Refugee Children’s Wellbeing in Greece: Methodological and Ethical Challenges

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Abstract
This paper brings to the fore the methodological and ethical issues we faced in the process of collecting qualitative data from refugee children in Greece in the context of the Children’s Understandings of Well-Being study. The aim of this contribution is to expose the methodological and ethical challenges we encountered before and during the data collection. Through the case study of 4 children we critically reflect on the methodological tools used as a means of exploring refugee children’s sense of wellbeing. These were individual interviews initially and more participatory methods. Contextual factors are discussed and our dilemmas as researchers are unpicked for further analysis.

Keywords: participatory research, refugee children, well-being

1 Introduction and research aims
In the context of the Children’s Understandings of Well-Being study we explored refugee children’s personal views on their wellbeing through qualitative data. The aim of this paper is to address the methodological and ethical challenges we confronted as researchers before and during the data collection. We examine the theories and methodological tools we used...
to investigate refugee children’s subjective well-being. Thus, the actual findings and children’s actual responses on what matters in their lives are not part of the scope of this paper.

Our data collection took place during August 2018 and June 2019 in the mainland of Greece. Our sample consists of four refugee children aged 4, 6, 7 and 8 years who live in the mainland of Greece and engage with community activities. Refugee families in Greece are located in temporary camps, but families who have been assessed as most vulnerable by social workers and psychologists live in apartment buildings in urban contexts. Access to and knowledge of how these children live becomes much more difficult compared to children who live in camps where organizations coexist in space.

The children who participated in the study were initially interviewed with the aid of an interpreter. However, this method seemed not to be very efficient and at a second stage, the mosaic approach (Clark/Moss, 2011) was considered. In this second stage children were given a variety of ways to share their lived experiences and showed higher levels of active engagement by contributing with their thoughts and views.

The paper starts with an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the study and continues with a critical analysis of methodological and ethical aspects that emerged from the research. This paper aims to highlight the methodological and ethical challenges we faced as researchers when exploring refugee children’s views on the quality of their lives. Using individual interviews (stage 1) and participatory methods (stage 2) are critically discussed.

2 Literature review: Child well-being in theory

Childhood is characterized by a wide diversity across cultural frames, space and time (Facer/Holmes/Lee 2012, p. 172); nevertheless, its importance, as a decisive life stage with a value in itself, is unquestionable. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has advanced the debate on childhood and altered the view on children from being merely recipients of freedom and services or beneficiaries of protective measures, to being subjects with rights and participants in the actions impacting on them. The fundamental difference between present discussions about children’s rights and those of previous years lies partly in a different picture of the child as deserving personal rights rather than simply protectionist rights (Sünker/Swiderek 2007). As such, over the last decade children are viewed as agents who have views and opinions on what matters to them and what sets a good, healthy and happy life.

Early childhood forms a critical life period which may have long-term effects on later life. The impact of adversity or positive experiences on children’s life quality can be approached through two ways: their entitlements to a good life in the here and now, as young children, and the impact these may have on the societal development and the potential for children’s forthcoming adulthood. As such, the understanding and research of childhood wellbeing is approached through a developmental perspective and/or a children’s rights perspective (Pollard/Lee 2003; Statham/Chase 2010). A developmentalist outlook is more likely to adopt measures associated with deficits, such as poverty, ignorance, and physical illness whereas a rights-based approach emphasises indicators and measures that provide opportunities and help children reach aspirations in the now rather than just in the future (Morrow/Mayall 2009).