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# Time use and time use satisfaction: an examination of children's out of school activities in Namibia

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*Abstract:* Population-based information on how school-going children spend their daily lives outside of school from their own perspective in African contexts is limited. Using representative data from 2124 four- and six-graders who completed the 2018 International Survey of Children's Wellbeing in Khomas region, Namibia, this article describes children's out-of-school activities, the contextual factors that influence patterns of time use and how these patterns of time use affect subjective wellbeing. Results indicate that children in Namibia spend time on diverse activities related to school, family, and leisure. Furthermore, children's participation in chores contributed positively to their life satisfaction and both play and spending time with family had a valuable impact on their wellbeing. By describing at a population level children's out-of-school time use and satisfaction, this study contributes to understanding the richness of children's lives in Khomas region and the valuable contributions they make to their families and communities.

*Keywords*: Time use, time use satisfaction, children, subjective wellbeing, Namibia.

*Note on the authors:* see end of article.

## Introduction

At a global level, and particularly across the African continent, children contribute to their families through household chores and outside work. Notwithstanding the risks of housework [and child labour], through these contributions not only do children free other family members to engage in employment and other activities and provide concrete benefits to their households (e.g. by supplying water or providing childcare) but children may learn useful skills, strengthen sibling ties, and enhance their psychosocial well-being (Putnick & Bornstein 2016). Having leisure time for play and exploration is also crucial for the promotion of children's development, and influences their levels of satisfaction and well-being (Tonon, Laurito & Benatuil 2019). However, population-based information on how school-going children spend their daily lives outside of school from their own perspective in African contexts is limited (Sauerwein & Rees 2020), with most studies being smaller scale qualitative studies. Understanding how children in Africa spend their time from their own perspective, can provide a rich snapshot into their daily lives and help understand the diverse influences on childhoods in Africa.

### Previous research on children's time use

While most research on children's time use has been conducted in the Global North (Sauerwein & Rees 2020), a few studies have looked at this issue in Africa. In a multi-country study, which included three African countries (Algeria, Ethiopia and South Africa), Rees (2017) found that children in Africa spend the majority of their out of school time on school work, household tasks/chores, caring for siblings/ other family members and watching television (South Africa only). Qualitative studies have supported this, reporting that children in Africa spend time on leisure activities, such as watching television (De Lange *et al.* 2012) as well as chores. In South Africa, for example, a study using drawings from 16 children, aged 6 to 10 years old, depict them collecting water from the river or the dam, fetching wood, and running errands (De Lange *et al.* 2012). Similarly, in Zambia, drawings from 38 children between the ages 8 and 12 show them cleaning, washing, cooking, caring for young children, and running errands as part of their everyday lives (Hunleth 2019). Since these latter studies were qualitative in nature, they do not show how frequently children engage in such activities and whether they may interfere with other parts of their lives such as schooling and play.

Studies have also shown that children's characteristics and social circumstances influence their patterns of time use. For example, research has shown that female children generally have less time for leisure activities (Fonta *et al.* 2020). In Egypt, Assaad, Levinson & Zibani (2010), for example, found that many girls who participate in 14 or more hours of domestic work per week do not go to school and would have been in

school had they not been expected to work. There are also apparent differences according to income level and whether children reside in rural and urban areas. Kazeem (2013) reports that, in Nigeria, children in rural areas and poor children spend more time on unpaid work than urban children and children classified as non-poor. Indeed, research in Burkina Faso considered leisure deprivation as an important dimension of child poverty, a deprivation felt by girls more than boys. With poverty depriving children of both leisure and studying time (Fonta *et al.* 2020), other research suggests that this may even increase rates of child labour (Kazeem 2013; De Wet & Ewemade 2018). Rees (2017), examining the effects of income on time use, reports a negative relationship between time spent on household chores and the countries' relative income level, suggesting that children residing in poorer countries tend to spend more time on household tasks. However, no clear relationship was found between income level and time spent on educational activities. In terms of leisure, findings from other studies suggest differences between rural in urban children; for example, free-time tends to be more spontaneous and creative in rural children as they tend to use their surrounding environment to entertain themselves. In Northern Malawi, playing with soil dolls and wire cars is more popular than watching television (Nelson *et al.* 2017), and rural children in South Africa have been found to use their imaginations and items from their milieu to create toys (Bartie *et al.* 2016). Rural children also seem to use different play spaces, like the streets, the forests and the rivers, given their close proximity to nature (Alexander, Cocks & Shackleton 2015). However, several studies have suggested that children in rural areas may spend less time on leisure and educational activities (Fonta *et al.* 2020; Tötemeyer *et al.* 2015) and more time on labour (Kazeem 2013). Indeed, socio-economic factors may impact how children spend time and influence whether or not children in different geographical or socio-economic contexts have access to safe spaces for leisure and other out of school activities (Savahl *et al*. 2020).

Findings on children's use of technology, another form of leisure, shows a substantial increase in recent times. This research has been conducted prior to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic where children may spend more time at home during lockdowns. In such cases access to internet and electronic equipment may mean better access to resources for some children and this differential access to technology may widen the gap between the haves and the have nots. On the other hand, there is also a concern that excessive media use may have a negative effect on children's development (Sauerwein & Rees 2020). Looking at cross-country comparisons, Rees (2017), found that children in higher-income countries spent more time on the three leisure activities asked about in the survey—including using a computer (other activities include playing sports or doing exercise, watching television or listening to music) more frequently than children in lower-income countries. However, this study did not include data on children's time spent on free play. Understanding patterns of access to technology and the factors that may hamper them are important to understand.

Research has also explored whether time use patterns can influence children's overall levels of wellbeing. Sauerwein & Rees (2020), for example, looking at data from over 14 diverse countries across different continents found that children who engage infrequently in educational activities tend to be from more disadvantaged backgrounds and show lower life satisfaction whereas children who engage in more structured activities, such as extra classes, tend to have higher levels of satisfaction. The latter group of children also tend to be from more economically advantaged backgrounds. Research further examining the link between patterns of time use and children's satisfaction is thus needed to better understand the differential effects of play and other out-of-school activities on children's wellbeing.

The current article uses information from the Namibia component of the *International Survey of Children's Well-being (ISCWeB)*. This survey is a multi-country assessment of children's subjective well-being and various other facets of their life, including living conditions, material possessions, school and family, and experiences of daily life (Rees *et al.* 2020). Through the survey, children were able to share about many different contexts of their lives and provide insight of their perceived well-being within these contexts. The survey began in 2009 with 11 countries participating in the first wave (Dinsman & Reese 2014). Currently is in its third wave 35 countries from five continents have participated of which three are African countries (Algeria, Namibia, South Africa). Using data from Wave 3 of *ISCWeB*, this article describes (1) children's out-of-school activities in Khomas, Namibia; (2) contextual factors that influence children's patterns of time use; (3) children's satisfaction with how they spend their free time; and (4) whether these patterns of time use are related to children's subjective wellbeing. By exploring these sections of the survey, we hope to provide a snapshot into how children in one African country spend their time from their own perspectives.

## Method

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design in line with the *ISCWeB* (Rees *et al.* 2020). The international study targets three age groups (8-, 10-, and 12-year-olds), however in Namibia, the study was limited to the two older age groups.

### Research setting

In Namibia the survey took place in Khomas region, a predominantly urban region which contains the capital city, Windhoek. Khomas region has a population of 342 141, accounting for about 16 per cent of the total population of Namibia, and is divided into ten constituencies (Namibian Statistics Agency 2017). There exist wide variations between the ten constituencies of the region, with those characterised by

informal settlements recording higher levels of poverty and often lacking basic facilities, such as adequate water, sanitation, and electricity (RAISON 2014).

### Participants

We used data from a representative sample of 2124 students (1025 in Grade 4 and 1099 in Grade 6) in Khomas region, Namibia (Ruiz-Casares, Gentz & Gouin 2021). A stratified random sample with replacement of primary and combined schools in the region was selected, with location (rural/urban) and whether the schools were private or public used as strata. In total, 31 schools were selected across the region. Within each school, a maximum of two classes or 50 students were selected per grade.

The final sample was 58.1 per cent female with a mean age of 11.1 years (Table 1). About half of participants were in Grade 6 and just over one tenth (11.9 per cent) of children were orphaned. Most children spoke English at home (48.6 per cent), followed by Oshiwambo (37.6 per cent), and Afrikaans (30.4 per cent). The sample was predominantly urban (88.6 per cent) and most children attended public/state schools (86.5 per cent). While most children owned clothes in a good condition and had access to electricity sometimes or always at home (83.9 per cent), less than two-thirds lived in a house with running water (64.3 per cent), and fewer had internet at home (58.3 per cent) or a mobile phone (52.4 per cent).

### Materials and procedures

The questionnaire included close-ended questions on socio-demographics, family and school factors, different dimensions of wellbeing, and children's satisfaction with various aspects of their life, including time use. The questionnaires were pilot-tested in English with Grade 4 students prior to administration and refined to make the language more understandable to children. The final version of the questionnaire was back-translated and pilot tested in the four other local languages (i.e. Afrikaans, Oshikwanyama, Nama/Damara, and Otjiherero) and administered in July-November 2018 to groups in their usual classroom by multilingual researchers who had been previously trained in the survey and the ethical conduct of research with children.

This article uses data from the items in the survey pertaining to participant socio-demographics, time use, and one indicator of subjective wellbeing. Children's time use was measured with the item '*How often do you usually spend time doing the following things when you are not at school?*'; weekly frequency of participation in fourteen activities was measured with a 6-point scale ranging from *Never* to *Every day*. Satisfaction with *time use* and *free time to do what you want* was measured with two items and assessed using an 11-point Likert scale where 0 means *Not at all satisfied*

**Table 1.** Characteristics of study participants and their households (n = 2124).

| | N/Mean | %/SD |
|---|---|---|
| **Children** | | |
| **Age,** mean | | |
| Grade 4 (n = 1025) | 10.1 | 0.8 |
| Grade 6 (n = 1096) | 12.2 | 0.8 |
| Total (n = 2121) | 11.2 | 1.3 |
| **Sex** | | |
| Female | 1233 | 41.9 |
| Male | 891 | 58.1 |
| **Born outside of Namibia (n = 2116)** | | |
| Yes | 183 | 8.6 |
| Unsure | 53 | 2.5 |
| **Orphanhood (n = 2097)** | | |
| Maternal | 47 | 2.2 |
| Paternal | 164 | 7.8 |
| Double | 39 | 1.9 |
| **Language spoken at home**[a] | | |
| English | 1033 | 48.6 |
| Oshiwambo | 804 | 37.9 |
| Afrikaans | 645 | 30.4 |
| Nama/Damara | 439 | 20.7 |
| Otjiherero | 282 | 13.3 |
| Other | 294 | 13.8 |
| **Grade/ Age** | | |
| Four/ 10-year old | 1025 | 48.3 |
| Six/ 12-year old | 1099 | 51.7 |
| **School type** | | |
| Public | 1838 | 86.5 |
| Private | 286 | 13.5 |
| **Area** | | |
| Rural | 242 | 11.4 |
| Urban | 1882 | 88.6 |

**Table 1.** Continued

| | N/Mean | %/SD |
|---|---|---|
| **Personal assets** | | |
| Clothes in good condition (n = 2102) | 1884 | 89.6 |
| Two pairs of shoes in good condition (n = 2102) | 1719 | 81.8 |
| Enough money for school trips and activities (n = 2095) | 1338 | 63.9 |
| Equipment/things for school (n = 2107) | 1581 | 75.0 |
| Equipment/things for sports and hobbies (n = 2107) | 1349 | 64.0 |
| Pocket money (n = 2100) | 1230 | 58.6 |
| Internet at home (n = 2102) | 1226 | 58.3 |
| Mobile phone (n = 2101) | 1100 | 52.4 |
| **Households** | | |
| **Type of household (n = 2116)** | | |
| Child's family | 1928 | 91.1 |
| Hostel or boarding school | 120 | 5.7 |
| Children's home/orphanage | 9 | 0.4 |
| Other[b] | 59 | 2.8 |
| **Household composition** | | |
| Mother | 1767 | 83.2 |
| Father | 1301 | 61.3 |
| Stepparent | 318 | 15.0 |
| Grandparent | 515 | 24.2 |
| Brothers and sisters | 1702 | 80.1 |
| Other children | 521 | 24.5 |
| Other adults | 688 | 32.4 |
| **Number of siblings (n = 2109)** | | |
| 0 | 48 | 2.3 |
| 1–3 | 988 | 46.9 |
| 4–6 | 725 | 34.3 |
| 7+ | 348 | 16.4 |

**Table 1.** Continued

| | N/Mean | %/SD |
|---|---|---|
| **Housing conditions and assets** | | |
| Electricity (always, sometimes) (n = 2117) | 1776 | 83.9 |
| Running water[c] (n = 2001) | 1287 | 64.3 |
| Toilet that flushes[d] (n = 1979) | 1433 | 72.4 |
| House made of brick or concrete (n = 2091) | 1382 | 66.1 |
| Lives in a shack (n = 2091) | 706 | 33.8 |
| Has computer (n = 2099) | 1352 | 64.4 |
| Has television (n = 2097) | 1810 | 86.3 |
| Has place for study (n = 2120) | 1444 | 68.1 |
| Has separate bed for child (n = 2114) | 1183 | 56.0 |

Notes: [a] Children could select more than one language; [b] Includes friends and neighbours
Missing values (only more than 5% shown): [c] Missing=5.8%; [d] Missing=6.8%;

and 10 *Completely satisfied*. A single-item scale was used to measure Overall Life Satisfaction (OLS) (Campbell, Converse & Rogers 1976). This item was measured using an 11-point scale from *Completely dissatisfied* (0) to *Completely satisfied* (10).

## Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics are used to examine relationships between contextual indicators, children's activities, and satisfaction with time use. Socio-demographic differences (for example, gender, orphan status, rural/urban location) were assessed with t-tests/Mann Whitney U test and Pearson's/Spearman's correlation analysis was used to explore the relationship between time use, time use satisfaction, subjective wellbeing, and time use variables activities. To compare weekly participation in different activities by distinct groups of children, the scale assessing time use was converted to a 7-point scale. All analyses were conducted with unweighted data using SPSS 24.0. For participant demographics, missing values above 5 per cent are indicated in the table.

## Ethics

Ethics approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Boards of the University of Namibia and McGill University and permits granted by the national and regional offices of the Namibia Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture. In addition, permission was obtained from school management and informed consent was obtained from

parents/guardians and children. The study followed the *Ethical Research Involving Children* (ERIC) guidelines (2013), with an emphasis on considering both children's rights to *participation* without discrimination and to *protection* from harm, and the implications of differential power relationship between adult researchers and child participants. Written informed consent was obtained from all participating children and their parents/legal guardians.

## Results

### Children's out-of-school activities

Children were asked how much time they spend on different activities when not in school (Table 2). The most common out-of-school daily activities are doing homework/studying (64.7 per cent of children), watching television (54.9 per cent), helping around the house (53.7 per cent) and relaxing/having fun with the family (50.7 per cent). The least common daily activities are working with non-family for money (13.8 per cent) and taking classes after school (18 per cent). Children were also asked about time spent on leisure activities. Just under half the children play outdoors (47.1 per cent) or practise sports/exercise every day (41.1 per cent). Many children never or less than once a week use social media (43.1 per cent) and never or rarely play electronic games (34.6 per cent).

### Contextual factors that influence children's patterns of time use

Differences in children's patterns of time use (mean number of days participating in an activity in the week) according to child traits are shown in Table 3.

*Age/grade group*: Compared to children in Grade 6 (around 12 years-old), Grade 4 children (around 10 years-old) engage more in leisure activities including relaxing/having fun with the family ($p<.05$), going to religious activities ($p<.001$), playing sports/exercise ($p<.01$) and playing electronic games ($p<.001$). Grade 4 children also report spending more time taking classes after school ($p<.001$), working for money/food (not with family members) ($p<.001$) and caring for siblings or other family members ($p<.001$) than Grade 6 children.

*Gender*: Male children more frequently work with the family on a business or farm ($p<.01$) and work with non-family members for money/food ($p<.001$) than female children. They also spend more time on leisure activities, such as watching TV ($p<.05$), playing sports ($p<.001$) and using social media ($p<.001$). In contrast, female children spend more time helping around the house ($p<.001$) and doing homework/studying ($p<.001$).

**Table 2.** Time spent in different activities outside of school.

| Activity | | | Frequency of children reporting each level | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean[a] | SD | Never (%) | < once/week (%) | Once or twice/ week (%) | 3–4 days/ week (%) | 5–6 days/ week (%) | Every day (%) | DK /NR (%) |
| **Work & home care** | | | | | | | | | |
| Help around the house | 4.9 | 2.6 | 6.3 | 8.8 | 10.6 | 8.7 | 11.9 | 53.7 | 0.4 |
| Work with family (business/farm) | 2.9 | 3 | 31.5 | 14.3 | 9.7 | 7.3 | 10.7 | 26.6 | 0.7 |
| Take care of siblings/other family | 4 | 3 | 20.5 | 10.9 | 8.2 | 6.3 | 11.9 | 42.2 | 0.7 |
| Work (not family) for money | 1.6 | 2.6 | 59.5 | 9.2 | 6.2 | 5.2 | 6.2 | 13.8 | 1.4 |
| **Academic** | | | | | | | | | |
| Have classes after school | 2.1 | 2.8 | 49 | 9.8 | 9.5 | 7.3 | 6.3 | 18 | 1.3 |
| Do homework/study | 5.6 | 2.3 | 3.2 | 5.3 | 6.6 | 7.3 | 12.9 | 64.7 | 1.2 |
| **Leisure** | | | | | | | | | |
| Go to religious places/ services | 2.7 | 2.6 | 10.5 | 19.3 | 34 | 7.2 | 9.4 | 19.5 | 0.9 |
| Watch TV | 4.6 | 2.9 | 12.8 | 10.4 | 8 | 6.7 | 7.2 | 54.9 | 0.5 |
| Do sports/exercise | 4.2 | 2.9 | 13.1 | 10.8 | 12.3 | 9 | 13.7 | 41.1 | 1.1 |
| Relax, talk, have fun with family | 4.8 | 2.7 | 8.4 | 9.7 | 8.5 | 8.7 | 14 | 50.7 | 1.1 |
| Play outside | 4.5 | 2.8 | 10.4 | 10.7 | 10.3 | 9.9 | 11.6 | 47.1 | 0.7 |
| Use social media | 3.1 | 3 | 34.1 | 9 | 9.4 | 7.9 | 10.6 | 29.1 | 1.1 |
| Play electronic games | 3.6 | 3 | 24.1 | 10.5 | 11.2 | 8.1 | 11.9 | 34.2 | 0.8 |
| Do nothing/rest | 3 | 2.9 | 27.5 | 15.1 | 12.3 | 8.3 | 9.5 | 27.3 | 0.7 |

[a] Mean number of days in the week spent on each activity.

*Orphan status*: Compared to orphaned children, non-orphans spend more time doing homework/studying (p<.01) and on leisure activities, such as exercising (p<.018), relaxing and having fun with their family (p<.001) and using social media (p<.05). In contrast, orphans spend more time working for money/food for people outside of their family (p<.01) and going to religious places/services (p<.01).

Table 4 shows children's patterns of time use according to some social and geographical characteristics.

*Location*: Children who live in urban locations spend more time on certain leisure activities, including watching television (p<.001), doing sports/exercise (p<.05), relaxing/talking and having fun with family (p<.001), playing outside (p<.05) and using social media (p<.001). They also spend more time on work activities such as helping around the house (p<.001), working with family in a business/farm (p<.05) and taking care of siblings (p<.05). Whereas urban children spend more time doing homework or studying (p<.001), rural children spend more time taking classes after school (p<.001).

*School type*: Children in private schools spend more time doing homework/studying (p<.001) and significantly more time on certain leisure activities (p<.001), such as watching television (p<.05), using social media (p<.001), and playing electronic games (p<.01). Children in public/ state schools spend more time engaging in work activities, such as helping around the house (p<.001) and taking care of siblings/other family members (p<.001). They also report spending more time in classes after school (p<.001) and going to religious places/services (p<. 001).

*Dwelling type*: Children who live in a shack spend more time engaging in some work activities, including working with family on a business/farm (p<.001), taking care of siblings or other family members (p<.05), and working for money or food for people outside of their family (p<.01) than children who live in a brick/concrete house. They also spend more time taking classes after school (p<.05), but significantly less time doing homework/studying (p<.05). Children living in shacks also spend less time on leisure activities, such as watching television (p<.001), playing sports/exercise (p<.001), relaxing and having fun with family (p<.001), using social media (p<.001), and playing electronic games (p<.001).

*Ownership of Personal Assets:* Children who own more personal assets report spending more time doing homework/studying (p<.001), watching television (p<.001), doing sports/exercise (p<.001), relaxing and having fun with family (p<.001), playing outside (p<.001), using social media (p<.001), playing electronic games (p<.001), and doing nothing/resting (p<.001) than children who own fewer assets. Children who own fewer assets, spend more time taking care of siblings (p<.05) and other family members than children who own more assets.

**Table 3.** Children's patterns of time use by child traits.

| Activity | Total | Age groups | | | Gender | | | Orphanhood | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 10 years | 12 years | p-value | Male | Female | p-value | Orphan | Non-orphan | p-value |
| | *n* | M (SD) | M (SD) | | M (SD) | M (SD) | | M (SD) | M (SD) | |
| **Work and home care** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Help around the house | 2116 | 4.8 (2.7) | 5.0 (2.6) | .065 | 4.6 (2.7) | 5.1 (2.6) | .000 | 5.1 (2.6) | 4.9 (2.7) | .256 |
| Work with family | 2109 | 3.4 (3.0) | 2.4 (2.9) | .000 | 3.1 (3.0) | 2.7 (3.0) | .002 | 3.0 (3.0) | 2.9 (3.0) | .704 |
| Take care of siblings/other family | 2109 | 4.2 (3.0) | 3.8 (3.1) | .001 | 3.9 (3.0) | 4.1 (3.0) | .319 | 3.7 (3.1) | 4.1 (3.0) | .097 |
| Work (not family) for money | 2095 | 2.0 (2.7) | 1.3 (2.4) | .000 | 2.0 (2.8) | 1.4 (2.4) | .000 | 2.2 (2.9) | 1.5 (2.5) | .002 |
| **Academic** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Have classes after school | 2097 | 2.4 (2.9) | 1.7 (2.6) | .000 | 2.1 (2.8) | 2.0 (2.) | .181 | 2.3 (2.8) | 2.0 (2.7) | .076 |
| Do homework/study | 2098 | 5.7 (2.3) | 5.6 (2.2) | .347 | 5.4 (2.4) | 5.8 (2.1) | .000 | 5.2 (2.5) | 5.7 (2.2) | .005 |
| **Leisure** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Go to religious places/ services | 2105 | 3.1 (2.7) | 2.4 (2.4) | .000 | 2.9 (2.6) | 2.6 (2.5) | .015 | 3.2 (2.7) | 2.7 (2.5) | .007 |
| Watch TV | 2114 | 4.6 (2.9) | 4.7 (2.9) | .626 | 4.8 (2.8) | 4.5 (3.0) | .015 | 4.4 (2.9) | 4.7 (2.9) | .071 |
| Do sports/exercise | 2100 | 4.4 (2.8) | 4.0 (2.9) | .002 | 4.9 (2.7) | 3.7 (2.9) | .000 | 3.8 (2.9) | 4.3 (2.8) | .018 |
| Relax, talk, have fun with family | 2101 | 4.9 (2.6) | 4.7 (2.7) | .018 | 4.7 (2.7) | 4.9 (2.7) | .095 | 4.1 (2.9) | 4.9 (2.6) | .000 |
| Play outside | 2109 | 4.5 (2.8) | 4.4 (2.8) | .350 | 4.7 (2.7) | 4.3 (2.9) | .000 | 4.2 (2.8) | 4.6 (2.8) | .093 |
| Use social media | 2101 | 3.1 (3.0) | 3.0 (3.0) | .634 | 3.4 (3.0) | 2.9 (3.0) | .000 | 2.7 (3.0) | 3.2 (3.0) | .015 |
| Play electronic games | 2106 | 3.9 (3.0) | 3.2 (3.0) | .000 | 4.2 (2.9) | 3.1 (3.0) | .000 | 3.4 (3.0) | 3.6 (3.0) | .235 |
| Do nothing/rest | 2109 | 3.1 (3.0) | 2.8 (2.9) | .005 | 3.1 (3.0) | 2.9 (2.9) | .153 | 2.9 (2.9) | 3.0 (2.9) | .284 |

**Table 4.** Children's patterns of time use by social characteristics.

| Activity | Total | Location | | | Type of school | | | Dwelling type | | | Ownership of Assets | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Rural | Urban | p-value | Public | Private | p-value | Concrete | Shack | p-value | Pearson r | p-value |
| | *n* | M (SD) | M (SD) | | M (SD) | M (SD) | | M (SD) | M (SD) | | | |
| **Work and home care** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Help around the house | 2116 | 4.3 (2.8) | 5.0 (2.6) | .000 | 5.0 (2.6) | 4.1 (2.7) | .000 | 4.9 (2.6) | 5.0 (2.7) | .274 | -.027 | .230 |
| Work with family | 2109 | 2.5 (2.7) | 3.0 (3.0) | .017 | 3.1 (3.0) | 1.5 (2.3) | .000 | 2.7 (2.9) | 3.2 (3.0) | .000 | .016 | .476 |
| Take care of siblings/other family | 2109 | 3.5 (3.0) | 4.1 (3.0) | .012 | 4.1 (3.0) | 3.3 (3.0) | .000 | 3.9 (3.1) | 4.2 (3.0) | .012 | -.049 | .027 |
| Work (not family) for money | 2095 | 2.4 (2.8) | 1.5 (2.6) | .000 | 1.7 (2.7) | 0.9 (2.0) | .000 | 1.5 (2.5) | 1.9 (2.7) | .001 | -.037 | .099 |
| **Academic** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Have classes after school | 2097 | 2.6 (2.7) | 2.0 (2.8) | .002 | 2.1 (2.8) | 1.5 (2.2) | .000 | 1.9 (2.7) | 2.2 (2.8) | .014 | -.009 | .693 |
| Do homework/study | 2098 | 4.8 (2.7) | 5.7 (2.2) | .000 | 5.6 (2.3) | 6.0 (1.8) | .000 | 5.7 (2.7) | 5.4 (2.4) | .011 | .137 | .000 |
| **Leisure** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Go to religious places/ services | 2105 | 3.4 (2.7) | 2.7 (2.5) | .000 | 2.9 (2.6) | 1.9 (1.9) | .000 | 2.6 (2.5) | 2.9 (2.7) | .015 | .037 | .093 |
| Watch TV | 2114 | 3.5 (3.2) | 4.8 (2.9) | .000 | 4.6 (3.0) | 5.0 (2.5) | .023 | 5.1 (2.7) | 3.7 (3.2) | .000 | .309 | .000 |
| Do sports/exercise | 2100 | 3.8 (2.9) | 4.2 (2.8) | .017 | 4.1 (2.9) | 4.4 (2.6) | .066 | 4.4 (2.8) | 3.8 (3.0) | .000 | .234 | .000 |
| Relax, talk, have fun with family | 2101 | 3.8 (2.9) | 4.9 (2.6) | .000 | 4.8 (2.7) | 5.0 (2.5) | .144 | 5.1 (2.5) | 4.3 (2.9) | .000 | .287 | .000 |
| Play outside | 2109 | 4.1 (2.8) | 4.5 (2.8) | .020 | 4.5 (2.8) | 4.3 (2.8) | .178 | 4.6 (2.8) | 4.3 (2.9) | .072 | .170 | .000 |
| Use social media | 2101 | 2.2 (2.8) | 3.2 (3.0) | .000 | 3.0 (3.0) | 3.7 (3.0) | .000 | 3.6 (3.0) | 2.0 (2.8) | .000 | .414 | .000 |
| Play electronic games | 2106 | 3.2 (3.0) | 3.6 (3.0) | .073 | 3.5 (3.0) | 4.0 (2.7) | .002 | 3.9 (2.9) | 2.9 (3.0) | .000 | .334 | .000 |
| Do nothing/rest | 2109 | 3.1 (2.9) | 3.0 (2.9) | .540 | 3.0 (3.0) | 3.0 (2.8) | .940 | 3.0 (2.9) | 2.9 (3.0) | .498 | .104 | .000 |

### Contextual factors that influence children's life satisfaction and satisfaction with time use

More than half the children report high levels of satisfaction (scores above 7 on the 11-point scale) with how they use their time (67.1 per cent) and also how much free time they have (65.5 per cent), with very few children indicating low satisfaction (scores below 3) for time use (5.5 per cent) and free time (8.2 per cent).

Table 5 and Table 6 shows how different groups of children rate their wellbeing and their time use satisfaction. Grade 4 children score higher in all three indicators: they report higher levels of life satisfaction ($p<.001$), time use satisfaction ($p\leq.001$), and satisfaction with the amount of free time ($p\leq.001$) than Grade 6 children. No gender differences are noted. Non-orphans report higher levels of life satisfaction ($p\leq.05$) and time use satisfaction ($p\leq.05$) than orphaned children. Children who school in urban locations also report higher satisfaction with life ($p\leq.05$), time use ($p\leq.001$) and free time ($p\leq.001$), when compared to children from rural areas. Children in public schools report higher satisfaction with the amount of free time they had ($p\leq.0$) than children in private schools, but no differences are apparent with life satisfaction or time use. Finally, socio-economic indicators also have an effect on children's satisfaction with the different indicators; children living in informal dwellings (shacks) report lower life satisfaction ($p\leq.05$), satisfaction with time use ($p\leq.001$) and with the amount of free time ($p\leq.0$). Finally, owning more personal assets is positively associated with life satisfaction ($r=0.229$, $p<.001$)), time use satisfaction ($r=0.302$, $p<.001$), and satisfaction with free time ($r=.282$, $p<.001$).

### Life satisfaction and time use patterns

Involvement in certain activities has a positive impact on wellbeing scores (Table 7). The strongest relationships are with relaxing with family ($r=.279$, $p<.001$), doing homework/studying ($r= .141$, $p<.001$), and playing sports/exercise ($r=.136$, $p<.05$). Furthermore, children who indicate higher levels of satisfaction with their time use as well as with their free time are those who spend more time relaxing and having fun with family ($p<.001$), playing outside ($p<.001$) and playing sports/exercise ($p<.001$).

## Discussion

In this article, we explored children's patterns of out-of-school time use in a sample of Grade 4 and 6 students from the Khomas region of Namibia. We were interested in children's own perspectives on how they spend their everyday lives as well as advancing the literature on how child traits and socio-demographic characteristics affect the activities that

**Table 5.** Children's levels of wellbeing and satisfaction by child traits.

| | Age/grade groups | | | Gender | | | Orphanhood | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10 years/ Grade 4 | 12 years/ Grade 6 | p-value | Male | Female | p-value | Orphan | Non-orphan | p-value |
| | M (SD) | M (SD) | | M (SD) | M (SD) | | M (SD) | M (SD) | |
| Satisfaction with life as a whole (OLS) | 9.0 (2.1) | 8.4 (2.4) | .000 | 8.9 (2.2) | 8.7 (2.3) | .135 | 8.4 (2.6) | 8.8 (2.2) | .039 |
| Satisfaction with time use | 8.4 (2.5) | 7.5 (2.7) | .000 | 8.0 (2.6) | 7.8 (2.7) | .111 | 7.6 (3.0) | 8.0 (2.6) | .028 |
| Satisfaction with free time | 8.3 (2.6) | 7.1 (3.1) | .000 | 7.8 (2.9) | 7.6 (3.0) | .170 | 7.5 (3.2) | 7.7 (2.9) | .307 |

**Table 6.** Children's levels of wellbeing and satisfaction by socio-economic characteristics.

| Activity | Location | | | Type of school | | | Dwelling type | | | Ownership of Assets | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rural | Urban | p-value | Public | Private | p-value | Concrete | Shack | p-value | Pearson r | p-value |
| | M (SD) | M (SD) | | M (SD) | M (SD) | | M (SD) | M (SD) | | | |
| Satisfaction with life as a whole (OLS) | 8.4 (2.8) | 8.8 (2.2) | .029 | 8.7 (2.3) | 8.8 (1.9) | .636 | 8.8 (2.1) | 8.6 (2.5) | .018 | .229 | .000 |
| Satisfaction with time use | 7.3 (3.1) | 8.0 (2.6) | .001 | 7.9 (2.7) | 8.0 (2.1) | .388 | 8.1 (2.4) | 7.5 (3.0) | .000 | .302 | .000 |
| Satisfaction with free time | 7.0 (3.3) | 7.8 (2.9) | .001 | 7.7 (2.9) | 7.3 (3.0) | .012 | 7.8 (2.8) | 7.4 (3.1) | .002 | .282 | .000 |

**Table 7.** Associations between wellbeing, time use satisfaction, and selected activities children engage on.

| | **Wellbeing (OLS)** | **Time use satisfaction** | **Free time satisfaction** | **Household chores** | **Taking care of siblings** | **Homework/ studying** | **Play outside** | **Play sports** | **Social media** | **Watching T.V.** | **Relaxing with family** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wellbeing (OLS) | 1 | .355** | .356** | .083** | .034 | .122** | .141** | .136** | .097** | .087** | .279** |
| Time use Satisfaction | | 1 | .434** | .057** | .051* | .142** | .197** | .179** | .124** | .127** | .293** |
| Free time Satisfaction | | | 1 | .092** | .071** | .095** | .209** | .176** | .160** | .130** | .318** |
| Household chores | | | | 1 | .227** | .167** | .106** | .109** | -.010 | .041 | .174** |
| Taking care of siblings | | | | | 1 | .122** | .090** | .164** | -.004 | .010 | .150** |
| Homework/ studying | | | | | | 1 | .138** | .144** | .068** | .099** | .225** |
| Play outside | | | | | | | 1 | .279** | .167** | .219** | .313** |
| Play sports | | | | | | | | 1 | .206** | .187** | .271** |
| Social media | | | | | | | | | 1 | .278** | .211** |
| Watching TV | | | | | | | | | . | 1 | .236** |
| Relaxing with family | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |

*p≤ .05, **p≤ .01, *** p≤ .001

children engage in and how these may affect their life satisfaction levels. Out-of-school time is under-studied in Namibia and although there is more research on the topic in the rest of Africa, the studies tend to be ethnographic in nature or have smaller samples.

Our research shows that children in Namibia spend time on various activities related to school, family, and leisure. The most common out-of-school activity conducted daily by almost one-third of our sample was homework or studying, similar to what Tötemeyer *et al.* (2015) found in their study of 1402 Grade 6 students in seven regions in Namibia. Like our study, Rees (2017) found that allocating one's time to homework was highly influenced by gender, with girls dedicating more time to it than boys in 11 different countries, including some on the African continent (i.e. Algeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia).

Watching television was the second most common out-of-school activity in our sample, also found to be a popular activity in other parts of Africa. For example, watching television and listening to the radio is a common activity in rural South Africa (De Lange *et al.* 2012) and Malawi (Nelson *et al.* 2017). A previous study of 12- to 15-year-olds from average to below-average income groups in the Khomas region of Namibia found that adolescents would rather spend their out-of-school time watching television or on social media than reading (Kirchner & Mostert 2017). This resonates with children's experiences in other income groups and parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Diary entries of a 15-year-old boy from a high-income suburb of Accra in Ghana showed that he enjoys watching television in his free-time and going to the cinema with his family (Twum-Danso Imoh 2016).

In the current study, time spent helping around the house was reported as being the third most common out-of-school activity, similar to qualitative research in other African contexts which document activities like fetching wood, (De Lange *et al.* 2012), preparing food and washing clothes (Hunleth 2019), sweeping, helping in the garden, herding goats, grazing cattle, collecting groceries (Nelson *et al.* 2017), preparing food and caring for young children (Njelesani *et al.* 2011). While the above studies predominantly document children's chores in rural areas, our research shows that this is a common activity in both rural and urban children. Indeed, helping around the house is an important part of children's lives in sub-Saharan Africa.

Spending time with family on a daily basis, another common activity in our sample has been reported in both urban and rural children. In rural South Africa, children sometimes spend time listening to music, reading, and enjoying meals as a family (Samuels *et al.* 2020). Mealtimes, leisure time (radio, music, television), watching football matches within the community, and telling stories by the fire are all popular family activities in rural Malawi (Nelson *et al.* 2017).

Grade 4 children in our study spent more time on leisure activities, including relaxing with the family, playing sports and electronic games, than Grade 6 children. Grade 4 children also spent more time on educational activities and caring for other family

members. Results from previous research have also indicated that younger children are able to allocate more time to leisure than their older siblings, and the latter will only spend more time on homework if they don't have many younger siblings to care for (Jordan *et al.* 2018). In regions where children are expected to work at a certain age, studies have shown that younger children will participate in work-themed play to practice their skills. This type of play disappears as soon as the children are of age to work (Fouts, Neitzel & Bader 2016).

Our results show marked gender differences in children's patterns of time use. Boys spent more time than girls on work with family members on a business/farm and work for money for non-family members and on most leisure activities. Similarly, Posel & Graspa (2017) found that, on average, boys have been found to spend more time than girls on leisure and production work during the day, while girls spend substantially more time on household work. Furthermore, boys are often recorded playing sports outdoors, like soccer and cricket (Alexander, Cocks & Shackleton 2015). In this line, in a large sample of 13- to 15-year-olds from eight African countries (Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, Senegal, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), 16.6 per cent of boys reported being frequently physically active (i.e. running, fast walking, biking, dancing, and playing football; it excluded gym class), compared to 12 per cent of girls (Peltzer 2010).

Our results showed that girls in Khomas spent more time helping around the house and doing homework/studying. Data from 16 countries from a previous *ISCWeB* Wave, also shows that girls are more likely to help with housework (Rees 2017). This often starts at an early age. In Egyptian communities where basic public services are limited, young girls are asked to fetch water and fuel, dispose of garbage, do laundry, and care for younger siblings (Assaad, Levison & Zibani 2010). Although our study did not find that girls' participation in household chores impacted their time spent on school work, research in other contexts has suggested this (Kazeem 2013) and it will be important to monitor this. Other studies have found no significant gender difference in the average time allocated to learning activities both at school and at home (Posel & Grapsa 2017), in fact, our findings confirm Rees (2017): that children who do more housework also tend to spend more time on homework, with girls being more involved in both activities.

Our results uncover the impact of socio-economic circumstances on children's time allocations. Indeed, children who owned more personal assets reported spending more time doing homework, watching television, doing exercise, relaxing with the family, playing outdoors, and on social media and electronic games. Children who lived in informal dwellings in our sample tended to spend more time contributing to family, such as taking care of siblings, and less time on homework/studying and leisure activities. Results from previous studies have also shown that children from a higher socio-economic status participate more in sports (Rees 2017; Peltzer 2010) and leisure in general (Jordan *et al.* 2018). Rees (2017) in particular found that children from higher-income countries spend more time on leisure activities, such as watching

television, listening to music, and using the computer than children from lower-income countries. Other research has also shown that children in poorer living conditions may have less time available for leisure and study (Fonta *et al.* 2020) as they may be required to contribute more to family life, including participation in domestic chores, such as fetching water and disposing of waste (Assaad *et al*. 2010).

Our findings show that children living in urban locations spent more time watching television, doing sports, relaxing with family, outdoors, and/or on social media. They also spent more time on chores, working with family, and studying. Previous studies found similar results. Rural children in Burkina Faso were found to have less access to information and leisure than urban children (Fonta *et al.* 2020). Totemeyer *et al.* (2015) pointed out that while rural Grade 6 children spend less time on educational activities, like reading (with 17.3 per cent of rural students being readers,[1] compared to 36.5 per cent in urban schools), they spent more time on oral storytelling, story reading and listening to stories on the radio, which also resulted in rural children spending quality time with their family. This is supported by other research that shows more creative use of play for children in rural areas (Alexander, Cocks & Shackleton 2015; Bartie *et al.* 2016; Nelson *et al.* 2017). Indeed, while our findings showed that urban children spend more time playing outdoors, it should be noted that play was not defined for children and it may be that rural children did not consider these types of activities as play. Finally, while our findings suggested that urban children spend more time on chores and working with family, previous studies have come to different conclusions with regards to labour. Kazeem (2013), for example, found that rural Nigerian children's involvement in agricultural activities and labour was very high compared to urban children. Finally, other findings suggested that South African children living in rural areas have higher mean time allocations to household and production work and lower mean time allocations to learning, compared to urban children (Posel & Grapsa 2017). These differences may be attributed to differing definitions of household work, and teasing out what household activities children in different circumstances engage in, may be valuable for future research.

Grade 4 children, non-orphans, children schooling in urban locations and children in better socio-economic conditions tended to report higher levels of satisfaction with life and/or time use. Children who attended public schools reported being satisfied with the amount of free time they had but no differences were found with life satisfaction or time use. While our study did not find gender differences, in Posel & Grapsa (2017) girls reported being more comfortable with their time use than boys and rural children being less likely than urban children to report being uncomfortable with their time use during

[1] In this study, readers are defined as 'a person who had some knowledge of the basic types of reading material available, who either spontaneously mentioned reading for pleasure as an activity, or gave reading a priority among various options on which a substantial amount of time was spent after school'.

the day. Using *ISCWeB* data from 14 countries, Sauerwein & Rees (2020) showed that children who report allocating very little time to homework, reading, and media, such as television, music and computers, tend to have high levels of material deprivation[2] and low levels of life satisfaction. These children also tend to be predominantly male. Children who are low media users but are engaged in structured leisure activities (youth movements, scouts, etc.) were found to have an average level of life satisfaction. Those who report having an organized schedule and being engaged in extra lessons and reading for pleasure tended to have higher-than-average levels of life satisfaction.

Our study revealed that relaxing with family, doing homework/studying, and playing outdoors have a strong impact on children's wellbeing scores. Furthermore, children who reported higher levels of satisfaction with their time use and free time patterns were those who spent more time relaxing and having fun with family, playing outdoors, and exercising. This points to higher self-reported satisfaction for children who are involved with active leisure activities as well as leisure with family. These results are in line with other studies on the African continent that examine the impact of certain activities on children's overall satisfaction. In Central Africa, Fouts *et al* (2016) observed play behaviours and found that social play (i.e. object play, games, roleplaying, imagined scenarios, wrestling and tickling between a child and at least one other person) had a positive and relaxed effect on children. To represent when they most have fun, children in several studies in South Africa have identified playing outdoors (De Lange *et al.* 2012; Alexander, Cocks & Shackleton 2015). Finally, a 9-year-old boy from Ethiopia in Jirata's (2012) study put a lot of emphasis on the happiness that playing riddles and folktales with his siblings and friend brought him. While all these studies used different conceptualisations of satisfaction, they are consistent with our findings that children are satisfied with their time use when this time is spent having fun with family.

This study has some limitations. The sample was limited to Khomas region and Grade 4 and Grade 6 children. Results cannot be generalized to a broader population of children since no weights were used for analysis. Causality cannot be inferred as we used a cross-sectional design. Comparisons across grades need to be done with caution since different answering styles have been documented across groups (Casas & González-Carrasco 2019).

Despite these limitations this study broadens our understanding of children's lives in Namibia, the valuable contributions they make to their families and communities, and the activities that contribute most to their life satisfaction and wellbeing. Children in this context regularly engage in a wide range of activities during their out of school time. This study also illustrates the potential of population-based research to capture the perspectives of a large and diverse group of children in different ecological contexts. Solid evidence that children's participation in household chores contributes positively to their life satisfaction broadens our understanding

[2] Clothes in good condition, a computer, the internet, a mobile phone, one's own room, books, a family car, and equipment to play music.

of children's work and should be further studied across different sub-groups of children, particularly those who are economically and otherwise disadvantaged. A closer look at the tasks different children perform and the conditions under which they carry them out will be crucial to facilitating positive child development and integration into their families and communities. Our study also adds to the scarce literature on child play in Africa by showing the valuable impact of play and leisure on children's wellbeing as well as the importance of spending time with family. Indeed, the dimension of play has been chronically overlooked in the literature and this study offers a significant route to rethinking the role of play and creativity in African childhoods. Finally, our study suggests avenues for initiatives to ensure that children from diverse contexts have the opportunity to participate in activities that can promote their well-being.

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