**Materialism, Inequality and Wellbeing in Childhood:**

**Using International Ethnography to Understand the Dynamics**

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UNICEF’s Report Card 7 ranked the UK towards the bottom of a number of wellbeing indicators. This qualitative comparative study, funded by the UK government looks behind some of these statistics. Quantitative studies across the world confirm a strong correlation between media exposure, materialism and negative wellbeing in children and concur that the less well off are more susceptible to consumer pressure. Most of this quantitative work has been carried out within in a cognitive psychology paradigm with the individual as the unit of analysis, materialism conceptualised as a personal value construct and wellbeing measured through standard scales for self-esteem, depression or life satisfaction. We turn instead to a social ecology model of childhood where children are considered as actors within the social, cultural and political context of their everyday lives and to a definition of wellbeing encompassing a broader set of conditions related to the child’s sense of dignity, security, autonomy and resilience. The study so far has concentrated on the context of the family and compares the dynamic interplay between inequality, materialism and wellbeing in Spain, Sweden and UK. Filmed ethnographies of 24 diverse families suggest that the impact on children’s wellbeing of both materialism and inequality is profoundly affected by different national approaches to being a parent. Household rules and roles, pocket money, ways in which families spend time together, TV and computer usage and parents’ involvement in children’s activities all seem to help or hinder the development of children’s resilience and ability to cope with both consumer pressure and perceived inequalities. The next stage of the study (complete June 2011) examines the context of children’s school peer groups in the three countries. The conference presentation (including video clips) will discuss the challenges of using ethnography in an international context and will also present the recommendations for the UK government.