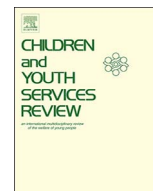




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Urban-rural variations in children's lives and subjective well-being: A comparative analysis of four countries

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses differences in the lives and well-being of children aged 8 to 12 in four contrasting countries – Argentina, Romania, South Africa and Korea – using child self-report data. The article reviews a range of previous international literature on urban-rural differences in children's lives. Based on this literature a set of expectations are identified regarding a number of aspects of children's lives – material deprivation, family context, family relationships, friendships, school experience, safety and facilities in the local area, time use and overall subjective well-being. These are then tested against the data for the four countries separately. Some findings correspond with expectations from previous research while others do not and there is considerable variation in this between the four countries. There is some tentative evidence for slightly higher child subjective well-being in rural areas than urban areas. It is provisionally concluded that urban-rural differences in children's lives and well-being are country-specific. However, further research is needed with a larger range of countries.

1. Background

1.1. Introduction

The analysis of the Children's Worlds data undertaken so far indicates that there is far more variation in children's subjective well-being within countries than between countries (see Bradshaw and Rees elsewhere in this volume). In view of this it is important to begin to gain an understanding of the sources of within-country inequalities in child subjective well-being.

Previous research on variations in child subjective well-being has examined the extent to which individual factors such as age, gender and ethnicity and household factors such as family structure and household income/poverty can explain variations in child subjective well-being. Typically these types of factors, while often statistically significant, explain relatively small amounts of the total variation. So far there has been relatively little research on possible associations between the nature of children's wider environments and their subjective well-being. This paper makes use of Children's Worlds data from four countries to look at one aspect of these wider environments – that is, the population density of the area in which children live.

This is a potentially interesting area for further consideration because research on children's objective living conditions as well as a

broader body of research on adult well-being has highlighted significant differences between urban and rural areas.

1.2. Definitions of urban and rural

There is no global agreement on how to define and characterize the urban and the rural (Braga, Remoaldo, & de Carvalho Fiúza, 2016). The existing contrast between rural and urban areas has its origin in the socio-territorial division of labor since ancient times. In this regard there appear theories that refer to rural as a backward or residual space, others refer to a situation of continuity between the urban and the rural, others credited the idea of rural fragments and others to the complementary rural/urban (Sili, 2002, 2005).

The difficulty in arriving at a consistent definition of 'urban' and 'rural' is recognized by the United Nations who note that 'because of national differences in the characteristics that distinguish urban from rural areas, the distinction between the urban and the rural population is not yet amenable to a single definition that would be applicable to all countries or, for the most part, even to the countries within a region. Where there are no regional recommendations on the matter, countries must establish their own definitions in accordance with their own needs' (United Nations, 2016).

There coexist different criteria to identify urban to rural areas. One

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of the most widely used refers to settlement size. This approach differs greatly worldwide, so for example in Greece the rural limit is 10,000 inhabitants, in Norway it is 200, in Japan it is 50,000 and in Argentina and Bolivia it is 2000. Another criterion reflects population density, that is to say the number of inhabitants in relation to the surface of a given area. The third possibility reflects the presence of certain economic activities. Thus, the rural space is linked to the development of primary activities, mainly agricultural while the urban space will have higher percentages of the population engaged in activities of a secondary or tertiary type. Combining two or more variables is also common, as indicated by [Castro and Reboratti \(2005\)](#) – for example, population quantity and density or the degree of intensity in the pendulum flow of people. The World Bank, ‘has seen the OECD population density criterion incorporating the distance to urban centers measured as time required to access the nearest city’ ([de Ferranti et al., 2005](#), cited by [Castro & Reboratti, 2005](#): 6). Seeking for the use of an ‘expanded definition of rural’, it should consider not only the scattered population and the one clustered in towns with fewer than 2000 inhabitants but also include all localities ‘with less than 50,000 inhabitants and that are not found in metropolitan areas and are related to services of the primary sector’ (Banco [Mundial, 2007](#): 20). The option to expand the universe of analysis is linked to the type of functions performed by rural communities, mainly, in most cases, as providers of services to the surrounding rural area.

Given this diversity of options the [United Nations \(2016\)](#) suggests that ‘it may be considered appropriate to distinguish between agricultural localities, market towns, industrial centres, service centres and so forth, within size-categories of localities’. However it recognizes that ‘the traditional urban-rural dichotomy’ is still needed.

It should also be acknowledged that, while a binary urban-rural distinction is fairly common in the research literature, some researchers make a tripartite distinction between urban, suburban and rural areas and some of the research findings reviewed below identify interesting differences using this categorization.

1.3. Differences between the context of children's lives in urban and rural areas

There is a range of evidence of systematic differences in socio-economic conditions of relevance to children's lives between urban and rural areas in many countries.

First, there is evidence of an urban-rural wealth gap in many countries with typically higher wealth in urban areas. In relation to developing countries, [Smith, Ruel, and Ndiaye \(2005\)](#) and [Van de Poel, O'Donnell, and Van Doorslaer \(2007\)](#) both report greater poverty/deprivation in rural areas, although there is often also greater wealth inequality in urban areas. In the European Union, there is evidence of higher household income in urban than rural areas, but there is only a significant gap in deprivation in poorer European countries ([Shucksmith, Cameron, Merridew, & Pichler, 2009](#)). [Ferge \(2009\)](#) identified three groups of European countries where urban child poverty is (a) higher, (b) about the same and (c) lower than rural child poverty. [Macours and Swinnen \(2008\)](#) find that, in 23 transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, rural poverty is generally higher than urban poverty but that there are large variations in the size of the difference across countries.

There is also evidence that the quality of people's home environment differs substantially between urban and rural areas in some countries. In developing countries rural children are more likely than urban children to live in households without access to basic services such as water sanitation and electricity ([Cueto & Escobal D'Angelo, 2011](#); [Duc & Nguyễn, 2011](#); [Galab & Vijay Kumar, 2011](#); [Woldehanna & Gudisa, 2011](#)). In Europe, [Shucksmith et al. \(2009\)](#) report significantly poorer housing conditions in intermediate, poorer and accession countries in the EU-25.

The levels of educational attainment of adults in rural areas are

often lower than in urban areas. In most countries in the European Union the percentage of adults with tertiary education is higher in urban than rural areas ([Bertolini, Montanari, & Peragine, 2008](#)). [Smith et al. \(2005\)](#) report similar differences in a sample of 36 developing countries. Thus in many countries, rural children are likely to be growing up with parents who have poorer levels of education compared to urban children and this difference may have a direct impact on children's lives.

Related to this attainment differential, other educational issues identified in the literature on developing countries are school facilities, participation and attainment. In the Young Lives research, which focused on four developing countries, there were poorer school facilities in rural areas in all four countries ([Dornan & Woodhead, 2015](#)). There was also some evidence in rural areas of lower attendance and grade completion ([Woldehanna & Pankhurst, 2014](#) in Ethiopia); earlier age of school leaving ([Cueto & Escobal D'Angelo, 2011](#) in Peru; [Duc & Nguyễn, 2011](#) in Vietnam); and poorer achievement ([Castro & Rolleston, 2015](#) in Peru; [Dornan & Woodhead, 2015](#) in Vietnam).

The Young Lives project also gathered information about various kinds of shocks that households might experience (e.g. environmental, economic and family events). There were some instances where urban households were more likely to experience shocks than rural households (e.g. illness or death in families in Vietnam, [Duc & Nguyễn, 2011](#)). However, where there were differences, more often it was rural households who were more likely to experience shocks – particularly environmental and economic ([Duc & Nguyễn, 2011](#); [Galab & Vijay Kumar, 2011](#); [Cueto & Escobal D'Angelo, 2011](#); [Woldehanna & Gudisa, 2011](#)). Other research on orphanhood in sub-Saharan Africa found different patterns and trends of urban-rural variation in different countries ([Monasch & Boerma, 2004](#)).

In summary, overall, both in economically poorer and richer countries, there are substantial differences in the context of children's lives in rural and urban areas. For many of the topics considered there is a tendency for greater disadvantage in rural areas.

1.4. Children's lives and well-being in urban and rural settings

[Powell, Taylor, and Smith \(2013\)](#) make a distinction between research on rural childhoods in richer countries – often characterized by ideas of the ‘rural idyll’ – and research on rural children's experiences in poorer countries which have tended to focus more on issues such as children's work, globalisation, migration and health. They argue that recent research with children challenges the rural idyll idea in wealthier countries, identifying both positive and negative aspects of children's experience.

In wealthier countries, there is a growing body of research on urban-rural differences in children's lifestyles and potential implications for their health, linked to a perception that rural children are more physically active. However, findings paint a complex picture with varying patterns of rural-urban difference in different countries according to age ([Ogunleye, Voss, Barton, Pretty, & Sandercock, 2011](#)) and season ([Loucaides, 2004](#)). In some countries there is evidence of higher physical activity in suburban areas compared to urban or rural ones ([Joens-Matre et al., 2008](#)) while in others there were no area-related differences ([Lammler, Worth, & Bos, 2012](#); [Salmon et al., 2013](#)). In terms of health implications, in Canada, [Bruner, Lawson, Pickett, Boyce, and Janssen \(2008\)](#) found higher rates of overweight and obesity as rurality increased, while [Ismailov and Leatherdale \(2010\)](#) found the lowest rates of overweight and obesity in suburban areas. On the other hand [Chillón, Ortega, Ferrando, and Casajus \(2011\)](#) reported that, in Spain, rural children had higher levels of physical fitness than urban children.

In developing countries, the focus has been more on expectations of children to contribute to household work and the potential effect this has on their education. [Amin and Chandrasekhar \(2012\)](#) report a trade-off between studying at home and household work among children in rural Bangladesh, with boys having more study time than girls. There

was also evidence of higher involvement of children in one or more of three related activities (caring responsibilities, household chores and unpaid family work) in all four countries in the Young Lives project (Cueto & Escobal D'Angelo, 2011; Duc & Nguyễn, 2011; Galab & Vijay Kumar, 2011; Woldehanna & Gudisa, 2011). Ersado (2005) reports lower school attendance and higher child employment rates in rural areas in Nepal, Peru and Zimbabwe and a widening gender gap as children get older.

One of the more obvious potential aspects of urban-rural difference is children's experience of their local area. In the UK, Rees et al. (2012) found urban-rural differences in children's views of the local area with higher satisfaction with facilities in urban areas and greater feelings of safety and freedom in rural areas. Tyrrell and Harmer (2015) in the UK studied young people who had moved from urban to rural areas in the UK and found conflicting views – for example, lack of facilities and poorer transport links but also more positive experiences of unstructured free time. In Peru, Cueto and Escobal D'Angelo (2011) rural children felt that their local area was safer and cleaner.

Finally, we have found limited literature on child subjective well-being in rural and urban areas. In Peru, rural children around eight years old had lower life satisfaction than urban children, the differences were less pronounced at 15 years old (Cueto & Escobal D'Angelo, 2011). There was also evidence of higher urban life satisfaction in Andhra Pradesh (Galab & Vijay Kumar, 2011) and Vietnam (Duc & Nguyễn, 2011). However, controlling for other factors, Duc and Nguyễn (2011) found lower life satisfaction among urban than rural children aged around 12 years old in Vietnam. In Spain, UNICEF Spain (2012) report that children in semi-urban areas had higher subjective well-being than those in other types of areas.

A brief comment on research with adult populations is also relevant here. One key issue discussed in the adult literature has been the extent of urban-rural differences in adult mental health and potential links with the differing nature and extent of social support in these settings. Recent studies have generated divergent findings with evidence of poorer mental health in urban areas (McKenzie, Murray, & Booth, 2013 and Alcock, White, Wheeler, Fleming, & Depledge, 2014 in the UK; Liu & Shuzhuo, 2011 in China); in small urban and semi-rural areas (Breslau, Marshall, Pincus, & Brown, 2014 in the US); in rural areas (Stickley, Koyanagi, Roberts, & McKee, 2015 in nine former Soviet Union countries; and Shucksmith et al., 2009, optimism in the European Union); or no difference (e.g. Mair & Thivierge-Rikard, 2010, older adults in the US). Stickley et al. (2015) argue for 'caution in extrapolating findings from one part of the world to others and the importance of undertaking research on the geographical correlates of mental health in different world regions' (p.142). This is a key issue considered in this article.

1.5. Urban and rural contexts in the four countries analysed

The above literature review suggests that it is important to understand the contexts of urban and rural life in the particular countries being studied. Some relevant contextual information and literature in relation to each of the four countries included in this analysis is as follows.

Romania has one of the highest proportions (45%) in Europe of the population defined as living in rural areas (Dachin, 2008). It has one of the largest urban-rural differentials in poverty among 23 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Macours & Swinnen, 2008). There is also a rural-urban gap in tertiary education participation rates, which means that rural children are likely to have parents with less formal education (Voicu & Vasile, 2010). Precupetu and Precupetu (2013) report poorer quality of housing, access to utilities and life expectancy in rural areas, although there are higher rates of crime and feelings of insecurity in relation to crime in urban areas.

South Korea has experienced a rapid process of urbanization since

1960. The urbanization rate has more than doubled during the period between 1960 and 2010 and exceeded 90% in 2014 (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2016). This unprecedented fast pace of urbanization has been mainly fueled by industrialization. The period represents unprecedented economic development in which Korean society finally made an escape from the absolute destitution it suffered since the time of modernization. Per capita gross national income increased almost 100 times from below \$300 in early 1970s to about \$28,000 in 2014. From a mainly agricultural society 60 years ago, Korea has developed into one of world's leading industrial countries. The proportion of the labor force employed in agricultural sector has decreased from about 80% in 1960 to below 10% during the period (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2016).

In South Africa, in Western Cape province where the Children's Worlds survey was conducted, around 95% of children are defined as living in urban areas (Hall, 2014). Savahl et al. (2015) note that the rural population in South Africa is 'predominantly black African, and tends to exhibit a greater adherence to traditional cultural norms... [including]... more communal living arrangements, in which many members of the extended family may cohabit with a set of children and parents'. Thus concepts and practices of family life in these contexts are very different from Western ideas (Madhavan & Gross, 2013). Adams and Savahl (2016) point out that concepts of 'rural' in South Africa are also very different to those in developed countries. Their study includes a rural area with high poverty/deprivation, poor resources and basic services, but also high rates of crime and violence.

Argentina is characterized by a high proportion of population living in cities (Velázquez, 2008). In the 2010 census 91% (36.517.332) of the total population resided in urban areas, while 9% (3.599.764) of the remaining population lives in grouped or scattered rural areas. There has been the development of a great variety of productive circuits from North to South and from East to West, this situation coupled with the population diversity results in rural socio-cultural and productive heterogeneity and complexity. Such complexity is characterized by different combinations of natural elements, social and cultural systems, modes of settlement and the plurality of economic activities that the diverse social groups develop (Reboratti & Sabalain, 2002). Persistent regional and intra-regional inequalities have historically existed, for example between the Argentine NorthWest (NOA) and the Pampean Region or between the latter and the Patagonian Region, and in the vulnerability of rural populations. Over the last four decades, it is interesting to note that the advance of agribusiness, the agriculturalization and the predominance of soybean production (Teubal, 2008), have led to productive specialisation of Argentina in certain primary products (cereals, oilseeds, oil, gas, metals, and minerals), the concentration of land and capital, reduction of family farming, rural unemployment and the resulting shift of population from rural to urban, with the growth of the cities especially in their areas of greater social marginalization.

2. Research questions

In summary there is good reason to believe that there may be important differences in children's lives and subjective well-being according to whether they live in urban or rural areas, but there is currently a shortage of evidence on this topic, and on whether urban-rural differences vary according to context. The Children's Worlds data offers a new opportunity to consider this issue by undertaking a descriptive analysis of urban-rural differences across a more diverse set of countries than has been possible in previous research.

Our overarching research questions are:

1. To what extent are there differences within each country in the context of children's lives and their experience of childhood according to the type of area (urban or rural) in which they live?
2. To what extent are any such differences consistent across countries with different cultural and economic contexts?

Within these overarching questions our main hypothesis, on the basis of the literature reviewed earlier, is that there will be a diversity across countries of urban-rural similarities and differences. We recognise that the differences we are exploring may be due to a range of unmeasured factors within each country. It is not possible, or our main purpose, to identify these factors. Our main intention in undertaking the analysis is to evaluate whether there are consistent urban-rural patterns and differences in children's lives and well-being across diverse contexts. To this end, our analysis aimed to cover a number of themes identified in the literature discussed above regarding differences between urban and rural areas as follows.

2.1. Material deprivation

There may be higher mean levels of deprivation in rural areas than urban areas, at least in some countries, but also greater inequality of deprivation in urban areas where material circumstances may be more heterogeneous.

2.2. Quality of the home environment

The quality of children's home environment may be poorer in rural areas due to lack of basic service and amenities. However there may also be overcrowded housing in urban areas due high costs and pressures on space in urban environments.

2.3. Family context

There may be differences in the types of families in which children live in urban and rural areas. Overcrowding in urban areas may lead to multi-generation households but on the other hand higher levels of geographical mobility in urban areas (including rural to urban migration) may lead to smaller family units.

2.4. Family relationships

Given the three factors discussed above there may be differences in the quality of family relationships and time spent with different family members in urban and rural settings.

2.5. Friendships and social support

It may be that the distances and transport issues in rural areas could lead to children spending less time with friends outside school. On the other hand, there may be stronger community ties in rural areas thus increasing the opportunities for children to spend time with peers in their local area.

2.6. Experiences of school

Given the evidence of relatively poor educational provision in rural areas in some countries, it is interesting to examine whether children's own views about school vary according to type of area.

2.7. Views of the local area

One of the more obvious potential aspects of urban-rural difference is children's experience of their local area. There may be differences in children's feelings of safety in rural and urban areas and there also may be differences in availability of leisure facilities.

2.8. Time use

Given the evidence on different demands and expectations of children in rural areas in some countries we expected that we might find urban-rural differences in children's own accounts of their time use – for

example, more time spent on housework in rural areas and less time spent on leisure activities.

2.9. Overall subjective well-being

Given the evidence of different patterns of urban-rural variation in adult mental health in different countries we were interested to see whether there was an evidence of such variation in terms of children's sense of positive well-being.

3. Methods and data

3.1. The sample of countries

Out of the 17 countries that have so far completed Wave 2 of the Children's Worlds study we identified eight countries that had incorporated indicators of population density into their sampling strategy. These were Spain, Germany, Poland, Estonia, Romania, Argentina, South Africa and South Korea. However, for several reasons we decided to restrict our analysis to a smaller number of countries. First, there were some limitations to the precise nature of the urban-rural samples in Germany and Estonia. Second, the questionnaire in Poland had omitted some key variables that we wished to include in our analysis. Third, we were concerned that the number of European countries, and specifically those in Eastern Europe, in this group of countries would lead to an imbalance in the analysis. Fourth, the categorization used in Spain involved three groups – urban, semi-urban and rural – which presented additional challenges in terms of comparative analysis. We therefore decided to focus the analysis on four countries – Korea, Argentina, South Africa and Romania – meaning that we had one country in each of the four different continents involved in the Children's Worlds study.

The total sample consisted of 15,782 children – comprising 1023 in Argentina; 3188 in South Africa; 7467 in Korea and 4104 in Romania. The data covered all three age groups of the survey (aged around 8, 10 and 12 years old) except in Argentina where only the younger two age groups were surveyed.

3.2. Categorisation of urban and rural samples within each country

In each of the four countries a definition of the distinction between 'urban' and 'rural' was used which conformed to official methods or official statistics in that country. Therefore, while acknowledging the debates about different ways of distinguishing between urban and rural discussed earlier, our categorisation for the purposes of this article was entirely dependent on the definitions used in the surveys in each country which were as follows.

In Korea, the urban and rural distinction is based on administrative grouping of geographic regions. The rural population size limit is 50,000. Along with the population size, the proportion of farming population and agriculture economic structure are considered to be classified as rural area.

In Romania, the groupings were defined at the school level and were based on data provided by the Ministry of Education, which included a categorisation of schools as either urban or rural. On this basis, of the total sample, 1934 were in urban schools and 2170 in rural schools.

In South Africa, the sample was selected from the eight Education Management District Councils of the Western Cape Education Department which groups schools into four urban districts and four rural districts (Savahl et al., 2015). In the total sample, 2316 children were in urban schools and 872 in rural schools.

In Argentina, according to the census classification established by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC), urban agglomerations are those that have 2000 inhabitants or more. In contrast, areas with a lower number of inhabitants are considered rural. The rural population concentrated in settlements classified as locality (INDEC

1991, Vapñarsky & Gorojovsky, 1990) are recognized as rural grouped, while the rest of the rural population is defined as dispersed; this distinction could be considered a “narrow definition of rural” (Banco Mundial, 2007: 20). Of the total of 1023 cases surveyed in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, 894 children lived in urban areas and 129 children lived in rural areas (Tonon, Mikkelsen, de la Rodriguez, & Toscano, 2016).

Clearly given these different methods of categorization it would not be appropriate to compare or pool data on urban and rural children across countries. Our focus in the analysis is on urban-rural variations within each country only.

3.3. Measures

Variables relevant to each of the key topics identified above were selected from the data sets. Some variables were only available for some age groups surveyed. The variables include nominal variables such as those describing family contexts and economic circumstances and ordinal variables with either five or 11 response categories for most of other topics. Descriptions of the measures used are provided at the beginning of each sub-section of the findings section below.

3.4. Analysis

Statistical analysis was undertaken in SPSS. The testing involved bivariate comparisons for children living in urban and rural areas. Where the second variable was nominal a chi-square test was used and where the second variable was a single-item ordinal variable two tests were used – a Mann-Whitney test and a *t*-test – and the levels of significance indicated are the lower of the results of the two tests. This approach was taken to reduce the risk of Type 1 errors, given the large number of pairwise comparisons being made. Finally, for the multi-item scale scores of subjective well-being presented in the final section of analysis, ANOVA was used with the Welch test for equality of means. For descriptive purposes, ordinal variables consisting of five categories are usually presented in tables using percentages and ordinal variables based on an 11-point scale are presented as means.

The analysis makes use of weighted data for South Africa, Korea and Romania where the weightings were calculated to create a more representative sample taking into account variations between the planned and achieved sampling strategy (see Rees & Main, 2015 for further details). The data for Argentina was not weighted due to the size of the sample and nature of the sampling strategy.

All differences noted as statistically significant refer to a test result having a *p*-value of less than 0.05, indicated by a single asterisk. A double asterisk indicates a significant difference with a *p*-value of less than 0.01.

4. Findings

4.1. Material deprivation

As a measure of material deprivation, children in each age group were asked to indicate whether they possessed or had access to a list of personal and household items – for example, clothes in good condition to go to school in, a family car. For the older two age groups the list consisted of a greater number of items than for the 8-year-old age group. It is possible to create a scale of self-reported material deprivation based on the number of items the child lacked (Rees & Main, 2015) with a higher score therefore indicating a higher level of material deprivation. Table 1 below presents two sets of mean scores – the first for an eight-item scale for the 10- and 12-years-old age groups and the second for a shorter five-item scale for all age groups.

In Korea there were no significant urban-rural differences in deprivation. In Argentina, children in rural areas tended to have lower levels of deprivation than children in urban areas for the shorter scale

only. In South Africa the mean scores for children in rural areas were significantly higher than in urban areas. The largest differences were in Romania where rural children had much higher mean levels of deprivation than urban children. A quarter (25%) of Romanian children living in rural areas lacked more than two items on the eight-item list, compared to 8% of those living in urban areas.

We were also interested to analyse inequalities in material deprivation in rural and urban areas. Levene and Browne-Forsythe tests of the equality of variances in urban and rural areas for the eight-item scale only indicated a statistically significant difference in Korea and Romania. In Korea the difference in standard deviations (1.04 in rural areas and 0.97 in urban areas) does not appear that substantive and may be partly attributable to the large sample size. In Romania the standard deviation of the deprivation scale in rural areas (1.59) was much higher than in urban areas (1.16). These findings therefore do not support the hypothesis of greater economic inequalities in urban than rural areas.

4.2. Quality of the home environment

We utilised three indicators of the quality of the home environment. First there was an agreement item asking children if they had a quiet place to study at home, which was asked of all three age groups surveyed. Urban-rural comparisons for responses to this question are shown in Table 2. In Argentina, children living in rural areas were more likely to say that they had a quiet place to study than in urban areas; while in Korea the opposite was the case. There was no significant difference in responses between area types in Romania and South Africa.

Second, there was a question about whether children had their own bedroom. This may serve as a proxy indicator for overcrowding. A summary of responses by country and area type is shown in Table 3. Here there were significant urban-rural differences in all four countries. In South Africa and Argentina, children in rural areas were more likely to have their own bedroom than in urban areas. These findings support the idea that there may be more household overcrowding in urban areas. However the opposite was the case in Romania and Korea where children in urban areas were significantly more likely to have their own bedroom than children in rural areas, although in the case of Korea the difference was substantively small and only significant with 95% confidence.

Third, there was a question on satisfaction ‘with the house where you live’. This used an 11-point response scale in the 10- and 12-years-old surveys but a five-point response scale in the 8-years-old survey. Table 4 shows mean scores for the older two age groups. There was no significant urban-rural difference to children’s responses to this question in any of the countries.

4.3. Family context

Children in the 10- and 12-years-old surveys were asked about who they lived with. Table 5 below shows the proportion of children in each country in urban and rural areas who, in their only or main home (in the case where children spent time in two homes) lived with each of their parents, with siblings or other children and with one or more grandparents.

The proportions of children living with their mother were above 90% in all countries and there was only a significant difference in this respect between urban and rural areas in Korea where children in urban area were more likely to live with their mother. In Romania children in rural areas were significantly more likely to live with their fathers than in urban areas and the same was true for living with siblings or other children. In all countries except South Africa rural children were more likely than urban children to have one or more grandparents living in their home. Thus overall, there was a tendency in Romania and to some extent in Korea and Argentina for children in rural areas to be living in

Table 1
Material deprivation by country and area type, means.

	S Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina					
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural				
Eight items (10- and 12-year-olds)	0.41	ns	0.46	0.78	**	1.61	1.82	**	2.01	1.46	ns	1.15
Five items (All ages)	0.19	ns	0.21	0.51	**	1.07	1.03	**	1.27	0.53	**	0.35

Table 2
'I have a quiet place to study at home' by country and area type (All age groups).

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Not agree	2%	4%	3%	4%	14%	11%	7%	5%
Agree a little	6%	8%	2%	2%	6%	6%	6%	2%
Agree somewhat	17%	22%	8%	6%	19%	16%	14%	9%
Agree a lot	25%	29%	22%	24%	15%	23%	25%	21%
Totally agree	50%	37%	66%	64%	46%	44%	48%	63%
Sig.	**		ns		ns		**	

larger households with a wider range of people than children in urban areas.

4.4. Family relationships

We consider four indicators of family life. A question about satisfaction with family life on an 11-point response scale which was asked of the older two age groups; and three questions about the frequency of time spent with family in different ways which were asked for all age groups.

Table 6 shows the mean satisfaction scores for family life. There were no significant differences between urban and rural areas here.

Tables 7 to 9 show the frequency with which the family talk, have fun together and learn together. In Romania, rural children significantly more frequently spent time on each of these family activities than urban children. In Korea, rural children spent significantly less time on all three activities, with the most substantive differences being for learning together. There were few differences in the other two countries, although rural children in South Africa less frequently spent time having fun with family, compared to urban children.

In summary there was some evidence here in individual countries of rural children spending more time on activities with family than urban children; but there was no evidence of a significant urban-rural difference in satisfaction with family life.

4.5. Friendships and social support

Children in all three age groups were asked if they felt they had enough friends, using a five-point agreement response scale. Urban children in Korea were significantly more likely than rural children to feel that they had enough friends (See Table 10). There was no evidence of rural-urban differences in the extent of children's friendships in the other three countries.

Tables 11 to 13 show the frequency that children spent time talking, having fun and meeting to study with friends, in urban and rural areas

Table 3
Whether has own bedroom by country and area type (All age groups).

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina					
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural				
Has own bedroom	89%	*	86%	68%	**	60%	55%	**	63%	64%	**	87%

in each country. There was only one minor difference within countries in the frequency of talking with friends. In Argentina, rural children more frequently spent time doing this than rural children. Rural children in Romania tended more often to have fun with friends than urban children; while the opposite was true in South Africa. In all countries except South Africa, rural children significantly more frequently met to study with friends than urban children.

4.6. Experiences of school

We looked at responses to a single-item question about liking going to school. In Romania rural children liked going to school more than urban children while in South Africa and Korea the reverse was true (Table 14).

4.7. Views of the local area

Children in all three age groups were asked two agreement-type questions about their local area – relating to feelings of safety and to facilities. As shown in Table 15, children living in rural areas in Romania and Argentina tended to feel significantly safer in their local areas than children in urban areas. The opposite was true in Korea while there was no clear difference in South Africa.

There was also a mixed picture regarding urban-rural differences in leisure facilities (Table 16). In Romania and Korea, urban children were more positive about local places to play and to have a good time. Contrary to our expectations, the opposite was true in Argentina, while there was no significant difference in South Africa.

4.8. Time use

The survey of all three age groups included questions about the frequency of spending time on sports, learning activities after school, extra-curricular reading, helping with household chores, doing homework, watching TV, and using computers. Children in the 12-years-old survey were also asked about time spent caring for siblings or other family members.

Table 17 presents comparisons of frequency of time use on these activities in rural and urban areas in each country. For brevity we present mean scores to these questions which were on a four-point response scale — 'Rarely or never', 'Less than once a week', 'Once or twice a week' and 'Every day or almost'. Thus mean scores can range from zero to three. Clearly the response scale cannot be regarded as interval scale so means are used here purely for convenience. The outcomes of statistical tests refer to both t-tests and Mann-Whitney tests as discussed earlier.

Rural children in Romania were more likely to help around the house but there was no significant difference in the other countries.

Table 4
Satisfaction with home by country and area type (10- and 12-year-olds).

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina					
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural				
Mean satisfaction	8.75	ns	8.58	9.42	ns	9.32	8.54	ns	8.77	9.33	ns	9.70

There were significant gender differences in time spent doing housework in Korea – girls spent more time on this activity than boys – with a stronger effect size in rural areas. We did not find any evidence of larger gender differences in helping with housework in rural areas than urban areas in the other three countries. Similarly, rural children in South Africa were more likely to spend time caring for family members but there was no difference in this respect in Korea and Romania (data was not available for Argentina). There were a number of urban-rural differences in other activities in particular countries but no consistent pattern here. For example, in Korea, urban children were more likely than rural children to read for fun but no more or less likely to use a computer. The opposite was the case in Romania.

Children in the 10- and 12-years-old surveys were also asked how satisfied they were with how they spent their time and what they did in their free time. Results are summarized in Table 18. Rural children were more satisfied with how they used their time in South Africa. There were no significant differences in these ratings in Korea, Romania and Argentina.

4.9. Overall subjective well-being

Finally we consider three multi-item measures of children's overall self-reported well-being which were included in the questionnaire for 10- and 12-years-olds.

The first was a five-item scale designed to tap into the concept of life satisfaction (cognitive subjective well-being). It consisted of statements –e.g. ‘My life is going well’ – mostly derived Huebner's Student Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1991), to which children were asked to respond on a zero to ten response scale from ‘Not at all satisfied’ to ‘Completely satisfied’. The five items were summed to create an overall score which was then transformed to a scale from zero to 100. The reliability of the scale (Cronbach's alpha) ranged from 0.84 in South Africa to 0.97 in Korea. Casas (2016) has tested the extent to which this scale is suitable for use in comparative international research and has concluded that the scale functions reasonably well across 16 countries and can be used to compare correlations and regressions across countries, although not for the comparison of mean scores in all cases.

The second scale was a six-item measure of positive affect (affective subjective well-being) which asked to children to say how often they had had certain feelings and emotions – e.g. ‘happy’, ‘full of energy’ – in the last four weeks. Again response options were on an 11-point scale from ‘not at all’ to ‘completely’. Cronbach alpha's ranged from 0.77 in Argentina to 0.95 in Korea.

The third scale was a six-item measure of flourishing (psychological well-being) designed to tap into the six components of Ryff's (1989) framework of psychological well-being. This consisted of six statement-based items – e.g. ‘I feel that I'm learning a lot at the moment’ – to

Table 5
People that children lived with by country and area type (10- and 12-year-olds).

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Lives with	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Mother	97%	94%	94%	93%	92%	90%	97%	98%
Father	94%	92%	83%	86%	68%	69%	73%	73%
Other children	86%	85%	61%	79%	81%	78%	81%	90%
Grandparent	12%	19%	31%	39%	35%	36%	18%	2%

which children responded in the same way as for the life satisfaction items. Cronbach alpha's for this scale ranged from 0.77 in Romania to 0.93 in Korea. This scale was only included in the 12-years-old questionnaire and therefore does not cover the sample in Argentina.

All three scale scores were created by summing the items and transforming onto a scale from 0 to 100 for ease of comparability.

Results for bivariate urban-rural comparisons of mean scores within each country are shown in Table 19. The only country where there were significant differences was South Africa where children in rural areas had significantly higher mean scores for life satisfaction and psychological well-being than children in urban areas. Around 9% of children in urban areas in South Africa had low life satisfaction (a score of less than 50 out of 100) compared to around 5% of children in rural areas.

However, age, gender and deprivation may also be associated with variations in subjective well-being (see Bradshaw and Rees in this issue) and there are variations in these variables, particularly deprivation, between urban and rural areas in some countries. So we also ran linear regressions for each overall well-being variable incorporating these variables where possible.

In terms of life satisfaction, when controlling for age group, gender and deprivation, living in a rural area rather than an urban one made a significant positive contribution to the model in Romania and South Africa, while it did not in Korea. Living in a rural or urban area did not make a difference in Argentina among 10-year-olds when controlling for gender and deprivation. For positive affect, when controlling for other variables, living in a rural area made a significant positive contribution to explaining variation only in Romania. Finally, living in an urban area did not explain variations in psychological well-being among 12-year-olds in Korea, Romania or South Africa. Data was not available for Argentina.

In summary, when taking into account age, gender and deprivation, there is evidence in some countries of higher cognitive and/or affective subjective well-being for children in rural areas and no evidence of higher overall well-being in urban areas for any of the three measures.

5. Discussion, limitations and conclusions

5.1. Discussion

Previous research has indicated important differences between children's lives and the context of their lives both in rich and poor countries. However there has been a lack of studies which have adopted a comparative perspective across a diverse range of countries, and a relative lack of attention to urban-rural variations in children's own evaluations of their lives. This article addresses these two gaps by providing an analysis of differences between urban and rural children's lives and subjective well-being in four contrasting countries in different

Table 6
Satisfaction with family life by country and area type (10- and 12-year-olds).

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina					
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural				
Mean satisfaction	8.87	ns	8.72	9.63	ns	9.59	8.96	ns	9.11	9.56	ns	9.81

Table 7
Frequency of family talking together by country and area type (All age groups).

Each week	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Not at all	3%	3%	2%	3%	4%	6%	5%	8%
Once or week	20%	22%	6%	6%	10%	8%	16%	16%
Most days	35%	39%	16%	13%	23%	20%	30%	30%
Every day	43%	37%	75%	78%	63%	66%	49%	47%
Sig.	*		*		ns		ns	

Table 8
Frequency of family having fun together by country and area type (All age groups).

Each week	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Not at all	9%	11%	7%	6%	5%	6%	2%	
Once or week	42%	40%	15%	12%	13%	14%	13%	15%
Most days	28%	31%	37%	29%	29%	32%	33%	43%
Every day	22%	18%	42%	53%	54%	48%	51%	42%
Sig.	*		**		**		ns	

Table 9
Frequency of family learning together by country and area type (All age groups).

Each week	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Not at all	16%	21%	14%	14%	7%	10%	3%	5%
Once or week	35%	39%	15%	13%	12%	11%	15%	11%
Most days	27%	24%	25%	18%	26%	26%	27%	33%
Every day	23%	15%	47%	55%	55%	53%	55%	51%
Sig.	**		**		ns		ns	

Table 10
'I have enough friends' by country and area type (All age groups).

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Not agree	2%	2%	4%	4%	7%	6%	2%	2%
Agree a little	5%	7%	3%	4%	5%	4%	3%	2%
Agree somewhat	14%	18%	8%	8%	7%	9%	7%	4%
Agree a lot	29%	34%	21%	22%	13%	19%	17%	15%
Totally agree	50%	39%	64%	62%	67%	62%	71%	77%
Sig.	**		ns		ns		ns	

continents. Using topics identified by previous research as a starting point, we have examined urban-rural differences within each country and identified the extent to which patterns of these differences are consistent across countries.

The broad overarching conclusion that can be drawn from our analysis is that there is considerable variation in patterns of urban-rural difference across the four countries that we focus on. We found evidence of differences that match previous research in some countries for some topics, but also no evidence of difference, or evidence of differences in the opposite direction in other instances. In general our

Table 11
Frequency of friends talking together by country and area type (All age groups).

Each week	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Not at all	3%	4%	8%	8%	6%	7%	10%	6%
Once or week	13%	12%	11%	12%	8%	9%	20%	14%
Most days	31%	31%	27%	25%	21%	21%	29%	27%
Every day	53%	54%	54%	56%	66%	63%	41%	53%
Sig.	ns		ns		ns		*	

Table 12
Frequency of friends having fun together by country and area type (All age groups).

Each week	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Not at all	6%	4%	13%	10%	6%	7%	8%	2%
Once or week	22%	19%	14%	14%	8%	10%	16%	15%
Most days	29%	31%	30%	27%	22%	26%	24%	34%
Every day	44%	45%	43%	49%	64%	58%	52%	50%
Sig.	ns		**		**		ns	

Table 13
Frequency of friends meeting to study together by country and area type (All age groups).

Each week	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Not at all	38%	35%	59%	47%	33%	34%	46%	26%
Once or week	28%	26%	18%	16%	17%	14%	30%	27%
Most days	16%	18%	11%	16%	18%	23%	13%	31%
Every day	17%	21%	12%	21%	32%	29%	12%	16%
Sig.	*		**		ns		**	

Table 14
'I like going to school' by country and area type (All age groups).

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Not agree	3%	4%	5%	4%	7%	7%	14%	24%
Agree a little	7%	10%	5%	3%	5%	4%	9%	11%
Agree somewhat	16%	23%	11%	7%	11%	11%	16%	9%
Agree a lot	30%	29%	22%	19%	13%	18%	18%	17%
Totally agree	44%	34%	57%	66%	64%	59%	43%	39%
Sig.	**		**		*		ns	

findings, although only based on a small selection of countries, support the argument of [Stickley et al. \(2015\)](#) that caution is needed in applying findings about urban-rural differences from one context to another.

In the introductory section we provided a review of previous relevant evidence across a range of aspects of children's lives. The majority of these findings suggested that, where there are urban-rural differences, children's quality of life was better in urban than rural areas. There are lower poverty rates in urban areas in developing countries ([Smith et al., 2005](#); [Van de Poel et al., 2007](#)) and in European countries ([Shucksmith et al., 2009](#); [Macours & Swinnen, 2008](#)). There is

Table 15
'I feel safe when I walk around in the area I live in' by country and area type (All age groups).

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Not agree	8%	12%	7%	7%	26%	23%	9%	4%
Agree a little	19%	20%	7%	4%	11%	11%	8%	3%
Agree somewhat	30%	29%	17%	9%	16%	15%	14%	11%
Agree a lot	25%	23%	20%	20%	11%	17%	21%	20%
Totally agree	19%	16%	49%	60%	36%	34%	47%	62%
Sig.	**		**		ns		**	

Table 16
'In my area there are enough places to play and have a good time' by country and area type (All age groups).

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Not agree	6%	15%	12%	26%	16%	14%	8%	4%
Agree a little	13%	16%	10%	12%	9%	6%	4%	2%
Agree somewhat	24%	26%	18%	13%	12%	13%	15%	3%
Agree a lot	26%	21%	18%	15%	13%	16%	17%	13%
Totally agree	31%	23%	42%	34%	50%	51%	56%	78%
Sig.	**		**		ns		**	

evidence of better quality housing in urban areas (Cueto & Escobal D'Angelo, 2011; Duc & Nguyễn, 2011; Galab & Vijay Kumar, 2011; Woldehanna & Gudisa, 2011 for developing countries and Shucksmith et al., 2009 for Europe). Adult educational attainment tends to be higher in urban populations in both developing (Smith et al., 2005) and European (Bertolini et al., 2008) countries and better parental education is linked with higher child well-being. In developing countries there is evidence that school facilities are better in urban areas (Dornan and Woodhead, 2015). Urban families in developing countries tend to experience fewer shocks than in rural countries, although there are some exceptions (Duc & Nguyễn, 2011; Galab & Vijay Kumar, 2011; Cueto & Escobal D'Angelo, 2011; Woldehanna & Gudisa, 2011). Levels of children's educational attendance are sometimes better in urban areas in developing countries and this has been linked to greater pressures on children in rural areas to spend time working within and outside the family home (Cueto & Escobal D'Angelo, 2011; Duc & Nguyễn, 2011; Guerrero et al., 2012; Woldehanna & Gudisa, 2011; Amin & Chandrasekhar, 2012; Ersado, 2005).

In comparison there is relatively little research evidence that points to higher quality of life for rural than urban children. The key findings we were able to find in this respect were greater feelings of safety in rural areas in Peru (Cueto & Escobal D'Angelo, 2011) and in the UK (Rees et al., 2012); and more positive experience of unstructured free time in the UK (Tyrrell & Harmer, 2015).

There was a more mixed picture of urban-rural differences

Table 17
Mean frequency of time spent on different activities by country and area type (All age groups, except 'caring for family members' – 12-years-old survey only).

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina					
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural				
Help house	1.89	ns	1.93	2.38	**	2.59	2.45	*	2.36	2.25	ns	2.33
Family caring	1.17	ns	1.31	1.48	ns	1.61	2.03	**	2.32	na	-	na
Classes	1.74	**	1.40	1.41	**	1.00	1.79	ns	1.75	1.91	ns	1.94
Homework	2.57	**	2.24	2.84	**	2.79	2.61	ns	2.58	2.60	ns	2.50
Read for fun	1.89	**	1.59	2.07	ns	2.11	2.20	**	2.05	1.89	ns	1.86
Play sports	2.13	ns	2.06	2.34	ns	2.33	2.34	ns	2.23	2.14	ns	2.07
Watch TV	2.50	*	2.56	2.69	ns	2.63	2.57	**	2.44	2.67	ns	2.65
Use computer	1.52	ns	1.58	2.11	**	1.96	1.78	ns	1.74	2.16	ns	2.18

(sometimes in contrasting directions) in terms of physical activity and health (e.g. Bruner et al., 2008; Chillón et al., 2011; Joens-Matre et al., 2008); and in terms of subjective well-being (Cueto & Escobal D'Angelo, 2011; Galab & Vijay Kumar, 2011; Duc & Nguyễn, 2011; Nguyen, 2011; UNICEF Spain, 2012).

Given the balance of this evidence, we might have expected the findings from our analysis also to generally show a more positive picture for urban than rural children. However, this may not be the case because the above evidence relied mainly on objective and/or adult-reported social indicator data, whereas our analysis is based on children's own accounts and evaluations of their lives.

In fact our findings suggest a complex picture with different patterns in different countries. It is not the main purpose of this article to provide a detailed account of findings in individual countries. However some general observations about findings in each country are useful in illustrating the complexity and diversity.

In Korea, the balance of findings indicated higher well-being of children in urban areas, in relation to quality of housing, friendships, satisfaction with school and with the local area (safety and facilities). These findings are in line with the wider research cited above. However rural children reported higher levels of engagement than urban children with family and with friends, and there were no urban-rural differences in deprivation or overall subjective well-being.

In Romania, urban children tended to score higher on material aspects of life (lower deprivation, better housing and better local facilities). On the other hand, rural children tended to spend more time with family and friends and subjectively there were indications that they were happier at school, felt safer in their local area and had higher subjective well-being.

In South Africa, urban children had lower levels of deprivation, spent more time with family and friends, were a little happier with how they used their time, and enjoyed school more. Despite this more positive picture for urban children, overall subjective well-being scores were generally somewhat higher among rural children.

In Argentina, the only significant urban-rural differences were in favour of rural children. Children in rural areas had lower levels of deprivation, better quality housing, spent more time talking with friends, and were happier with safety and facilities in their local area. However there were no urban-rural differences in overall subjective well-being.

These brief summaries of findings show considerable diversity and difference across the four countries. They also highlight that overall patterns of subjective well-being do not necessarily correspond with the general pattern of differences in specific areas of children's lives. It is beyond the scope of this article to develop an understanding of the reasons for this diversity but we would suggest that our findings indicate that, in studying urban-rural differences in children's lives and well-being, it is essential to contextualise the analysis and not to assume that there are broadly generalisable conclusions about urban-rural differences.

Table 18
Satisfaction with time use by country and area type, means (10- and 12-year-olds).

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina					
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural				
How you use your time	7.93	ns	7.79	9.18	ns	9.18	8.54	*	8.27	9.35	ns	9.17
What you do in free time	8.23	ns	8.09	9.48	ns	9.45	8.71	ns	8.71	9.41	ns	9.40

Table 19
Overall subjective well-being by country and area type, means.

	Korea		Romania		S Africa		Argentina					
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural				
Life satisfaction	78.2	ns	75.4	94.1	ns	93.7	82.2	**	85.0	90.1	ns	88.8
Positive affect	78.4	ns	76.9	92.1	ns	92.5	83.5	ns	84.0	91.9	ns	93.4
Psychological well-being	74.2	ns	75.0	90.5	ns	89.7	82.9	**	83.7	na	-	na

5.2. Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this piece of analysis.

The first is that, as discussed in the introduction, it is not possible to adopt consistent definitions of 'rural' and 'urban' across such diverse countries. Thus the reader should be aware that the statistics we are presenting should not be used to make simple comparisons between countries. The urban-rural distinction is defined in a different way in each country and a specific statistic on rural children in one country cannot be compared directly with that in another. On top of this, some of the categorisations of urban and rural areas in the national surveys were rather approximate. In particular, they were based on the location of the school rather than the child's home and, for example, some children in rural areas may attend school in urban areas for various practical reasons.

We have been limited to four countries in our analysis and, in fact, in two of these countries the survey was conducted in a specific region rather than the country as a whole, which limits the generalisability of the findings. In three of the countries, probability sampling techniques were used and weightings have been applied to try to ensure that the sample is as representative as possible. However, in Argentina, the sample was smaller and not necessarily representative of the region in which it was conducted. The small sample size in Argentina may explain the relative lack of statistically significant differences that we found in this country; while the much larger sample size in Korea may increase the likelihood of statistically significant differences which are not substantively that large.

Additionally, given that this is a schools-based survey, it is possible that there are differences in school attendance in urban and rural areas and this may affect our comparisons and results. This also indicates that the findings cannot be generalised to the general population of children including those not attending school.

Finally, our analysis is restricted to a particular age range and cannot be generalised further. For example, it is possible that there are more pronounced urban-rural differences among young people aged 13 and over than there are in our age range.

Despite these limitations, given the paucity of comparative survey research on urban-rural differences during childhood, the Children's Worlds study provides a rare opportunity to compare urban and rural children's lives and well-being in a diverse set of countries. Our analysis suggests a number of directions for research on this topic with a larger number of countries in the future.

5.3. Concluding comments

The analysis presented in this article makes an important new

contribution to the international comparative literature on urban-rural differences in children's lives and well-being in two ways. First, previous comparative analysis has generally focused either on developing countries or on wealthier countries, and rarely across both. We have been able to make use of comparable data gathered from children in four diverse countries in four different continents. Second, previous work has tended to rely mainly on either social indicator data and/or information reported by adults. The data we used was gathered directly from children regarding their experiences and evaluations of their own lives.

Our broad conclusion, based on the four countries for which we have data, is that there is at least as much difference as consistency across countries in patterns of urban-rural variations in children's lives and well-being. There is a need in the future to extend this analysis to cover a wider range of countries including, ideally, groupings of countries with similar geographic, cultural, social and economic contexts. Our aim in this article has been a descriptive one and it will be important for future research in this area to take a more explanatory approach, paying close attention to contextual factors in trying to account for patterns of urban-rural difference across countries.

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