

## Parental well-being

### 1. Introduction

Family is the central institution for women, which may influence their capabilities and individual chances in life (Nussbaum 2008). Looking at income distributions there could be a connection between earning more money and having a better bargaining position inside the family. To find out more about this process it is very important to look at every member of the family and his well-being individually.

The research on well-being has undergone tremendous change in the last decades. While it was more about studying the survival of humans in the past (Ben-Arieh 2010), the focus has now evolved towards understanding how people really live, how they feel and how satisfied they are with the way their life is going on. Asher Ben-Arieh (2010) describes a development from examining basic needs to designing a multidimensional model. This new model tries to include different aspects of life like the financial situation, education, health and safety, social relations and networks etc. A very important new aspect is the inclusion of the persons' subjective well-being. It deals with the fact that people who understand themselves as being healthy or safe because of a reliable surrounding are more likely to have a higher well-being no matter if their impression equals reality. The emergence of such a multidimensional approach has definitely widened the understanding of well-being and life satisfaction.

With our representative parental survey ("Ravensburger Elternsurvey") (Bertram/Spieß 2010), we are focusing on parental well-being: How do parents feel and in which way is their subjectively perceived well-being framed nowadays? By using the "capability-approach" of Amartya Sen (2000) we construct parental well-being not only from an utilitarian perspective, as we want to look at possibilities and capabilities of the parents.

In this presentation we would like to present our model of parental well-being and focus on one of our seven dimensions – material well-being – because material well-being is an empirical strong dimensions and also very different in its influence on fathers and mothers.

## **2. Our concept of parental well-being**

In the understanding of Amartya Sen (2007) a multidimensional approach is not only necessary to give valid policy advices concerning families but also an important extension of perspective. Looking at parental well-being, Sen would argue that choices are only reliable when they are made out of good reasons (ib.). Therefore it should be a political goal to secure certain rights for people so that everyone has equal capabilities (ib.). Of course financial resources have an effect on people's choices and their well-being, but besides this there are other fundamental rights, which influence the quality of life in a negative way when they are non-existent. By understanding the family as a microsystem with different actors who influence each other it appears to be necessary to look closer at all participants of this system. Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory (Ecological Systems Theory 1989) also states that an individual must always be seen within its context and the influence of the direct and wide surrounding.

With the support of the foundation "Stiftung Ravensburger Verlag" the chair in microsociology at the Humboldt-University of Berlin and the German Institute for Economic in total 1050 mothers and 1002 fathers of at least one child below six years were interviewed. Research analyzed the following dimensions of parental well-being<sup>1</sup>: 1) material well-being, 2) employment-well-being, 3) well-being in the fields of health and identity, 4) educational well-being, 5) family policy well-being, 6) well-being with the regard to social networks and 7) subjective well-being.

Overall, the aim was to establish a common model with the factors that determine parental well-being that would be able to explain especially how the meaning of the different aspects and of the general well-being is related. The model then may serve to analyze and optimize current family policies.

## **3. One dimension of parental well-being: material well-being**

Parental and child well-being must always be seen in a very close relation to each other. Not only because the dimensions, which measure our model of paternal well-being, are similar constructed to those which measure child well-being (UNICEF 2010), but also

---

<sup>1</sup> The Interviews (CAPI) were done by TNS Infratest in Spring 2009.

because contextual by there is a very high responsibility for parents regarding the child well-being.

In our presentation at the conference „Gender, Policies and Population“ (2012) in Stockholm we would like to focus on one of our dimensions in particular – the material well-being in our model of parental well-being. Material resources are not more than one possible key to provide well-being for families (Sen 2007: 91), but to measure the standard of living it is even better, like Sen points out, to rely on the possibilities and the capabilities of each person (Sen 2000: 9). Nonetheless material well-being is one of our strongest dimensions in our model of paternal well-being and we would like to present some of our results in this dimension.

By focusing material happiness, our results point out that this dimension has the biggest effect in comparison to the other dimensions on the general happiness. With the predominant focus on household income, saving behaviour and household situation, the first findings show a statistically significant cohesion between this material variables and parental well-being. It stands out, that a small living space tends to influence well-being negatively, single parent women in particular.

Besides the important results of material well-being for the whole model of parental well-being we further would like to present some results at this conference and would like to show, how material well-being must be seen separate for mothers and fathers. The dimension of material well-being has different strength of influence on fathers and mothers. We would like to point out, that economic variables, like income, have different influence on material well-being of fathers and mothers and in our results much stronger effects on parental well-being of mothers. We would like to discuss at the conference what these results could imply for the concept of parental well-being and family policy.

#### **4. International perspective on parental well-being**

Apparently there is a strong interest in the discussion on well-being in the last decades and we would like very shortly touch the international perspective of parental well-being in this context (Diener et al. 2010). We would like to recommend the measurement of parental well-being in an international context: By comparing different countries we find out more about the country-specific attributes as well as contingent

similarities between countries. An international perspective shows us further details about demographic developments and paternal transitions in modernization processes and possible options for family policy within countries.

## 5. Sources

- Ben-Arieh, Asher (2010): From Child Welfare to Children Well-Being: The Child Indicators Perspective. In: Kamerman, Sheila B./Phipps, Shelley/Ben-Arieh, Asher (Hrsg.): From Child Welfare to Child Well-Being. Dordrecht/Heidelberg/London/New York: Springer, S. 9-24.
- Bertram, Hans/Spieß, Katharina (2011): Fragt die Eltern! Ravensburger Elternsurvey. Elterliches Wohlbefinden in Deutschland. Berlin: Nomos (in Druck).
- Bertram, Hans/Kohl, Steffen (2010): Zur Lage der Kinder in Deutschland 2010: Kinder stärken für eine ungewisse Zukunft. Köln: Deutsches Komitee für UNICEF.
- Bertram, Hans/Spieß, Katharina (2010): Ravensburger Elternsurvey. Elterliches Wohlbefinden - Erwartungen, Voraussetzungen und Unterstützung der elterlichen Ressourcen für die Zukunft der Kinder. Zwischenbericht. Berlin: Im Auftrag der Stiftung Ravensburger Verlag.
- Bronfenbrenner, Urie (1981): The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Diener, Ed/Helliwell, John F./Kahneman, Daniel (2010): International Differences in Well-Being. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. (2008): Women and Human Development. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sen, Amartya (2000): Der Lebensstandard. Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag.
- Sen, Amartya (2007): Ökonomie für den Menschen. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.