New Approaches to the Study of Social Inclusion of Poor Children and Youth

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Edited by Anita Borch and Kirsi Laitala

Table of Contents

Editorial

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Abstract
This thematic issue seeks to bring the field of science on poverty and social inclusion/exclusion of children and youth beyond the state-of-the-art, empirically, theoretically, and methodologically. This editorial briefly presents the topic and summarizes the different articles published in the issue.

Keywords
childhood; consumption; poverty; social inclusion

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "New Approaches to the Study of Social Inclusion of Poor Children and Youth" edited by Anita Borch (OsloMet) and Kirsi Laitala (OsloMet).

1. Introduction

Poverty, often passed from one generation to another, is associated with an increased risk of being marginalized and socially excluded in childhood and adult life. Why some poor children connect to their surroundings while others do not is, however, insufficiently understood, diminishing our chance to develop efficient policy measures aiming to reduce social inequality and increase social mobility.

This thematic issue seeks to bring the field of science on poverty and social inclusion/exclusion of children and youth beyond the state-of-the-art, empirically, theoretically, and methodologically. It includes six articles and one commentary addressing social inequality amongst children from different parts of the world: Europe, Canada, and China. Most contributions are studying economic and material deprivation from a child's perspective, emphasizing the experiences and challenges children and youth (0 to 24-year-olds) are facing in different arenas—in education, family, care, research, law, and policy. All articles present a new approach to the study of children and youth, yet the way in which they are novel varies. Let us hereby briefly introduce the articles by pointing at some of these novelties and the articles' main results.

In "Education Aspirations and Barriers to Achievement for Street-Involved Youth in Victoria, Canada," Vetrone et al. (2022) conduct qualitative interviews of a social group that rarely has been studied before: street-involved youth who were partly or fully disengaged from school. The study indicates that these youths like school and find education important but are facing too many barriers in everyday life hindering them to take part in the educational system.

Also in "Exploring Children's Views and Experiences in the Frontline of Poverty in Catalonia: A Qualitative and Participatory Approach," Narciso et al. (2022) report qualitative research on social groups that have seldom been the subject of research: poor children and youth and social intervention staff aiming to enhance their situation. The article indicates that material deprivation plays a role in youth's life and that their understanding of social inequality and poverty, as well as coping strategies, vary.

In "Economic Abuse From Child and Youth Perspectives: A Review of the Literature," Bruno (2022) does not focus on an underexamined social group but on a social

phenomenon that only in exceptional cases has been examined before: economic violence from a child and youth perspective. The research encompasses both economic violence conducted against children directly and indirectly via the economic abuse of one of the parents, usually the mother. The article is based on a scoping review. Although Bruno makes an effort to map what we know about economic violence from a child and youth perspective today, the review shows that the lack of knowledge in this field is striking.

The article "Immigrant Children's Connections to People and the World Around Them: A Critical Discourse Review of Academic Literature" by Borch (2022) uses another type of review—the critical discourse review—to conclude that highly cited literature on immigrant children's connections to people and the world around them tend to be published by psychologists inclined to ignore the material conditions of children's connections.

In "Court Cases on Poor Children's Access to Normalcy," Näsman and Fernqvist (2022) question how children and youth are treated in the court system. The focus is on how the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is practiced within this system in cases where parents have applied for social services for financial aid and appealed the rejection of the application to the court. The research shows that the court system tends to use the opportunity to foster and discipline parents and to give them incentives to become self-sufficient mostly rather than ensuring a safe childhood for all.

In the last article of this thematic issue, "Mixed-Methods Inquiry of Socially Inclusive e-Learning: A Policy Document Analysis and Rapid Survey Study," Liu et al. (2022) uses a mixed-method approach to study social inequality and policy measures related to the new and fast-growing research field addressing the after-effects and lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic. The research shows how students' accessibility to technical equipment like personal computers and smartphones—and, hence, their learning experience during the pandemic—varied. Political measures aiming to overcome these potential sources of social inequality are suggested.

The thematic issue closes with a commentary by Mari Rysst, professor at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences (HINN) and research professor at OsloMet. Rysst (2022) critically evaluates this thematic issue and argues that the novelty of published articles is, for the most part, empirical and to a less extent theoretical

and methodological. She illustrates her argument by describing an ongoing project based on research techniques that are seldom used in research on children and poverty today.

Overall, this thematic issue confirms the importance of keeping on focusing on children and youth and the economic and material conditions of their lives. In this turbulent time characterized by multiple crises related to climate, energy, armed conflicts, economic crisis, and the Covid-19 restrictions, addressing social inequality and poverty among children and youth may not be a prioritized area of research. The individual and societal costs of downgrading this area are, however, considerable in the form of dropouts from school and future unemployment, disablement, and low income.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Article

Education Aspirations and Barriers to Achievement for Street-Involved Youth in Victoria, Canada

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Abstract

Much of the literature on street-involved youth focuses on their deficits, including their high risk of withdrawing before completing high school, which is often interpreted as a rejection of formal education. Missing from the literature is an understanding of street-involved youth's educational aspirations. We employed thematic analysis of qualitative data from in-person interviews with a purposive sample of street-involved youth (N = 69) residing in one city in Canada, who were partly or fully disengaged from school at the time of the interview. We asked the youth to talk about their opinions of formal education, its importance for young people, whether learning was important for them, and whether they imagined returning to school/continuing with school. We discovered that the majority of youth had a positive view of school/formal education and stated they liked learning new things and recognized the benefits of continuing/completing their education. At the same time, the youth identified material hardship and other barriers to achieving their educational goals. We discuss these findings in light of the relevant literature and make policy recommendations to improve educational success for youth struggling with poverty and homelessness in Canada.

Keywords

Canada; education; educational aspirations; homelessness; social inclusion; street-involved youth

1. Introduction

Researchers have recently called for attention to the influence of formal education on health and well-being (The Lancet Public Health, 2020) and social inclusion in society (Smith et al., 2015; Tilbury et al., 2014). Formal education in Canada is the full-time continuous participation in educational institutions from age five until around 17–18 years of age (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). Formal education ranges from regular schooling, vocational learning, instruction for those with special needs, and some areas of adult education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). Equitable and inclusive education is currently a major goal for education policy globally (Gidley et al., 2010; OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2020). People without high school diplomas are more likely to experience unemployment or underemployment and be at risk of poverty throughout their adult lives (Levin et al., 2007; Liljedahl et al., 2013; Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). Other costs of limited formal education include a reduced sense of life control and lower personal satisfaction and self-esteem (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). In brief, education is one of the most modifiable social influences on health and well-being and has the potential to mitigate structural risks (McGill, 2016).

Yet education remains out of reach for many people experiencing marginalization. The marginalization

of people in education is rooted in social exclusion, which disadvantages certain groups or individuals based on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic or housing status (Benoit et al., 2009; Duchak, 2014). Canadian research shows that only two-thirds of Indigenous students in British Columbia (BC) finish high school compared to over 80% of comparable age non-Indigenous students (Auditor General of British Columbia, 2015). Even more disconcerting, the graduation rate for youth in the care of the government of BC (henceforth referred to as "government care") was just 53% in 2014 (British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2016).

Youth who are street-involved—the focus of this article—are over-represented in the numbers of young people not holding a high school diploma and are commonly depicted in the media and other channels as not interested in going to school (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013). Street-involved youth—also referred to as "street youth," "homeless youth," "runaway youth," or "system youth" (Kennedy et al., 2017; Magnuson et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2015)—are young people with loose or no attachment to their family, who are "absolutely, periodically or temporarily without shelter, as well as those who are at a substantial risk of being in the street in their immediate future" (Daly, 1996, p. 24). In this article, we seek to understand if early withdrawal should be interpreted as a rejection of the formal education system by gaining a deeper understanding of the educational aspirations of street-involved youth.

2. Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework draws on human rights and strength-based approaches. Education is a foundational human right that is written into law in Canada and the UN Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948, art. 26.1). This includes the right to an education that is free from discrimination based on "race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (United Nations, 1948, art. 2). While Canada is regarded as having a world-class education system ("A quality education in Canada," 2018), structural inequalities continue to exclude marginalized youth from achieving their future career goals and maximizing their health across the life course (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020; The Lancet Public Health, 2020). We also draw upon a strengths-based perspective (Harvey, 2014) to center the voices of street-involved youth in improving our understanding of the impact of social forces on their educational success and the structural changes needed to improve educational access and opportunities.

3. Literature Review

Attending high school in Canada is considered a normative stage in adolescence and it is a legislated requirement for youth to attend school until the age of 16 (Hyman et al., 2011; Liljedahl et al., 2013; Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1996). Canada ranks higher than most OECD countries regarding educational achievement, with 86.3% of Canadians holding a high school diploma or an equivalent and 50.4% have some post-secondary education (Statistics Canada, 2017). Canada strives for educational policies targeted at raising the average performance in schools with measurable standards to assess achievement in core subject areas (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021; Klasen, 2001). The delivery of education varies slightly across Canada as each province and territory is responsible for its own implementation and oversight ("A quality education in Canada," 2018).

Public schools are where adolescents occupy the most time outside of their homes (Eccles & Roeser, 2009). Adolescence is a time of rapid development for young people of high school age (12–18), where there is a range of changes in their bodies, sexual interests, relationships, identity, and orientation towards the future (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Eccles and Roeser's (2009, p. 226) review of the developmental aspects of schools posits that "declines in adolescents' motivation during the transition to secondary school in part reflects academic work that lacks challenges and meaning" that is in line with their developmental needs. In a study of street-involved girls in Canada, Dhillon (2011, p. 113) asserts that the formal curriculum within schools can "become inextricably linked with the successes of certain students and the failures of others."

In BC, where the present study is situated, the majority of young people are educated through public schools which receive a combination of funding from the province and fundraising from individual schools (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021; Society for Children and Youth of BC, 2020). The province has policies to provide additional funding for the inclusion of young people with disabilities, for rural youth, and for youth who are of Indigenous background and who have been/currently are in government care (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2020). There are no explicit policies to provide funding for or to support the inclusion of street-involved youth in education in the province or Canada wide (Hyman et al., 2011; Liljedahl et al., 2013). An examination of child rights in BC report shows as well that public schools in Canada are chronically underfunded (Society for Children and Youth of BC, 2020).

In Canada street-involved youth is estimated to make up 20% of the country's unhoused population (Gaetz, 2014). These marginalized youth are also less likely than their housed peers to participate in the formal education system, complete high school, and attain post-secondary credentials (Smith et al., 2007). Findings from the Canadian National Youth Homeless Survey in 2016 found that street-involved youth drop out of school at a rate of 53.2% compared to a rate of 9% for all Canadian youth (Gaetz et al., 2016).

Some street-involved or "at-risk" youth find successful learning environments in alternative education programs. However, these alternatives are often short-term, experimental, plagued by changing policy agendas, and lack continuous funding (McGregor, 2017; Peled et al., 2010). While a small body of literature shows that some street-involved youth value education and try to access supports that help them to remain in school (Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Julianelle, 2008; Smith et al., 2015), the common discourse on street-involved youth characterizes them as "unintelligent, lazy and delinquent" (Karabanow et al., 2010, p. 61) and choose to withdraw from the educational system (Curtis, 2019; McGregor, 2017; Pendergast et al., 2018; Robinson, 2015). Some investigators find that these youth adopt an alternative definition of education (Tierney & Hallett, 2012). In a study conducted with street-involved youth in Vancouver, Rogers et al. (2014, p. 65) found that young people redefined their experiences of living on the street "as a way to access new spaces of learning, new talents and abilities, and to develop new social skills."

There is a wide breadth of research highlighting the barriers that these street-involved youth face in obtaining their education (Ferguson & Xie, 2012; Jones et al., 2018; Klodawsky et al., 2006; Magnuson et al., 2021; Solomon, 2013). Young people who are able to remain in school while being street-involved contend with frequent absences and lack the space to complete homework (Dhillon, 2011; Jones et al., 2018; Tierney & Hallett, 2012). Additionally, schools are often experienced as unsafe spaces for street-involved youth, where they fear discrimination from peers and are sometimes subjected to harsh disciplinary action (Jones et al., 2018; Klodawsky et al., 2006; Robinson, 2015; Smith et al., 2015; Society for Children and Youth of BC, 2020; Tierney & Hallett, 2012). While having a caring mentor/support person is a reason street-involved youth remain in school, the absence of one is a prominent reason they disengage from formal education (Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Dhillon, 2011; Jones et al., 2018; Klodawsky et al., 2006; Rew, 2008; Robinson, 2015).

Building on this body of research, in this study we aim to answer these research questions: Do street-involved youth reject formal education? What challenges do they face re-engaging with school? And what are their opinions and attitudes about learning in general?

4. Methods

4.1. Risky Business Study

Our data comprise interviews and surveys from a five-wave panel study called "Risky Business? Experiences of Street Youth." The purpose of the study was to understand the impact of street life on the health and well-being of a diverse sample of street-involved youth in Victoria, BC, Canada.

4.2. Sample and Procedure

To be eligible for this study, the participants had to be between the ages of 14–18 years at first contact, with loose or no attachment to family and school. Different sampling techniques were used to recruit participants. The principal investigators had relationships with four community partner organizations in downtown Victoria that provide services to street-involved youth in the area. The organizations were able to assist in establishing recruitment protocols and coordinating access to youth who were living on the street, either part- or full-time. Participants were also recruited through contacts with the provincial Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Ministry of Health Services, and through front-line services, such as the Victoria Youth Clinic, a local community health and social care resource that plays an important role in these young people's lives. In addition, ads for the study were posted in local spots where street-involved youth were known to congregate.

A portion of the youth was recruited through "respondent-driven sampling" (Heckathorn, 1997, p. 177), a technique employed to recruit hidden populations when no sampling frame exists, who experience stigma by the general population and when acknowledging membership with the group can be threatening. All youth who participated in the study were given cards with information about the study to hand out to their peers. If the young people who distributed the cards recruited peers to participate, they were given ten dollars per recruited participant. Close to half of all participants were recruited for the project through this sampling method (Kennedy et al., 2017; Magnuson et al., 2017).

Described at length elsewhere are the research protocol and ethical considerations that were undertaken throughout the study (Benoit et al., 2008; Kennedy et al., 2017; Magnuson et al., 2017, 2021). Briefly, during each wave, the participants completed an interviewer-administered questionnaire that included open and closed-ended questions. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours in length. Interviews and open-ended questions were transcribed by trained research assistants and the principal investigators. All participants provided verbal consent prior to completing the interviews. For the first interview, participants were offered a $20 honorarium and received $25 for subsequent interviews. The research protocol for this study was approved by the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board. Gender neutral pseudonyms have been applied and identifiers have been removed from the responses presented in the results to protect participants' identities.

The findings below are from the 69 participants who took part in wave four of data collection and provided answers to the qualitative questions analyzed herein. In addition to the repeated questions asked across all six waves, questions in the fourth wave focused on youth's

educational experience, attitudes, and perception of the education system and what they need to reengage with formal education. The mean age of these 69 youth at the time of the first interview was 16.7 years, 64% identified as cis women, and half of them had experienced foster care. Almost one-third identified as Indigenous and almost all declared multiple ethnicities, among those who provided information on their ethnic background other than Indigenous. The most common ethnicities were North European (52%), Canadian, and Latino (9% each). At wave 4 of the study the mean age of participants was 18.5 years and 60% of them had worked for a salary or wage in the last two months. Nevertheless, the living situation of most participants continued to be precarious, with only a quarter of them sleeping every night in their own rented house or apartment during the last month or sleeping in the home of a parent or guardian. Pertinent to this article, only 35% were enrolled in the regular school system in the first wave of the study, compared to 97% of 15-year-old youths in the general population (Statistics Canada, 2018). At wave 4, 36% said they had been enrolled in the regular school system at any point during the last two months.

4.3. Data Analysis

Answers to the following open-ended question about participants' views of education were analyzed: What are your opinions about formal education? Probes included: Do you think getting an education is important for young people? Is learning important to you? Do you imagine yourself going back to school or continuing with school? Qualitative analyses were conducted using NVIVO-12.

The data analysis followed the procedures for thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006) by employing a non-linear process beginning with the first author getting familiar with all transcribed responses to the education questions from the 69 participants. A combination of an inductive and deductive approach to generating an initial coding structure was used to identify the broader themes, then review and refine the identified themes, and finally define and name themes. The next steps in the analysis were taken to achieve validity and reliability in the coding process (Guest et al., 2012). The tentative themes generated by the first author were presented, described in detail, and justified to the other authors. After revisions to the themes, two authors independently coded five randomly selected transcripts and this coding was presented to all authors to achieve intercoder reliability (Guest et al., 2012; Morse, 2015). After minor revisions, the coding was applied to the entire data set by the first author. The analysis thus consisted of collaborative, iterative cycles of coding the data, considering themes, reviewing the relevant literature, auditing coding, re-considering themes, and re-coding conducted by multiple authors until consensus was achieved on the final codes.

5. Results

Participants' responses showed both formal education and informal education/learning were important in their lives, that they struggle to engage with the formal education process, and that they face formidable barriers to re-engaging, continuing, and completing their schooling. Three core themes are highlighted below:

1. importance of formal education;
2. barriers to returning/continuing formal education;
3. importance of informal education.

5.1. Importance of Formal Education

Formal education "takes place in educational institutions that are designed to provide full time education for students in a system designed as a continuous educational pathway" (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012, p. 11). When reflecting on the value they see in having a formal education, many participants had a different perspective now that they were out of school. Some wished they had continued. Other participants spoke about their changing perception of the formal education system and how the time away from school helped them to realize their goals and how learning is needed to get them there.

5.1.1. New Perspective on Formal Education After Leaving

For some participants reflecting on their educational experiences they expressed regret for not continuing. Archer said: "I regret not having my education." There was some self-critique for the choices they had made to disengage. Campbell put it like this: "Yeah. I think it was stupid for me to drop out halfway through grade ten." Other participants channeled that new perspective to take advantage of an opportunity they missed out on. Lennon stated:

> If I had a chance to go back [to school] and do it again, I would. And I'd stick to it. You know, I wouldn't like it, I'd hate it just as much, but now I know that, you know, how much I actually missed out on.

For Yael, taking time away from school helped him figure out what he wants to do:

> It also depends [on] what you want to do later in life. Um, not necessarily do many people know what they want, not many teenagers know what they want to do. I didn't really know what I wanted to do till [a] couple [of] weeks ago.

This was reinforced by Salem's response: "It is [important] now that I have a goal for myself. Because now I'm taking school for myself."

5.1.2. Recognition of the Benefits an Education Can Provide

Youth who were engaged with the formal education system at the time of the interview mentioned that the most important change associated with their current engagement was a recognition of the opportunities it could connect them to and why schooling was needed to succeed in our society. Jordan described how education is important not only for learning the standard curriculum but also for socio-emotional development:

> I think it gives us a certain confidence that everyone deserves. It makes us feel, I hope, comfortable in our own skin and, you know, able to handle everyday situations. And unfortunately, whether we like it or not, it is the gateway to any job we could ever, ever want or have.

Casey concurred:

> It's more the fact that, our society has progressed to a level where you need some form of education to be able to survive comfortably, and, like, support yourself and support other people, like children and stuff like that. So I definitely think that an education is an asset, yeah, it's definitely important.

For Brady "education is one of the more important things a youth should have. Without proper education, there are most jobs in this world that a youth cannot get." Taylor shared this practical view: "Yeah, because you need to be able to make money and [learning] that's [school] the only way you can do it." Lennon framed his perspective on formal education this way: "It's not about listening to adults and your parents and stuff. It's about setting yourself up for your future." Salem stated "Now that I have goals for myself, I think. That's the whole difference, and I know that school is just one step that I need to take to get there." Kelly put it this way: "I think that it [education] is the most important thing for any person.''

5.1.3. Future Goals

The recognition of the benefits that an education could provide extended beyond just getting a high school diploma to increase employability. For some participants, their future plans also involved post-secondary education, including Skyler's: "Yeah, well, I already figured out what I want to be: I'm going to become a vet. And if that falls through, I'll have like—my political science course. So if that falls through I could become a lawyer." Other participants spoke about how they learned from their experiences on the street and wanted to use that experience to help others after attaining a college/university social work degree. Salem stated: "Basically, I want to become a youth outreach worker. So, I want to work with

kids on the street. And I want to take my social worker's degree and, yeah, and see what happens from there, pretty much."

5.2. Barriers to Returning/Continuing Formal Education

When asked if they imagined going back to school or continuing with school, some participants spoke about barriers that had to be overcome. These barriers were individual—changes within themselves—and also structural—changes related to access to crucial resources and changes in the school system.

5.2.1. Individual Barriers

Some participants relayed that they needed to change their attitude and personal habits. Lee said that, while attending school, he "was lazy." Reese named the barrier to overcome as "motivation [and] self-control." Other participants spoke about how they needed to figure out what they wanted to do with their life. As Arya put it: "I know I'm gonna go; I just don't know what I want to take.''

5.2.2. Structural Barriers

Getting to school was difficult for many of the participants in our study. Carmen stated: "Can't really get up every morning at seven o'clock when you live on the streets." Reilly explained school would be easier by "not having to bus across town every day to get there." For other participants, the challenge was about completing the homework they needed to do outside of school to meet curriculum expectations. As West discussed: "It's difficult [to do schoolwork] because I don't have a computer so I need to be able to go and ask to borrow my friend's library card so I can go to the library." Others mentioned that when you do not have a stable residence, it's hard to have a place to do your work. Charlie needed "more space": "That way I can bring home my work and it doesn't get wrecked." For Archer, the problem was the inflexible school scheduling, which was difficult to balance with employment and other responsibilities: "I want to do some night schooling, because I know I can do night school. Or I can even just get my school paper stuff and bring it home to do."

Youths also voiced discontent about the hurdles they had to face in schools and engaging in learning that they felt was valuable or inspiring. Winter found the classrooms to be uninspiring: "I love learning on my own, and I love reading, and I hate [the] classroom." Winter continued: "When you're sitting there surrounded by your friends and everyone's kind of hypnotized by their paper. That just doesn't work for me." For Flynn, the struggle was not being taught "life skills....Maybe in high school make it more specialized." Lane said that "a lot of the stuff that you learn in school isn't completely necessary."

Education was also costly for some of the youth who struggled to hold down a job to pay for school and other

bills while attending classes. Campbell posited: "If I could go to school, not have to pay anything, just go to school, have it already paid for, I'd go, no problem." Landry discussed their outlook: "'Cause school is a job but, you're not getting paid for it, you're paying for it." Having to pay for an apartment, work, and go to school can be very difficult to manage. Avery expressed their exasperation: "It's just so hard for me 'cause working and then rent and then school and all that is just too much."

5.2.3. Knowledge of the Support Available

Many of the participants were knowledgeable about the support they could access to attending and completing their formal education. When asked where or how they were going to find support, Flynn spoke about getting assistance from a "social worker" to apply for funding for disability benefits. Salem spoke about applying for an Indigenous status card and hoped that it would "help out somewhere along the way [to further education]." Youths who had been in the government care system and "aged out" when they became 19 were eligible for a government program (Agreements With a Young Adult) to help cover housing, child care, tuition, and health care costs (British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development, n.d.). Yet even this program was challenging for street-involved youth like Ramsey, who said the program required them to be either employed or enrolled in school for three months before receiving funding. Ramsey said they were in an impossible place: "I cannot go to school for three months while I'm sleeping outside."

5.3. Role of Informal Education

Informal education is characterized by the absence of an institution, authority figure, or material structure and is contextualized through "learning activities that occur in the family, workplace, local community and daily life, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis" (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012, p. 12). Participants said learning occurred through everyday experiences, impersonal interactions, when taking responsibility, or tapping into community resources to acquire skills. These opportunities to learn were often not recognized in formal education.

5.3.1. Importance of Learning

Participants were probed during their interviews to see the role that learning played in their lives while being street-involved. Learning was important to all participants. Archer said: "I learn every day….Yeah, there's always stuff I'd like to learn how to do." The learning they wanted to engage in often connected to their future goals: Carmen wanted to learn "skills that [could] get [her] a job." While other participants were able to access community resources outside the formal edu-

cation system to expand their learning opportunities. Harley described an opportunity to acquire skills in his local community: "I'm learning about permaculture and agriculture and sustainable, um, practices, food, farming, and all of that." Kennedy argued that learning was important to her even though she was not getting an education in the formal education, as she pointed to her child and declared: "I learned to take care of her, so." To Harper, learning is a life-long process: "I believe that you learn all through our lives, like, you never stop learning." For Hayden, "expansion of knowledge is [the] utmost—it's awesome….If you can expand your perspective on the world then you can understand it better."

5.3.2. Life Experience as Education

While learning was important for the majority of the participants, they spoke about the learning they had from life experiences as being more expansive and beneficial than anything gained through formal education. Jesse stated:

> I've learned lots like from life. I'll look at somebody who's like gone through school and like gotten straight As. Done like so well in school and is like going to college now. And then I look at me, and I'm like look at her maturity level and stuff like that and it's completely different.

The foundational academic skills were discussed by some participants as being important. Skyler shared:

> To tell you the honest truth, education doesn't really matter—well, it does, like, you know, I mean, you need to know the essentials like reading, writing, you know, all the skills of typing or whatever, right, that's, that's easy to learn on your own. But you don't learn as much as you could in school than you would not going to school, because you need life experiences.

For Winter, "the academics are just as easy to learn outside of school": "Like I learned more history being a part of a bookstore for a year than I have probably all my life in school." The learning that occurs within formal education is often standardized to meet the needs of all students. Some youth said that in school you are "just learning what they think you should learn," as Hayden put it. Classroom teaching was described by Alex as being "just writing down stuff that you might use in the future but it's just hard. You learn more stuff just by living on the streets." For Val, "school is not really important…and the things they teach isn't really, totally, relevant [in their life].''

Marley put it this way: "Depending on what you want to do with your life. Um, for me, it's not important, because what I'm doing with my life only really involves common knowledge, and not like specific school stuff." Even if formal education was not valuable for them right now, some participants did not entirely dismiss it.

Carmen saw formal education as a future plan: "You don't have to be a young person to get an education. You can do it when you're thirty years old…You can only be a kid once. So you might as well just be a kid while you want, and then when you're twenty or whatever, you can go back to school."

6. Discussion

The results of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of education for street-involved youth in Canada that extends beyond just the barriers that they face. Our article also challenges the societal stigma that they choose to withdraw from school (Curtis, 2019; McGregor, 2017; Pendergast et al., 2018; Robinson, 2015). The life aspirations of street-involved youth are remarkably mainstream, even if their current circumstances are unusual compared to their peers (Magnuson et al., 2021). The participants valued the benefits that a formal education provides, they talked about future goals that often involved completing their high school diploma and moving on to post-secondary education. These aspirations can be enhanced and reinforced into capabilities through an education system that works to redress injustice by prioritizing equitable opportunities, participation, and empowerment for all students beyond performance standards (Hart & Brando, 2018; Klasen, 2001; Sen, 2005).

The learning gained in the participants' lives through everyday experiences, interactions, and responsibilities were also recognized and valued. The majority of these participants reported a positive attitude towards learning and found meaningful ways to learn through everyday activities. Yet educational policies prioritize attendance and the meeting of measurable standards in order to be deemed successful enough to graduate (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021; Klasen, 2001; Tierney & Hallett, 2012).

The positive attitude towards education and the search for meaningful learning opportunities despite being disengaged from school is not unique to street-involved youth. High schools are often developmentally mismatched to the needs of adolescents (Eccles & Roeser, 2009). Most students have high expectations of the classes they are taking and expect what they are learning to apply to the real world, yet that connection is often opaque to street-involved youth (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). For many street-involved youths in our study, the classroom learning environment did not meet their needs and was not immediately found to be relatable to their future goals. What is needed is a shift from performance measures to a capability-driven approach to education (Hart & Brando, 2018). Failure to do so means further excluding street-involved students from receiving the benefits that a formal education can provide (Klasen, 2001).

Several youths identified their own culpability for educational barriers, including their lack of motivation.

It is important to remember that these problems are not unique to homeless youth. The youth in our study also had knowledge of the supports that they could access but they faced barriers in retrieving them. These supports include housing, disability and income support, making it possible to participate in formal education without having to worry about earning an income, an ongoing concern for many of the participants in our study. Among other barriers, rent subsidies and income supports are inaccessible to street-involved youth in BC because multiple barriers exist including a lack of affordable housing and landlord discrimination (McParland, 2020; Millar, 2009).

Canada has no current national policy providing oversight and funding to support street-involved students in schools (Hyman et al., 2011; Liljedahl et al., 2013). One program intending to fill the gap is Upstream Canada, a program adapted from the Geelong Project in Australia (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020), which connects students in need to community organizations to access support. An interim report on the project showed a 20% reduction in early school leaving of at-risk students in participating schools (MacKenzie, 2018). With education being the most modifiable social determinant of health, the educational aspirations and goals of street-involved youth can be meaningfully incorporated into planning support that are actually needed to achieve their goals (Edgerton et al., 2012; McGill, 2016; The Lancet Public Health, 2020).

Future research should ask questions about the educational programs street-involved youth are engaged in to inform how funding is allocated, the educational spaces they interact within, and the practices of teachers, staff, or other mentors. Exploring early school experiences while collecting accurate data around the time of disengagement for street-involved youth could better direct prevention and intervention services. Learning outside of schools was important for the young people in our study. Exploring the spaces or people street-involved youth learn from would inform educational programs looking to make learning more applicable to the real world of marginalized youth. Additionally, studies of alternative educational programs that take a diverse approach to learning could shed light on how to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach to education and develop a comprehensive framework for educational programs for disadvantaged youth.

The qualitative results presented in this article are not without limitations. First, the article presents findings from a purposive sample of street-involved youth in one geographical location only. Thus, the findings may not be generalized to the greater population of street-involved youth in the metropolitan area or other urban regions of Canada. Second, responses to the interview questions were based on self-report and the probes used (outlined in the data analysis section of the article) reflect forced-choice questions. When addressing the forced-choice probes, even though participants did

not have to answer, they may not have had the freedom to answer the questions if they were asked in an open-ended way. The questions in our study focused on the participants' perception of learning and their educational experiences. None of their accounts were confirmed, and due to the time elapsed since the final wave of the study, member checks were not used. There is also the potential for reporting bias from the young people in the study, choosing what information they share. Additionally, the authors did not ask participants about the type of school they were enrolled in when they answered the questions and who their key teachers or mentors were when street-involved. About 95% of students in Canada attend public schools with relatively homogenous programs. Nevertheless, questions about their particular school(s) could have provided more context to the educational experiences of the young people in our study, and we have recommended this be accounted for in future research.

7. Conclusion

In this study, we reported what a sample of street-involved youth in one Canadian city have to say about the importance of learning and formal education in their lives and their experiences to (re)engage with the institutions within their reach. The approach to data analysis employed in this study was used to reflect street-involved youth's views of education. Their diverse perspectives on education directly challenge misperceptions of this population and provide a catalyst for future research using a human rights and strength-based perspective. For a group of young people who are often characterized as willfully disengaged from school, they remain positive in their outlook about learning new things and have plans to re-engage with formal education (Curtis, 2019; McGregor, 2017; Pendergast et al., 2018). Labeling these students as being "at-risk" or in need of intervention fails to consider their lived realities and the protective factors they call attention to that can increase their engagement within the education system (McGregor, 2017).

Several implications for policy and program development are evident. First, our results reinforce the notion that the housing and economic needs of marginalized young people need to be meaningfully addressed for them to be successful in high school and other formal educational institutions (Hyman et al., 2011; Julianelle, 2008; Liljedahl et al., 2013). Second, there is a need for a multi-level response in Canada, including legislation that governs the delivery of public education to better support street-involved students in their attempts to engage with education (Hyman et al., 2011; Liljedahl et al., 2013). Third, learning opportunities should build upon the lived and living experiences of street-involved youth, helping them to connect to the knowledge they want and the support they need in achieving their future educational goals.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Article

Exploring Children's Views and Experiences in the Frontline of Poverty in Catalonia: A Qualitative and Participatory Approach

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Abstract
One in three children and adolescents is currently living in poverty in Catalonia. Most specialised research has been concerned with assessing and questioning current legal frameworks and policies to combat child poverty mainly through quantitative approaches. However, these approaches neglect the specific experiences, perspectives, and visions of children and their potential to provide important clues for the design and evaluation of policies to eradicate poverty. It is also uncommon to include the experiences and views of social intervention staff who often work in situations of extreme budgetary reductions with remedial—not transformative—models. The article presents some findings from a qualitative study commissioned by UNICEF to explore this double experience from the point of view of its protagonists on the front line, drawing on fieldwork carried out before the Covid-19 pandemic that aggravated the living conditions of the most vulnerable sectors of society. The results show a shared perception of the impact of material deprivation in all spheres of life, but also diversity in coping perspectives and understanding of the structural factors that cause inequality and poverty, as well as the possible responses to overcome them. They also reveal the need to further explore child poverty as a gendered experience.

Keywords
child poverty; participatory methods; qualitative methods; Spain; UNICEF

1. Introduction

According to the Statistical Institute of Catalonia (IDESCAT), one in three children and adolescents under the age of 18 (31%) was already at risk of poverty in Catalonia before the Covid pandemic in 2019 (Figure 1). Moreover, households with average available income below the poverty line were 60% in Catalonia, threefold as much as the 2017 EU average of 22.4% (Eurostat, 2019) in the year regarded as the beginning of the economic recovery after de 2008 crisis in Europe.

The development model and the unequal power structures of late-modern society (see, among others, Castel, 2002; Young, 2007) are at the root of poverty.

The transformations inherent to the post-industrial economic model, with the polarization and deregulation of the labour market (see, among others, Flaquer et al., 2006; Marí-Klose & Marí-Klose, 2012), have led to the loss of weight of wages in the face of the capital, to the detriment of families with dependent children who obtain their income from work (Flaquer & Villà, 2008). The crisis of the welfare state has further aggravated this in Spain due to the lack of policies to support families in comparison to other European countries (León & Pavolini, 2014; Mendoza & Vernis, 2008; Moreno & Acebes, 2008; Rodriguez Cabrero, 2014) and the austerity policies applied during the recession (León & Pavolini, 2015) and their impact on child well-being also in rich
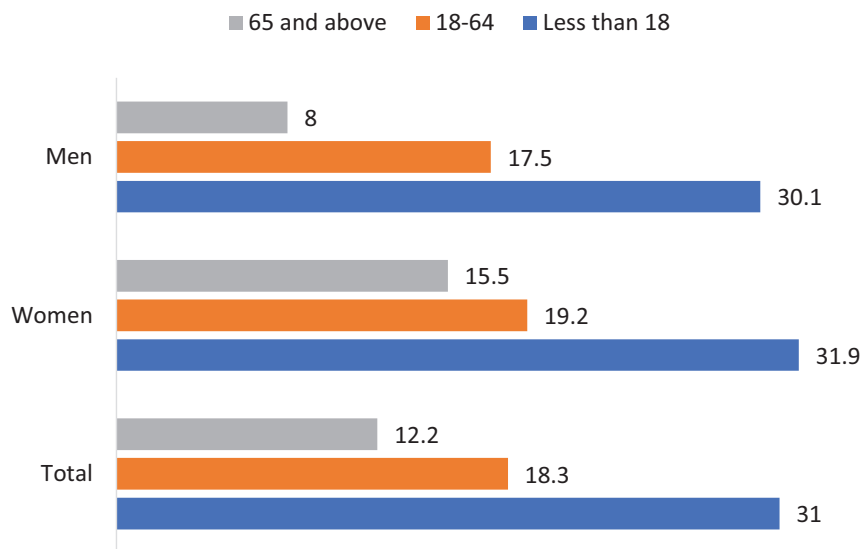
Figure 1. Risk of poverty rate (%) by age and sex (Catalonia 2019). Source: Own elaboration with data from IDESCAT (2019).

countries (UNICEF, 2014). Finally, changes in the social structure, especially in family models and their functions (Carrasco et al., 2005; Gómez-Granell, 2004) are undermining the pillar of a family-centred welfare state (Ayllón, 2017; Cantó, 2014).

The perspective used in the definition of poverty has a direct impact on the methods used to measure it as well as on the production and analysis of data that support interpretations. This is crucial because some data are treated as evidence while other data are ignored, hindering a better understanding of poverty (Jones, 2012). Beyond a static conception that describes the situation of low income at a given moment, poverty and exclusion must be understood as a process of accumulated disadvantage. The concept of "space of exclusion" reflects the degree of alienation of the individual in multiple dimensions in a continuum of social inclusion/exclusion (Subirats, 2004, 2006). However, focusing on the individual and the recovery of "normalised" social positions, without questioning the factors that cause the expulsion itself is highly problematic (Laparra et al., 2007). Being poor is not an individual condition, but rather an outcome of multiple dimensions (structural, institutional, and of individual and collective response) that have an impact on the living conditions experienced (Subirats et al., 2005) and simultaneously produce the accumulation of barriers or risks in different areas (labour market, education, social relations, health, housing, etc.), and limit the opportunities to access protection mechanisms.

In general, but even more in the case of children, poverty and well-being are multidimensional phenomena that must be approached from the perspective of rights, which considers, following the definition of Lamela de Castro (2017), that resources not only have a material dimension but also a relational one (available resources, but also access or discrimination to them, participation or exclusion, and having or not decision-making power over the issues that affect them) and a

subjective one (perceptions, evaluations, expectations, and meanings). Since 2013, the reports of the UNICEF Innocenti Study Centre have applied a rights-based perspective and a methodology based on calculating the satisfaction of children's basic needs (multidimensional and relative poverty), including subjective measures of children's well-being and gender analysis. This also requires a complex approach that includes qualitative and participatory methods.

The importance of qualitative approaches to child poverty has been highlighted (Jones, 2012) to account for relational and subjective dimensions of children's well-being related to material dimensions of poverty (Andresen & Meiland, 2019; Quint et al., 2018), and to capture children's views on what should be done about it (Monks et al., 2022). However, qualitative research continues to be scarce, usually aiming to complement quantitative data and often limiting the repertoire of methods to interviews, despite efforts made to counterbalance the top-down production of evidence. In their thorough literature review, Barbosa et al. (2020) concluded that qualitative research often has not used exact definitions of poverty and that children's perceptions that could provide clues to improve policies and their practical applications have received almost no attention. This largely describes the case of research on child poverty in Spain.

UNICEF has been promoting the Child-Friendly City seal among municipalities since 2001. To obtain it, it is necessary to demonstrate networking between administrations and social organisations, the participation of children and adolescents in local politics to find solutions to the problems that affect them, as well as plans to increase equity and attention to the most vulnerable groups. This is part of the 2030 agenda and the SDGs (UNICEF, 2017). The UNICEF Child-Friendly City seal allows, among other advantages, the possibility of offering a diagnosis of the local reality with a participatory approach. The authors carried out a study commissioned

by UNICEF to explore, from a qualitative approach, the local conditions to combat child poverty including a focus on the experiences and visions of poverty among children themselves. In this article, we will describe the methods applied and present some of the findings from the study with children, complemented with data from intervention staff on the frontline of child poverty.

2. Methods and Context

The target population were children and youth aged 0–18 from three Catalan cities with different risk profiles identified by research literature and also in previous phases of the study and the primary care local staff. The purposive sample (see Table 1) included children and adolescents that belonged to households with unemployed adults and diverse family compositions (single-parent households, two-parent households, large families, etc.), both nationals and with migrant and minority status backgrounds. Municipalities were chosen to include diverse population sizes, levels of residential segregation, main economic sectors, education offer available, and different capacity to design interventions and budgeting. Finally, we selected one of the five large cities in Catalonia (medium-sized cities) devoted to the service sector (local area B), one city in the north, with a higher percentage of migrant population (local area C), and one city in the province of Barcelona, far from the dynamics and resources of the metropolitan area (local area A).

Fieldwork with children and intervention staff was carried out in the winter of 2019. Participants were selected by purposive sampling. With the help of technical staff from the local councils, prospective groups were identified and the first contacts were made. In the case of children and adolescents, we organised two groups in each town. We worked with already-established groups of between six to twenty participants in familiar settings. Participant boys and girls were all around 11–12. In each city, one group was at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion (e.g., from council open centres or after-school pro-

grammes; group 1) and the other one was selected from after-school leisure time activities (e.g., sports clubs or cultural associations; group 2). In the case of practitioners, we identified and contacted key agents in the local areas, mainly technical staff from the council services of childhood, education, and social services, creating ad hoc groups in each city.

Data collection included projective and elicitation group techniques. Six playful-participative sessions were carried out with 32 participant children and adolescents to capture their specific perspectives within their daily experiences and the way they talk about them. This participatory approach is based on the idea that an essential right of children is to be heard and to actively participate in the issues that affect them (Castro et al., 2016). The so-called child-friendly or participatory techniques are connected to children's daily lives, which are presented in an attractive and simple way, have a playful ingredient, and are applied to avoid situations that make children uncomfortable or singled out (Ames et al., 2010; Clark et al., 2003). To collect multiple forms of children's expression, it is recommended that data-gathering techniques are diverse, which some authors have called the mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001). The application has been adapted to the context by following colloquial forms of communication that avoid the feeling of being evaluated and promote a climate of respect and non-judgement. In line with this, a guide for the group sessions with the children was designed and implemented in three phases and modalities, from more projective to more reflective, after having explained the objectives of the project and the session in a colloquial way:

1. Game of cards created ad hoc, with images that the participants had to comment on and sort first according to their wishes and then according to their needs.
2. Role-play imagining a situation and a scene, after having listened to a vignette provided by the person who conducted the activity explaining one actual measure applied to reduce child poverty

Table 1. Key characteristics of the local areas~.

	Local area A	Local area B	Local area C
Inhabitants	35.000 hab.	200.000 hab.	50.000 hab.
Population under 18	8.000–10.000	35.000–45.000	8.000–10.000
% migrant population	≈11%	≈11%	≈25%
Unemployment (2019)	10–12%	10–12%	12–14%
One-parent households (2011)	1.500–2.000	7.000–9.000	1.500–2.000
Children at risk of poverty	20–30	20–30	40–50
Poverty rate	15–20	15–20	25–30

Source: Own elaboration with data from IDESCAT (2018), Observatori del treball i model productiu (2019), and Alto Comisionado para la lucha contra la pobreza infantil (2019).

that could be uncomfortable or inadequate from their perception.

3. Proposals to reduce poverty in Catalonia with post-it sheets that could be attached to cards indicating different areas of social life.

In the case of intervention staff, three in-depth interviews were carried out with six local technical staff responsible for coordinating the basic areas of social services in child care (interviews A, B, C); four focus group practitioners of social intervention staff with a total number of 26 participants (focus group practitioners A, B, C).

Data analysis was carried out using Nvivo11 applying an inductive and deductive iterative scheme. All the material was transcribed and organised selectively, inferring the main ideas from the content and discourse analysis and the emotional tone of research situations, following an analysis strategy based on grounded theory starting only from the broad dimensions indicated by the state of the art previously elaborated (see Figure 2). Similarities and differences were searched according to children's diverse levels of poverty risk and by resources devoted to coping with it at a local level.

This way of interpreting data is especially relevant in research with children and young people as a strategy to avoid the bias of the adult perspective. Finally, the recommendations for responsible research and innovation were followed, specifically the principles of freedom, honesty, and responsibility in social and child research, adapting informed consent to the research context (UAB, 2020). The instruments were administered in a familiar and trusting setting in all groups. We avoided talking directly about personal experiences with children. Finally, special attention was paid to keeping the anonymity of participants and local areas to avoid negative impacts of the research. Access to the information

and photographs taken and the rest of the material is restricted to the research team in which the participants placed their trust. The information collected during the focus group with professionals and the play-participatory groups with children will be stored for a limited period and subsequently destroyed.

3. Results

Mapping the comparative impact of poverty by age group and sex is essential. We did so by drawing on secondary data available at IDESCAT. As can be observed, children live in more impoverished households than the rest of the age groups; or, from another perspective, one could say that the number of dependent children in the household has an impact on the unit of consumption.

In this section, we present some results related to the experiences and impacts of poverty from the point of view of the participants. Secondly, we move to their imaginaries and visions of poverty and how to deal with it. Results will be presented in reference to all groups as one, except when there are distinct views or experiences connected to one specific group according to the risk of poverty rate or other characteristics, or to one specific local area (see Table 1).

3.1. Experiences and Impacts of Poverty

Although none of the children participating in the research personally identified as "poor" or in a situation of poverty, their discourse and reflections revealed their clear experiences in some of the areas that define what is meant by poverty. They display a multidimensional perspective, and many prove to be aware of poverty as an actual experience undergone by some of their peers at school or in their immediate circle. From the data
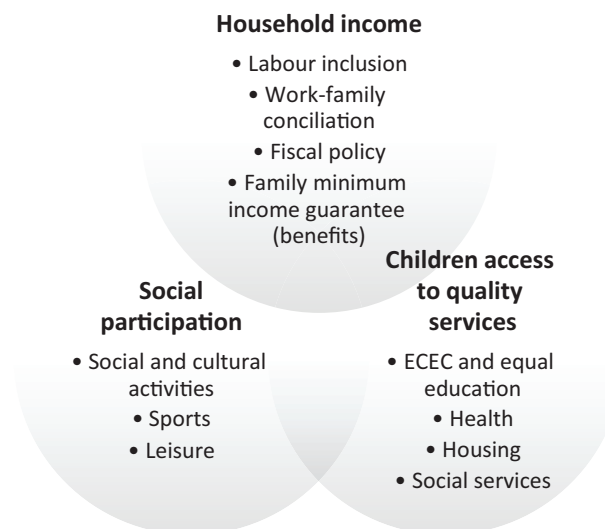
Figure 2. Model of analysis: Main dimensions. Source: Own elaboration based on TÁRKI (2010), the European Commission (2013), and Ikuspegiak—Observatorio Infancia País Vasco (2013).

collected in the three local areas, it can be concluded that being a child or adolescent affected by poverty in Catalonia today means living in poor housing conditions or even that the family does not have access to housing at all.

This reality emerges from the stories of children and adolescents in the three areas and is evident to the extent that squatting is part of their imaginaries. Although it may not be a personal experience, participants are aware of this phenomenon close to them. They refer to it by talking about the "flats with a kicker" or "flats in shacks," meaning you just get in by kicking the door open (Group C2) or showing concern about evictions. In various groups, they provide hints of their family's moral economy and believe "that no one can be evicted from their homes" (Group B1), "that there should be houses for everyone" (Group B2), or that "everyone has to have a good place to live" (Group A2). They are perfectly aware of the housing contradiction:

What happens is the other way around. There are many uninhabited houses and then homeless people. Why can't these people occupy the houses? Why are they building a supermarket in one place? There are already supermarkets in this city, they could build apartments, you do not have to have the newest one, but a flat in good condition so that people without a livelihood or people who come from other places at war can go and stay. (Group C2)

Along the same lines, in their conversations, they have naturalised, to a certain extent, the precariousness and poor housing conditions, indirectly explaining energy poverty. Some children at risk of poverty argued that "going to the bottom floor" (Group B1) could be a strategy in the face of the lack of basic resources at home while suggesting that it should not be possible to "cut off neither light nor water" in anyone's house. Other living arrangements are also part of their lived experiences, such as sharing rooms, emerging as a spontaneous remark in the stories of some boys and girls: "Well, the fridge….If there is a tenant living in the house, it is usually fuller" (Group C1).

Similarly, other children and adolescents, although not affected by energy poverty, reported having repeatedly seen people drinking water on their way home from school because the water had been cut off at home (Group A2). Intervention staff confirms these experiences as seen by children.

3.1.1. Material Deprivation Affects the Social Life of Children and Adolescents Daily

Low family income and economic insecurity penetrate the daily lives of children and adolescents in the form of material deprivation, which limits their access to and participation in social life, one of the main areas of social inclusion, in at least four ways. The first one is the limitation in social participation in the educational sphere, both in the schools' academic projects and in out-of-school activities. Children in all groups mentioned that the lack of participation of some children in school outings is not uncommon, due exclusively to their cost, especially in secondary school. Again, the social intervention staff has confirmed this:

Sometimes, a whole school project is only actually enjoyed by 53 children out of 200. We usually try that the ones who stay here do the same activities as the ones who go to the camps, even special games. We try to make them feel the same experiences, but here. (Focus group practitioners C)

Some municipalities have provisions that ensure free or reduced payment, but families who cannot afford the cost involved opt for their children to stay at school and take part in alternative activities. This fact may imply feelings of stigma, especially in primary school when the shared perception is that attendance is more generalised. A dialogue from Group A1 illustrates this:

Child 1: I never go on outings and stay overnight.

Researcher: What does the school offer?

Child 1: Well, they do in [at the end of] ESO, it's [part of] the end of term project, it's not so important… In primary school almost everyone goes and if you do not go, it's…

Child 2: I'm in primary school and I don't go, but I don't care, I prefer to stay with my family.

According to the staff views, this is a narrative of concealment: They say "they 'do not want to go on outings' or 'I do not like it! But the truth is they cannot" (focus group practitioners A).

Along these lines, some children responded: "We should all have scholarships so that we always go to school" (Group B1). Other children also expressed this limit of the provision systems regarding food security and demanded "that they leave the grant free" (Group B1), referring to the partial coverage of the school meal allowance, which keeps the cost of this service and is the reason why some families do not even apply.

Lack of access and participation in extracurricular activities is also a reality. Some participants demanded "that everyone should be able to have some extracurricular activities so that they can do something after school" (Group A2), although this was not a demand that emerged from the stories of the children most affected by poverty. It should be borne in mind, however, that out-of-school activities are complementary education activities that provide access to forms of cultural capital beyond the formal curriculum. At the same time, they are spaces for socialising, both for children and their families.

Intervention and technical staff have highlighted this as a main area of inequality for children.

Moreover, children have unequal access to quality playtime and positive experiences of family leisure time—some of them, for example, do not go away on holidays (as is included in the At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion Indicator), don't go out to the cinema, or visit amusement parks (Group A2). They also don't often participate in summer camp activities and other ordinary services aimed at children and adolescents during school holidays, in cultural or sporting camps, which can be highly beneficial in terms of academic capital, promoting aptitude to learning new languages, new technologies, or highly specialised sports. The reasons why some children have limited access to them vary, from the lack of services (for example, in August, when not all municipalities offer them) to various barriers including the cost of enrolment, the necessary material or equipment, transport and, again, the lack of financial aid to enjoy them, among other factors.

Moreover, the services specifically organised to compensate for these barriers do not always meet the same quality standards as the general offer. Fieldwork has shown that sometimes children enjoy enriching activities of socio-educational value in supportive settings with positive social relations and staff with specific training to work with children in situations of high vulnerability. However, there are also segregated services that work from a deficit view and tend to reproduce a large part of school tasks and rhythms, with demotivating effects: The children themselves do not associate them with cultural practices that resemble those of schools. At the same time, this prevents them from developing other skills and relationships. In this second type of setting, "for the disadvantaged," the staff often has low specialised training or qualifications to work with vulnerable children from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Many of these services and activities are carried out in poorly maintained and unsuitable settings, only used for the season, and poorly equipped, which makes it difficult to organise attractive activities of high socio-educational value and, thus, enhancing inequalities among children.

The children talked about the difficult access or lack of it when it comes to certain goods and services popularised among peers and same age groups. Branded clothes and shoes, beyond their value, are symbolic markers of social inclusion in peer groups. Their purpose, therefore, goes beyond the consumerist logic that is sometimes attributed to children of poor families by some technical staff and politicians. The opposite is true and these markers can also promote feelings of belonging and foster bonding:

You go to school and your friend has something very fashionable and you say, "I want that too!" (Group A1)

Well, and the issue of whether they spend more or less money on food, but then the child carries a mobile phone or brand-new clothes….When you enter adolescence, you have to join your peer group and, therefore, if you cannot afford everything they need….[The issue is that] they need it! It is not a priority [but] among them…

Yes, because it is [a priority] to be part of the group. (Focus group practitioners C)

Children appear to be aware of their image, especially clothes and shoes, which are markers of class, and they have certain prejudices associated with them. From the point of view of children affected by poverty, material deprivation in families can mean not having access to certain popular items and, in some cases, being exposed to ridicule and even insults. This can exacerbate their actual risk of exclusion in relations among peers:

Having new clothes (Group B1)

You are judged by the clothes you wear. (Group A1)

Money is what gives you everything, without money people call you poor! People insult you. (Group C1)

Access to a mobile phone or having internet available at home are ways that make relations with family and peers easier and are not always regarded by young people at risk of poverty as luxury items in a general way. The schools' lockdowns during Covid-19 have proved that to a greater extent.

Having internet. (Group B1)

There are poor people who have a mobile phone, a Nokia…most people…it doesn't cost a lot of money. (Group A1)

I have a mobile phone because both my father and my mother work….I am on my own, well, with my bother. (Group C2)

Having these goods and services means negotiations with the family, which can be part of the education process but can also increase tensions in the household, as these quotes from children affected by poverty (groups A1, B1, C1) show:

"If you work, you get good marks….I'll buy them for you," they say.

She tells me to wait until they pay her and that she'll buy it for me then.

"I'm going to buy it for you, tomorrow, tomorrow…" Then…when a month goes by and it goes out of fashion, he buys it from me!

Some children and adolescents from the groups affected by poverty proposed that some free public services they already go to should include these goods and facilities for those deprived of them:

> There should be PlayStations in the public libraries. (Group B1)

A recurrent reflection made by staff directly working with children shows concern about the time they spend on their own. Working hours and difficulties in reconciling work and family life are the main factors causing this, together with the children's lack of or lesser participation in extracurricular activities. The fact that classes are concentrated in the mornings in compulsory secondary education has been highlighted by some technical staff as a risk factor, not only because it does not include lunch in school and poses a risk to food safety, but also because it means that many adolescents finish the school day much earlier than their parents or guardians finish their working day:

> Every day it's the same, arriving home, they play Fortnite for hours and hours…and of course, you get warm, and toxins come out, all sorts of things come out, friends and companions who may not be the most suitable. And one thing leads to another, but the basis is that they are alone, and no one accompanies them in anything, neither in their studies nor in anything else. (Focus group practitioners C)

Apart from the non-negligible fact that the examples refer to male adolescents by default, this risk pattern seems to be aggravated if the family home is far from services and spaces in which children and young people can be taken care of outside school hours:

> We have three or four families with children in their care for whom it takes almost an hour to get to the urban area, and other cases living in irregular situations with irregular jobs that leave the children on their own; they go to work, the children have to go to school through terrible roads and streets, and then they come back, and their mother arrives in the evening. (Focus group practitioners B)

3.1.2. Poverty Influences Children's and Adolescents' Aspirations and Expectations for the Future

Children's accounts show that they are aware of the high cost of post-compulsory education. While some have already ruled out this possibility, others are concerned about it from the earliest stages. This perception is probably a story heard from the adults in their circle and passed on to children, in a context of lack of institutional protection (as expressed in these quotes from Group C1):

> Studying costs a lot of money.

> I'm already saving to be able to study.

> Studying is the least important thing, studying is important, but what matters…is being good, knowing people…

At the same time, some were aware that education is a way to the labour market and social inclusion, especially to overcome disadvantages:

> I do not like homework, but it is important to study for poor people. (Group A1)

The children in the groups with the lowest risk of being affected by poverty, on the other hand, perceive education from a global perspective as an end in itself:

> It is important for your future to know things. (Group C2)

> The council can help them to buy books or help them make a career for their lives. (Group A2)

Some staff have highlighted the cost of post-compulsory education, both vocational education and training (VET) courses and university, as a factor that leads to educational exclusion already limiting the options available to young people and adolescents. Grants that pay only for the tuition fees are not enough.

3.1.3. Family Poverty Has an Impact on Children in the Form of Discomfort, Stress, and Shame

Being affected by poverty in the family during childhood over time implies an accumulation of daily experiences that generate discomfort, accompanied by feelings of exclusion, difference and inferiority, which can end up having an impact on mental health:

> This is very important for them and therefore all this poverty also implies that, as we are in a consumer society, in my opinion, this stress is associated with mental health problems. We have many adolescents who have lived their lives in poverty as children. And to have the books the day school starts or not to have them, you know….And all of this goes through and creates…because they feel bad. However much we try to do, this is the truth. I mean, how do you feel on the day of the anniversary if all the children are wearing, I don't know, what and you never will wear? All this is adding up, adding up. (Focus group practitioners B)

> Sad, sad, sometimes they start telling you about their lives and burst into tears right there, in the office, and they are…nobody is with them, they are really helpless. It's affecting them at all levels. (Focus group practitioners B)

According to the technical and intervention staff, emotional impact is one of the most worrying impacts of poverty, and one that can lead to situations of social risk, especially considering the context of limited resources in this area. They are also concerned with the fact that poverty in the family can also lead to taking on adults' roles, worries, and responsibilities, especially among adolescent girls, an added barrier during childhood:

> [There are] things they try to hide not to do more harm, taking on situations that are not theirs to take on…

> Not all the families show the vulnerability that they have at home, we have children who are acting as carriers to the services, don't we? Of the situation that is lived at home with the fear that they do not know because at home there is certain…shame.

3.2. Imaginaries and Visions of Poverty

To understand and explain the experience of poverty among children and adolescents (directly or indirectly), it is relevant to know what they understand by poverty and to what social phenomena they relate it to. Evidencing these ideas, their coherence and contradictions allow us to infer where they place themselves and analyse their own situation and the tools they have to face it and respond to it.

Children simultaneously handle different definitions of poverty and exclusion, sometimes reproducing the narratives that commonly circulate among the adults close by or in the media, sometimes reflecting their own experience, but also elaborating on critical discourses that have emerged from the research process itself, as a prompt to reflection. From their stories, stereotypical definitions of poverty emerge, for example locating poverty as an alien phenomenon taking place in other parts of the world:

> At school or in other places, I haven't, but on TV news I have [seen] people who do not have the same as us, who do not live in the same kind of houses we do. (Group A2)

> Children in Africa should have more food so that they don't die. (Group B2)

They also produce traditional one-dimensional definitions that associate poverty with lack of food, but reflect the visibility of social exclusion in cities:

> But we have seen people who do not care and take things from the rubbish. They go with shopping trolleys and take food thrown away by other families who have discarded it. They depend on the people who leave it out so that others can recover it. (Group A2)

As can be seen in the previous excerpts, children produce paternalistic and abstract discourses and proposals, especially in the groups not affected by poverty themselves:

> [There should be] more food collection for the children who cannot buy any. (Group A2)

> [People should] convince people to give what is still edible instead of throwing food away. (Group C2)

> The city council must help the poor. (Group B2)

Other children, on the other hand, acknowledge the invisibility of poverty:

> There are also children who you don't see, but you give them lunch and they are the first to tell you "I give you half my lunch," and then they go to the neighbourhood soup kitchen because they have a grant, otherwise they cannot eat anything….I know that we don't find out, we don't really know about it. (Group A2)

3.2.1. Multidimensional Definitions of Poverty: Complexity, Risk of Perpetuation, and the Triggering Effect of Vulnerability in Other Social Dimensions

"Poverty is like the food chain," said one of the children from Group A2.

Children tell stories that show their awareness of the impact and strategies of adults to cope with poverty. Some of the children in the three municipalities imagined stories in which mobility, eventually involving the separation of children from their families, or other important relationships like those with peers or teachers, emerges as a strategy for coping with poverty:

> A family has lost their job, found a house in France. They are leaving the school. The teacher wants him to stay, but the parents take him to a cheaper school. (Group A1)

The causes they highlight allow us to identify two opposing discursive models—on the one hand, a meritocratic discourse that naturalises poverty and overestimates the capacity of individual action, as underlined in the following quotes:

> She's not poor, she's normal, it's her mother's fault that she doesn't do well….She doesn't want to work. (Group C2)

> Work is the first thing of all, the most important, the most! Or put up with it. (Group C1)

This discourse leads children's reasoning to provide solutions that do little to transform social reality, largely

ignoring citizenship rights. From this point of view, when asked what to do to cope with situations of poverty, the answers (Group A1) are as follows:

> That's what poor people do: look for things in the rubbish.

> Scrap metal.

> Many people steal because [of poverty].

> Work.

> Ask for help from NGOs such as Caritas.

In one of the groups with children not at risk of poverty, a critical discourse emerged that acknowledges the existence of social inequality and calls for citizens' social rights from a children's rights perspective. According to their own account, having worked on the subject at school through the analysis of a novel that deals with the issue of poverty has helped them question other mainstream discourses and discuss it with their friends and families:

> The saying goes that if there are no poor people, there are no rich people!

> One of them goes to school with a three-storey coat and the other with a raincoat and colours.

> All children in Catalonia have the right to go to school…it's a state responsibility. The state should help them. (Group C2)

3.2.2. Promoting Social and Political Participation Among Children: Providing Them with the Means to Respond to Vulnerability

Children in the groups most at risk of being affected by poverty have a stigmatising analysis framework that often holds their own families responsible for their fate. This framework is less protective against feelings of shame. In contrast, children from groups at lower risk of being affected by poverty display more tools for a critical analysis moving away from individual responsibility and enabling them to analyse situations of vulnerability from a position related to social and political participation.

This is clear when dealing with definitions of welfare and identifying needs and the priority areas of action. The link with the family and, in general, with relational networks is the priority for the welfare of children according to their views. The most recurrent idea among all the participant children in the three municipalities and all the groups has been to place the care they receive from their family as a priority and as a pillar that offers them security, well-being, and support:

> Your family understands you more than anyone else.

> Family, family [all in a chorus]. Family is at the top of the list, otherwise…if they do not take care of you, you cannot do anything else.

> The important thing is what is not physical, the family, friends…

> Sometimes you'd rather be with your family than having this or that item.

> Water and food…it's necessary to live, but if you don't have someone to help you, to stimulate you, you can't do anything either.

> Family and friends. Then the material things.

> Being happy with your mother, family, and friends.

Thus, they are aware of and value the relational and affective dimension of care work (Brullet & Gómez-Granell, 2008) explicitly prioritising positive ties with peers and family over material well-being. This clear position contradicts assumptions about the implications of growing up in a capitalist consumer culture. Taking this into account, it follows that intervention measures in situations of children and adolescents affected by poverty cannot be separated from the intervention and protection of the whole family, especially of the person in charge of their care. The narrative of the intervention and technical staff has been consistent with this logic: "Protecting children is protecting their families, their natural haven" (interview with local authority B).

As argued in the previous section, this analysis confirms that the priority action should be to ensure the well-being of the family or the carers of minors:

> A family living in a room….These parents will have more stress factors, and when there are stress factors, you do not look after the child that much because the level of stress that you may have as a parent, as a person, sometimes leads to risk situations. And it is here that the commitment to the more preventive part makes sense. (Focus group practitioners B)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Before starting this project, we knew that the group most affected by poverty and social exclusion were the children. We also knew that the local councils were the most appropriate administration to respond to children's poverty despite their limited capacity to combat it with remedial tools and unequal resources.

Our findings show that the most important factors that threaten the living conditions that should ensure children's well-being can be divided into two main areas. On the one hand, the effect of material deprivation on

the social life and protection networks of children is often caused by adults' difficulties in reconciling work and family life or other stressful factors, which generate experiences of loneliness and/or the assumption of adult roles that increase their stress (in the family sphere). This area also includes limits to participation in education and acquisition of cultural capital within and beyond school, which may generate socio-educational exclusion in the educational sphere; lack of access to quality leisure time, which causes experiences in segregated settings and enhances inequality (also in the field of education); and access to goods and services that define mainstream practices of consumption among their age group and have an impact on peer group belonging, which can generate feelings of shame and stress. These findings confirm those of Quint et al. (2018): Children and adolescents highlight material deprivation as a fundamental aspect of children's experiences of poverty as well as the feeling of stigma and concerns about their parents' well-being, placing emotional bonds and social support from the family at the core.

The second area is, to a large extent, the naturalisation of coping strategies in their daily lives, like insecurity or bad housing conditions, evidenced by the fact that the irregular occupation of housing or energy poverty have become part of some children's spontaneous accounts. Moreover, in the imaginaries and perspectives on poverty, both children themselves and some staff on the frontline of intervention combine and mix prejudices about the experience of poverty and critical approaches. It seems that stigmatising assumptions persist to show that traditional conceptions of poverty have not been overcome, although the theoretical corpus and policy recommendations to combat poverty have broadened and become more complex and critical. In this sense, it is very important to highlight that it is precisely the children and adolescents of the groups at risk of poverty who show internalisation of these prejudices that can contribute to worsening their discomfort and stress and leave them without a framework to avoid blaming themselves or their families for the actual condition they live in. On the other hand, children and adolescents who had had the opportunity to reflect on poverty at school and/or who had participated in measures applied in the municipality to promote full social and political citizenship for children elaborated more complex discourses regarding the phenomenon and, therefore, had acquired protective tools.

Social and political awareness of the structural conditions of poverty and the responses that can transform them is, therefore, a highly valuable protective factor in children's perspectives on poverty, whether they are directly affected or not. This is what we mean when we say that we are committed to a rights perspective. In this sense, participatory research helps to provide a framework for reflection on one's own living conditions from a more complex and holistic perspective, which is precisely what we demand from policies to eradicate poverty.

To do so, a rigorous analysis from a gender perspective needs to be undertaken to uncover experiences and views from girls, especially adolescent girls, that were identified by technical and intervention staff as important family members in charge of care. This would further contribute to knowledge-based, better than top-down evidence-based, child poverty reduction policies.

Despite the limitations of this exploratory study, we believe that the data gathered from children's experiences and views have managed to provide valuable insights that cannot be offered by quantitative approaches based, for the most part, on measuring household income. Giving prominence to children's views reveals rich, multiple, even contradictory, conceptions of what it means to be affected by poverty during childhood in Catalonia. At the same time, it provides a realistic account of the limited impact of interventions concerning policies that should guarantee their welfare, that is, the effectiveness of social, civic, and political rights at this key stage of their life cycle.

Current methods for measuring child poverty that ignore the lived experience and multiple dimensions of well-being, including subjective well-being, from children's own accounts are very limited not only for complex diagnoses but also for the design of interventions with them. This is crucial when it comes to identifying profiles and dimensions of greater vulnerability. It becomes clear that the unit of analysis must be the child and not the family within which the child's experience is subsumed to combat children's poverty. Measures need to incorporate multidimensionality from a rights perspective and place emphasis on equity in children's terms, applying a gender perspective and an intersectional analysis of subgroups affected by other factors generating inequality.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Article

Economic Abuse From Child and Youth Perspectives: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract
Research has established that the economic hardship caused by intimate partner violence (IPV), including economic abuse, is an important obstacle impeding women from leaving a violent partner. Furthermore, economic violence typically continues post-separation, also when other forms of abuse have ended. IPV—typically, men's violence against women—is an issue of direct concern for children, even if the violent behaviour is not directed towards the child. A growing body of research has documented detrimental effects on children's health, well-being, and cognitive development when exposed to IPV/domestic abuse. In recent decades, research has also explored children's perspectives and strategies to cope with being exposed to violence in families. Economic abuse, however, is a form of violence that is seldom studied from a child's perspective. This article aims to explore existing knowledge on economic abuse from child and youth perspectives, drawing from childhood studies, interdisciplinary violence studies, critical social work, and social policy studies. The research review is divided as follows: (a) findings on children's direct and indirect victimisation of economic abuse; (b) findings on economic abuse in young people's intimate relationships and the context of honour-related violence; and (c) findings on economic abuse concerning parenting, with discussions on possible implications for dependent children. Suggestions for further research are put forward.

Keywords
child abuse; child maltreatment; coercive control; domestic violence; economic abuse; economic violence; financial abuse; intimate partner violence; young people

1. Introduction

The present article aims to explore existing knowledge on economic abuse from child and youth perspectives. Within the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies and in the sociology of childhood, the relation and tensions between a general child perspective and the perspective of children or that of an individual child is a central and contested issue (Alderson, 2013; Sommer et al., 2010). Adults may be asserted as adopting a child perspective when they are considering implications for children, for example, certain policies and decisions. A genuine child perspective implies seeking to understand children's perspectives, relating these views to other relevant knowl-edge and striving towards meeting or advocating the best interest of the child. Regarding research, I would argue that important work from a child(hood) perspective can be produced also without including children as respondents or informants, as exemplified by several studies included in this review. As Gulløv and Højlund (2003, p. 29) assert: "A child perspective is not an empirical entity that can be produced through the study of children's statements and actions alone, but rather an analytical construction related to the theoretical considerations." Moreover, critical analyses of adults' discourses, decisions and practices concerning children are crucial to cast light on adult privilege and abuse of power, in turn aiming at changing these practices towards social

justice and improving children's lives (Bruno, 2018a; Eriksson et al., 2013). Intimate partner violence (IPV)—typically men's violence against women—is a paramount issue of direct concern for children, even if the violence is not directed towards the child. An extensive body of research has documented the detrimental effects on children's health, well-being and cognitive development from being exposed to IPV/domestic abuse (Evans et al., 2008; Fang & Corso, 2007; Huang et al., 2015). In recent decades, research has additionally explored children's own perspectives and strategies when coping with victimisation and exposure to violence in families (Callaghan et al., 2018; Katz, 2015; Överlien, 2017; Staf & Almqvist, 2015). Economic abuse, however, is a form of violence that is seldom studied from child or youth perspectives. Particularly, children's narratives are absent in the few studies which do focus on economic abuse and its implications for children, as noted by Bruno (2018b) and Näsman and Fernqvist (2015).

Economic violence, financial abuse, economic coercion, and financial oppression are terms used in the literature to capture similar abusive acts. An often-cited definition of what constitutes economic abuse is "behaviours that control a woman's ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources, thus threatening her economic security and potential for self-sufficiency" (Adams et al., 2008, p. 564). Among the numerous ways economic abuse can be exerted is by stealing or destroying the victim's property, excessive economic control by demanding receipts, denying access to a bank account, withholding money, not contributing to the household expenses, forcing the victim to borrow money from friends and relatives, or to commit fraud, preventing her from seeking education or paid work (cf. Chowbey, 2017; Fawole, 2008; Postmus et al., 2012; Sanders, 2015). Coerced debt is a prominent theme in the literature on economic abuse (Littwin, 2012; Sharp-Jeffs, 2015). Economic abuse is proposed as a broader concept than financial abuse, which specifically aims at restricting the partner's access to money, thus not including restricting resources such as transport, housing, employment, and education (Postmus et al., 2020). Other researchers argue that control and exploitation of women's reproductive and unpaid work in the home should also be included in the definition of economic abuse, not least in cases when women are living in slave-like conditions in marriages in which they have entered by coercion or by poverty (Anitha, 2019).

Nonetheless, article 3 in the Istanbul Convention defines violence against women as "all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty" (Council of Europe, 2011). Moreover, domestic violence is specifically defined in the convention as "all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence" (Council of Europe, 2011). Establishing the prevalence of physical abuse has hitherto been prioritised in large scale studies on IPV. Additionally, historically, economic abuse has often been categorised as a form of psychological violence. Few quantitative studies have comprehensively—if at all—included economic abuse, and those that did indicate that economic abuse is far more prevalent than often thought (Leigh Doyle, 2020; Stylianou, 2018).

There is growing evidence and concern among scholars of the danger of policymakers assuming that economic resources are equally distributed within the family. Measuring economic well-being based on household income is increasingly questioned since this indicator neglects the realities of economic abuse (Branigan, 2004; Sharp, 2008; Voth Schrag et al., 2020). A scoping review of 44 empirical studies on households' acquisition and management of debt from a gender perspective revealed several examples of what in other studies would have been categorised as financial abuse. In their article, however, that term was not used, but instead the expression "unequal power relations" was employed (Callegari et al., 2020). Notwithstanding this downplaying of abuse, the authors do refer to the internationally established concept and widespread phenomenon of "sexually transmitted debt" (Kaye, 1997), which means that a woman is forced to provide pledge for her husband's business or to enter debt for his sake—with or without threats of physical or other forms of violence. While women's indebtedness often seems to be related to low income and the responsibility of others, men's indebtedness was more often related to bankruptcies, over-consumption, and unpaid maintenance. In most households with heterosexual couples, the man tends to have the most control over the household finances. In financially disadvantaged families, however, women are often responsible for making ends meet and for managing debt (Callegari et al., 2020).

Research has established economic hardship resulting from violence, as well as economic abuse, as important obstacles for women to leave a violent partner (Bullock et al., 2020; Voth Schrag et al., 2020). Furthermore, economic abuse typically continues post-separation, also when other forms of abuse have ceased (Branigan, 2004; Eriksson & Ulmestig, 2021; Fawole, 2008; Krigel & Benjamin, 2020; Miller & Smolter, 2011). Several studies show great difficulties for financially vulnerable mothers to receive the support they are entitled to when they are afraid of their partner and he refuses to pay maintenance/child support (Douglas & Nagesh, 2019; Fernqvist & Sépulchre, 2021; Natalier, 2017, 2018; Patrick et al., 2008). Indeed, most studies on economic abuse focus on women's victimisation. Nevertheless, narratives of economic abuse directed towards children or implications of this abuse for dependent children do appear in some of these studies. To my knowledge, reviews of the literature on economic abuse exploring this paramount issue from child or youth perspectives have hitherto not been published.

2. Methodology

2.1. A Scoping Review

One of the main purposes for scoping reviews is to provide a quick overview of available research conducted on a specific topic or area of research, including the identification of research gaps. It may serve as the first step in a larger study, or function as a stand-alone project (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Typically, scoping reviews are chosen to provide insights into areas of limited study. Any research review process implicates systematic features such as focus and explicit research questions, and rationale as regards exclusion and inclusion criteria. In contrast to systematic reviews, however, most scoping reviews do not prioritise the assessment of the methodological quality of the studies reviewed (Peterson et al., 2017; Pham et al., 2014). Instead, emphasis is on a comprehensive summary of content and of research activity related to a topic rather than on the standard of evidence (McColl et al., 2009).

2.2. Search Strategies and Inclusion Criteria

As stated in the Introduction, a child/youth perspective in research or on a certain issue does not necessarily imply including child/youth respondents/informants,

even if it often seems eligible in childhood studies and when aiming to promote children's rights. Accordingly, this was not an inclusion criterion for the present review (see Table 1). In this project, the process of identifying potentially relevant records comprised three stages: Firstly, a systematic search in the two databases Sociological Abstracts and Social Services Abstract was conducted. The search terms applied were "economic abuse," "economic violence," "financial abuse," and "economic control." Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed articles and doctoral dissertations published in English between 2011 and 2021, which resulted in 106 records (see Figure 1). As expected, few of these abstracts mentioned children or young people. On the contrary, economic abuse against the elderly was a recurring theme. Therefore, a manual search in academic journals significant in child and youth studies and related social work comprised a second step. The following journals were included, with the same search terms applied as in the database search: *Childhood, Children & Society*, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *Child & Youth Services Review*, *Child & Family Social Work*, *Journal of Family Violence*, which resulted in an additional 15 records. Thirdly, an additional 25 records were identified by screening reference lists of relevant articles, web searches and other sources such as grey literature. Relevant articles published before 2011 were then also included. Further, a
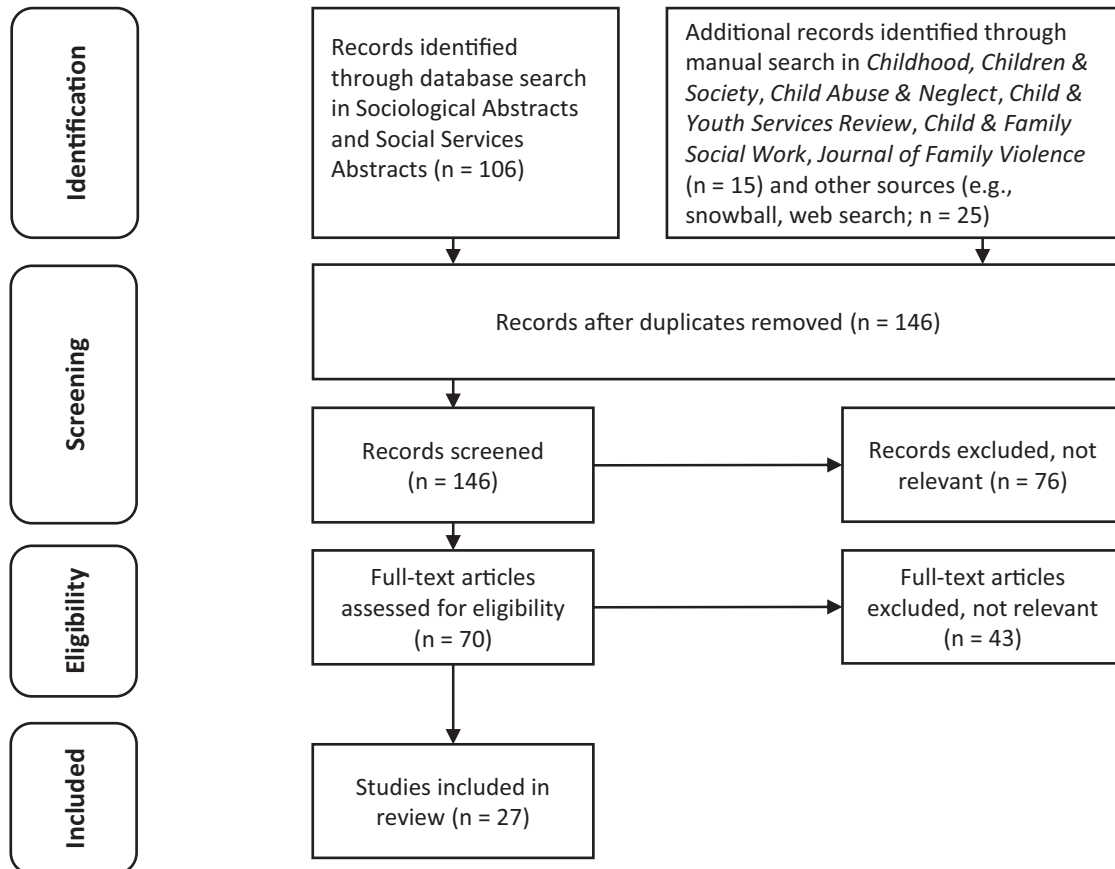

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram.

minor part of these records found by a manual screening of reference lists were academic reports and book chapters, not peer-reviewed articles. The search approach was thus broadened at this stage, in line with the more exploratory purpose of scoping studies, in comparison to systematic reviews (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Duplicates were removed during the process and the remaining 146 records were screened.

The database and manual search, as well as the screening of identified records, was conducted in December 2021. Studies that focused solely on economic abuse against elderly people or towards people with disabilities and studies that by "economic control" referred to control over territories (and not people) were deemed not relevant and excluded (n = 76). Thus, the remaining 70 full-text articles were subsequently assessed for eligibility based on their relevance from child and/or youth perspectives. Many of these articles (n = 43) were excluded from further review since they did not comprise any findings on economic abuse against children/young people or in relation to parenting. Quite a few of these excluded studies, however, contribute with important insights and contextualisation of the problem of economic abuse in general. Therefore, several of these are referred to in the introduction of the present article. Consequently, the final selection consists of 27 texts, of which 23 are peer-reviewed articles, one is an academic book chapter, another is an academic report published by a university and two are reports published by NGOs. In several of the studies included, economic abuse was not the main focus. Importantly, all studies included do not refer to the same definition of financial abuse, economic abuse/violence or economic control. Several studies used other concepts, such as "material violence." A few additional studies do not explicitly define the actions accounted for, but were included in the review nonetheless since I deemed the empirical examples as indications (rather than findings) of economic abuse. In line with scoping reviews' general focus on content and research activity before establishing evidence-based knowledge, this strategy seemed adequate.

3. Findings

The present literature review is structured as follows: (a) findings on children's direct and indirect victimisation of economic abuse; (b) findings on economic abuse in young people's intimate relationships and the name of honour; and (c) findings on economic abuse concerning parenting, with discussions on possible implications for dependent children involved. As illustrated in Table 1, the predominant category is "qualitative studies, with findings on economic abuse in relation to parenting" (8), followed by the category "quantitative studies, with findings on economic abuse in the context of youth IPV or honour-related violence" (5). A few studies have findings in two categories but most only in one.

3.1. Children's Direct and Indirect Victimisation

Globally, child labour affects 152 million children (Ahad et al., 2020). Indeed, it may in itself be defined as abuse which is depriving child workers of education and play and with devastating impacts on health and life chances. Yet, a scoping review on child labour in Southeast Asian countries argues for the relevance of viewing child maltreatment as a distinct issue (Ahad et al., 2021). Since violence directed towards child workers is a neglected issue in research on child maltreatment, different types of abuse, such as physical, sexual, emotional maltreatment, financial exploitation, forced work, neglect, overburden, and indirect (witnessing) abuse in the context of child labour should be measured separately. Financial exploitation is here referred to as situations when the child worker is deprived of his/her wage (wage theft). The scoping review suggested sexual abuse to be the most researched type of abuse in this context, but all types are prevalent and under-researched (Ahad et al., 2021).

In welfare states, with publicly funded education and health care, economic abuse directed towards children is obviously less prevalent and has less severe implications than in societies permeated by poverty and millions of children exploited in labour. Notwithstanding, economic inequality and relative child poverty are on the rise in several affluent countries, especially affecting households with single parents (OECD, 2021). A few qualitative studies with child informants include examples of children's views and actions concerning post-separation economic issues (Ridge, 2017) and economic abuse. Callaghan et al.'s (2018) interview study with children (n = 21) of divorced parents does not focus specifically

Table 1. The empirical base of studies reviewed.

	Children's direct or indirect victimisation	Economic abuse, youth IPV, and honour-related violence	Economic abuse in relation to parenting
Quantitative	1	5	2
Qualitative	4	3	8
Mixed methods	1		
Research reviews	1		
Children/Youth informants (qual.)	2	2	
Children/Youth respondents (quant.)	2	4	

on children's direct victimisation of economic abuse but explores children's strategies for tackling coercive control and stalking. Several examples in their paper can however be interpreted as indications of economic abuse, for instance, narratives of how fathers with restraining orders seek out children and try to exchange money, food, or gifts for information about the mother, or for manipulating the children into having contact with them. Callaghan et al. (2018) cite a boy who explicitly states that he is not going to "be bought." In addition, he details how he has to lie to his father about financial issues. According to the authors' interpretation:

> Mark is aware of the way that financial control functions to limit his mother's capacity for agency in her life. He supports his mother in resisting this by lying about her access to money, actively protecting her from the risk of control. (Callaghan et al., 2018, p. 1568)

Another interviewed boy describes how he also actively resists manipulation by using a different strategy: accepting gifts but without giving any information in return, which the authors suggest produces a sense of self-reliance and confidence. I would argue that the examples of perpetrators trying to buy contact could be interpreted as indications of economic abuse directly towards the child because the perpetrator withholds money that the child is entitled to, using money as a means of control—not only towards the mother but also towards the child. The informants were aware of their own economic hardship as an effect of IPV and clearly wished for no contact with the perpetrator. The study highlights how children can have their own adversity as well as agency, regardless of the vulnerability of the non-abusive parent. Similarly, drawing from interviews with 15 mothers and 15 of their children, Katz (2016) found that not only did these children often resist the physical and emotional abuse of their mothers, but also financial control, for instance by defying the abuser's rules, by collectively hiding purchases and secretly going to the cinema. Coercive control (including economic abuse), however, may severely disempower children and adults alike, and hamper their resilience (for an elaborated discussion of the concept see also Katz et al., 2020; Stark, 2007; Walby & Towers, 2018).

A particularly striking finding, Sharp (2008) concludes from her interview study with 55 women in the UK, was the recurring overlap between economic abuse towards women and their children. Not only were the children indirectly affected by the economic abuse exerted against their mother, but in addition, the interviewed mothers reported how partners and ex-partners would steal the children's toys, Ipads, other belongings, and savings. In addition, the abuser could threaten children and have them involved in the abuse of their mother. One informant detailed how her ex-husband had their eldest daughter forward threats such as: "If your mum stops the contact, I'll stop the maintenance money, then she can't pay rent, then you'll lose your house and then you'll have to come and live with me" (Sharp, 2008, p. 32).

The direct implications of economic abuse on children are only examined in two of the quantitative studies reviewed. A large longitudinal study with data collected from 20 American cities examined the effects of early childhood exposure to IPV on delinquency at age nine (Huang et al., 2015). Interestingly, exposure to IPV was measured as the mother's experiences of economic abuse and physical violence (thus not including other forms of IPV) in this study. The baseline data contained 4898 mothers and the last follow-up survey was conducted when the child was nine years old. Out of 4898 cases, 3400 children responded to the survey in year nine. Additionally, data were collected from teachers and parents. Both physical and economic abuse were found to have persistent and long-term effects on parenting and children. Regression estimates revealed that overall high levels of IPV increased the odds of neglect and physical punishment. Still, in comparison to physical violence, economic abuse had a stronger association with both neglect and child delinquency. The authors call for early interventions such as programs and policies that strengthen the parent–child bond and empower caregivers, since the negative effects of early trauma can be reversed with proper support (Huang et al., 2015). According to Voth Schrag et al. (2017), prior to their exploratory study there existed no research on young people's (adolescent) exposure to economically abusive tactics (EAT), including financial exploitation, economic control, and employment sabotage. Drawing from a sample of 105 girls aged 12–19 years with experiences from their involvement in the child welfare system and recruited for trauma-focused group treatment, the authors suggested that EAT may have a unique association with mental health indicators for girls who, in addition, are exposed to physical IPV. Nearly half of the sample reported having been exposed to moderate or high levels of EAT, indicating the need for including this type of IPV in screening tools designed for children (Voth Schrag et al., 2017).

3.2. Young People's Intimate Relationships and Economic Abuse in the Name of Honour

Recent studies suggest that IPV is at least as prevalent in young people's dating relationships as among adults (Korkmaz, 2021; Taylor & Mumford, 2016). Since no questions on economic abuse are included in any large-scale studies targeting adolescents, we have even less knowledge of the extent of this type of violence among youth. Out of the 146 records initially screened for this review, only four papers examine economic abuse in young people's intimate relationships (forced marriages excluded), all written in an American context. Drawing from an analytical sample of 728 10-to-18-year-olds surveyed for adolescent IPV, all of whom had a current or recent

dating relationship, the authors conclude that although only 8.8 percent reported having been economically controlled in their relation, 17.7 percent reported requests for lending money from their partner. Moreover, these money lending practices were associated with a heightened risk of serious threats and physical violence (Copp et al., 2016). A more recent survey (n = 1553) conducted by the same research team confirmed the conclusion that financial disagreement in young people's intimate relations contributes to conflicts that may escalate into violence. The authors argue for adding training in financial management to evidence-based violence prevention programs such as Safe Dates (Copp et al., 2020).

As mentioned in the introduction of the present article, the economic consequences of IPV, in general, are immense. Various types of abuse tend to have mutually reinforcing and cumulative effects. For example, economic control may be used to isolate and further psychologically and sexually abuse and exploit the victim. Out of fear of physical violence or because of visible marks from such violence, the victim may avoid going to class or working outside the home. Evidence on the economic effects of specifically adolescent IPV is presented in a longitudinal study with 498 women currently or formerly receiving welfare. This study demonstrated that adolescent IPV survivors completed significantly fewer years of education and earned significantly less than non-victimised women, also after controlling for several variables such as adult IPV (Adams et al., 2013). Another longitudinal study with 4898 mothers (mean age 26 at baseline) revealed that for those who at baseline reported being subjected to economic or physical IPV in particular, economic abuse tended to increase over time. Furthermore, regression analyses found a significant and negative association between economic abuse and the likelihood of marriage or cohabitation at year 5, indicating that economic abuse does not necessarily prevent women from ending abusive relationships. On the contrary, the authors assert that economic abuse may lead women to distrust abusers and to avoid more stable union formation with them. In conclusion, they call into question policies and practices that push marriage promotion, also in the context of IPV, arguing for a shifted focus toward violence prevention (Huang et al., 2013).

Child marriage and forced marriage are often understood to be intrinsically related to honour-based violence. Yet, from a global perspective, poverty stands out as the leading cause of child marriage. Far from all child marriages are arranged regarding protecting the family's honour. With child marriage, however, the circle of poverty continues (Ayga & Rampagane, 2013). Child marriage is a severe violation of children's rights with detrimental effects on health, education, and employment opportunities, increasing the risk of all forms of IPV and economic hardship. Narratives of informants who have been married off as minors are scarce. Moreover, research on this topic tends not to focus on economic abuse. An interview study with 15 women in rural Ghana

who had entered marriage as children is a contribution in this regard. To note, the women were more inclined to recognise economic abuse—the husband withholding money or refusing to economically provide for the family—as a form of violence or maltreatment, in comparison to sexual abuse. All informants were economically dependent on their husbands and with limited autonomy and few had any formal education (Amoah et al., 2021).

Several studies on honour-related violence towards young people and particularly girls comprise findings on economic abuse, although none of them elaborates on these findings to any great extent. A prevalence study on honour-based violence in Sweden, drawing from a survey of 15-year-olds (n = 6002), found higher levels of multiple forms of violence and control among respondents who experience honour norms in their families. Fifteen percent of girls in this group reported being subjected to material violence (having valuable items destroyed) in comparison to 7 percent of girls not living with honour norms (Strid, Baianstovu, & Enelo, 2021). The qualitative sub-study of the same project detailed how economic abuse appears to be a central feature in this context. According to both victimised youth and service providers, economic abuse was described as an effective way to control and limit victims' scope of action. Similar to economic abuse in intimate partner relations, the abused in the name of honour were often not allowed to have their own credit card or mobile phone (Baianstovu et al., 2019). Further, a Canadian interview study with 34 welfare professionals working in social work, education, healthcare, settlement, and law enforcement emphasised that forcing girls to work (at home or elsewhere) is a predominant example of financial abuse in the context of honour-based violence and oppression. The findings suggest that economic stress, trauma and mental health issues may further aggravate intergenerational conflicts in some migrant families (Blum et al., 2016; on economic abuse in transnational contexts see also Singh, 2019).

3.3. Economic Abuse and Parenting

As mentioned previously, child maintenance is a key issue concerning economic abuse. State policies in several countries are increasingly emphasising parental cooperation post-separation, which creates difficulties for parents who take the main responsibility for children and enhance the risk of continued economic abuse, also when other forms of violence have ended (Bruno, 2018b; Fernqvist & Sépulchre, 2021; Harris, 2015; Natalier, 2018). Importantly, comparative analysis demonstrates the potential of child maintenance to significantly contribute to income for single parents and thus reduce child poverty (Hakovirta & Jokela, 2019; Skinner et al., 2017). In a survey of 1357 single parents, published by the British NGO Gingerbread, only 16 percent stated that they received all the maintenance they were entitled to each month, 34 percent that they received no maintenance at all, and 86 percent that they considered the

Child Maintenance Services to allow their ex-partners to exert financial abuse towards them and their children by withholding maintenance (Richardson & Butler, 2021). Several studies suggest that fathers make considerations about maintenance according to which extent they perceive that the mother facilitates the relationship between them and the children and if they consider that she has earned it, based on how she behaved in their previous relationship (Skinner, 2013). Mothers, on the other hand, may avoid pursuing a formal child support order if they believe this could create tensions and negatively affect the father–child relationship. The welfare state places high demands on separated mothers to deal with economic hardship resulting from IPV. In an interview study with divorced mothers with experience of economic abuse in Sweden, a recurrent theme was the dilemma of having to choose between struggling for children's rights to protection or provision. In one informant's narrative:

> I let him have everything. For the sake of the children, I don't argue over money. We need peace and quiet. If this is how he must have it, then let him feel all our property is his….He went to the pawnshop with the children's art….He is so greedy. The children need a desk, but can't have it. Our oldest son [17 years old] is in pain; he really needs a proper bed but sleeps on a thin mattress….The children get some money from my friends, but I don't tell him. He would take the money. (Bruno, 2018b, p. 9)

In the same article, court orders in welfare benefit appeals and contested contact cases were analysed, with the conclusion that financial abuse in the context of parental separation was a non-question in the domain of welfare benefits and the domain of child contact framed as a conflict between equal parties. Cooperation with the perpetrator is often required by the authorities (Eriksson & Ulmestig, 2021; Näsman & Fernqvist, 2015). In addition, mothers seeking assistance to obtain maintenance for their children may be punished or subjected to microaggressions from case managers (Fernqvist & Sépulchre, 2021; Natalier, 2017), controlling and disempowering them as parents in similar ways as their ex-partner do. However, studies also comprise examples of effective support from social services—emotionally as well as financially (Ulmestig & Eriksson, 2016).

In the US, where the safety net is considerably weaker than in, for example, Sweden, IPV is a leading cause of feminisation of homelessness. An interview study with 46 currently and formerly unhoused mothers reveals that a majority reported having been severely abused by partners, institutions, and authorities, and that reporting abuse often could deepen hardship. Public housing policies implied that the mothers could be evicted for behaviours of others, even if unaware of these. For instance, a mother of six children described how she was made homeless after the arrest of her boyfriend for having marijuana worth 12 dollars (Bullock et al., 2020). Another policy, which adds to the hardship, is that when child support is formalised in the US, but not paid, low-income mothers who depend on food stamps and rent assistance are penalised for money they do not actually receive. Consequently, children most in need of support are the least likely to receive it (Harris, 2015).

4. Conclusion

Despite increasing evidence of the serious impact of economic abuse on adults, this scoping review shows that the prevalence and impact of children's and young people's exposure to, or direct victimisation of this type of, IPV is a marginalised and often unseen issue in research. In particular, children's views and strategies to cope with economic abuse are almost entirely unknown. Nevertheless, several of the studies reviewed suggest detrimental effects of economic abuse on parents and children, which should be addressed by further research. For example, the large study by Huang et al. (2015) revealed that in comparison to physical violence, economic abuse had a stronger association with both neglect and child delinquency. Another theme is the significance and prevalence of economic abuse in different cultural contexts. Both quantitative (Strid, Baianstovu, & Enelo, 2021) and qualitative (Baianstovu et al., 2019; Blum et al., 2016) studies suggest that economic abuse is a prominent form of abuse in the context of honour-related violence and oppression. In essence, the present review confirms the need for intersectional perspectives in this area of research, since economic abuse is a multifaceted societal problem with considerably diverse implications for different groups of survivors (cf. Anitha, 2019; Bullock et al., 2020; Postmus et al., 2020; Singh, 2019).

Qualitative research on economic abuse remains of great importance, not least because such studies can capture more expressions of violence and with more nuances than can be captured in a survey. Since few questions about this type of abuse are usually included in prevalence studies on violence, the extent of the abuse may be underestimated (Leigh Doyle, 2020; Postmus et al., 2020). In addition, research indicates that informants tend to disclose experiencing more forms of economic abuse in qualitative interviews than they report within questionnaires, which illuminates the importance of using multiple research methods (Sharp, 2008). More knowledge is needed about the survivors' own strategies, experiences, and needs—in general, but not least from children's and young people's own perspectives. The studies by Callaghan et al. (2018) and Katz (2016) are contributions in this regard, both casting light on children's resistance to financial control. Still, these studies explore children's experiences of coercive control more broadly and do not focus specifically on economic abuse.

In this review, studies that only focus on economic hardship resulting from violence, without any reports

or indications of economic behaviours as a means to exert control, exploit or in any other way cause harm, are not included. It could certainly be argued that the economic consequences of IPV are not the same as economic abuse. Furthermore, all financial disagreements within intimate partner relations or between ex-partners, parents and children or others in the household are not acts of violence. Yet, abuse can be more or less intentional. Drawing from a broad, multi-level understanding of violence (Strid, Humbert, et al., 2021) and a feminist tradition of continuum-thinking (Boyle, 2019; Kelly, 1988) it would be difficult to determine exactly when an unequal relationship becomes an abusive one, and when the economic impact of IPV is not also a part of the abuse. Providing an elaborated discussion on the various understandings and definitions of violence and abuse is outside the scope of this article. Both more theoretical and empirical explorations of different forms of violence, on several levels and in various contexts, are indeed required. In conclusion, I concur with Krigel and Benjamin (2021), among others, who underscore the need to critically examine the state's priorities and role concerning economic abuse and other manifestations of IPV. Children's and young people's adversity concerning all kinds of abuse must be taken into consideration, in research, policy, and professional practice. Research-based knowledge is crucial to improving policy, practice, and support measures aiming at reducing poverty and enhancing social justice.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Article

Immigrant Children's Connections to People and the World Around Them: A Critical Discourse Review of Academic Literature

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Abstract

A primary goal of the welfare state is to ensure that children and young people have a good upbringing and that families feel secure. However, several studies indicate that the risk of marginalisation and social exclusion increases, especially among children of low-income and immigrant families. Why some children seem to be more loosely connected to people and the world around them is poorly understood. Based on a Foucauldian critical discourse review, this article aims to explore the most cited academic discourses on children's connections to the social and material environment—typically referred to by terms such as "social inclusion," "social participation," "social integration," and "social exclusion." The main research questions are: What has been addressed in this literature, by whom, and what are the knowledge gaps? Some of the most important observations are that the most influential literature on children's connections is typically written by psychologists, address children settled in the US, and tends to neglect important explanation factors, such as the material conditions of children's everyday life. Implications for the (re)production of knowledge and knowledge gaps are discussed.

Issue

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1. Introduction

In 2020, 24.2% of children in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Most at risk are children in vulnerable situations, such as children from low-income families with immigrant backgrounds (Eurostat, 2022). It is poorly understood why children in vulnerable situations seem to be more loosely connected to people and the world around them. This article explores how children's experiences of attachment to people and the world around them have been examined in highly cited articles published in international peer-reviewed journals. The aim is to obtain an overview of the most influential literature on children's connections and the discussions within this literature. The main research questions are: What is typically addressed in the highly cited literature, and what are the research gaps? The analysis is based on a quantitative Foucauldian critical discourse review. Critical discourse

reviews typically pay more attention to structures of interest and power in fields of knowledge than other forms of review (Wall et al., 2015). An underlying assumption is that researchers of different scientific disciplines (psychologists, sociologists, etc.) have different perceptions of "good" and "important" knowledge. If one or a few disciplines dominate fields of knowledge, the knowledge that is (re)produced within these fields is at risk of becoming biased in highlighting some knowledge and ignoring others (Borch, 2019; Borch & Kjærnes, 2016). If these biases are not revealed, structures of interest and power that have made their mark in fields of knowledge will tend to stabilise or reduce (Borch, 2012) at the expense of scientific novelty and progress. The article starts with a section that provides an overview of the previous literature on children's connections. The next section describes the methodology on which the analysis is based, followed by a report and discussion of the main results.

2. Immigrant Children's Connections

Children are deeply dependent on other people and the world around them—caregivers, peers, and other adults. Children copy other people's skills and practices and learn how to interact and cooperate with them (Over, 2016). At stake is their connection to a greater community that, ultimately, ensures their access to fundamental needs, such as food, clothes, and shelter. In welfare societies, access to fundamental needs is a human right ensured by law. However, the need to be part of a greater community is still imperative, as it gives people a sense of ontological security and self-value, without which life would be difficult (May, 2011). The character of the children's connections, their quantity, strength, and composition, may vary, here below by ethnic background. As immigrant children's connections may influence their access to choices, resources, and social positions later in life, a study of these connections may provide valuable insight into processes and mechanisms behind social inequality, mobility, stability, and change.

In this article, "connections" is used as a collective term covering partially overlapping terms addressing children's relations to people and the world around them, such as "social inclusion," "social exclusion," "social participation," "integration," and "belonging." "Children," too, is used as a generic term encompassing preschool children and young adults. As pointed out by Alanen (2016), children are not only children; they are girls/boys (i.e., gendered), and they are also, in many cases, "raced," dis/abled, classed, and ascribed ethnicity. Regardless of the children's various backgrounds and characteristics, the research literature addressing their connection can roughly be divided into two bodies of literature: those dealing with children's relationship to people (e.g., individuals, groups and communities) and those focusing more on the settings in which children's connections are played out (e.g., schools and sports). This section provides an overview of some of the best-known (i.e., most cited) literature in this field of knowledge.

2.1. Relations to People

In the first body of literature, immigrant children's relationships with other people are emphasised. Immigrant children report the highest levels of ethnic belonging with their parents (Kiang & Fuligni, 2009). Adolescence is a period in life during which they often question the conventions of society. The questioning may be particularly strong among adolescents with immigrant adults, as they reconcile the often-conflicting values of the home and the school and encounter racism in their daily lives. Some experience different role ascriptions for males and females, and their parents' religions may differ from the secular ethos of their school's curricula. For example, Indian boys may experience more freedom in their choice of clothes, dating, going out, and spending money than girls, who should not show their legs and should always cover their hair, according to the dictum of the Koran (*Haddii*). Moreover, elders' views should not be questioned, which differs from the school curricula that encourage critical approaches to all ideas irrespective of their origin (Ghuman, 2009).

Children and youth with immigrant backgrounds are largely abandoned by their parents' patterns of assimilation. Portes (1995) described different forms of "segmented assimilation." Immigrant parents may assimilate into the majority middle class of their host country (classical pattern of assimilation). These parents tend to have more than average income when they arrive and to have successful children who easily move into the middle class. There are, however, cases where this classical pattern does not lead to economic progress or social acceptance. Parents may, for example, settle in ghettos (downward assimilation) or remain in their ethnic communities to utilise their resources and thereby decrease their chance of educational and economic mobility (pluralistic integration). Bullying, discrimination, and the family's socio-economic position in the community are strongly associated with migrant children's sense of belonging and well-being (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). Moreover, "lifestyle incongruity," that is, inconsistency between the family's lifestyle and its socio-economic status, is a main source of stress among youth (McDade, 2001).

The next categories of people to whom children and youth of immigrant backgrounds feel most attached are same-ethnic peers and different-ethnic peers (Klang & Fuligni, 2008). Immigrant girls report a higher sense of peer group belonging than immigrant boys, and immigrant children who report a higher sense of peer group belonging tend to have fewer behavioural problems (Newman et al., 2007). Killen et al. (2013) differ between "interpersonal rejection" and "intergroup exclusion" in childhood. Interpersonal rejection regards individual differences in personality traits such as wariness and fear explaining bully–victim relationships. Intergroup exclusion focuses on in-group and out-group attitudes contributing to social exclusion based on group membership, such as gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and nationality. What appears to be interpersonal rejection in some contexts may, in fact, reflect intergroup exclusion. Whereas research on interpersonal exclusion focuses on how victims promote rejection themselves, research on intergroup exclusion focuses on how excluders reject members of out-groups to maintain status differences.

According to Raabe and Beelmann (2011), children demonstrate evidence of intergroup attitudes by three and four years of age and a peek in prejudice between four and seven years. Most children between seven and thirteen years of age rejected exclusions of children only justified by stereotypes. However, the oldest children in these groups were more likely to accept the rejections of younger children if the group's functioning was at stake (Killen et al., 2013). Youths who are not well-liked by peers have fewer options for friendships and group membership. The rejected youth who continue to seek group

membership tend to be part of smaller cliques comprising other rejected youths and are further excluded when they come to be recognised as antagonistic relationships (Brown, 2004). Whereas aggressive youths often find a place within a friendship group, youth who have withdrawn from peer groups are less likely to find supportive friendships and more likely to be victimised (Bagwell et al., 2000; Goldbaum et al., 2003). The position "outside" makes it difficult to learn and practice the social skills that are expected to be accepted as a member of larger peer groups (Brown, 2004).

2.2. Relations to Settings

The second body of literature deals with immigrant children's and youth's relation to settings—be it in institutions or at arenas for leisure activities and geographical areas. One of the institutional settings is schools. Research conducted among Hispanic, Afro-American, and Anglo/White students settled in the US indicates that a sense of school belonging influences academic motivation, engagement and participation, especially among students from groups at risk of school dropout. It also indicated that school belonging is more strongly associated with expectancy for success among Hispanic students than Afro-American students and more among girls than boys (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Based on research among Latino adolescents, Sánchez et al. (2005) observed that sense of school belonging significantly predicted academic outcomes, including academic motivation, effort, and absenteeism, and that females consistently had more positive academic outcomes than males. Also, parents' involvement may increase academic adjustment among Latino youth, especially in high school (Kuperminc et al., 2008). Drawing on research on immigrant youth from North Africa and Southern and Eastern Europe, Valls and Kyriakides (2013) found that lower school misconduct was associated with higher perceived teacher support and school belonging, whereas higher school misconduct was associated with higher peer attachment.

Another setting addressed in previous research is organised activities, such as sports. Sport plays a significant role in the everyday lives of many young people with refugee backgrounds. One reason is that sports provide a setting in which young people can express themselves through bodily practices, connecting emotional bonds to or distance themselves from other people (e.g., Walseth, 2006; Walseth & Fasting, 2004). Playing and watching sports is a common activity and a frequent subject of discussion, not least among young men and therefore a way to get in contact and socialise with others. For some immigrant youth, being good at sports represents a way to "make it" in a new country (Amara et al., 2004).

A third setting is unorganised activities that take place during leisure time. A well-known example is a study conducted among pupils and teachers in selected schools in Zurich investigating leisure activities in urban forests and public green spaces and their potential to facilitate social interactions between Swiss and immigrant young people. Patterns of socialising and making friends in these outdoor locations were found to vary by age, school level, gender, and the percentage of immigrants in each residential area. A main observation was that public urban green spaces play an important role for children and youths in making contact and friends across cultures (Seeland et al., 2009).

Like public parks, local communities and countries represent geographical areas that can be objects of affiliation and places at which social relationships are played out. For refugee youth, establishing a sense of belonging to their host country in early resettlement is foundational to well-being (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). Undocumented migrants who resettle as children tend to experience more confusion and conflicting feelings of inclusion and exclusion than those who arrive as adults (Gonzales et al., 2013).

As indicated by this overview, children's connections to people and settings have been addressed in several studies. The extent to which these objects of affiliation are more frequently researched than others will be explored in the results section. The next section describes the methodology on which the analysis is based.

3. Method

The review of children's connections is based on a Foucauldian critical discourse review (Borch, 2012; Borch & Kjærnes, 2016; Wall et al., 2015). Discourses are understood here as culturally and historically transmitted knowledge about children's connections embedded in social practices, including those of writing and publishing peer-reviewed academic articles. Discourses are created and recreated in social practices carried by social actors ("spokesmen") with vested interests (Borch, 2012, 2019; Borch & Kjærnes, 2016). For example, psychologists and sociologists would most likely tend to emphasise the importance of studying individual/cognitive and contextual/social factors influencing children's connections, respectively. Consequently, if a field of knowledge addressing children's connections tends to be dominated by one or a few disciplines, the knowledge produced will tend to be biased.

There are more than 60 types of review methodologies (Sutton et al., 2019). Like most reviews, critical discourse reviews aim to provide an overview of the previous literature and identify knowledge gaps. The aim of revealing structures of power and interests of knowledge often understood as dominating ideologies, is, however, a special characteristic of this type of review (Wall et al., 2015). As reviews synthesise previous research, a general criticism has been that they tend to reproduce structures of knowledge and ideologies in society. A critical discourse review aims to reveal and combat these structures (Wall et al., 2015). Most critical discourse reviews are based on either Habermas's or Foucault's perceptions

of discourses. Reviews based on Habermas are primarily concerned with structures of interest and power in dialogues between two parties. This article is based on Foucault's work in terms of focusing on knowledge structures operating at cultural and historical levels.

Critical discourse reviews belong to what Snyder (2019) calls "semi-systematic reviews," the category of review methodologies that is developing most in academia today. Semi-systematic reviews have systematic reviews as an ideal, yet they have a more pragmatic approach to the choice of sample and quality assessments. They are also more frequently based on analyses of qualitative research than systematic reviews, which are primarily based on analyses of quantitative studies. The aim is often to produce sufficiently robust research results by using fewer resources than the most time-consuming systematic or narrative/interpretative reviews. As part of this pragmatic approach, the critical discourse review conducted in this article concentrates on peer-reviewed, highly cited academic literature, rather than all academic literature addressing children's connections. By analysing high-cited literature, the focus is on the literature that most researchers know and most researchers will most likely read when they attempt to learn a new field of knowledge. If this field is biased, the researchers' knowledge will be biased as well, and the biased field of knowledge will be stabilised or strengthened—at the expense of another knowledge that could have enriched and developed the field.

Revealing biased structures to combat knowledge bias and ensure scientific progress is particularly important within academia. One reason is that the literature produced in this context is generally regarded as more reliable than texts produced in other contexts, such as in the press or in policy. Due to its trustworthiness, academic literature often represents the source of knowledge on which other texts are based and spread in society. This article's focus on peer-reviewed, highly cited research may have some weaknesses, some of which will be discussed in the last chapter of this article.

3.1. The Sample

The study is based on a sample of articles published in peer-reviewed journals on the online database Web of Science from January to April 2021. The selection criteria were as follows:

- Published on Web of Science;
- Published in the Social Science Citation Index (from 1987–2022) and the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (2015–2022);
- Published as articles (peer-reviewed);
- Written in the English language;
- Addressing children's experiences of connection;
- Includes different terms of children (child*, young*, peer*, youth, kids, teen*, and adolescent*) combined with different terms of connections (belong*, inclu*, exclu*, integrat*, and participat*) in the title.

Although the sample includes the most-cited articles and, hence, are regarded as "influential," it should be noted that it does not include articles that do not use terms referring to children and connection in the title; nor does it include articles that have not yet reached a high level of citation and articles that are regarded as influential based on measures other than the number of citations (e.g., due to their high quality or novelty). Table 1 shows the number of articles selected from the total number of hits.

As shown in Table 1, the sample included 20 of the most cited articles from each of the five search terms indicating connections, for a total of 100 articles. Many of the hit articles were irrelevant, as they have more related, multiple meanings and hence, to a lesser extent, were used to address children's connections. This especially regards articles with participation in the title, followed by integration and inclusion. Notably, articles addressing inclusive or integrative settings, most frequently "inclusive/integrative schools," were excluded from the sample, as they primarily regarded the extent to which schools facilitate children's connections regardless of children's experience of these connections. Also, articles addressing children's participation in research and other ad hoc activities were excluded, as they did not cover the more durable form of experiences focused on in this research.

The 100 articles were coded into an SPSS matrix and made into dummy variables covering aspects of children's connections. An overview of the variables appears in Table 3. The variables are, for the most part, self-explanatory. It should, however, be noted that the spokesmen of this analysis are two representatives of academic disciplines: scientific journals and 1st authors

Table 1. Number of hits and number of selected articles.

	Total number of hits	Number of selected articles
Belonging	369	20
Inclusion	1076	20
Exclusion	508	20
Integration	1933	20
Participation	3725	20
Total		100

of articles. This research is expected to address different aspects of children's connections. For example, psychological spokesmen are assumed to keep their analysis at an individual level, focusing on cognitive and mental factors and human behaviour, whereas sociologists are believed to operate at a societal level, putting more emphasis on conditions of social, economic, and political kind. It should also be noted that the variable "arena" refers to the place at which the connection takes place. The variable often overlaps, yet is not like the variable "object of affiliation," that is, the object to which children feel a connection. For example, the object of affiliation may be peers, but the arena may be schools.

Four articles were represented twice in the sample, as they included two terms of connections (e.g., belonging and inclusion, or inclusion and exclusion). One of the four articles was excluded, so the sample included 96 articles. From these articles, three samples were obtained:

- Sample 1 includes 19 articles addressing children with immigrant backgrounds—from now on called "immigrant children" for simplicity reasons.
- Sample 2 includes 77 articles dealing with children without an immigrant background.
- Sample 3 includes all 96 articles, including children, both with and without an immigrant background. These are sometimes referred to as "children in general."
- Sample 1 is the focus of this article. Samples 2 and 3 were analysed for comparison reasons.

Table 2 provides an overview of the articles in sample 1.

3.2. The Analysis

This analysis is based on a critical discourse review methodology conducted by Borch (2012, 2019) and Borch and Kjærnes (2015). The methodology is built on several assumptions about the technical construction of discourses and fields of knowledge, drawing on Foucault's work on discourses in general and the book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) in particular. First, it is assumed that the smallest components in discourse are statements. The statements addressed in this article concern the term of connection used in the articles' title (e.g., "belonging," "inclusion," "exclusion," "integration," or "participation"), the year of publication, the spokesmen—here defined as the discipline of the journal and the 1st author of the article (e.g., social sciences, education, psychology, social work, medicine), the country of the explored children (the US, Europe, Australia, or others), the age of the explored children, the type

Table 2. Overview of articles addressing children with immigrant backgrounds (sample 1).

Term in title	Reference	Title	No. of citations
Belonging	Goodenow and Grady (1993)	"The Relationship of School Belonging and Friends Value to Academic Motivation Among Urban Adolescent Students''	358
	Correa-Velez et al. (2010)	"Longing to Belong: Social Inclusion and Well-Being Among Youth With Refugee Backgrounds in the First Three Years in Melbourne, Australia''	181
	Gonzales et al. (2013)	"No Place to Belong: Contextualising Concepts of Mental Health Among Undocumented Immigrant Youth in the United States''	134
	Sánchez et al. (2005)	"The Role of Sense of School Belonging and Gender in the Academic Adjustment of Latino Adolescents''	126
	Bartholet (1991)	"Where Do Black Children Belong—The Politics of Race Matching Adoption"	98
	Newman et al. (2007)	"Peer Group Membership and Sense of Belonging: Their Relationship to Adolescent Behavior Problems''	86
	Kuperminc et al. (2008)	"Parent Involvement in the Academic Adjustment of Latino Middle and High School Youth: Teacher Expectations and School Belonging as Mediators''	68
	Demanet and Van Houtte (2012)	"School Belonging and School Misconduct: The Differing Role of Teacher and Peer Attachment''	66
	Mcmahon et al. (2008)	"School Belonging Among Low-Income Urban Youth With Disabilities: Testing a Theoretical Model"	56
	Kiang and Fuligni (2009)	"Ethnic Identity in Context: Variations in Ethnic Exploration and Belonging Within Parent, Same-ethnic Peer, and Different-ethnic Peer Relationships''	50
	Spaaij (2015)	"Refugee Youth, Belonging and Community Sport"	47

Table 2. (Cont.) Overview of articles addressing children with immigrant backgrounds (sample 1).

Term in title	Reference	Title	No. of citations
Inclusion	Killen and Stangor (2001)	"Children's Social Reasoning About Inclusion and Exclusion in Gender and Race Peer Group Contexts''	212
	Seeland et al. (2009)	"Making Friends in Zurich's Urban Forests and Parks: The Role of Public Green Space for Social Inclusion of Youths From Different Cultures''	84
	Valls and Kyriakides (2013)	"The Power Of Interactive Groups: How Diversity of Adults Volunteering in Classroom Groups Can Promote Inclusion And Success for Children of Vulnerable Minority Ethnic Populations''	75
Exclusion			
Integration	McDade (2001)	"Lifestyle Incongruity, Social Integration, and Immune Function in Samoan Adolescents''	49
	Ghuman (2009)	"Assimilation or integration? A study of Asian adolescents"	34
	Vermeulen (2010)	"Segmented Assimilation and Cross-National Comparative Research on the Integration of Immigrants and Their Children''	32
	Myers (1999)	"Childhood Migration and Social Integration in Adulthood"	32
Participation	Orellana et al. (2001)	"Transnational Childhoods: The Participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration''	270

of children explored (e.g., children with majority background, children with an immigrant background, children with disabilities, children from poor families), the arena in which the connections are played out (e.g., home, school, organised leisure activities, unorganised leisure activities, digital media), the object of affiliation (e.g., family, peers, geographical areas, things, or activities), methods (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, review, or experiment), and the article's number of citations.

Second, it is assumed that statements tend to cluster into discourses that constitute seemingly logical reasoning. For example, a discourse dealing with children's school belonging will differ from a discourse dealing with children's relationships with peers or local society.

Third, the field of knowledge is assumed to constitute "a static, but movable web of statements from which statements flow between discourses that partially overlap and partially contradict each other" (Borch, 2012, p. 59) and in which "discourses and statements are constantly established, maintained and dissolved" (Borch & Kjærnes, 2015, p. 141). The stronger a discourse, the greater its influence on how children's connections are generally perceived and handled in society.

Fourth, the statements, discourses and how they change can be analysed through statistical analysis. In this research, the articles were coded in line with the above-mentioned statement. Then, the statements were analysed through frequency analyses and the clustering into discourses was analysed through factor analyses. The strength of the discourses is indicated by the explained variance of the factor analyses. In the cluster analyses conducted in this research, the number of vari-

ables included in the factor analyses was systematically reduced. First, all variables with less than two units were excluded. Next, the variables with a score lower than .5 were excluded one by one. Finally, two factors of each model that gave no substantial meanings were removed. Bivariate crosstab analyses were used to compare statements about immigrant children (sample 1) and all children except immigrant children (sample 2).

4. Field Dominated by Psychology

Table 3 shows the statements of children's connections in the three samples of articles dealing with "children with immigrant background," "children without immigrant background," and "children with and without immigrant background."

Table 3 indicates that most articles dealing with immigrant children use the term "belonging" to describe children's connections. The articles were published between 1989 and 2015. The number increased from 1989–1999 to 2000–2009 but decreased from 2000–2009 to 2010–2015. The decrease probably reflects that it takes time to get a high number of citations.

Most articles dealing with immigrant children's connections are published in psychological journals and have a psychologist as the first author. The children participating in the research were, for the most part, settled in the US and were between six and 16 years old. The object of affiliation was usually peers, but schools and geographical areas were also addressed. The connections were usually explored in a school context, and the methodology tended to be quantitatively oriented.

Table 3. Number of articles on children's connections (samples 1, 2, and 3).

	Sample 1: Children with immigrant background (N = 19)	Sample 2: Children without immigrant background (N = 77)	Sample 3: Children with and without immigrant background (N = 96)	Parsons Chi-Square on the difference between samples 1 and 2 (N = 96)
Term in title				
Belonging	11 (58%)	9 (12%)	20 (21%)	
Inclusion	3 (16%)	16 (21%)	19 (20%)	
Exclusion	0	18 (25%)	18 (20%)	
Integration	4 (21%)	16 (21%)	20 (21%)	
Participation	1 (5%)	18 (23%)	19 (18%)	
Year of publication				
1989–1999	4 (21%)	11 (14%)	15 (16%)	.467
2000–2009	9 (47%)	46 (60%)	55 (57%)	.329
2010–2015	6 (32%)	20 (26%)	26 (27%)	.622
Discipline of journal				
Social sciences	5 (26%)	13 (17%)	18 (19%)	.345
Education	3 (16%)	5 (7%)	8 (8%)	.189
Psychology	8 (42%)	32 (42%)	40 (42%)	.965
Social work	0	2 (3%)	2 (2%)	.478
Medicine	2 (11%)	17 (22%)	19 (20%)	.258
Other	1 (5%)	7 (9%)	8 (8%)	.589
Discipline of 1st author				
Social science	6 (32%)	12 (16%)	18 (19%)	.110
Education	2 (11%)	9 (12%)	11 (12%)	.887
Psychology	8 (42%)	39 (51%)	47 (49%)	.505
Social work	1 (5%)	2 (3%)	3 (3%)	.550
Other/not found	2 (5%)	14 (18%)	15 (16%)	.165
Children's country of residence				
USA	12 (63%)	40 (52%)	52 (52%)	.380
Europe	5 (26%)	26 (34%)	31 (32%)	.534
Australia	2 (11%)	4 (5%)	6 (6%)	.390
Other	0	7 (9%)	7 (7%)	.172
Children's age				
0–5	0	7 (9%)	7 (7%)	.172
6–12	9 (47%)	24 (31%)	33 (34%)	,183
13–16	9 (47%)	30 (39%)	39 (41%)	.504
17–19	5 (26%)	12 (16%)	19 (20%)	.425
20+	3 (16%)	15 (20%)	15 (16%)	.982
Not specified	4 (21%)	14 (18%)	19 (20%)	.878
Group of children				
Majority children	1 (5%)	44 (57%)	45 (47%)	.000***
Disability	1 (5%)	26 (34%)	27 (28%)	.013*
Poor	1 (5%)	3 (4%)	4 (4%)	.789
Other vulnerable groups	0	8 (10%)	8 (8%)	.142
Arena				
Home	3 (16%)	2 (3%)	5 (5%)	.020*
Education	7 (37%)	34 (44%)	41 (43%)	.564
Organised leisure time	1 (5%)	13 (17%)	14 (15%)	.199
Unorganised leisure time	2 (11%)	14 (18%)	16 (17%)	.423
Geographical area	4 (21%)	4 (5%)	8 (8%)	.025*
Digital media	0	7 (19%)	7 (7%)	.172
Other/not specified	5 (26%)	18 (23%)	23 (24%)	.789

Table 3. (Cont.) Number of articles on children's connections (samples 1, 2, and 3).

	Sample 1: Children with immigrant background (N = 19)	Sample 2: Children without immigrant background (N = 77)	Sample 3: Children with and without immigrant background (N = 96)	Parsons Chi-Square on the difference between samples 1 and 2 (N = 96)
Object of affiliation				
Family	3 (16%)	3 (4%)	6 (6%)	.055
Peers	6 (32%)	34 (44%)	40 (42%)	.319
Geographical area	5 (26%)	3 (4%)	8 (8%)	.002**
Materials	0	2 (3%)	2 (2%)	.478
Activities	1 (5%)	13 (17%)	14 (15%)	.199
School	6 (32%)	16 (21%)	22 (23%)	.316
Other/not specified	0	8 (10%)	8 (8%)	.142
Method				
Qualitative	4 (21%)	13 (17%)	17 (18%)	.670
Quantitative	13 (68%)	44 (57%)	57 (59%)	.370
Review	1 (5%)	8 (10%)	9 (9%)	.492
Experiment	0	8 (10%)	8 (8%)	.142
Other	1 (5%)	2 (3%)	3 (3%)	.550
Citation				
0–99	13 (68%)	33 (43%)	46 (48%)	.046*
100–199	3 (16%)	25 (33%)	28 (29%)	.052
200–629	3 (16%)	19 (25%)	22 (23%)	.409

Notes: Univariate frequencies and bivariate cross table analysis (N = 96, 19, 77); ***$p < .0.001$, **$p < .0,01$, * $p < .0,05$.

When comparing the sample of articles addressing children with and without immigrant backgrounds, the general observation is that the two samples do not differ significantly. However, some exceptions are worth noting. For example, articles addressing immigrant children rarely address majority children at the same time, indicating that minority and majority children seldom are compared, nor do they deal with children with disabilities. These observations may indicate that some aspects of immigrant children's intersectionality are seldom explored.

Moreover, articles dealing with immigrant children are more often dealing with children's connections to geographical arenas and are more frequently explored in specified areas, for example, a country or a local society. Immigrant children's connections are also more frequently explored at home and tend to be less cited than articles addressing children without immigrant backgrounds. Overall, Table 3 reveals several knowledge gaps in the high-cited literature on immigrant children. Most striking is the lack of articles addressing preschool children, children with disabilities, poor children, and children's connection to digital media and other materials.

5. American and European Discourses on School Belonging

Table 4 shows how the statements tended to cluster into discourses in articles dealing with immigrant children.

In Table 4, three discourses on immigrant children's connection can be identified. Two of them are here entitled "the American tradition" and "the European tradition." The American tradition was developed in the early 2000s and dealt primarily with belonging (and not integration) to schools, and children's ages tend to be unspecified. The spokesmen were typically psychological journals with psychologists as 1st author. The methodology was most frequently quantitative. The spokesmen tended not to be social scientists, and the articles tended not to be geographically rooted, either with regards to arena or object of affiliation.

On the other hand, the European tradition tends to be basically educational and has, to a little extent, engaged American researchers. The focus has been on children 13–16 years old. This tradition, too, is focused on schools, both as arenas and objects of affiliations and tends not to be concerned with connections taking place at home.

The third discourse deals with "integration." The discourse was at its strongest in the 1990s and at its weakest in the 2010s. For the most part, the discourse is based on quantitative methodologies and is, to a little extent, associated with qualitative methodologies. Overall, the discourse is relatively weak, with an explained variance of 14.

6. The Participation of Children in General

Table 5 shows the discourses on the connections of children in general.

Table 4. Discourses of immigrant children's connections (sample 1).

Statements	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Title: Belonging	0,553	−0,048	−0,294
Title: Integration	−0,578	0,185	0,595
Year: 1989–1999	−0,259	0,201	0,581
Year: 2000–2009	0,645	−0,385	0,202
Year: 2010–2015	−0,466	0,237	−0,726
Journal: Social science	−0,642	−0,353	−0,015
Journal: Education	−0,101	0,703	0,036
Journal: Psychology	0,758	−0,105	−0,119
1st author: Psychology	0,736	0,187	0,395
Country: USA	0,555	−0,542	0,374
Country: European	−0,430	0,597	−0,171
Children's age: 13–16	0,115	0,717	0,004
Children's age: Not spesified	−0,594	−0,492	0,267
Arena: Home	0,003	−0,644	0,045
Arena: School	0,418	0,717	−0,078
Arena: Geographical arena	−0,674	0,285	0,461
Object of affiliation: Geographical area	−0,659	0,186	0,258
Object of affiliation: School	0,536	0,509	−0,265
Method: Qualitative	−0,288	−0,229	−0,717
Method: Quantitative	0,537	0,354	0,572
Total variance explained	27,299	19,168	14,789

Note: Factor analyses (N = 19).

Table 5 indicates the statements about immigrant children largely differ from those identified in the general sample. In the general sample, three academic discourses on children's connections can be identified: "the discourse of participation," "the discourse on place," and "the discourse on disability." The discourse on participation deals with children's participation in organised and unorganised leisure-time activities. This discourse tends to include the most cited and not the least cited articles. The discourse on place tends to be published in social

Table 5. Discourses of the connections of children in general (sample 3).

Statements	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Title: Inclusion	−0,166	−0,282	0,596
Title: Participation	0,861	0,048	−0,082
Journal: Social science	0,134	0,694	0,076
Journal: Psychology	−0,159	−0,554	−0,491
1st author: Education	−0,064	−0,105	0,766
1st author: Psychology	−0,098	−0,581	−0,517
Group of children: Disability	0,053	−0,304	0,605
Arena: Organised leisure time	0,858	0,024	0,066
Arena: Unorganised leisure time	0,614	0,031	0,168
Arena: Geographical arena	−0,225	0,811	−0,119
Object of affiliation: Geographical arena	−0,220	0,763	−0,148
Object of affiliation: Activity	0,899	0,055	0,080
Citation: 0–99	−0,555	0,115	0,130
Citation: 200–629	0,614	0,017	−0,280
Total variance explained	25,249	18,345	14,294

Note: Factor analyses (N = 96).

scientific journals, not in psychological journals; nor does it tend to have psychologist as 1st author. The discourse tends to be geographically rooted, both with regard to the arena and the object of affiliation. The disability discourse deals with the inclusion of children with disabilities and tends to have an educationist as 1st author and not a psychologist. This discourse is relatively weak, with an explained variance of 14.

7. Belonging vs Participation

In this article, the literature on children's connections has been analysed as "statements" and "discourses," providing an overview of this field of knowledge as well as the smaller discussions going on within it. The statements and discourses identified have been compared with those identified in other samples of children. In this section, the research results reported in the last section are discussed in light of the previous literature on children's connections.

In the analyses of statements, articles dealing with immigrant children's connections were compared to the connections of other children. A general observation was that the two samples of articles tended not to differ from each other. For example, most research on children with and without immigrant backgrounds tends to have psychological spokesmen, are based on quantitative methodologies and address connections played out at school. The dominance of psychological spokesmen may imply that individual explanation factors are given priority at the expense of more structural factors of social, economic, political, or other kinds. In psychological studies, quantitative methodologies are often preferred (Wertz, 2014). The preference for quantitative methodologies may explain why research on children's connections tends to focus on school children and not preschool children, as school children are easily recruited through schools, and younger preschool children hardly can be examined by surveys. As such, psychological dominance may also partly explain why schools are frequent objects of research in articles dealing with children's connections. Another factor explaining why school belonging is focused is less pragmatic and more substantial, namely, that school belonging matters in immigrant children's lives in terms of being positively associated with their academic motivation and outcomes (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Sanzes, 2008), as well as with their peer attachment and teacher support (Valls & Kyriakides, 2013).

Another example is that articles addressing children with and without immigrant backgrounds tend to focus on children settled in the US. The high percentage of articles from the US, which, to some extent, reflects that the sample of articles is only based on articles written in English. Research results addressing children settled in the US are not necessarily transferable to children in other settings (Vermeulen, 2010). However, as articles written in English are probably more accessible to researchers who attempt to update themselves in this field of science, the research results of this article probably provide a representative picture of what researchers learn to perceive as the international discourse on children's connections. As much as one of every four articles explored in this research focused on immigrant children. This result, too, may reflect that most articles address children settled in the US, as the share of immigrant children is higher in the US than in Europe or other geographical areas. In other words, if the sample had included more articles addressing children settled in Europe or other geographical areas than in the US, the percentage of immigrant children would most likely be lower.

A third example is that research on children with and without immigrant backgrounds focuses on children's connections to their peers. One reason may be that social bonds between peers are more voluntarily created. Even though peers may mean less than their parents, they become increasingly important in children's lives as they get older (Cabrera & Leyendecker, 2017). The research reported in this article does not show to what kind of peer groups children feel most connected: same-ethnic or different-ethnic groups, nor does it show from whom the children feel most excluded. Research indicates, however, that children with immigrant backgrounds can be victims of intergroup exclusion based on their race (Killen et al., 2013). This makes it difficult for them to learn and practice effective social skills within peer relationships, so that their social standing within the larger peer group could improve. Perhaps this explains why rejected peer status is more stable than other sociometric categories (Brown, 2004, p. 382).

Some articles addressing immigrant children's connections differ from articles dealing with other children. For example, connections at home are more frequently addressed, which may reflect the fact that immigrant children, to a larger extent, have parents with other religious and cultural backgrounds, and experience conflicting norms and values at home and in other contexts (Guhman, 2009). Previous research indicates that immigrant children's sense of well-being and belonging rely on their parents' history of segmentation and socio-economic position (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Portes, 1995, Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) and that "lifestyle inconsistency" is a main source of stress (McDade, 2001). Research also indicates that materials such as digital media and clothes are important in children's lives, both in terms of being objects of affiliation and as tools providing access to social groups and communities (Pugh, 2009; Rysst, 2013). From this perspective, the absence of articles dealing with poor children and their material conditions is striking.

Another example is that geographical areas are more frequently addressed in research dealing with immigrant children's connections. The focus on geographical areas may reflect that these objects of affiliation are more important in immigrant children's lives. Establishing a sense of belonging to the host country is essential for

their well-being (Correa-Velez et al., 2010) and even more so for those who arrive in this country as children (Gonzales et al., 2013). The focus may also reflect the fact that immigrant children relate to more countries, including their host country and their family's country of origin, which makes the question of belonging more current. Immigrant children's belonging to their family's country of origin and how this influences their connection to the host country were not addressed in the sample explored in this article.

Table 6 in the Supplementary File compares the research results of Tables 4 and 5. As shown here, the discourses of immigrant children and the discourses of children in general tend to vary. The discourses on immigrant children's connections reveal an American and European tradition dealing with school belonging, yet from a psychological and educationalist perspective. The discourse on children in general, in contrast, reveals a discourse on children's participation in leisure-time activities, a discourse on place dealing with children's connection to geographical areas, and a discourse of disability dealing with children with disabilities from an educationalist perspective. The deepest contrast can be found between the American tradition concerned with immigrant children's connections at school and the discourse of place dealing with children in general. The former is dominated by psychologists, and the latter is dominated by social scientists.

A weak discourse on immigrant children's "integration" has been observed in this study. However, the discourse seems to have diminished since the 1990s, indicating that the term has been replaced by other terms addressing immigrant children's connections. Considering that belonging seems to be the preferred term in studies of immigrant children's connections (cf. Table 3), it seems reasonable to believe that it is this term that—at least to some extent—has replaced integration. Belonging is also the preferred term in European discourse that addresses children's connection to schools. This contrasts with the discourse on connections to leisure activities, in which "participation" is the preferred term. The latter observation can be connected to the results reported in Table 1, indicating that participation is the preferred term in studies of children in general. Previous research has indicated that the different terms of connections tend to overlap (Koster et al., 2009). However, this study indicates that the use of the terms varies to some extent. All variations in the use of terms observed in this research are summarised in the Supplementary File (Table 7).

Overall, this data material has a general tendency, suggesting that the term belonging is preferred in studies of immigrant children's connections, whereas participation is preferred in studies of children in general. On the one hand, it can be argued that children in general seem to be given a more dynamic and empowered role than immigrant children, as participation is more strongly associated with "activity" and "citizenship" than

belonging. However, the concept of belonging does not necessarily perceive children as passive carriers of naturally given relationships but as dynamically involved in the co-creation of connections to people and the world around them (see, e.g., Pugh, 2009; Rysst, 2013). Indeed, they may face barriers and may react with withdrawal, but that can children who participate do as well.

Also interesting from a power perspective is the observation that the discourse on children's connection to leisure activities tends to be more cited than the other discourses, as this may imply that this is an attractive field of knowledge. In this respect, it contrasts with research on immigrant children's connections, which tends to be less cited than articles dealing with other children (cf. Table 5).

8. More Research on Socio-Material Contexts

Studies indicate that immigrant children are more at risk of marginalisation and social exclusion (Eurostat, 2022). This is poorly understood, diminishing the welfare state's ability to handle the problem (Hyggen et al., 2018). Based on a Foucauldian discourse analysis review, this article has explored the most cited academic literature addressing immigrant children's connections to people and the world around them. The main research questions have been: What is typically addressed in this literature, and what are the knowledge gaps? In this concluding section, the most important observations are summed up and considerations regarding the research's conclusion validity are highlighted.

One of the main observations is that the articles addressing immigrant children's connections tend not to differ from articles dealing with other children's connections. For example, both articles dealing with children with and without immigrant backgrounds tend to include psychologists as spokesmen. This has several implications. Let us look at a few: Most research on immigrant children's connections tends to be based on quantitative methodologies, which are preferred in psychological studies (Wertz, 2014). The use of methodology can explain why most research is conducted at schools and why school belonging is a frequent subject of research, as children are easily recruited for surveys at schools. It can also explain why school children are more often explored than preschool children, as preschool children hardly can participate in surveys.

The consequence of this psychological dominance should not be underestimated, as it most likely implies that structural factors of social, economic, and political kind influencing (in influenced by) children's connections are underexamined and need to be systematically explored. If not, the prevailing structure of knowledge and power will most likely stabilise or strengthen—at the expense of a more enriched field of knowledge and scientific progress.

The dominance of psychological spokesmen does not mean that other disciplines do not play a role in

the (re)production of knowledge and knowledge gaps. Rather, they are present, though not necessarily concerned with the same subjects as psychologists. For example, educationalists and social scientists seem to be more concerned with children with disabilities, while social scientists seem to be more concerned with children's connection to place. This confirms that the discipline of the spokesmen plays a role in the (re)production of knowledge and knowledge gaps and should be considered in future review studies.

The third observation is that research on immigrant children's connections is seldom compared with research on majority children; nor are they concerned with how children's ethnicity intersects with other vulnerabilities, such as disabilities or low-income family backgrounds. Overall, there seems to be limited research addressing economic and material conditions, such as the role of digital media and other artefacts in children's everyday lives. This observation may cause concerns considering the important role artefacts like food, clothes, shelter, and digital media play in children's lives (Pugh, 2009; Rysst, 2013). As material conditions deal with environmental conditions rather than individuals, this result can also be the outcome of the psychological dominance observed in this study. However, the neglect of material conditions is also common in the social sciences and, to some extent, in the humanities.

The research results of this study should be tested in future research, not only limited to the 100 most influential articles measured by the number of citations but also larger samples of articles. As the number of citations increased over time, the articles addressed in this research were all published before 2016. As such, the research gaps identified in this research may have been covered in research published after this point in time. For example, the high citation of research dealing with children's leisure-time activities may indicate that this has been a popular research object in recent studies. An interesting follow-up study could analyse articles addressing children's connections published in the last 5–10 years. Such a study would not only provide insights into the state of the art when compared with the research results of this article, but it could also indicate how studies of children's connections have changed over time.

Another consideration regards the observation that most studies explored in this research address immigrant children settled in the US. The US is a big country, and research results addressed in one state are not necessarily transferrable to other geographical areas, either inside or outside US borders. "Local" discourse analytical reviews of research addressing the connections of immigrant children settled in other countries may therefore be needed to address knowledge and knowledge gaps in a specific area.

The sample of articles analysed in this article has all been written in English. As this means that the sample is biased in the sense of favouring articles address-ing children settled in Anglo-Saxon countries, it may, to some extent, explain why the articles tend to address children settled in the US. However, the biased sample is also the most cited literature and, hence, the best-known literature to which most researchers all over the globe actively conduct in their everyday lives at work—be it to get familiar with a new research field or to be updated on an old. Exactly because this kind of literature forms the basis of new knowledge and knowledge development, doing critical reviews that not only explore what we know and do not know, but also discuss why the knowledge is as it is and its possible consequences, is important. When exploring the field of knowledge as a social construct, the field's strengths and weaknesses are more easily revealed, their potential for change is more easily utilised and political goals are more easily achieved.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Court Cases on Poor Children's Access to Normalcy

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Abstract
Poverty in childhood is associated with an increased risk of being marginalised and socially excluded, which is also the case in the Swedish welfare state. Poor parents often strive for their children to fit in among same-aged children, which is difficult for the poorest to accomplish. As the last resort for the poor, the welfare state offers the opportunity to apply for financial aid, but applications may be rejected. Parents can then appeal the rejections to an administrative court. In these decisions, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child could be applied or referred to. The convention has been incorporated into Swedish law since 2020. This article is grounded in childhood sociology and aims to show how poor children, their needs, and rights are processed in the legal system, which sets the framework for the children's access to material conditions needed for inclusion in a welfare state such as Sweden. The presentation is based on a qualitative content analysis of administrative court records concerning financial aid appeals. The results show that the appeal process confirms the adult orientation of financial aid and that a child rights perspective is, with few exceptions, missing in these records. When children are mentioned, a care perspective dominates and their right to participation is neglected.

Keywords
child perspective; child poverty; children's rights; court records; financial aid

1. Introduction

A life in poverty means an increased risk for children to become marginalised and socially excluded, also in the Swedish welfare state. Poor parents often strive for their children to fit in among same-aged children, which is difficult for the poorest to accomplish. As the last resort for the poor, the welfare state offers the opportunity to apply for financial aid. If the social services reject these applications, parents can appeal their case to an administrative court. In these decisions, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which has been incorporated into Swedish law since 2020, could be applied or referred to.

In earlier research, several approaches have been applied to understand processes that reduce or enforce the impoverishment of children. Some studies analyse child poverty on a structural level (e. g. Mood & Jonsson, 2016) and how general policy changes can affect child poverty (O'Brian & Salonen, 2011). Statistical annual reports in Sweden show the frequency and distribution of child poverty within the child population (Salonen, 2021) and others analyse how efficient Swedish policy has been in fighting child poverty (Lindquist & Lindquist, 2008). Some research has focused on poverty as a risk factor when it comes to children's health and welfare. International, as well as Swedish studies, have shown how children are at risk of negative impact from their parents' lack of resources both during childhood and in the long run, though it is not always clear whether it is a matter of causality or correlation (Mörk et al., 2015; Najman et al., 2010; Weitoft et al., 2008; Yngwe, 2004). In these studies, children are positioned as objects affected by poverty, which is in line with the tendency

to frame economic issues in general and household finances in particular as adult concerns that children should be protected from (Näsman & von Gerber, 1996; Pålsson & Wiklund, 2021). Research with children as subjects, focusing on poor children's experiences and everyday life, is still limited both in Sweden and internationally. In recent decades, several qualitative studies primarily based on interviews with children and their parents have shown how children themselves define and frame their situation and experiences of poverty in a welfare state (Andersson Bruck, 2020; Fernqvist, 2013; Harju, 2008; Hjelmtveit, 2008; Hölscher, 2003; Ridge, 2002). This research clearly shows that poor children are not only objects of adult concern, but are involving themselves in the household finances and use strategies to cope with their situation.

Only a few studies have addressed financial aid with a focus on children's rights. Näsman (2019) concludes in an analysis of the recommendations from the Swedish National Agency for Health and Welfare (NAHW), that there is ambivalence in addressing poor children's access to a normal childhood. Interviews with social workers show that they find it difficult to apply a child perspective in financial aid cases (Hjort, 2019). Social service professionals have a wide range of different and sometimes inconsistent interpretations of the meaning of a child perspective and its implementation (Pålsson & Wiklund, 2020). A study on children's participation in financial aid cases, based on a combination of local guidelines, case files and interviews, concluded that even though child participation was mentioned in most of the guidelines, the issue was left to the frontline workers to handle (Pålsson & Wiklund, 2021). The social workers, in turn, expressed hesitation when it came to meeting or listening to children as part of their decision-making process. They saw a risk of infringement on parents' integrity if children were to participate. Children were rarely present and when so, they were not regarded as social actors. Children's needs and participation were seen as the responsibility of child welfare workers, while financial aid is adult-centred since both investigations and services primarily target adults. This can explain why child participation is seen as alien to financial aid processes (Pålsson & Wiklund, 2021).

The social services do not have the final say when it comes to children's access to financial aid, since their decisions can be appealed to the administrative court. It has been argued that the UNCRC is not suitable for application in individual legal cases and cannot constitute grounds for demanding a particular right or benefit (Åhman et al., 2020; Holappa, 2020). There is, however, a lack of knowledge about the relevance of the UNCRC in these welfare state processes. We aim to address this issue by analysing if a child rights perspective is implemented in administrative court records when parents have appealed the social services' decisions on applications for financial aid. This approach, we argue, contributes to the understanding of children's access to the material and social conditions needed for inclusion in society and provides insights into child perspectives applied in welfare state practices. It is of utmost importance to see how tensions between the national level and local practices play out when parents appeal rejections of their applications. Court records concerning financial aid can reveal both formally regulated practices and more subtle expressions of perspectives on children, both important to understanding children's poverty in affluent welfare societies. This article draws on an ongoing study of court records concerning financial aid appeals analysed against the backdrop of Swedish legislation, national recommendations and the UNCRC. The main research questions are: How are poor children, their needs and rights, framed in the context of financial aid appeals? Is a child rights perspective made relevant in the court records and if so by whom? Are children made visible as having rights and agency, and if so, how is that done?

The project has the sociology of childhood as its theoretical framework, which entails that childhood is seen as a life phase within the age order of society (Närvänen & Näsman, 2007). Childhoods are socially constructed and regulated by age-based norms on normality and deviance. Children are a subordinated social category in the age order, which distributes rights and obligations and regulates scope of action and social status (James & Prout, 1990). Alanen (1992) coined the term "familialisation" to conceptualise how children may be primarily viewed as components in a family, and secondly as acting subjects with rights of their own; within the family as well as in other contexts (see also Näsman, 1994). Children's needs in terms of financial and social resources may often be subordinated to parents' needs and claims, in social work practice as well as political discourse. This can be viewed as an expression of familialisation in practice (Fernqvist, 2011; Näsman, 2019). Children's perspectives on their own needs are often excluded in financial aid cases since decision-making processes are based on parents' and social workers' articulations of children's needs. The children are very rarely consulted (Näsman et al., 2009; Pålsson & Wiklund, 2021).

Childhood sociology furthermore analyses how children are positioned mostly as "human becomings" defined by their lack of adult capabilities (Qvortrup, 1994). This futuristic orientation is linked to the dominating "care perspective" in society, which stresses children's vulnerability and the need for adults to take responsibility for children's protection and provision (Eriksson & Näsman, 2011). That perspective is nowadays complemented by a "participation perspective" where children are acknowledged as actors with competence to have agency in their own lives. The UNCRC encompasses both perspectives, which could be seen as contradictory, but rather calls for a double gaze on children at risk as both vulnerable and acting subjects (Eriksson & Näsman, 2011).

2. Child Poverty and Legal Rights in Sweden

Sweden is often regarded as one of the most developed welfare states in the world, with a family policy prioritising universal kinds of support to families with children, in addition to income-related transfers such as parental leave benefits. The family policy aims to keep children out of poverty and to reduce income inequalities in society. The system for financial transfers contributes to a great extent to the income of households with children. During the last twenty years, however, the welfare state has receded by narrowing who is eligible for some kinds of support and by not raising benefit levels at the pace of the overall increase in incomes (the Swedish Social Insurance Agency [SSIA], 2022). The pandemic in 2020 contributed to a dramatic increase in households with children who had such a low income that they could be eligible for financial aid. Single parent households represented the largest increase. The proportion of families with children who, thanks to the family policy measures, had an income above the poverty line has decreased from two thirds in the year 2000 to one third in 2020. The income gap has increased both between households with and without children and between single and two-parent households (SSIA, 2022).

Sweden has a low rate of child poverty in an international comparison. The global poverty line based on survival is of no use if the aim is to understand income inequalities and what is seen and experienced as poverty in an affluent society. Consequently, poverty in the welfare state is related to social norms and standards of living which vary over time (Jonsson & Mood, 2017). In reports to the Swedish government, SSIA uses three measures which show the same ranking of poverty by type of household with children, where poverty is most frequent among single mothers and immigrated parents. Of households with children, 18% had a relatively low income, i.e., below 60% of the median income in the population (single parents: 38%); 6% were recipients of financial aid (single parents: 14%), and 8% had an income below their costs for basic needs (single parents: 17%). Of single mothers with immigrant backgrounds, 31% were recipients of financial aid (SSIA, 2022). These percentages underestimate the proportion of poor children since poverty increases with the number of children. Based on the income level for eligibility for financial aid, Save the Children concluded that almost 196,000 children lived in poverty in Sweden in 2019 (Salonen, 2021). The persistence of poverty is crucial. SSIA (2022) reports that 41% of the poor children had been poor for at least three years and Lindquist and Lindquist (2008) found that the chronically poor are primarily immigrant children.

When the general family policies fail in keeping children out of poverty, financial aid is the last safety net. This is a means-tested cash benefit and aims at ensuring a reasonable level of living and promoting self-sufficiency. The aid is administered by municipal social services. A national norm prescribes how much and for which basic costs financial aid should be granted, related to household structure and children's age. The norm was supposed to constitute a minimum level, but research shows that it has become the ceiling for how much social services are willing to award (Hjort, 2019). There is a wide scope for discretion in social work practices. Each case should be assessed individually, and guidelines may be adapted to local circumstances. Johansson (2019) found that the payments are on average not more than 20% of the median income in the population, which means that some households may be seen as poor even when obtaining financial aid.

A general aim of the social policy in Sweden is social equality, but the level of living granted to those who get financial aid is mostly limited to what those who provide for themselves on a low income can afford. When it comes to children, there is a specific recommendation from the NAHW (2021) stating that in addition to the national norm, money may be granted when needed to make it possible for a child to take part in leisure activities. There is obviously a tension here between positioning poor children as part of the population segment with low income, who might not be able to afford costs for a leisure activity, and giving children access to what is considered a normal childhood in Sweden.

Children's access to aid is dependent on whether and for what parents apply, as children can only apply for aid themselves in exceptional cases. Principles of voluntariness and self-determination are paramount in the Social Services Act (Government of Sweden, 2001). This entails that financial aid has to be requested by the client and can never be enforced upon an individual, even if it could mean an improvement in a child's living conditions. Children's access to aid is also dependent on the entitlement of their parents. Access to financial aid is conditioned not only by low income but also by demands on the applicants' behaviour: to spend their money wisely, to provide information in time to the investigation conducted by the social services, to use all alternative options for income, and, not least, to actively strive for increased self-sufficiency, for instance, by taking part in education, vocational training, and applying for jobs. An application for financial aid from a parent who does not fulfil these demands may be rejected completely or partially, which entails the rejection of aid to other household members as well. Despite a rejection, the social services may provide aid for necessary temporary and urgent costs such as food for the day to children and temporary housing. This raises questions about how child poverty and children's rights should be tackled in the welfare state.

When the social services inform an applicant that the application is rejected, they are obliged to also inform them of their right to appeal the decision to an administrative court. Children are not parties in these cases, according to Swedish law, but a child rights perspective should, according to the UNCRC, be applied when the social services handle cases on financial aid. The NAHW

(2021), acknowledges that poverty may have several serious negative effects on children and advocates, based on the UNCRC, that a child rights perspective should guide the administration of financial aid when a child is affected. Reviews of the social services have shown very divergent practices and understandings of how the UNCRC can be applied in cases of financial aid involving children (NAHW, 2015).

The "child rights perspective" and the "best interest of the child" are, according to the NAHW (2021), both based on a combination of information from adult child perspectives (scientific knowledge, professional practices, and adults who know the child) and the child's own perspective. How these sources of information should be weighed in relation to one another, or if they are compatible, is not clear (Näsman, 2019). The NAHW (2021) recommends a procedure for the application of a child rights perspective: (a) assess if an application for financial aid has relevance for a child, (b) investigate the child's position in the household finances and how the child is affected, (c) evaluate what the child's best interest is, (d) analyse the consequences a decision on the application has for the child and, based on these steps, (e) weigh the child's best interest against other interests, and finally (f) come to a conclusion. The recommendation concludes that a child's best interest is not decisive but should weigh heavily in the decision-making (NAHW, 2021). Although these recommendations are not used as a vantage point in our study, we find it useful to explore and analyse court records based on these six steps.

In recent years, scholars have called for studies exploring how key concepts originating from the children's rights discourse and the UNCRC are implemented in professional practices. A national investigation on how well Swedish legislation and legal practice were adapted to the UNCRC concluded that the demands in the convention targeting poverty were fulfilled (Government of Sweden, 2020). A relevant question, then, is what that means when looking more closely at poor children's needs and rights in financial aid cases.

3. Data, Coding, and Analysis

In the ongoing project concerning financial aid appeals, the total sample encompasses more than 500 court records where it is directly or indirectly evident that the case concerns a child. Court records were collected from all 12 administrative courts in Sweden via a database (JUNO, 2021). The article presents results from a sample of 102 court records on financial aid in 2021, where housing issues were at stake.

The court presents its cases in a short text, which is publicly available, as part of the democratic right to scrutinise the courts. The court is obliged to mention in its records all information deemed important for its rulings. When parents appeal a decision on financial aid, court records accordingly present the decisive information concerning the reasoning of the parties involved.

Court record texts are divided into several clearly separated and detailed parts. The front page provides information about the court, the applicant, the dates for the appealed decision, and the court ruling. This is followed by summaries of the decision and arguments from the social services, the applicant's appeal, the social services' reply, the applicant's reply to the reply, the legal grounds for the decision, the court's argument, the ruling and finally information about the right to appeal the court's decision to the Administrative Court of Appeal. An analysis of court records thus offers an opportunity to study the interplay between three perspectives, though with the limitation that the court selects the information and produces the text. Another limitation of this study is that it does not provide information about parents' applications for financial aid in general, since some applications, are, of course, approved and some, or perhaps even most, rejections are not appealed. We argue, however, that the broad variation regarding the applicants' living conditions, the kinds of rejections they appeal and the outcomes of the process, is of relevance for our understanding of the positioning of poor children in financial aid cases.

The project has a qualitative content analysis approach. In practice, this entails that the court records have been closely read and broken down into codes with labels used to describe the core content in the segments of the records to which they refer (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). The codes were reworked into broader categories that have been regarded as relevant based on previous research, our theoretical framework and the research questions (see Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). These categories have laid the foundation for the discussion in the following pages. The record excerpts presented in the article were translated by the authors.

4. Relevance of Family Background

Children should not, according to the UNCRC, be discriminated against, but their access to financial aid depends on their parents: their eligibility for financial aid and what they apply for. A crucial question is then what impact children's family background has on their right to financial aid.

According to Swedish legislation, parents share the responsibility to provide for their children regardless of marital status. Couples who live together have to apply jointly for aid and are assessed together, but a single parent's connection with the other parent is also scrutinised in the investigation by the social services. The resources of the other parent may be included in a decision about financial aid for a child. In several cases where an appealing single mother's child mostly stayed with the father, the social services and the court shortly concluded that "her son's basic needs are fulfilled since he lives primarily with his father," without considering her obligation to provide for her child or the child's own perspective. This is inconsistent with the general stress in Swedish family

policy on the importance of shared parenting (Blomqvist & Heimer, 2016) and with the national recommendation to attend to the needs also of children who do not live with the applying parent (NAHW, 2021).

Parents' immigration status was also made relevant in some cases. Parents without permanent residence in Sweden are only entitled to support concerning urgent financial needs, which in itself may be problematic for their children. We also found indications in the records of a lack of consideration for the special problems new immigrant parents face when they try to manoeuvre in a new complicated system of regulations. Language difficulties, lack of a social network, and care for many children were all arguments immigrant parents put forward to explain their difficulties in making a correct application for financial aid, getting a job or finding a cheap enough flat to live in.

Parental problems such as drug abuse, criminality, health issues, mental disability, and exposure to partner violence were neglected in some cases concerning social housing contracts but in other cases made relevant. Some rejections interfered with professional interventions regarding the parent's additional problems, which also had an impact on the child. A court ruling on the right of a young child to have regular contact with the father was jeopardised by a decision to reject his application for financial aid needed for the travel costs. Treatment of a father's drug abuse problems was counteracted by a rejection of his application for stable housing. The efforts the probation services made to reintegrate a parent after a prison sentence became more difficult since he was denied financial aid from the social services. In another case, a mother who had a protected identity due to abuse from the father was denied aid regarding housing for her and her children and recommended to apply for flats on the public housing market, which was problematic due to the confidentiality marking.

Non-familiar family structures seem to cause problems, which can affect children's right to financial aid. Polygamy is forbidden in Sweden but refugees may come from countries where it is legal. Three mothers who were married to the same man applied for financial aid for their separate households, but were all rejected since the social services "could not investigate their family situation." The court did not agree and returned the applications to the social services for further investigation and decision.

All in all, our analysis clearly shows that parental background factors may play a decisive role for children's access to the support they need and it could be argued that the right to non-discrimination due to religious, social, or ethnic background is thereby compromised.

5. Children's Visibility

The first step in the application of a child rights perspective is to decide if a case is relevant to a child. This question was already highlighted when we selected the court records since the answer was not immediately clear. There is no standardised description of the appellants' household or possible responsibility to provide for a child. A careful reading of the court records revealed that the existence of children is downplayed or outright neglected in several cases. Children were then only made visible indirectly, for example when child allowance was mentioned as an income or lack of child care was a hindrance on the parents' way to self-sufficiency. The children are invisible as individuals when they are regarded merely as an aspect of the parents' financial situation. The word "child" was in other cases mentioned in the records, but only as a part of a standard expression such as in the label for a housing norm and did not refer to the appellant's specific child. The mentioning of a specific child was sometimes solely a way to define a parent, "the father of her child," which made the child an appendix to the parent rather than a subject in its own right (see also Alanen, 1992; Fernqvist, 2011). Several children were positioned only as objects the parents should provide for: "She is able to provide for herself and her child." Other children were subsumed under the appellant adult, such as when the court stated that a mother was not granted a reasonable level of living if the child did not have internet access. From a child rights perspective, the latter could have been formulated as a matter of the child's level of living, rather than that of the mother. All these examples illustrate that poor children were often invisible as individuals with needs and rights of their own. A child rights perspective seems to be missing.

Mentioning of specific children is unevenly distributed between the various parts of the records, with preponderance in the parts of the text where the parents' arguments are declared. Parents' attempts to draw attention to their children do not necessarily mean that the children are also made visible in parts of the record that focus on the perspectives of the social services and the court. In one case, the child was presented as an individual actor by the parent but only included in the family's collective of children by the social services as a way to define "the children's school." The same child was then made visible by the court as an individual again, labelled by the relationship to the parent, "the daughter," but only to later be used as part of a definition and therefore not addressed as an individual.

6. The Child in the Household Finances

The next two steps in the application of a child rights perspective are to investigate the child's position in the household finances and how the child is affected by financial vulnerability. The answers to this are found in descriptions of children's needs. They can, depending on how the parties or the court present them, be divided into individual needs of the child (such as a bicycle), shared needs (such as food), and collective family needs (such as safe housing). These categorisations can

be intertwined and change during the appeal process. One parent mentioned food as a common good for the family, but it changed into a need only for the child when addressed by the social services. A computer, described by a parent as a tool needed by both the parent and the child, was also by the social services reduced to a need of the child.

Some needs of children were on the other hand turned into needs of the parent such as when a child's contact with the parent was made possible if the parent was granted aid for travel costs. The court in some cases formulated the satisfaction of a child's needs as a need of the parents to be able to fulfil their parental duties, which was part of the reasonable level of living standard for the parents. This illustrates that children in some cases are treated as separate individuals with rights of their own within the family collective and in others are subsumed under the family umbrella or even "familialised" as characteristics of their parents and as objects for parenting actions (Alanen, 1992).

The connection between a child's needs and financial issues can be unclear. Some parents mentioned needs of their child which had no direct connection with the application but were used as explanations for the parents' actions or lack of actions when they argued against the social services' reasons for rejection. A parent argued that she was absent from a meeting because her child was sick and needed her attention. Other parents mentioned their child's needs as demanding for the parent in what seems to be a more general appeal to an understanding of the difficult situation the family was facing.

Connections between the child's needs and the need for financial aid were clear when parents argued that their child's health was affected by their poor housing conditions or uncertain financial situation. Some parents also argued that harm was inflicted on their children, or pointed at needs that could not be satisfied if financial aid was not granted: "As a consequence of the decision the family will become homeless"; "they need money to buy clothes for the children."

Food, clothes, safe housing and housing area, enough floor space to be able to move around, a room of one's own, electricity, hot water, furniture such as a sofa and a bed, Christmas gifts, internet connection, computer, glasses, leisure activities, regular contact with a parent the child does not live with, are some of the different needs of children parents have mentioned. Some parents also attributed their children's special needs to health problems such as special food or stable housing close to their school. Not all of these needs are mentioned as basic in the regulation of financial aid. Christmas gifts are for instance not included, though they are taken for granted in most Swedish children's childhood. Other needs should already be covered by the national norm, but some could motivate additional support if needed for a reasonable level of living.

Children's possible need for and right to participation is hardly visible in the court records. If or how children are informed, consulted or taking part in decision-making is not mentioned (see Hart, 1992). Some parents make their children visible as actors by mentioning the children's school activities, which the court considered in one case and disregarded in two cases. A few parents gave voice to their children's opinions, which are at the heart of article 12 in the UNCRC. Some children did not want to move from their current home, but the court did not comment on the children's views.

Applications directly from children are rare and to grant children financial aid without their parents' consent should be an exception according to the law and national recommendations (NAHW, 2021). Two cases concerned young adults who moved away from serious conflicts and violence in their families. Since they were studying at secondary school and were under 21 years of age, their parents were still obliged to provide for them. The social services rejected their applications since they could be provided for by moving back to their parents, but the court ruled in their favour. These cases raise issues concerning children's social status, parental power, and children's right to support from society despite their parents' duty to provide for them, a right the court granted them, but not the social services. This indicates that these issues are ambiguous for the welfare state to handle.

7. Children's Rights and the Child's Best Interest: Balancing Perspectives

When a child's situation in the household finances is mapped and the effects on the child are analysed, this forms the basis for a decision on what the child's best interest is and for the conclusion about the consequences for the child of the decision to be made. Cases where concepts such as "child's best interest," "child (rights) perspective," or "child convention" are mentioned or alluded to, can be viewed as particularly critical to study since children's rights issues are put on the agenda.

References to a child perspective did not mean that children were always positioned as separate individuals. The social services and the court could still position a child as included in the household collective, subsumed under the appellant adults or not made visible at all in accordance with a process of familialisation. In some cases, the social services stated, without any specification, that they considered the "child perspective" or the "child's best interest" when they rejected the application. This may be interpreted as a way to just avoid critique.

The "child perspective" is, however, in other cases used to motivate the social services to reconsider their rejection and grant some basic aid to prevent or resolve a distressful and potentially damaging situation for the children, such as granting temporary housing or money for food. In some cases, money for food was granted only to the child, which shows that children are sometimes positioned as separate individuals within the family

context. It also implies an expectation that the parents do that as well, and only serve to the children the food they will purchase for that money.

The social services and the courts should weigh the child's best interest against other interests before they make a decision. It is relevant from a child rights perspective to ask to what extent the social services and/or the court, as part of that balancing process, comment upon the parents' arguments about the child's needs. It can make sense that the social services and the courts abstain from comments if there, as was the case in some records, was no connection at all between the mentioned needs of the child and what the application was about. Children's needs were, however, in many cases neglected altogether even when the parents' arguments concerning the child's problems and/or needs were clearly linked to the application, for instance in cases of overcrowding, homelessness or access to hot water and electricity. As mentioned earlier, there seems to be a tension between the aims of financial aid to foster self-sufficiency and to respond to the needs of children (Näsman, 2019). How that balancing act is accomplished is rarely described in the court records, but it becomes clear in some cases that the interests of a child are not prioritised: "The social services are aware of the situation of the family and their child's illness, but that does not in itself make the social services change their decision." In another case, the social services argued that "the decision is not compatible with the best interest of the child," followed by a description of all the ways in which the parent's behaviour was unacceptable. In that case, the household had lost access to hot water due to unpaid bills. From a child rights perspective, such a rejection concerning a child's best interest is not good enough since the arguments only referred to the parent.

In several cases the court argued that other interests take precedence over the interests of children: "What [the mother] has said about her daughter's health does not lead to another judgement since it is made clear that the mother is able to arrange housing for herself and her children." The fact that the mother was homeless and had not found any housing for herself and her five children was not relevant since the social services, despite the apparent outcome, assessed that she had the ability to do that. The focus here seems to have been to foster the parent rather than providing for the family's, or children's, needs (see also Swärd, 2019).

8. Outcome

The appeal process has several possible outcomes: that the social services reconsider their decision in parts or as a whole before the court's ruling; that the courts dismiss, reject, or approve the appeal in parts or as a whole and return the case to the social services for further investigation, reassessment or calculations. We found that the appeal process resulted in a change only in a minority of the cases. That was, however, more frequently the

outcome when the "child perspective," the "child's best interest," or the "child convention" were mentioned, albeit still to a limited extent. Of the six cases where the court mentioned any of these concepts, two cases were returned to the social service for emergency assessment and one case for a new investigation of the child's best interest. The latter is the only case where the court criticises the social services for a lack of implementation of a child rights perspective. A mother had applied for aid to move into a flat, which would allow her teenager to get a room of her own. The court concluded:

It is not clear from the documents in the case that any assessment on the basis of the child's best interest has been made concerning the decision to reject [the appellant's] application....It is neither shown that there are any hindrances for making such an assessment. The decision is further not of such a character that it can be assumed to be without importance for [the appellant's] daughter. Since [the social services] has not carried out any investigation on how their decision can affect [the appellant's] daughter, they have not fulfilled their obligation to take the child perspective into consideration.

The court continued by mentioning missing facts about the child, which made it impossible for the court to rule in the case. The court further stated: "When [the appellant] has mentioned that there is a child in the household, irrespective to which extent, it is the duty of [the social services] to investigate how that can affect the assessment.''

Financial aid is supposed to grant those who are eligible for support a reasonable level of living, but when the parents did not fulfil the necessary demands, their application was mostly rejected partially or as a whole. In these situations, the question of children's rights in relation to obtaining financial aid is at stake. Our data does not tell what the result became for the children when the social services and the courts agreed to reject the parents' application for financial aid. In contrast to the living standard for children that the legislation aims for, the children may have had to live under unacceptable conditions with homelessness, overcrowding, or a home without hot water and electricity, since these were some of the conditions mentioned in cases where aid was denied.

9. Conclusion

It is clear from the court records that some children end up in financial hardship despite the welfare system in Sweden, a country which, in an international context, is often referred to as child friendly. This article has demonstrated many aspects of how the exercise of public power targets poor children. Some children's individual needs were under particular circumstances and, to some extent, catered to even though their parents

were not deemed eligible for financial aid, while other children's rights were neglected and the focus of the decision-making mainly or exclusively targeted their parents. The aim to foster and discipline parents and to give them incentives to become self-sufficient mostly takes precedence over the child's best interest to such an extent that some children run the risk of living under harmful conditions. This can be understood as related to traditional ways of categorising the poor as undeserving or deserving of support (see, e.g., Handler & Hasenfeld, 1991; Marston, 2008; Swärd, 2019). Even in cases where parents in some way caused their children harm, the social services neglected the legal opportunity to grant aid directly to the children. In these cases, the parental power over those children would have been preserved if the court had not ruled otherwise.

The centrality of adult perspectives in the appeal process confirms findings concerning the social services in earlier research. It is also evident that familialisation, rather than an orientation toward viewing children as subjects with rights of their own, to a large extent still guides welfare state practices (see Alanen, 1992; Näsman, 1994, 2019). A notable absence of a child rights perspective dominates the practices of the courts. In our view, the few exceptions where the courts argued in favour of children's needs or criticised the social services for not implementing a child perspective do not change that overall impression. When children were mentioned, a care perspective dominated and their right to participation was neglected. Although it could perhaps not be expected that the incorporation of the UNCRC would dramatically change the courts' decision-making, it has, as far as we can see, not had any significant impact on how accounts of children's rights and needs are discussed or handled by the administrative courts.

This article not only aims to report results from research. We hope that our presentation makes it clear that court records constitute a relevant source of information on real-life arguments and decisions concerning poor children. Analyses of court records have the advantage of giving insights into how both local social services and administrative courts respond to children's financial needs. This particular analysis has shown that a child rights perspective is more or less absent in this context, which ultimately may contribute to the further exclusion of poor children from the life conditions children generally have. The last safety net is supposed to grant children a reasonable level of living, but some poor children fall through that net. How that may happen, and which children it may affect, could be made visible by examining court records from the processes where decisions determining such outcomes are made.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Article

Mixed-Methods Inquiry of Socially Inclusive e-Learning: A Policy Document Analysis and Rapid Survey Study

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Abstract
The Covid-19 pandemic has catalyzed irreversible structural changes in education systems worldwide. One key development is the broad utility of remote digital e-learning modalities for learning and instruction that could jeopardize social inclusion if digital in(ex)clusion is left unaddressed. This study assembles a two-step mixed method research design and conducts a case inquiry of Shaanxi Province in China by leveraging policy document analysis and rapid survey methodology in examining how transitions to remote digital e-learning may introduce learning barriers to children from vulnerable backgrounds. Findings reveal that children's access to remote digital e-learning devices during the rapid transition to e-learning has a close association with their backgrounds. Key policy implications include utilizing multimodal hybrid technology in diversifying content delivery and maximizing e-learning coverage, developing open learning platforms, expanding access to e-learning resources, and collaborating with industry partners to bring tangible support to families and realize meaningful e-learning at home.

Issue
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1. Introduction

The novel coronavirus epidemic caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) began in December 2019 and spread rapidly around the world (Zhang et al., 2020). According to the World Health Organization (2020), more than a hundred countries, territories, and regions were affected to varying degrees. As a collateral consequence, education systems were faced with an imminent challenge of more than three-in-five children at academic risk in the wake of system-wide school closures, as public health mandates and social distancing measures were enforced to contain local disease transmission (UNESCO, 2020a). To this end, recent studies estimate that school closures are

expected to result in a quality-adjusted loss of 0.6 years of schooling, reducing the effective years of basic education achieved by children in their schooling from 7.9 years to 7.3 years (Azevedo et al., 2021). In light of new societal realities imposed as consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, unintended adversities inevitably add to an already widening learning crisis around the world that impedes children from reaching their full potential (Liu, 2021).

In light of broad-spectrum learning interruptions, designing and implementing digital remote e-learning strategies at scale have become a near unitary response to mitigate adverse learning loss in the wake of broad-base school closures globally (Liu et al., 2021). Digital remote e-learning is commonly a manifest of the

teacher–learner separation in both time and space, by leveraging media and technology devices to activate meaningful learning and communication tools and social media channels for web-based information exchange (UNESCO, 2020b). Undoubtedly, digital remote e-learning has alleviated the adverse consequences caused by the inaccessibility of schools in the wake of the ongoing pandemic, but emerging research suggests that the problem of household digital inequality is significantly exacerbated and dearly threatens social inclusiveness in education (van Deursen, 2020). To that end, UNICEF identifies digital inequality as a key obstacle to educational service delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic and recommends adopting alternative low-tech teaching methods in areas where digital remote e-learning devices are not readily available, including alternatives such as television and radio broadcasting of instructional content (World Bank, 2020c).

In many countries, social exclusion in the form of disparate access to the internet and unequal ownership of digital devices has become a pressing challenge, limiting the full potential of digital remote e-learning to an emergency form of learning mitigation. Particularly, there is an elevated social inequality risk in channeling learning opportunities through pre-existing forms of home digital disparities (Goudeau et al., 2021). Household digital inequality exists in various forms, including connectivity, devices, and supportive environments for e-learning that collectively transcend into a vast digital divide reproducing new inequalities online (World Bank, 2020a). Against the backdrop of a pandemic-led "new normal," household digital inequality emerges as a significant contributor to educational achievement gaps among children. On the one hand, home digital device availability and internet connectivity have become vital in light of the transition to e-learning amidst school closures. Studies show that, as of 2020, only 14.9% of households in low-income countries have broadband access, and only 9.5% of these households are frequent users of digital devices at home (International Telecommunication Union, 2020). These less visible social inequalities at home leave an influential vacuum for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are not only losing learning opportunities at present but also risk future access to further and higher education levels (Li & Ranieri, 2013). On the other hand, parental and caregiver socioeconomic status influences the quality of children's engagement with digital devices and reflects how home environments support digital remote e-learning. Prior research has indicated that children's learning conditions outside of school settings highly mirror that of their family socioeconomic conditions and can lead to consequential heterogeneity that varies sharply from context to context (Liu & Steiner-Khamsi, 2020). To illustrate, parents with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to participate and provide learning scaffolding for children's engagement with e-learning devices, whereas parents from disadvantaged backgrounds rarely have the oppor-

tunity to offer the same kind of guidance since they are often preoccupied with unfavorable life circumstances, exacerbating the already large gaps in children's home learning environment (Stewart et al., 2018).

To determine how new forms of digital inequality may introduce less-visible learning barriers to children from vulnerable backgrounds, there is not only a strong need to understand how disparate family socioeconomic conditions affect children's e-learning under the Covid-19 pandemic, but there are also clear social inclusion imperatives in exploring potentially viable policy measures that can alleviate such adverse effects of digital inequality. To achieve these dual research objectives, this study takes advantage of a two-step mixed-method research design to unpack the intertwined relationship between digital learning inequality, policy intervention, and digital social inclusion.

2. Mixed-Methods Inquiry of Digital Social In(ex)clusion

Family socioeconomic status has traditionally been identified as one of the most influential factors associated with children's health, cognitive, and socioemotional outcomes, beginning as early as the prenatal stage and lasting well into late adulthood (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Dating as far back as the Coleman Report, variation in academic achievement has been found to be significantly influenced by family environment and educational resources (Coleman et al., 1966). Globally, children raised in disadvantaged families with low parental educational support are more likely to suffer from prolonged "learning poverty," which results in a substantial delay in early childhood cognitive development and unfavorable outcomes in adulthood (World Bank, 2020b).

More recently, interdisciplinary studies have begun utilizing a mixed-methods approach in documenting the more nuanced mechanisms of how inequality in family socioeconomics act as a critical factor affecting child development in the digital age (Ragnedda et al., 2020). A primary premise of scholars advocating for adopting a mixed-methods approach in unpacking intricacies of digital exclusion is because integration of both qualitative and quantitative inquiry provides a more layered and in-depth picture than any singular methodological approach alone (Creswell, 2014). On the one hand, emerging evidence indicates that disparate family wealth circumstances highly correlate with the unequal distribution of material capital that serves as prerequisite for ownership and access to digital devices that may be utilized as information acquisition tools for children (Istenic, 2021). On the other hand, scholars argue that heterogeneity in how families use the internet and how parents interact with children in household environments with digital devices creates another key area where family conditions may predetermine quality of digital learning and determinedly a fundamental human rights issue in the digital age (Sanders & Scanlon, 2021).

In light of the rapid digitization of social life and increasing immersion of educational interaction in technology-enhanced environments, the once less visible social inequality existing in the form of an at-home digital divide is becoming increasingly salient, and digital exclusion has become a serious threat to families from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bonfadelli, 2002). Having access to digitally-rich learning environments is in itself a reflection of how familial pecuniary and non-pecuniary capital affect the unequal distribution of digitally meaningful educational interaction across households that persists in the form of disparate digital literacy, parental guidance, and learning support (Lythreatis et al., 2021). Against this backdrop, the saliency of digital divide, which is characterized as the social inequality that persists between those who have access to digital devices and digitally-enriched learning opportunities and those who do not, in limiting children from reaching their full potential is more pronounced than ever before and is observed to be drastically reshaping the landscape of social stratification in the digital era (Bernard, 2011).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, pre-existing forms of digital divide at home were further amplified by the rapid transition to remote e-learning arrangements adopted in many education systems (Barron et al., 2021). Emerging evidence has indicated that the digital divide within households during the pandemic mainly manifested in unequal access to information and communication technology, disparate skills proficiency in digital competency, and differential engagement with digital resources (Goudeau et al., 2021). For digital connectivity, emerging studies have found that about one-fifth of working-class families in France are unable to access information and communication technology; in England, about the same proportion of children who are eligible for free school meals did not have a computer at home; in the United States, more than two-fifths of working-class families do not own a laptop or desktop computer, nor have reliable broadband access (Cheshmehzangi et al., 2022). In terms of digital skills, there exists a substantial gap in respect to the number of working-class children who are proficient in using a computer as compared to that of upper-middle-class children (OECD, 2015). Recent studies have shown that families with higher socioeconomic status are more proficient in web-based tools and resources, and are more likely to be already familiar with digital devices necessary for remote e-learning, and that the associated pandemic learning loss is higher for those families lagging in such digital competency (Engzell et al., 2021; van Deursen & van Dijk, 2010). As for e-engagement, existing evidence suggests that families with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to use digital resources for productive activities such as work and education, whereas families from disadvantaged families lack such e-engagement, and when they do, they are more likely to use e-resources solely for entertainment (Harris et al., 2017). Additionally, studies have found that children who study alone tend to

underperform than when they are well supported by their parents at home, since self-regulation skills and digital self-efficacy tend to develop under adult supervision (Jackson et al., 2006; Størksen et al., 2015). Emerging programmatic evidence also suggests that one-on-one digital literacy tutoring sessions targeting parents of children in middle school can reap potentially large benefits for children lacking parental educational support at home (Angrist et al., 2021).

3. Data and Methodology

In this study, a two-stage interrelated mixed-method approach is adopted, with the first step being qualitative in nature and attempting to understand how educational policies were utilized to address social inclusion issues during the implementation of digital remote e-learning during the outbreak of Covid-19. The second step adopts a more quantitative lens, focusing on how children's background characteristics are related to their remote digital learning experiences.

Mixed-methods research is a promising productive approach in social, behavioral, and health sciences that enables the researcher in gathering and integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to better answer a set of given research questions (Creswell & Plano, 2017). The mixed-methods analytic lens empowers researchers with the utility of both quantitative and qualitative methodological traditions and allows for careful triangulation of intricately intertwined observations at varying observational levels (Cohen et al., 2018).

Both stages of the analysis in this study anchor on the case of Shaanxi Province in China, which is a large well-populated administrative region covering a total of 17 municipalities and population size of 39 million people. At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools in Shaanxi Province were closed from 26 January to 29 April 2020, during the first wave of the outbreak. The main rationale for focusing on one provincial administrative region, instead of expanding the analysis to include larger cross-provincial geographic variation, is twofold. Firstly, the analytic objective is to unpack the intertwined complexities underlying family socioeconomics, remote e-learning experiences, and public policy response during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the empirical analysis benefits from an in-depth case-oriented inquiry on the "life-world," rather than broadly focusing on inter-variable relationships that could be confounded by contextual factors across inquiry sites (Maxwell, 2012). Secondly, the research design is analytically positioned to uncover and understand educational processes, interactions, and contexts that persistently shape the experiences of children that engaged in remote e-learning during a unique period, characterized by a rapid transition to digital learning and instruction.

In the qualitative analysis stage, this study leverages policy document analysis to produce a detailed systematic review of all published policies by the

Shaanxi Provincial Department of Education and the Xian Municipal Bureau of Education, between 26 January to 29 April 2020. In qualitative research, policy document analysis can help researchers identify the role of policy intent, discourse, and actions in intervening in educational affairs (Liu, 2019). Policy documents analyzed in this study were retrieved directly from the provincial and municipal educational policy document depository, utilizing a combination of the following keywords: COVID* (*xinguan**), delayed school start (*yanchikaixue**), school closure* (*tingke**), learning disruption* (*tingxue**), emergency* (*jinji**), and crisis* (*yingji**). The 14 policy documents are identified and listed in chronological order in Table 1.

In the quantitative analysis stage, this study employs an original large-scale rapid roll-out survey study, which was distributed between 12 to 18 May 2020, just before schools in Shaanxi Province began reopening after three months of unexpected school closures following January 2020. The survey inquiry was designed as informed by rapid survey methodology, which is an established survey data collection approach commonly operationalized in developing contexts to maximize sample size within a relatively abbreviated timeframe. The questionnaire was directly distributed to respondents and collected information about children's background demographics such as sex, grade level, urban–rural status, as well as information on their experience engaging in remote e-learning during the pandemic-induced school closures. The sample inclusion criteria for valid survey respondents are as follows: (a) can comprehend and respond to the questionnaire; (b) currently enrolled in middle or high school; (c) volunteered to participate; (d) respondents whose guardians have completed the informed consent form. A total of 1,171 respondents from 7th to 12th grade satisfied the inclusion criteria.

4. Results

4.1. Qualitative Findings From the Policy Document Analysis

Announced in early February of 2020 at the dawn of the epidemic crisis caused by the initial outbreak of Covid-19, the Chinese Ministry of Education detailed the Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning (DCUL) initiative as a pandemic-response policy aimed at providing flexible learning opportunities to children who were quarantined at home or unable to attend in-person classes due to system-wide school closures (Huang et al., 2020a). In epistemology terms, flexible learning has a long theoretical history in academic research and has been developed to encompass both flexibility and resilience in the design of learning environments, delivery of learning and instructional pedagogical content, and execution of learning outcomes assessment (Ryan & Tilbury, 2013). In the present study, the policy document analysis focuses on how flexible learning was

Table 1. List of provincial policy documents analyzed.

ID	Date	Translated title	Level
1	2020/1/26	Municipal Notice on Delaying Start of Spring 2020 Semester	Municipal
2	2020/1/26	Municipal Notice on Preparing for Delaying Spring 2020 Semester Start	Municipal
3	2020/2/2	Provincial Notice on Preparing for Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning (DCUL) Initiative	Provincial
4	2020/2/5	Provincial Announcement on Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning (DCUL) Special Column	Provincial
5	2020/2/7	Municipal Notice on Implementing Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning (DCUL) Online Professional Development	Municipal
6	2020/2/10	Provincial Notice on Delaying School Start Beyond March 2nd 2020	Provincial
7	2020/2/11	Municipal Notice on Control and Protection of Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia for School Health Safety	Municipal
8	2020/2/14	Provincial Notice on Implementing Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning (DCUL) Initiative during School Closure	Provincial
9	2020/2/26	Provincial Notice on Teacher-Related Policy Arrangements	Provincial
10	2020/3/9	Municipal Announcement of Online Training for School Administrators and Homeroom Teachers	Municipal
11	2020/3/13	Provincial Announcement of Partnership With Firms to Support Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning (DCUL) Initiative	Provincial
12	2020/3/19	Municipal Announcement of Professional Development Program for All Teachers	Municipal
13	2020/4/10	Municipal Notice on Preparing for Spring 2020 Semester Start	Municipal
14	2020/4/29	Municipal Notice on Official Spring 2020 Semester Start	Municipal

crafted as a policy and operationally realized in execution and attempts to bring clarity to this process by zooming in on DCUL implementation, tracking provincial- and municipal-policy guidance, and identifying four key thematic takeaway lessons, as organized and synthesized in the following.

First, there existed an instantaneous national–local link and provincial–municipal policy coupling in the early stages of the Covid-19 response, such that within a couple of days of the announcement of delayed school start by the Chinese Ministry of Education, the Shaanxi Provincial Department of Education began instructing and supporting schools in preparation for implementing DCUL-related online instruction and designing remote e-learning activities, particularly highlighting the importance for ensuring learning opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Policy ID#1 in Table 1). The DCUL initiative was regarded as highly unconventional, since policy decision chains are shortened and implementation preparation abbreviated, with key instructional features designed, piloted, and scaled swiftly at the local level. To a large extent, locally designed and context-adapted DCUL plans carefully catered to local learning conditions, since local education authorities were instructed to partner directly with schools to personalize flexible learning arrangements (Liu, 2020). Particularly, DCUL plans were designed to be highly practice-driven with hands-on protocol, resource contact, and FAQ information to aid local implementation on the ground.

Second, during the spring school-postponement period, both provincial and municipal education authorities actively provided free and open access to remote digital e-learning materials for all children online. On the one hand, to facilitate a successful implementation of the DCUL, the Shaanxi Provincial Department of Education created a thematic column that curated comprehensive integration of national, provincial, and school-based units of high-quality instructional resources, providing everything free-of-charge to children and families. In addition, the thematic column regularly featured live-streamed courses on pandemic-related instructional content, such as pandemic-related mental health guidance and at-home physical activity remedy workshops (Policy ID#2). To address learning inclusivity, provincial DCUL plans instructed municipalities to independently choose the mode of remote e-learning delivery, in consideration of substantial intra-province variability in providing flexible learning opportunities. In addition, provincial authorities widely mobilized teacher training resources to ensure that all teachers felt prepared to implement synchronous and asynchronous instruction via remote e-learning platforms. At the municipality level, the Xian Municipal Bureau of Education initiated live-streamed teaching on 10 February 2020: This involved 270 well-known teachers from 28 schools. This DCUL initiative in Xian covers a wide range of disciplines and instructional

grades, and leverages multimedia platforms in the integration of high-quality and freely-accessible educational content. Concurrently, radio and television broadcasting resources are mobilized to reach children who lack access to remote digital e-learning medium at home, particularly those families residing in rural and hard-to-reach areas (Policy ID#3).

Third, both provincial and municipal education authorities actively sourced infrastructure support from network providers and ensured stable operation of internet connectivity as the foundation for a successful implementation of DCUL. The Shaanxi Provincial Department of Education emphasized that schools in all administrative regions should take into full consideration of the local network connectivity and instructional support conditions in reasonably selecting an online instruction platform fit for the local scale of learning and instructional need (Policy ID#4). For example, in safeguard measures issued by the Shaanxi Provincial Department of Education, some municipalities actively consulted with major network operators and requested data and speed boosts to network connection for families with school-age children up to 500 megabytes free of charge, effectively alleviating network congestion and network burden for families. In other municipalities, there was a stark focus on supporting rural "left-behind" children in remote, hard-to-reach areas, providing service guarantees to families with financial difficulties, establishing a working mechanism of "one-to-one" support systems, and guiding the use of low-tech media such as radio and television to carry out autonomous learning at home (Policy ID#5).

Fourth, both provincial and municipal education authorities prioritized the implementation of teacher training during early-stage mobilization and preparation, which is not only conducive to preparing teachers to more flexibly carry out teaching tasks during digital instruction but is considered especially useful for families from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Relatedly, the Shaanxi Provincial Department of Education emphasizes that local education authorities and school administrators should pay particular attention to guiding teachers in making full use of digital e-learning resources. Both the National Training Program for Primary and Secondary School Teachers and the Shaanxi Provincial Teacher Training Network provided teachers with extensive resources to support the instructional transition to technology-rich environments (Policy ID#6). At the local level, the Xian Municipal Bureau of Education also actively provided teacher support network services for teachers and commissioned Xian Radio Station and the China Teacher Training network to jointly broadcast over-the-air training for teachers and school staff in aiding their transition to remote e-learning (Policy ID#7).

Fifth, in addition to fully utilizing the existing educational digital resources, both provincial and municipal education authorities partnered with local enterprises

quickly and formed cooperative partnerships to better support remote e-learning and e-instruction. For instance, strengthening the cooperation with major telecommunication can effectively cover a wider range of demographic groups, through timely technical support services. In addition, both provincial and municipal education authorities collaborated with Shaanxi Telecom to make available free synchronized and asynchronized lessons and to complement existing online instructional resources. Importantly, these partnered initiatives provided improved online learning opportunities and experiences for families in remote areas through installation free of charge of high-speed broadband internet connection and providing heavily subsidized 4G-enabled smartphones. As a result, a total of 415 schools have initiated synchronous online classes, with more than 230,600 registered students, 9,800 teachers and 2,521 classroom broadcast rooms, with an average of 820,000 online viewers and an average of 63,000 hours of viewing documented (Policy ID#8). Consequently, to promote DCUL, diverse forms of online learning are mobilized to ensure programmatic support to those children needing additional support the most, especially for families in rural remote areas, left-behind children, and families with financial difficulties.

4.2. Quantitative Findings From the Rapid Survey

In the following quantitative analysis segment, we first report information on descriptive statistics of respondents to the rapid survey and conduct three pairs of bivariate analyses to identify patterns of how children's remote digital e-learning experiences are shaped by their background characteristics during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Column 2 of Table 2, respondent breakdown is reported by sex, education level, and residential location. More specifically, there are 577 female respondents (49.27%) and 494 male respondents (50.13%), among whom 269 respondents (22.97%) are currently attending middle school while the remaining 902 respondents (77.03%) are in high school. In terms of residential location, 151 respondents (12.89%) are in rural areas and 1020 respondents (87.11%) are in urban areas.

Between columns 3 and 7 of Table 2, detailed frequency count and percentage share of respondents are reported by access to remote digital e-learning devices, as categorized as "smartphone," "computer," "multiple e-devices," and "television." Across all respondent background categories, generalized patterns indicate that approximately half of all respondents report using smartphones as their main mode of remote digital e-learning medium, while about one-fifth report using computers and one-third report relying on multiple e-devices for e-learning engagement. Very few respondents, or between 1 to 3% of the total sample report using television as the main medium. Results from the bivariate χ^2 statistical test in the final column of Table 2 identify statistically meaningful differences in access to remote digital e-learning by sex ($\chi^2(3) = 8.19$, p-value = 0.04), but not for education level ($\chi^2(3) = 5.46$, p-value = 0.14) or by residential location ($\chi^2(3) = 2.41$, p-value = 0.49). Observed patterns seem to indicate that there is a markedly higher percentage of male respondents (34.92%) having access to multiple devices than do female respondents (21.49%).

For the remainder of the analysis, we leverage multinomial regression analysis in examining how respondents' background characteristics are related to

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and bivariate analysis results (N = 1,171).

	N (Col %)	Smartphone (row %)	Computer (row %)	Multiple e-devices (row %)	Television (row %)	N (row %)
Sex						
Female	577 (49.27)	324 (56.14)	121 (20.97)	124 (21.49)	8 (1.39)	577 (100%)
Male	594 (50.13)	295 (49.66)	132 (22.22)	148 (34.92)	19 (3.20)	594 (100%)
Education level						
Middle school (7th–9th)	269 (22.97)	134 (49.81)	71 (26.39)	60 (22.30)	4 (1.49)	269 (100%)
High school (10th–12th)	902 (77.03)	485 (53.77)	182 (20.18)	212 (23.50)	23 (2.55)	902 (100%)
Residential location						
Rural	151 (12.89)	86 (56.95)	27 (17.88)	36 (23.84)	2 (1.32)	151 (100%)
Urban	1020 (87.11)	533 (52.25)	226 (22.16)	236 (23.14)	25 (2.45)	1020 (100%)

their access to different modalities of remote digital e-learning devices. In detail, the outcome comparison is made between respondents' access to smartphones (defined as base outcome), as opposed to computers, television, or multiple devices. The predictor variables are modeled as a set of background characteristics including sex, grade level, and residence location. For results interpretation, relative risk ratios (RRR) illustrate the probability of having access to computers, television, and multiple devices as opposed to owning smartphones (base outcome). Results in Column 2 of Table 3 show that respondents in high school are less likely to use computers than smartphones, when compared to similar respondents in middle school (RRR = 0.70, p-value <0.05). Results in Column 3 of Table 3 indicate a lower probability of male respondents having less access to television rather than smartphones when compared to similar female respondents (RRR = 0.39, p-value <0.05). There is no discernible statistical difference regarding the influence of background characteristics on access to smartphones or multiple devices. In more conclusive terms, multinomial regression model findings seem to jointly suggest that there exists a certain degree of influence of respondent background on access to remote digital e-learning devices, particularly between smartphones, computers, and television, but less so between smartphones and multiple e-devices.

5. Discussion

Under rapid transition to remote digital e-learning as catalyzed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the global pace of digital transformation in education is increasing exponentially, aggravating the emergence and saliency of an expanding broad-based digital divide across the entire social spectrum. Given the growing uncertain prospects of the pandemic, remote digital e-learning is likely to become integrated as part of an inevitable global trend in digitally transforming how teachers and students interact. In light of such broad-scoped transformation, it becomes more important than ever before to consider the social in(ex)clusion implications of relying more heavily on remote digital e-learning media as channels of learning and instructional interaction. While a combination of remote instruction and digital e-learning presents a timely solution to mitigate the adverse impacts of pandemic-induced school closures, the risk of digital exclusion is greater than ever before. In this regard, a large body of prior studies has shown that family socioeconomic level is a primary determinant of children's access, participation, and outcome in engaging in remote digital e-learning opportunities (Claro et al., 2015). Pandemic-induced school closures have created new and uncharted environments in which education systems are forced to deal with new forms of systemic inequality in the wake of the broad transition to remote digital e-learning.

In the present study, a key research objective is to deepen understanding of how digital social in(ex)clusion permeates physical boundaries of classroom instruction via channels of remote digital e-learning and attempts to illustrate how these disparate learning experiences are exacerbated by inequalities in family educational resources at home during a unique episode of children's learning amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. By utilizing a two-stage interrelated mixed-method approach, findings uncover the complex and intertwined relationship between digital inequality, policy intervention, and social inclusion. More specifically, we highlight that most respondents in our sample rely on "high-tech" forms of digital media, such as smartphones or computers, while very few use "low-tech" mediums such as television, for which worryingly is the disparate access being reflected in their background characteristics. In response, provincial and municipal education authorities utilized a combination of locally-designed, access-focused, capacity-oriented, and open-resourced policy tools to address the differential consequences of the digital divide on children's learning during the pandemic-led school closures.

Taking stock of these findings, several key implications and potential strategies for re-imagining socially inclusive e-learning could be synthesized. First, utilizing multimodal hybrid technology in diversifying remote digital e-learning opportunity delivery can maximize effective coverage of urban and rural areas. In China, since the DCUL plan was primarily locally designed, it fielded many localized inclusivity solutions by offering a range

Table 3. Multinomial logistic regression results of respondent background characteristics on access to remote digital e-learning devices (N = 1,171).

	Computer v.s. smartphone	Television v.s. smartphone	Multiple e-devices v.s. smartphone
Male	0.83	0.39*	0.76
(Ref = Female)	(0.12)	(0.17)	(0.11)
High school	0.70*	1.52	0.96
(Ref = Middle school)	(0.12)	(0.84)	(0.17)
Urban	0.74	0.51	0.95
(Ref = Rural)	(0.17)	(0.38)	(0.20)

Note: Cells display exponentiated coefficients in RRR; transformed standard errors in parentheses; * denotes p-value <.05.

of flexible learning alternatives in order to reach children from disadvantaged families who may rely on "low-tech" mediums such as television and radio for remote learning. More recently, such strategies have been echoed in other parts of the world in addressing disparate access to remote digital e-learning resources (Singh et al., 2021). Second, developing open learning platforms and making e-learning resources free of charge can alleviate the learning burden for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. For instance, the National Public Service Platform for Education Resources made a range of learning and instructional materials openly available to the public, which empowers learners, parents, and teachers to access a wide variety of professionally-curated and peer-produced content necessary to facilitate remote digital e-learning at home. The social inclusive value of open educational resources during the pandemic should not and cannot be understated (Huang et al., 2020b). Third, collaborating with diverse stakeholders to expand access to digital devices can bring tangible support to families and realize meaningful e-learning at home. Education authorities in China mobilized public–private partnerships with telecommunication providers in establishing cross-platform solutions that reduce access costs and improve content delivery. To this end, the integration of digital technology in education holds promise not only as a complementary form of remote instruction during times of crisis, but it holds significant value in meeting the diverse individual learning needs of children, by incentivizing and supporting learning that is unrestricted by time and space (World Bank et al., 2021). These cross-sectoral partnerships are anchored on firms' technology specialization and enhance both the quantity and quality of remote digital e-learning coverage. Furthermore, many schools partnered with telecommunication carriers to text-message parents with information on lesson guidance via a toll-free number to better support learners at home (UNICEF, 2020).

Finally, there are several limitations in this study worth joint consideration in the interpretation of results. Firstly, logistical capacity and social-distancing measures have prompted this current study to adopt a rapid survey approach, which may be improved in the future given the possibility to obtain more representative samples. Secondly, the present study primarily focuses on the case of Shaanxi, China, which requires caution when extrapolating conclusions drawn to other sociocultural and geographical contexts since societal realities are largely unique. Thirdly, given the continuation and uncertainty of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the effectiveness of policy measures requires further monitoring and generates a strong need for future inquiries.

6. Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic left influential structural changes in the organization of instruction and delivery of learning and instruction, which could risk amplifying the less-visible social inequality costs on younger generations from disadvantaged and marginalized backgrounds, particularly if digital exclusion is left unaddressed. As shown in this study, there is a real challenge facing many education systems as digitally empowered forms of e-learning are on the brink of jeopardizing progress in educational equality and are making visible the structural inequalities associated with family background and socioeconomics. Education authorities, at national, provincial, and local levels, have crucial roles to play in redrawing the landscape of the digital divide in remote digital e-learning, and in doing so, the prospects of a truly socially inclusive education arrangement might arise on the approaching horizon.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Commentary

New Approaches to the Study of Social Inclusion of Poor Children and Youth: A Commentary

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Abstract
This thematic issue addresses one of the most important social and political challenges worldwide: The social inclusion of poor children and youth. In addressing it in this commentary I will have Europe as the regional context and Norway as the national one, although the methodological perspectives I bring forth have relevance beyond Europe.

Issue
This commentary is part of the issue "New Approaches to the Study of Social Inclusion of Poor Children and Youth" edited by Anita Borch (OsloMet) and Kirsi Laitala (OsloMet).

The theme of poverty and social inclusion/exclusion is not new (Borch et al., 2019; Lareau, 2011; Pugh, 2009; Ridge, 2002), but appears to be more publicly debated today than twenty years ago. I believe this is directly connected to at least two historical developments: the commercialization of childhood and the increased social mobility and migration, making, for instance, Europe increasingly culturally, financially, and ethnically/racially diverse. Over the last two decades, modern childhood has become increasingly commercialized in the western world (Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010; Brusdal & Frønes, 2008; Cook, 2004; Pugh, 2009; Sørensen, 2014). As a result, more and more aspects of children's lives cost money, for instance, "must-have" clothes and organized leisure activities. This commercialized situation increases the possibility of social exclusion related to class and income. The commercialization of childhood means that more and more aspects of children's and youth's lives cost money, such as leisure activities and sociality in general. As a result, peer pressure and own expectations to have acceptable clothes and other material items have probably increased in so-called western countries, making social inclusion increasingly hard for children and youth in low-income families.

In earlier research from two culturally diverse areas in Oslo, it appears that children of immigrant parents strive to experience social inclusion among the ethnic Norwegians due to lack of finances and parents' cultural priorities. The title of one of these articles is "It Costs Money to Be Cool" (Rysst, 2005), with a follow up article this year "It Still Costs Money to Be Cool" (Rysst, 2022). These articles and other research (Pugh, 2009; Ridge, 2002) point to the significance of relevant consumption in discussions of social inclusion among children and youth growing up in low-income families. Allison Pugh states from her research in the US, that the most important relational process among children concerns how to secure the experience of belonging among peers. Her analysis of children's "longing and belonging" argues that children everywhere "claim, contest, and exchange among themselves the terms of their social belonging, or just what it would take to be able to participate among their peers" (Pugh, 2009, p. 6). She termed this system of social meanings the "economy of dignity" (Pugh, 2009, p. 7). According to her, "children together shape their own economies of dignity, which in turn transform particular goods and experiences into tokens of value suddenly fraught with meaning" (Pugh, 2009, p. 8). If Pugh is correct, this situation affects children and youth worldwide and puts materiality up front. However, "particular goods and experiences" that are "suddenly…fraught with meaning" are not easy to grasp for an outsider

or researcher, and often demand a bottom-up methodology that includes long-time participant observation. In my experience, the distinctions in the hierarchies of children and youth are seldom revealed through interviews only (Rysst, 2020, 2022).

In Europe today, including Norway, immigrants from non-western families make up the majority of low-income families. In this sense, in today's world, migration and poverty are closely intertwined. That relationship is increasingly addressed in European political debates because capitals such as London, Paris, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Oslo have a great number of immigrants from non-western countries, which in varying degrees stir harmonious living in these cities. Parts of these cities are populated by non-white immigrants and political debates concern how to avoid these immigrants settling in the same areas. This is no easy task, as many non-western immigrants have low-paid jobs or no jobs at all and live where housing expenditures are relatively low.

"Social inclusion" is a much-used concept both in academia and media, and is closely connected to the concept of "belonging." It is often used in opposition to "social exclusion" and "marginalization." The phenomenon may be studied from various scientific angles: from a macro and statistical level or an individual, phenomenological level—and many in between. Research designs may be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, be positioned in defined disciplines such as political science, sociology, social anthropology, or social work, or be entirely interdisciplinary.

An ongoing research project in Norway called BELONG: Practices and Policies of Belonging Among Minority and Majority Children of Low-Income Families is methodologically and theoretically interdisciplinary. More precisely, BELONG's goal is to increase current knowledge of the practices causing marginalization and social exclusion of minority and majority children of low-income families by exploring them from new theoretical and methodological angles. I mention this project here because one of its aims is almost the same as that of the articles in this thematic issue: To highlight new approaches to the study of social inclusion. Methodologically, the project will advance novel techniques specially suited to capture practices of social inclusion and will use techniques equipped to assess actions, the role of materials in people's life, as well as belonging experienced through senses such as vision, touch, smell, sound, and taste. These include well-established methodologies like desktop studies, interviews, observations, and surveys, mixed with novel methodologies that have gained ground in recent years: visual ethnography, walk-along studies (Pink, 2006), and having children as co-researchers by asking them to share pictures of their belongings. This will be done by using a recently developed mobile app (preliminary entitled MobileApp) for collecting and storing sensitive mixed-methods data. Inspired by methodologies where children act as "co-researchers," researchers will arrange workshops where children categorize and analyze photos collected through the MobileApp. Inspired by "stakeholder/user-involvement" methodologies, the project will arrange a seminar every six months to discuss research results with potential users—representatives from local schools, parents, sports clubs, organizations, and political parties. These are "new approaches" in the study of children, youth, poverty, and social inclusion, some combined with traditional approaches like participant observation. It is my view that in interdisciplinary projects, long-term participant observation is an underrated methodology to grasp poor children's and youth's perspectives on their situation. Against this backdrop, I will give a summary of the research designs of the articles in this issue and how they can be understood to present "new approaches."

The article by Laura Vetrone, Cecilia Benoit, Doug Magnuson, Sven Mikael Jansson, Priscilla Healey, and Michaela Smith is based on qualitative interviews of a social group in Canada that rarely has been studied before: street-involved youth who were partly or fully disengaged from school. The authors apply thematic analysis of qualitative data from in-person interviews with a purposive sample of street-involved youth (N = 69). This research design in itself is not "new," it is traditional and much used, but the theme of street-involved youth is original.

The article by Laia Narciso, Silvia Carrasco, and Gabriela Poblet has data from Catalonia and is also based on a qualitative research design combined with fieldwork and interviews. This methodology captures the voices and experiences of both the young people and the staff surrounding them, which gives a rich picture of the poor children's situation. The methodology is relevant to the task at hand and, even if it is not new in itself, I believe it is one of the best approaches in the study of children, youth, and poverty.

Linnéa Bruno's article on economic abuse is based on a scoping review in order to grasp the perspectives of children and youth. The author makes an effort in mapping what we know about economic violence from a child and youth perspective today, but the question is how a scoping review can actually capture the "perspectives of children and youth." I would also recommend a bottom-up perspective to get a fuller view of economic abuse.

Another type of review, written by Anita Borch, is reported through a critical discourse review of academic literature and results in new knowledge of scientific tendencies and missing knowledge in the field. This approach is fruitful for its task.

In their article, Elisabet Näsman and Stina Fernqvist question how children and youth are treated in the court system. This is an original and relevant contribution to the study of poor children and youth, even though it remains somewhat unclear on how it relates to social inclusion.

Finally, Ji Liu, Faying Qiang, and Ying Zhou use a mixed-method design to construct data from China. This

study is not original in research design, as mixed-method is widely used, but it is original in that it brings forth valuable knowledge on China.

These articles represent many methodological approaches. However, it is my view that it is unclear how they fit the category "new approach" methodologically, since that is the title of the issue. Still, when viewed in relation to the theme each article addresses—that is, the research design and theme—they are "new," particularly when we look at the countries the data are constructed from. There is not much research on children, youth, and poverty in China, Catalonia, or Sweden, nor do we have enough overviews of which scientific disciplines dominate in the field of children, youth, and poverty issues. That said, in my view, the issue would have benefited from more articles focusing on the importance of relevant consumption and materiality for social inclusion, using participant observation and a bottom-up phenomenological approach to grasp the perspectives of children and youth. As mentioned above, I believe this is an underrated methodological approach in the study of sensitive fields like children, youth, and poverty, particularly in interdisciplinary projects and interdisciplinary research milieus in general. In such milieus, long-term participant observation often appears as a "new" approach. Sensitive themes like social exclusion, poverty, and racism often demand methodological approaches that get "under the informants' skin" in order to understand what is going on.

In conclusion, I will say that there is potential in the BELONG project to bring forth new methodological approaches and knowledge that can go beyond the contributions in this thematic issue. However, I believe that the issue together with forthcoming publications from the BELONG project hopefully will bring research on children, youth, social inclusion, and poverty a major step further.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Social Inclusion is a peer-reviewed open access journal which provides academics and policymakers with a forum to discuss and promote a more socially inclusive society.

The journal encourages researchers to publish their results on topics concerning social and cultural cohesiveness, marginalized social groups, social stratification, minority-majority interaction, cultural diversity, national identity, and core-periphery relations, while making significant contributions to the understanding and enhancement of social inclusion worldwide.

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