



RESEARCH  
PAPER

# Child Wellbeing in England, Scotland and Wales

## **Comparisons and variations**

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RESEARCH & POLICY FOR THE REAL WORLD

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## Key findings

Children's wellbeing in Britain has been the subject of impassioned debate since a 2007 UNICEF report put the UK at the bottom of a list of 21 rich countries for wellbeing.

In this report we use data from the 2005 Families and Children Study (FACS) to look at England, Scotland and Wales and compare income and wellbeing indicators in all three countries.

Adjusted incomes (for what families can buy with it) are slightly smaller for poorer families and child poverty is greater in England than in Scotland and Wales, but England fares better than its smaller neighbours when it comes to key wellbeing indicators such as health, housing and child behaviour.

We argue that when comparing different countries on the British mainland, income by itself is not the best measure of children's wellbeing.

- Welsh children fare worse, on average, than their counterparts in England and Scotland under six wellbeing outcomes (including health). Moreover, childhood accidents for the poorest children – a quarter of families report them – are particularly high in Wales compared to Scotland and England.
- Of the 10 indicators of child wellbeing identified in the study English children also come top, on average, in more of them than Scottish or Welsh children.
- Children in England are, on average, more healthy than children in Wales or Scotland; they are less likely to have accidents and less likely to be bullied at school.
- But police are much more likely to get in touch with poor parents in England than poor parents in Scotland or Wales about their children's behaviour (although overall English families report that police are slightly less likely to be in touch with them about their children than in Wales and Scotland).
- Poor families in England are twice as likely as Welsh families to report that their children do not have a quiet place to do their homework at home.
- In England, houses are reported to be in better repair than in Scotland and Wales – this is particularly marked for the poorest Scottish families whose houses are in far worse repair than for the poorest English families.
- About a fifth of poor Scottish families also report their houses are not warm enough – more than in England or Wales.

*“The true measure of a nation’s standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born.”*

UNICEF (2007) *Child Poverty in Perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries*

## 1. Introduction

This paper compares the wellbeing of children across England, Scotland and Wales using the concept of functionings developed in economist Amartya Sen’s capability approach. Children’s wellbeing is assessed in 10 different dimensions. The results from this exercise show that, although England has the highest child poverty rate, outcomes for English children do not lag behind those of their Welsh and Scottish peers.

This finding suggests that conclusions from those studies using income as the only proxy for children’s wellbeing should be interpreted cautiously.

The 2004 HM Government report *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* suggested that over the past few years the UK had made significant progress towards the improvement of children’s wellbeing. However, in spite of that progress, the UK is still lagging behind many developed countries. The 2007 UNICEF study mentioned above shows that the UK performs poorly in six dimensions of children’s wellbeing when compared with 20 other developed nations.

Moreover, while other countries produce regular reports on child wellbeing, for instance the Kids Count project in the United States, the UK government does not produce a regular report on child wellbeing. This gap was partly addressed by an independent overview of child wellbeing in the UK presented in a study edited by Bradshaw and Mayhew in 2005a (Axford, 2006). In addition, the UNICEF (2007) report highlights the need in countries within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to monitor new dimensions of child wellbeing, citing a survey of young people by the National Family and Parenting Institute (2000) as a positive example:

*“The United Kingdom’s National Family and Parenting Institute, for example, has conducted surveys to estimate the number of children who could answer ‘yes’ to statements such as:*

- *my parent/s are always there for me when I need them*
- *my parent/s make me feel loved and cared for*
- *I can talk to my parent/s about any problem which I may have...*”

*“In the absence of such detailed data for other OECD countries, this attempt to include ‘relationships’ in the overview of child well-being should be regarded as an initial step towards monitoring this dimension of child well-being.”*

Recommendations such as this underscore the need for UK policymakers to pay attention to the issue of child wellbeing in the round, to take the necessary actions to constantly monitor its progress and to measure more revealing related dimensions.

This paper offers new evidence on child wellbeing in the UK by analysing recent data from the seventh wave of the Families and Children Study (FACS). This survey was carried out in 2005 and data was released in 2007. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that Amartya Sen’s capability approach has been employed to investigate children’s wellbeing across England, Scotland and Wales. The capability approach is integral to Sen’s contributions to welfare economics, for which he was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics in 1998 (Atkinson, 1999; Arrow, 1999).

The empirical application of the capability approach has attracted much interest. The Human Development Index, published by the United Nations Development Programme, has been greatly influenced by Sen’s concept (Anand and Ravallion, 1993). Sen’s approach is employed in several empirical studies on the UK (some of which are reviewed in Kuklys, 2005, p. 24). Additionally, an independent enquiry, commissioned by the then prime minister Tony Blair, adopted it as a basis for the conceptualisation and measurement of inequality in Britain (Cabinet Office, 2006).

### The capability approach

The capability approach comprises two main concepts: functionings and capabilities.

Functionings are the things a person achieves with the resources and abilities she or he has. Examples of functionings are: 'being in good health', 'being well educated', 'being adequately nourished', 'being happy' (Sen, 1992, p. 39).

Capabilities are things that a person has the opportunity to achieve (e.g. someone might have the opportunity to be well nourished, but might choose not to do it because he or she wants to fast). Thus, 'capability' involves the full set of attainable alternative things a person can achieve; it is the equivalent to the microeconomic concept of an opportunity set defined in commodities space, but is instead defined in the space of functionings (Gasper, 2007). In this study we focus only on functionings.

Since the capability approach does not indicate which particular functionings should be included in the list of important achievements (Sen, 1999, p. 75), we selected them by employing the first selection method identified by Alkire (2007). This method entails drawing on the available data to select the dimensions. However, we also chose the functionings taking into account those employed by Phipps (2002), whose study aimed to establish a benchmark for comparisons of young children's functionings across countries.

The remainder of this paper is as follows. Section 2 considers the data used in the study. Section 3 examines child poverty rates in England, Scotland and Wales and also looks at income differences across these countries for children living in families at the bottom of the income distribution. Section 4 analyses children's wellbeing across England, Scotland and Wales using Sen's capability approach. Conclusions are drawn in Section 5, where findings from the income analysis are compared with those from the capability approach.

## 2. Data

The FACS has taken place annually since 1999 and was originally designed to examine the wellbeing of a representative sample of low-income families with children in Britain (Disney and Bridges, 2004). However, since 2001 the sample has been extended to all families with children, thereby including high-income families previously screened out. The sample is taken from Child Benefit records, so is strictly a sample of Child Benefit recipients rather than of all families with children.

Nevertheless, since in the UK all parents with a child under 16 are entitled to Child Benefit and the Government has estimated the take-up of this benefit to be 98 per cent,<sup>1</sup> the sample can be considered as representative of all families with children in Britain.

The FACS is a survey carried out via a face-to-face interview with the mother and the partner (if present). The person who takes part in this interview is usually the family's 'mother figure' – an adult with the main responsibility for looking after children in the family (the mother in 98 per cent of cases). The survey also provides a variable for equivalised income employing the OECD equivalence scale<sup>2</sup> (Hoxhallari et al, 2007).

The FACS has been widely used in empirical work. For example, Disney and Bridges (2004) employ it to examine the use of credit, default and arrears among low-income families with children. Additionally, Morris (2007) uses the FACS to analyse the means through which mothers arrange for the payment of child support.

In this study, we have focused our attention on the seventh wave of the FACS, and our final sample comprises 12,838 children. Children are defined as those aged 16 years or below, or 17 or 18 years if they are in full-time education. In the final sample the large majority of children (10,946) are from England. Children from Scotland and Wales are 1,125 and 767, respectively.

The FACS contains 69 questions related to children's wellbeing. Responses to 10 questions are examined in this study. More precisely, the answers are used to construct children's wellbeing measures indicating:

- 1 the proportion of children who do not enjoy good health
- 2 the proportion of children with a long-standing illness or disability
- 3 the proportion of children with special educational needs
- 4 the proportion of children who have had an accident requiring attendance at an accident and emergency department
- 5 the proportion of children who had behavioural problems at school
- 6 the proportion of children who did something wrong according to the police
- 7 the proportion of children who have been bullied

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons *Hansard*, Written Answers 7 March 2006, col 1296W.

<sup>2</sup> The equivalisation of income is the process by which total income is adjusted for family size (number of family members) and composition (number of parents and number and age of children).

- 8 the proportion of children living in a house where there is not a quiet place for them to do their homework
- 9 the proportion of children living in a house that is not warm enough in winter
- 10 the proportion of children living in a house in a poor state of repair.

### 3. Comparison of family income for children in England, Scotland and Wales

To put the analysis of the different functionings into context, we first compare income and child poverty rates across England, Scotland and Wales. The rationale for employing income is that it is an important indicator of children's wellbeing, as low levels of income are likely to negatively affect outcomes (Gregg et al, 1999; Feinstein, 2003). Economists often use income as a proxy for wellbeing, theoretically linking higher income with higher, but marginally diminishing, levels of wellbeing through the concept of utility.

Several cross-country studies indicate that the rate of child poverty in the UK is one of the highest among developed countries (see, for example, Bradbury and Jantii, 1999; Vleminckx and Smeeding 2001; Immervoll et al, 2000; and Bradshaw, 2005). Looking at changes in the rate over time, a major increase occurred between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. In that period, the increase in child poverty experienced by the UK was faster than in almost any other developed country (Oxley et al, 2001). Although child poverty declined between 1997 and 2005 (Harker, 2006), the trend reversed again in 2006 (DWP, 2007a). Today child poverty is more than double what it was 25 years ago.

Table 1 depicts child poverty rates in England, Scotland and Wales. England has the highest child poverty rate. Whilst 33 per cent of children in England are poor, the corresponding figures in Wales and Scotland are 31 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively. These results are consistent with those obtained by a recent government report (DWP, 2007b) that uses data from the FACS 2005.

Table 1 **Relative income comparisons**

	England	Scotland	Wales
<i>Percentage poor</i>	33%	28%	31%
<i>Percentage rich</i>	15%	14%	13%

Source: FACS 2005

Note: 'Poor' means family equivalent income after housing costs is less than 60% of the mean country equivalent income. 'Rich' means family equivalent income is greater or equal to 1.5 times the mean country equivalent income. Equivalent income has been modified using the OECD equivalence scale. However, it is possible that year-on-year estimates using FACS data are volatile. T-tests employing weights from the FACS show that these figures are statistically different from zero across all countries at the 95% level.

Table 2 **Absolute income comparisons for children**

	England	Scotland	Wales
<b>All children</b>			
Mean	£10,151	£10,757	£11,035
Median	£8,820	£9,607	£8,370
<b>Bottom quintile</b>			
Mean	£3,294	£4,059	£4,225
Median	£3,561	£4,246	£4,506
<b>2nd quintile</b>			
Mean	£6,382	£7,610	£7,157
Median	£6,124	£7,547	£7,181
<b>3rd quintile</b>			
Mean	£8,801	£10,158	£9,642
Median	£8,713	£10,047	£9,414
<b>4th quintile</b>			
Mean	£11,765	£12,778	£12,904
Median	£11,758	£12,671	£12,696
<b>5th quintile</b>			
Mean	£22,947	£22,753	£27,612
Median	£17,911	£18,633	£22,191
Ratio of mean all children to mean of bottom quintile	3.27	2.72	2.40

Source: FACS 2005

Note: This is yearly income after housing costs, adjusted using the OECD equivalence scale. The proportion of missing cases in England is 2%, while these are 1% and 2% in Wales and Scotland respectively. Figures are derived employing Wingfield et al 2005, Table I, regional weights. T-tests employing weights from the FACS show that these differences are all statistically significant across countries at the 95% level, with the exception of the difference between England and Wales in the top quintile of the income distribution.



Next we look at differences in absolute incomes. However, in order to make meaningful comparisons in income across these countries, we need to account for differences in price. To address this problem, income figures are corrected for purchasing power parity (PPP).<sup>3</sup>

Table 2 shows that average income for all families with children is highest in Scotland, followed by England and Wales. Nevertheless, given the purpose of this study, we are particularly interested in differences at the bottom of the income distribution. Table 2 shows that England is consistently found to have the lowest average income in the first and second income quintiles. Moreover, when looking at the middle of income distribution, England does worse than Scotland and Wales. Even children in the third and fourth income quintiles in England appear to have, on average, a lower standard of living than their peers in Scotland and Wales.

In summary, given the expected correlation between income and children's wellbeing, Tables 1 and 2 suggest that there are likely to be more children at risk in England than in Wales and Scotland.

## 4. Children's wellbeing in England, Scotland and Wales

Although income, as discussed above, is an important input into children's wellbeing, five sets of arguments suggest that it does not capture other dimensions that are crucial for children's development. First, family income alone can be a misleading concept as it does not provide any indication of the extent to which families rely on public services (e.g. medical care, child care, schooling). This consideration is especially relevant given the difference in public expenditure per head across countries.<sup>4</sup> Second, while the usual family income distributions fold all family members together in the family unit, children may receive a different proportion of income

than adults (Lazear and Michael, 1986). Additionally, there is the possibility that resources within a household are not distributed according to needs (Thomas, 1990, 1992). Third, there is compelling evidence that the most important determinant of child outcome seems to be parenting quality and income is only a crude measure of this (Heckman 2008). Fourth, household 'production activities' (e.g. playing games, reading stories or cooking a healthy dinner) are crucial for children's wellbeing and yet they are not included in a simple income proxy (Phipps, 2002). Fifth, as Sen (1992) points out, the ability to convert income into wellbeing varies according to personal characteristics and circumstances. For example, children enjoying a higher level of family income may be worse off in terms of wellbeing because of things such as having to endure a long-standing illness (e.g. asthma).

In light of the above considerations, we argue that, in order to study children's wellbeing, the income analysis needs to be complemented by Sen's (1992) functionings approach. Our 10 functionings have been split into four main groups: physical wellbeing, behavioural problems, being bullied and housing problems.

### Physical wellbeing

The first group of functionings concerns physical wellbeing. It includes four functionings:

- health
- long-standing illness/disability
- special educational needs
- accidents.

The upper part of Table 3 depicts the health status of children reported by the person who is responsible for them. The proportion of children who do not enjoy good health<sup>5</sup> is higher in Wales (3.8 per cent) and Scotland (3 per cent) relative to England (2.8 per cent). Furthermore, in line with our expectations, health problems increase with lower income levels. Thus, children in families at the bottom of the income distribution are more likely to have a poor health status. However, there appear to be important differences across countries. Scotland (5.8 per cent) and Wales (5.6 per cent) display a higher proportion

<sup>3</sup> PPP weights come from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and they refer to 2004 (Wingfield et al, 2005). Although it would be better to use PPP weights for 2005, these figures are currently unavailable. Additionally, these PPP figures can be criticised on the grounds that they do not consider that families with children consume a different bundle of goods and services than the average UK household.

<sup>4</sup> For differences in public expenditure per head across England, Wales and Scotland, see McLean and McMillan (2003).

<sup>5</sup> For details on official UK government policies in this area see: *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003); *Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier* (DH, 2004a); *National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services* (DH, 2004b); *Support for Parents: The best start for children* (HM Treasury, 2005); *Aiming high for disabled children: better support for families* (DfES and HM Treasury, 2007). *The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures* (DCSF, 2007).

of children who do not enjoy good health in the first income quintile compared with England (3.7 per cent). These findings are broadly in line with those from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (2001/02) study that are reported in Bradshaw and Mayhew (2005b). Children living in Wales were more likely to rate their health as 'fair' or 'poor' than children living in England and Wales. According to Bradshaw and Mayhew, this may be partly due to Welsh children having the lowest physical activity rates, eating fruit and vegetables rates and life satisfaction rates.

**Table 3 Health and long-standing illness or disability**

	Percentage (all children)	Percentage (bottom quintile)	Ratio of the bottom quintile to the average
<b>Survey question asked</b>			
[Since your baby was born/over the last 12 months] would you say [name of child]'s health has been good, fairly good or not good?			
<b>England</b>			
Good	86.1%	83.3%	1
Fairly good	11.1%	12.9%	1.2
Not good	2.8%	3.7%	1.3
<b>Scotland</b>			
Good	86.7%	78.5%	0.9
Fairly good	10.3%	15.7%	1.5
Not good	3%	5.8%	1.9
<b>Wales</b>			
Good	85.8%	77.2%	0.9
Fairly good	10.4%	17.3%	1.7
Not good	3.8%	5.6%	1.5
Does [name of child] have any long-standing illness or disability? By long-standing I mean anything that has troubled [name of child] over a period of time or that is likely to affect [child's name] over a period of time?			
<b>England</b>	14.6%	15.1%	1.03
<b>Scotland</b>	13.6%	18.6%	1.36
<b>Wales</b>	14.2%	19.3%	1.37

*Note:* T-tests employing weights from the FACS show that these figures are statistically different from zero across all countries at the 95% level, with the exception of the difference between Scotland and Wales under the functioning of 'long-standing illness/disability' for children in the bottom quintile of the income distribution.

The lower part of Table 3 looks at the incidence of long-standing illness or disability. While 13.6 per cent of children have a long-standing illness or disability in Scotland, the corresponding figures in Wales and England are 14.2 per cent and 14.6 per cent respectively. Again, as expected, also with respect to this indicator, children in the bottom of the income distribution are especially negatively affected. For this group of children, the incidence rate is 15.1 per cent in England, 18.6 per cent in Scotland and 19.3 per cent in Wales.

The upper part of Table 4 depicts the proportion of children with special educational needs. Wales has the highest reported incidence (both on average and for children living in families at the bottom quintile of the income distribution), followed by Scotland and England.

**Table 4 Special educational needs and accidents**

	Percentage (all children)	Percentage (bottom quintile)	Ratio of the bottom quintile to the average
<b>Survey question asked</b>			
Has [name of child] been identified at school as having a special educational need?			
<b>England</b>	10.4%	11%	1.06
<b>Scotland</b>	7.5%	9.2%	1.21
<b>Wales</b>	10.9%	12%	1.10
[Since your baby was born/over the last 12 months/that is, since date 12 months ago], has [name of child] had to attend an accident and emergency department (casualty)?			
<b>England</b>	19.7%	20.2%	1.03
<b>Scotland</b>	20.6%	21.1%	1.02
<b>Wales</b>	24.5%	26.9%	1.10

*Note:* T-tests employing weights from the FACS show that these figures are statistically different from zero across all countries at the 95% level.

Our final measure of physical wellbeing is whether the child had had an accident<sup>6</sup> that required attending an accident and emergency department; the lower part of Table 4 reports some figures on its incidence. Although these figures are very similar for children in England and Scotland, Welsh children are much more likely to have experienced accidents (24.5 per cent as compared to 20.6 per cent in Scotland and 19.7 per cent in England). In line with our expectations, there is a higher incidence

<sup>6</sup> For some details related to official UK government policies in this area see: *Choosing Health: Making healthier choices easier* (DH, 2004a).



rate for children living in families at the bottom of the income distribution (26.9 per cent in Wales, 21.1 per cent in Scotland and 20.2 per cent in England).

### Behavioural problems

Our second set of functionings is related to behavioural problems. These are: concerns about behaviour at school and having done something wrong or been contacted by the police.

The upper part of Table 5 shows that, on average, children in Scotland are more likely to have behavioural problems at school than those in England and Wales. Although in all these three countries children living in families at the bottom of the income distribution are more likely to experience behavioural problems at school than average children, England is characterised by the lowest incidence rate.

Table 5 **Concerns about behaviour at school and 'mother figure' contacted by the police**

	Percentage (all children)	Percentage (bottom quintile)	Ratio of the bottom quintile to the average
<b>Survey question asked</b> In the last 12 months, has the school had to contact [you/or your partner] about [name of child] because of concerns about [his/her] behaviour at school?			
England	9.5%	13.2%	1.4
Scotland	9.8%	14.0%	1.4
Wales	9.5%	14.5%	1.5
Have the police [ever/in the last 12 months] had to contact [you/or your partner] about [name of child] because they thought [he/she] had done something wrong?			
England	2.3%	4.3%	1.9
Scotland	2.6%	2.7%	1.1
Wales	3.5%	3.2%	0.9

Note: T-tests employing weights from the FACS show that these figures are statistically different from zero across all countries at the 95% level with the exception of: 1) the difference between England and Wales under the functioning 'concerns about behaviour at school' for all children; and 2) the difference between Wales and England under this same functioning for children in the bottom quintile of the income distribution.

The lower part of Table 5 reports the percentage of children whose 'mother figure' has been contacted by the police<sup>7</sup> because they thought the child had done something wrong. The results show that, on average, this is less likely to occur in England than in Scotland or Wales (2.3 per cent in England, 2.6 per cent in Scotland and 3.5 per cent in Wales). Two further comments can be made. First, the reported incidence for this measure increases for children in the bottom quintile of the income distribution only in England and Scotland, but not in Wales. Second, although England has the highest incidence rate for children at the bottom of the income distribution, it has the lowest point estimate for all children.

### Being bullied

In the third set of functionings considered by this study we examine the incidence of being bullied.<sup>8</sup> Table 6 reports that in England 14.3 per cent of all children have been bullied. The corresponding figures are 14.9 per cent in Scotland and 17.8 per cent in Wales. The evidence across all these countries is that children living in families in the bottom quintile of the income distribution are more likely to be bullied than average children. England, however, shows the lowest incidence also among this group of children.

Table 6 **Been bullied**

	Percentage (all children)	Percentage (bottom quintile)	Ratio of the bottom quintile to the average
<b>Survey question asked</b> As far as you are aware in the last 12 months has [name of child] been bullied, either in or out of school?			
England	14.3%	18.1%	1.3
Scotland	14.9%	24.0%	1.6
Wales	17.8%	20.5%	1.2

Note: T-tests employing weights from the FACS show that these figures are statistically different from zero across all countries at the 95% level.

<sup>7</sup> For information on official UK government policies in this area see: *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003); *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005); *Youth Matters: Next steps* (DfES, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> For details of official UK government policies in this area see: *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All* (DfES, 2005); *Bullying*, Education and Skills Select Committee report (House of Commons, 2007); House of Commons Hansard, Written Answers 14 Feb 2006, Column 1918W.

**Housing problems**

Our last group of functionings focuses on housing problems.<sup>9</sup> The upper part of Table 7 shows that in England children are, on average, more likely to live in a house where there is not a quiet place for them to do their homework relative to those in Scotland or Wales. At the bottom of the income distribution, children in England are more likely to suffer from this problem (7 per cent) than those in Scotland (4.2 per cent) or Wales (3.5 per cent).

The lower part of Table 7 depicts the incidence of children living in a house that is not warm enough in winter. In Scotland, 8.8 per cent of children live in a house that is not warm enough in winter, while in England and Wales the equivalent figures are 5.6 per cent and 6 per cent respectively. This issue is particularly problematic for children from low socio-economic background groups.

Table 7 **No quiet place to do homework and accommodation not warm enough**

	Percentage (all children)	Percentage (bottom quintile)	Ratio of the bottom quintile to the average
<b>Survey question asked</b>			
In this house does [name of child] have a quiet place to do [his/her] homework?			
England	3.8%	7.0%	1.8
Scotland	3.5%	4.2%	1.2
Wales	2.5%	3.5%	1.4
In winter, are you able to keep this accommodation warm enough?			
England	5.6%	13.2%	2.4
Scotland	8.8%	19.8%	2.3
Wales	6.0%	12.7%	2.1

Note: Percentages for children living outside the household are: England 2.9, Scotland 1.2 and Wales 4.1. T-tests employing weights from the FACS show that these figures are statistically different from zero across all countries at the 95% level.

Table 8 records the percentage of children living in a house in a poor state of repair. While in England 7 per cent of all children live in accommodation in a poor state

<sup>9</sup> For details of official UK government policies in this area see: *Quality and Choice: A decent home for all* (DCLG, 2006); *Policy review of children and young people: a discussion paper* (HM Treasury and DfES, 2007) *Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable* (DCLG, 2007).

of repair, the figures in Scotland and Wales are 8.8 per cent and 10.4 per cent respectively. When one looks at the incidence of this measure among children living in families in the first quintile of the income distribution, the highest incidence rate is found in Scotland, followed by Wales and England.

Table 8 **Accommodation in a poor state of repair**

	Percentage (all children)	Percentage (bottom quintile)	Ratio of the bottom quintile to the average
<b>Survey question asked</b>			
How would you rate this property's state of repair?			
England	7.0%	13.1%	1.9
Scotland	8.8%	20.2%	2.3
Wales	10.4%	15.2%	1.5

Note: Answers to this question are on a six-point scale, as follows: 'excellent – nothing needs doing'; 'very good – only minor problems'; 'fairly good – some problems but not too many'; 'fairly poor – quite a lot of problems'; 'very poor – a lot of major problems'; 'none of these – spontaneous'. We have considered that the property was in poor state of repair if the 'mother figure' responded that the property's state of repair is either 'fairly poor' or 'very poor'. T-tests employing weights from the FACS show that these figures are statistically different from zero across all countries at the 95% level with the exception of: 1) the difference between England and Scotland for all children and 2) the difference across England, Scotland and Wales for children at the bottom of the income distribution.

**All functionings**

Table 9 provides a summary of the incidence rates for the 10 functionings among all children across England, Scotland and Wales. It is important to bear in mind that one cannot conclude that children's outcomes are worse in one country relative to another on the basis that one displays a higher incidence rate relative to another in a larger number of functionings. This is because it is impossible to rank these functionings in terms of their impact on children's wellbeing. One may, however, observe that average Welsh outcomes are the worst under six functionings. Although both England and Scotland fare the worst in two functionings, a direct comparison reveals that England does better than Scotland in seven out of 10 functionings.

Looking at the four groups of functionings separately, three conclusions can be drawn. First, children in Wales have, on average, a lower physical wellbeing than those in England and Scotland. Wales presents the highest incidence rate in three out of four functionings in this

area. Second, children in Wales and Scotland have more behavioural problems and are more likely to be bullied than those in England. Third, regarding housing problems, there are no great differences across these countries. Each country fares the worst in one of the three functionings.

Table 9 **Child outcomes in England, Scotland and Wales – all children**

	England	Scotland	Wales
Good health	86.1%	86.7%	<b>85.8%</b>
Fairly good health	11.1%	<b>10.3%</b>	10.4%
Not good	2.8%	3%	<b>3.8%</b>
Long standing illness/disability	<b>14.6%</b>	13.6%	14.2%
Special educational needs	10.4%	7.5%	<b>10.9%</b>
Accidents	19.7%	20.6%	<b>24.5%</b>
Concerns about behaviour at school	9.5%	<b>9.8%</b>	9.5%
Contacted by the police	2.3%	2.6%	<b>3.5%</b>
Been bullied	14.3%	14.9%	<b>17.8%</b>
No quiet place to do homework	<b>3.8%</b>	3.5%	2.5%
Accommodation not warm enough	5.6%	<b>8.8%</b>	6%
Accommodation in poor state of repair	7%	8.8%	<b>10.4%</b>

We now turn our attention to the incidence rates for the 10 functionings among children living in families that are in the bottom quintile of the income distribution. The general picture emerging from Table 10 is not too dissimilar from the one resulting from Table 9.

Both Scotland and Wales are characterised by the highest incidence rate in four functionings. This means that England fares the worst only in two functionings.

Examining separately the four sets of functionings for this group of children, three comments are noteworthy:

- Wales fares the worst in three out of four functionings in the area of physical wellbeing
- poor children are slightly more likely to have behavioural problems at school and to be bullied in Scotland and Wales relative to England

- children from low socio-economic groups in Scotland seem to experience more housing problems than those in England and Wales.

Table 10 **Child outcomes in England, Scotland and Wales – bottom quintile**

	England	Scotland	Wales
Good health	83.3%	78.5%	<b>77.2%</b>
Fairly good health	<b>12.9%</b>	15.7%	17.3%
Not good	3.7%	<b>5.8%</b>	5.6%
Long standing illness/disability	15.1%	18.6%	<b>19.3%</b>
Special educational needs	11%	9.2%	<b>12%</b>
Accidents	20.2%	21.1%	<b>26.9%</b>
Concerns about behaviour at school	13.2%	14%	<b>14.5%</b>
Contacted by the police	<b>4.3%</b>	2.7%	3.2%
Been bullied	18.1%	<b>24%</b>	20.5%
No quiet place to do homework	<b>7%</b>	4.2%	3.5%
Accommodation not warm enough	13.2%	<b>19.8%</b>	12.7%
Accommodation in poor state of repair	13.1%	<b>20.2%</b>	15.2%

## 5. Conclusions

This paper compares children's wellbeing across England, Scotland and Wales. If income is used as a proxy for economic welfare, our analysis shows that children are worse off in England compared with Scotland and Wales. England has the highest child poverty rate and English children living in families at the bottom of the income distribution suffer more economic hardship than their Scottish and Welsh peers.

In line with other papers (Phipps 2002; Phipps and Burton 1995), we argue that income is an important but not a fundamental input into children's wellbeing. Many other dimensions that are relevant to children's development are not captured through an analysis based only on income. In an attempt to address this issue, we

used Sen's (1992) capability approach to analyse children's wellbeing.

The findings that emerge from using this approach are not consistent with those emerging from the analysis based only on income. Under six out of 10 functionings, children in Wales fare worse than those in Scotland and England. Even when we focus our attention on poor children (i.e. children living in families in the bottom quintile of the income distribution), we find that outcomes for English children do not lag behind those of their Welsh and Scottish peers; rather, the opposite is true.

The study also throws up a range of questions to be explored around the causes and contributory influences associated with the outcomes identified. Some exploration of these matters will be undertaken in a follow-up study of capability to be undertaken by the author. It is also intended to repeat this study at regular intervals in order to facilitate measure over time and to identify any significant change.

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## About this publication

**This is a report into child wellbeing and functionings: variations across England, Scotland and Wales. It uses data from the 2005 Families and Children Study (FACS) to look at England, Scotland and Wales and compare income and wellbeing indicators in all three countries.**

### About the author

Lucas Pedace is an economist who has undertaken research related to child outcomes using Nobel Prize Laureate Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and employing structural equations regression models.

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