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Applying Conceptualisations of Child Well-being to Early Childhood Education and Care: A Scoping Review of the Literature

Lynn Lee-Pang¹ · Penny Levickis¹ · Lisa Murray¹ · Laura McFarland¹ · Jon Quach^{2,3}

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Abstract

‘Well-being’ and ‘child well-being’ are broad terms with little consensus amongst numerous definitions. Applications of the term, particularly for children aged birth to six, are vague due to the lack of conceptual clarity. The aim of this scoping review is to synthesise the recent literature on young children’s well-being, drawing on perspectives across disciplines to propose relevant considerations for promoting child well-being in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) contexts. Using Arksey and O’Malley’s methodological framework for scoping studies, 55 articles gathered and published between 2018 and 2024 were reviewed. Two key themes emerged from qualitative analysis of the articles: (1) ambiguity in conceptualisations of the concept stemming from varied discourses guiding definitions and different approaches towards supporting and assessing child well-being; and (2) increasing consensus on the need for multidimensional conceptualisations. Main considerations for applying understandings of child well-being to ECEC were proposed, including: contemplating education as contributing towards the goal of child well-being and well-being as necessary for effective learning; adopting a balanced and multidimensional approach towards promoting children’s well-being in the present and in the future; and recognising that children’s well-being is influenced by and supported within dynamic contexts, systems and processes.

Keywords Child well-being conceptualisations · Early childhood · Multidimensional · Ecological systems · Scoping review

Introduction

In the last two decades, there has been an increased focus on child well-being within policy, research, and educational practice (Bailey, 2009; Robson et al., 2019), coupled with the development of comparable measurement indicators to assess children’s well-being (Camfield et al., 2010; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021). This shift could be attributed to the

growing recognition that positive well-being brings benefits to society (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Maccagnan et al., 2019; Robson et al., 2019). Child wellbeing is of importance globally, being included as a policy and reform priority in many countries. In Australia, for example, a national health plan has been developed to address young children’s mental health and well-being outcomes in light of increased child mental health difficulties and evidence that half of adult mental health issues emerge in childhood (National Mental Health Commission, 2024). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), which has been used widely by child well-being researchers and international organisations, mentions child well-being in six articles (Dalyot & Dalyot, 2018). Optimal well-being is paramount for children’s development, learning and success, not only during the formative early childhood years, but well into adulthood (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007; OECD, 2021). Early childhood education and care (ECEC) educators (including early childhood teachers, practitioners and staff working with young children in early childhood contexts) play a vital role in fostering children’s

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well-being through nurturing educator-child interactions, enriched learning experiences and responding to children's holistic needs.

Child well-being, however, is a multifaceted construct, with inconsistent definitions across different countries and within ECEC, with scarce research on the supports and barriers to young children's well-being (Amerijckx & Humblet, 2014; Campbell & Lokken, 2023; Mashford-Scott et al., 2012; Monteiro et al., 2020). While many theories of well-being already exist, child well-being remains under-theorised, with studies often focusing on measuring outcomes and indicators of well-being (Lewis, 2019; Street, 2021b). Traditional deficit views of children as 'adults of the future' may have contributed to this lack of theorisation (Raghavan & Alexandrova, 2015), presenting challenges for its application in educational curriculum (Bailey, 2009; Lewis, 2019). Furthermore, an overemphasis on outcomes and school readiness may be contradictory to supporting children's well-being (Street, 2021b). Instead of a new theory of child well-being, Lewis (2019) argued that a greater focus on what is relevant to the education of young children is more important.

Additionally, gaps exist in the research on well-being in early childhood contexts and its applications to children younger than eight (Robson et al., 2019). Most existing conceptualisations of well-being have concentrated on middle to later childhood and adolescence, overlooking the unique developmental needs and experiences of children in the first five years of life (Cho & Yu, 2020). Moreover, few studies explore well-being from children's perspectives (Fattore et al., 2007; Mashford-Scott et al., 2012). Varying disciplinary understandings of well-being also underscore the need for multidisciplinary perspectives for guiding applications to educational policy and practice (Lewis, 2019; Street, 2021b; Thorburn, 2014).

The Current Study

This review aims to develop a deeper understanding of child well-being, exploring perspectives from across disciplines to clarify how conceptualisations of child well-being can be applied to the work of ECEC educators in promoting young children's well-being.

Method

Scoping reviews focus on identifying a broad range of literature relevant to the inquiry, clarifying complex concepts to guide further research activity (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010). This scoping review sought to identify and map literature on child well-being relevant to informing

ECEC educators, stakeholders, parents, and researchers. Drawing on Levac et al.'s (2010) refinement of Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework for scoping studies, this review had five distinct stages. These included: (1) identifying the research question; (2) identifying relevant studies; (3) study selection; (4) charting the data; and (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting results.

Stage 1: Identifying the research questions

Identifying research questions guides the strategies for searching (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The guiding research questions were:

- What are the different ways in which child well-being has been understood and conceptualised?
- How do conceptualisations of child well-being apply to ECEC?

Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies

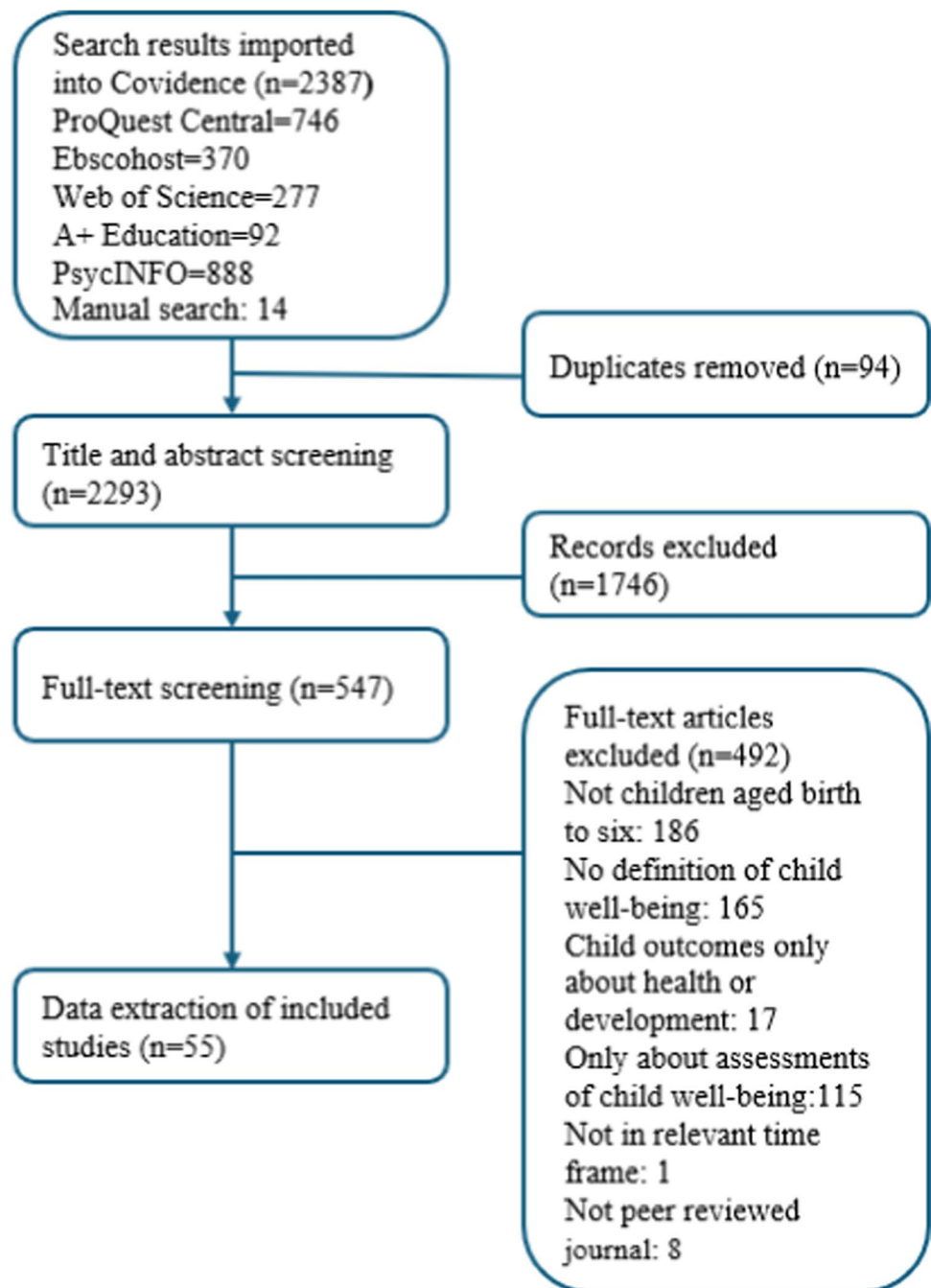
In conjunction with a librarian, the search terms and search strategy were refined to reflect the research questions. Articles on conceptualisations of child well-being were identified through searching relevant electronic databases, as well as relevant articles manually identified from the researchers' existing networks. Search terms were based around the words 'child', 'well-being' and 'conceptualisations' and a full list of the search strings used and electronic databases (24 in total) are listed in Appendix A.

Due to the limitations of time required to complete this review, the initial search was limited to articles published between May 2018 and May 2023, representing a five-year period preceding the start of the search. Subsequently, an additional search was conducted through to August 2024 to capture any relevant literature published between the initial search phase and completion of the review analysis. The search was also limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English, and document type (journals, reviews and reports). The electronic search resulted in 2373 articles. An additional 14 articles (comprised of peer-reviewed articles and grey literature) were manually sourced by the researchers.

Stage 3: Study selection

The process for study selection is illustrated in Fig. 1. All articles (n=2387) found were imported into Covidence, a literature review software. Duplicate articles (n=94) were automatically removed, resulting in 2293 articles for title and abstract screening. The inclusion and exclusion criteria (listed in Table 1) were further clarified through team

Fig. 1 Study Selection



reviewing of several initial articles. To check for reliability, an initial 10% of the title and abstracts were screened by six reviewers, followed by a check for level of agreement by the lead researcher (author 2) who then raised and discussed any conflicts in agreement or consistency issues between the reviewers. Dual screening was performed on 20% of the articles, and the remaining articles were single screened. This resulted in 547 articles included for full text screening.

Given the broad use of ‘well-being’ across disciplines, the inclusion criteria were further refined during full-text screening in line with the review’s focus. Articles discussing

factors contributing to definitions of child well-being were included, while articles focusing only on health, physical, or environmental aspects of well-being without mention of mental health and psychosocial well-being were excluded, unless there was mention of how these contribute to young children’s holistic well-being. As the term ‘child’ was also applied broadly across a wide age range, with many studies involving child participants across multiple age groups spanning from early childhood to adolescents, decisions for inclusion were based on the subject matter of the study and its applicability to and consideration of the early years age

Table 1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Participants	Children aged birth to six (including studies that consider children in this age range as a sub-group of the analysis)	Not children aged birth to six
Relevance	Related to child well-being definitions, conceptualisations, theories, frameworks of child well-being	Does not include definitions, conceptualisations, theories, frameworks of child well-being
Study design	Quantitative and qualitative studies, concept papers, reviews, grey literature	Not peer-reviewed journal articles or grey literature

range (birth to age 6). Four reviewers screened all included full-text articles independently, while two reviewers were assigned to screen excluded articles to ensure consistency. A further 492 articles were excluded after the full text review, and 55 articles were included for data extraction.

Stage 4: Charting the data

Key information relevant to the focus of this review were extracted from the full text articles. Data was extracted independently by the first author and two other reviewers, with regular meetings to ensure consistency in the data extraction process. The information extracted were:

- General information: author(s); year of publication; title; country in which the study pertained to
- Study characteristics: aim(s)/ research question(s); discipline(s); methods (study design, participants, population description and age of children, total number of participants)
- Child well-being: child well-being definition/ conceptualisation/ theory/ framework; perspective reported (i.e. parent/ teacher/ child perspective, if applicable); measurement (if applicable); indicators of child well-being (if reported); factors contributing to child well-being (e.g. protective/ risk factors if reported); implications/ other notes (if applicable)

Stage 5: Collating, summarizing, and reporting results

The three steps in stage five of the scoping review (Levac et al., 2010) include data analysis, result reporting, and application of meaning to results. Data analysis included qualitative thematic analysis of the extracted data. Key recurring ideas from the included articles pertaining to conceptualisations of child well-being and applications to ECEC were coded

and grouped into themes and sub-themes, and frequency of common codes and themes were counted. Agreement on the main themes surfacing from the data were checked between the authors. Descriptive summaries of the characteristics of included articles were also performed. As per Levac et al.'s (2010) steps for this stage of the scoping review, the results of this analyses are reported in the next part of this paper, followed by recommendations for the application of these themes to ECEC contexts. In this manner, the application of meaning to the results of this scoping review is achieved.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of included articles

The 55 included articles represented varying disciplinary perspectives, with many representing interdisciplinary perspectives from two or more disciplines ($n=31$). The disciplinary perspectives (including articles with interdisciplinary perspectives) were: education (including early childhood education and educational research) ($n=17$), health ($n=15$), psychology ($n=14$), sociology ($n=8$), social work ($n=4$), policy ($n=12$), economics ($n=3$), social sciences ($n=8$), well-being science ($n=2$), and philosophy ($n=3$).

Countries that the research in the included studies pertained to were the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Norway, studies with international applications, and others (full list and number of articles in Appendix B). The studies employed a range of methodologies (including qualitative, quantitative and mixed method research designs) and included reviews and meta-analyses, theoretical and conceptual discussion papers, grey literature and reports, population studies, and randomised controlled trials. Participant age groups in the included studies differed, with: studies that had a wide age range of children and young people but included sub-group analyses of children in the birth to 6 age range ($n=23$); studies focusing on preschool-aged children from 3 to 7 years ($n=14$); studies that included children from a broad early years age range (birth to 6) ($n=9$); studies that focused on children in the early years although children's age were unspecified ($n=8$); and one study focusing on infants and younger children.

Differing conceptualisations of child well-being

The studies included in this review, drawn from multiple disciplines, reflect differing ways in which child-well-being has been understood. Thematic analysis of the extracted data revealed two clear thematic patterns across the data: (1) differences and ambiguity in definitions stemming from various discourses and approaches towards conceptualising

and measuring child well-being; and (2) a trend towards multidimensional conceptualisations.

Differing and ambiguous definitions

Child well-being “is rarely concretely defined” (Campbell & Løkken, 2023, p. 2) and the first pattern that emerged from the included studies was the paucity of clear definitions. Ambiguity in definitions of the term and descriptions of existing definitions as inconsistent and lacking in consensus were reported across a number of the included articles ($n=19$). The articles also described existing definitions using differing terms interchangeably, contributing to difficulty in reliably measuring children’s well-being (Campbell & Løkken, 2023; Kuppens et al., 2020; Lewis, 2019; Mowat, 2019; Robson et al., 2019). In our review, we found the synonymous use of well-being with terms such as mental health ($n=6$), thriving ($n=1$), social and emotional learning ($n=1$), and health ($n=1$).

Various discourses and approaches towards conceptualising and supporting child well-being

The ambiguity and complexity in defining child well-being can be attributed to the interrelated discourses and theories originating from various fields of knowledge that have contributed to current understandings. Lewis (2019) expanded on how prominent discourses on well-being from philosophy, psychology, and economics had similarities and were relevant to children’s well-being. Robson et al. (2019) commented on early perspectives of well-being from health disciplines which are based on definitions from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) where well-being is defined with a health focus and includes not only the absence of disease but also well-being in the physical, mental and social dimensions. Across our included studies, various discourses were observed to shape understandings of child well-being across disciplinary fields. These discourses influence approaches towards assessing and promoting child well-being.

In philosophical needs-based discourses, a person’s needs (such as income, health, freedom and education) which are related to their relationships, happiness and sense of fulfilment contribute to their well-being (Raghavan & Alexandrova, 2015; Thompson & Marks, 2006, as cited in Lewis, 2019). The influence of needs-based discourses on approaches towards assessing and supporting child well-being was observed across various disciplines. Policymakers, health workers, and educators use child well-being indicators to assist in goal setting to ensure policies and programs meet the needs of families (Ryberg et al., 2022). From a psychological and educational point of view,

Malboeuf-Hurtubise (2020) described how meeting basic psychological needs are necessary for “academic achievement, perseverance and life satisfaction” (p. 2–3) which are considered to be aspects of child well-being. From a sociological perspective, Tuukkanen and Pekkarinen (2022) drew on Finnish sociologist Erik Allardt’s theory of well-being which is based on the satisfaction of needs in “standard of living (having), community relationships (loving) and fulfilment (being)” (p. 344). They proposed a further dimension of considering living conditions and the future of the earth as another determinant of child well-being. From an economics perspective, Mishra et al. (2018) maintained that “the wellbeing of children depends on their needs being adequately met across a multitude of dimensions—including health, safety, material provisions, educational development, emotional security and social inclusion” (p. 1188).

Differing foci and priorities across disciplines in relation to children’s well-being have also contributed to different approaches towards supporting child well-being. Closely related to needs-based discourses are distributive approaches, drawing on primary goods theory and capability theory, which emphasize the importance of resources for children’s well-being from economic perspectives (Street, 2021b). In primary goods theory, the distribution of inherent and public goods and resources (such as health, education, rights and wealth) are important for increasing well-being (Street, 2021b). This has some similarity with capability theory, where the distribution of resources and opportunities is important in enabling individuals to have freedom to function and achieve their potential and desired outcomes, based on what they value, through a fundamental set of capabilities (Mowat, 2019). Capability approach, however, differs in its stronger emphasis on an individual’s capability to be and do rather than just on what they can have, with a focus on the expansion of children’s capabilities in the sense of freedom and opportunities to pursue and achieve meaningful goals as they develop through a “dynamic and complex process of interaction between resources and individual and social conversion in feedback loops that reshape, at every stage, children’s capability set” (Domínguez-Serrano & del Moral-Espín, 2022, p. 2044).

Monteiro et al. (2020) report on parallels between the capability approach and approaches such as human development and life sustainability, where there have been similar emphases in child well-being influencing the development of children and affecting future social, economic, and ecological aspects of society. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, sustainable development goals such as ending poverty, achieving food security, health and quality education were identified for countries as strategies for promoting child well-being, based on principles of children’s rights (Saran et al., 2019). Other conceptual approaches

include the health-related quality of life approach (which emphasizes various health domains and how people view the impact of these on their quality of life) (Cho & Yu, 2020), and quality of life from a social policy perspective, where well-being has been defined as relating to a one's quality of life (Clair, 2019; Vameghi et al., 2018).

Measuring child well-being

Economic discourses have dominated views of well-being as an indicator of how well a nation is doing (McLellan & Steward, 2015). From a policy perspective, the ongoing interest in measuring child well-being is due to the need to invest in the future, report on how children are faring and assess efforts in supporting child well-being to guide policies and actions (Fane et al., 2020; Monteiro et al., 2020). Such a focus has led to expressions of child well-being in terms of dimensions, domains, and indicators. Fane et al. (2020) stated how "child wellbeing is frequently expressed and operationalised through the creation of indicators, domains or dimensions such as: health, safety, feeling loved and happy, successful social relationships, opportunities for learning and development, and material/economic basics" (p. 1895). Lansford et al. (2019) reviewed indicators of children's well-being in the Gulf countries and developed a framework that focused on six domains—physical health; behavioural adjustment; psychological well-being; social relationships; safety; and cognitive. Their conceptualisation of child well-being draws on a viewpoint where the child develops in relation to "domains of adjustment that are influenced by families, peers, communities, programs, and policies" (p. 1972), affecting the child not only in the present but also in the future. Other indicators include education, housing and the environment (Vameghi et al., 2018).

Objective dimensions of well-being are quantifiable and include measurable indicators, such as health, income, education and housing (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2020; Clair, 2019; Lewis, 2019). In contrast, subjective dimensions draw on individuals' perspectives, based on what people value in life (Lewis, 2019). Subjective child well-being takes into account various social, emotional, cognitive, physical and spiritual constructs including children's perspectives, relationships with family, educators and friends, health, socio-economic status, rights, community and culture (Gündoğan, 2022; Sandseter & Seland, 2018). Other dimensions include spirituality and culture, which are particularly relevant for Indigenous children and those in developing nations (Ettinger et al., 2022). Glasgow (2021), for instance, highlighted the importance of spirituality to well-being for Pacific children.

In the included articles, the terms 'dimensions', 'domains' and 'indicators' were used interchangeably to

refer to various aspects that comprise child well-being, with assessments of child well-being based on these measures. These measures were further predicated upon differing conceptualisations of child well-being. As noted by Dalyot and Dalyot (2018), indicators of child well-being measured were determined by different definitions and understandings of the concept. Appendix C provides examples of specific dimensions/ domains, and indicators of child well-being that were mentioned in the included articles.

Psychological discourses also have a strong focus on measures of child well-being. Overlaps are observed between philosophical discourses and two psychological discourses: affect discourse (which has to do with emotions and is similar to hedonic discourses) and life satisfaction discourse (where individuals cognitively evaluate their lives) (Lewis, 2019). Hedonic discourses focus on happiness and pleasure as fundamental for experiencing a good life (McLellan & Steward, 2015). Eudaimonic discourses stem from Aristotelian ideas of meaning and purpose in life through one's development and ability to function and fulfil and realise one's goals and potential (Gasper, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2001). These discourses contributed to subjective measures of well-being (Lewis, 2019).

Initial measures of child well-being in the field of psychology which influenced social policy were, however, focused on deficit conceptualisations of child well-being as a social problem and perceptions of poverty and disadvantage impacting on child well-being (Mishra et al., 2018; Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2023). A more recent discourse proposed by Martin Seligman in 2011 is positive psychology, where well-being is perceived through five constructs drawing from both hedonic and eudaimonic discourses (McLellan & Steward, 2015). Positive psychology focuses on individuals flourishing and improving well-being and resilience by highlighting the development of positive explanatory styles versus the traditional approach in psychology of identifying negative well-being (Campbell & Løkken, 2023; Robson et al., 2019).

Towards multidimensional conceptualisations

Despite the varied perspectives of child well-being, there was similarity across many studies in the perception of the concept as complex and encompassing multiple domains and dimensions (Monteiro et al., 2020; O'Hare et al., 2013; Vameghi et al., 2018). Across the included studies, well-being was described as a multidimensional concept in 58% of the studies ($n=32$). Examples of child well-being described as a multidimensional concept are listed in Appendix C (see "Multidimensional" column). According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2014, cited in Saran et al., 2019), child well-being is multidimensional and

holistic, providing an understanding of a child across various domains including the child's health, relationships, education, and social-economic status. Monteiro et al. (2020) report on various studies (e.g., Domínguez-Serrano & del Moral Espín, 2018; Minkkinen, 2013; O'Hare et al., 2013) that highlight multidimensional perceptions of well-being which consist of both objective and subjective indicators for measuring children's well-being.

Conceptualisations of child well-being have evolved alongside current global trends with an increasing recognition that children's well-being depends not only on survival and satisfaction of basic needs, but also quality of life and the child's immediate well-being (Loudghiri et al., 2021). Mitchell and Alexandrova (2021) cautions against oversimplification in measures of well-being in the well-being sciences and monism in philosophy, advocating instead for a pluralistic outlook where well-being is not characterised by a singular definition or only partial aspects of well-being. Instead, they argue that pluralism in both methodological (measuring) and conceptual (conceptualising) approaches to well-being is necessary, taking into account the appropriate usage of multiple concepts applied within differing contexts and occasions.

In the last two decades, there has been increased acceptance and use of subjective measures of children's well-being amongst policy makers (Cho & Yu, 2020). Subjective perspectives are observed in the rise of relational approaches which stem from sociological perspectives and emphasize relationships and processes (rather than resources or goods) that promote children's well-being (Street, 2021b). The importance of interdependency and an individual's sense of belonging are highlighted in relational approaches which seek to understand how individuals experience well-being through interpretivist modes, instead of what well-being is (Street, 2021b; White, 2015).

The trend towards multidimensional conceptualisations of child well-being is also observed in the increased use of multidimensional frameworks such as capability approach (discussed earlier). In ecological approaches, which are also multidimensional, interactions between different ecological systems at different levels affect an individual. Stemming

from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of human development, this approach recognises the influence of young children's interactions with self, family, early childhood educators, the learning environment, community and society on their well-being. In the included studies, ecological approaches were described in 10 articles while capability approaches were described in seven articles.

Yet another multidimensional approach is children's rights approaches, where child well-being is promoted through acknowledging children's rights to achieve their potential, abilities and skills (Wulczyn et al., 2021). Based on the UNCRC (1989), children's rights approaches consider both objective and subjective indicators of well-being, including children's perspectives and experiences based on children's rights to be heard. Child well-being approaches linked to children's rights also highlight the importance of supporting families. Dolan and colleagues (2019) argue that families, who are affected by the communities and contexts they live in, need to be supported in caring for the well-being of their children. Zhussipbek and Nagayeva (2023) presented styles of parenting based on children's rights, arguing that parenting guided by children's rights promote children's well-being and lead ultimately to human flourishing. In the included studies, rights-based approaches were mentioned in 8 articles.

Multidimensional conceptualisations of child well-being also stem from the movement towards interdisciplinary understandings and collaboration in efforts to support child well-being. Across the included studies, the trend towards a multidisciplinary conceptualisation was also observed in 58% of the articles ($n=32$) having an interdisciplinary focus and drawing from two or more fields of knowledge.

Applications to ECEC

The thematic patterns uncovered through this review reflect a shift towards multidimensional conceptualisations of child well-being, despite differing definitions stemming from varied disciplinary discourses, approaches, and measures (see Fig. 2). Implications of multidimensional conceptualisations and key considerations for the work of ECEC educators are discussed in the following sections.

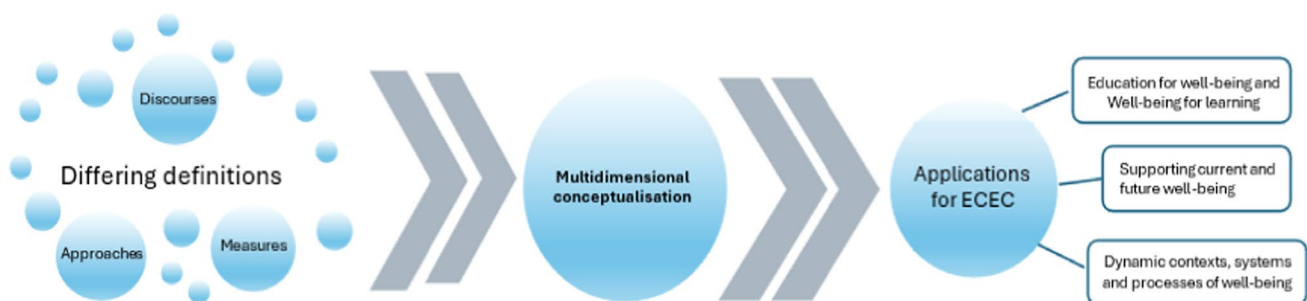


Fig. 2 Child Well-being Conceptualisations and Applications for ECEC

Conceptualisations of child well-being in ECEC

In education, there is a strong focus on educational outcomes which is linked to policy and economic discourses emphasizing future well-being, where the promotion of well-being in the early years of life promotes future adult well-being, health, productivity and translates into benefits for the society and economy at large (Robson et al., 2019; Street, 2021b). Well-being is viewed as important for learning, success at school, and prevention against mental health issues. Within the included articles with an educational disciplinary perspective, 8 out of 17 emphasized well-being as an educational outcome. Well-being appears as a mandatory focus in many early childhood government guiding documents and frameworks (e.g., in Australia, England, Fiji, etc.) (Baker et al., 2021), with well-being being linked to ECEC program quality (Robson et al., 2019).

Education for well-being and well-being for learning

The included studies from a range of disciplines had a similar goal of enhancing child well-being despite their differing foci, discourses, and approaches. A multidimensional conceptualisation denotes the importance of child well-being as an overall goal, where holistic consideration of all aspects of a child's life is important for a child to thrive and flourish. Educating the whole child is thus an important consideration and clarity on the child's well-being outcomes versus educational outcomes is needed. Academic achievement (as an educational goal) works in conjunction alongside other well-being outcomes (such as self-regulation, motivation, and pro-learning behaviour) (Campbell & Løkken, 2023) to promote children's well-being. At the same time, well-being is a basis for effective learning to occur and needs to be viewed "as paramount to, perhaps inseparable from, educational achievement" (Rudoe, 2020, p. 1021). Supporting child well-being is thus necessary for effective learning while effective education simultaneously facilitates child well-being.

Multidimensional understandings for supporting child well-being in the present and future

The various discourses and approaches that have influenced conceptualisations of child well-being, particularly discourses that have influenced early childhood policies and practices thus far, need to be considered in light of a multidimensional understanding of child well-being. Conceptualisations of well-being based on prominent discourses can be limiting and Lewis (2019) advocated a multidisciplinary perspective of well-being where there is not a privileging of particular discourses of well-being that are more dominant, and a balance in reflecting the objective and subjective dimensions of children's well-being.

Although economic discourses and objective dimensions of well-being have dominated policy, recent trends towards multidimensional conceptualisations of child well-being have led to increased valuing of a more balanced approach towards incorporating both subjective and objective measures of well-being (Robson et al., 2019). Multidimensional approaches such as the capability approach provides a useful lens for guiding well-being agendas due to its emphasis on both the material and immaterial aspects of well-being through objective and subjective indicators of well-being (Domínguez-Serrano & del Moral-Espín, 2022; Monteiro et al., 2020).

Discourses from the various disciplinary perspectives can be drawn upon for a balanced conceptualisation of child well-being. Positive psychology, for instance, has relevance to child well-being in ECEC contexts where the emphasis on positive emotions and positive feedback enable children to learn and function well in life by overcoming fear, engaging in challenges, and generating optimistic growth mindsets (Campbell & Løkken, 2023). In a scoping review on positive psychology, optimism, and growth mindsets, Campbell and Løkken (2023) found agreement in the literature that the development of positive explanatory styles (through interactions with parents/ caregivers) in the early years impact positively on children's well-being.

Philosophical discourses also have applications to ECEC. Lewis (2019) argues that hedonic perspectives of well-being are applicable to young children since they are capable of experiencing and expressing emotions from a very young age. Lewis (2019) also applies the eudaimonic perspective to children's freedom to engage and explore their environments through play. Children perceive their well-being in terms of the "here-and-now" (Street, 2021a, p. 661) and children's experiences of play, social relationships and entertainment contribute to their subjective well-being (Gündoğan, 2022). A complete picture of children's well-being needs to consider not only what children are becoming, but their well-being in the present (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011, cited in Clair, 2019). An awareness of the multi-faceted nature of child well-being and regular evaluations on whether curriculum decisions and teaching practices are balanced in supporting children's present and future well-being is thus necessary. At the same time, greater attention to the quality of children's daily experiences and interactions with the child are key to efforts in supporting children's well-being.

Child well-being within dynamic contexts, systems and processes

Multidimensional conceptualisations of child well-being also align with ecological approaches where child well-being is influenced through dynamic processes at the

intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, and society levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Minkkinen, 2013; Shonkoff et al., 2000). Families and educators play a fundamental role in influencing children's well-being. Cultural, societal, and economic factors also contribute to the child's well-being, and child well-being is a "process in itself" (Minkkinen, 2013, p. 549), constantly evolving as the child develops in the contexts of changing circumstances.

In ECEC, promoting child well-being within dynamic contexts, systems and processes includes reflecting on ways of relating to the child and partnering with families to support child and family well-being. Baker et al., (2021, p. 4) advocated the application of "well-being literacy" (defined as a capability for the intentional use of well-being languages for well-being) to ECEC, drawing on capability and social constructivist theories to promote communication between ECEC services, families and communities for supporting well-being, as well as a means of understanding the well-being experiences of children. Incorporating children's, families' and educators' perspectives in evaluations of children's well-being is also important (Robson et al., 2019).

As emphasized in capability approaches, children's participatory role in gaining (and not just experiencing) well-being implies the necessity of incorporating children's perspectives into child well-being assessments, although this does not mean that children's viewpoints are the only consideration (Domínguez-Serrano & del Moral-Espín, 2022). Street (2021a) further argues the importance of considering the interdependence of children's well-being within their social and material contexts and considering children's views of their well-being alongside the circumstances, environments, and experiences of their families and neighbourhoods. The inclusion of young children's perspectives is also in keeping with children's rights and is essential for deeper understandings on the validity and applicability of assessment indicators in order to guide the development of policies and practices that align meaningfully to children's experiences (Fane et al., 2020).

Giving consideration to children's perspectives on what is important to them also contributes to efforts in supporting children's well-being in the here-and-now. From children's point of view, factors that are important for their positive well-being include relationships with peers and ECEC staff, agency and opportunities for decision making, the physical environment, toys and equipment for daily activities (Gündoğan, 2022; Sandseter & Seland, 2018).

Multidimensional conceptualisations of child well-being that draw on multidisciplinary knowledge further imply the need for collaborations, including inter-disciplinary collaborations (e.g. with health and allied health organizations, family support services, etc.) and working in tandem with

government and stakeholders in supporting children's well-being. Tapping into interdisciplinary knowledge for ways of supporting children's well-being is another practical application for the work of ECEC educators. For instance, interventions based on well-being science constructs have relevance in ECEC contexts (Baker et al., 2021). At the policy level, advocating for the provision of resources and opportunities that promote children's well-being across the various domains of well-being is necessary. Additionally, supporting educator well-being is essential to promoting child well-being since poor educator well-being is linked to lower quality of interactions with children (Cassidy et al., 2016; Cumming, 2017), which can then negatively impact children's well-being (Harding et al., 2019).

Conclusion

This paper has reported on how child well-being has been understood differentially, drawing from a scoping review of articles across differing fields of knowledge and disciplines, in order to decipher conceptualisations applicable to ECEC. In answer to our first research question (RQ1), the differing discourses that contributed to child well-being conceptualisations, differing approaches towards promoting and assessing child well-being, and various dimensions, domains, and indicators for measuring child well-being were presented. While these varied conceptualisations have resulted in ambiguity in what the concept means, a clear direction that arose across the studies reviewed was the need for multidimensional conceptualisations of child well-being.

In response to our second research question (RQ2), applications to ECEC extrapolated from the included articles were considered against the existing patterns uncovered through the thematic analysis of the data. Findings from RQ1 on the need for holistic, pluralistic and multidimensional conceptualisations of child well-being have implications for ECEC educators envisioning education as contributing to the holistic well-being of the whole child. Additionally, children's well-being for their happiness and functioning in the present and future outcomes are equally important (Lansford et al., 2019). Efforts in supporting child well-being in ECEC contexts need to be targeted at enhancing the quality of children's daily interactions and experiences, working in tandem with the various levels of dynamic systems and processes affecting the child's development and well-being, as well as including children's perspectives of their own well-being.

We acknowledge the limitations of time for this scoping review, where studies identified were published in the previous six years. Relevant studies prior to this time-frame may thus not have been included. However, it should be noted that key studies (that is, studies that contributed

significantly to understandings of child well-being) published earlier than the search timeframe and mentioned in the included articles were included in the discussion of results in this paper. Findings point towards the need for further exploration into the dynamic interplay of individual

and systemic supports that influence and promote positive children's well-being in ECEC contexts, as well as novel ways of understanding young children's perspectives and experiences of well-being.

Appendix A

Table 2 Search Record

DATE OF SEARCH	DATABASE(S)	SEARCH STRING/ FILTERS	RESULTS
29/05/2023	ProQuest Central: • Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA) • Coronavirus Research Database • Education Database • ERIC • Psychology Database • PTSDpubs • Sociological Abstracts • Sociology Database	(child* OR toddler* OR infan* OR preschooler* OR pre-schooler*) NEAR/3 (well* OR "mental health") NEAR/10 (model* OR framework OR framed OR concept* OR conceive OR defin* OR underst* OR mean OR classification* OR explanation* OR explain* OR mapping) Limited by: Peer reviewed Date: From May 2018 to May 2023 Source type: Government & Official publications, Reports, Scholarly Journals, Working Papers Document type: Article, Evidence based healthcare, Literature Review, Report, Review Language: English Further filtered by Subject: well being	614
29/05/2023	EBSCOhost: • Academic Search Complete • CINAHL Complete • Education Source • Educational Administration Abstracts • Family & Society Studies Worldwide • MEDLINE • SocINDEX with Full Text	(child* OR toddler* OR infan* OR preschooler* OR pre-schooler*) N3 (well* OR "mental health") N10 (model* OR framework OR framed or concept* OR conceive OR defin* OR underst* OR mean OR classification* OR explanation* OR explain* OR mapping) Limiters: Peer reviewed, Published date (May 2018-May 2023), English language Filters: Academic Journals, reviews Filters: Age (all infant: birth-23 months, infant: 1–23 months, child, preschool: 2–5 years)	227
30/05/2023	Web of Science	TS=((child* OR toddler* OR infan* OR preschooler* OR pre-schooler*) AND (well* OR "mental health") AND (model* OR framework OR framed or concept* OR conceive OR defin* OR underst* OR mean OR classification* OR explanation* OR explain* OR mapping)) Refined by: Publication date: Last 5 years Document types: Review Article or Article Languages: English Citation topics Meso: Social Psychology Citation topics Micro: Subjective Well-being Web of Science Categories: Family Studies, Education Educational Research, Education Special, Psychology, Psychology Developmental, Psychology Educational, Psychology Social, Pediatrics	212
31/05/2023	A+ Education: • A+ Education • Australian Public Affairs Full text (APAFT) • Families & Society Collection • Health Collection • Australian Education Index (AEI) • Australian Family & Society Abstracts (FAMILY) • Policy database from Analysis & Policy Observatory (APO)	child* OR toddler* OR infan* OR preschooler* OR pre-schooler* AND well* OR "mental health" Limits: - Peer reviewed - Resource type (Journal, report) - Language: English - Subject: Well-being - Publication date: 1 May 2018 to 31 May 2023	92

Table 2 (continued)

DATE OF SEARCH	DATABASE(S)	SEARCH STRING/ FILTERS	RESULTS
31/05/2023	PsycINFO	((child* or toddler* or infan* or preschooler* or pre-schooler*) adj3 (well* or {mental health}) adj10 (model* or framework or framed or concept* or conceive or defin* or underst* or mean or classification* or explanation* or explain* or mapping)) Limits: peer reviewed journal and English language and year="2018 -Current", Empirical human population: Childhood (Birth to 12 years), Publication type: Peer-reviewed journal, Population group: Human, Age groups (childhood, neonatal, infancy, preschool)	664
2/09/2024	ProQuest Central: • Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA) • Coronavirus Research Database • Education Database • ERIC • Psychology Database • PTSDpubs • Sociological Abstracts • Sociology Database	(child* OR toddler* OR infan* OR preschooler* OR pre-schooler*) NEAR/3 (well* OR "mental health") NEAR/10 (model* OR framework OR framed OR concept* OR conceive OR defin* OR underst* OR mean OR classification* OR explanation* OR explain* OR mapping) Limited by: Peer reviewed Date: From June 2023 to Aug 2024 Source type: Government & Official publications, Reports, Scholarly Journals, Working Papers Document type: Article, Evidence based healthcare, Literature Review, Report, Review Language: English Further filtered by Subject: well being	132
2/09/2024	Ebscohost: • Academic Search Complete • CINAHL Complete • Education Source • Educational Administration Abstracts • Family & Society Studies Worldwide • MEDLINE • SocINDEX with Full Text	(child* OR toddler* OR infan* OR preschooler* OR pre-schooler*) N3 (well* OR "mental health") N10 (model* OR framework OR framed or concept* OR conceive OR defin* OR underst* OR mean OR classification* OR explanation* OR explain* OR mapping) Limits: Peer reviewed, Published date (June 2023-Aug 2024), English language Filters: Academic Journals, reviews Filters: Age (all infant: birth-23 months, infant: 1–23 months, child, preschool: 2–5 years)	143
2/09/2024	PsycInfo	((child* or toddler* or infan* or preschooler* or pre-schooler*) adj3 (well* or {mental health}) adj10 (model* or framework or framed or concept* or conceive or defin* or underst* or mean or classification* or explanation* or explain* or mapping)) Limits: peer reviewed journal and English language and year="2024", Empirical human population: Childhood (Birth to 12 years), Publication type: Peer-reviewed journal, Population group: Human, Age groups (childhood, neonatal, infancy, preschool)	224
2/09/2024	Web of Science	TS=((child* OR toddler* OR infan* OR preschooler* OR pre-schooler*) AND (well* OR "mental health") AND (model* OR framework OR framed or concept* OR conceive OR defin* OR underst* OR mean OR classification* OR explanation* OR explain* OR mapping)) Refined by: Publication date: 2023, 2024 Document types: Review Article or Article Languages: English Citation topics Meso: Social Psychology Citation topics Micro: Subjective Well-being Web of Science Categories: Family Studies, Education Educational Research, Education Special, Psychology, Psychology Developmental, Psychology Educational, Psychology Social, Pediatrics	65

Appendix B

Table 3 Countries in which included studies pertained to

Countries	Number of articles
International applications	11
United States	8
United Kingdom	8
Australia	7
Norway	4
Others (Albania, Bahrain, Canada, Chile, China, Fiji, Finland, Hong Kong, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, New Zealand, Oman, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Uganda, and the United Arab Emirates)	17

Appendix C

Table 4 Child well-being conceptualisations

Disciplines	Authors	Multidimensional	Dimensions/Domains/Indicators	Overlapping definitions/Ambiguity
Health	Guruge et al. (2022)		Subjective and objective indicators and measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Well-being contains subjective and objective indicators, and it can measure diverse things as happiness, health and prosperity which are contextually dependent" (p. 2) • "Subjective well-being complements objective measures by offering the 'dimension of how individuals feel about their health or economic status' (p. 3)" (p. 2) 	
Health/ Policy	Saran et al. (2019)	Multidimensional and holistic: "Child well-being is a multidimensional and a holistic concept which provides a contextual understanding of a child in different domains such as health, material well-being, education, conditions of housing and environment, and interpersonal relations (UNICEF, 2014)." (p. 1)		
	Ryberg et al. (2022)	Multi-dimensional, with a focus on health: "Child well-being is globally defined as 'the multi-dimensional nature of health that is enhanced when physical, cognitive, and social-emotional-spiritual development is nurtured in developmentally appropriate ways'" (The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 11)." (p. 1064)	"We specifically focused on indicators of nurturing care identified by the World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, World Bank Group (2018): good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, security and safety, and opportunities for early learning. Within the span of child development, these indicators of infant and toddler well-being can be thought of as related to current child well-being. Infant and toddler well-being indicators are also predictive of well-being during later parts of the life course, or 'well-becoming' as indicated by the arrow at the bottom of the figure (Ben-Arieh et al., 2001)." (p. 1065)	

Table 4 (continued)

Disciplines	Authors	Multidimensional	Dimensions/Domains/Indicators	Overlapping definitions/ Ambiguity
	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes objective, subjective, and spiritual dimensions • includes health, development, learning and safety • includes mental health • Social-emotional well-being falls under mental health 	<p>Assessed through indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports on how children in Australia are doing according to the domains of health, education, social support, income/ finance/ employment, housing, justice and safety (p. 379–380) • Draws on key national indicators for child health, development and well-being (p. 381) 	<p>“Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realises their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and make a contribution to their community. Poor mental health can impact on the potential of young people to live fulfilling and productive lives (WHO 2014a).” (p. 85)</p>
Health/ Social sciences	Smith et al. (2021)	Multidimensional: “Child health and well-being is a multidimensional construct that encompasses the dynamic process of a child’s physical, mental (cognitive, psychological), social, and material/ economic situation as an outcome of intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal, and cultural processes (Pollard and Lee, 2003; Minkkinen, 2013)” (p. 5)		
	Nankinga et al. (2022)		Child well-being index: “The index was based on domains of child well-being, including nutrition health status, health care, child protection, happiness of the child, vaccination of the child, breastfeeding status and number of meals given to the child.” (p. 182)	
Health/ Psychology	Xie et al. (2021)			<p>“Mental health, a key well-being indicator of family members, refers to ‘a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community’ (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013, p. 3).” (p. 2844)</p>

Table 4 (continued)

Disciplines	Authors	Multidimensional	Dimensions/Domains/Indicators	Overlapping definitions/ Ambiguity
	Kuppens et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multidimensional: "We sought to address this gap by conceptualizing child well-being as a broad, multi-dimensional construct that involves physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and economic subdomains. This broad conceptualization is similar to the World Health Organization's (WHO, 2004, p. 10) definition of mental and physical health ("a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being")." (p. 766) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domains: physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and economic • "includes both subjective and objective features (Newman, Tay, & Diener, 2014)" (p. 766) 	"Well-being is a nebulous term that is informed by personal, cultural, and other factors (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003), and there is no clear distinction between well-being and quality of life or mental health problems (Siddaway, Taylor, & Wood, 2018; Siddaway, Wood, & Taylor, 2017)." (p. 766)
	Lansford et al. (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "An understanding of child well-being requires a holistic understanding of child development as involving many domains of adjustment that are influenced by families, peers, communities, programs, and policies" (p. 1972) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multiple domains of child well-being (physical, behavioral, psychological, social, safety, and cognitive) • framework for child well-being in the Gulf countries: "The framework integrates six key domains of well-being: physical health, behavioral adjustment, psychological well-being, social relationships, safety, and cognitive well-being." (p. 1974) • "Subjective well-being encompasses meaning and purpose in life; life satisfaction; and feelings of happiness, sadness, and other positive and negative emotions (Kahneman et al. 1999)." (p. 1977) • "Child well-being encompasses a range of indicators of how children are faring physically, behaviorally, psychologically, socially, and cognitively." (p. 1971) 	
Pediatrics/ health	Ettinger et al. (2022)	"Our domains of vibrant communities and healthy environments is consistent with the more holistic models of well-being of indigenous cultures, which are inclusive of extended family, tribal or village, and environmental well-being, as well as ancestral and spiritual connection." (p. 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Subjective well-being has been conceptualized as having frequent positive emotions, infrequent negative emotions, and an overall positive evaluation of life, and psychological well-being has been defined to included 6 dimensions leading to positive functioning: self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relationships, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth." (p. 2) • "Spiritual well-being was a core domain in several frameworks" (p. 5) • "Rountree and Smith (2016) provide an overview of how well-being is defined for indigenous communities (in the United States and internationally) that both dovetails and expands on the definitions of child thriving. Particularly relevant for indigenous communities is a connection to one's ancestry, spiritual practice, and ceremony." (p. 14) 	Synonymous use of the term "well-being" and "thriving"

Table 4 (continued)

Disciplines	Authors	Multidimensional	Dimensions/Domains/Indicators	Overlapping definitions/ Ambiguity
Interdisciplinary (Paediatric, psy- chiatry, clinical psychology, clini- cal social work)	Rider et al. (2021)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health and well-being termed together • Well-being considered from a mental health perspective. <p>"Well-being is a person's ability to recognise their own capacities, manage regular stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their community.11" (p. 1)</p>
Psychology	Pustilnik (2019)			Elements in child psychiatric practice to promote overall well-being viewed as synonymous to addressing mental health issues in a holistic manner
	Maftai et al. (2020)			Well-being related to but different from happiness
	Gündoğan (2022)	"Subjective well-being is a multi-dimensional concept that includes different elements such as physical (Hinkley et al., 2014; Kennedy-Behr et al., 2015), social (Kennedy-Behr et al., 2015), affective and cognitive (Fiorelli, 2011). " (p. 747)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The concept of subjective well-being includes subjects such as family and home life, friendship, money and possessions, children's rights, health, self-perceptions as well as school life (Andresen et al., 2019; Lam & Comay, 2020) • "Studies (Koch, 2018; Lam & Comay, 2020; Permiakova et al., 2016; Sandseter & Seland, 2016, 2018) show that the subjective well-being of young children is mostly about play, entertainment, and social relationships." (p. 757) • "Emotional well-being is related to the characteristic features of children such as hope, love, pleasure, love of learning (Shoshani, 2019)." (p. 757) 	
Psychology/ Education	Malboeuf- Hurtubise (2020)		"positive (i.e., social skills and adaptability) and negative (i.e., internalized symptoms: depression, anxiety, inattention; and hyperactivity) indicators of well-being" (p. 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No explicit definitions of child well-being, discusses related concepts and indicators of well-being • mental health and well-being termed together

Table 4 (continued)

Disciplines	Authors	Multidimensional	Dimensions/Domains/Indicators	Overlapping definitions/ Ambiguity
Positive psychology/ Early childhood	Campbell and Løkken (2023)	"The positive social and emotional development of young children is at the centre of many pedagogical approaches and incorporated into the ECEC learning frameworks in many countries." (p. 2)		"Well-being for very young children, however, is rarely concretely defined, often encompasses many different concepts and constructs, and is difficult to reliably measure" (p. 2)
Early childhood education/ Psychology	Narea et al. (2022)	"We measured the dimension of children's well-being using the Child and Adolescent Evaluation System (SENA (the Spanish acronym), a comprehensive, multi-source, and multidimensional assessment battery aimed at identifying the main emotional and behavioral problems in children and adolescents from three to 18 years of age (Fernández-Pinto et al., 2015)." (p. 535)	Measured child well-being in terms of emotional and behavioral problems	
Education (Early childhood)	Street (2021a, 2021b)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child well-being is "under-theorised" (p. 211) • "there appears to be a lack of agreement across disciplines about what well-being means in educational contexts" (p. 212)
	Baker et al. (2021)	"Child wellbeing is a complex, contextual and multi-dimensional construct whose definition is historically, politically and pedagogically affected. There are complexities and contextual challenges when discussing and facilitating young children's wellbeing, and attempts at fresh thinking can benefit from multi-domain perspectives, such as those from science and education." (p. 6–7)	"a child's wellbeing cannot be extracted, defined or measured without consideration of their environment and experiences." (p. 13)	<p>Summarises varied definitions of well-being and child well-being which is "complex, intangible, and multi-faceted" (p. 5) and can be considered through the perspectives of different disciplines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "wellbeing is our subjective sense of thriving (Seligman, 2011)" (p. 5) • "feeling good and functioning well (Huppert and So (2013)" (p. 5) • "connects to a broad range of outcomes" (p. 5)

Table 4 (continued)

Disciplines	Authors	Multidimensional	Dimensions/Domains/Indicators	Overlapping definitions/ Ambiguity
	McInnes et al. (2021)	Multi-faceted: self, relationships, culture, economic, spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicators of child poverty (including housing affordability, food security, and health outcomes) also affect well-being encompasses: children's positive self-perception, positive relationships with other children and adults, cultural understanding (children developing an understanding of their own culture), cultural awareness (children becoming aware of other cultures) and acceptance of diversity 	Termed together with social and emotional learning
	Glasgow (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-dimensional: spiritual, physical, mental, and family/ community/ culture holistic view of health and well-being for Pacific people based on Fonofale model includes: "spiritual, physical, mental, and other aspects of life" to do with family and community. (p. 26) 	Aspects and considerations of well-being for Pacific children tied to cultural identity, language, and cultural practices	Well-being termed together with health
	Nah et al. (2020)	Drew on multiple sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the concept, incorporating emotional, physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and economic aspects		
	Beate et al. (2018)	"Well-being is an abstract, multi-dimensional, social and culturally constructed phenomenon, and Amerijckx and Humblet (2014) conclude after a thorough review of research on child well-being that: The negative, eudemonic, objective, material and individual approaches to child well-being predominate over its positive, hedonic, subjective, spiritual and collective dimensions (p. 411)" (p. 1586)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The concept of subjective well-being refers to an internal, subjective perception and experience of being recognised by others, feeling appreciated and having a sense of happiness and satisfaction—feeling well in relation to others" (p. 1586) "Happiness is often seen in relation to subjective well-being, as this is a positive affect connected to general satisfaction with life." (p. 1586) 	
	Sando et al. (2021)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the context of the Leuven Well-Being Scale (Laevers, 2005), the article describes the five levels of well-being as: "1) Outspoken signs of distress, 2) Signs of distress predominate, 3) A mixed picture, no outspoken signs, 4) Signs of enjoyment predominate, and 5) Outspoken signs of enjoyment" (p. 1440) Signals of subjective well-being viewed as the "degree children feel at ease, acts spontaneously and show vitality and self-confidence (Laevers 2000)." (p. 1437) 	
Educational research/ Early childhood	Robson et al. (2019)			No single, clear-cut definition, discusses the complexity and lack of consensus
	Lewis (2023)	Well-being perceived as a multidimensional concept, drawing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> objective and subjective dimensions multiple domains (p. 781) Relational aspects 		

Table 4 (continued)

Disciplines	Authors	Multidimensional	Dimensions/Domains/Indicators	Overlapping definitions/ Ambiguity
Sociology	Sado et al. (2018)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Early childhood well-being index constructed for the purpose of this research: This is an index that devises three positive dimensions correspondent to the “capabilities” as outlined in the Capabilities Approach theory of Nussbaum (1999), including receiving (i) the adequate health care and nutrition; (ii) the necessary support for cognitive development; and (iii) the necessary protection during early childhood.” (p. 1306) • Objective perspective on well-being: • “We also took into account that the operationalization of well-being from an objective perspective accounts for objective elements that make a life well-lived (Parfit 1984).” (p. 1304) 	
Social work	Cavanagh & Fomby (2019) Akin et al. (2019)	Focuses primarily on social-emotional well-being as a key aspect of overall child well-being in the context of foster care and child welfare	“indicators are markers of child well-being at key developmental periods (e.g., childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood)” (p. 500) Social-emotional well-being measured through: Social-emotional functioning, child problem behaviors and prosocial skills	
Social work/ Early childhood education	Cartmel et al. (2021)	Multidimensional, where there is a balance between mental, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual health “Wellbeing is defined as a good balance between mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual health and the foundation for leading a fulfilling and productive life (Heyeres et al., 2020; WHO, 2018).” (p. 104) “Statham and Chase (2010) have conceptualised children’s wellbeing as multidimensional, incorporating physical, emotional and social wellbeing.” (p. 104)	“Children’s social and emotional wellbeing—thinking, feeling, resilience and coping skills—is integral to their overall health, development and wellbeing (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2012).” (p. 104)	“The concept of wellbeing is complex and multifaceted. However, we are guided by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2018) definition of mental health as a state of well-being” (p. 104)
Social work/ social policy	Dolan et al. (2019)	“A child’s well-being has many aspects that may be more or less interrelated. It is used as an umbrella term to encompass specific concepts such as opportunities to grow, learn and achieve, feel safe and secure, to have positive personal and social relationships and to have a voice, participate and influence.” (p. 9)		• “umbrella term” (p.9) with many interrelated aspects
Social policy	Clair (2019)	“Well-being is a multidimensional concept that relates to a person’s quality of life.” (p. 610)	“Child well-being has been operationalised in a number of ways, but large-scale studies often break children’s well-being down into a number of dimensions covering objective well-being, such as health and education, accompanied by a subjective well-being dimension” (p. 610)	

Table 4 (continued)

Disciplines	Authors	Multidimensional	Dimensions/Domains/Indicators	Overlapping definitions/ Ambiguity
	Vameghi et al. (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Child well-being is a broad and multi-dimensional concept. Given the multidimensionality of the subject, the present study used 26 different indicators from areas related to child well-being." (p. 1471) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple indicators needed to assess child well-being: "a single indicator cannot represent a child's well-being. According to this point, most studies used multi indicator-based approaches to measure child well-being." (p. 1466) • "In addition, according to the Child and Youth Well-Being Index (Land et al. 2001: 243), the overall well-being of children and young people... is defined in terms of averages of social conditions encountered by children and young people." (p. 1471) • "In UNICEF and other studies in this field, domains such as economic well-being, health, risk and safety, education, family, housing and environment, school, social relationship, and subjective well-being constituted the elements of child well-being" (p. 1468) 	"There are various definitions of child well-being, but it is generally understood as the quality of a child's life (Ben-Arieh and Frønes 2011)." (p. 1466)
Education/ Social policy	Mowat (2019)			No clear distinctions between mental health and well-being, and terms used synonymously: "There is an extensive literature devoted to mental health and wellbeing and a plethora of terms such as wellbeing, subjective/ psychological wellbeing, mental health and mental illness/ conditions/issues/ problems/disorders/symptoms/ distress which are often used synonymously and interchangeably, being defined in different ways in different contexts" (p. 206)
Public policy	Noble et al. (2023)	Holistic view where "wellbeing refers to ALL the areas of a child's life" (p. 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child well-being comprises six interrelated domains to do with relationships, material needs, health, learning, child voice/ participation, and identity and belonging • Created an Australian Children's Well-being Index to track the well-being of children aged birth to 24 across Australia • Indicators for each domain are reported 	
Economics	Mishra et al. (2018)	"the wellbeing of children depends on their needs being adequately met across a multitude of dimensions— including health, safety, material provisions, educational development, emotional security and social inclusion" (p. 1188)		

Table 4 (continued)

Disciplines	Authors	Multidimensional	Dimensions/Domains/Indicators	Overlapping definitions/ Ambiguity
Interdisciplinary (demography, sociology, statistics)	Loudghiri et al. (2021)	<p>“Due to the correlation between the domains of children’s well-being, all dimensions of individual functioning should be taken into consideration.” (p. 2287–2288)</p>	<p>“The domains of children well-being refer to: (i) Physical well-being: health status, nutrition, preventive health care, physical activity and safety; (ii) Psychological well-being: how children see themselves and their future; (iii) Social well-being: child’s ability to form social relationships and includes basic social skills, the ability how to use time and to form emotional relationships; and (iv) Educational or cognitive well-being: skills related to a child’s ability to learn, remember and reason in an age-appropriate manner.” (p. 2287–2288)</p>	<p>“This concept is multidimensional, ambiguous and not specific, with many interpretations and no universally acceptable definition” (p. 2287)</p>
Interdisciplinary (economics, public policy, social sciences, health, education)	Monteiro, et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "O'Hare et al. (2013) announces some researcher's conceptualizations of child well-being and argues, 'These statements demonstrate that there are no consensus on exactly how child well-being should be conceptualized, but most analysts think of child well-being as a global concept involving multiple domains/dimensions. We also conceptualize child well-being as a multi-dimensional construct, which is reflected in a variety of indicators from several key domains.'" (p. 338) • "Uyan-Semerci and Erdoğan (2017) state that child well-being as a multidimensional and holistic approach puts the quality of life and happiness of the child at the forefront and aims at increasing the capabilities of the child following the fundamental indicators in each domain. The child well-being approach combines real-life conditions and children's subjective experiences." (p. 338) • "Indeed, the child well-being concept is multidimensional and must take into account all matters that in part come from the Capabilities Approach, but it is also based on social and material aspects of quality of life and human development." (p. 338) • "Minkkinen (2013) introduced the SMCW (Structural Model of Child Well-being) model, which encompasses both objective and subjective indicators, providing essential information about child well-being. His model uses the definition formulated by the World Health Organization, and according to his study it conveys a multidimensional, holistic view of well-being comprising physical, mental, and social dimensions, which are well-known concepts in both theoretical approaches and empirical studies." (p. 340) 	<p>"Continuously measuring child well-being indicators is essential to plan and to implement the right policies for their social development." (p. 338)</p>	

Table 4 (continued)

Disciplines	Authors	Multidimensional	Dimensions/Domains/Indicators	Overlapping definitions/ Ambiguity
Interdisciplinary (public health, social work, developmental psychology)	Fava et al. (2022)	“This multidimensional measure of child wellbeing was shown to have good psychometric properties and accounts for multiple domains of child wellbeing, including physical and mental health, material wellbeing, relational wellbeing, and educational enrichment.” (p. 2074)	Child well-being viewed as an “outcome measure” (p. 2074)	
Social sciences	Cho and Yu (2020)	Multidimensional: includes objective and subjective (p. 6) domains (e.g., material well-being, education, health)		
	Zhussipbek and Nagayeva (2023)	“multifaceted and complex phenomenon” (p. 4)		
Interdisciplinary (social sciences)	Dominiguez-Serrano & Moral-Espín (2022)	“a multidisciplinary, relational and interconnected perspective on childhood.” (p. 2044)		
Interdisciplinary social sciences (Human geography, developmental psychology, public health/epidemiology, sociology, urban studies)	Visser (2021)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measured through “happiness, positive affect and life satisfaction” (p. 2) Cognitive and affective evaluations of one’s life: “The cognitive element refers to a person’s life satisfaction in general terms (life as a whole) and in domain terms (e.g. relationships, work). The affective element refers to emotions, moods and feelings (e.g., joy, affection, anger, guilt, fear or nervousness).” (p. 2) 	Mental health and well-being associated together
Interdisciplinary (Social sciences, Computer Science, Philosophy)	Dalyot and Dalyot (2018)		Spiritual dimension: “Bourdillon (2014) has argued for expanding the academic research into child well-being to include dimensions of spirituality. He states that ‘childhood studies should look seriously at what makes life meaningful for growing children, what enables them to fit constructively and to their own satisfaction, into the societies in which they live...’ (501–502). In addition, he also calls out attention to some of the biases of western conceptions of children’s well-being. Specifically, he talks about children’s work, and makes an important point about how international agencies and Western society often fail in understanding the different circumstances of children in the developing world.” (p. 187)	
Well-being science and Philosophy	Mitchell and Alexandrova (2021)	Cautions against well-being monism and over-simplification of this complex concept, which can be dangerous. Advocates for a pluralistic outlook of well-being: “Conceptual pluralism about well-being entails that there is no single essence which characterises all and only instances of well-being. Instead, there are many different, inconsistent concepts of well-being, which are appropriately invoked in different contexts and at different times.” (p. 2422)		

Table 4 (continued)

Disciplines	Authors	Multidimensional	Dimensions/Domains/Indicators	Overlapping definitions/ Ambiguity
Interdisciplinary (Well-being, Social indicators)	Fane et al. (2020)	Multi-dimensional	"child wellbeing is frequently expressed and operationalised through the creation of indicators, domains or dimensions such as: health, safety, feeling loved and happy, successful social relationships, opportunities for learning and development, and material/economic basics" (p. 1895)	"Despite the sustained interest, theorisation, and empirical research in child wellbeing from a social indicators perspective, the definition of child wellbeing remains poorly defined and strongly contested" (p. 1895)
Interdisciplinary (with focus on child and youth studies)	Casas & Frønes (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> multifaceted concept: "The article identifies four basic perspectives in research on child well-being: objective, subjective, developmental and eudemonic well-being." (p. 188) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subjective well-being: "Indicators of SWB usually refer to children's evaluations of various domains of their life in terms of satisfaction, happiness, fears and apprehensions in the present" (p. 191) Objective well-being: "We seek to develop a dynamic perspective on well-being encompassing both environmental and subjective factors. Inspired by the capability approach of Sen (1999), we understand objective well-being not only as a function of the opportunity structures and economic resources of various groups of children, but as rooted in the interplay between their opportunity structures, their freedom to access opportunities and their ability to utilise those opportunities." (p. 190) Importance of considering environmental, objective and subjective factors together: "the meaning of specific material resources has to be understood relative to local contexts and from the perspective of the children" (p. 191) 	

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Declarations

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