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Health, Well-being and Lifestyles.

Introduction:

The research within this poster will focus on defining the meaning of Health, Well-being and Lifestyles and the importance of each within the early years. The research will demonstrate how each has an impact on children's development and future prospects, however look at what current Government policies and early years setting are implementing, in order to bridge the inequality gap and support individual needs and those of their families. There will be links to past theorist whose research is still evident in today society and how through those theories, policies and professionals have been able to develop a better understanding and make a difference in children's lives today.

Health

Musgrave (2017) discusses how there is a vague understanding of the meaning of health, this could be due to not having a "*universally accepted definition*". However, Musgrave proceeds by acknowledging the World Health Organization (WHO) definition from 1986 which describes health as "*a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living*". Today WHO (2025) describes health as not just being free from chronic illness or disease, yet having a positive sense of "*physical, mental and social well-being*". Defined further by Dr. Langmaid (2021) who agrees with the WHO's terminology and discusses how having a positive mental attitude supports daily life choices, whilst being physically active is a vital part of everyday life and how social connections support a sense of belonging. The WHO (2025) highlights, it is a human right to have the opportunity to experience a good standard of health regardless of political, religious or gender beliefs.

Musgrave (2017) also discusses factors that can affect an individual's health, such as living environments, circumstances or even delays in developing relationships, as well as the level of education and support an individual receives. This coincides with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological system theory, which is made up of five systems that demonstrates the importance of everyone's interactions with or towards the impact on the individual's development. This starts with immediate family and friends' interactions moving gradually to the outer system of worldwide policies and regulations (Guy-Evans, 2025). Evidence demonstrates that the higher up in the socio-economic system families are, the greater results in children's health, through having those positive experiences which provides lifelong health benefits along with educational outcomes, social and emotional well-being (Musgrave, 2017; Marmot et al 2020, p37).

However, individuals who do not have these positive experiences have "*lifelong impacts*" which may result with living in poverty, developing unhealthy behaviors resulting in poor mental and physical health (Musgrave, 2017). Researchers believe children who witness stress from caregivers from living in poverty, struggling with mental health or other issues, will also experience a "*significant impact*" with their own health and nervous system throughout their lifetime (Barlow, Blair, 2012, p5). Maurer (2017) agrees, citing Seungpil Jung research which discusses how a child's "*neurodevelopmental disorders*" are caused from disturbance of the "*central nervous system*", linked with an individual's emotional, physical and mental health, which are potentially due to many factors such as trauma or environmental stress. Children who experience numerous Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) have a higher risk of ill health, this could be within their emotional, social or physical development (Howard, Burton, Levermore, 2020, p5).

Well-being

According to Berlinski, Schady (2015, p24) and Mental Health Foundation (MHF) (2015), well-being is related to an individual's health, happiness and success. MHF continues to discuss how well-being is a feeling of satisfactions within an individual's life, their goals and the control they have with it. Measure Wellbeing (no date) agrees with MHF, however highlights the importance of being a part of a community, as this can give individuals the "*quality of life*" and "*experiences*" which help towards positive physical and mental health, whilst allowing a feeling of belonging to a wider society.

Measure wellbeing (no date) discusses how there are many aspects that can give individuals a better sense of well-being for both long and short periods of time. Developing a new skill can give a sense of achievement and purpose, also taking time to enjoy nature which can also reduce stress and support well-being in the moment and possibly for life, (Measure wellbeing, no-date). Coinciding with having a purpose is also linked to having a job, the sense of security, personal goals and relationships which helps promote personal well-being (Measure wellbeing, no-date). Relationships are key to personal well-being, having someone to rely on and talk to, whether this be through family, friends or people within the community (Measure wellbeing, no-date). John Bowlby's attachment theory further highlights how relationships are a fundamental part of well-being especially within the early years of life (McLeod, 2025). Bowlby talks about how the bond developed between a child and their main caregiver is not only "*vital for survival*", however also for the child's emotional development, allowing the child to feel a sense of security and confidence, which later in life can be the "*foundations of future attachments*", such as relationships and friendships (McLeod, 2025). O' Connor (2017) defines Bowlby's theory of attachment as "*the first feelings of emotional security*", and babies developing positive attachments early on, develop better well-being through childhood and into adulthood.

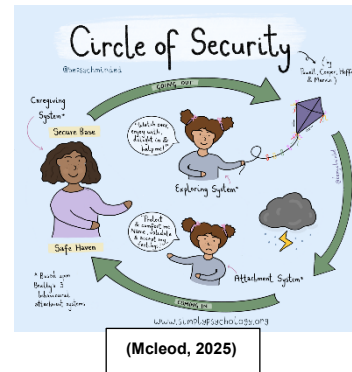
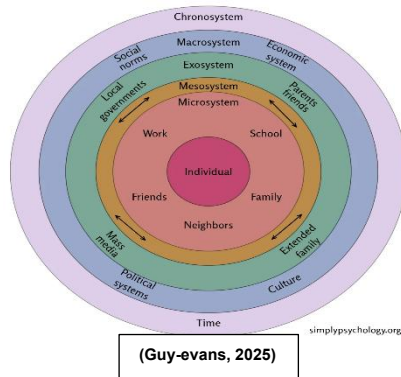
Although there are also many factors that affect an individual's well-being, such as living in poverty due to low income or debt, as well as feeling lonely from having a lack of relationships. These issues leave individuals feeling debilitated and under stress (Measure wellbeing, no date). A study carried out over a two-year period discovered over half a million of UK citizens reported a low result in regard to well-being questions according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) (2021). The study showed most individuals who demonstrated low levels of wellbeing had experienced at least one of following circumstances, bad health, medical health issues, being single, separated or widowed, renting and lastly have a lack of education (ONS, 2021). All these issues can have an impact in the children's lives as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2021) has highlighted. NSPCC (2021) states how the main part of children's overall well-being is their mental health and affecting this can be the stress they experience through family circumstances and environments, if the children witness or sense these struggles these can affect them also.

Lifestyles

Lifestyle is acknowledged as a way or manner of living an individual develops in life (Jensen, 2007). The influence from social strata effects how individuals live their lives as well as their values and beliefs they hold (Office of National Statistics, (ONS), 2017). Education, work, culture and environmental conditions are all connected to a person's lifestyle (ONS, 2017).

Jensen (2007) cites Johansson and Miegel 1992 research, on how there are four levels of lifestyles individuals experience, the global, structural, positional and individual. The structural is based on the culture, societies and countries which may determine how and individual lives, from religious beliefs to cultural experiences. The positional is related to social strata of an individual's lifestyle, this can be determined from living accommodations, financial or educational prospects. Those with higher incomes, better education may have more choice in where to live, whereas the lower income or difficult education have less choice. Then looking at the individual level relating to individuals' personalities, relationships, "*self-identity*" and attitudes towards their life choices. Lastly the wider interconnection the global level, which is the earth's population and how that effects lifestyles from air pollutions, government support, effecting people through medical reasons, to accommodation and finances Jensen (2008). Van Acker (2016) re-emphasizes Jensen's research in recent studies agreeing with the four different levels, although, states how individuals can change and adapt their lifestyles, however, have to have the opportunities and influences to do so. This relates to Bourdieu's theory on how individuals' lifestyles are based on the experiences they have socially, culturally and economically, which form the basis of their personalities and behaviour (Ramsey, 2024).

Children are impressionable to adults around them and may copy the adult's behaviour, principles and faith (Howard, Burton, Levermore, 2020, p119). The primary carers or adults within the children's lives have the responsibility of the child's well-being, health and lifestyle, and the influences the children experiences will impact the children later in life (Howard, Burton, Levermore, 2020, p119). Children who are living within an environment with at least one adult that smokes may develop health issues but also has an 80% chance of smoking in adolescence, unlike children who come from smoke free homes (ONS, 2017). Adults who have little knowledge on nutrition are more likely to face obesity, which also implicates children's weight, this is often identified more in lower income families due to cost of food, linking with children living in poverty (ONS, 2017). Where children live can also impact their lifestyles, as in more disadvantage areas the lack of safe places to play or explore will impact the children's physical health (ONS, 2017). While also considering ACE'S, related to abuse or neglect that harms the child or the environment in which they live, these leave negative social, behaviour and health implications later in life (Stevens, 2017).



Practitioners' role:

Article 24 from the United Nations convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC) states all children have a right to the best health in regard to care, nutrition, clean water and environment, also education and well-being in order to give children the best start in life (UNICEF, no date). The Healthy child Wales program (HCWP, 2022) supports this right by offering every family regardless of need the HCWP, providing families with key information and tips in relation to medical services, how to build positive environments, relationships and attachments, as a way to support children's holistic development. Settings providing opportunities for balanced diets can have a positive impact on children's health and eating habits and support them in making healthier choices (Welsh Government, 2014, p2). The Welsh Government (2024) has implemented that all children of primary school age are entitled to free school meals, which contain "one third of the recommended daily nutrients" (Welsh Government, 2014, p4) and support families living in poverty. Breakfast is associated with "the most important meal of the day" and has educational benefits to children, along with the free school meals, schools are also providing opportunities for free breakfast within schools (Welsh Government, 2014, p1).

Bryce- Clegg (2015, p14) discusses how children who have a positive sense of involvement and engagement in settings, where their well-being is promoted achieve higher. Early years settings providing quiet areas, as well as encouraging play allows for all children to feel safe and supported in a positive atmosphere, developing their self-esteem and well-being (Howard, Burton, Levermore, 2020, pg36). Welsh Government (2021), highlights play being "a Fundamental right for all learners" which is also stated in the UNCRC Article 31, play both indoors and outdoors allows children to explore various emotions, physical abilities and helps develop well-being, while experiencing the world alongside others, supporting their holistic development. Howard, Burton and Levermore (2020, p37) continue to discuss how the curriculum can support health, well-being and lifestyle in children by including time to explore with a variety of different media, literacy and opportunities for physical activity. The Curriculum for Wales (2020) creates opportunities for this in the "Four Purposes" which support children to become independent, creative, healthy individuals and allow children to have a sense of identity and well-being, whilst also understanding others. The practitioners should ensure in planning that all children's individual needs are met, creating a child-centered approach to support a child's holistic development (Welsh Government, 2021).

Practitioners working alongside carers and other agencies to support children's progression is also a key part in a child holistic development according to Welsh Government (2021). Working collaboratively alongside carers and other professionals, enables children's overall development, from engaging in social groups and interactions, to information and support from medical professionals and psychologists, all having a positive impact on the children's emotional, physical and social development, whilst offering their carers the support and information they may need (Care learning, 2024).

Conclusion

Consolidating all of the research it is clear to see that there are close interconnections between health, well-being and lifestyles and each will have a different meaning to different people in relation to cultural backgrounds. However, the research highlights the impact on children's lives and future prospects if these needs are not met. Through research the links to past theorists are still influential in today's research and how current professionals have developed strategies and policies to give all children the best start in life. Which has also made it possible for settings to work collaboratively with carers and other professionals, to provide enabling adults and environments which are safe and secure. These strategies and policies have developed children's rights, new curriculums and government legislation which empower children and young people to reach their full potential.

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