

## Chapter 2

# Types of Advocacy Activity Using Child Indicators

Data-based child advocacy includes any activity where at least one central component is focused on improving the lives of children using statistical data or scientific evidence. Data-based child advocacy-related activities can be described and clustered many different ways but for purposes of this publication six different kinds of data-based child advocacy activities are identified and discussed;

1. Increasing public awareness about child well-being,
2. Making data on children more easily available,
3. Advocating for more and better data on children,
4. Monitoring child well-being,
5. Goal setting for child well-being, and
6. Evaluating programs and policies related to children.

There is considerable overlap among the six categories listed above and some activities actually belong in multiple categories. I have tried to be parsimonious, but some material may be referenced in more than one place.

## 2.1 Increasing Public Awareness About Child Well-Being

I would argue that using child indicators and data to raise public awareness about the well-being of children is the single biggest use of child indicators in an advocacy context. Growing numbers of indicator-based reports around the world are trying to educate the public and inform policymakers about the levels and trends in the well-being of children. Pollard and Lee (2003) found more than 1,600 articles they classified as being related to child well-being that were published between 1990 and 1999. Ben-Arieh (2006) found 199 “child reports” as of 2006. Interestingly, the vast majority of the reports found by Ben-Arieh were from governments, advocacy groups, and international organizations. Only 16 % of the 199 studies

were classified as academic. This reflects the strong advocacy orientation of such reports.

I think it is fair to say that the more reports there are on child well-being the more likely it is that they will increase public awareness about the problems facing children. In the words of Hood (2006, p. 249);

Regular reports on the state of children are an essential tool in raising public awareness, achieving political support for improving children's living conditions and promoting and ensuring children's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Below I review some of the key reports based on child indicators over the past few decades. I focus on recurring reports because I believe they have the most impact and visibility. It is important to recognize that this is not a complete listing of such reports, but just a sample of similar reports. The reports reviewed here are meant to provide readers with a better sense of the kinds of reports that I view as part of data-based child advocacy. This chapter also provides evidence that data-based child advocacy is widespread.

There are many ways to organize data-based reports on child well-being that have been issued in the past few decades. I discuss reports produced by international organizations first, then some country-specific reports, and finally the United States landscape. The United States is examined individually because it is the area that I know the best and I believe data-based child advocacy is relatively advanced there.

### **2.1.1 International Reports**

On the international front, the United Nations has been a leader in data-based reports on children. The United Nations *State of the World's Children* (available at <http://www.unicef.org/sowc/>) annual report which began in 1979 has pioneered this type of data-rich publication. A recent report (United Nations 2014, p. i) captures the thrust of the report series;

Thirty years have passed since *The State of the World's Children* began to publish tables of standardized global and national statistics aimed at providing a detailed picture of children's circumstances.

Much has changed in the decades since the first indicators of child well-being were presented. But the basic idea has not: consistent, credible data about children's situations are critical to the improvement of their lives—and indispensable to realizing the rights of every child.

In terms of raising public awareness, another key development on the international front was the adoption of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990. The UNCRC fosters civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children (Doek 2014; Vuckovic et al. 2013). The UNCRC not only provides a framework for assessing the well-being of children, it fosters and promotes more measurement and reporting on child well-being around the globe

(United Nations 1989/1990). Article 44 of the Convention calls for regular reporting on child well-being by countries that have ratified the document.

Every country in the world except the United States, South Sudan, and Somalia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The United States has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (during President Clinton's administration) but the United States has not ratified it. In the United States system in order to be ratified, the treaty would have to be passed by two-thirds of the Senate and signed by the President. Despite internal efforts to persuade the United States to ratify the UNCRC (Campaign for United States Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 2014), there is no indication that this is likely to happen soon and there is clearly some opposition to the United States ratifying the UNCRC (Kilbourne 1998).

The UNCRC has also stimulated production of child indicators. For example, Doek (2014, p. 212) concludes;

With regard to measuring the impact of CRC's implementation, there is ongoing discussion on the development of indicators, with considerable attention focused on quantitative results, for example, statistics on infant mortality, malnutrition, and other health rates; education enrollment figures; and the number of children in institutions, foster care, and juvenile justice systems.

Another branch of the United Nations, UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, has produced a series of publications focused on various aspects of child well-being in developed countries. There are now nine publications in the Report Card series from the Innocenti Research Centre all published since 2000. Most of the report cards focus on measures of comprehensive child well-being among a set of developed countries. Collectively, these reports provide one of best sources of comparative statistical data about the well-being of children in more developed countries. The reports are available on the Centre's website at <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/>.

The UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) initiative which started in the mid-1990s is now in the fourth round of surveys focused on measuring the well-being of children in less developed countries (available at [http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index\\_24302.html](http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index_24302.html)). This initiative has generated an on-going series of publications based on measuring child well-being as well as a website where data are made available. According to the MICS website;

Since the mid-1990s, the MICS has enabled many countries to produce statistically sound and internationally comparable estimates of a range of indicators in the areas of health, education, child protection and HIV/AIDS.

The adoption of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals has also fostered measurement and reporting on the well-being of children around the globe (United Nations 2000). While the United Nations Millennium Development Goals project is not about children per se, many of the Millennium Development Goals, such as reducing child mortality and achieving universal primary education, are directly related to the well-being of children, and other goals, such as improving

maternal health and eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, are closely related to child well-being (United Nations 2000).

The work outlined above indicates that the United Nations has taken a leadership role in using data to increase public awareness of child well-being. I also want to emphasize the extent to which the work outlined above has been sustained over time because I strongly believe that repeated publications on a topic underscore an organizations commitment to that topic and repeated publications have more impact on policymakers and the public.

But the United Nations is not the only international organization engaged in such work. In recent years The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) has undertaken a large initiative to promote the use of statistical indicators for monitoring general social well-being and children have been a very visible part of this initiative. In addition to comprehensive reports on child well-being (OECD 2009), OECD has established a website where information can be shared and views among scholars can be exchanged ([http://www.wikiprogress.org/index.php/Child\\_well-being](http://www.wikiprogress.org/index.php/Child_well-being)). The thrust of the OECD initiative is captured in the Istanbul Declaration signed by several international organizations. In part the Istanbul Declaration (available at <http://www.Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.org/site/worldforum06/>) says;

We urge statistical offices, public and private organizations, and academic experts to work alongside representatives of their communities to produce high-quality, fact-based information that can be used by all of society to form a shared view of societal well-being and its evolution over time.

OECD has held a series of international meetings on statistics, knowledge and power under their “Measuring Progress of Societies” initiative and the topic of child well-being has been reflected in such meetings (Ben-Arieh and Gross-Manos 2009).

A variety of international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have contributed to the collective effort to increase awareness of child well-being as well. For example, over the past decade The Save the Children UK organization has produced a series for reports that use child well-being indicators to raise awareness of specific programs and their yearly publication of the Child Development Index has become a staple publication (Save the Children UK 2012).

### ***2.1.2 Country Reports***

Over the past two decades several countries have begun producing regularly updated reports on the well-being of children based on child indicators. Eleven such reports are identified in Table 2.1. I want to emphasize the reports listed in Table 2.1 and the reports covered here are only a sample of such reports. With the exception of the report on Mexico, the only reports covered here are those in English, and even within those written in English, I am sure I have not identified

**Table 2.1** Data-based reports on children from selected countries

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Making Progress: The health, development and wellbeing of Australia's children and young people <a href="http://www.aihw.gov.au/publicaitons/index.cfm/title/10653">http://www.aihw.gov.au/publicaitons/index.cfm/title/10653</a>
Canadian Council for Social Development Report: The progress of Canada's children <a href="http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2002/pcc02/index.htm">http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2002/pcc02/index.htm</a>
Israel National Council for the child report, the state of the child in Israel: A statistical abstract <a href="http://www.children.org.il/pro_articles-list-eng.asp?ProjectID=35">http://www.children.org.il/pro_articles-list-eng.asp?ProjectID=35</a>
South African Child Gauge Report: <a href="http://www.ci.org.za/depts/ci/pubs/pdf/general/gauge2013/SouthAfricanChildGauge2013.pdf">http://www.ci.org.za/depts/ci/pubs/pdf/general/gauge2013/SouthAfricanChildGauge2013.pdf</a>
Kinder Intel Report (Netherlands) <a href="http://www.kinderrenintel.nl">www.kinderrenintel.nl</a>
State of the Nation's Children;Office of the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs Report (Ireland) <a href="http://www.omc.gov.ie">www.omc.gov.ie</a>
South African Child Gauge Report: <a href="http://www.ci.org.za/depts/ci/pubs/pdf/general/gauge2013/SouthAfricanChildGauge2013.pdf">http://www.ci.org.za/depts/ci/pubs/pdf/general/gauge2013/SouthAfricanChildGauge2013.pdf</a>
Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en Mexico (Children's Rights Network in Mexico): México KIDS COUNT Report/La Infancia Cuenta: <a href="http://www.infanciacuenta.org">www.infanciacuenta.org</a>
United States Reports
Children's Defense Fund <a href="http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/Ppover?pagename=policyareas_stateamericaschildren_2008">http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/Ppover?pagename=policyareas_stateamericaschildren_2008</a>
Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Families Statistics <a href="http://www.childstats.gov">http://www.childstats.gov</a>
Foundation for Child Development's Child Well-Being Index <a href="http://www.soc.duke.edu/~cwi/">http://www.soc.duke.edu/~cwi/</a>
The Annie E. Casey Foundation <a href="http://www.kidscount.org">http://www.kidscount.org</a>
KIDS COUNT <a href="http://www.kidscount.org">www.kidscount.org</a>
Over the past decade several countries have begun producing regular reports on the well-being of children. Some reports are produced by government agencies while others are produced by Non-Governmental Organizations within the country

them all. Nonetheless, I think the reports covered here are representative of the broader set of reports and will give readers a flavor of this kind of activity.

The reports in Table 2.1 are produced by a mix of government agencies and non-profits or Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), often with the involvement of university scholars. They are similar in the fact that they all rely heavily on statistical indicators to provide a broad portrait of child well-being and they have all been published on a fairly regular basis over the past ten years or more. They often serve two advocacy-related purposes: raising public awareness and making data more easily available.

Consistent with the primary thrust of data-based child advocacy, it is the intention of most, if not all, of these country reports to stimulate some type of action to improve the lives of children. A quote from the Israel report captures a common sentiment;

This report is more than just a passive portrayal or silent image of the world of children in Israel. It should serve as a vital tool in safeguarding of the rights of children in Israel and as a basis for taking action to improve their welfare. (Israel National Council for the Child Report 2007, p. iii).

In discussing the report from Ireland one prominent official stated;  
 The *State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2008* is an important resource for all those who seek to understand the experience of childhood in Ireland. As such, it will help us in our task of making Ireland a better place for children. (Andrews 2008, p. iii).

It is also notable that the production of country reports on the well-being of children is not just happening in the most developed countries of the world. For example, in South Africa, the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town has produced a publication called *South African Children's Gauge*, regularly since 2005 (Children's Institute 2013). According to one source (Price 2009, p. 6);

The South African Children's Gauge, now in its fourth year of publication, has gained a reputation as an invaluable resource that monitors the country's progress in realizing children's constitutional rights.

In Mexico the non-profit group Red por Los Derechos de la Infancia in Mexico (Children Rights Network) has produced a publication called *La Infancia Cuenta en Mexico* (Kids Count in Mexico) for the past several years, which provides measures of child well-being for the states of Mexico. A rough translation of one passage in the 2010 Book (Red Por Los Derechos de la Infancia in Mexico 2010, p. 5) says, "We hope this edition of the publication will facilitate access to the information necessary for defense and promotion of the rights of children in our country."

The data-based child advocacy movement is slowly developing in Latin America, but it may not be as apparent there as other parts of the world because it is largely reflected in non-English language publications. I asked two colleagues who are familiar with data-based child advocacy in Latin America to provide a short summary of some of the work there (See Appendix 1).

### 2.1.3 United States

There was a volume on child well-being published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1980), almost simultaneously with the United Nations State of the World's Child Report, but it did not get much public attention and was not repeated. The development of the child indicator movement in the United States is reflected in a series of yearly ongoing comprehensive reports on child well-being that have emerged over the past 30 years (O'Hare 2012a). The four ongoing reports covered here are;

- *State of America's Children*, produced yearly since 1981 by Children's Defense Fund,
- *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, produced yearly since 1990 by The Annie E. Casey Foundation,
- *America's Children; Key Indicators of Well-Being*, produced yearly since 1997 by United States Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics,

- *Child Well-Being Index* produced yearly since 2004 by the Foundation for Child Development.

Each of these initiatives is discussed below.

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) started producing their annual *State of Americas Children* report around 1981. The most recent version of this annual report is available at <http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/2014-soac.pdf>.

The *State of America's Children Report* is a comprehensive report on the well-being of children in the United States based on the latest data. Like many earlier reports, the 2014 report provides plentiful child indicators for each state and contains a media-friendly section showing all the negative events that happen in a typical day to American children, with a special emphasis on racial disparities. The *State of America's Children* report does not combine indicators into an overall index of child well-being and does not rank states on individual indicators or overall child well-being.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* produced by The Annie E. Casey Foundation has been published each year since 1990 and has gained a lot of visibility among journalists, advocates, and policymakers, in part, because the Foundation has used its resources to heavily promote and disseminate the publication. Many key audiences such as state legislators and Congressional staff report that they regularly use the data in the KIDS COUNT report and say that the KIDS COUNT report has had an impact on public policy in America (National Conference of State Legislators 2004, The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2005a, b, c, 2007; O'Hare 2008). More information about the KIDS COUNT program and the most recent version of the annual report are available at [www.kidscount.org](http://www.kidscount.org).

The 2011 edition of the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2011, P. 37) reiterates the primary purpose of KIDS COUNT report, "It is our hope that the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* and the accompanying KIDS COUNT Data Center will help raise the visibility of children's issues on the national agenda and serve as a tool for advocates, policymakers and others to make better decisions." This quote speaks to the Foundations desire to see the KIDS COUNT data used to improve child well-being.

The effectiveness of the KIDS COUNT initiative is due in part to the fact that the Casey Foundation has funded a KIDS COUNT program in every state. Since 1991 these state level organizations have produced hundreds of data-driven reports on child well-being in their state. (For a list of state KIDS COUNT organizations see <http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/KIDSCOUNT/KIDSCOUNTStateNetwork.aspx>).

In 1994, staff in several United States federal government statistical agencies informally initiated the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. The "Forum," which now has 22 agency members, was formally established through Executive Order No. 13045, issued by President Clinton in April 1997. The Forum's mission (Wallman 2011, p. iii) is "to develop priorities for collecting enhanced data on children and youth, improve communication of information on

the status of children to the policy community and the general public, and produce a more complete data on children at the Federal, state, and local levels.”

The Forum is involved in many activities, but the most visible is their report called *America’s Children: Key Indicators of Well-Being*, which has been published annually since 1997. The most recent edition as well as past editions of this annual report are available on line at <http://childstats.gov>. The *America’s Children Report* differs from the KIDS COUNT and CDF reports because it is focused on national-level data rather than state-level data (O’Hare et al. 2013a).

According to the press release accompanying the 2011 report, ([http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/press\\_release.asp](http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/press_release.asp));

The report provides statistical information on children and families in a non-technical, easy-to-use format to stimulate discussion among data providers, policymakers, and members of the public.

I think this speaks to the Forum’s interest in getting this information into the hands of a broad audience.

In addition to the government-wide report on children published each year by the Interagency Forum, many United States statistical agencies, such as the Census Bureau, the National Center on Education Statistics and the National Center on Health Statistics, also produce child indicator reports on a regular basis.

In short, many parts of the United States government provide data on the well-being of children. Again, this is just a sample of data on children available from United States government statistical agencies. Several authors (Brown 2008; Brown and Botsko 1996) provide a more complete accounting of child data from federal statistical agencies.

The Child Well-Being Index (CWI) created by the Foundation for Child Development was first reported in a peer-reviewed journal article in 2001 (Land et al. 2001). Starting in 2004, the CWI report has been released each year using the same 28 indicators clustered into seven domains of well-being (Foundation for Child Development 2013). The most recent edition of this annual report as well as past editions are available at <http://fcd-us.org/our-work/child-well-being-index-cwi>. The CWI report differs from the Forum’s *America’s Children* report largely because it has more historical data (back to 1976), it provides an annual index of well-being highlighting changes over time in overall child well-being, and the theoretical basis for indicator selection is more explicit.

In addition to the yearly CWI report, CWI methodology and data sources have been used to examine differences in child well-being, by gender, race, age, and international differences (among major English-speaking countries). The regular yearly CWI report only focuses on national level data but the CWI framework has also been used to look at variations across states (Lamb and O’Hare 2013; O’Hare et al. 2013b). The development of the index has also been the springboard for scholarly examination of issues related to measuring child well-being. For example, see the assembly of papers generated by a conference at the Brookings Institute in 2006 (available at <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2006/0510welfare.aspx>).



Nearly every year the CWI report has been covered by at least one large national newspaper in the United States such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post* or *USA Today* that reach millions of potential readers. The good media coverage is linked to thoughtful marketing and a strategic release strategy. The report is almost always released in Washington DC., (it has often been released at a special event held at the United States Capitol) and often involves one or more prominent elected official.

I want to mention two other closely-related report series that are slightly different than the four series described above. First Focus (2013) has been issuing a report called *Children's Budget* each year since 2007 that shows how the interests of children are reflected in the United States Federal budget. This report series is the first sustained look at how the Federal government supports (or doesn't support) children with dollars. And a companion report issued each year since 2007 called *Kids' Share* (Isaacs et al. 2013) shows similar data from a historical and projections perspective. While these two reports do not use measures that are typically thought of as child well-being indicators, they are data-rich and provide useful information about children in a public policy context.

The annual reports series discussed above have all emerged in the past 30 years and reflect the growing interest in data-based reports on child well-being. Collectively these annual reports on the well-being of children in the United States have raised public awareness about the well-being of children in a mutually reinforcing way.

Several non-governmental organizations have also contributed to the child indicator movement in the United States. For example, the Washington-based nonprofit research organization Child Trends has developed an online data bank with information on numerous measures of child well-being (available at <http://www.childtrends.org/databank/>). Child Trends also produces a regular newsletter called *The Child Indicator* as a way to help keep the child indicator community informed about developments. Each issue of *The Child Indicator* goes out to about 13,000 potential readers. Child Trends also issues many data-driven publications on child well-being each year.

Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago is the home of the Child Monitoring Project, which provides information from early efforts to measure and monitor child well-being. The Multi-National Project for Monitoring and Measuring Children's Well-Being is an ongoing, multi-phase effort to improve our ability to measure and monitor the status of children around the globe. The National Center for Children in Poverty has also produced a number of data-driven reports on child well-being over the past 20 years. More information is available on their website at <http://nccp.org/>.

Data-based reports on children can help increase policymakers and the public understanding of children's issues, but regular publications on the well-being of children are also important because they signal that this is an important topic. If there were no prominent regular reports on the well-being of children, there may be an unconscious understanding that the well-being of children is not an important topic on the public agenda. Moreover, using data to generate public

interest in improving the lives of children can put political pressure on policymakers to enact programs to enhance child well-being.

In summary, there are growing numbers of individuals and groups in a variety of settings working to increase public awareness about the well-being of children by publishing data-based reports. The sample of reports and efforts outlined here are all relatively new (within past few decades) and clearly such efforts are increasing. I believe the efforts outlined above are a fundamental part of the data-based child advocacy movement.

## 2.2 Making Data on Child Well-Being Easily Available

In some ways making data easily available overlaps with raising public awareness, but I believe there is a distinct set of efforts focused on getting data into the hands of decision makers and the broader public that is part of data-based child advocacy.

Many of the publications reviewed in Sect. 2.1 and the websites in Tables 2.1 and 2.2, are examples of how data on child well-being are being made widely available. Thirty years ago none of these publications or website existed. Despite the rapid increase in such activity over the past two decades, there are still many gaps in the data available on child well-being.

There are at least two key issues involved with making data more readily and easily available. One issue is related to increasing the amount and quality of data on children made available by government agencies and a second issue is making such data available in a form that is more usable for non-scholarly audiences. Scholars and researchers have a special role to play in both of these issues.

Data-based child advocates can play an important role by encouraging government statistical agencies and other groups involved in gathering data on children to make such data available to the public. They can also provide feedback to government agencies in terms of the kinds and amount of data they make available. Often times statisticians or data experts working in government agencies don't have a clear idea of how the data they release is perceived or used by the public.

If government agencies are unable or unwilling to make data available, data-based child advocates can play an important role by locating data in government files and making it more easily available through printed reports and/or websites. This activity is reflected in many publications discussed in the previous section. By gathering data from several different sources and putting it together in a data book or website, data-based child advocates can foster better and more holistic understanding of children and youth.

Researchers and data analysts can play an important role because they often have an understanding of the kinds of data collected by different statistical agencies. If data on children are buried in a government agency files, they are effectively unavailable to the non-scholars. Data-based child advocacy groups can

**Table 2.2** Selected websites with child well-being Indicators

(1) The Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT Project— <a href="http://www.kidscount.org">www.kidscount.org</a>
(2) The United States Federal Forum on Child and Family Statistics— <a href="http://www.childstats.gov">www.childstats.gov</a>
(3) Foundation for Child Development Child Well-Being Index— <a href="http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/2010-child-well-being-index-cwi">http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/2010-child-well-being-index-cwi</a>
(4) Child Trends Data Bank— <a href="http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/">http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/</a>
(5) Chapin Hall/University of Chicago Child Monitoring Project <a href="http://multinational-indicators.chapinhall.org/">http://multinational-indicators.chapinhall.org/</a>
(6) International Data Base at United States Census Bureau <a href="http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/">http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/</a>
(7) International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI) <a href="http://www.childindicators.org/">http://www.childindicators.org/</a>
(8) UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre <a href="http://www.unicef-irc.org/">http://www.unicef-irc.org/</a>
(9) UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre Data Base <a href="http://www.unicef-irc.org/databases/">http://www.unicef-irc.org/databases/</a>
(10) UNICEF Monitoring Statistics <a href="http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index.html">http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index.html</a>
(11) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child <a href="http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm">http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm</a>
(12) Chapin Hall/University of Chicago Child Monitoring Project <a href="http://multinational-indicators.chapinhall.org/">http://multinational-indicators.chapinhall.org/</a>
(13) Child Trends Data Bank- <a href="http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/">http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/</a>
(14) International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI) <a href="http://www.childindicators.org/">http://www.childindicators.org/</a>
(15) Foundation for Child Development Child Well-Being Index— <a href="http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/2010-child-well-being-index-cwi">http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/2010-child-well-being-index-cwi</a>
(16) The Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT Project— <a href="http://www.kidscount.org">www.kidscount.org</a>
(17) The United States Federal Forum on Child and Family Statistics— <a href="http://www.childstats.org">www.childstats.org</a>
(18) UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre <a href="http://unicef-irc.org">http://unicef-irc.org</a>
(19) UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre Data Base <a href="http://www.unicef-irc.org/databases/">http://www.unicef-irc.org/databases/</a>
(20) UNICEF Monitoring Statistics <a href="http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index.html">http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index.html</a>
(21) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child <a href="http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm">http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm</a>

play an important role by making sure such information is more accessible to broad audiences.

In the United States federal government, many statistical agencies seem like an unsolvable maze for people who are unfamiliar with them. Yet the success of many data-based child advocacy initiatives rests partly on finding such data and making statistical indicators easily available to the public. Child indicator experts typically know how to find data on the well-being of children in government reports and/or websites, while many advocates and policymakers do not. Providing a bridge between government statistical agencies and public or non-scholarly audiences is an important role data-based child advocates can play.

It also important to distinguish between nominal availability of data and availability of data in a form that is usable by people without data or statistical skills or experience. There are at least two components to this issue. Sometimes,

government agencies release data that is too complicated for a non-scholarly audience. Data-based child advocates can play an important role in translating complicated or unclear measures into something the lay public understands.

Another issue relates to how data is made available. For example computer-readable files are sometimes made available by government agencies. Such files can be very powerful and helpful for groups who have the human resources to download and analyze them using statistical software. Analyzing computer files to make data available to those without the resources to access computerized data is an important activity for researchers and data analysis.

But for many group, particularly under-funded child advocacy organizations, and the public at large, data on those files are effectively out of reach because they do not have the resources to purchase and process the data files.

Here is one example of how a non-profit organization helped make data available. During the 1990s, there were no regularly published comparable state figures on high school dropout rates in the United States. The federal government did not produce a set of comparable numbers and the figures produced by states were not comparable. The Annie E. Casey Foundation used a rolling 5-year average from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) to produce state-level indicators for high school dropout rates (O'Hare and Pollard 1998). These data could only be generated by purchasing the CPS micro-data files from the Census Bureau, processing them using statistical software and combining five consecutive years together to produce a large enough sample size for reliable state estimates. Most child advocacy organizations do not have the capacity to do this.

Another potential problem involves lack of statistical or mathematic skills; for example skills needed to convert counts into meaningful percentages or rates which are often needed to make comparisons among geographic units or socio-demographic groups. If a government agency provides the number of children in poverty and the total number of children, it is easy for a trained analyst to calculate a poverty rate. Many tables provided by the United States Census Bureau's American Factfinder software only provide such counts.

The provision of raw data or counts rather than percentages can be helpful because they allow users to combine data in ways that are more useful for them, but it can be problematic for people not accustomed to using data. For people who are drawn to data and statistics, it is difficult to imagine there are people unable to make such a calculation, but for those are not mathematically or statistically inclined, such a calculation may be beyond their ability. A recent report by the United States Department of Education (2013) found U.S. adults ranked 21st out of 23 countries in terms of numeracy. The survey found roughly 30 % of adults in the United States had relatively low numeracy skill levels compared to about 19 % for all countries combined. And it is important to recognize that some of these people are in important decision-making positions. Consequently, providing data in easy-to-understand forms is important.

Given the problems identified above, scholars, researchers, and scientists can play an important role in data-based child advocacy by helping to make data more readily available in a form that is useful to a broad public. Scholars, researchers,

and scientists often know where data are located within the government bureaucracy, they can assess the quality of the data, they know which indicators are typically more powerful, they have the computer skills needed to access the data, and they often have some presentation skills such as map making or chart making.

Methods for making information available are rapidly changing. The use of the internet and websites are increasing rapidly. Some of the implications of the growing influence of the internet are discussed in Chap. 5. However, Table 2.2 provides URLs for a sample of websites that now provide statistical data on children.

The Child Trends Data Bank is one such source of child indicators in the United States. The Data Bank is described as “...a one-stop source for the latest national trends and research on over 100 key indicators of child and youth well-being.” (Child Trends 2011). This is just one more example of new sources of statistical indicators of child well-being that are being made available.

The KIDS COUNT initiative has moved from being solely focused on printed publications when it started in 1990, to having a website that provides more than 100 measures of child well-being for all states. The KIDS COUNT website is designed for users without a lot of statistical or computer skills so it is user-friendly and intuitive. It is also powerful because it allows users to create their own tabulations, charts and maps. The switch from printed form to a web-based form of dissemination allowed the KIDS COUNT initiative to not only make more data available, it allowed the staff to make data available more quickly.

The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development has developed a website (WIKICHILD) that provides data on children and families from many countries, and the Multiple-Indicators Cluster Surveys also have a portal for obtaining data online.

Chapin Hall at The University of Chicago is the home of the Child Monitoring Project which provides information from early efforts to measure and monitor child well-being (more information about the Chapin Hall Child Monitoring Project is available online at <http://multinational-indicators.chapinhall.org/>).

The United States National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) which has been fielded in 2003, 2007 and 2011, provides state level indicators of child well-being on a broad spectrum of topics related to child well-being. A few summary reports have been issued based on the data but one of the most innovative aspects is the NSCH website (<http://www.childhealthdata.org/learn/NSCH>) which allows users to produce customized tabulations from their survey data.

In summary, many sources of data on the well-being of children have emerged over the past few decades that help make statistical information more easily available to both scholars and non-scholarly audiences. Making child well-being data readily available provides an important use of indicators in an advocacy context and another link between scholars and those advocating for children. The dramatic increase in this kind of activity over the past few decades can be seen as another reflection of the growth of data-based child advocacy movement.

## 2.3 Advocating for More and Better Data on Children

The interests of child advocates and child researchers clearly overlap in advocating for data needed to better measure and monitor child well-being. Data availability is critical for assessing many government functions such as policy development and program administration. Many of the reports referenced in Sect. 2.1 would not have been possible unless someone had successfully advocated for the production and release of data on children.

The vast majority of data used in data-based child advocacy is collected by government agencies, either directly or by funding other organizations such as universities and NGOs. So influencing such agencies is an important aspect of data-based child advocacy.

The connection between child indicator experts and government agencies has evolved differently in different countries. In some countries, researchers already work very closely with government agencies to develop data on children. In other countries, researchers sometimes play more of an outside advocacy role (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2009a, Stagner et al. 2008).

This is a bit of an oversimplification, but there are three main data-related tasks undertaken by government statistical agencies. First, government agencies determine what data to collect. Second, of the data collected by government agencies, a decision must be made about what to tabulate and/or analyze. And third, government agencies determine what data to make available to researchers and the public. There are potential advocacy activities associated with each of these steps.

Scholars can lend their expertise and weight to efforts to make sure government data collection activities use the best data collection methodologies, include the most accurate and reliable measures of child well-being, and make sure the data are made easily available in a timely fashion. Child indicators scholars generally have a lot of expertise and credibility on all of these issues.

Data-advocacy is needed because data production is generally a low priority within policy-making circles and is often vulnerable when governments try to reduce expenditures. In examining statistical agencies in developed countries around the world, Groves (2010, pp. 176) concludes, "One of the continuing challenges of statistical agencies is getting attention and support from the leaders who use their products, regardless of the sector of use." In the United States, "The Federal government typically spends between 0.15 and 0.40 % of its total budget on statistical activities, representing between \$10 and \$25 per year per resident for the country." (United States Office of Management and Budget 1999 to 2009). The high number for both of these series reflect the once a decade costs for the decennial census.

Pressure to limit government data collection is often highest when budgets are tight. But there is strong argument to be made that during times of budget cuts is exactly the wrong time to reduce the amount of data available for thoughtful decision making (Lewis and Burd-Sharps 2010).

Even though the cost of government data production is relatively small compared to other expenditures, statistical agencies have relatively few advocates

outside of government. Moreover, many of the primary users of such data (scholars or researchers) are often not well organized to be active data advocates.

Given the low priority for data collection, advocates need to continually be a visible voice to promote the availability of data on children from government agencies and to make sure funds to support research on children are made available. In most cases such agencies are not in a good position to advocate for themselves and they need outsiders to represent the interests of data users. This is an opening for data-based advocates to “lobby” leaders to make sure government agencies have the resources they need to produce good quality data on children.

Getting government agencies to produce data that measures child well-being is not only useful in providing data to help us understand the well-being of children and the role of government assistance programs, I believe it helps elevate children on the public agenda. The importance of measuring child well-being is underscored by former Director of the United States Office of Management and Budget, Peter Orzag (2010, p. 34) who stated “Because what gets measured gets done”. In other words, if a topic is not monitored on a regular basis it is easy for it to be overlooked.

A good example of data advocacy occurred in Ireland where the regular report on child well-being in their *State of the Nations Children* series spurred interest in developing additional data on children. In Ireland prior to the first publication of the State of the Nation’s Children Report in 2006, very little data was published about the breadth of children’s lives. Since the first publication of *State of the Nations Children* a number of Irish organizations, statutory and voluntary, have been active in publishing documents, reports and “report cards” on children’s lives in Ireland. This is a welcome development and is possible because of the many improvements in data on children in Ireland over the last ten years. The quality of data has also been improved through interactions between the research unit and the various data holders, particularly those in service areas where the purpose of data collection is to support administrative tasks rather than to facilitate research.

Over the past few decades data advocacy has been successful in gaining several new sources of information. In the United States, the American Community Survey and the National Survey of Children’s Health have emerged to provide more detailed data on child well-being. The development of Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates and the Small Area Health Insurance Estimates by the United States Census Bureau over the past 20 years is another example of expanded availability of data on child well-being.

Although this section is labeled more and better data, in recent times, many advocacy efforts in the United States have been focused on saving government data collections from being eliminated rather than advocating for more data. For example, House Bill H.R. 1638 introduced by United States Congressman Jeff Duncan in 2013 would have eliminated nearly all of the United States Census Bureau surveys, but data advocates were able to persuade other members of congress not to move forward on the bill.

Another example of losing ground is the publication called *Trends in the Well-Being of America’s Children and Youth* that was published yearly by the U.S.



Department of Health and Human Services from 1997 to 2003. The publication provided nearly 400 pages of detailed data on children and youth, but publication was stopped in 2003, ostensibly for budgetary reasons. The point here is that advocates must remain vigilant not only to argue for additional data needed to provide a full portrait of child well-being, but to protect what is already available.

An example of where researchers have been instrumental in expanding the collection and provision of critical data is the emergence of several data collection efforts that provide comparable data across many countries. The provision of such statistical data not only has an impact in each country where country-specific data is provided, there is a collective impact that is achieved by enabling cross-country comparisons. The importance of providing consistent standardized measures for countries is captured by UNICEF (2007, p. 3); "What is to be gained by measuring and comparing child well-being in different countries? The answer lies in the maxim 'to improve something, first measure it.'" A few such data collection and reporting efforts are discussed here. For more detailed information on comparable international surveys with data on children, see Brown et al. (2002).

The *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) is a worldwide evaluation of 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance. The survey was first conducted in 2000, and then repeated every three years thereafter. It is coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, with a view to improving educational policies and outcomes. More information about PISA is available on their website at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Programme\\_for\\_International\\_Student\\_Assessment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Programme_for_International_Student_Assessment).

Another similar study is the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) which focuses on mathematics and science. TIMSS was first collected in 1995 and data have been collected several times since then. More information is available on their website at <http://nces.ed.gov/timss/>.

The *Health Behavior of School-Aged Children* (HBSC) study is a cross-national research survey conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. The HBSC aims to gain new insight into, and increase the understanding of young people's health and well-being, health behaviors, and their social context. Initiated in 1982 in three countries, there are now more than 35 participating countries and regions. The first cross-national survey was conducted in 1983–1984, the second in 1985–1986, and subsequently every four years using a common research protocol. More information about HBSC is available on their website at <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/about/org/despr/studies/behavior/HBSC.cfm>.

In summary, advocating for more and better data on child well-being is an important activity in promoting child well-being and it is a goal shared by many scholars and child advocates. Over the past two decades there have been many successes in this endeavor, but also a few setbacks. The production of such data is not only important for gaining a better understanding of child well-being, but also because the absence of data on children or specific aspects of children's lives is likely to diminish the amount of public attention received. If the public is unaware of specific problems facing children they are unlikely to call for solutions to those problems.



## 2.4 Child Well-Being Monitoring

A key phrase used in child indicator world is “measuring and monitoring child well-being.” The monitoring part of this phrase reflects on-going regular reports which allow users to see if child well-being is improving or deteriorating over time and/or to see if child well-being is better for one group of children than another. Monitoring suggests repetitive reports including the same measures of child well-being so progress, or lack of it, can be determined. Many of the reports discussed in previous sections provide this kind of monitoring capacity.

Scholars, advocates and communication experts, often have different views about the value of publishing a report every year. The different views are discussed in Appendix 2.

The production and use of child well-being indicators has expanded recently, in part, because they provide a useful way to determine whether a country, state, or group of children is moving in a positive or negative direction (Brown and Corbett 1997).

Many data-based child advocates understand the important role indicators and data play in monitoring. For example, Hood (2006, p. 249) concludes that “Monitoring and reporting on the well-being of children has a central role to play in the development of policies to improve children’s lives.” Brown and Moore (2009, p. 2) state, “ Having strong data at the national and state level is key to developing, targeting, and monitoring policies and programs for children and youth.”

Monitoring often involves using data for accountability. For example, one of the main purposes of *The Child Development Index* published regularly by Save the Children UK, (2013) includes “holding government to account for children’s wellbeing” which is in the publication’s subtitle. Likewise many provisions of the UNCRC invite on-going monitoring of child well-being from the children’s rights perspective.

In summary, there are many examples of how data on children are being used to monitor developments over time. Such data provides an excellent way to determine if child well-being is improving or deteriorating

## 2.5 Goal Setting

Another use for statistical indicators of child well-being is their application in setting goals. Several examples of this type of application are described below.

In the United States, the federal government initiative called *Healthy People 2020* explicitly sets goals related to health and many relate to children. Some of the goals included in *Healthy People 2020* are:

- Reduce the rate of infant deaths,
- Reduce rate of child deaths,

- Reduce the rate of low weight and pre-term births,
- Increase the proportion of children who had access to a “Medical Home”.

The articulation of such goals often helps shape policies to reach the goals and foster data collection needed to monitor movement toward the goal.

The *America’s Children* report by the United States Inter-Agency Forum on Child and Family Statistics has played a similar role. After reviewing the use of the report, Bradburn and Fuqua (2010, p. 101) state, “This pegging of data to goals is one source of indicators power to engage and effect changes”.

The America’s Promise Alliance initiative in the United States has set a goal of increasing the high school graduate rate in the United States to 90 % by the year 2020. This goal helps drive the work of its alliance partners across the country (America’s Promise 2013).

In Great Britain, a goal of cutting child poverty in half over ten years, lead to significant reduction in child poverty rates. There is widespread belief that identifying lower child poverty as a goal was crucial to the improvements in child poverty that were seen following adoption of the goal (Waldfoegel 2010).

Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations is another example where goal setting involved data and indicators. Many of the Millennium Development goals involve measuring and reporting on the well-being of children based on statistical indicators of child well-being.

In summary, using child indicators and statistical data on children to set and measure movement towards goals is another important part of data-based child advocacy.

## 2.6 Evaluating Programs and Policies

Indicators are increasingly seen as important to the policy process (Ben-Arieh and Fronese 2009; Ben-Arieh and Goerge 2006). In discussing the changes experienced by the child indicators field in the past two decades, prominent child researchers Ben-Arieh and Goerge (2006, p.21) recently wrote;

...we argue that yet another change of focus is appropriate. We refer to the role of indicators in shaping policies and services, which requires that indicators be devised and used in ways that would extend their impact beyond building knowledge.

Many others agree. For example, one widely read European publication (Eurochild 2009) states;

Indicators are increasingly valued as a means to interpret and present statistical data, monitor policy implementation, and provide the grounds for evidence-based policies and increased accountability.

This application of statistics on children fits neatly into the framework of data-based child advocacy.

Some would argue that major changes in governance over the past few decades have increased the relevance of child well-being indicators for policymakers. There has been more interest in public accountability over the past twenty years and this movement requires more and better data (Brown and Corbett 1997). In the United States context, Corbett (2008, p. 33) argues;

In short, this focus on results, public accountability, and new forms of organizing social assistance increasingly demands a much more sophisticated use of what we broadly think of as social indicators.

Put succinctly, “Accountability requires counting.” (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2009b, p. 7). Counting (measuring) is the heart of the data-based child advocacy movement.

In the context discussed here, I argue that indicators are used in two different kinds of evaluation. The first kind is an evaluation of broad approaches to child welfare. For example, when countries or states are ranked in terms of child well-being, this is often taken as an evaluation of that country or that states’ effort to care for children and is a reflection of a political regime or administration that holds power in that state or country. Assessing trends in child well-being over time is another way to assess the efficacy of political regimes or administrations and to hold leaders accountable for child well-being.

The study by Mekonen includes a Child Friendliness Index which is used to rank all 52 African countries based on the extent to which they have child friendly policies. Mekonen (2010, p. 207) defines a child-friendly government as “one which is making the maximum effort to meet its obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill child rights and ensure child well-being.” The Global Movement for Children aspires to create a similar index for all countries in the world (Global Movement for Children 2010).

In the context of the United States, the devolution of program and policy responsibility from the federal level to the states has generated a need for more detailed measures of child well-being. As states have developed different approaches to public policies, evaluating the impact of those policies requires state-level data. The Assessing the New Federalism project collected data on child well-being from 13 states to assess varied state approaches to providing support for children and families. The work of the Assessing the New Federalism project can be found at <http://www.urban.org/center/anf/index.cfm>.

The second way in which indicators are used is in the evaluation of individual programs and policies. Statistical measures of child well-being are often used to determine whether a program has been a success or a failure. According to Ben-Arieh et al. (2001, p. 41);

...indicators make possible the evaluation of particular programs and policies, especially over time. Current policies can be examined in light of past efforts and evaluation of proposed changes can be enhanced.

There are many examples of how child indicators have been used in a public policy context (Belsky et al. 2006; Bernal 2008; Jack and Tonmyr 2008; Portwood

et al. 2010; Rose and Rowlands 2010). The use of child indicators in a public policy context typically takes place at a national or state/provincial level, but they have also been used at the local level as well (McCroskey 2008).

In the United States, many researchers have used child indicators to show links between policy measures and overall child well-being in the states. For example Voss (1995) found that social service expenditures were very important predictors of child well-being across states. In another study, authors show that states with a higher tax rates (this reflects federal, state and local taxes paid by residents have better child outcomes than states with a lower tax rate (Every Child Matters Education Fund 2008). Another study found states that spend more on children have better outcomes (measured globally) even after taking into account potential confounding influences (Harknett et al. 2003).

Several scholars have found that more supportive state welfare policies are associated with better conditions and better outcomes for children (Cohen 1998; Ritualo and O'Hare 2000; O'Hare and Lee 2007; O'Hare et al. 2013b). Bradshaw and Richardson (2009, p. 319) examined several European countries and found;

There are positive associations between child well-being and spending on family benefits and services and GDP per capita, a negative association with inequality and no association with prevalence of “broken” families.

In looking across developed countries, Bradshaw (2014) reports that the percentage GDP spent on families exhibits a positive correlation with subjective well-being among children, but the association does not rise to the level of statistical significance.

The 2009 Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development study of child well-being in developed countries devotes a chapter to examining the relationship between child well-being and social spending across the child's life cycle and another chapter to policy choices in early childhood (OECD 2009). The authors found substantial variation in social spending and public policies related to children across more developed countries.

One country where a child indicator report has been widely interwoven with government activities is Ireland. Several findings from the *State of the Nations' Children* report in Ireland related to gender differences in physical activities and a growing gender gap over time, resulted in a commitment by the Department of Health and Children (2000) to develop a national recreation policy for teenagers. The development of the recreation policy took place over a two year period and the policy “Teenspace—National Recreation Policy” was published in 2007.

One of the most important roles child indicators can play is in the rational or data-based distribution of public funds. For example, the United States government bases the distribution of several billion dollars in Education funding (Title 1) to states and school districts each year on the basis of child poverty rates. O'Hare (2012b) identifies six federal assistance programs that use measures of young children to distribute over \$18 billion to states and localities each year.

Other researchers use specific child indicators in evaluation, such as using teen birthrates to evaluate the effectiveness of abstinence programs and test

standardized test scores to evaluate education outcomes. Reflective of a number of similar reports, The Center on Education Policy (2011) used state-level standardized test scores in American public school students to assess educational attainment differences across states and among groups of students.

A number of organizations have assembled sets of child well-being outcome measures that can be used to assess education and training programs (Child Trends, undated) including some that attempt to assess the so-called soft skills, that have received increasing attention (Wilson-Ahlstrom et al. 2011).

In summary, child well-being indicators are being used in a variety of ways to assess policies and “policy-regimes.” Such data are often used in an accountability context, that is, trying to hold leaders accountable for the general well-being of children.

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