



Child Protection in Crisis

Network for Research, Learning & Action

A Ugandan childhood: through the eyes of children and parents



A report by the Child Protection in Crisis Network

The Consultation

In 2011, 320 children from across Uganda participated in a consultation on the nature of childhood in the country. Drawn from urban and rural areas in the south, north, east and west, children shared their hopes as they described what they saw ‘doing well’ as a child to mean. Over 150 parents, from the same communities, indicated their own aspirations for their children as they too described what they saw as marking those children who were ‘doing well’.

The findings suggest some key characteristics defining children’s well-being in contemporary Uganda, which should shape national approaches to child protection. The consultation also revealed important differences in the perspectives of children and parents, and in expectations of boys and girls, that inform work in promoting children’s well-being across the nation.

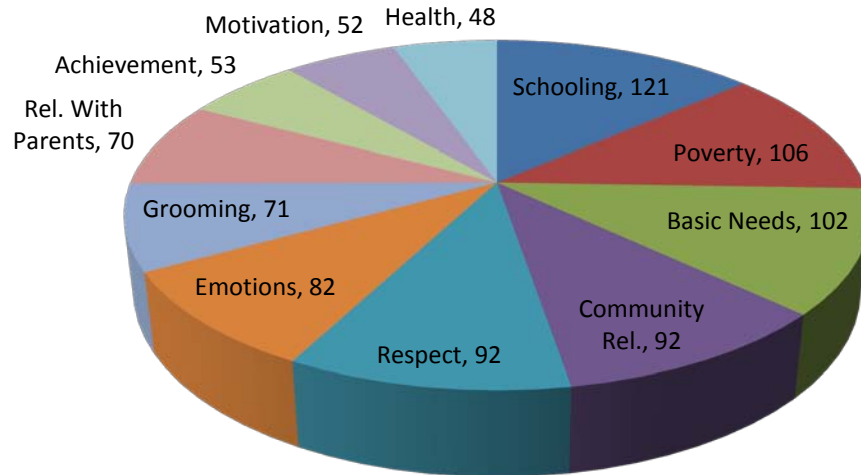


‘Doing Well’ in Uganda?

80% of the characteristics of a child ‘doing well’ suggested by participants could be grouped into one of eleven categories. These were: schooling (being in school, progressing well, able to pay fees etc.); not in poverty (being able to afford things, having possessions etc.), basic needs (having adequate food, clothing, bedding etc.); community relationships (having friends outside the home, getting

along within the community etc.); respect (having good manners, showing respect for others etc.); emotions (being happy, content etc.); grooming (being well presented, clean etc.); relationship with parents (communicating well, showing love and concern etc.); achievement (being successful, especially in school); motivation (trying hard, setting goals etc.) and health (being fit and well etc.).

Categories of characteristics of children ‘doing well’ (showing percentage of all responses)

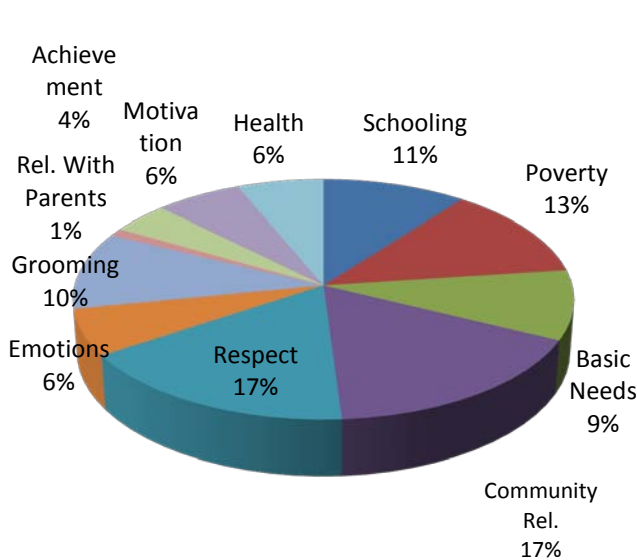


The figure above shows the number of suggested characteristics fitting each of these categories. Of a total of 1121 characteristics mentioned, nearly 30% of all items fell in the first three categories. Overall, **schooling** emerges as the top priority marking positive children’s well-being, suggesting supporting school enrollment and continuation in school to be a key strategy to support a sense of well-being in children (in addition to being of broader economic and social value). Material conditions, however, were also generally acknowledged to be of significance in shaping the experience of childhood. Characteristics signaling that a child was **not in poverty** and had **basic needs** met were also high up in the overall ranking, confirming that children, as well as parents, recognize the importance of such issues in determining ‘doing well’

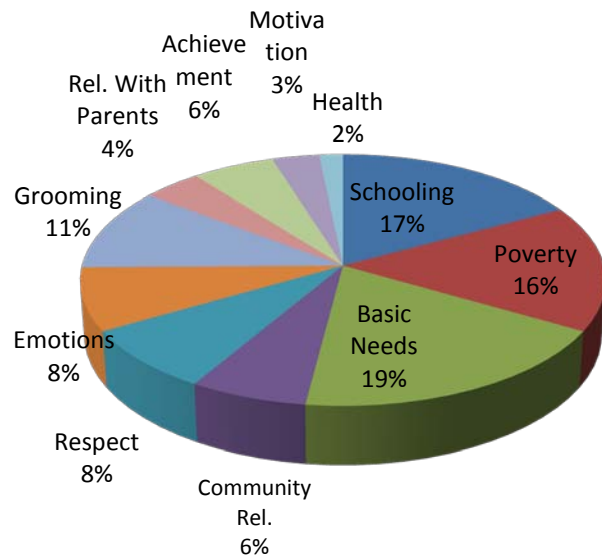
Children’s Expectations of Boys & Girls

With respect to this overall pattern, it is of interest to see variations across those consulted. For example, the responses of young children suggest that they see ‘doing well’ to look very different for a boy or a girl (the different pattern of responding regarding young boys and young girls below being significantly different¹.) Young children expect boys to show *respect* and to have good *community relations* (including with friends and neighbors), while for young girls the importance of *schooling* and *basic needs*, such as food and clothing, being met are more emphasized.

Young Boys



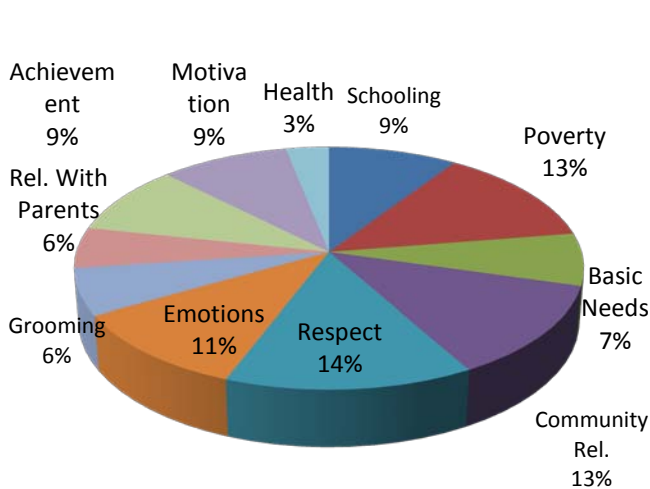
Young Girls



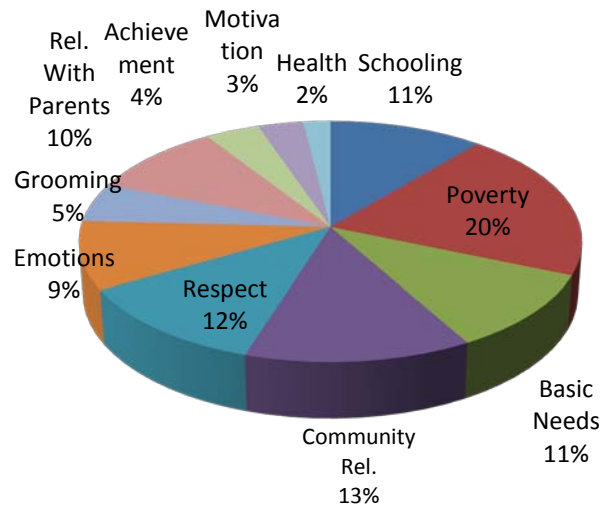
¹ $\chi^2 = 20.34, p=0.026$

However, with judgments of older children, such differences are less marked. As with younger children, adolescents see successful girls to be *avoiding poverty* and having *basic needs* met. But *relationships with the community* and showing *respect* are seen as equally important by adolescent boys and girls.

Older Boys



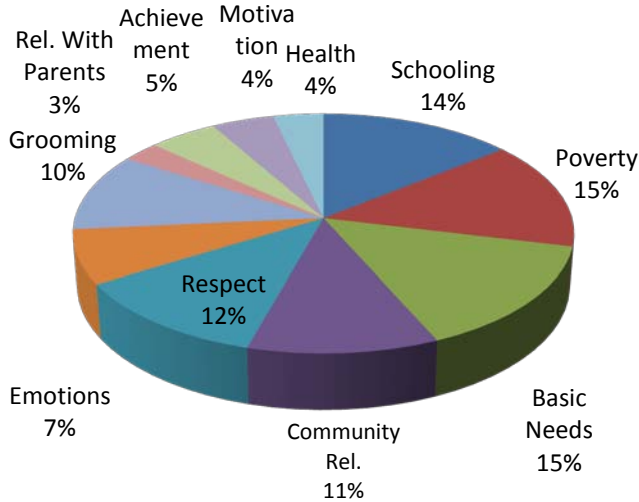
Older Girls



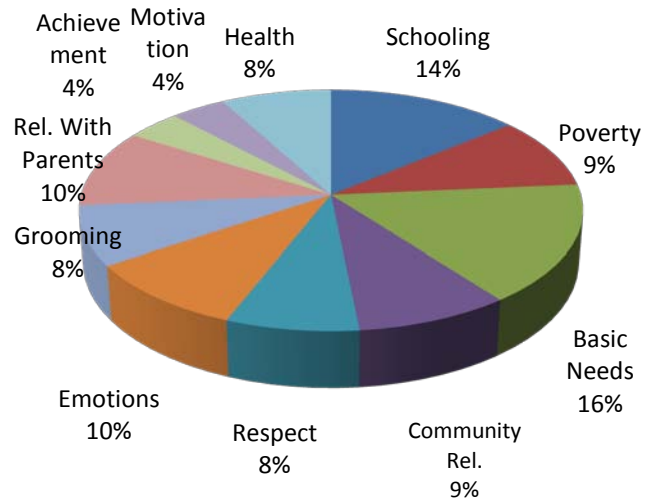
Thus, while we need to acknowledge the importance of gender, adolescent boys and girls have a similar vision for their success and well-being, with *respect* and *good relationships within the community* big factors alongside *material well-being* and progress in *schooling*.

Children and Parents Don't Value the Same Things

Young Children Themselves



Young Children by Adults

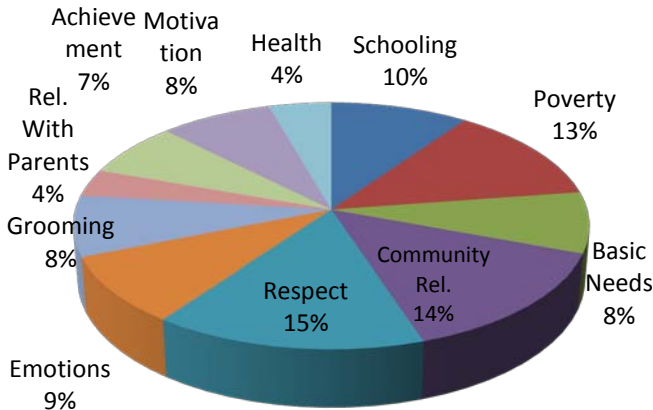


The characteristics of young children ‘doing well’ that are highlighted by parents are significantly different from those identified by children² There are major areas of overlap in areas such as schooling, meeting basic needs and relationships within the community, but parents are more likely to highlight the importance of a child having a *good relationship with parents* and *being in good health*. However, adolescents and their parents share very similar views on what represents doing well in one’s adolescence. There are no significant differences in their ratings, with *good relationships with parents, showing respect, and demonstrating positive emotions* emerging as important for both.

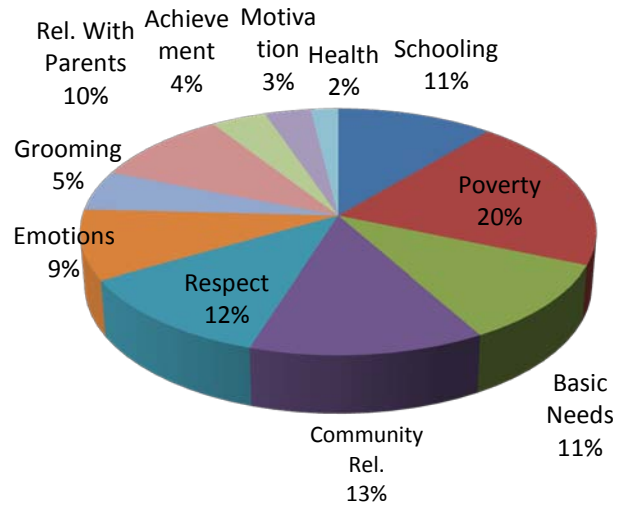


² $\chi^2 = 20.99, p = 0.021$

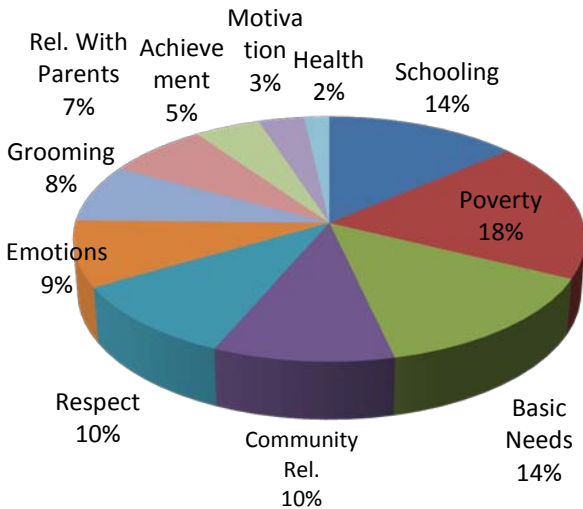
Boys Themselves



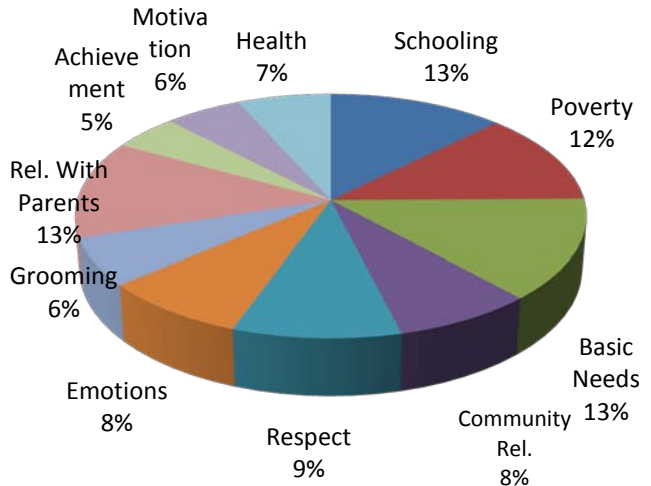
Boys by Male Parents



Girls Themselves



Girls by Female Parents



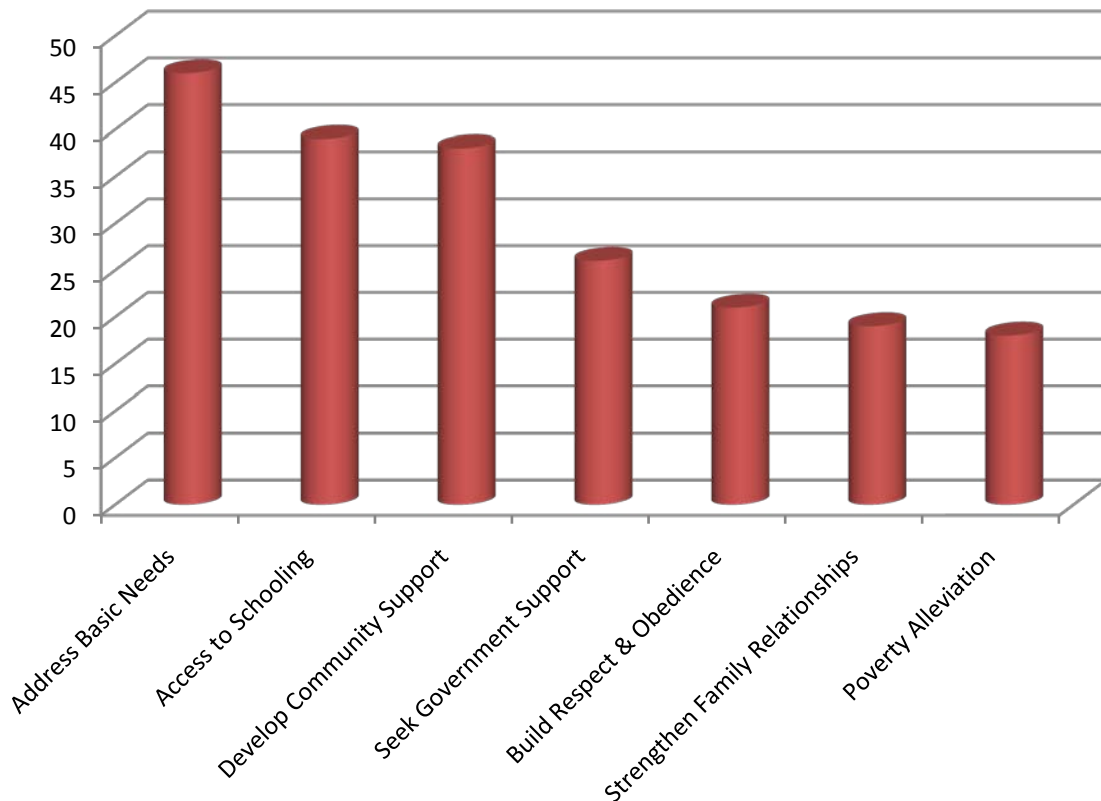
Finally, the consultation suggested that there were significant differences in what was seen as ‘doing well’ by boys and male parents³, and also by girls and female parents⁴. Male parents put more emphasis on *not being in poverty* and *having a good relationship with parents* compared to boys themselves. Female parents put less emphasis on *poverty* and more on *relationships with parents* and *health* than girls themselves.

³ $\chi^2 = 19.19, p=0.038$

⁴ At borderline significance, with $\chi^2 = 18.23, p=0.051$

How to Address the Problems of Children?

Although the emphasis here is on the account given by those consulted about positive well-being in childhood, it is appropriate to note the views addressing the needs of children that were not enjoying positive well-being. Unsurprisingly, given their prominence in accounts of positive well-being, *addressing basic needs*, *promoting access to schooling* and *developing effective community support* were the three categories of response most frequently proposed across all participants. *Securing government support*, *building respect and obedience* (utilizing the cultures, traditions and value of communities), *strengthening family relationships*, and *getting out of poverty* were the other channels of response that represented more than 5% of all suggestions made.





Details of the Survey Method

Four research sites were selected for the study: Kampala, Lira, Masaka, and Katakwi, with research teams provided by ChildFund, International Rescue Committee, World Vision, and Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) respectively. For each site, a rural and an urban location were selected. Interviews were conducted in schools at that location and in the surrounding communities. Surveys were developed in English, and translated into Luganda, Langi and Teso.

At each research site 40 children aged between 8 and 12, and 40 youths between 13 and 18, were interviewed. Using a variant of the Brief Ethnographic Interview⁵ participants were asked to think of examples of children they knew who they considered to be ‘doing well’, and to describe the characteristics that led them to make that judgment. They were also asked other questions about children facing difficulties, and potential strategies to assist them, which are not the focus of the current report.

Responses were transcribed onto cards and sorted by raters into 31 thematic groups. 18% of cards were randomly selected for entry into an Excel spreadsheet for statistical analysis.

In addition to the current document, this work has been used to inform the report *Defining Success: Developing Locally Meaningful Indicators for Child-Centered Psychosocial Programming in Uganda*.

⁵ Hubbard, J. (n.d.) Brief Ethnographic Interviews. Minnesota: CITR.

The Implications for Practice

ACCESS TO SCHOOLING IS CRUCIAL FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

Across all regions, and all age groups, schooling consistently emerged as the most important factor supporting children's well-being

MEETING BASIC NEEDS AND NOT BEING IN POVERTY REMAIN CENTRAL CONCERNS FOR CHILDREN

It was clear that meeting basic physical needs, such as having food, shelter and clothing, and not being in poverty were not 'taken for granted' by children or their parents.

GOOD COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPECT ARE ALSO KEY TO CHILDHOOD IN UGANDA

These factors were consistently in the 'top five' characteristics identified and, for some groups, displaced schooling, basic needs and not being in poverty in importance.

YOUNG BOYS AND GIRLS VALUE DIFFERENT THINGS IN CHILDHOOD, BUT SUCH DIFFERENCES DIMINISH IN ADOLESCENCE

Adolescent girls and adolescent boys shared a similar view of well-being being marked by a concern for respect and good relationships within the community as well as material well-being and progress in schooling.

PARENTS HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF A CHILD HAVING A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENTS AND BEING IN GOOD HEALTH

These issues are recognized by children, but given higher priority by parents.

SCHOOLING, MEETING BASIC NEEDS AND BUILDING UPON COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY TO ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS OF CHILDHOOD

Among other strategies, children and parents prioritized these ways to address the problems of children.

CPC Network

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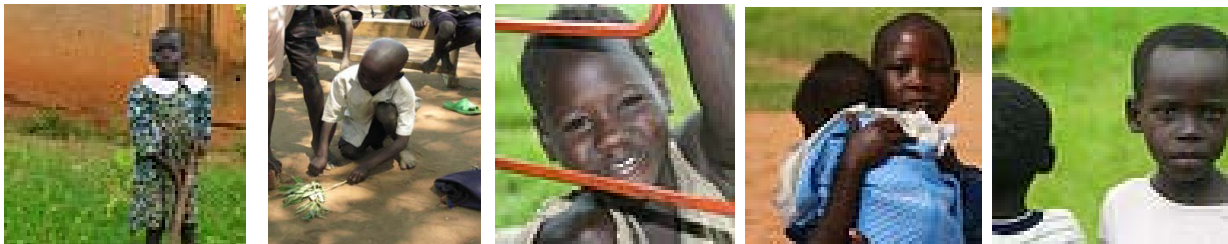
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Photos: Lindsay Stark, Faith McCollister & Alastair Ager