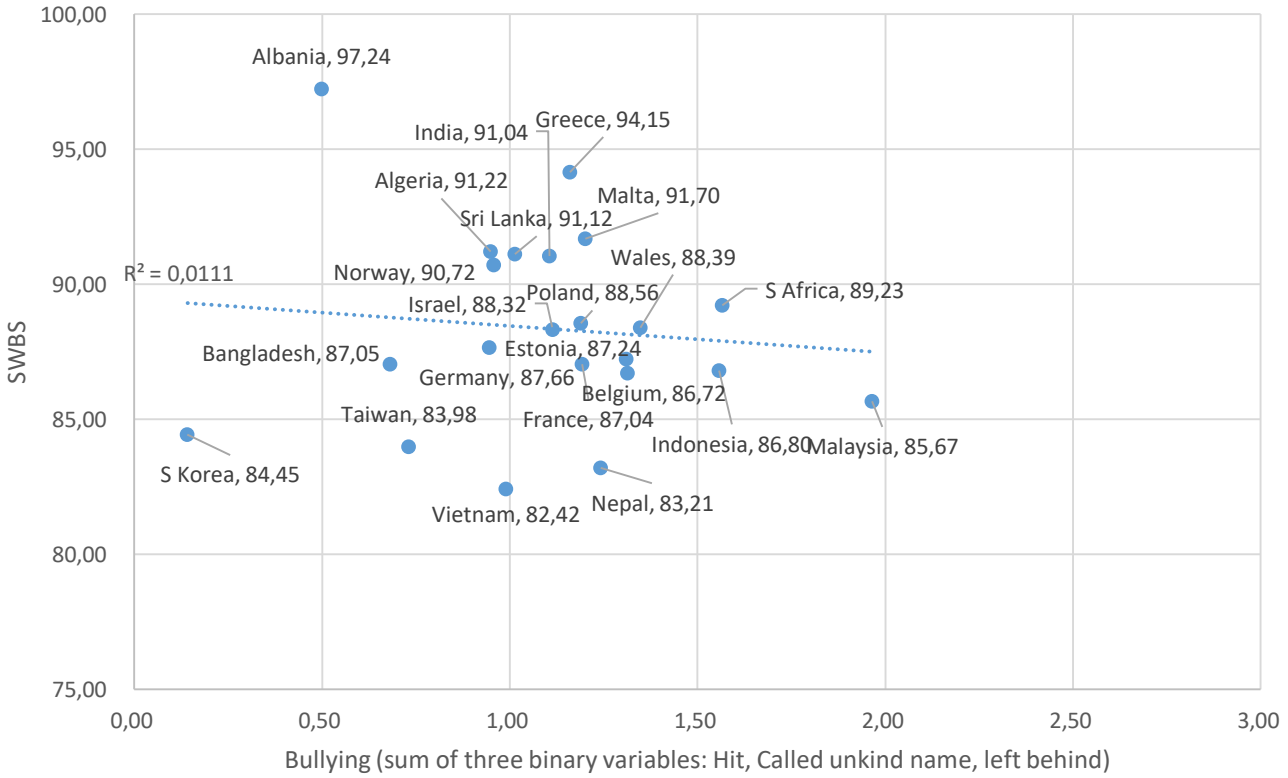


Independent Variables by countries : Peer and Teacher Relationship

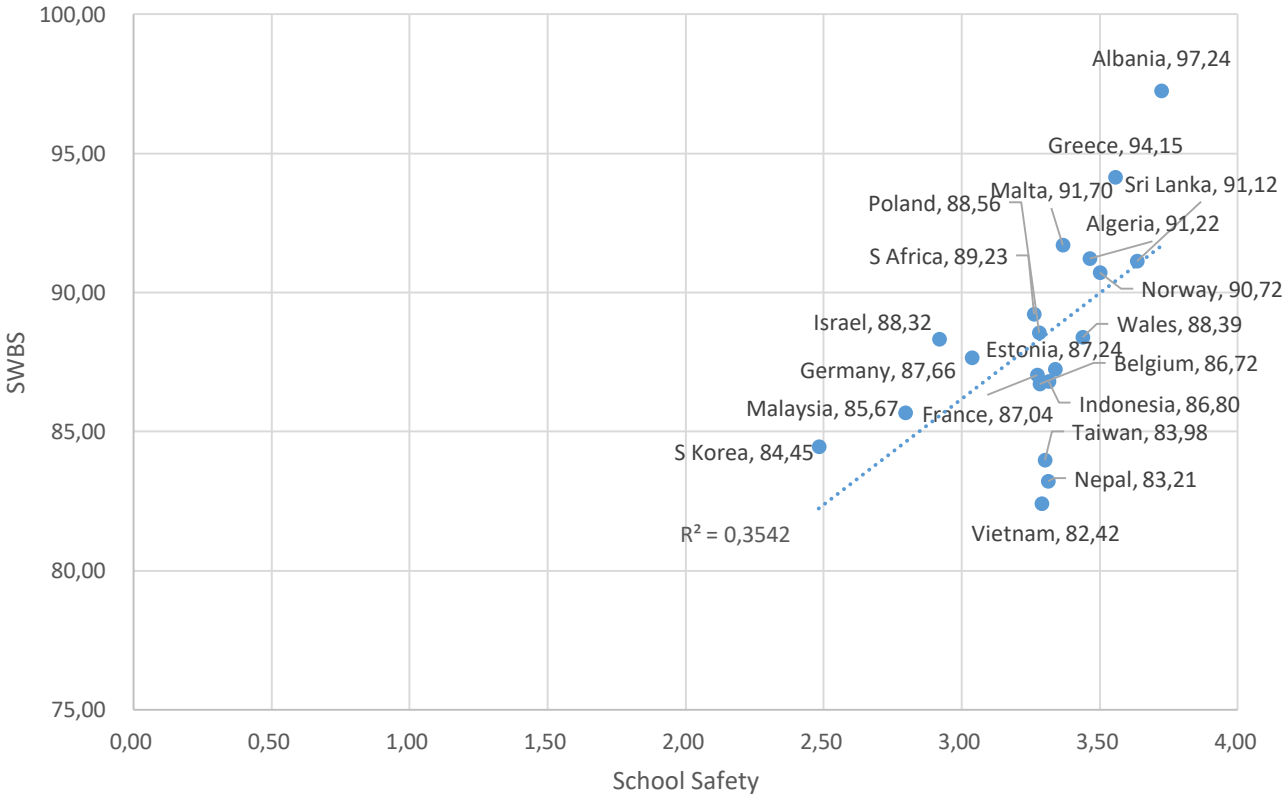


*Bangladesh was omitted in this graph (not asked in this country)

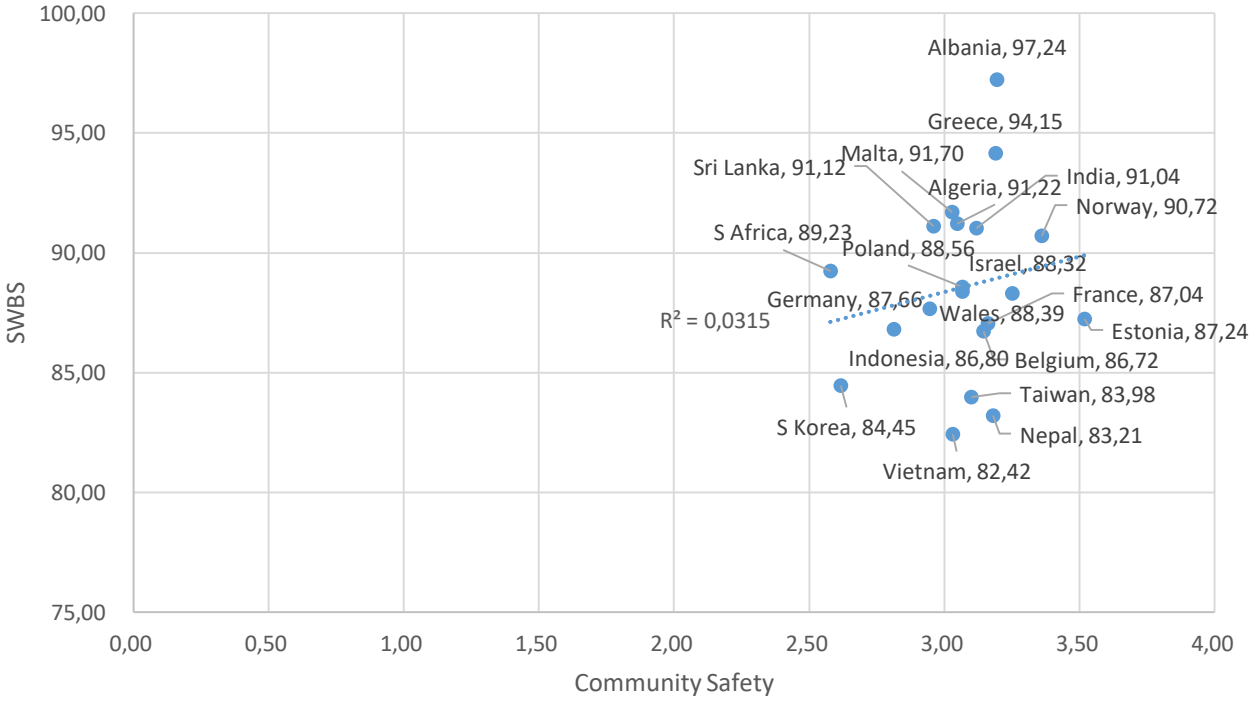
Independent Variables by countries : Bullying



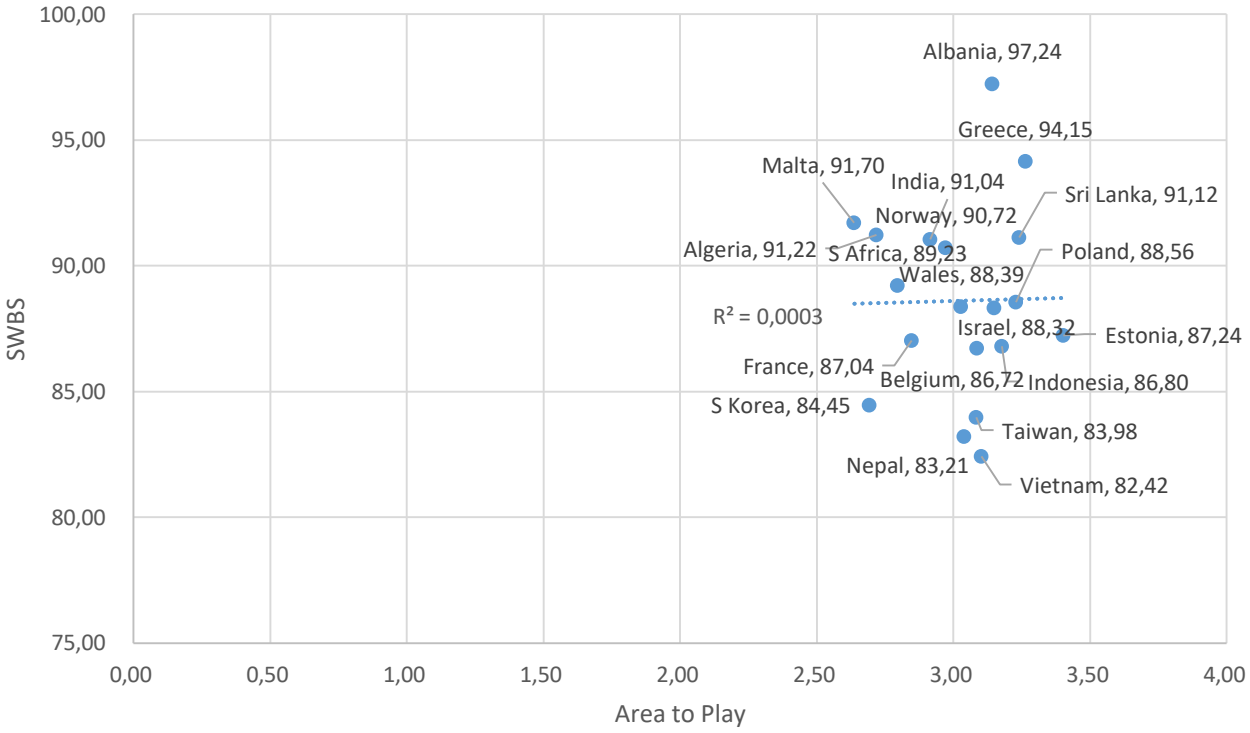
Independent Variables by countries : School Safety



Independent Variables by countries : Community Safety



Independent Variables by countries : Area to Play



Regression results: Pooled dataset (18 countries)

Domain	Sub-domain	B	S.E.	Beta	t	P-value
Family	Family Relationship	4.427	.148	.191	29.928	.000
	Home Safety	1.587	.122	.078	13.018	.000
	Access Materials	.598	.058	.055	10.329	.000
School	Peer and teacher Relationship	4.214	.150	.185	28.115	.000
	Bullying	-.872	.085	-.055	-10.207	.000
	School Safety	2.475	.094	.158	26.191	.000
Community	Community Safety	.861	.085	.060	10.127	.000
	Area To Play	1.372	.082	.098	16.802	.000
Demography	Sex (Boy=1, Girl=0)	.616	.181	.018	3.405	.001
Constant		36.090	.643		56.139	.000

a. Dependent Variable: SWBS (Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale)

b. R square: .304

Regression results: 18 countries

Domain	Sub-domain	Albania	Algeria	Belgium	Sri Lanka	Taiwan	Estonia	France	Greece	Indonesia
Family	Family Relationship	.186	4.461***	5.846***	4.646***	7.061***	9.768***	9.155***	2.620***	2.114***
	Home Safety	-.601	3.432***	.998	1.178	2.953***	.579	3.272***	4.102***	1.060***
	Access Materials	1.218***	1.719***	.566	.996**	1.483***	1.021	.678	.957**	.892***
School	Peer and teacher Relationship	1.609***	2.355***	5.201***	3.430***	4.897***	4.367***	3.305***	4.232***	3.850***
	Bullying	-1.307***	-.804	-1.792***	-2.170***	-1.356*	-.230	-2.323***	-.644	-1.219***
	School Safety	.613	.883*	3.727***	1.782**	2.645***	3.353***	1.638***	1.402**	1.954***
Community	Community Safety	.565**	1.266***	-1.188*	1.457***	1.059*	.950	.954**	.375	.584**
	Area To Play	.213	.476	1.665***	-.115	2.077***	1.786***	1.249***	1.201***	1.443***
Demography	Sex (Boy=1, Girl=0)	-.681	-2.226*	3.856***	-.586	-.859	.916	2.923***	.199	1.006**
Constant		80.727***	38.097***	30.104***	43.837***	6.382	7.278	17.761***	38.861***	48.663***
R2		.171	.318	.404	.245	.429	.445	.425	.356	.188
n		1066	925	856	938	1225	833	1766	753	5985

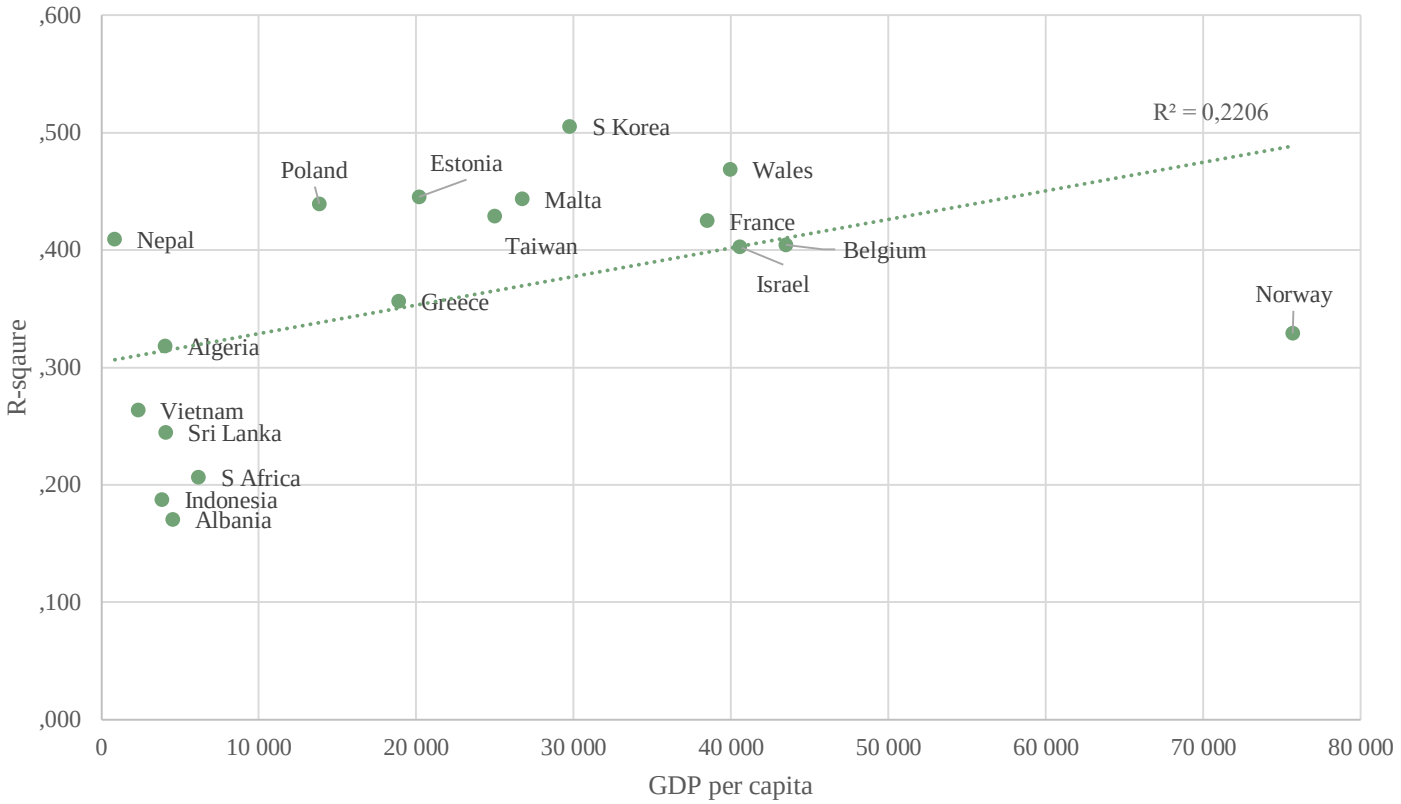
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Regression results: 18 countries

Domain	Sub-domain	Israel	S Korea	Malta	Nepal	Norway	Poland	Vietnam	S Africa	Wales
Family	Family Relationship	5.568***	10.614***	8.355***	.781	4.291***	4.828***	2.956**	2.035***	5.374***
	Home Safety	3.109***	1.144**	5.007***	2.556**	.850	1.008	2.701***	.828*	4.571***
	Access Materials	.300*	1.247***	1.130	1.019**	.508	1.241*	2.536***	.953***	2.773***
School	Peer and teacher Relationship	4.389***	4.088***	.971	7.737***	3.086**	7.049***	3.976***	2.912***	4.868***
	Bullying	-1.578***	-2.431***	-1.462**	.649	-1.110*	-.787	-2.093**	-1.673***	-.686
	School Safety	2.163***	1.724***	2.669***	-.476	2.195**	3.289***	.488	1.147***	3.305***
Community	Community Safety	1.409**	1.467***	.263	4.407***	1.719**	1.496***	1.530*	.964***	2.566***
	Area To Play	1.404***	1.536***	.451	1.692**	1.633***	1.379***	.478	1.362***	.196
Demography	Sex (Boy=1, Girl=0)	.565	1.379**	.165	-1.341	-1.623	1.223	.011	.666	-.416
Constant		28.894***	9.143**	22.865***	24.294***	41.835***	15.977**	31.220***	57.788***	-2.418
R2		.403	.506	.444	.409	.329	.439	.264	.207	.469
n		1377	2948	519	803	702	985	757	2540	809

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

Relationship between GDP per capita and R^2 among 18 countries



- We can better explain the variances of SWB with the 'usual correlates' in rich countries.
- What does this mean?

1. Those factors matter when the basic economic needs are met?
2. Or, the theories and empirical research have been only developed focusing on western and developed countries?

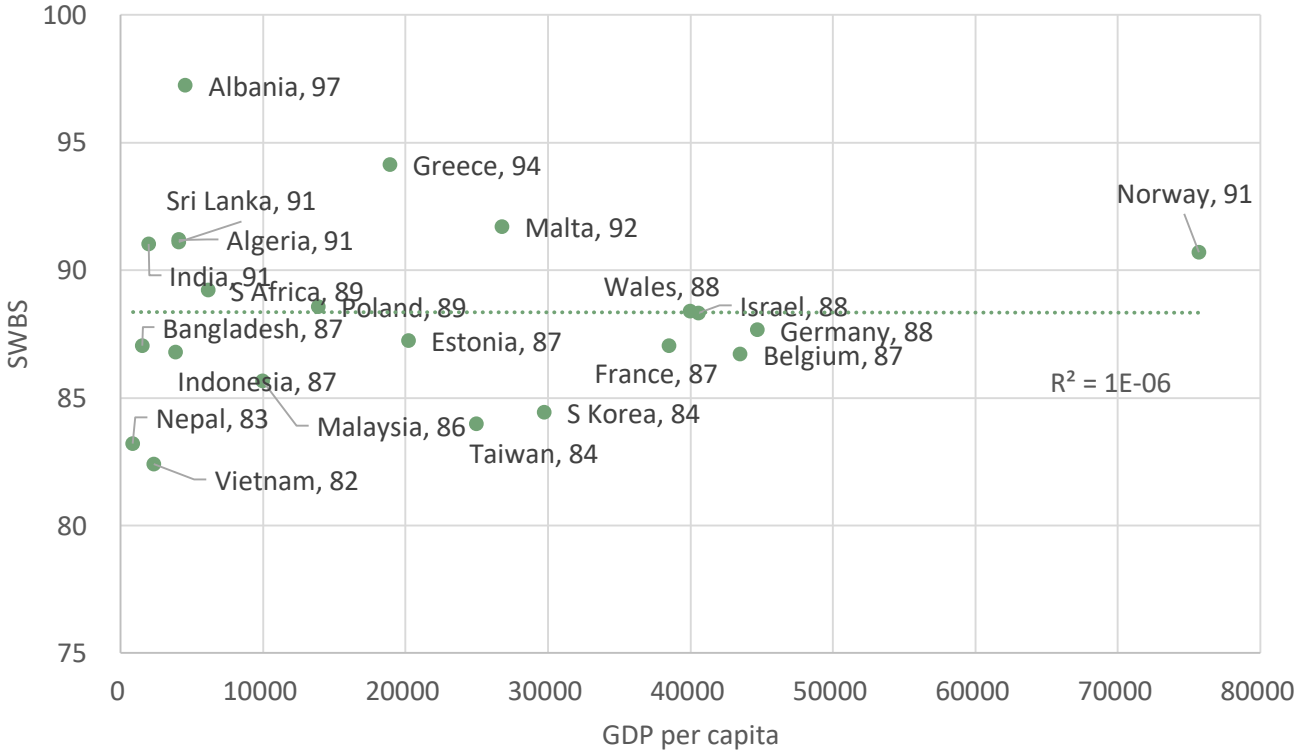
Multi-level analysis

- Data and participants are same but we employed multi-level analysis to see whether national-level variables explain variations of children's subjective well-being.
- Dependent variable: CW-SWBS
- Level-1 (Individual level variables): family, school, and community variables
- Level-2 (national level variables)
  - GDP per capita, (*source: World Happiness Report 2018)
  - Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births), most recent years (*source: Worldbank database)
  - Inequality (Gini coefficient), most recent years (*source: World Happiness Report 2018)

	N	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max
GDP per Capita	18	22134.44	20023.36	849	75704.2
Infant mortality rate	18	9.39	9.2	2.1	28.8
Inequality (Gini Coefficient)	18	0.4	0.08	0.25	0.57

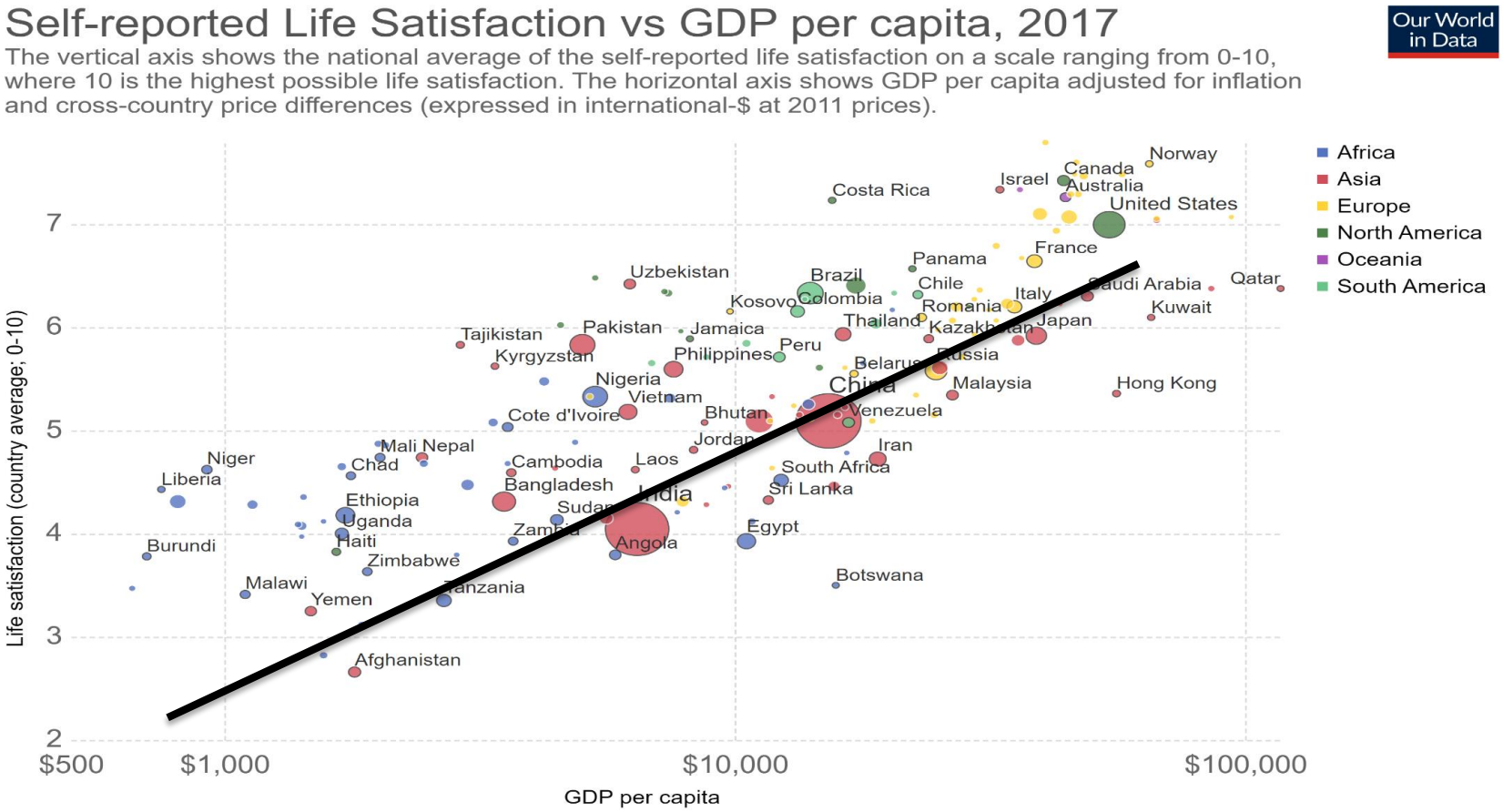
National level variable and children's subjective well-being

: Relationship between children's SWB and GDP per capita among 22 countries



No relationship between country's wealth and children's subjective well-being!

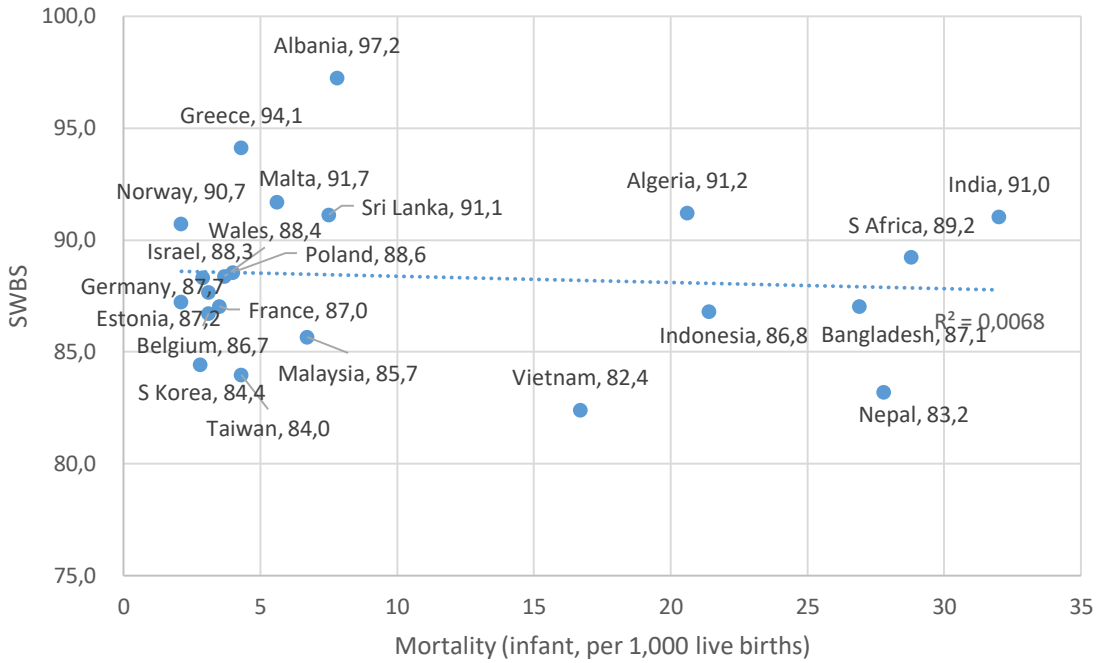
By comparison, adults life satisfaction shows quite different pattern



Source: World Bank, World Happiness Report (2019), Population by country, 1800 to 2100 (Gapminder & UN)
OurWorldInData.org/happiness-and-life-satisfaction/ • CC BY

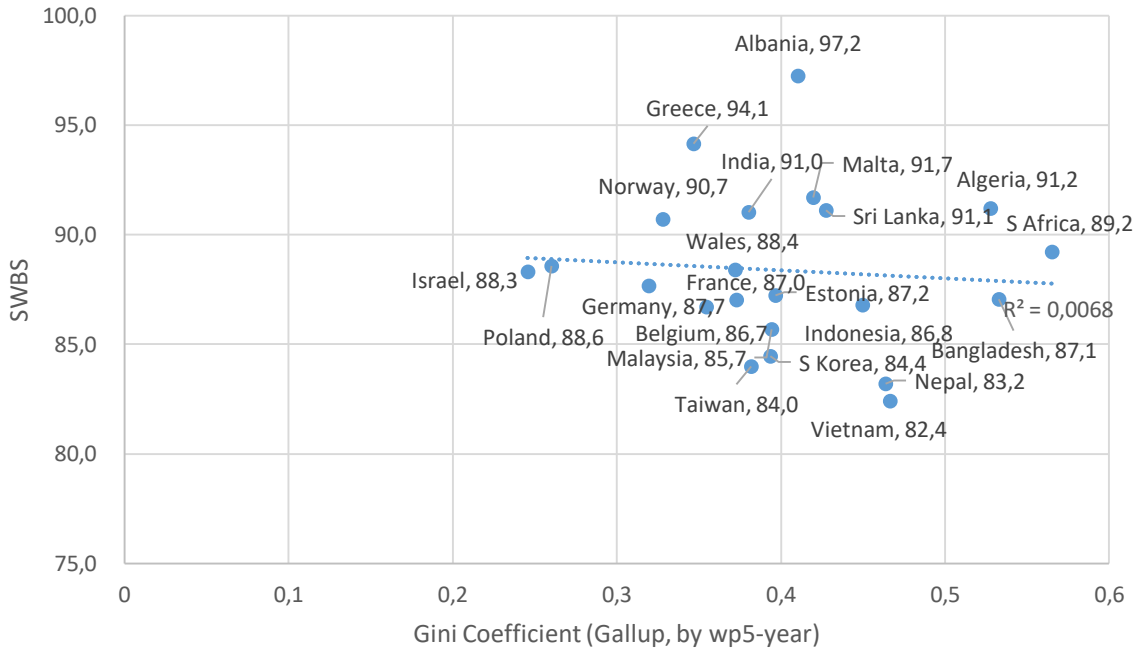
National level variable and children's subjective well-being

:Relationship between mortality rate and SWB by countries



National level variable and children's subjective well-being

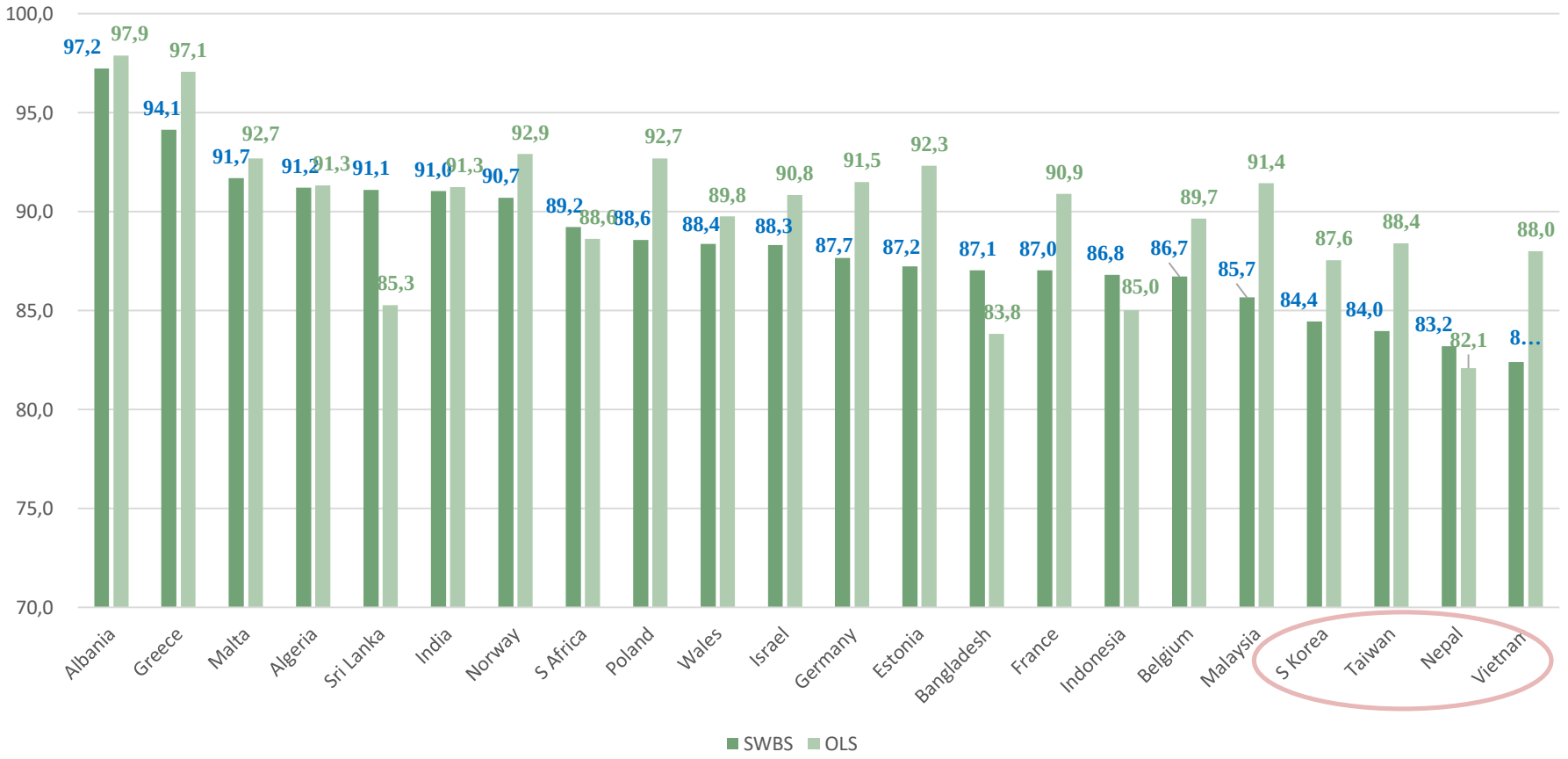
:Relationship between Gini coefficient and SWB by countries



Findings from analysis of the correlates

- Individual, family, and community-level factors matter for children's SWB.
- However, these factors work differently across countries.
- How much variation of SWB you can explain with these variables differ across countries – more can be explained in developed countries.
- Traditional country-level variables (mostly economy related) have limited role explaining the variation of children's SWB across countries.

Children's SWB across countries



Asian bias?

Decomposition analysis

- The primary purpose of this analysis is to examine what factors explain the SWB differences across the countries.
- In order to do that:
  - We used domain-specific life satisfaction questions to see which domain explain global life satisfaction (*CW-SWBS is domain-free scale).
  - We examine what areas are accountable for the variations in the overall SWB.

Domain	Item(s)
Money	Satisfied things have
Time use	Satisfied time use, Satisfied free time
Learning	Satisfied life as a student, Satisfied things learned
Relationship	Satisfied people live with, Satisfied other family, Satisfied friends, Satisfied classmates
Safe environment	Satisfied house, Satisfied local area, Satisfied general safety
Self	Satisfied freedom, Satisfied appearance, Satisfied health

For example:

Why are the levels of children's SWB of Asian countries lower than others?

- There are several possible explanations
  - Asian reporting bias?
  - Asian children are 'really' unhappy?

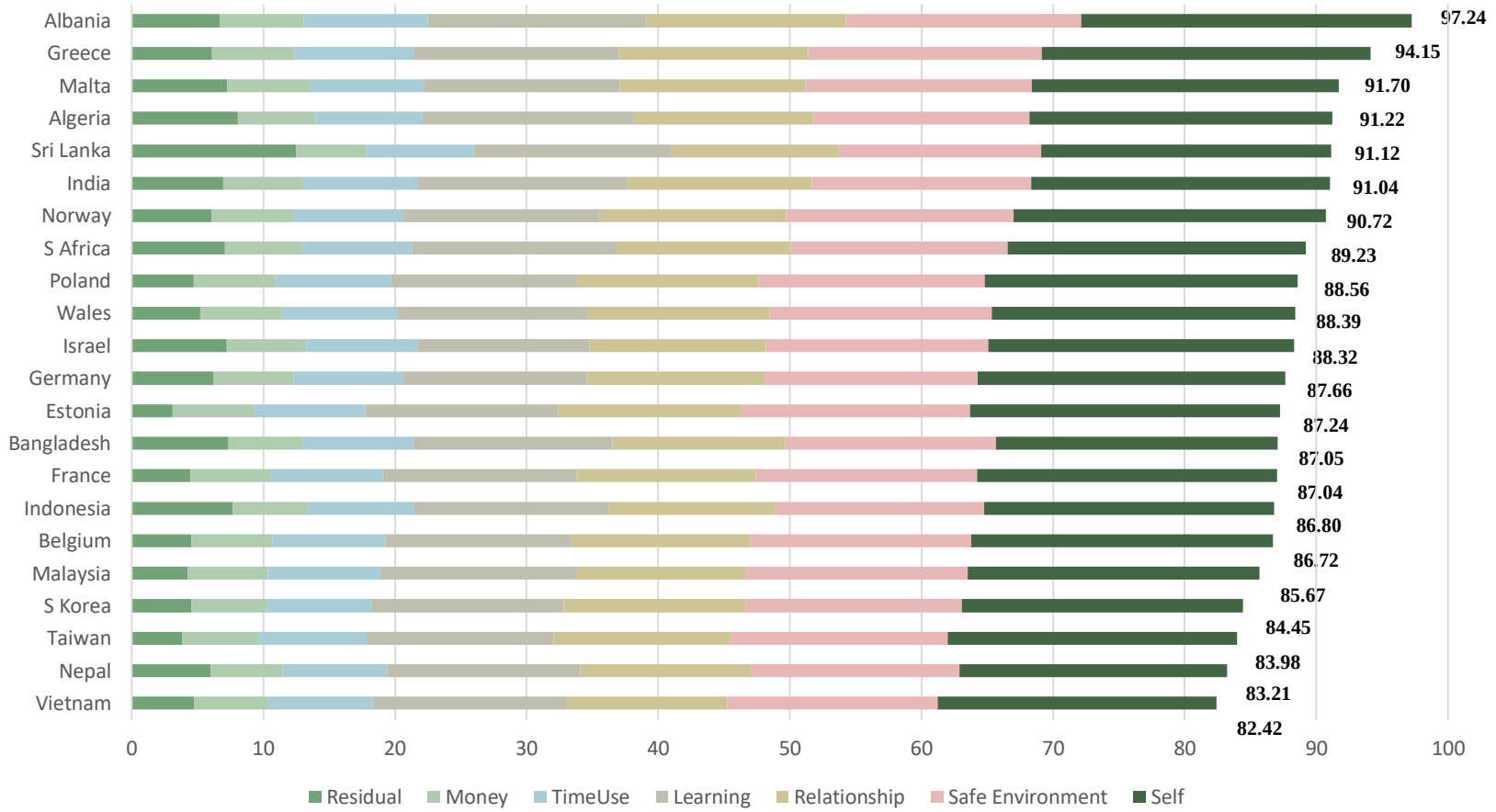
– If Asian children's SWB is lower than others, what 'factors' are accountable for that?

OLS Decomposition:

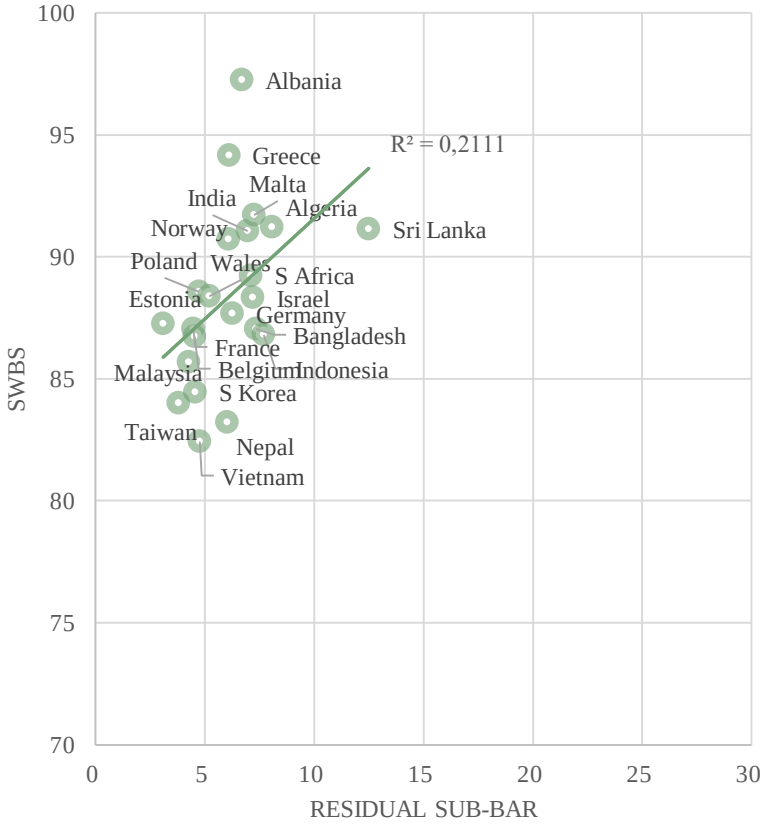
Pooled Regression with domain-specific life satisfaction measures:

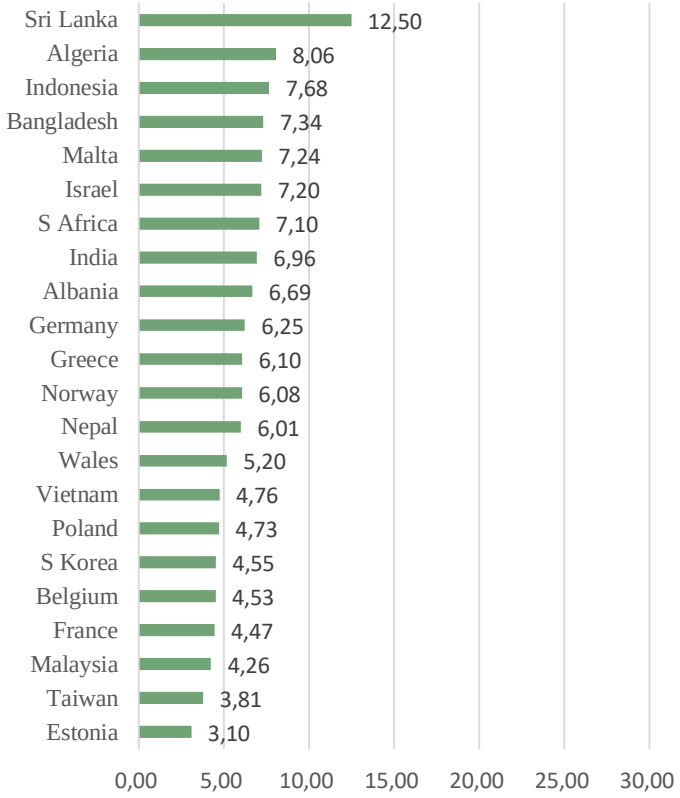
Dependent variable: CW-SWBS

		Unstandized Coeff.		Standardized Coeff.		
		B	S.E.	B	t	sig.
	constant	6.209	.442		14.061	.000
	Self	2.617	.053	.258	49.404	.000
	Time Use	.980	.046	.109	21.465	.000
	Learning	1.704	.046	.175	37.137	.000
	Money	.662	.044	.072	15.120	.000
	Relationships	1.585	.053	.150	29.722	.000
	Safe Environment	1.888	.060	.172	31.515	.000

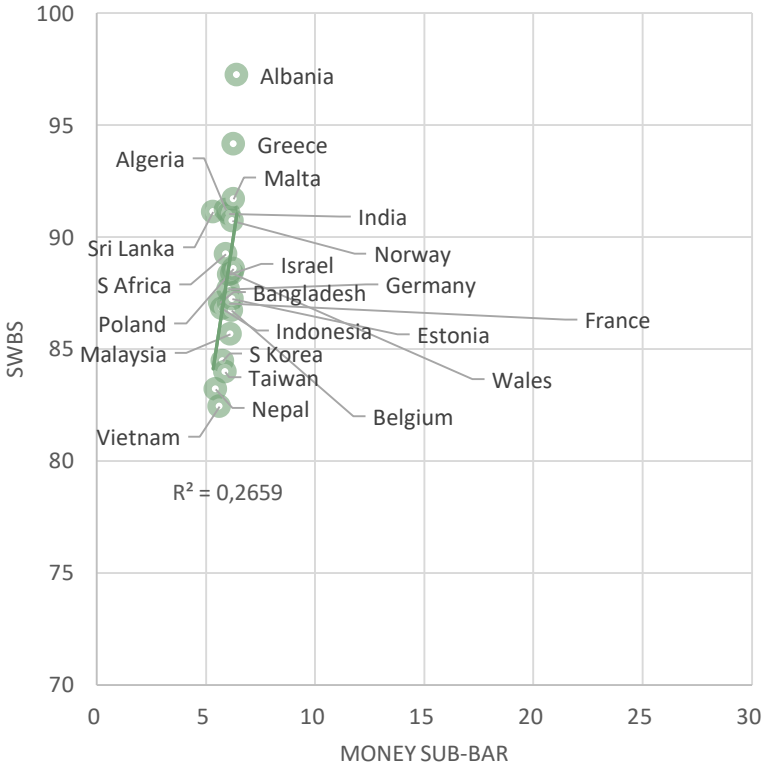

Albania
Greece
Malta
Algeria
Sri Lanka
India
Norway
S Africa
Poland
Wales
Israel
Germany
Estonia
Bangladesh
France
Indonesia
Belgium
Malaysia
S Korea
Taiwan
Nepal
Vietnam
97.24
94.15
91.70
91.22
91.12
91.04
90.72
89.23
88.56
88.39
88.32
87.66
87.24
87.05
87.04
86.80
86.72
85.67
84.45
83.98
83.21
82.42
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
90
100
Residual
Money
TimeUse
Learning
Relationship
Safe Environment
Self

Residual – SWBS (R^2 = .2111)

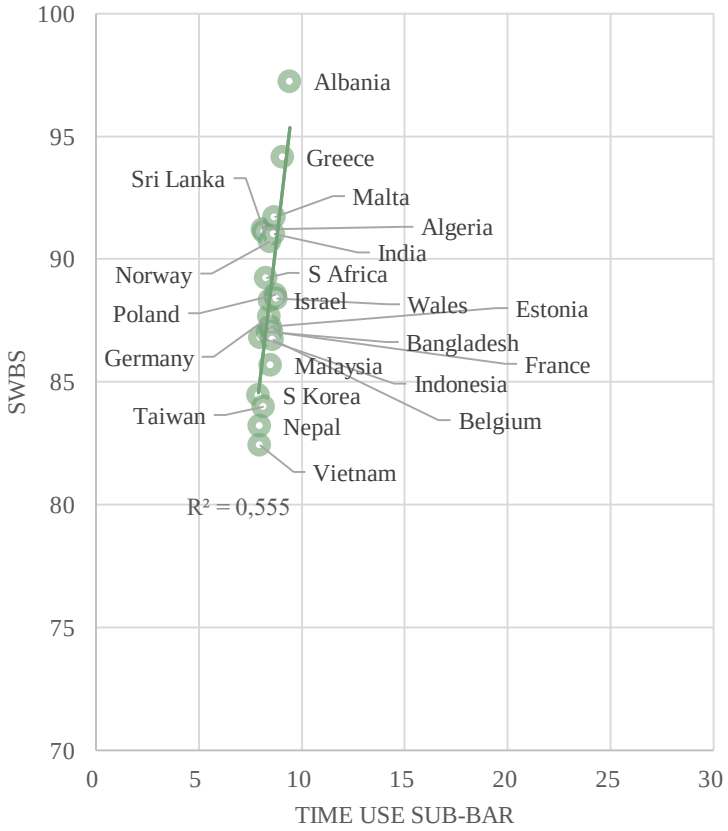




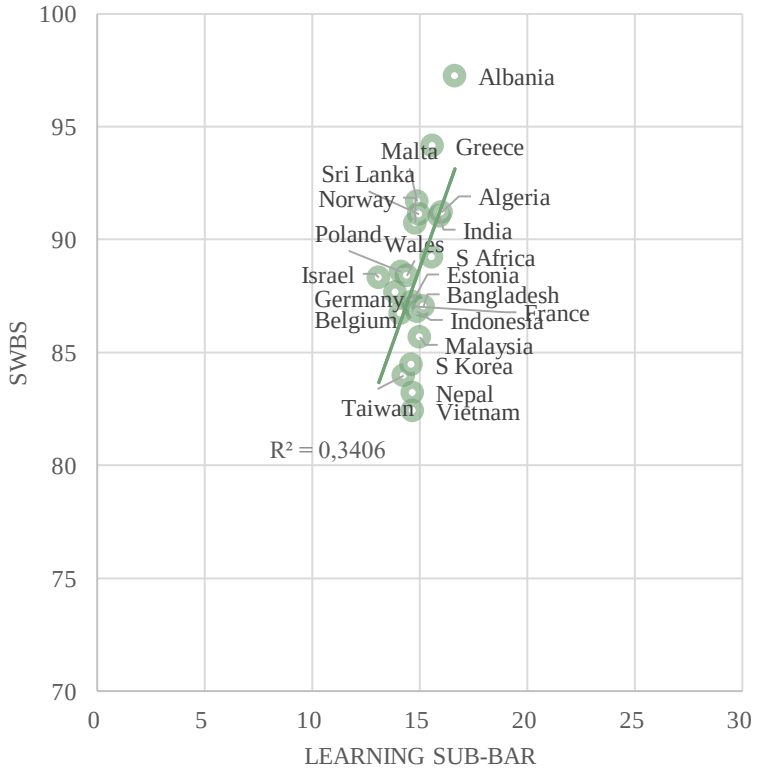
Money – SWBS (R^2 = .2659)

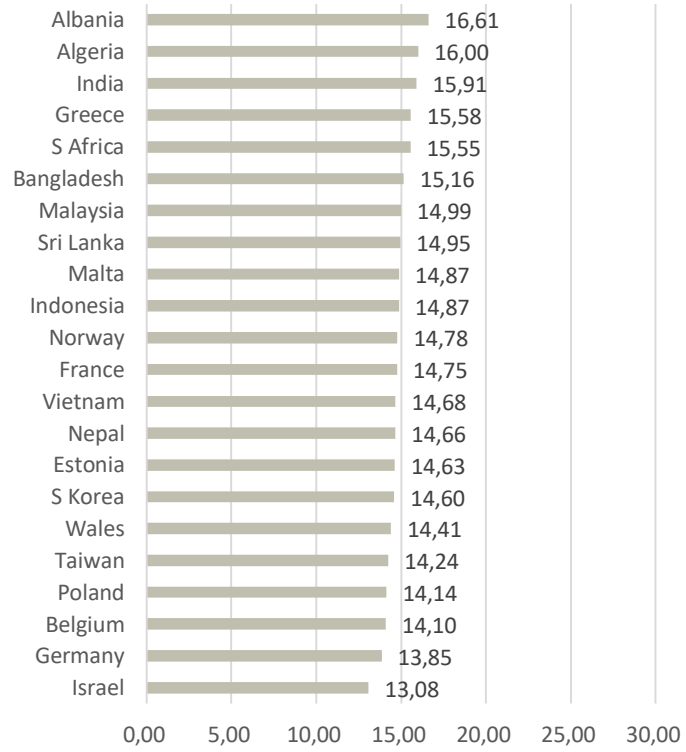


Time Use – SWBS (R^2 = .555)

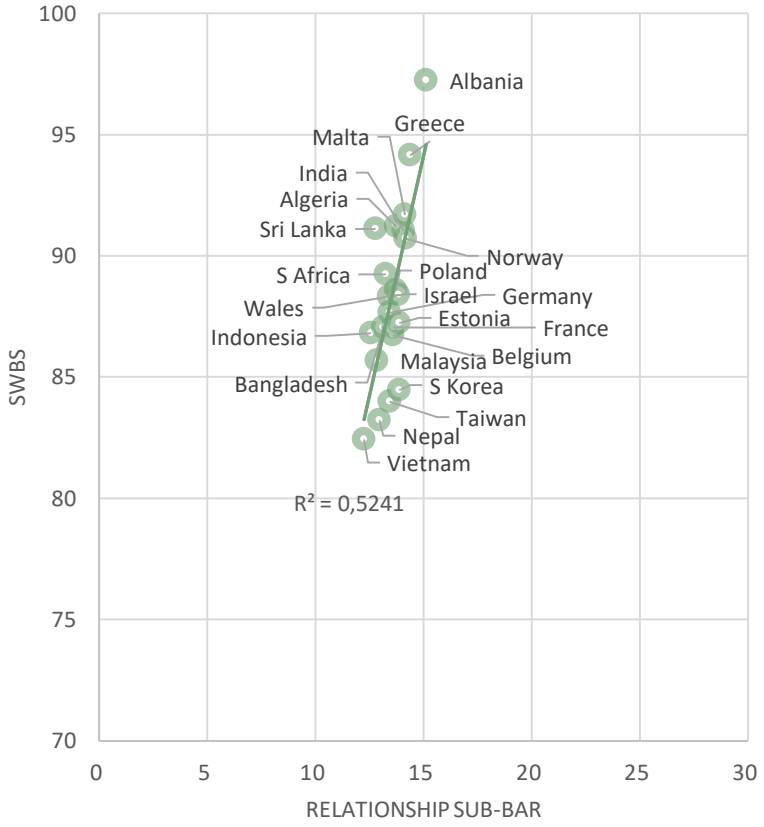


Learning– SWBS (R^2 = .3406)

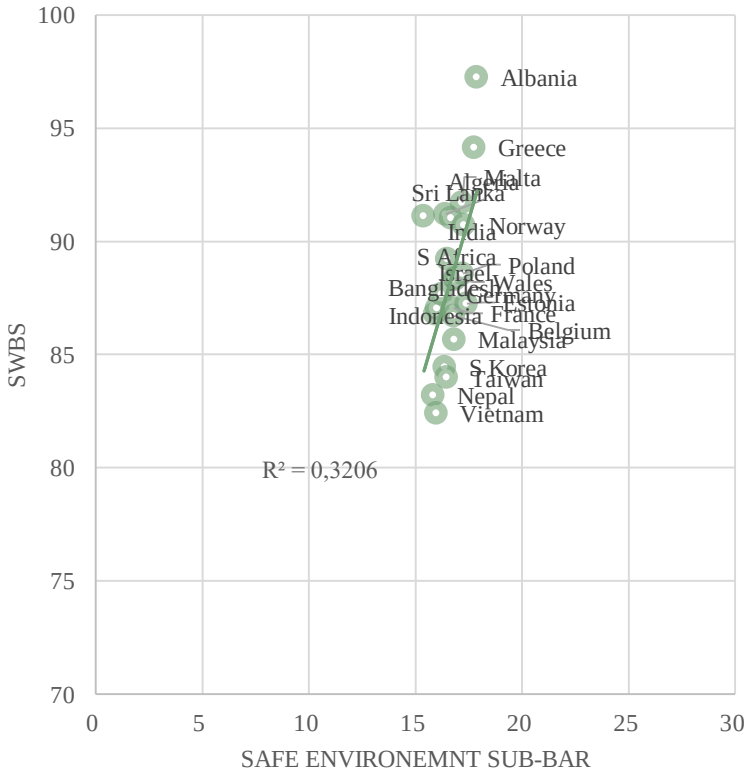


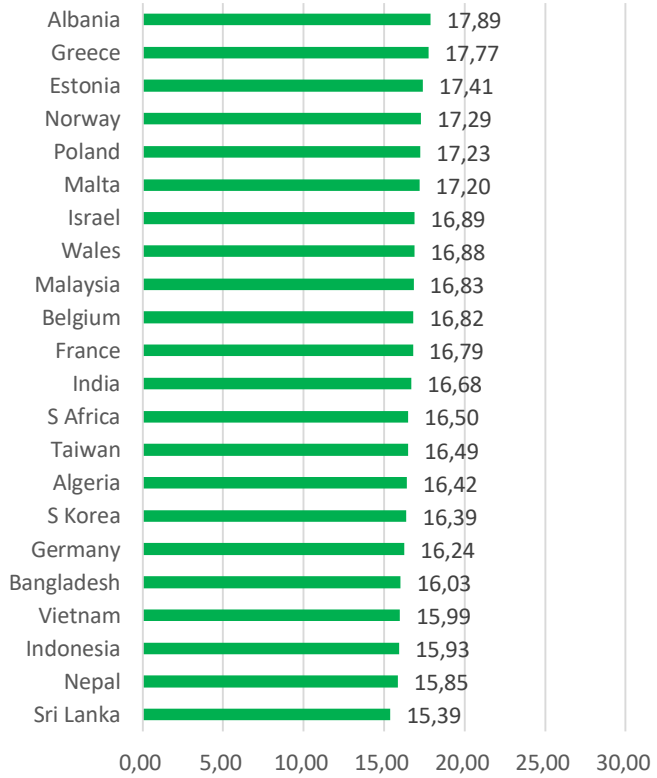


Relationship– SWBS (R^2 = .5241)

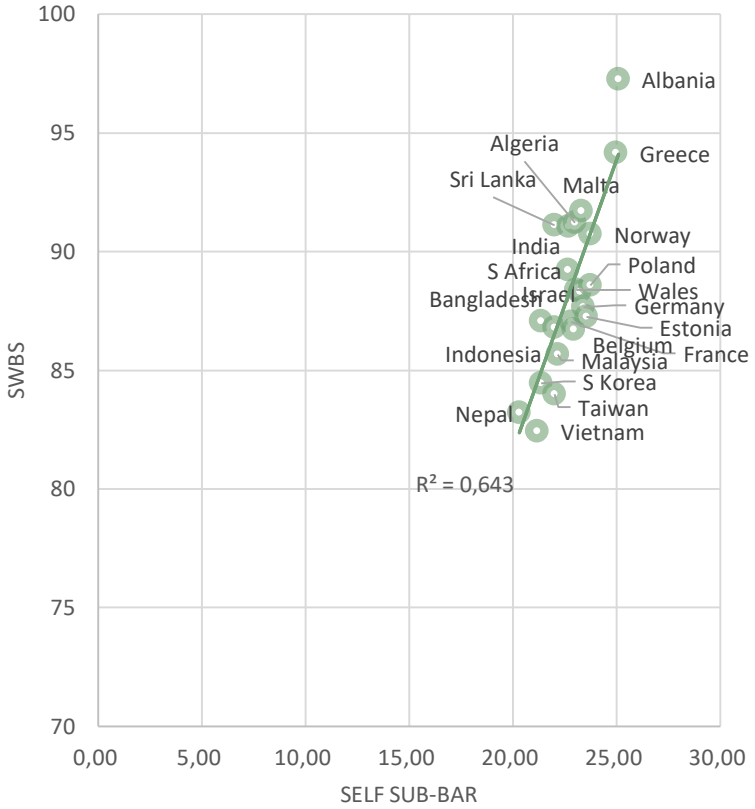


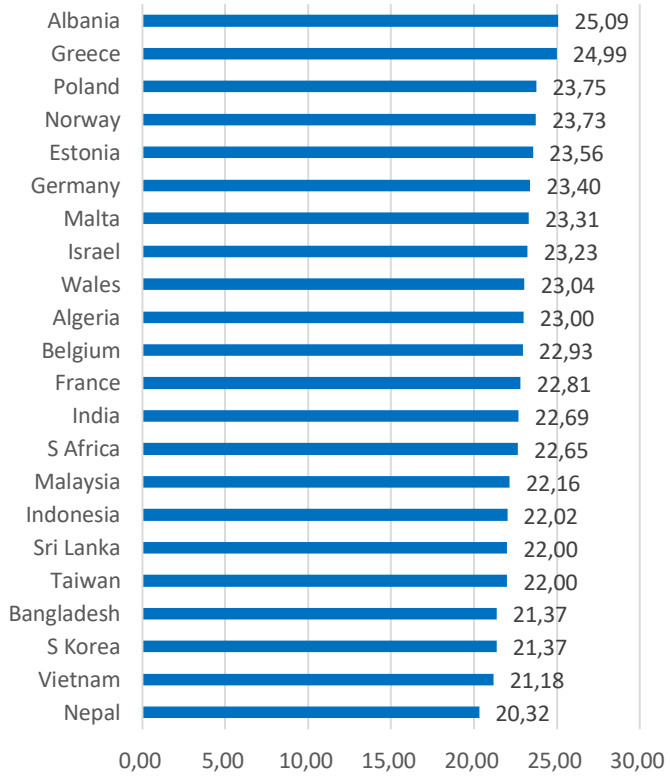
Safe environment– SWBS (R^2 = .3206)





Self – SWBS (R^2 = .643)





What do the results mean?

- The results show that the variations of children's SWB exist across countries.
  - South Korea, Taiwan, Nepal, and Vietnamese children reported lower level of SWB.
  - But, why?
- Decomposition of SWB
  - We decomposed of SWB using the pooled-data, individual-level country data.
  - We divided differences of SWB between countries into the 'explained' and 'unexplained' portions.
  - The 'effects' of the 6 major factors are different across countries.

Discussion

- We can assume the ‘unexplained’ part (intercept and residuals) of SWB could be due to ‘reporting bias’.
- However, the differences in the ‘unexplained’ parts do not fully account for the observed SWB variations.
- Then, what matters really?

Different level of influences to 'determine' children's SWB

- 'Weak' factors ($R^2 < 0.3$)
  - The 'unexplained'
  - Money
- 'Moderate' factors ($R^2 < 0.5$)
  - Learning
  - Safe environment
- 'Strong' factors ($R^2 > 0.5$)
  - Time use
  - Relationship
  - Self

Implications

- In fact, the reason why some countries have the lower levels of SWB is due to the fact that children in those countries have lower level of satisfaction with ‘self’, ‘time use’, ‘relation’.
- Along with more obvious policy targets (such as learning, money, and safe environment), more attention is needed to how children view

In total, what we learned (and confirmed!):

- County level variables have limited power to explain variations of children's SWB around the globe.
- Individual level variables, especially self, time use, and relation variables, explain large amount of variations of children's SWB.
- These factors explain a lot of variance in children's SWB in mostly developed western countries. But, not in developing countries? Why?

Further questions:

- The evidence shows that the importance of daily living conditions of children to their SWB (Lee & Yoo, 2015).
- However, society level factors really don't matter much? Further research is needed on how macro level variables (socioeconomic and cultural characteristics) affect micro level environment of children's lives.
- What kind of national level indicators might have more impact on children's subjective well-being?
  - More social and cultural indicators are needed other than the traditional 'economic indicators'?
- We hypothesize that the national socioeconomic environment affects children's microsystems, which in turn will shape children's daily lives and ultimately affect subjective well-being. But what is the process?

Policy Implications:

- The task of promoting children's well-being should focus on changing children's daily lives.
- Satisfying children's basic needs, enhancing children's present and future capacities, and ultimately enhancing the level of happiness, needs to be set as the national goal of today.
- To this end, the SWB indictors work is important
  - To make scientific contribution
  - To make an impact on children’s policy
  - To contribute to the promotion of child well-being around the world

Thank you very much!

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