Youth Well-Being Contextualized: Perceptions of Swedish Fathers

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Abstract

Background Fathers can have a critical role to play in supporting the well-being of youth. However, little is known about how fathers perceive youth well-being. The Five Cs model of positive youth development was the theoretical starting point of this study, in part due to this framework's focus on the importance of bi-directional, person–context relations (Geldhof et al., in: Molenaar, Lerner, Newell (eds) *Handbook of developmental systems theory and methodology*, Guilford Press, New York, 2014). Questions posed in the present study were derived from the 4-H study of positive youth development (Lerner et al. in *J Early Adolesc* 25(1):17–71, 2005), which is rooted in the Five Cs model.

Objective The present study explored themes and patterns of meaning in descriptive information from fathers about youth well-being.

Method An inductive–deductive approach to thematic analysis was used to examine responses to open-ended survey questions from 201 Swedish fathers regarding youth well-being.

Results Based on the fathers' reports four themes were identified: cognitive well-being, emotional and psychological well-being, physical well-being, and social well-being. While some sub-components of these themes have been identified in earlier literature, new sub-components were also found in each domain of youth well-being (i.e., cognitive, emotional/psychological, physical, social).

Conclusions These findings suggest that the understanding of youth well-being is contextual and multi-faceted, and that fathers' perceptions can be important to consider in future research as they may further our insight into the rich and nuanced characteristics of positive youth development in diverse contexts.

Keywords Youth · Development · Well-being · Fathers · Sweden

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Introduction

As a relatively new field, much of the research on positive youth development (PYD) to date has focused on theorization and identification of core characteristics of well-being (Lerner et al. 2015). Few studies seek to understand how parents perceive youth well-being. When parents are asked about their perceptions of youth well-being, it tends to be predominantly mother reports (e.g., Alberts et al. 2006; King et al. 2005). Generally, knowledge about the unique perceptions of fathers on this matter is scarce. Therefore, this study aimed to explore how Swedish fathers perceive youth well-being.

Contemporary Theories of Youth Well-Being

Over the past 30 years, several theoretical frameworks have delineated critical elements of youth well-being with a focus on strengths and skills, for example, positive psychology, PYD, social competence, and social emotional learning (Tolan et al. 2016). Although the field is growing, currently no unifying theory on youth well-being exists. However, most posit that youth well-being is complex and multi-dimensional, covering a wide range of domains. In their framework, Lippman et al. (2014, 2011) identified that well-being of the young consists of many different elements of the individual, contextual resources, and the relationships between these. The individual characteristics cover four major domains: academic/cognitive, emotional/psychological, physical, and social.

Among the contemporary frameworks of youth well-being, some focus on the promotion of optimal functioning, flourishing, and thriving (Tolan et al. 2016). From a positive psychology ontological standpoint, specific characteristics are described and in turn encouraged. Proponents of positive psychology primarily emphasize the subjective experiences and qualities of individuals that promote quality of life (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000). For instance, Diener and colleagues (Diener 1984; Diener et al. 1999, 2018) highlight the importance of subjective well-being as an evaluation of life quality from the perspectives of people themselves with regards to happiness, life satisfaction, and positive emotions. Fredrickson (2001, 2013) also accentuate positive emotions (e.g., joy, contentment, interest) as a source to expand individuals' repertoire of actions and cognitions to develop and strengthen various physical, psychological and social resources, which through a reciprocal process promotes well-being and further experiences of positive emotions. Seligman (2011, 2018) on the hand proposes that in addition to positive emotions well-being is also made up of accomplishment, engagement, meaning, and relationships. Peterson and colleagues (Park and Peterson 2006; Peterson and Seligman 2004) address how 24 moral competences, termed as character strengths, are relevant for individuals to be doing well. These character strengths are grouped into six broad categories: Wisdom (e.g., creativity, curiosity), courage (e.g., persistence, zest), humanity (e.g., kindness, social intelligence), justice (e.g., fairness), temperance (e.g., self-regulation), and transcendence (e.g., hope, spirituality). These selected positive psychology theories highlight the centrality of positive subjective experiences to well-being and the characteristics of individuals who are doing well, primarily within the emotional/psychological domain and to some extent also the cognitive and social domains.

Proponents of PYD also emphasize youth strengths. Some go beyond the positive subjective experiences and individual qualities by conceptualizing youth well-being as a dynamic, relational process between systems of individuals and their complex contexts

(Lerner et al. 2015). For example, Benson and colleagues (Benson et al. 2011, 2012) propose through their developmental assets framework that the combination and accumulation of specific internal assets (e.g., commitment to learning, positive identity) and external assets (e.g., empowerment, external support) promotes youth well-being and reduces risk and problem behaviors. In their model, youth well-being is a synthesis of successful academic performance, having inhibitory self-control, being resilient, being helpful to others, maintaining good health, valuing diversity, and demonstrating leadership. On the other hand, Larson and colleagues (Dawes and Larson 2011; Larson and Rusk 2011) emphasize the role of intrinsic motivation in youth combined with environments and activities (e.g., youth programs) that challenge, engage, and facilitate abilities to maintain motivation as critical to their well-being. They propose that these processes in turn promote academic learning and performance, emotional and identity development, as well as social skills. These aforementioned PYD models therefore highlight in addition to individual characteristics of youth well-being within the four domains (i.e., academic/cognitive, emotional/psychological, physical, and social) their relationships with various contextual resources.

The Five Cs Model

One of the more prominent and detailed theories of the processes of youth well-being is the Five Cs model of Lerner et al. (2005, 2015). The Five Cs model has garnered a great deal of research attention, and one of the more comprehensive tests of this model is the longitudinal 4-H study of PYD, which involved nearly 7000 youths and 3500 of their parents across the United States (Lerner et al. 2015). The present study applied adapted versions of the open-ended questions that were used in the 4-H study to measure perceptions of youth well-being. Moreover, the present study used the Five Cs model as a theoretical starting point because this framework is well suited to the study of youth. Based on the relational developmental systems metatheory, the model considers youth and contexts as dynamic and open to change (i.e., embraces human plasticity), and it emphasizes the importance of bi-directional, person–context relations as a way to understand youth development (Geldhof et al. 2014; Overton 2015). Indeed, the Five Cs model has relevance in the field of youth well-being.

The Five Cs involves five core concepts: caring, character, competence, confidence, and connection. In the Five Cs model, caring indicates a person's sense of empathy and sympathy for others; character signifies integrity and a sense of right and wrong; competence refers to domain-specific skills within academic, cognitive, social, and vocational spheres; confidence denotes a positive belief in one's own value and capacities; and connection represents a person's constructive relationships with others. Together, the Five Cs are used to illustrate positive development and well-being of youth (Lerner et al. 2010). Lerner et al. (2015) describe youth well-being as the outcome of a relational process between specific youth strengths and ecological resources. However, they emphasize that the unique fit between persons and contexts matters and when specific youth strengths are joined with particular ecological resources, then youth would most likely develop the Five Cs. Examples of such youth strengths includes intentional self-regulation manifested as goal-selection, resource optimization, and compensatory strategies when facing obstacles (Gestsdotir and Lerner 2008). Instances of ecological resources comprises other people, community institutions offering youth programs, collective activities between youth and adults, and access to all of these resources in family, school and neighborhood settings (Theokas and Lerner 2006). Lerner and colleagues also suggest that development of the

Five Cs would increase contributions youth make to themselves and to their families, communities, and societies (Jelicic et al. 2007). Indicators of contribution include both a desire and an engagement in activities to promote one's context (e.g., to lead a group or an organization, to help friends and neighbors, to provide community service, to mentor others; Lerner et al. 2005). Thus, the Five Cs model is used to describe developmental processes and positive outcomes that have prospective importance to the later development of youth and contexts. Similar to other theories of PYD, the Five Cs model suggest that the relationship between certain individual characteristics of youth—within academic/cognitive, emotional/psychological and social domains—and specific ecological resources are vital to the well-being of youth.

The Importance of Qualitative Methods to Study Youth Well-Being

Some researchers have identified the need to assess the ecological validity of the theorized characteristics of youth well-being with diverse research methods, including qualitative methods, and to match theoretical frameworks with the perceptions of youth, their parents or youth workers (Alberts et al. 2006; Hershberg et al. 2014; King et al. 2005; Nott and Vuchinich 2016). Although few in number, the findings from the existing qualitative studies on youth well-being and the Five Cs model suggest that the characteristics of youth well-being are complex and context specific in at least three ways. Firstly, these characteristics include but also in some cases are broader and more multi-faceted than the Five Cs, and secondly, the value assigned to these characteristics can vary between and within groups. In their interview study with 71 youths, 52 parents, and 50 youth-workers in the United States, King et al. (2005) identified initially 77 characteristics of youth well-being and noted that there was no clear consensus between or within the three groups. For example, the characteristics reported the most by the parents were communication skills and positive self-concept (50.00% respectively), whereas the characteristics referred the most by the youths were academic success (38.03%) in addition to positive self-concept (39.44%; i.e., when considering both younger and older youths as one group). After the entire material was analyzed further King et al. (2005) concluded that the most frequent characteristics of youth well-being in addition to the Five Cs were assets, commitment, goal-directed/purposeful, physical well-being, positive emotions, and self-control/regulation.

Subsequent studies would also suggest that youth well-being may entail more than the Five Cs and how it is perceived varies across groups and contexts. In their survey study with 691 dyads of sixth grade youths and their parents as part of the 4-H study of PYD, Alberts et al. (2006) noted that although the Five Cs and contribution were identified as characteristics of youth well-being, discrepancy existed between youth and parent reports. For example, they found that competence was more important for the youths (62.50%) than for the parents (34.90%). Moreover, beyond the Five Cs other characteristics were also identified. For instance, some youths referred to professional/educational aspirations (21.70%) and being bright/smart (21.30%), whereas some parents described being happy (23.60%). Moreover, in a comparative focus group study with homeless youth and non-homeless youth enrolled in out-of-school programs, Nott and Vuchinich (2016) found happiness as a key component of youth well-being independent of homelessness status. They did however report that the reasoning behind their happiness did differ among the youth. Homeless youths associated happiness with a subjective experience and the non-homeless youths linked it to achievements in economic, educational or vocational domains. Another difference in perceptions of youth well-being was that the homeless youths emphasized

self-confidence and to ignore the expectations of others, whereas the non-homeless youths highlighted a wish to please others by being engaged in multiple activities and advanced classes. These findings give support to ideas noting that characteristics of youth well-being may be more complex than the Five Cs, and that their meaning may vary across groups and settings.

A third aspect where perceptions of youth well-being may differ is that the importance given to certain characteristics can also vary among persons over time. Based on the 4-H study of PYD, Hershberg et al. (2014) investigated among other things the perceptions of youth well-being among 56 youths at grades 6, 9, and 12. Not only did they identify 14 characteristics of youth well-being, the characteristics could also vary between and within individuals over the three time points. Over time the importance of certain characteristics increased (e.g., connection, career aspiration, being happy, being successful, college aspirations), fluctuated (e.g., academic competence, contribution, work) or simply declined (e.g., athletics, character attributes). Thus, life phase appeared to matter for the perceptions of youth well-being in this sample.

Taken together, these qualitative findings suggest that youth well-being is context specific with some intersections with frameworks of youth well-being, such as the Five Cs. Youth well-being likely includes how youth interpret and respond to their immediate environment (e.g., responding to social expectations or seeking to please others; Nott and Vuchinich 2016) and alludes to the importance of subjective experiences (e.g., feeling happy or experiencing positive emotions; Alberts et al. 2006; King et al. 2005; Nott and Vuchinich 2016). These studies indicate provisionally that what youth well-being means and what is emphasized may vary across groups, settings, and across time (e.g., Hershberg et al. 2014). Although the four qualitative studies on youth well-being described yielded important insights and extended the Five Cs model, these studies are few and solely based on North American cohorts. More importantly, there remain important knowledge gaps such as the need to study youth well-being from the perspective of individuals living in non-English speaking countries.

In light of Bornstein's (2017) specificity principle, Lerner et al. (2018) have recently highlighted the need for a cultural and contextualized approach to studying the Five Cs model outside the United States in order to understand the meaning and measurement of youth well-being in distinct cultural, personal, and social settings. As an extension to the qualitative studies of youth well-being, the present study qualitatively explored the perceptions of youth well-being and the relevance of the Five Cs in a Swedish context. The present study is needed because qualitative research is important to study youth well-being in order to expand current frameworks (Futch Ehrlich 2016), to go beyond quantitative evaluations (Lerner and Tolan 2016), and to contextualize and distinguish its meaning in specific settings (Lerner et al. 2018). A starting point would be fathers' perceptions of youth well-being, as the unique perspective of fathers has often been merged with mothers to represent parents in general and fathers have been underrepresented relative to mothers (e.g., Alberts et al. 2006; King et al. 2005).

Fathers' Perceptions of Youth Well-Being in a Swedish Context

From the wider international research literature, it is clear that fathers' perceptions are important to consider as these are associated with involved and supportive parenting, and youth well-being. In their ecological framework, Cabrera et al. (2014) proposed that fathers' characteristics including beliefs and values are linked with their involvement in

supporting their child's development. Furthermore, Leung and Shek (2016) noted that fathers' high expectations on their children's future concerning autonomy, conduct, education, family commitment, and occupation, were associated with children's self-reported well-being among families in Hong Kong. Moreover, Castro-Schilo et al. (2013) detected that more optimistic fathers were associated with more involved parenting, which in turn was related to children's self-reported peer competence among families living in Mexico. In North America, Jodl et al. (2001) found that those fathers who described their children as athletically talented, who appreciated athletic skills, and who were supportive (e.g., purchasing sports equipment and attending sporting events) had children who also appreciated athletics and perceived themselves as athletically skilled. Taking these findings into account, it would be valuable to understand fathers' perceptions of youth well-being. Nevertheless, fathers' perceptions of youth well-being needs to be considered in their particular socio-cultural contexts. Contextual perspectives, such as critical realism, suggest that people's representations of reality are inseparable from individual and collective beliefs and structures within complex social settings (Willig 1999). This applies also to all parents according to a developmental systems framework (Lerner et al. 2002) and specifically to fathers from the ecological model of fathering (Cabrera et al. 2014).

The present study explored the perceptions of fathers in a Swedish context. In Sweden, the notion of fatherhood and the need to achieve greater gender equality in family and work life are undergoing changes. For example, Sweden was the first country to introduce parental insurance in 1974 that enabled fathers to also receive economic support and to divide paid parental leave equally with mothers (Johansson and Andreasson 2017). More Swedish companies support employed fathers to take parental leave both through formal policies and informal encouragement from colleagues and managers (Haas and Hwang 2009). Moreover, recent reports indicate that fathers in Sweden are gradually using more of the total parental benefit days allocated to parents (i.e., 480 days per child), increasing from 17% in 2003 to 28% in 2017 (Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2018). It is noteworthy that these reforms tend to be adopted more by those of mid socioeconomic status (Johansson and Andreasson 2017) and that corporate support tends to be more common among professionals than manual laborers (Haas and Hwang 2009).

Research suggests that although various forms of father involvement changes over time, Swedish fathers tend to become more accessible to their children with time (Lamb et al. 2004). Based on reports from Swedish youths between 12 and 18 years, a majority state that that they get along well with their fathers (92%) and that fathers are perceived to be available for conversations when needed (90%). A closer look at these reports indicates that this engaged and accessible perception of fathers is more common in households where both parents live together, whereas youths who live primarily with one parent report somewhat lower figures (81% and 76% respectively; Statistics Sweden 2017a). Thus, the socio-cultural and socioeconomic aspects of fatherhood are important to consider when investigating their perceptions of youth well-being.

Study Aim

Against this background, the present study intended to explore the perceptions of youth well-being in a sample of fathers living in Sweden. Fathers were focused on in this study, rather than both parents, in light of theory (Cabrera et al. 2014) and research that documents that fathers also can support the well-being of youth (Castro-Schilo et al. 2013; Leung and Shek 2016). This study juxtaposed deductive and inductive approaches to

thematic analysis. From a deductive standpoint, the Five Cs model was the theoretical basis of the present study and the questions employed in this study to fathers was derived from the 4-H study of PYD (Lerner et al. 2005), which has been a central study that has substantiated and expanded the Five Cs model. From an inductive standpoint, the approach to the thematic analysis was a data-driven process. This study brought deductive and inductive approaches together when the codes identified from the responses of fathers were compared to the theoretical definitions of the Five Cs model (Lerner et al. 2010). With these approaches to the study and key research gaps in mind, the study aim was guided by the following research question: What themes and patterns of meaning can be identified from the descriptions provided by Swedish fathers, when asked about what youth well-being meant to them?

Method

Participants

Information from the fathers ($N=201$; M age=47.50; SD 6.55)¹ of seventh graders (99 girls and 103 boys) was analyzed for the present study. The study inclusion criterion for this analysis was that the response be from a youth's father. The operational definition of a father was being a male legal guardian, which included 199 biological fathers, one step-father, and one adoptive father. As seen in Table 1, most fathers reported Sweden as their country of origin (87.06%), had studied at a university or a college (59.70%), were employed (90.55%), and cohabitated with their child's other primary guardian (77.61%). In other words, the fathers' sociodemographic characteristics can be viewed as relatively homogenous and represent mid or high socioeconomic status.

Procedure

The fathers completed a survey as part of the first baseline cohort of a larger research project entitled KUPOL (a Swedish abbreviation for knowledge on young people's mental health and learning). KUPOL is a longitudinal school-based study including information from legal guardians, school staff, and youth spanning a 4 year period between seventh grade and the first year of high-school. The wider study aim is to investigate the mental health of youth across contexts such as family, peers, and school. For detailed information about KUPOL, see Galanti et al. (2016). A Swedish Regional Ethics Review Board approved the wider study and research on the information used in the present study. All procedures followed in this study were consistent with the 1964 Helsinki declaration. Active informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest. The authors take responsibility for the integrity of the data and for the accuracy of the data analysis.

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¹ The age of one father was unknown.

Table 1 Descriptive data on country of origin, county of residence, education, living arrangements, and occupation

Characteristics	Frequency	
	<i>n</i>	%
Country of origin		
Sweden	175	87.06
Asian	12	5.97
African	6	2.99
Other European	6	2.99
South American	2	0.99
Education		
University/College	120	59.70
High-school	66	32.84
Other	13	6.47
None/Unknown	2	0.99
Living arrangements		
Cohabitates	156	77.61
Does not cohabitate	38	18.91
No second legal guardian	5	2.49
Unknown	2	0.99
Occupation		
Employed	182	90.55
Other	15	7.46
Unknown	4	1.99
Region of residence		
Central Sweden (Stockholm)	111	55.22
Central Sweden (Other)	53	26.37
Southern Sweden	20	9.95
Northern Sweden	16	7.96
Unknown	1	0.50

Measures

The present study applied a qualitative research design. The analyses in the present study are based on the information from fathers specifically from two joint open-ended survey questions in which they could freely write their thoughts and reflections on youth well-being and how youth are when they do well. These open-ended questions were part of a larger self-report survey. The questions asked were: “How can you tell if a teenager is developing and if things are going well for her/him in all areas of life? In your opinion, what is she/he like, in what way is she/he?”. These questions were adapted from the 4-H study of PYD (Lerner et al. 2005) from English to Swedish and several other languages. These questions are similar to those used in earlier qualitative studies with North American cohorts, such as the 4-H study (Alberts et al. 2006; Hershberg et al. 2014) and other studies of youth well-being (King et al. 2005; Nott and Vuchinich 2016).

Fig. 1 Analytical flow chart illustrating the iterative process

Data Analysis Strategy

The fathers’ descriptions of youth well-being ranged predominantly from a list of words to several sentences. In three cases (i.e., 1.49%) one word accounts were reported (e.g., “happy”), yet these were not negated if they together with other words or sentences throughout the dataset formed a meaningful pattern. The fathers’ reports were examined based on the Braun and Clarke (2006, 2016) framework of thematic analysis, an interpretative and a meaning-making method. Thematic analysis is a rigorous and systematic approach suitable to analyze qualitative information and a useful method to summarize key characteristics across a large qualitative dataset (Braun and Clarke 2016). To address the study research question a contextual perspective on thematic analysis was employed, where people’s experiences and views are considered to be embedded in and mediated by socio-cultural contexts and meanings (Terry et al. 2017). Furthermore, the thematic analysis was conducted using primarily an inductive approach, that is, coding of data and the identification of themes was a data-driven process, but also employing a deductive approach where identified codes were compared with theoretical definitions of the Five Cs (Lerner et al. 2010), akin to an earlier study (Hershberg et al. 2014).

Two coders, the first and the third author, analyzed the data independently and collaboratively using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2016) guidelines on the thematic analysis process, an iterative process that is summarized in Fig. 1. First, the responses of the fathers were read several times, and then gradually pieces of raw data were extracted and coded in a semantic fashion (i.e., descriptive codes that were explicit in their meaning) while considering their specific sentence contexts. The qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 (QSR International 2018) was used to code the data, and throughout the process memos were taken while also documenting reflections and questions (e.g., it was early on noted that certain words were mentioned frequently by the fathers, such as “happy”, “responsible”, and “confident”, of which some reflected the Five Cs). The codes were subsequently clustered according to their qualitative similarities and differences (e.g., codes that were in agreement with definitions of each of the Five Cs were clustered together). Then, from the clustered codes preliminary themes were identified that reflected patterned and meaningful responses to the research question. It was therefore possible that more than one theme could be identified from individual responses.

Initially seven preliminary themes were identified (i.e., “communication”, “curious and conscientious”, “deep determination”, “Five Cs”, “independent thinker and actor”, “optimistic”, and “physical and psychological prosperity”). Consequently, these preliminary themes were reviewed and adjusted based on their coherence with underlying codes and the dataset as a whole. For example, the codes “independent”, and “takes responsibility” were initially grouped together with other similar codes as the preliminary theme “independent thinker and actor”, while the codes “motivation”, and “willpower” were clustered together with other similar codes as the preliminary theme “deep determination”. Thereafter, after having compared these preliminary themes and their underlying codes with each other and the entire dataset it was decided that they belonged together and formed a higher-order theme named “conscientious agency”, with “determination”, “independence” and “responsibility” as its sub-components. Furthermore, each of the components of the preliminary theme “Five Cs” were re-grouped with other components based on the identification of qualitative similarities and differences across the entire dataset (e.g., “caring”, “character”, “connection”, and “social competence” from the Five Cs were clustered together with “communication” and identified as the theme “socio-emotional competence”). By this stage five preliminary themes were identified (i.e., “conscientious agency”, “harmonious happiness”, “mental and physical robustness”, “open intelligence”, and “socio-emotional competence”). Finally, the themes were further refined, re-labelled, and operationally defined with reference to the positive indicators framework of Lippman et al. (2011). All underlying codes and theme sub-components grouped according to their qualitative similarities and differences in terms of academic/cognitive, emotional/psychological, physical and social dimensions of well-being. More specifically, “open intelligence” and “socio-emotional competence” were renamed as “cognitive well-being” and “social well-being” respectively. Furthermore, “conscientious agency”, “harmonious happiness” and “mental and physical robustness” were merged into “emotional and psychological well-being”, with the exception of one characteristic (i.e., “healthy”) that represented “physical well-being. By doing so, four final superordinate themes of youth well-being were identified.

Table 2 Themes of youth well-being according to a sample of Swedish fathers

Themes	Definitions
1. Cognitive well-being	
Cognitive competence	A range of mental abilities (e.g., concentration, decision-making, planning, an engagement in school responsibilities and tasks)
Consciousness	General intelligence and an awareness of self or the surrounding world
Curiosity	An openness to explore and learn from experiences and other people
2. Emotional and psychological well-being	
Confidence	A positive self-image and sense of capacity
Determination	An eagerness, motivation, and willpower to act or to advance in life
Harmony	A sense of calmness and inner peace
Independence	Qualities that signify agency and autonomy
Joy	Feelings of contentment and delight
Responsibility	General accountability and reliability
Optimism	A positive and hopeful attitude
3. Physical well-being	
Healthy	A general sense of good health and undertaking health promoting activities (e.g., diet, exercise, sleep)
4. Social well-being	
Caring	A sense of empathy and compassion for other people or the world at large
Character	Moral characteristics, such as humility, integrity, and trustworthiness
Communication	A range of conversation abilities and behaviors including consultation, dialogue, language, and honest and open disclosure
Connection	Constructive relationships and mutually supportive relationships with people
Social competence	General interpersonal abilities

Results

The over-arching pattern identified from the fathers' accounts was that youth well-being involved a wide range of characteristics that reflected academic, cognitive, emotional, psychological, physical, and social dimensions of youth. In total 16 characteristics were identified, and these were either described by the fathers as relational, situated in multiple contexts that stretched from proximal (e.g., family, peers, school, leisure) to distal settings (e.g., the surrounding world), or general and not context specific. In light of the positive indicators framework of Lippman et al. (2011) and as illustrated by Table 2, these characteristics were grouped into four main themes: cognitive well-being, emotional and psychological well-being, physical well-being, and social well-being. These four themes are respectively presented in more detail below with illustrative quotations² from selected fathers with pseudonyms.

² The quotations are full responses, translated from Swedish into English without corrections, except for four instances where "&" has been replaced with "and". The significant codes of each theme are italicized to guide the reader.

Cognitive Well-Being

Cognitive well-being represents a diversity of mental abilities and interests that are either context specific (e.g., successful school performance) or general (e.g., an awareness about or openness to the world) and comprises specifically of cognitive competences (e.g., academic skills, concentration and decision-making abilities), consciousness, and a curious disposition. Cognitive well-being, which was identified in about every third response (35.82%), refers to more than rational qualities per se as also an openness to explore and learn from various experiences and people. This description from Allan values cognitive competence manifested as school knowledge and grades, equivalent to academic competence of the Five Cs, as an important characteristic of youth well-being:

Allan: “*School knowledge = grades, social knowledge, can adapt to different social situations.*”

Furthermore, these statements from Leif and Hugo demonstrate the centrality of curiosity and an openness to learn:

Leif: “*Curious, interested. Readily tries different things.*”

Hugo: “*You see it by how happy and confident he is. He is open, alert and interested in the surrounding world.*”

Lastly, these statements from Jan, Kjell, and Tage specify in addition to curiosity and an awareness about the world that specific cognitive skill, namely planning, problem-solving, and talking about complex matters, which similar to cognitive competence of the Five Cs, are relevant for youth well-being:

Jan: “*Physical wellness (rosiness, good mobility, good growth, not overweight); interested and motivated, a gradually increasing awareness of the surrounding world on a larger and larger scale; optimism, thoughtfulness and empathy, increased problem solving ability, increased communication skills (speech, gestures and writing).*”

Kjell: “*You can talk about more complex questions and things that happen in the world.*”

Tage: “*Positive, forward, proactive, planning, diligent, goal oriented, confident, social, wants to learn new things, humble, popular, honest, conscious.*”

Cognitive well-being thus includes a blend of attitudes and actions that are either general or definite, applicable in multiple or specific contexts (e.g., successful engagement in school tasks), and a readiness to explore things. In other words, cognitive well-being is a combination of a particular way of being and doing that characterizes youth well-being.

Emotional and Psychological Well-Being

Emotional and psychological well-being was identified in over three quarters of the fathers’ reports (76.72%), making it the most commonly mentioned theme in the entire dataset. Emotional and psychological well-being embraces a variety of characteristics, such as psychological robustness (i.e., confidence), a happy and positive state of mind (i.e., harmony, joy, optimism), and capacities of agency (i.e., determination, independence, and responsibility). Psychological robustness was in the fathers’ reports described in terms of confidence, one of the Five Cs of PYD that refers to a positive self-regard and sense of being

competent. These accounts from Ernst and Markus highlight confidence as a central component of youth well-being:

Ernst: “The teenage years are a period of adjustment on many levels. If one despite this is *confident* and happy, then things may go well in all areas of life.”

Markus: “Important that he is *confident and satisfied with himself* and *dares to be as he is* and *to stand for it*.”

Emotional and psychological well-being also refers to a range of general positive mental states and expressions that are comprehensive and not context specific, namely harmony, joy, optimism. These brief passages from Jesper and Peter highlight the mental states of harmony and happiness of youth well-being in a general sense:

Jesper: “*Content and happy/life is fun*.”

Peter: “*Harmonious and happy*.”

Moreover, the following brief descriptions of Harry, Kurt, and Thomas include in addition to harmony and happiness also optimism as an important attitude of manifesting youth well-being:

Harry: “*Happy, content. Positive*.”

Kurt: “*Energetic, happy, positive, harmonious*.”

Thomas: “*A happy and harmonious teenager with a positive view of life!*”

As illustrated by the above quotations, the question of how fathers in this study perceive youth who are doing well in life is closely intertwined with their inner conditions, where youth not only appear to be happy, but that they are generally happy. Furthermore, emotional and psychological well-being was described in terms of three specific capacities of agency, namely determination, independence, and responsibility. In other words, these self-regulatory characteristics refer to an eagerness to act and advance in life, accountability, autonomy, and resourceful activity, and these were described by the fathers in either general terms or in relation to specific domains (e.g., school or sports). This account from Sven demonstrates how emotional and psychological well-being in youth is manifested as being independent and being able to act responsibly in the general sense:

Sven: “*Heading towards independence. Enabled to take more responsibility*.”

Furthermore, Bengt and Mikael depicted emotional and psychological aspects of youth well-being as being committed within school or out-of-school contexts and being eager to advance in life:

Bengt: “*They have someone to talk to, show commitment in school and during spare time. Curious about new things, not ‘just satisfied’. Wants to ‘seize’ every day and see where it leads*.”

Mikael: “*Takes responsibility* for his homework on his own. Wants to get a good result on the tests and *looks forward, to what he wants to do when he grows up*.”

Finally, Karl and Nils described emotional and psychological well-being of youth as a matter of motivation and passion for the activities one is undertaking within specific contexts, such as school or sports:

Karl: “*Accountable, works well in social contexts. Has a good relationship with adults (including parents). An inner driving force within a field (school, sport, etc.). Has empathy towards living creatures*.”

Nils: “*When one is passionate about what one is doing. Irrespective of whether it is school work or sports. When one does it with desire and energy.*”

Collectively, these excerpts illustrate the theme of emotional and psychological well-being and how they place a focus on the actions of the youth and the positive attitudes or feelings that are connected with such actions. In other words, youth who develop positively are portrayed as leaders of their own development, rather than as passive beneficiaries. Furthermore, their sense of agency can manifest itself generally or explicitly within a certain context, rather than in isolation.

Physical Well-Being

Physical well-being, identified in close to every seventh account (14.93%), is represented by the characteristic healthy. Healthy refers to the physical and also the general aspects of youth well-being. These physical and general qualities of well-being included a range of indicators, for example, the general condition of the youth, but also specifically health promoting habits in terms of diet, exercise, and sleep. These accounts from Lars and Christer highlight that youth who do well look after themselves physically by eating and sleeping well:

Lars: “Harmonic, confident, positive, *eats well, sleeps well*, contactable, curious, interested.”

Christer: “Open and happy about success. *Eats and sleeps well*, has friends, has interests.”

Moreover, these reports by Robert, Hans, and Olof also suggest that youth that are physically active, either generally or specifically (e.g., sports and outdoor activities) are doing well:

Robert: “Glad, positive, eats well, good friends, sleeps well, *outdoor activities (healthy ones)*. Socially competent.”

Hans: “Curious, positive, outgoing, *physically active*.”

Olof: “The child is confident, harmonious. Has friends and is social. *Has hobbies such as sports* or music. Happy and positive. *Good health*.”

Hence, physical well-being represents youth well-being as a combined state of being and doing. More specifically, implicit states and explicit expressions of well-being in the form of being physically active and generally healthy are important.

Social Well-Being

Social well-being refers to both attitudes and actions among a wide range of prosocial and social skills, as well as positive social relations. Social well-being, stated in more than half of the descriptions (60.70%), includes the characteristics caring, character, communication, connection, and social competence. Caring involves a sense of empathy and compassion for other people or the world at large, whereas character encompasses prosocial qualities such as humility, integrity, and trustworthiness. Communication incorporates various conversation abilities and behaviors, such as consultation, dialogue, language, and honest and open disclosure. Connection refers to constructive bonds with a variety of specific groups of people (e.g., friends, members of the family, the extended family, friends of the family,

parents), but also generally persons of different ethnic backgrounds or age groups. Social competence on the other hand refers to more general interpersonal abilities. All of these characteristics, with the exception of communication explicitly, are part of the Five Cs. The following accounts from Alf and Hassan address the importance of being connected with other people, such as parents and peers, for youth well-being:

Alf: “Confident and independent with *many friends* and *good relationship with parents*.”

Hassan: “I think people, especially teenagers, need *a social life, make friends* to enjoy life, school, and later also work life.”

Also, these accounts from Anders, Ove, and Rune highlight communication skills and activities, as well as being a person that demonstrate empathetic and virtuous characteristics:

Anders: “*Engages in a dialogue. Is trustworthy. Seizes opportunities. Curious, confident, and humble.*”

Ove: “A person who *can communicate both linguistically and socially*, who develops *sensitivity to others* but can also stand up for own opinions.”

Rune: “*Honest, open about feelings. Brings up problem with their parents.*”

Finally, this statement from Patrik underscores how social competence, unrestricted by other people’s age or ethnicity, is key for youth well-being:

Patrik: “Peaceful in everyday life and new situations. *Socially competent to meet both younger, same-aged and older people with different ethnic backgrounds*. Acquires new knowledge with great interest. Wants to be good at what one undertakes.”

These accounts demonstrate that social well-being embraces a range of characteristics that are action-oriented and attitude-oriented, and cover an array of social spheres, including friends, parents, and generally persons of diverse age and ethnic backgrounds.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how a sample of Swedish fathers perceive youth well-being. Study results concerned four main themes that were identified as cognitive well-being, emotional and psychological well-being, physical well-being, and social well-being. Each of the themes contained a set of specific characteristics illustrating distinct domains of youth well-being, such as academic, cognitive, emotional, psychological, physical, social competences and conditions. Furthermore, these characteristics were described both in general and specific terms and were situated in multiple contexts ranging from proximal, personal settings to more distal and even global settings. Together, these results illustrate the complex nature of youth well-being as perceived by Swedish fathers.

In the research literature, the perspectives of parents are often merged, which can mask the unique views and voices of mothers and fathers, and fathers’ perspectives on youth well-being tend to be underrepresented relative to mothers (e.g., Alberts et al. 2006; King et al. 2005). Thus, it is clear that studies designed to focus on the perspectives of fathers are needed in order to advance what is known about youth well-being. This in turn can from an ecological father–child framework (Cabrera et al. 2014) serve as a springboard to explore the links between fathers’ perceptions, the father–youth relationship, and the well-being of

youth. Furthermore, this study offers a first glimpse in a relatively open-ended and inductive manner of the relevance of the Five Cs model and how it may not completely cover youth well-being in Sweden.

Findings Related to Earlier Qualitative Research on Youth Well-Being

Some characteristics of the four themes identified in the present study resemble those identified in prior qualitative studies and are consistent with what is posited in the Five Cs model; however, new components were also found. For instance, the theme cognitive well-being included characteristics that were comparable with academic competence (Hershberg et al. 2014) and being bright/smart (Alberts et al. 2006). Yet, cognitive well-being differed by representing more than intellectual competencies. It incorporated dispositions of curiosity and an openness towards the surrounding world. Moreover, the theme emotional and psychological well-being encompassed diverse characteristics, such as psychological robustness (i.e., confidence), a happy and positive state of mind (i.e., harmony, joy, optimism), and capacities for agency (i.e., determination, independence, and responsibility). Some of these were identified in earlier research. For example, capacities for agency resemble characteristics such as commitment and goal-directed/purpose (King et al. 2005). However, emotional and psychological well-being was more extensive as it also included independent and responsible actions. Likewise, psychological robustness and a happy and positive state of mind as part of emotional and psychological well-being contained characteristics similar to confidence and positive emotions (King et al. 2005), as well as happiness (Alberts et al. 2006; Hershberg et al. 2014; Nott and Vuchinich 2016). However, emotional and psychological well-being was based on the fathers' reports broader than just positive emotions, and included also calmness, contentment, and optimism. The theme physical well-being supports earlier research on the relevance of physical health for youth well-being (King et al. 2005) and included characteristics similar to engagement in athletics (Hershberg et al. 2014). Once again, in the present study physical well-being was more comprehensive in that it also reflected an integration of both a general sense of good health and undertaking a variety of health promoting activities (e.g., diet, exercise, sleep). Finally, in line with previous research findings the theme social well-being covered components, such as caring (Alberts et al. 2006), character (Alberts et al. 2006; Hershberg et al. 2014), connection (Hershberg et al. 2014; King et al. 2005), communication skills and (social) competence (King et al. 2005). The present study findings illustrate the importance to further investigate the major components of youth well-being and to explore the nuances of how components varies and are contextually embedded across the globe.

It is important to note that most of the core characteristics of the Five Cs model were identified in the accounts of fathers in this study, that is caring, character, competence (academic, cognitive, and social), confidence, and connection. However, vocational competence was not identified in the dataset. Also contribution, defined as a desire and an engagement to promote one's context (Jelicic et al. 2007; Lerner et al. 2005), was not explicitly mentioned by the fathers in this study and this is in contrast to findings from earlier qualitative studies (Alberts et al. 2006; Hershberg et al. 2014). Overall, these findings suggest that the Five Cs model is relevant to a Swedish context; however that it lacks certain elements from the perspectives of the fathers in this study. For example, the fathers reported elements of physical well-being as well as aspects of emotional and psychological well-being pertaining to positive emotions and subjective well-being in terms of joy, harmony, and optimism, which are not at the moment considered by the Five Cs model.

The present study findings that point to the importance that fathers placed on the positive emotions of youth is consistent for example with views within positive psychology that focus on subjective well-being and life satisfaction. Subjective well-being is viewed as a characteristic of people and that individuals will vary on this disposition and certain situations can encourage this aspect of individuals to be expressed and experienced more frequently and with greater intensity (Diener 1984; Tolan et al. 2016). Theories on subjective well-being within positive psychology is not necessarily at odds with the Five Cs view of PYD on some points, for example both perspectives focus on understanding better than average functioning and adaption. However, subjective well-being and life satisfaction take up a much more prominent role and research focus in positive psychology relative to a perspective such as the Five Cs model, and in this case provides an important theoretical addition to the Five Cs in light of the present study results. These results point to the need for theoretical integration and wide considerations of positive development theories as research continues to shed new light on the well-being of youth (Tolan et al. 2016).

Although the field is growing and theoretical knowledge is key to its advancement, many of the prominent frameworks of youth well-being and the research literature that these are based on have been conducted in North America. Thus, much more empirical work is necessary from diverse vantage points (e.g., ideographic and nomothetic) and from diverse parts of the world in order to further develop these models. Also, the perspectives of fathers and their contexts are important to include in the further study and theorization of youth well-being. By contextualizing fathers' perceptions of youth well-being in the present study it is not suggested that Swedish fathers are completely unique. Rather, fathers in various countries are increasingly more involved in caring for their children as enabled by social policies (Haas and Hwang 2013). These wider trends in fatherhood in some nations, might add to the complexity of and changes in how youth well-being is understood and described in different parts of the world.

Context May be Embedded in the Findings

In order to understand the four themes of youth well-being identified from the father reports in this study, it is necessary to consider the participants' socio-cultural contexts, with reference to contextual perspectives, such as critical realism (Willig 1999), the developmental systems model of parenting (Lerner et al. 2002), and the father–child ecological framework (Cabrera et al. 2014). It is possible that these themes reflect the normative expectations of youth by this sample of Swedish fathers and other actors from a similar social demography in Sweden. As noted earlier, the fathers in this study were predominately highly educated, employed, Swedish-born and cohabiting persons.

Aspects of the theme cognitive well-being that concern awareness of or an interest in the surrounding world might reflect both the context and historical period of how fathers in this study view youth. Swedish youth connect to the surrounding world through various media technologies. Reports indicate that most of the Swedish youth between 12 and 15 years are active internet users on a daily basis (70%), and a majority of this age group follow the news at least once per week (80%; Statistics Sweden 2017b). Furthermore, beyond an awareness of the surrounding world, cognitive well-being also incorporated curiosity and openness to learn from experience and people. Therefore, an attitude of learning was important for youth well-being according to the fathers in this study. Perhaps this reflects perceptions of a way for youth to remain competitive in the Swedish school market (Björklund et al. 2006) and in times when youth are faced with transitional uncertainties

towards adulthood to enter higher education and the labor market in Sweden and further in a world undergoing globalization (Bygren et al. 2005).

Emotional and psychological well-being included various capacities for agency. These agentic capacities portrayed youth as taking an active role in their own development often in the context of school or sports and this might to some extent reflect ideals that are highly valued in Sweden, such as personal autonomy (Trost 2012). A current state policy (Swedish Government 2013) concerning all youth between 13 and 25 years recommends that they should be empowered to shape their own lives through free choice and accountability, and to have opportunities to influence the development of society by involving youth and valuing their perspectives in civic and political life. Some research also suggests that in Sweden independence is an important goal for rearing children (Daun 1996; Trost et al. 2007) and a quality that is more valued among highly educated fathers than less educated fathers (Bernhardt et al. 2002). This along with political and scientific discourses in Sweden that have challenged authoritarian education and parenting (Nelson and Sandin 2013), these study findings may also illustrate present-day priorities that permeate the normative perceptions and understanding of youth well-being in some segments of Swedish society. Furthermore, emotional and psychological well-being also covered a happy and harmonious state of mind. This might partially echo norms about calmness noted in Sweden (Daun 1996), but perhaps also that these perceptions of youth well-being are to some extent based on the pervasiveness of psychosocial programs for children and youth in Sweden, targeting among other things self-control and self-regulation of aggressive or antisocial behavior (Dahlstedt et al. 2011; Swedish National Board of Health 2009).

Moreover, although recent figures indicate that overall physical activity is declining and sedentary behavior is increasing among youth in Sweden (Nyström et al. 2016), the theme physical well-being might reveal a combination of normative expectations on youth to be active and healthy. Reports indicate that youth are relatively more physically active in sport associations and clubs if they live with both of their primary care-takers (68%), belong to families with higher education (72%), or have a Swedish background (67%) compared to youth who live with single parents (51%), belong to households with only secondary education (55%), and have a foreign background (53%; Statistics Sweden 2017b). This may be due to child-rearing strategies observed among families of middle or upper socioeconomic status intended to develop and evaluate children's talents through organized extra-curricular activities, which Lareau (2011) has termed concerted cultivation.

Finally, the theme social well-being is interpreted with consideration to family characteristics in Sweden. Research indicates that parents in Sweden are often perceived by their youth as having a democratic style to negotiate family decisions (Ferrer-Wreder et al. 2012). This is also supported by statistics where a great majority of youth between 12 and 15 years report that they are involved in the decisions that concerns them (94%; Statistics Sweden 2017a). More recent research also indicates that Swedish youth report that their parents most commonly demonstrate average or high levels of communication and relatively moderate levels of control and warmth (Trost et al. 2015). It could be that social competences is not only encouraged or expected, but also is a common practice for Swedish youth.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study

The present study has several strengths. It is the first study to document perceptions of youth well-being that includes elements of the Five Cs model in Sweden. The sample is

relatively large for a qualitative study. The unique perspective and voice of fathers is highlighted in this study, the data analysis approach was rigorous, and novel results are added to the wider field of youth well-being.

Despite these strengths, there are also three important limitations. Firstly, the participants in this study represent a specific socioeconomic segment of Swedish fathers, hence the results are not nationally representative and cannot be generalized to the wider population of Swedish fathers. Future studies would benefit from including a more diverse group of Swedish fathers. Further, it is important to note that other studies with fathers in diverse parts of the world would be needed to have better insight into how these study results may be relevant or depart from fathers living in different parts of the world, where fatherhood is conceptualized and supported socially in different ways relative to a Swedish context. Secondly, although the measurement used in this study were specific open-ended survey questions adapted from the 4-H study of PYD (Lerner et al. 2005), it is not exhaustive nor do the questions used offer a guarantee to represent entirely the perceptions of fathers on youth well-being, rather only one of many possible approximations at one point in time. Furthermore, although a variety of characteristics of youth were identified in the study results, the study did not directly explore the relational processes between youth and their contexts that promote youth well-being. Future research would benefit from exploring these matters from other approaches or even a multi-method approach, combining for example surveys over time and in-depth interviews. Thirdly, while the present study is first of its kind to explore fathers' perspectives of youth well-being in Sweden, highlighting both similarities with earlier studies conducted with American cohorts and finding new aspects, it nevertheless is only a first exploration. Deeper insights could be gained by conducting more research and even to include other international cohorts for a more diversified understanding of youth well-being.

Future Directions

The findings of this study both confirm past findings and shed new light on the complexity of what youth well-being means from the perspectives of a sample of fathers living in Sweden. The characteristics identified in this study could potentially pave the way for future research to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to compare the characteristics of youth well-being as perceived by both fathers and mothers of youth. Furthermore, future research could also within a developmental systems framework of parenting (Lerner et al. 2002) examine links between these parental perceptions of youth well-being with parenting practices and the health of youths. This could then potentially increase our understanding of some of the relations that stimulate the advancement and well-being of youth within dynamic parent–youth family systems.

Well-evaluated interventions designed to enhance youth well-being have primarily been universal school-based interventions implemented by teachers that are designed to promote social and emotional competences (Taylor et al. 2017) and voluntary afterschool youth development programs, such as mentoring or community service (Ciocanel et al. 2017). Interventions designed to partner with parents to support youth well-being have largely been within the realm of prevention science. These study results point to the untapped potential of parents and by extension other caring adults (e.g., teachers) to be allies in intervention efforts to promote youth well-being and to reach a consensus on what valued intervention outcomes should consist of from a caring adult standpoint. Much more research is needed to fully conceptualize what youth well-being intervention outcomes should be in a

specific context based on the multiple perspectives of teachers, youth themselves, and additional parents including mothers and fathers, and preferably over several time points. Such insights might perhaps better inform the efforts of program developers and decision-makers to provide youths and caring adults with the resources and training needed to promote the health and well-being of youth and as such build stronger communities.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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