

EXPLORING THE CASE FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

Jonathan Bradshaw

Childhood, well-being and parenting
2nd Seminar
University of Rennes
28 June 2018

Three questions

- ◆ Is the study of child subjective well-being just a smokescreen?
- ◆ Can comparisons of child subjective well-being be valid and reliable?
- ◆ What is the policy relevance of child subjective well-being?

Smokescreen

- ◆ SWB only one dimension of child well-being – all are worth studying
- ◆ Well-being multi-dimensional
- ◆ Domains: material, health, education, behaviour, relationships, housing/environment, subjective
- ◆ Parents, (grandparents) and the state have an interest in child happiness
- ◆ UNCRC – listen to children
- ◆ Adult and child SWB are only weakly associated
- ◆ New sociology of childhood
- ◆ Poorer outcomes

UNICEF Report on child well-being 2007

		Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3	Dimension 4	Dimension 5	Dimension 6
Dimensions of child well-being	Average ranking position (for all 6 dimensions)	Material well-being	Health and safety	Educational well-being	Family and peer relationships	Behaviours and risks	Subjective well-being
Netherlands	4.2	10	2	6	3	3	1
Sweden	5.0	1	1	5	15	1	7
Denmark	7.2	4	4	8	9	6	12
Finland	7.5	3	3	4	17	7	11
Spain	8.0	12	6	15	8	5	2
Switzerland	8.3	5	9	14	4	12	6
Norway	8.7	2	8	11	10	13	8
Italy	10.0	14	5	20	1	10	10
Ireland	10.2	19	19	7	7	4	5
Belgium	10.7	7	16	1	5	19	16
Germany	11.2	13	11	10	13	11	9
Canada	11.8	6	13	2	18	17	15
Greece	11.8	15	18	16	11	8	3
Poland	12.3	21	15	3	14	2	19
Czech Republic	12.5	11	10	9	19	9	17
France	13.0	9	7	18	12	14	18
Portugal	13.7	16	14	21	2	15	14
Austria	13.8	8	20	19	16	16	4
Hungary	14.5	20	17	13	6	18	13
United States	18.0	17	21	12	20	20	-
United Kingdom	18.2	18	12	17	21	21	20

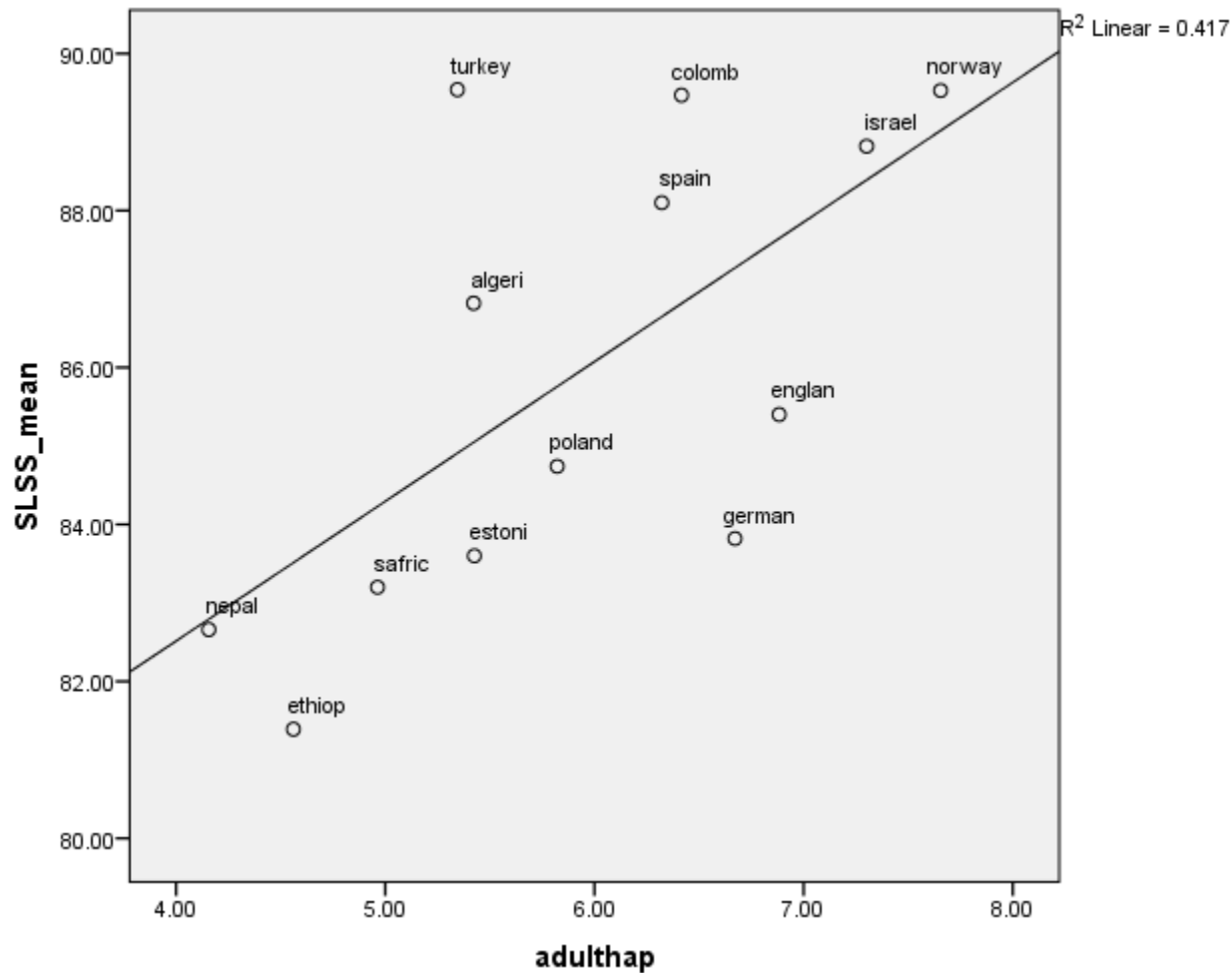


UNICEF Report on child wellbeing 2013

	Material Situation	Health	Education	Behaviour	Housing and environment	Child well-being Index
Netherlands	1	5	1	1	4	2.4
Norway	3	7	6	4	3	4.6
Iceland	4	1	10	3	7	5.0
Finland	2	3	4	12	6	5.4
Sweden	5	2	11	5	8	6.2
Germany	11	12	3	6	13	9.0
Luxembourg	6	4	22	9	5	9.2
Switzerland	9	11	16	11	1	9.6
Belgium	13	13	2	14	14	11.2
Ireland	17	15	17	7	2	11.6
Denmark	12	23	7	2	15	11.8
Slovenia	8	6	5	21	20	12.0
France	10	10	15	13	16	12.8
Czech Republic	16	8	12	22	18	15.2
Portugal	21	14	18	8	17	15.6
United Kingdom	14	16	24	15	10	15.8
Canada	15	27	14	16	11	16.6
Austria	7	26	23	17	12	17.0
Spain	24	9	26	20	9	17.6
Hungary	18	20	8	24	22	18.4
Poland	22	18	9	19	26	18.8
Italy	23	17	25	10	21	19.2
Estonia	19	22	13	26	24	20.8
Slovakia	25	21	21	18	19	20.8
Greece	20	19	28	25	25	23.4
USA	26	25	27	23	23	24.8
Lithuania	27	24	19	29	27	25.2
Latvia	28	28	20	28	28	26.4
Romania	29	29	29	27	29	28.6



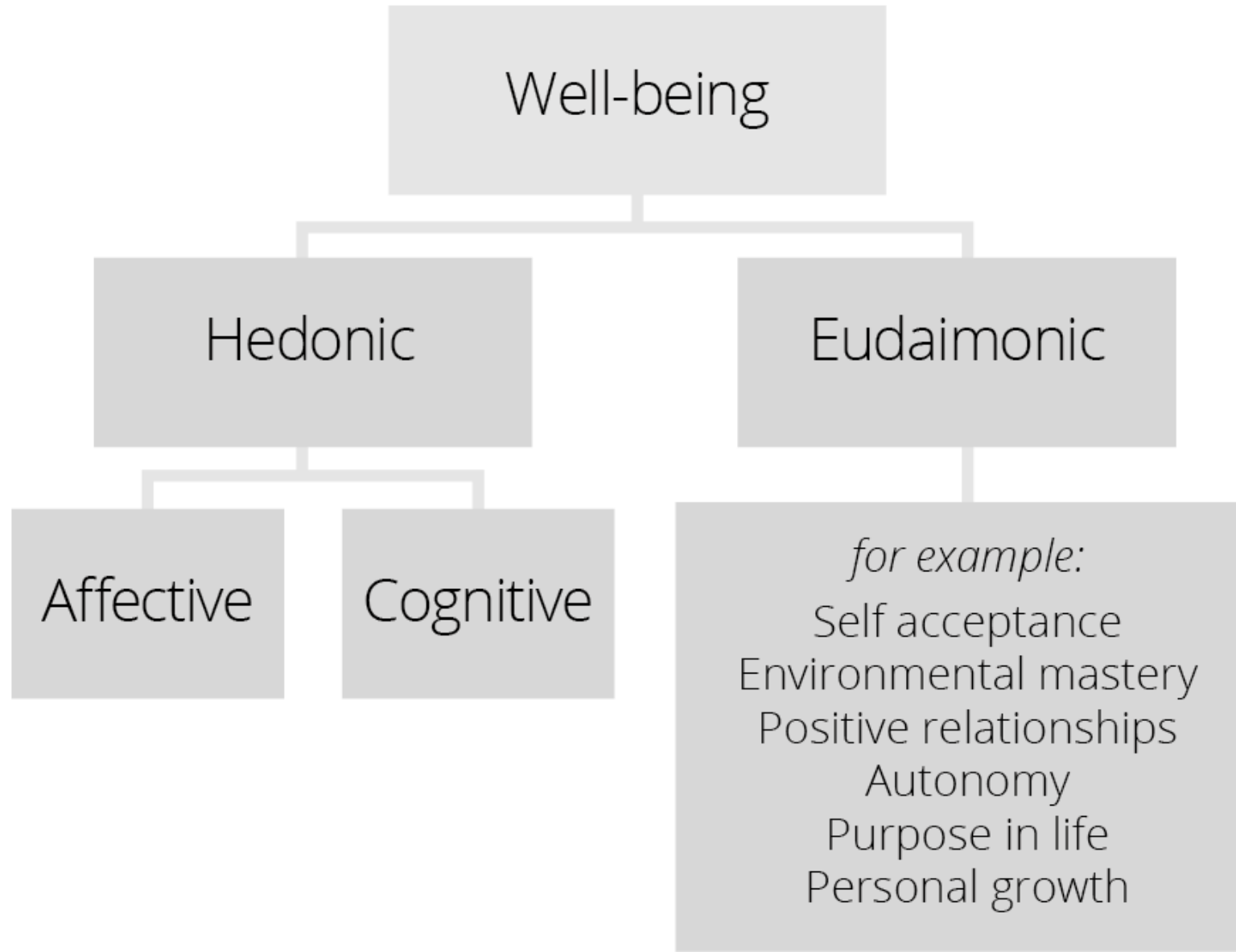
Adult versus child happiness (Children's Worlds)



Reliability and validity challenges

- ◆ You cannot ask children what they think or feel because they don't understand concepts like "satisfied with life".
- ◆ You cannot ask children about happiness because they are too immature to make a rounded judgement.
- ◆ You cannot ask children about their lives because of false consciousness, ignorance of the possibilities of life, or adaptive preferences will lead to responses that don't represent "reality".
- ◆ Children are too volatile, immediate, impulsive to deliver reliable responses.

Components of self reported well-being (Rees et al 2013)



Reliability and validity

- ◆ Not easy to establish, especially validity
- ◆ More work on measures needed – available measures mainly cognitive
- ◆ Many of the anxieties apply to adults – the measures are the same
- ◆ Repeatability – international ranks are consistent
- ◆ Associations possess face validity – bullying, sub domains.

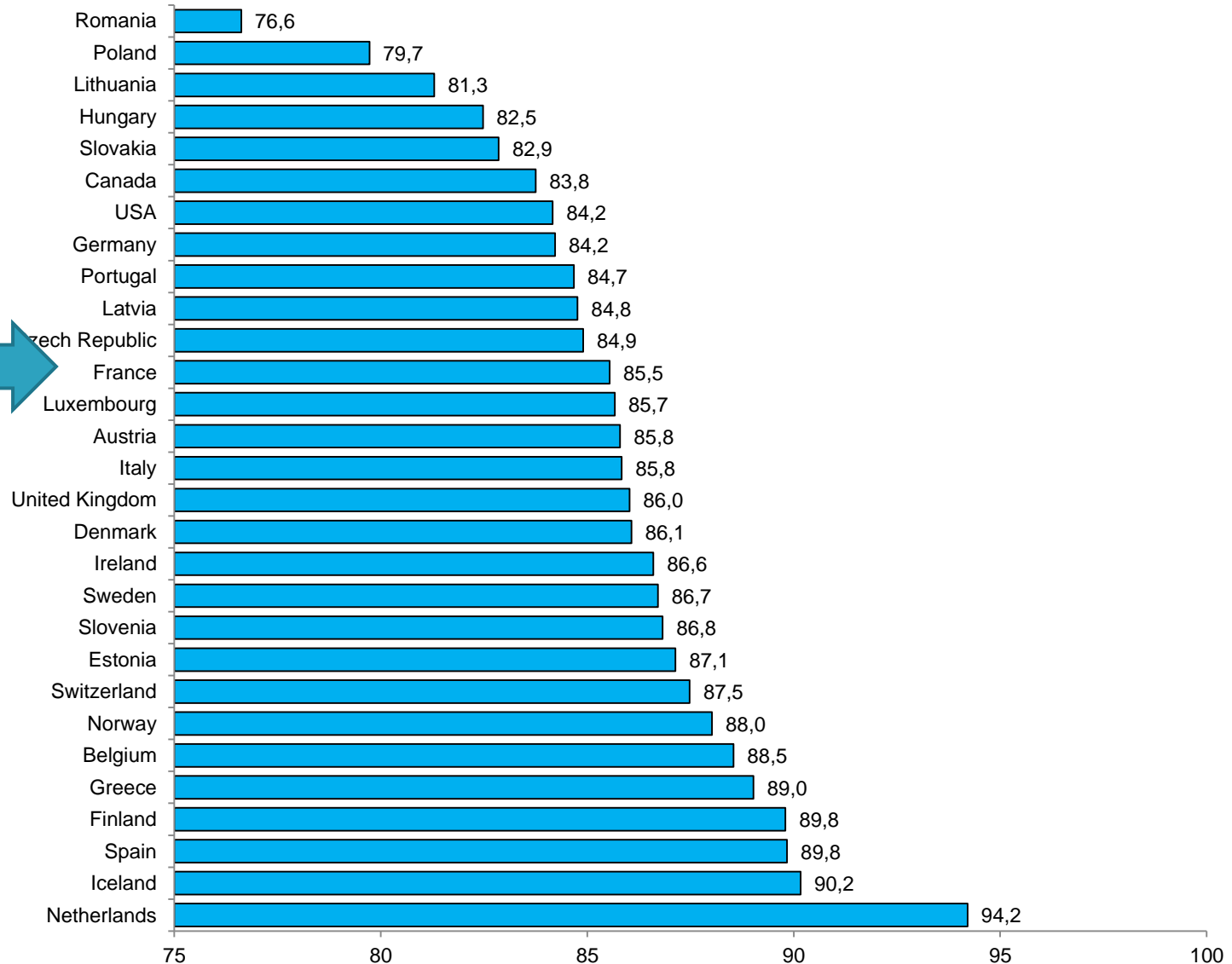
Three comparative sources

- ◆ HBSC – uses a version of Cantril's ladder
- ◆ PISA – uses a version of Cantril's ladder
- ◆ Children's Worlds – uses a battery including Cantril's ladder but prefers an adaptation of Huebner SLSS. Also domains of SWB - home, family, things, friends, school, freedom, health, appearance, time and future.

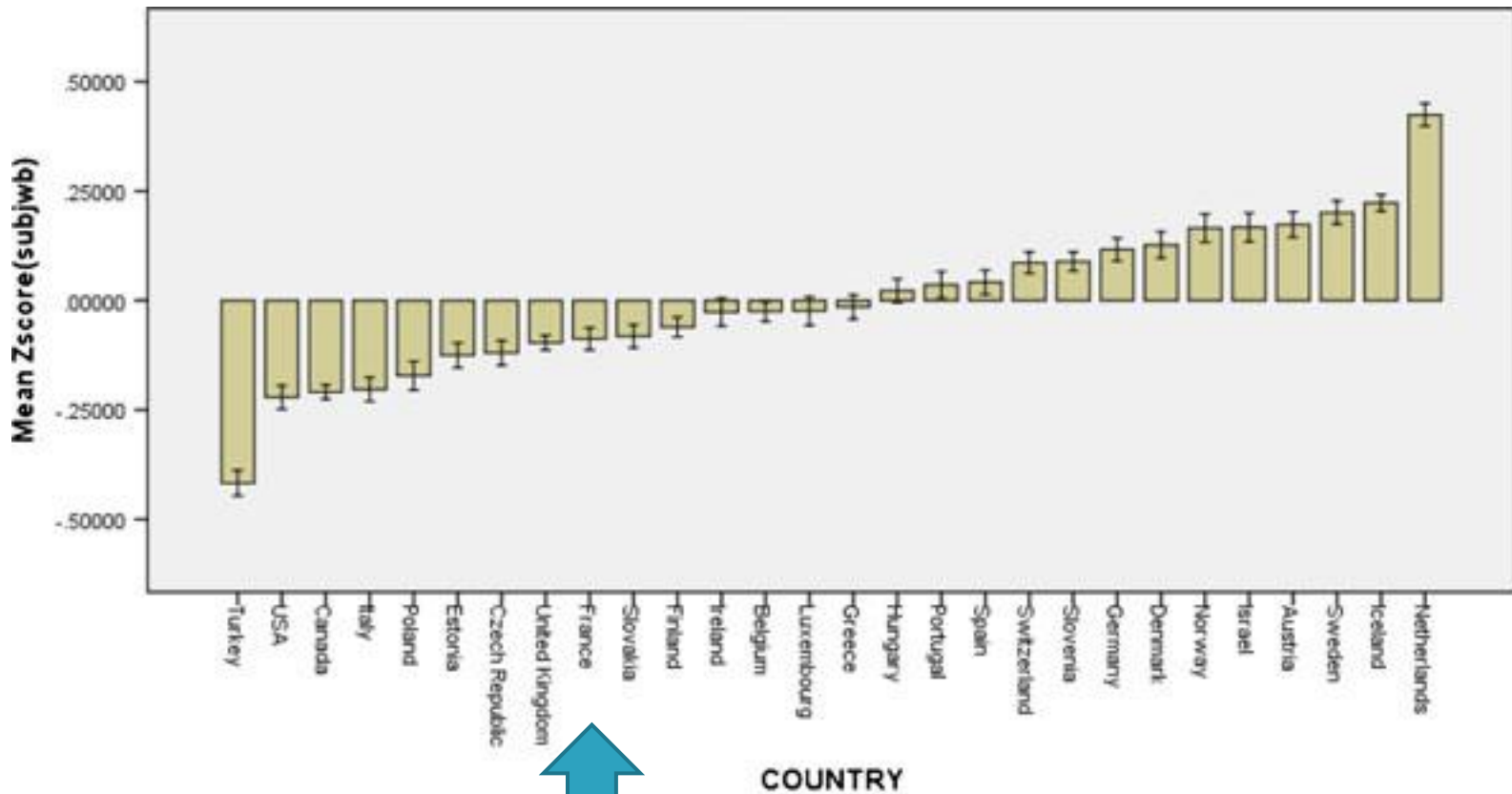
Findings

- ◆ Practical down to 8 years old
- ◆ Mean above the median
- ◆ Always a tail – neglected
- ◆ True of adult SWB
- ◆ Girls more miserable
- ◆ Misery increases with age until ?16
- ◆ Big national variations
- ◆ Most of the variation cannot be explained
?Dutch versus S. Korean children

Percentage of young people with scores above the middle of the life satisfaction scale, aged 11, 13 and 15 HBSC



Variation in overall subjective well-being in HBSC



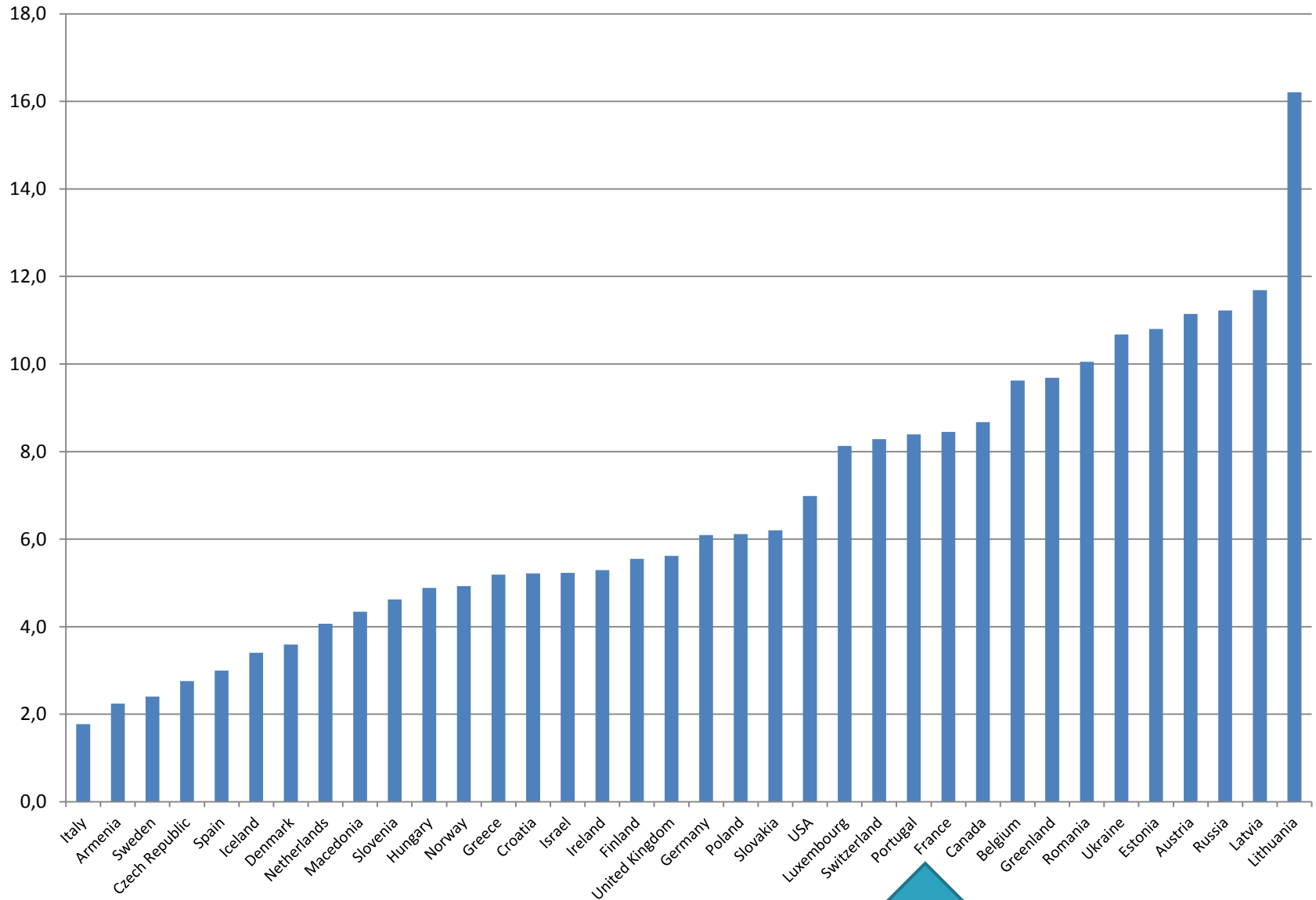
Error bars: 95% CI



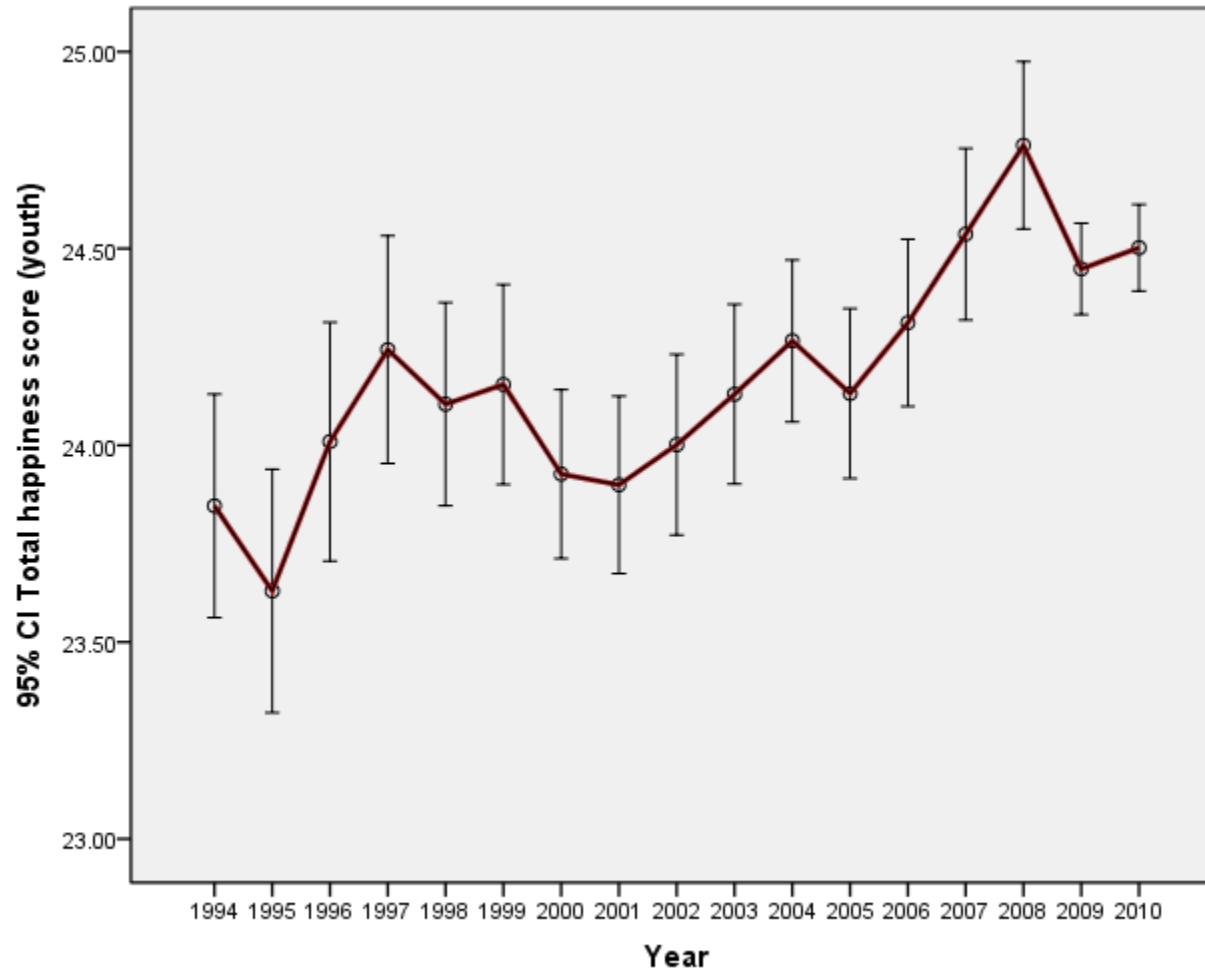
The factors that explain overall subjective well-being vary from country to country

- ◆ Korea does badly (in Children's Worlds), largely because of the educational pressures (after school schooling, freedom etc).
- ◆ In general family and freedom to choose are more salient than friends or school.
- ◆ Things (material well-being) matter to child SWB but household poverty is weakly associated with subjective well-being, although using child based deprivation measures increase the explanatory power.
- ◆ Recent experience of bullying has more impact than anything else.
- ◆ Family structure doesn't matter.
- ◆ French child SWB is dragged down (in HBSC) by scoring comparatively badly on relationships (ability to talk to mothers, fathers and finding class mates kind and helpful).
- ◆ Why? We are looking forward to the French results (being run from Nantes) for the Children's Worlds latest sweep so that we can explore this.

Bullied at least weekly (HBSC 2010)



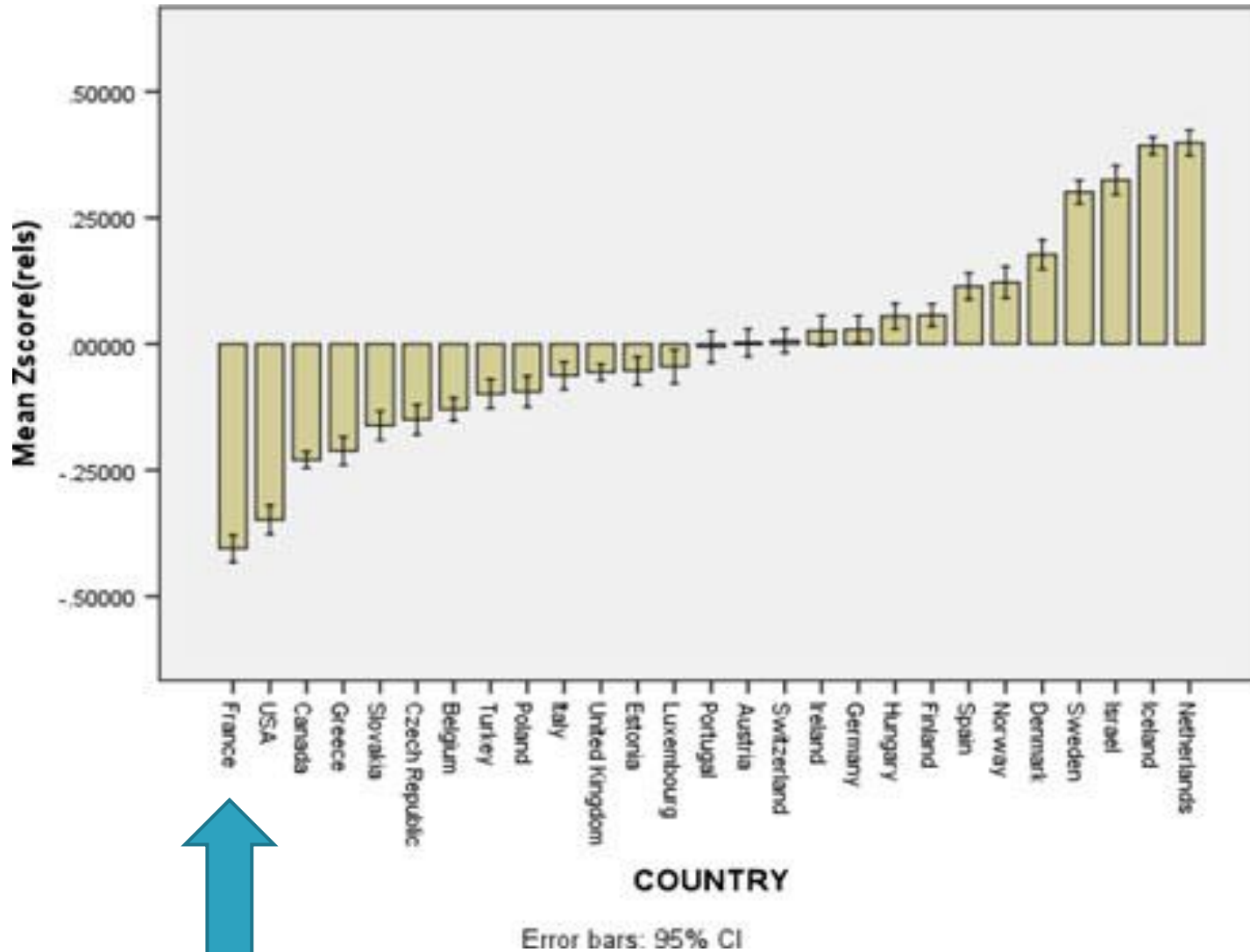
Subjective well-being 11-15 UK: BHPS



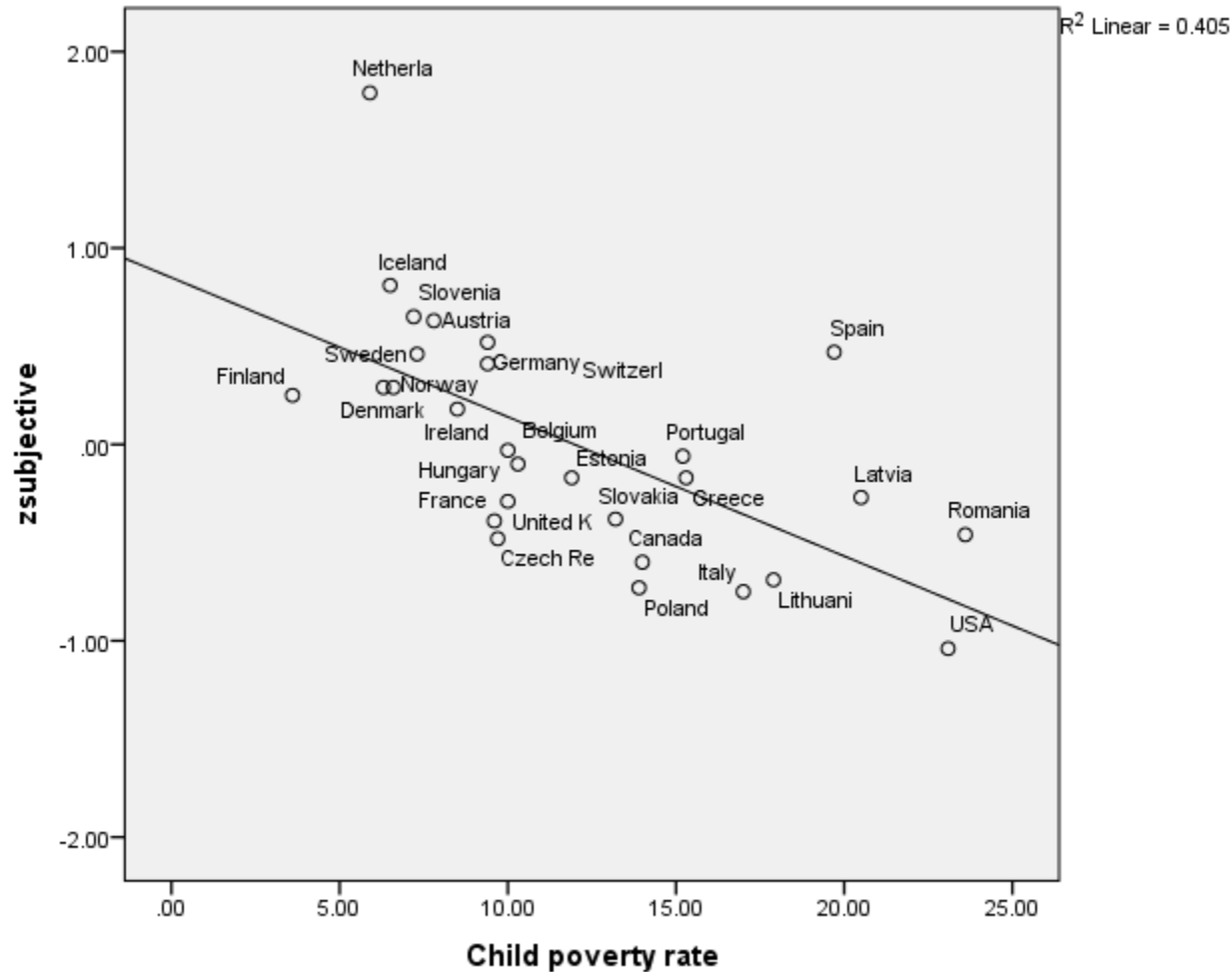
Policy relevance: France

- ◆ Why do French children do comparatively badly on ease of talking to fathers and mothers, finding friends kind and helpful, (and taking exercise and experimenting with drugs)?
- ◆ Why is there a significant gap between migrant and native 15 year olds in France?
- ◆ Having controlled for age and gender 17% of the variation in SWB can be explained by bullying in France. That is a lot more than any other factor for which we have data.
- ◆ Poverty matters
- ◆ Freedom matters
- ◆ Girls' anxiety about appearance matters
- ◆ Excessive use of social media matters
- ◆ All other domains of subjective well-being are closely associated with SWB.
- ◆ Public spending on children matters – France an outlier.

Relationships score in HBSC



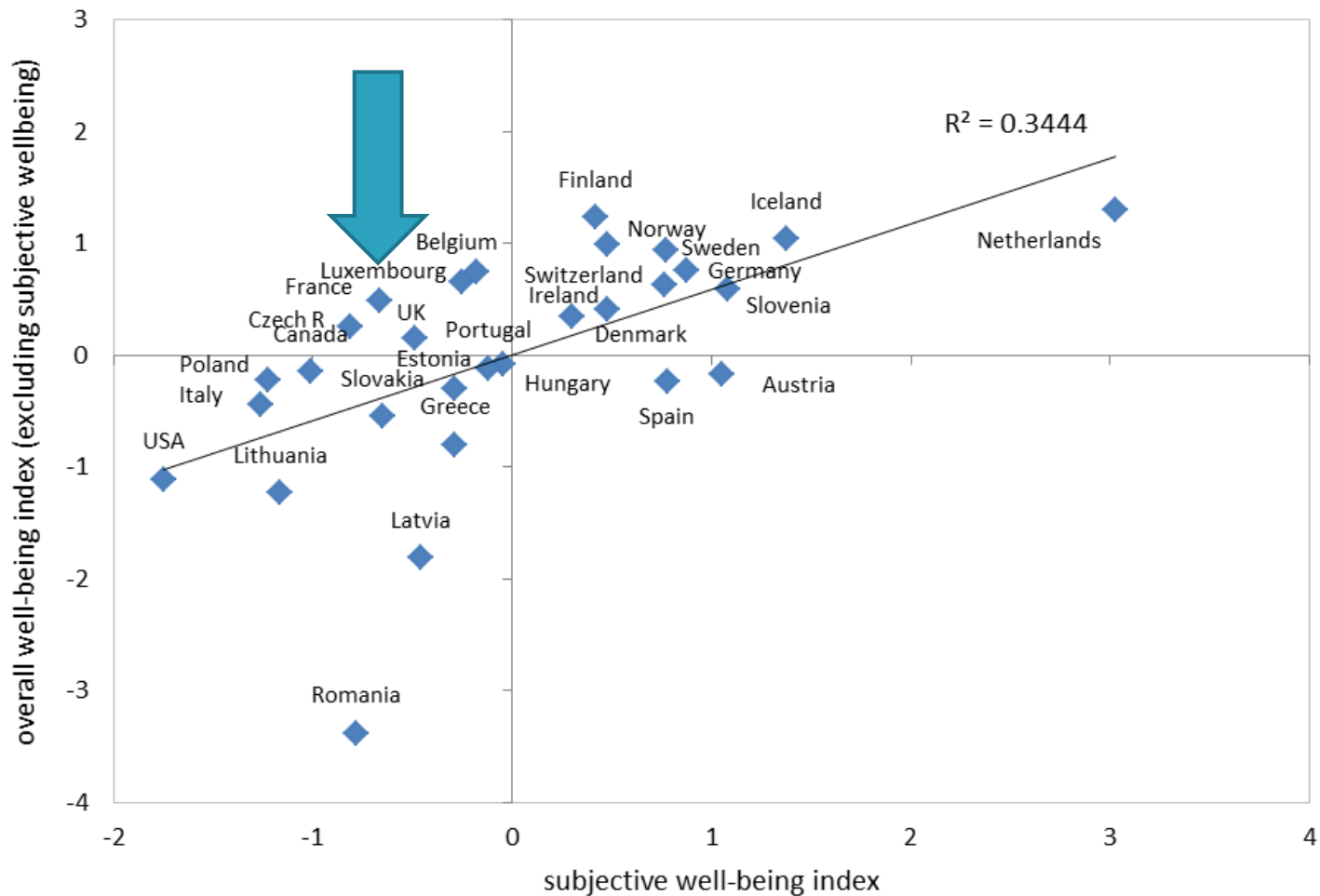
RC 11 relative at risk of child poverty rate by subjective well-being



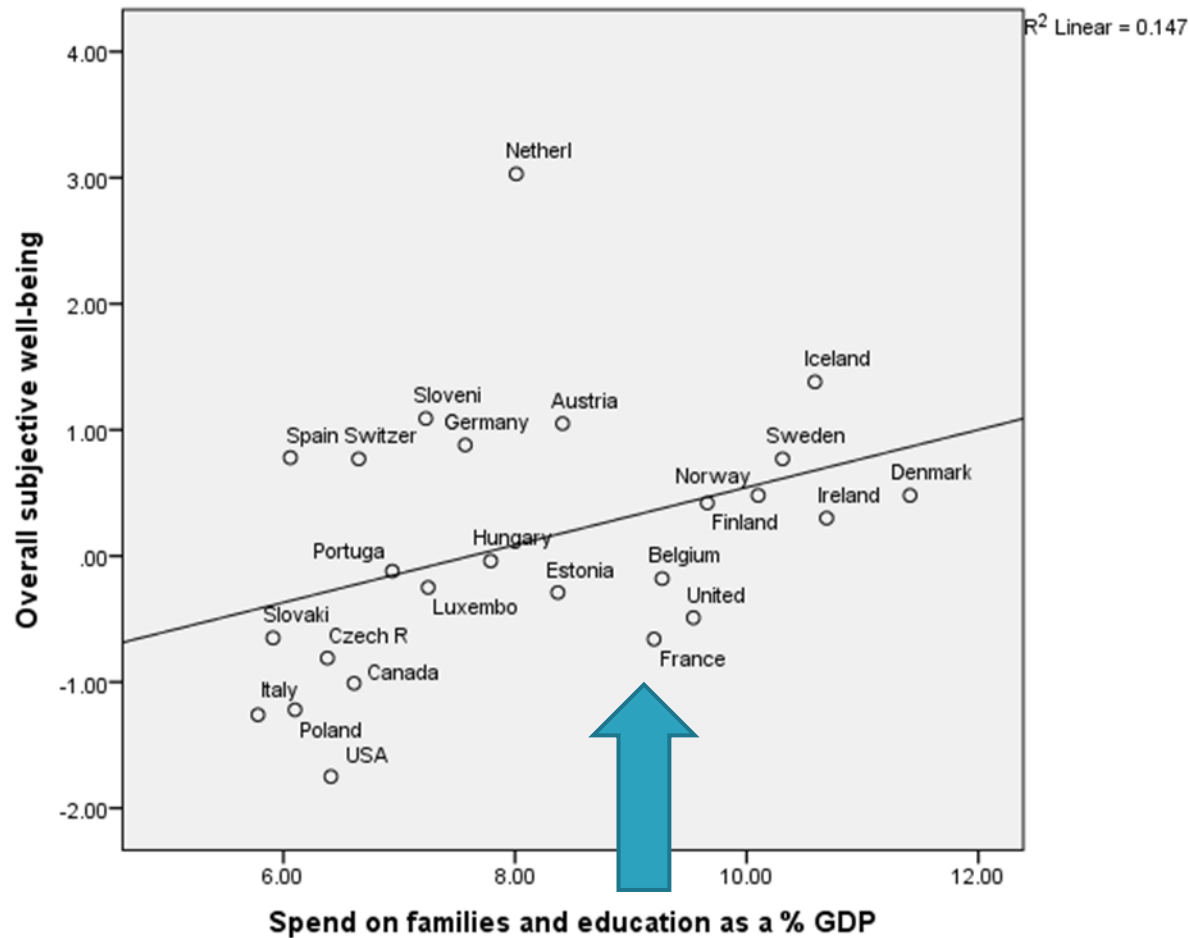
UNICEF RC11: all domains of objective well-being strongly correlated with subjective well-being

	Overall subjective well-being
Material well-being domain	.677**
Health and safety domain	.542**
Education domain	.474**
Behaviour domain	.534**
Housing and environment domain	.610**
Overall (exc subjective)	.666**

RC11 subjective well-being vs objective well-being (excluding subjective)



Spending on family benefits and services and education as a % GDP and subjective well-being (z scores on the y axis)



Korea and the UK

- ◆ Children's Worlds finding that Korean children are miserable has committed the government to a policy goal to increase the level of Korean children's happiness up to average of OECD countries in 10 years.
- ◆ In the UK the Office for National Statistics publishes indices of child well-being including SWB (though no evidence of government responsiveness)

Contacts

◆  [@profjbradshaw](https://twitter.com/profjbradshaw)

◆ Email: jonathan.bradshaw@york.ac.uk