

Life Satisfaction Among Children in Different Family Structures: A Comparative Study of 36 Western Societies

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This paper examines differences in life satisfaction among children in different family structures in 36 western, industrialised countries (n = 184 496). Children living with both biological parents reported higher levels of life satisfaction than children living with a single parent or parent-step-parent. Children in joint physical custody reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than their counterparts in other types of non-intact families. Controlling perceived family affluence, the difference between joint physical custody families and single mother or mother-stepfather families became non-significant. Difficulties in communicating with parents were strongly associated with less life satisfaction but did not mediate the relation between family structure and life satisfaction. Children in the Nordic countries characterised by strong welfare systems reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction in all living arrangements except in single father households. Differences in economic inequality between countries moderated the association between certain family structures, perceived family affluence and life satisfaction. © 2010 The Author(s). Children & Society © 2010 National Children's Bureau and Blackwell Publishing Limited.

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Introduction

Children who live with both biological parents tend to have less problems than their counterparts in other family arrangements (e.g. Amato and Keith, 1991; Bjarnason and others, 2003; Jablonska and Lindberg, 2007). This gap in psychological and social well-being can be traced to several related factors. Children who have experienced parental separation may suffer from emotional distress and loss of regular contact with the non-residential parent (Amato, 2001; Kelly, 2007). Children living in single mother households are also more likely to suffer from economic deprivation and less effective guardianship (e.g. Amato, 2000; Breivik and Olweus, 2006), although the involvement of the non-residential fathers may influence the level of financial support of their children (Bartfeld, 2000), poor emotional adjustment (King and Sobolewski, 2006) and more involvement in risk behaviours (Coley and Medeiros, 2007).

Evidence of the possible beneficial effects of a step-parent in the home is not conclusive. While the presence of a step-parent in the household may alleviate some of the structural deficiencies of single-parent households, the role ambiguity experienced by many step-parents and strained relations between step-parents and stepchildren may seriously undermine such benefits. Relations between non-residential fathers and their children also tend to deteriorate over time, in particular when either the residential mother or the non-residential father remarries (Hetherington and Kelly, 2002; Juby and others, 2007). Some studies thus find adolescents in stepfamilies to be similarly well adjusted as adolescents in intact families, while other studies find them to be more similar to adolescents in single-parent families (Amato, 2000; Langenkamp and Frisco, 2008).

The bulk of existing research in this area has focused on differences in children's well-being in common family arrangements such as intact families, single-mother families and mother-stepfather families. This emphasis may in part be due to the dominance of political controversy surrounding single mothers and absent fathers, and the apparent lack of a corresponding interest in single fathers and absent mothers. On a more pragmatic level, however, the need for very large data sets to make sound inferences about very small subgroups of the population has severely restricted possibilities for research on children living for instance with single fathers or fathers and stepmothers. Prior studies of children living with single fathers have nevertheless found them to have less access to health services, poorer educational outcomes and greater risk of delinquency and substance use than their counterparts living with single mothers (Eitle, 2006; Heard, 2007).

While some concerns have been raised regarding the importance of providing children with a single primary home (Kelly, 2007; Moxnes, 2000), children in joint physical custody tend to be similarly well adjusted as children in intact families (Bauserman, 2002; Jablonska and Lindberg, 2007).

Life satisfaction among children in various living arrangements in Western societies

Life satisfaction as measured by Cantril's (1965) ladder from the worst possible life to the best possible life is an efficient, global measure with high construct validity across diverse socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, height, income, marital status, employment and religion (e.g. Ball and Chernova, 2008; Deaton and Arora, 2009; Pouwels and others, 2008). This measure continues to be routinely used as a measure of quality of life in diverse studies of health-related outcomes (e.g. Ball and Chernova, 2008; Hermann, 2007; Kesler and

others, 2009). Studies in several countries have demonstrated that Cantril's (1965) measure of life satisfaction is associated with various health behaviours among children, including binge drinking in Wales (Desousa and others, 2008), addictive behaviours in the Netherlands (van Kooten and others, 2007), food poverty in Ireland (Molcho and others, 2007), and lack of physical activity and screen-based media use in Canada and the United States (Iannotti and others, 2009).

The aim of this paper is to examine differences in life satisfaction between children in different family structures across a wide range of cultural settings. A very large sample drawn from 36 countries allows us to compare common living arrangements such as intact families, single-mother families and mother-stepfather families with less common arrangements such as single-father families, father-stepmother families and dual households based on joint physical custody. Based on the literature we expect greater life satisfaction among children in intact families than either single-parent or parent-step-parent families. We also expect the life satisfaction of children living in joint physical custody arrangements to be more similar to those living in intact families than to those in other types of non-intact families. However, the literature is dominated by studies conducted in the United States and it is not clear to what extent such patterns are robust across different cultural, political and economic contexts.

Children living in less fortunate economic circumstances can be expected to be less satisfied with life and the association between single parenthood and reduced life satisfaction may be partly due to economic hardship. We furthermore expect national levels of life satisfaction among children to be positively related to the economic affluence of each country, but negatively related to the level of economic inequality. We also expect children living in the Nordic countries with a strong tradition of social welfare to report greater life satisfaction than children in other countries. The effect of single parenthood can be expected to be weaker in more affluent countries and in countries with a strong welfare system, while levels of social inequality can be expected to be associated with a stronger effect.

Finally, the literature strongly suggests that deteriorated relations with the absent parent may account for a substantial portion of the association between living in a non-intact family and various negative outcomes for children. We thus expect the negative effect of living with either a single mother or mother and stepfather to be partly mediated through difficulties communicating with the absent father. Similarly, we expect the negative effects of living with a single father or father and stepmother to be partly mediated through difficulties communicating with the absent mother. However, children in joint physical custody arrangements have been found to communicate as easily with both parents as their counterparts in intact families. We do therefore not expect differences in life satisfaction between children in joint physical custody and children in intact families to be explained by difficulties in communicating with either parent.

Data and methods

Data

Analyses were based on data from the 2005/2006 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study, a World Health Organisation collaborative cross-national study (Currie and others, 2008). The international standard questionnaire consists of a number of core

questions used in all participating countries and additional focus questions that allow participating countries to emphasise particular areas of national interest. The measures in the current study were used in 36 Western, industrialised countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States). Ethical approval for each national survey was obtained according to the relevant regulations in each country.

A nationally representative random sample of 11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children was drawn with recommended minimum sample size of 1536 students per age group in each country. About 80 per cent of the schools contacted allowed the survey to take place in selected classes and refusals at the student level were very rare. Listwise deletion of missing cases reduced the total sample size by 9.1%, leading to a net sample of 184 496 students.

Measures

Descriptive statistics, country-level and individual-level predictors of life satisfaction are shown in Table 1. The dependent variables of life satisfaction is measured by Cantril's (1965) classic measure, asking respondents to indicate where they feel that they stand at the

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for country-level and individual-level predictors of life satisfaction among 11- to 15-year-old students in 36 countries, HBSC 2005–2006

	Range	Mean (SE)	Lowest mean	Highest mean
Country-level				
Nordic	0–1	0.14 (0.06)		
GDP per capita (PPP)	7.3–78.6	29.9 (2.38)		
Gini coefficient	23.0–46.4	32.1 (1.05)		
Individual-level				
Gender				
Male	0–1	0.489 (0.001)	0.393	0.655
Female	0–1	0.511 (0.001)	0.345	0.607
Age group				
11 year old	0–1	0.321 (0.001)	0.321	0.247
13 year old	0–1	0.341 (0.001)	0.302	0.401
15 year old	0–1	0.338 (0.001)	0.199	0.420
Primary home				
Intact family	0–1	0.777 (0.001)	0.597	0.932
Mother only	0–1	0.132 (0.001)	0.048	0.360
Father only	0–1	0.016 (>0.001)	0.006	0.031
Mother and stepfather	0–1	0.057 (0.001)	0.002	0.137
Father and stepmother	0–1	0.008 (>0.001)	0.003	0.024
Joint physical custody	0–1	0.010 (>0.001)	0.001	0.043
Perceived family affluence				
Family well off	1–5	3.67 (0.002)	3.08	4.45
Parental communication				
Difficult to talk to father	0–1	0.335 (0.001)	0.192	0.470
Difficult to talk to mother	0–1	0.160 (0.001)	0.082	0.282
Dependent variable				
Life satisfaction	0–10	7.59 (0.004)	6.74	8.21

Each country is given equal weight irrespective of the size of the national sample or population. HBSC, Health Behaviour in School-aged Children.

moment or based on a visual representation of a ladder with 0 representing the worst possible life and 10 the worst possible life.

The living arrangements of children were determined by a series of binary variables derived from three related questions. The first question asks who resides in the home where the respondent lives all or most of the time, including father, mother, stepfather and stepmother. The second question asks if the respondent has another home or another family and how often he or she stays there (half the time, regularly but less than half the time, sometimes, hardly ever). The third question asks who lives in the second home, including father, mother, stepfather and stepmother. Respondents were classified as living in *intact families* if they lived with both biological parents in the primary household. Those who primarily lived with one biological parent were classified as living with a *single mother* or *single father*, *mother and stepfather*, or *father and stepmother*. Those who lived half the time with their mother in one household and half the time with their father in another household were classified as living in *joint physical custody*.

Communication with parents was measured by two single items (Currie and others, 2001; King and others, 1996) asking how easy it is for the respondent to talk to their mother or father about things that really bother him or her (1: Very easy; 4: Very difficult). Prior research has found these measures to be associated with a variety of negative outcomes in the theoretically expected direction, including psychological distress (Moreno and others, 2009) and substance use (Kuntsche and Silbereisen, 2004). The measures were dichotomised for the purposes of the current study (1: Difficult or very difficult; 0: Other). A small number of students indicated that they did not have a mother or father and were omitted from further analysis.

Controls for gender and age groups are included in each of the models. In the preliminary analysis the models were run on each of the three age groups in order to identify possible interactions between age and other predictors of life satisfaction. No important interactions were identified and therefore only the main effects of age group are included. To control the potentially confounding influence of individual-level economic affluence on life satisfaction a measure of *perceived economic status* was included (Currie and others, 2001). The question asks how well off the student thinks his or her family (1: Not at all well off; 5: Very well off). This subjective measure was preferred to more objective measures of affluence such as the HBSC Family affluence scale (Currie and others, 2001) as life satisfaction is more likely to be affected by the perception of affluence than the actual amount of material goods possessed by the family compared to other families.

Country-level economic affluence was measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (IMF, 2009) and country-level economic inequality by the Gini coefficient (WIDER, 2009). The Nordic countries are identified as Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Multi-level modelling

The following data analysis is based on multi-level modelling techniques (Bryk and Raudenbush, 1992; Goldstein, 1987; Raudenbush and others, 2004). This methodology allows several important theoretical and conceptual issues to be empirically addressed. Extending the general multiple regression model, hierarchical linear regression allows the estimation of individual-level models of life satisfaction with variable intercepts as well as variable slopes

for individual-level predictors across countries. The variance in intercepts across countries indicates differences in average life satisfaction across countries. The reduction in this variance from the baseline model including only the intercept can be interpreted as 'explained variance' on the country level.

In the following analysis three multi-level models of life satisfaction are considered. In the first model only background variables and measures of different living arrangements are included, allowing for the estimation of the cross-cultural average differences in life satisfaction and the variance in the strength of these associations. The second model includes the perceived affluence of the family in order to evaluate the role of economic factors in the association between family structure and life satisfaction. The final model includes all of the above individual-level predictors, difficulties talking to either mother or father about things that really worry the child, and country-level measures of GDP, inequality as

Table 2: Multi-level analysis of life satisfaction in different family structures among 11- to 15-year-old students in 36 countries, HBSC 2005–2006

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coeff.	Variance	Coeff.	Variance	Coeff.	Variance
Country-level						
Intercept	7.63***	0.101***	7.62***	0.100***	7.62***	0.096***
Nordic					0.26***	
GDP per capita (PPP)					–	
Gini coefficients					–	
Individual-level						
Gender						
Male	Contrast		Contrast		Contrast	
Female	–0.16***	0.013***	–0.11***	0.013***	0.02 ^{ns}	0.009***
Age group						
11 year old	Contrast		Contrast		Contrast	
13 year old	–0.45***	0.035***	–0.35***	0.031***	–0.27***	0.026***
15 year old	–0.81***	0.066***	–0.62***	0.056***	–0.46***	0.052***
Primary home						
Intact family	Contrast		Contrast		Contrast	
Mother only	–0.44***	0.020***	–0.28***	0.017***	–0.23***	0.013***
Father only	–0.58***	0.049**	–0.49***	0.033 ^{ns}	–0.42***	0.015 ^{ns}
Mother and stepfather	–0.41***	0.016*	–0.33***	0.021***	–0.28***	0.020***
Father and stepmother	–0.63***	0.119***	–0.62***	0.109**	–0.52***	0.049*
Joint physical custody	–0.26***	0.014 ^{ns}	–0.21***	0.016 ^{ns}	–0.22***	0.013 ^{ns}
Perceived family affluence						
Family well off			0.59***	0.018***	0.52***	0.013***
Parental communication						
Difficult to talk with father					–0.55***	0.006***
Difficult to talk with mother					–0.69***	0.017***
Cross-level						
Father only*Nordic					–0.22***	
Father and stepmother*Gini					0.03***	
Joint physical custody*Gini					0.01***	
Family well off*Gini					0.01***	
Explained variance						
Country-level	0.7%		1.7%		5.9%	
Individual-level	5.9%		11.1%		16.1%	

HBSC, Health Behaviour in School-aged Children; ns, non-significant.

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$.

measured by the Gini coefficient and the strong welfare systems of the Nordic countries. The final model furthermore allows us to estimate the extent to which individual-level predictors are moderated by country-level structural differences. Such cross-level interactions are tested for each type of family, but only statistically significant coefficients are included in the final model. The extent to which the effect of perceived family affluence is moderated by national-level GDP is also estimated in the final model.

Results

Table 2 shows the multi-level analysis for life satisfaction. The results for Model 1, shown in the second and third columns, include background variables and different living arrangements. In Model 2, perceived family affluence is added to the model. Model 3 adds difficulties communicating with either mother or father, country-level indicators, and interactions of living arrangements with country-level indicators.

Model 1 shows differences in life satisfaction between children by family structure and background variables in the 36 countries under study. Girls are found to be on average a little more than one-sixth of a rung (-0.16) below boys in Cantril's (1965) ladder of life satisfaction, although there is a significant variation between countries. Between the ages of 11 and 13 children move almost half a rung down the ladder (-0.45) and by the age of 15 they have moved four-fifths (-0.81) of a rung down the ladder. The change in life satisfaction by age does however vary significantly between countries.

Compared to intact families, children in single mother households score -0.44 lower and children living with their mother and stepfather score -0.41 lower. Children who do not live with their mothers score significantly lower: -0.58 if they live with a single father and -0.63 if they live with their father and stepmother. Children living in joint physical custody arrangements do however report a higher level of life satisfaction than children in any other non-intact family arrangements, only a quarter of a rung (-0.26) lower than children in intact families. Model 1 also shows that with the exception of joint physical custody there is statistically significant variance between countries in the magnitude of these differences. Model 1 reduces the unexplained variance between individuals by 5.9% and the unexplained variance between countries by 0.7%.

In Model 2 the perceived affluence of the family is added to the model. This substantially reduces the difference between intact families and single mother families from -0.44 to -0.28 . Somewhat smaller reductions are also found in the case of single-father families (from -0.58 to -0.49) and mother-stepfather families (from -0.41 to -0.33). However, the difference in life satisfaction between intact families, father-stepmother families and joint physical custody families is not affected by perceived economic affluence of the family. Model 2 reduces the unexplained variance between individuals by 11.1% and the unexplained variance between countries by 1.7%.

Model 3 in Table 2 shows the full model with country-level indicators of economic development (GDP per capita), inequality (Gini coefficient) and the Nordic welfare system on both national levels of life satisfaction (intercepts) and the strength of individual-level predictors (slopes). When all three country-level predictors are included in the multi-level model, children in the five Nordic countries are found to be on average about a quarter of a rung (0.26) higher in life satisfaction than children in other countries. Once this

difference is taken into account, measures of economic development and inequality do not significantly predict differences in national averages in life satisfaction. Model 3 reduces the unexplained variance between individuals by 16.1% and the unexplained variance between countries by 5.9%.

On the individual level, Model 3 adds measures of perceived socioeconomic status (SES) of the family and difficulties communicating with parents. Life satisfaction is found to increase on average half a rung (0.52) for each unit increase in perceived SES. Children who find it difficult to talk to their father score half a rung lower (−0.55) and those who find it difficult to talk to their mother score more than two-thirds of a rung lower (−0.69). The effect of each of these individual-level measures varies significantly between countries.

Differences in life satisfaction by gender were partly explained by differences in communicating with parents. The variance between countries in life satisfaction by gender is also reduced by almost a third but remains statistically significant. As difficulties with parents also tend to increase with age, the predictive value of the different age groups is reduced by almost a half in the full model. The variance between countries in the strength of this association with age is also reduced but remains statistically significant.

Once the effects of family SES and difficulties communicating with parents have been taken into account we find children living with single mothers, mothers and stepfathers, or in joint physical custody to be about one quarter of a rung lower in life satisfaction than their counterparts in intact families. Children living without their biological mother however score −0.42 lower if they live with a single father and −0.52 lower if they live with their father and stepmother. Differences in the strength of these associations are reduced in the full model and are non-significant in the case of those living with father only or in joint physical custody.

Finally, the full model shows the extent to which these effects vary significantly by economic inequality and the Nordic welfare system. This is modelled by using the Gini coefficient and a dummy variable for the Nordic countries as predictor of the variable slopes for each predictor. Contrary to our expectations we do not find significantly less differences in life satisfaction between children living in intact families and non-intact families in the Nordic countries compared with other western, industrialised countries. Such cross-level interactions are non-significant with only one exception. Children living with a single father in the Nordic countries are −0.22 rungs lower in life satisfaction than in other countries. In other words, while the average effect is −0.42, the effect in the Nordic countries is −0.62. As the Nordic countries enjoy a 0.26 higher baseline in life satisfaction, this means that this benefit is found in all family structures except single-father households, where the Nordic families do not differ from the average of the 36 countries under study. In other words, children in the Nordic countries characterised by strong welfare systems reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction in all living arrangements except in single father households.

There are no significant effects of GDP on the strength of individual-level predictors. Economic inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient is not associated with differences in life satisfaction by single-parent families or father-absent families. However, there is progressively less difference between children in intact families and children living with a father and stepmother as inequality increases. For each step in the Gini coefficient from 23 to 46.4

the negative effect of living in such families decreases in magnitude by 0.03. Similarly, life satisfaction among children living in joint physical custody becomes more similar to intact families by 0.01 for each unit increase in the Gini coefficient. The effect of individual family well-being increases by 0.01 for each unit increase in Gini from 23.0 to 46.4.

Discussion

The results presented above confirm and extend the findings of previous research in this area. Life satisfaction is lower among children in all types of non-intact families, but the magnitude of this impact differs significantly between countries. Before taking into account the effects of economic deprivation and deteriorated parental relations, we find higher levels of life satisfaction among children in joint physical custody than other types of non-intact families. This is consistent with the literature, suggesting that children benefit when separated parents share the emotional, social and economic burden of child-raising in this fashion (Bauserman, 2002; Jablonska and Lindberg, 2007). Although causality cannot be established in cross-sectional research, our results strongly suggest that parents willing to share physical custody do not need to fear that their children will suffer from less life satisfaction than children in other non-intact family arrangements.

Once the perceived economic status of the family and problems communicating with mother and father have been controlled, the highest level of life satisfaction is found in intact families, second highest in single-mother, mother-stepfather or joint physical custody, and the lowest level in single-father and father-stepmother households. It thus seems that not living with one's mother has a greater impact on life satisfaction than not living with one's father. Given the strong normative expectations that children should reside with their mothers it is also possible that children in the custody of their father are on average more likely to have experienced more psychological and social problems than children in the custody of their mother. In any case, our results do not suggest that living all or most of the time with mothers is crucial in this respect – children living approximately half the time with their mother and half the time with the father are equally satisfied as those living with their mother or mother and stepfather most or all the time.

Our findings regarding the Nordic countries are particularly important in this respect, as the Nordic welfare system has generally been assumed to alleviate the burden of single parenthood (see e.g. McLanahan, 1997). Despite great differences in family policy and welfare benefits between Norway and the United States, Breivik and Olweus (2006) found very similar patterns of negative outcomes among children of divorce in these two countries. They argue that within-country associations between family structure, SES and negative outcomes may be traced to relative rather than absolute levels of deprivation. Our findings suggest that children in Nordic welfare states enjoy above average life satisfaction, but this holds equally true for children living in intact families and most forms of non-intact families. The only exception is that children living with single fathers in these countries appear to be similarly satisfied with life as children living in the same circumstances in other countries. A strong system of social welfare may increase life satisfaction among all children in a given society, but our results do not suggest that the Nordic welfare system reduces the gap between intact and non-intact families. These findings have important and somewhat troubling policy implications for welfare systems geared towards reducing the impact of social inequality on children. Further studies are needed to confirm and explain these findings.

On the individual level, perceived economic deprivation of the family is associated with less life satisfaction among children in general. This negative effect of perceived family SES is consistent with prior research (Amato, 2000; Breivik and Olweus, 2006; DeBell, 2008) and less life satisfaction in single-mother or single-father families and in mother-stepfather families can partly be explained by lower perceived family affluence. On the country-level, however, neither economic affluence nor economic inequality explains national differences in life satisfaction. Furthermore, the negative impact of single-parent families on life satisfaction does not appear to be moderated by such national-level economic characteristics. These findings dovetail neatly with the findings of Breivik and Olweus (2006) discussed above. Cross-country differences in economic affluence and inequality do not appear to explain differences in the effects of non-intact families between countries, but relative perceptions of individual family economic deprivation do explain a substantial part of the difference between families in different countries. This suggests that economic deprivation relative to others affects children on a personal level that has little to do with societal-level poverty or inequality. This may partly explain why the Nordic welfare systems appear to fail to reduce the gap in life satisfaction between children in intact and non-intact families.

The national level of inequality is however found to moderate the effect of living in father-stepmother families and in joint physical custody in a rather unexpected fashion. The negative impact of both types of non-intact families is found to be significantly diminished as national levels of economic inequality increase. It is possible that residual differences in economic affluence not immediately visible to children result in better outcomes for children that are supported equally by two households or enjoy the full support of their biological father. It is also possible that children are more likely to be selected into such families on the basis of clear economic and social advantages of the fathers in societies characterised by less economic inequality. These patterns need to be explored further.

We find that gender, age and family structure accounts for about 6% of the individual-level variance and just under 1% of the country-level variance in life satisfaction. Adding perceived family affluence, difficulties communicating with parents, and country-level predictors reduces the unexplained variance in individual-level life satisfaction by 16% and the unexplained variance in country levels of life satisfaction by 6%. Overall, we find differences in children's life satisfaction by family structure to be relatively modest compared with such differences by perceived family affluence. Life satisfaction increases by roughly half a rung on Cantril's (1965) 0–10 ladder for each unit increase in perceived economic affluence from 1 to 5. Children who perceive their families as being 'very well off' thus score on average two rungs higher on Cantril's ladder than children that perceive their families to be 'not at all well off'. Holding such differences constant, we find that children who never live with their father score about a quarter of a rung lower and children who never live with their mother score close to half a rung lower on life satisfaction.

It is an important topic of future research to explain cross-cultural differences in life satisfaction by living arrangements. In addition to differences in family affluence and problems in communication with the absent parent, the emotional distress associated with parental divorce and single parenthood has been identified as a major source of negative outcomes for children (Amato, 2001; Barber, 1994; Kelly, 2007; King and Sobolewski, 2006). However, the meaning of divorce and single parenthood cannot be assumed to be culturally invariant, in particular with reference to the different situation of women in different societies. While such life events as divorce or single motherhood may be heavily stigmatised in some

countries and certain segments within countries, they may well be relatively meaningless in other social contexts. This may be a major source of the considerable variation in life satisfaction among children in living with single mothers or step-parents in different countries.

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