Satisfaction with the Neighborhood of Israeli and Chilean Children and its Effects on their Subjective Well-being

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Abstract

A study of subjective well-being in 4,942 children (49% girls) aged 10 and 12 living in Israel and Chile is presented. The association between perceptions of the neighborhood and subjective well-being (SWB) was analyzed based on a mediation model using satisfaction with the neighborhood as a mediating variable. The overall results showed high average SWB scores for both countries as well as high levels of satisfaction with the neighborhoods where they live. Differences between the countries were observed for the age groups. The SWB of Chilean children decreased with age, while a decrease was not detected for the Israeli children. The mediation model had excellent fit for the age groups and countries, and the satisfaction with the neighborhood variable presents a partial mediation effect between neighborhood variables and SWB. Satisfaction with the neighborhood displayed a greater effect on the SWB of the older children than the younger ones. Gender showed significant effects on SWB only in Chile. The results are discussed, analyzing the similarities and differences between both countries and providing new evidence for the study of SWB at the international level. Questions for a more specific analysis of SWB within each country are suggested.

Keywords Subjective well-being · Neighborhood · Israeli children · Chilean children

1 Introduction

For more than a decade, children's subjective well-being (SWB) has been studied in different countries in an effort to contribute more evidence-based knowledge to better understand the factors and conditions that relate to it. Much has been written about their shortcomings and problems, but we still know little about what helps

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them have greater SWB in different socio-cultural contexts (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014). Contexts are known to affect children's well-being. For example, collected evidence points out the importance of neighborhoods to their well-being. However, few studies compare the SWB of children living in such distinct historical, religious, geographical and political contexts as is the case of Chile and Israel. It is interesting to analyze possible similarities and differences in the well-being of Israeli and Chilean children, how satisfied they are with their immediate environments such as the neighborhoods where they live and how their relationships with the neighborhoods are associated with their SWB. It is also interesting to figure out whether children's gender or age influence this relationship.

This introduction lays out a conceptual framework from which the concepts of SWB, neighborhood, and their connections are understood using scientific evidence for this end. The objectives that guide this study are also presented.

1.1 Children's Subjective Well-Being: Findings at the International Level

According to Diener (2000), SWB is a complex structure influenced by many elements such as cultural and personal factors. An individual's personality or temperament and social belonging can influence their SWB, which contains emotional and cognitive components. Those components refer to both positive and negative experiences and one's evaluation of overall life satisfaction.

Diener (1994) also suggested that SWB refers to a person's experiences, including the evaluation of life as a whole along with positive aspects rather than merely the absence of negative ones. Ben-Arieh et al. (2014) defined SWB as a desirable state of feeling happy, healthy and thriving. Its study is concerned with how people positively perceive and evaluate their own lives through both cognitive determinations and affective reactions. Therefore, SWB includes a cognitive component, that of life satisfaction, and two affective components, one positive and one negative (Diener, 2009).

The research on children's SWB has expanded over the last decade, but it is still a new and evolving area of study. As of today, there is no consensus yet on the most relevant areas and scales regarding children's SWB (Casas, 2019). Goswami (2012) suggests that the quality of children's social relationships is associated with their SWB. According to him, stronger social relationships are linked to higher levels of individual happiness. Positive and negative social interactions can affect SWB differently. Rees et al. (2010) endeavored to develop an SWB index in England. For this goal, they commissioned a survey of a representative sample of 2,000 young people aged 8 to 15. The results showed that they felt happiest in their relationship with friends and family. Hence, exploring children's SWB can help us understand and predict their psychological and physical development and functioning (Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2016). According to Lee and Yoo (2015), family is one of the most important factors that shape and predict one's SWB. Positive family experiences are a stronger predictor than peer experiences. In addition, the school environment also influences children's SWB.

Pleasant relationships with peers have a positive effect on SWB. A negative effect on children's SWB was found in connection with unsafe environments or negative life events (Lee & Yoo, 2015).

Regarding sociodemographic variables and their effects on children's SWB, the results of the studies available to date have not been conclusive (Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2016). In general, demographic variables have not shown a consistent connection to children's SWB. Age and gender were found to be associated with some domains of children's SWB (Rees et al., 2010). However, gender differences did not display a consistent connection with overall SWB (Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2016). According to Rees et al. (2010), girls were less happy than boys with their appearance and with how they spent their time. On the other hand, girls were significantly happier than boys with their experiences in school. In another study conducted with Spanish adolescents, no gender differences were observed with respect to overall satisfaction with life, but differences were found according to domains of satisfaction (González-Carrasco et al., 2017). A meta-analysis that considered empirical studies conducted between 1980 and 2017 to examine gender differences in boys' overall life satisfaction found that it remained unaffected by gender with a slight difference in favor of adolescent boys, but that there were moderating variables that could explain the differences found in different investigations. The analysis showed that the geographic region of the study, the specific areas of well-being looked at, the type of students and age constituted moderating characteristics of the gender differences reported in the studies (Chen et al., 2020).

There has been agreement regarding age between the various investigations, observing a decreasing trend of subjective well-being as age increases towards adolescence in most of the countries studied (Casas & González-Carrasco, 2019; Goldbeck et al., 2007; Tiliouine et al., 2019; Tomyn & Cummins, 2011). However, the results of studies have also shown differences depending on the psychometric scales used and the countries included, so this research area is still under development and further work is required (Casas & González-Carrasco, 2019).

One effort that has made important contributions to the systematic study and analysis of the circumstances of children has been the Children's Worlds survey, one of its objectives being to investigate the SWB of children. Its main focus is the subjective experience of children, covering a wide range of topics in a diverse set of countries. The survey focuses on an age range that spans the transition between late childhood and early adolescence, with age groups of 8, 10 and 12 years. The first and second waves of the study covered 14 and 18 countries respectively. The third wave nearly doubled the scope of the survey, obtaining data from approximately 127,000 children. It covered 35 countries and territories, including Israel and Chile (Rees, 2021; Rees et al., 2020). This latest wave was launched in 2016, and data collection continued until the end of 2019. The ultimate goal of the project is to improve children's SWB by raising awareness among them, their parents and communities, opinion leaders, policy makers, professionals and the general public. The survey contemplates various scales of SWB, integrating cognitive and affective components and considers various domains of satisfaction, one of which is the neighborhood (Bruck & Ben-Arieh, 2020).

1.2 The Neighborhood and its Relationship with Subjective Well-Being in Children

Conceptual and empirical studies on childhood and adolescence have clearly underscored the importance of context in understanding the psychosocial development and well-being of children and adolescents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Coulton & Spilsbury, 2014).

Research on children's SWB has found that family, school and neighborhood are very influencing life domains (Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Goswami, 2012; Lee & Yoo, 2015; Oberle et al., 2011). Although the family's influence has been pointed out as the one with major effects on children's happiness, recent studies have shown that the neighborhood and its characteristics also affect their life satisfaction (Ben-Arieh & Shimoni, 2014; Lee & Yoo, 2015; Tonon et al., 2021; Tonon & Mikkelsen, 2021). Unsafe contexts have a negative impact on well-being, while neighborhoods with child-friendly facilities are part of a happy childhood (Rees et al., 2020).

The relationship between SWB and neighborhood has been studied with the help of qualitative methodologies. Tonon et al (2021), asked three groups of children living in Buenos Aires, Argentina, aged 9–12, regarding their sense of security. The study shows the importance of contexts to children's lives, and specifically to the topic of security in children's lives, with a demonstration of the street as a place where children might feel fear. The results highlight the connection between children's sense of security in public places to their SWB. The connection between SWB and neighborhood has been also studied from a quantitive perspective. Rees et al (2017), explore and expand the knowledge regarding the differences in the lives and well-being of children aged 8–12. The research used the Children's Worlds second wave data and compared four countries: Argentina, Romania, South Africa and Korea. The research indicates differences in the quality of life of children living in different contexts (urban–rural). The research emphasizes the need to be cautious with applying findings regarding urban–rural differences.

There are several denominations associated with neighborhood. Neighborhood usually refer to urban areas, although they may also include villages or villages in rural sectors. These areas are not simply geographical territories, but units of social organization that have a meaning as places to live, work and perform daily life. According to Coulton and Spilsbury (2014) neighborhoods have an identity in the minds of insiders and outsiders. These neighborhoods are more than the sum of individuals. They also include spaces, physical structures, social networks, formal and informal organizations, enterprises, exchange and governance systems, etc. and are spatially located in relation to other places. For children and teens, the neighborhood can be a particularly important context, considering the fact that aside from their homes and schools, the local neighborhood is a space they are likely to spend more time in. Even though adolescents gradually advance toward autonomy, the lives of children and adolescents are more spatially circumscribed than adults (Allison et al., 1999). Neighborhoods, local areas and communities are the most immediate contexts in which families and children live every day.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the study of the relationship between the neighborhood and the SWB of children (Abreu et al., 2016; Rees,

2017). A study done in New Zealand with more than 9,000 students who were geo-referenced according to the neighborhoods where they lived showed interesting relationships (Aminzadeh et al., 2013). The results indicated that the broader context in which adolescents live, particularly the psychosocial characteristics of their neighborhood, are significantly associated with their self-reported well-being. Neighborhoods with a greater general perception of mutual trust, reciprocity, sense of community and security, or with increased youth participation in community organizations were associated with higher levels of adolescent well-being. These results were maintained regardless of the youths' ethnicity, age, sex or socioeconomic status. Another study (Oberle et al., 2011) developed in Canada with a stratified random sampling of 1,402 students between the fourth and seventh years of schooling analyzed the perceived neighborhood support and its relationship to overall satisfaction with life. The results showed that the neighborhood support perceived by adolescents was significantly and positively associated with overall life satisfaction. The authors conclude that these findings support the importance of neighborhood and community in the life satisfaction of children and adolescents. Goswami (2012) analyzed the responses of more than 4,000 adolescents in England, including items on associations with the neighborhood. They were asked whether adults in the neighborhood listened to their opinions and treated them fairly. The relationship with adults in the neighborhood was found to have a significant association with the children's well-being. Along the same lines, a study by Moore (2003) suggested that the presence of strong community integration between adults and children promotes the SWB of children. Another study conducted in Taiwan with a nationally representative sample of adolescents concluded that relationships between neighbors influence their well-being and that neighborhood characteristics can contribute to social interactions that directly affect the well-being of adolescents. The results of the study supported the hypothesis that the mechanisms of collective neighborhood effectiveness positively influenced the subjective well-being of adolescents in Taiwan. Considering the particular characteristics of the Chinese culture to which these adolescents belong, the authors suggest caution in generalizations of this hypothesis to other contexts (Wang & Fowler, 2019). Other studies have also shown the importance of the neighborhood and community context in the well-being of children and adolescents (Coulton & Spilsbury, 2014; González-Carrasco et al., 2019; Kühner et al., 2021; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Oyarzún, et al., 2019; Paxton et al., 2006).

Interest in the influence of context on adolescent well-being led a group of researchers to examine the effects of neighborhood on the experience of adolescent life stress. Results from a sample of 114 adolescents with an average age of 15 indicated that life stress among adolescents varied depending on the neighborhood in which they resided. In addition, they found that family and community stress was linearly related to the economic resource indices of the neighborhood (Allison et al., 1999).

The use of psychometric instruments that were validated in and comparable between different countries has facilitated the development of international research that has enabled the study of children's SWB within and between countries (Casas & Rees, 2015; Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2016). Comparative studies between countries

have shown the importance of the type of instruments used in the evaluation, so that the results obtained can be cross-culturally comparable. According to the evidence so far, life satisfaction, as a cognitive component of subjective well-being and evaluated through a context-free scale, has been the most used and recommended in comparative studies (Casas & González-Carrasco, 2021).

Research conducted by Newland et al. (2019) through a multilevel analysis of 14 countries that included Chile and Israel concluded that contextual variables are important predictors of children's life satisfaction. Relationships with neighbors, even when they yielded weaker predictive indicators than other variables, turned out to be significant for the children's life satisfaction. In line with the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979), these authors maintain conceptual consistency with the obtained results in that the strongest predictors of well-being in children would be their personal characteristics and the most proximal areas of relationships.

Research by Lee and Yoo (2015) using data from the International Survey on Child Well-being pilot study showed that family, school, and community life significantly affect children's levels of SWB. The sample included 12,077 children from 11 countries, and the analysis was carried out with multiple and multilevel regression methods. Their results concluded that the children's relationships with the immediately surrounding environments, including the neighborhood, were consistently related to the levels of SWB of children in different countries. Furthermore, they concluded that macroeconomic variables such as a country's GDP did not prove to be significant factors for predicting children's SWB. These outcomes were consistent with the research of Klocke et al. (2014) whose results showed that economic growth and youth unemployment levels as a macroeconomic variable did not explain the variation in the subjective well-being of children between countries; rather, variables of levels that were more proximal or near to the children did so. They found that children's family, school, and community life are important predictors of SWB, even after controlling for country-specific cultural and contextual factors.

1.3 Safety in the Neighborhood and Children's SWB

A focus of special interest has been the study of the relationship between safety in the neighborhood and the subjective well-being of children, in its component of satisfaction with life. A study by Ben-Arieh and Shimoni (2014) explored the relationship between reported levels of safety in different settings and life satisfaction of children in a sample of more than 2,000 youths in Israel aged 10 and 12, including Arab and Jewish children. The study considered child-reported measures of perceptions of safety at home, school, and in the neighborhood. The results showed that Jewish children had higher satisfaction scores than Arab children with their homes, overall safety, and schools. However, in relation to satisfaction with their neighborhood, they returned significantly lower scores than the Arab children. Significant differences were also found by gender (girls were more satisfied with their homes and schools) and age (younger boys were more satisfied with the neighborhood and older boys were more satisfied with their homes). The results also showed evidence that children's perceptions of safety in different settings are positively correlated

with each other. In turn, perceptions of safety are positively correlated with subjective well-being. The authors concluded there is a significant role that neighborhood security plays in children's well-being, particularly with respect to the differences between Jewish and Arab children in Israel.

In a study with a representative sample of Spanish children in which they explored their opinions and perceptions regarding a set of indicators of subjective well-being, Casas et al. (2013) found that children who reported they completely agree that they felt safe showed significantly greater SWB scores compared to all other children in the study. These significant relationships were also found regarding feelings of security at home, at school, and while walking the streets of the city in which they resided. Lee and Yoo (2015) confirmed this relationship using transnational data from 12-year-olds in 11 countries showing that home safety, school safety, and neighborhood safety contributed positively and significantly to the children's SWB.

In Chile, Varela et al. (2020) conducted research in which they analyzed the interaction between variables associated with adolescent well-being, their neighborhoods and perceptions of safety. The results showed a direct impact of perceptions of home and community security on the adolescents' life satisfaction. Feeling safe at home and in the neighborhood was associated with greater life satisfaction. Through a mediation model using structural equations, they found an indirect effect of neighborhood satisfaction on adolescent life satisfaction. These findings highlighted a relationship between the perception of safety and life satisfaction of adolescents, incorporating satisfaction with neighbors as a mediating variable. In short, this study found that safety is not only important for life satisfaction, but also has an indirect effect through the assessment of neighborhood satisfaction. These results contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between perception of safety in the neighborhood and life satisfaction in children.

1.4 Neighborhood Spatial Characteristics and Opportunities and SWB in Children

Neighborhoods, in addition to encompassing relationships between neighbors, also involve physical and spatial characteristics that can be related to people's well-being and quality of life. One of the characteristics that has been studied in relation to the well-being of children is the presence of enough places for playing. Lee and Yoo's international study (2015) revealed that having sufficient play areas and feeling safe in the neighborhood was associated with higher SWB.

There is abundant evidence that has established a set of facts regarding neighborhoods that is relevant to children and adolescents (Sampson et al., 2002). Among them are the existence of economic and racial segregation in many countries, the grouping in neighborhoods of a series of social problems such as adult and juvenile delinquency, physical and social disorders, dropping out of school or child abuse. The territorial concentration of poverty on the one hand and the concentration of wealth on the other are phenomena that provide more or fewer opportunities to inhabitants. While these characteristics are seen in some countries more than

others, evidence indicates that neighborhood differentiation affects children's lives and well-being.

A study conducted in Italy with adolescents and young adults (Cicognani et al., 2015) showed that adolescents who lived in places with worse deprivation of services and facilities such as transportation, the absence of shopping centers, and a limited number of recreational and school facilities available in the territory presented lower levels of residential satisfaction. One can find substantial evidence from social science research showing that growing up in uninvested, distressed, or socially and economically isolated neighborhoods is associated with an increased risk of many adverse outcomes for children, including school failure, poor health, victimization and delinquency (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997; Coulton & Korbin, 2007; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

This is how the collected evidence supports the relationship between the neighborhood and the SWB of children and adolescents. Good relationships with neighbors, perception of safe neighborhoods and spaces that facilitate opportunities for play and recreation are associated with better levels of SWB in children and adolescents. The results of some studies, even when they are scarce, also advise that this relationship can vary between countries if other variables such as age or gender are integrated. Further specifying the relationship between variables associated with neighborhood and children's life satisfaction, there is evidence that has shown the importance of integrating more complex analysis into the relationship between these variables, such as mediation models (Varela et al., 2020). The findings have shown direct and indirect effects on life satisfaction that favor a greater understanding of the relationship between these variables and the SWB of children, supporting their complex and multifaceted character.

1.5 Subjective Well-Being of Children from Chile and Israel

1.5.1 Subjective Well-Being of Children from Chile

The situation of children and their associated problems has been part of the concerns of decision-makers in public policy and academia for many decades in Chile. However, the interest in the study of well-being and the investigation of subjective dimensions in childhood has only been observed more recently as of the last two decades (Alfaro et al., 2016). In 2016, the first study of SWB in Chilean children and adolescents was published, the results of which were part of the international study of Children's Worlds.

The general results of subjective well-being studies conducted in Chile show that Chilean children present high life satisfaction scores, like in most Western countries (Rees et al., 2020). Differences in overall satisfaction with life were observed according to the level of school vulnerability; children attending schools of high social vulnerability present lower SWB levels (Alfaro et al., 2016). At a global level, the areas in which children expressed greater satisfaction with life were the family and the home. They showed high satisfaction with the people they live with, their friends, school life, the neighborhood, material things, and their use of free time, as

with life in general. Comparatively, the areas linked to the school and the neighborhood came through with less satisfaction. A trend towards decreasing overall life satisfaction was observed in all parameters studied as the age of children increased. Results regarding gender differences were reflected in some settings and depending on the age group of the children. In the 10-year-old age group, gender differences showed no statistical significance, except for student's life satisfaction in which girls showed significantly higher scores. In the 12-year-old group, on the other hand, boys showed significantly lower levels of sadness and felt significantly more satisfied with their physical appearance than girls (Rees, 2021). In Chile's national report of the third wave, the results also showed that in general children expressed the highest percentages of disagreement when asked about their participation in important decisions being made for them, their feelings of safety in their neighborhoods and having enough spaces to play in the areas where they live, among other items (Alfaro et al., 2020).

1.5.2 Subjective Wellbeing of Children from Israel

Israel has a complex society divided by religion, culture, nationality, and ethnicity. Moreover, Israel is an immigrant society (Al-Haj, 2002; Gross-Manos et al., 2015). Israel adopted the melting pot method even before the establishment of the state, which influenced its attitude toward immigrants. In the 1990s, various groups protested against this method and demanded a shift to a multicultural approach. However, social services tend to continue following the melting pot approach (Mazursky & Ben-Arieh, 2020).

Research on children's SWB in Israel has been evolving over the last decade. Previously, in Israel there were only a few studies on SWB among adults. The Israeli Central Bureau of statistics conducted the research that most closely explored the subject among adults. The only study that investigates SWB among youth is a survey conducted every four years with 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds. The survey is the International Health Behavior of School-Aged children (HBSC) (Gross-Manos et al., 2015).

Gross-Manos et al. (2015) measured SWB among 12-year-olds in Israel, returning very high SWB scores for the participants. It also showed that Israeli children with one-parent families displayed significantly lower SWB than children with two-parent families. Ben-Arieh and Shimoni (2014) researched SWB and the perception of safety among Jewish and Arab children in Israel. Their results indicated that safety perceptions and life satisfaction among children were correlated positively. This connection was not affected by sociodemographic variables and held across various groups. Kaye-Tzadok et al. (2019) examined the connection between hope, material resources and the SWB of children aged 8 to12 in Israel. The study found positive correlation between SWB and hope and a negative connection between lack of material resources and SWB. Hope was also found to moderate the negative connection between the lack of material resources and SWB. These results may have implications for the ways in which action should be taken to improve children's SWB. Israeli children were highly satisfied with the area they live in, with a majority reporting they felt safe. Most (63%) of the 10- and 12-year-old Israeli children

rated their satisfaction with the area they live in as 10 and 20% as 8 or 9. Almost 60% of the children "totally agree" that they felt safe when they walk in the area they live and around 20% "agree a lot". The satisfaction scores of Israeli children for several life domains included in the well-being scales were high, ranging between 82.8 and 89. The overall SWB scale showed an average of 89.5 (Ben-Arieh et al., 2020).

1.6 Similarities and Differences between the Living Context of Israeli and Chilean Children

The reports of the international study of Children's Worlds have provided valuable information on the well-being of children from their own perceptions and experiences. Comparative analyses have been carried out between the results of a large number of countries (Casas, 2017; Gross-Manos & Bradshaw, 2021; Lee & Yoo, 2015; Newland et al., 2019; Rees, 2021), but their conclusions tend to be general without analyzing specific similarities or differences between the two countries in more detail. According to the review of evidence carried out, very few investigations have studied the situation of children in Chile and Israel together. One of them refers to the cross-cultural patterns of student victimization in Chile and Israel (López et al., 2018). The results showed certain common patterns of victimization in both countries. The order of frequency of victimization types was similar in the different groups. The most frequent type of victimization was social/verbal, followed by physical, and then sexual victimization. There were differences between the two countries as well as between the Arab and Jewish populations in Israel. Chilean students reported a higher prevalence of victimization followed by Israeli Arabs for most items, while Israeli Jewish students tended to report less victimization. This trend was evident in most of the items, but especially in the most extreme and severe behaviors. Differences were also found according to gender and age. Regarding gender, boys reported more victimization than girls in 17 out of 20 items. In terms of age, with the exception of sexual victimization, the group of older students reported less victimization than younger students. The report of older students was similar among Chilean and Israeli Arab students. In contrast, this age difference was not observed among Jewish students. Based on the analysis of the results in which lower victimization was observed in Israeli children in general (both Israeli Arabs and Jews) compared with that of Chilean students, it has been proposed that one factor that might be having an influence is the school reform that was undertaken in Israel. The nation adopted a systematic victimization monitoring system for preventing school violence more than a decade ago and has experienced decrease in its school victimization rates (López et al., 2018). The evidence indicates that phenomena such as victimization are multi-caused and therefore do not depend only on one factor. However, it is interesting to note that certain types of interventions can help reduce it and consequently increase children's well-being.

In Chile, there are a little more than 19 million inhabitants of which 23.3% are under 18 years of age, coming to more than four million children and adolescents (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia, 2021). Its economy is considered one of the most stable economies in South America. As of 2020, the country

has experienced a recession after facing major social protests in late 2019 and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2021). Chile was the first country in South America to be part of the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), considering its global macroeconomic stability indices. However, it has high internal economic, social and educational inequality. According to the Census conducted in Chile in 2017, 30.4% of Chilean children live with vulnerabilities due to having unmet needs in their homes, 14.7% belong to indigenous groups, and the number of immigrant children in the country has continuously increased in recent years. Although the total population of immigrants in Chile is relatively low at 4.4% with respect to the total population, this percentage is three times higher than that of the 2002 Census (Alvarez & Fuentealba, 2019). Regarding religion, a little more than half of the population declares itself to be Catholic (50.6%), about 8% are evangelical Christian and 35.1% state they have no religion (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2020). While past growth has lifted many Chileans out of poverty over the past three decades, income inequality remains high (OECD, 2021).

Israel has about nine million inhabitants of which 33% are under 18 years of age. Approximately 80% of the population is Jewish. Israel is a country that has attracted Jews from around the world and is made up of many different Jewish cultural groups. Most of the minorities are Muslim Arabs, Christian Arabs, Druze and Bedouins. Israel is a country considered technologically advanced (López et al., 2018). Israel performs well overall and ranks among the economies with the best economy, life satisfaction, health status and educational attainment in the OECD (OECD, 2016). However, it also performs poorly on poverty indicators measured by income, housing and air quality. There are differences between various groups within the population living in Israel. It is a very diverse society, with large differences between the Jewish population and the Arab population, as well as between various subgroups within its general population. The Arab population is revealed to be disadvantaged in multiple evaluated dimensions such as poverty rates, labor participation, education and health status (OECD, 2016).

The comparative background reflects relevant cultural differences between the two countries, as well as differences within each country (López et al., 2018). For example, the Chilean school system presents significant socioeconomic segregation among schoolchildren. Students from families of lower socioeconomic status attend municipal schools, those whose families are in the middle socioeconomic level go to subsidized private schools, and the ones from families with more income attend private schools. In the case of Israel, schools are segregated by cultural groups: secular Jews, religious Jews, ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arabs. These differences, even if they respond to different criteria of division, reflect differences within the countries.

Chile and Israel are two countries that have participated in the international Children's Worlds study. The two countries are located on different continents and have very different histories of cultural, economic, religious and social development, so the aim of exploring the SWB of children in Chile and Israel and understanding whether there are common factors beyond the different cultural contexts is an interesting one. Considering the SWB instruments recommended for cross-country comparative studies, the first objective of this study is to analyze the SWB in its cognitive component of

life satisfaction of children in Israel and Chile based on data from the third wave of the international Children's Worlds survey. The second objective concerns analyzing the association between the children's own views of the local neighborhood, specifically about safety and play spaces and their satisfaction with life in Israel and Chile. To this end, a mediation model will be tested using satisfaction with the neighborhood as a mediating variable between different perceptions of their neighborhood designated and children's SWB. Based on evidence presented that children's age and gender can affect their subjective well-being, the third objective is to explore the associations between all variables of the proposed mediation model, including the gender variable, for each age group.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

The total sample of participants in this study comes to 4,942 children (49% girls) in the age groups of 10 ($n = 2498$) and 12 ($n = 2444$) years from the dataset of the third wave of the Children's Worlds study with 3,073 (49.7% girls) of the children living in Israel and 1,869 (47.9% girls) in Chile. Both samples were stratified and clustered with the schools serving as the sampling unit.

In Chile a total of 26 schools participated, all located in urban areas of the two most populated regions of the country, the Metropolitan and Bío-Bío Regions (respectively, RM and VIII). The sample frame corresponds to all schools currently active in the urban areas of RM and VIII that offer primary education. The sample was stratified by region. In each stratum, a random sample of schools was obtained, and within each school a course was selected at random for each level (Alfaro et al., 2020).

In Israel, the national representative sample was based on a random, combined cluster, and stratified sampling from 2,748 registered primary schools in Israel from which 75 private schools were deducted so that the sample contained 2,673 schools. The list of schools (sample clusters) was divided into strata: religious or sectoral affiliation (Jewish or Arab), place of residence in terms of proximity to the center (close by or far from the center of the country) or periphery and the type of educational supervision in the Jewish sector (state, state-religious or ultra-Orthodox). Eight different layers were created from the combination of these strata. Once the layers were created, the sample assignment in each layer was determined. The total initial sample size was 60 schools, but then 34 more schools were assigned to the ultra-Orthodox class (to address when schools did not agree to participate.) Therefore, a total of 94 schools were sampled. Out of the sampling frame, 36 schools agreed to participate in the research (Ben-Arieh et al., 2020).

2.2 Instruments

2.2.1 CW-SWBS5

The Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale (CW-SWBS) measures the context-free cognitive dimension of subjective well-being. It was designed based on the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale or SLSS (Huebner, 1991). This version was improved to make it more interculturally comparable in the spirit of the third wave of the Children's Worlds international study. The five-item version is the most recommended SWB scale for cross-country comparative studies (Casas & González-Carrasco, 2021). The items are: *"I enjoy my life", My life is going well", "I have a good life", "The things that happen in my life are excellent", "I am happy with my life"*. The fit and statistical validation of the scale were verified through a confirmatory factorial analysis with the maximum likelihood method. Using the pooled sample for the two countries, the CW-SWBS displayed an excellent fit ($\chi^2 = 84.009$, $CFI = 0.996$, $RMSEA = 0.057$, $SRMR = 0.009$), and the reliability was $\alpha = 0.935$. Analyzing countries separately, fit was also very good (Israel: $\chi^2 = 35.633$, $CFI = 0.998$, $RMSEA = 0.045$, $SRMR = 0.007$; Chile: $\chi^2 = 43.292$, $CFI = 0.995$, $RMSEA = 0.064$, $SRMR = 0.010$) as its reliability was $\alpha = 0.937$ and $\alpha = 0.933$, respectively. Analyzing age groups separately, both fit indices and reliability were excellent (10-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 39.911$; $CFI = 0.997$; $RMSEA = 0.053$; $SRMR = 0.009$, $\alpha = 0.938$; 12-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 57.532$; $CFI = 0.995$; $RMSEA = 0.065$; $SRMR = 0.009$, $\alpha = 0.932$).

2.2.2 Neighborhood

Items about the neighborhood included in the *Children's Worlds* questionnaire for both age groups and answered by children in both countries were used. Only items included in the data collection of the two countries were used in our data analysis. One item was on the level of satisfaction with the area where the children live in general. Two agreement questions were about the children's perceptions of their neighborhood by inquiring about play areas and neighborhood safety. The item on the level of satisfaction used an 11-point scale from 0 to 10 (0 = completely dissatisfied; 10 = completely satisfied) and asked: *How satisfied are you with the area where you live?* Higher values indicate higher levels of satisfaction with the neighborhood. The two agreement questions about the local area were: *"I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in", "In my area there are enough places to play or to have a good time*. These items used a five-point scale (0 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree).

2.3 Procedure

Data collection both in Chile and in Israel was based on a self-report survey administered to participants at school during the regular class period. Data used in this study were produced as part of a larger project called *Children's Worlds*, *the International Survey of Children's Well-Being* (ISCWeB) supported by the ISCI (International

Society of Child Indicators) and the Jacobs Foundation, whose purpose is exploring development and well-being indicators in childhood and adolescence. The original English questionnaire was translated into the language spoken by the children in each country. The survey meets the stipulated legal and ethical framework and received approval from an appropriate ethics board in each participating country. All the children in each country gave their informed consent to participate in the research before filling out the questionnaire. Active or passive parental consent was granted if required by the country and obtained via school request. Data collection in Chile was done between May and December 2018. Data collection in Israel was done between September 2017 and August 2018.

2.4 Data Analysis

Mediation models were designed separately to estimate the direct and indirect effects of neighborhood items on the SWB scale as a latent variable for both of the age groups of the Children's Worlds International Survey, the 10-year-olds and the 12-year-olds, provided that both questionnaires included the same items on the topic of this study. Based on previous evidence showing differences in SWB between countries according to age and gender (Casas & González-Carrasco, 2019; Klocke et al., 2014), each model included gender as an exogenous variable. Previously, descriptive statistics and correlation between scales were calculated, and the fit of the SWB psychometric scale was tested for each country and age group.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation was used to estimate direct and indirect effects of the models with Amos 21.0 (Arbuckle, 2012). The chi-squared, Bentler Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Steiger-Lind Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) were used as indices to verify the fit of the model. Values above 0.95 in the CFI and below 0.05 in the RMSEA and SRMR were considered excellent fit (Arbuckle, 2012; Byrne, 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The model included *I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in* and *In my area there are enough places to play and have a good time* as exogenous variables, and *Satisfaction with the area where I live* as a mediator variable. All direct and indirect effects were estimated for each age group separately. Standard errors were calculated using the bootstrap method by 500 resampling iterations with maximum likelihood and a 95% confidence interval.

A multigroup model by country was constructed to determine whether metric and scalar invariance was supported and whether statistics were comparable between countries, considering three levels of invariance: (a) configural invariance (unconstrained model), (b) metric invariance (constrained loadings), and (c) scalar invariance (constrained loadings and intercepts). Metric invariance permits comparing correlation and regressions, while scalar invariance enables mean scores comparison. Invariance was considered acceptable when a change of less than 0.01 was observed for CFI, RMSEA or SRMR after any additional constraint (Chen, 2007; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

3 Results

3.1 General Descriptive Results

The results show a significant correlation among the CW-SWBS5 and each of its items, as well as between them and the three items associated with the neighborhood included for both Chile and Israel. Tables 1 and 2 show the correlations corresponding to Israel above the diagonal and those corresponding to Chile below the diagonal for each age group separately.

In Israel an overall SWB mean score of 89.47 $(SD = 16.73)$ is observed for the 12-year-olds and is significantly higher than the 10-year-olds' mean score $(M = 87.39, SD = 21.11; p \leq 0.01)$. For both age groups, the highest-scoring item was *I am happy with my life.* The lowest-scoring items were *My life is going well* for the 12-year-olds and *The things that happen in my life are excellent* for the 10-year-olds. For the item *I have a good life,* Israeli children aged 10 had a significantly higher score than the older ones $(M = 8.83, SD = 2.31$ vs. $M = 8.80, SD = 1.96$ respectively $p \leq 0.001)$. Regarding the neighborhood items, there were no significant differences by age group except for the item *I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in* with the 12-year-old group presenting a significantly higher score than the younger age group $(M = 3.33, SD = 1.00$ vs. $M = 3.24, SD = 1.14, p \leq 0.05)$ (Table 3).

Chilean children had an overall mean on the SWB scale of 89.48 $(SD = 17.69)$ for the younger children, displaying significantly higher scores than the older ones $(M = 81.83, SD = 23.03, p \leq 0.001)$. For all items used in this study, Chilean children from the 10-year-old group showed higher scores than the 12-year-old group $(p \leq 0.001)$. In both age groups the item *I enjoy my life* got the highest scores, although for the 12-year-old group scores were the same for the item *I have a good life*. The item that showed the lowest score for both age groups was *The things that happen in my life are excellent* (Table 3).

Between-country comparative comments on the statistics in Table 3 will be done only after getting evidence that metric and scalar invariance is supported, thus these comparisons are meaningful.

3.2 Mediation Model Results

Figure 1 shows the mediation model used. For the 10-year-old group, the model without a mediating variable explained 16% of the variance of the SWB latent variable, while the model in Fig. 1 (Model 1 in Table 4) explained 23%, according to Squared Multiple Correlations (SMC).

The model without a mediating variable for the 12yo age group explained 20% of the variance of the SWB latent variable, while the mediation model (Model 4 in Table 4) explained 28%.

The initial mediation models using the pooled sample displayed excellent fit for both age groups (Models 1 and 5 in Table 4). Multigroup by country mediating models were then analyzed to determine whether the parameters of the psychometric

Table 1 Correlations between study variables by country for 10-year-old group

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. CWSWBS-5	–	.898***	.898***	.916***	.879***	.915***	.445***	.349***	.317***
2. I enjoy my life	.842***	–	.766***	.796***	.712***	.788***	.407***	.293***	.300***
3. My life is going well	.881***	.737***	–	.783***	.731***	.771***	.403***	.315***	.282***
4. I have a good life	.845***	.658***	.683***	–	.744***	.811***	.393***	.302***	.290***
5. The things that happen in my life are excellent	.855***	.600***	.667***	.639***	–	.754***	.403***	.331***	.273***
6. I am happy with my life	.888***	.712***	.745***	.675***	.698***	–	.400***	.327***	.283***
7. Satisfaction with the area where I live	.382***	.321***	.309***	.330***	.342***	.338***	–	.451***	.443***
8. I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in	.362***	.281***	.303***	.290***	.347***	.326***	.526***	–	.470***
9. In my area there are enough places to play or to have a good time	.289***	.228***	.247***	.225***	.273***	.263***	.364***	.399***	–

Above diagonal results for ISRAEL and below diagonal results for CHILE. *** $p < .001$

**Table 2** Correlations between study variables by country for 12-year-old group

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. CWSWBS-5	–	.893***	.897***	.889***	.858***	.883***	.431***	.443***	.252***
2. I enjoy my life	.894***	–	.780***	.758***	.682***	.746***	.396***	.390***	.235***
3. My life is going well	.924***	.819***	–	.761***	.699***	.723***	.384***	.407***	.220***
4. I have a good life	.893***	.744***	.788***	–	.684***	.747***	.396***	.385***	.197***
5. The things that happen in my life are excellent	.886***	.712***	.765***	.732***	–	.696***	.322***	.381***	.235***
6. I am happy with my life	.930***	.806***	.827***	.796***	.769***	–	.413***	.393***	.224***
7. Satisfaction with the area where I live	.427***	.386***	.397***	.392***	.381***	.382***	–	.487***	.395***
8. I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in	.419***	.371***	.386***	.383***	.377***	.378***	.546***	–	.395***
9. In my area there are enough places to play or to have a good time	.337***	.311***	.314***	.306***	.298***	.300***	.425***	.453***	–

Above diagonal results for ISRAEL and below diagonal results for CHILE. *** $p < .001$

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of the CW-SWBS5 items and satisfaction with neighborhood-related items for Israel and Chile, 10yo and 12yo age groups

	10yo Age group		12yo Age group	
	Israel	Chile	Israel	Chile
	M	M	M	M
	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)
CWSWBS-5	87.39	89.48[**]	89.47	81.83[***]
	(21.11)	(17.69)	(16.73)	(23.03)
I enjoy my life	8.86	9.26[***]	9.01	8.50[***]
	(2.21)	(1.71)	(1.79)	(2.26)
My life is going well	8.64	8.99[***]	8.80	8.21[***]
	(2.33)	(1.93)	(1.96)	(2.43)
I have a good life	8.83	9.08[**]	8.80	8.50[***]
	(2.31)	(2.02)	(1.96)	(2.38)
The things that happen in my life are excellent	8.47	8.34	8.65	7.44[***]
	(2.52)	(2.51)	(2.07)	(2.85)
I am happy with my life	8.89	9.08[*]	9.14	8.27[***]
	(2.35)	(2.09)	(1.87)	(2.79)
Satisfaction with the area where I live	8.87	8.64[*]	8.95	8.20[***]
	(2.29)	(2.42)	(1.98)	(2.48)
I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in	3.24	3.14[*]	3.33	2.86[***]
	(1.14)	(1.20)	(1.00)	(1.25)
In my area there are enough places to play or to have a good time	3.14	3.27[*]	3.16	2.97[***]
	(1.28)	(1.21)	(1.20)	(1.35)

Between country differences are significant at [***] $p \le .001$ [**] $p \le .01$ [*] $p \le .05$
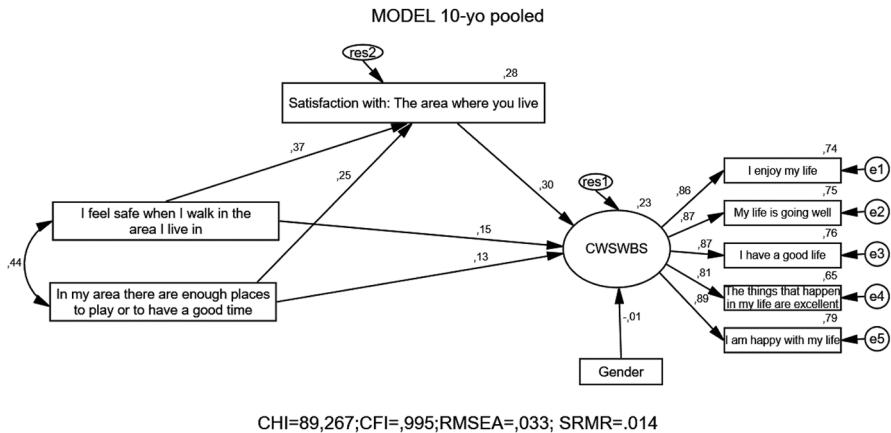
Fig. 1 Mediation model for the 10-year-old group using the pooled sample

instruments were invariant for both groups, and consequently, whether the results were between-country comparable. The multigroup analysis supported metric and scalar invariance between both countries for both age groups suggesting that

Table 4 Mediation model fit statistics 10-year-old group and 12-year-old group

	Model	Sample	X^2	gl	p	CFI	RMSEA [C.I]	SRMR
	10-year-old group							
1	Model 1. Initial model	Pooled	89.27	24	.000	.995	.033 (.026-.040)	.014
2	Model 2. Unconstrained	Multigroup	119.62	48	.000	.994	.024 (.019-.030)	.012
3	Model 3. Constrained loadings	Multigroup	160.97	52	.000	.991	.029 (.024-.034)	.012
4	Model 4. Constr. Load & interc	Multigroup	223.10	56	.000	.986	.035 (.030-.039)	.012
	12-year-old group							
5	Model 5. Initial model	Pooled	90.96	24	.000	.995	.034 (.027-.041)	.012
6	Model 6. Unconstrained	Multigroup	115.44	48	.000	.995	.024 (.018-.030)	.015
7	Model 7. Constrained loadings	Multigroup	182.74	52	.000	.989	.032 (.027-.037)	.015
8	Model 8. Constr. Load & interc	Multigroup	275.47	56	.000	.982	.040 (.035-.045)	.016

correlations, factorial loadings, and mean scores can be meaningfully compared, provided no increase higher than 0.01 is observed in any of the fit indexes with each additional constraint (Table 4).

Consequently, the SWB scale index and all items mean scores were compared between the two countries using the t-test for independent samples, as presented in Table 3. Results for the 10-year-old group showed that Chilean children displayed a significantly higher overall SWB index and for most SWB items than Israeli children (at different levels of significance) except for *The things that happen in my life are excellent*, which did not return a significant difference between the two countries. For *Satisfaction with the area where I live*, children in Israel displayed higher mean scores than in Chile, as well as for *I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in* (both at $p \leq 0.05$). However, Chilean children agreed more than Israeli children with *In my area there are enough places to play and have a good time* ($p \leq 0.05$) (Table 3).

For the 12yo group, both the scale index and all items showed significant differences between Israeli and Chilean children. Israeli children showed significantly higher scores than Chilean children at $p \leq 0.001$, for all SWB items and for the three items associated with the neighborhood (Table 3).

Table 5 shows the standardized estimates for the mediation model using the pooled sample and for each age group and country. All regression weights and correlations are significant, both when using the pooled sample and for the country multi-group models, except for gender, which is only significant for the Chilean 12-year-old group ($\lambda = 0.099$, $p < 0.001$) and for *Enough places to play* on the CW-SWBS5 latent, which displays significant effects in both Chilean age groups, but only for the Israeli 10-year-old group (Table 5).

The explained variance of the SWB latent variable was higher for the 12- than for the 10-year-old children in both countries, and it was higher for the Israeli children than for both Chilean age groups (Table 4).

Regression weights of the SWB items on the latent variable are higher for Israeli children than for Chilean children in the 10-year-old group, but it is the other way around for the 12-year-old group. While these regression weights decrease in Israel from 10 to 12 years of age, they increase in Chile.

Table 5 Standardized estimates, correlation and Squared Multiple Correlations. Models 1 (pooled) and 4 (multi-group, with constrained loadings and intercepts)

			Pooled		10-year-old group		12-year-old group	
			10-year-old group	12-year-old group	Israel	Chile	Israel	Chile
Satisfied local area	←	Enough places to play	.248***	.229***	.297***	.183***	.240***	.224***
Satisfied local area	←	Area safe walk	.371***	.435***	.311***	.453***	.392***	.444***
CW-SWBS5	←	Area safe walk	.154***	.279***	.155***	.183***	.307***	.216***
CW-SWBS5	←	Enough places to play	.126***	.074***	.101***	.131***	.021 ns	.135***
CW-SWBS5	←	Satisfied local area	.304***	.281***	.340***	.247***	.294***	.264***
CW-SWBS5	←	Gender (1=boy)	-.010 ns	.032 ns	-.030 ns	.036 ns	-.022 ns	.099***
Enjoy life	←	CW-SWBS5	.862***	.877***	.869***	.846***	.861***	.886***
Life going well	←	CW-SWBS5	.868***	.896***	.869***	.865***	.861***	.919***
Have good life	←	CW-SWBS5	.872***	.870***	.891***	.808***	.864***	.869***
Things life excellent	←	CW-SWBS5	.809***	.824***	.837***	.727***	.806***	.827***
Happy with my life	←	CW-SWBS5	.888***	.889***	.906***	.850***	.872***	.893***
Area safe walk	↔	Enough places to play	.442***	.429***	.470***	.399***	.395***	.453***
SMC		Satisfied local area	.280	.327	.272	.305	.285	.337
		CW-SWBS5	.225	.282	.244	.203	.279	.264

ns = non-significant; *** significant at p < .001

The three variables associated with the neighborhood presented different regression weights on the SWB latent variable depending on the age group and the country. *I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in* displays higher effects in Chile than in Israel in the 10-year-old age group, but higher in Israel than in Chile for the 12-year-olds. *In my area there are enough places to play and have a good time* shows higher effects in Chile than in Israel for both age groups. As already said, in Israel the effects are not significant for the 12-year-olds. *Satisfaction with the area where I live* displays higher effects in Israel than in Chile for both age groups.

Correlation between the two exogenous variables (*I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in* and *In my area there are enough places to play or to have a good time*) are higher for Israeli 10-year-olds, but lower for the 12-year-olds than for Chilean children. The effects of these two variables on *Satisfaction with the area where I live* are also different depending on the age group and the country. The first variable displays higher effects in Chile than in Israel for both age groups, but they increase in Israel and slightly decrease in Chile. The effects of the second variables are the other way around; effects are higher in Israel than in Chile for the two age-groups, but they increase with age in Chile, while they decrease in Israel. The combined explained variance of these two items on *Satisfaction with the area where I live* is higher in Chile than in Israel for both age groups and slightly increases with age in both countries.

Table 6 shows the total, direct and indirect effects of the mediation model on the two age groups and countries. For both the 10- and 12-year-old groups using the pooled sample, all the effects are significant, indicating that the variable of satisfaction with the neighborhood has a partial mediation effect between the neighborhood variables here analyzed and SWB. In both groups, the indirect effects are greater for the item *I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in* (10-year-olds: $\beta = 0.113$, $p < 0.01$; 12-year-olds: $\beta = 0.122$, $p > 0.01$) than for the item *In my area there are enough places to play and have a good time* (10-year-olds: $\beta = 0.075$, $p < 0.01$; 12-year-olds: $\beta = 0.064$, $p > 0.01$). Results in each country are the same. However, all indirect effects slightly increase with age in both countries, except for *In my area there are enough places to play or to have a good time*, which decreases in Israel.

In the case of Israeli 12-year-old children, a total mediating effect of neighborhood satisfaction on SWB was observed, since the total effect of *In my area there are enough places to play and have a good time* was significant ($\beta = 0.091$, $p < 0.01$), while the direct effect of the item was non-significant ($\beta = 0.021$, $p > 0.05$) and its indirect effect was significant ($\beta = 0.071$, $p < 0.01$).

4 Discussion

This article aimed to explore the SWB of children from Israel and Chile as well as some variables related to their neighborhood that may be affecting it. Based on data from the third wave of Children's Worlds international research, the SWB of children in both countries has been analyzed. In addition, the association between variables of the neighborhood in which children live and their relationship with SWB was also analyzed, considering their age and gender.

Table 6 Standardized total, direct and indirect effects on the SWB latent variable for each age group, both using the pooled sample, and with constrained loadings and intercepts for the multi-group by country model

Bootstrap M.I. 500 re-samples (95% C.I.)	Pooled		Multigroup with constrained loadings and intercepts			
			10-yo age-group		12-yo age-group	
	10-yo age-group	12-yo age-group	Israel	Chile	Israel	Chile
Direct effects						
Enough places to play	.126** (.079—.175)	.074** (.032—.126)	.102** (.038—.171)	.131** (.047—.205)	.021 ns (-.035—.092)	.135** (.065—.205)
Area safe walk	.154** (.090—.208)	.279** (.218—.337)	.155** (.089—.225)	.183** (.091—.288)	.307** (.228—.381)	.216** (.146—.322)
Indirect effects						
Enough places to play	.075** (.056—.098)	.064** (.047—.088)	.101** (.074—.136)	.045** (.024—.079)	.071** (.047—.102)	.059** (.031—.088)
Area safe walk	.113** (.085—.143)	.122** (.092—.160)	.106** (.074—.143)	.112** (.066—.163)	.115** (.080—.163)	.117** (.074—.160)
Total effects						
Enough places to play	.201** (.151—.253)	.138** (.092—.193)	.203** (.133—.264)	.176** (.091—.254)	.091** (.027—.172)	.194** (.124—.265)
Area safe walk	.266** (.212—.321)	.402** (.354—.453)	.260** (.195—.327)	.295** (.208—.382)	.422** (.347—.489)	.333** (.267—.412)

Note. ** two-tailed significant at $p < .01$

Regarding the first objective, which was to analyze the SWB of children from Israel and Chile, the results showed that in general, children presented a high average level of subjective well-being, according to the evidence of previous studies and consistently with the well-known effect of optimistic bias in SWB in children (Casas, 2019). The averages scores of each age group and country were above 80 points on a scale of 1 to 100. Children in Israel have high levels of subjective well-being, with older children having significantly higher scores than the younger age group. Both age groups also presented high levels of satisfaction with the neighborhood where they live, feel safe walking in their neighborhoods, agree that there are enough places for them to play, and have a good time in the area where they live. Chilean children also showed high levels of subjective well-being in both age groups. The younger children had significantly higher scores for subjective well-being than the older ones, as well as more satisfaction with their neighborhoods, feel safe, have enough places to play, and have a good time in the area where they live. Older children in Chile had lower scores than the 10-year-old group on all evaluated items both for subjective well-being and with respect to the neighborhood where they live. These findings are consistent with the results of most of the countries studied internationally. Evidence shows that there is a trend of decreasing subjective well-being in children as age increases (Casas & González-Carrasco, 2019; Inchley et al., 2020). This pattern, however, is not present in the children of Israel.

From what has been observed, the question arises of what happens to Israeli children whose SWB does not decrease as they get older and reach adolescence? The answer is not simple. From a conceptual point of view and supported by the empirical evidence reviewed, subjective well-being is a multi-cause concept, influenced by personal, family, social and cultural conditions, among others (Diener, 2000). One factor that has received attention in the study of children's SWB in Israel is hope understood as a cognitive component, which enables us to set goals in life and offers the capacity to establish solution routes and the ability to carry them out (agency). Evidence has shown that high levels of hope in children correlates positively with overall life satisfaction (Valle et al., 2006). A previous study with a representative sample of children in Israel showed a positive relationship between hope and SWB across all age groups of children. The authors conclude that hope provides a central avenue for increasing SWB because it helps initiate and sustain action toward long-term goals and that this would be a factor present in Israeli children. The ability to set goals and the belief that there are ways to achieve them is understood as very relevant to SWB. The study in Israeli children also showed that hope has a moderating effect in difficult circumstances, such as a lack of material resources (Kaye-Tzadok et al., 2019). There is no available data that would suggest there is a causal relationship between these phenomena. More research and analysis are required, but the question certainly remains of what is going on with the Israeli children who, on average, do not present a decline in their SWB scores with increasing age, as is the case of most studied countries, including Chile (see Casas & González-Carrasco, 2019, for a review). Qualitative studies can probably shed light on understanding these differences between the two countries.

Another possible explanation for the high SWB scores among older Israeli children could be related to a sense of community, neighborliness and outdoor activities,

such as youth movement memberships. First, according to Erikson's psychosocial theory (Erikson, 1993), the primary psychological task of adolescence is the formation of identity. This stage is characterized by independence and autonomy, which leads to more meaningful interactions with the neighborhood and community (Brown & Lohr, 1987). In Israel, one way youth identity is formed is by participating in youth movements.

In Israel thirty percent of all children are youth movement members (National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education, 2021). In Chile this percentage is lower, at 24.3% (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia, 2021). For youth, it is essential to spend time among peer groups. The peer group has a strong influence on adolescents' psychological characteristics and self-categorization processes (Arnon et al., 2008). In recent decades, youth movements in Israel have turned into a youth service for them (Arnon et al., 2008). Therefore, the affiliation of children in Israel to youth movements can provide them a meeting place with their peer group, which encourages them to continue their identity formation process. This background information can contribute to the understanding of why the SWB scores of children in Israel do not decrease with age as opposed to Chile and many other countries. Further studies are needed to provide more evidence to understand these differences between countries.

Although average SWB scores are generally high in both countries, consistent with international studies in other countries (Rees, 2021), a small percentage of children had low levels of SWB. According to the criteria proposed by Cummins (2014), 50 or fewer points on a scale of 0 to 100 indicates a low level of well-being and the possibility of having psychopathological problems. According to this author, the average ranges of SWB scores in Western societies have been defined as 75 ± 5 points on a $0 – 100$ scale. When analyzing the children's results, it was observed that in the case of Israel, 7.8% of 10-year-olds and 5% of the 12-year-olds had low scores on the life satisfaction scale. Those numbers for the case of Chile stood at 6% of 10-year-olds and 12% of 12-year-olds. These results are similar for satisfaction with the neighborhood. In the case of Israel, 10.4% of 10-year-olds and 7.1% of 12-year-olds displayed low scores in neighborhood satisfaction. Percentages of dissatisfaction were higher for Chile at 11.8% and 16.1% for the 10- and 12-year-old groups respectively. It is striking that more than 16% of Chilean children in the older age group showed a low level of satisfaction with their neighborhood. Although these warning signs do not represent the majority of children, they show that there is a group of children that probably requires specific and targeted measures. These children should be of particular concern since their responses indicate that some of them are neither satisfied with their lives nor with the neighborhoods where they live. Furthermore, the analyses results are averages. Although they serve as an indicator of a general trend, the inequalities that may be present within each country are not made visible (Casas & Rees, 2015; Rees, 2021). In this study we do not have the information needed to classify all children into more specific subgroups or categories, which evidence indicates as relevant to consider in the case of children. There are studies that point to differences in the SWB of children according to their level of material deprivation and/or religious affiliation with the latter particularly so for children living in

Israel (Gross-Manos & Ben-Arieh, 2017; Kaye-Tzadok et al., 2019). Therefore, the results presented here only provide a general profile regarding the levels of SWB of children in both countries. However, more specific studies are required within each country that analyze possible differences between groups of children, for example, according to their religious affiliation, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

The second objective of this study was to analyze the association between the area or neighborhood in which the children lived and their subjective well-being. For this, a mediation model was tested using satisfaction with the neighborhood as a mediating variable. The mediation model showed an excellent fit for both age groups and countries, and scalar invariance was supported, therefore it was possible to perform an analysis of correlations, factorial loadings, and mean scores between the groups.

When analyzing the model for each country and age group, it was observed that all effects are significant, indicating that the variable of satisfaction with the neighborhood has a partial mediation effect between the analyzed neighborhood variables and SWB. These results are consistent with previous studies in other countries that indicate that the neighborhood or area where children live is important for their SWB (Coulton & Spilsbury, 2014; González-Carrasco et al., 2019; Goswami, 2012; Lee & Yoo, 2015; Newland et al., 2019). The findings of this study further suggest that neighborhood satisfaction has a partial mediating effect on children's subjective well-being between the studied neighborhood variables and SWB.

The variance explained for the SWB latent variable was greater for children in the 12-year-old group than for 10-year-olds, suggesting satisfaction with the neighborhood becomes more important for their SWB the older the children are. These interesting findings could be linked to the processes of greater autonomy of the older age group, in which the affective links are extended beyond family and other variables acquire more relevance for their life satisfaction. This and other hypotheses encourage the development of qualitative studies that provide comprehensive elements to the study of differences between age groups, which may also be particularly interesting for designers of initiatives aimed at these age groups that seek to promote their well-being.

When analyzing more specifically the indirect effects of neighborhood variables on SWB, it was observed that feeling safe walking around the neighborhood had larger effects on children's SWB than having enough places to play and having a good time. These results were consistent for both countries. It was also observed that these effects increased slightly with age in both countries, except for the item of having enough places to play, which decreased in the older Israeli age group. This last result was interesting, suggesting that availability of enough places to play and having a good time in the neighborhood is very important for the SWB of most of the children in the study, except for the Israeli 12-year-old group for whom this variable did not present significant effects on SWB. Having enough places to play and having a good time had higher effects on the SWB of children in Chile than on those in Israel for both age groups. The perception of security in the neighborhood displayed differences both by age group and country. For the 10-year-old group, feeling safe when walking through the neighborhood had larger effects on children in

Chile than in Israel. This situation was reversed in older children with larger effects observed for Israeli children than for Chileans.

In summary, when reflecting on the results linked to this second objective, which relates the vision of Israeli and Chilean children regarding their neighborhoods and their SWB, the mediation model presented yields interesting relationships that can collaborate with a more specific understanding in the study of SWB and in future evidence-based intervention designs. Similarities were detected in terms of the pattern of relationships between the variables adjusted for both countries and age groups. Differences in the results between the two countries were found whose analysis can contribute not only to a greater understanding of childhood, but also to the mutual learning that can arise in this comparative observation of children in different contexts.

The third objective was to analyze the relationship of children's age and gender with the association between the neighborhood and SWB. Regarding age, the relationship has been analyzed in the previous paragraphs in which the differences in the results according to the age of the children have been noted both within each country and between Chile and Israel. Satisfaction with the neighborhood was shown to be more important in the SWB of older children, which could be related to the fact that as children grow, the cycles of influences expand beyond families and the neighborhood may become more important to their well-being. Research results with adolescents in other countries are consistent with this evidence (Aminzadeh et al., 2013; Oberle et al., 2011). This reinforces the need to check differences by age group to obtain a more specific and differentiated data analysis.

As reported in the results, the analyzed mediation model showed that all regression and correlation weights were significant for the variables studied except for the effects of the gender variable on the SWB latent variable, which was significant only for the case of Chile. For the 12-year-old group, Chilean boys displayed significantly higher SWB scores than Chilean girls. These results match with other studies in Chilean children that demonstrate differences between girls and boys (Ditzel et al., 2021; Rees, 2021). In Israel, the results show that being a boy or a girl does not significantly alter SWB. This characteristic was already observed in previous studies and suggests that Israeli society is more equal between boys and girls than other countries (Tatar & Myers, 2010). In the case of Chile, it is striking that these gender differences are not observed in the younger age group, but they are evident in the older group. This means it is important to more deeply analyze what happens when Chilean children reach adolescence and to understand what happens to Chilean girls who show a significant decrease in SWB compared to boys. Some previous studies have investigated the gender differences between Chilean children. A study that analyzed gender differences in health-related quality of life (HR-QOL) in 7,910 Chilean adolescents showed gender differences consistent with what is reported in other countries (González et al., 2016). Girls displayed lower scores than boys in areas such as their self-perception of physical and psychological well-being, mood, autonomy, relationship with parents, and family life. Girls had higher scores than boys on only two dimensions related to friends and social support and the school environment. The conclusions suggested that adolescent girls in school in Chile perceive a worse HR-QOL than adolescent boys. Another study evaluated the educational inclusion of girls

in mathematics classrooms. Researchers analyzed interactions between teachers and students using representative sociograms and modeling with multilevel regressions. They conclude that the results embody a gender bias that negatively affects girls, confirming patterns of sexism in the classroom that would affect their learning and development (Ortega et al., 2021). The results of this study warn about a difference in the levels of girls' SWB in the older age group studied in Chile compared to boys, suggesting more research and attention be paid to this specific group of girls.

These findings reinforce the idea of incorporating age and gender variables in the study of children's well-being because it provides interesting elements of analysis and considerations for the design and evaluation of educational and promotional programs aimed at better development in equal opportunities for boys and girls.

The study of SWB has advanced in recent decades and encouraged the interest of many countries to better understand the situation of their children. This has resulted in a sizeable number of publications contributing evidence that currently provides interesting information for creating initiatives and programs for children in various countries (Bruck & Ben-Arieh, 2020). However, fewer studies have compared children's SWB across countries. The complexity of gaining access to comparable representative samples, the use of instruments that have methodological validation and data analysis that considers the social, economic and cultural differences that may be present in the countries are likely some of the reasons that difficulties have arisen in carrying out comparative studies between countries. Children's Worlds' international research has facilitated the development of such international studies. It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to broadening the understanding of SWB for children in Israel and Chile and prove to be an interesting input for child-oriented designs in each country. It has tested a mediation model whose methodological analysis is expected to assist comparative studies between countries. The results reflect some common characteristics among children in this study as well as other differentiating ones.

The results of the present study have limitations that should be considered. One of them is the fact that the samples of the children from Israel and Chile were taken from the schools that the children attended, therefore unschooled children are left out. Although the percentages of children who do attend schools in Israel and Chile are high, children who do not attend classes are the ones who probably have the greatest psychosocial problems, meaning effort should be made to integrate such children into future studies.

Another limitation that was mentioned above is the fact that the data analysis was based on the average scores reported by children, so it does not show inequalities within countries. Thus, the results reflect general trends that should be complemented by more specific studies within each country.

Regarding the Children's Worlds study, it was observed that some items related to the neighborhood were not answered by the children of the two countries, so they could not be included. It is expected that in future waves of the study the complete information associated with the children's neighborhood for each country will be available, which will facilitate the analysis of comparative studies. The results presented here were based on the information obtained from the above-named international study whose discussion of results could be enriched with other research sources, which remains as a challenge for future studies.

Lastly, beyond these limitations, it is expected that this study will contribute to the understanding of the relationship between the neighborhood where children live and their subjective well-being, providing evidence of some similarities and differences found in children living in Chile and Israel.

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Declarations

Ethics Declaration The authors state that there is no conflict of interest. Legal and ethical standards corresponding to each country have been strictly adopted for the data collection.

Declaration of Interests The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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