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The Intergenerational Correlation of Subjective Well-Being

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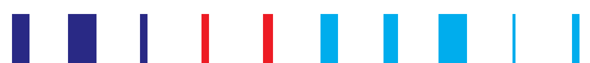

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The Intergenerational Correlation of Subjective Well-Being*

Abstract

There are many estimates of the intergenerational transmission of income and education, even though these may be considered as only partial measures of individual welfare. We here analyse long-running UK panel data and directly consider the intergenerational transmission of two widely-used indicators of well-being, life satisfaction and psychological distress. We use the long-run nature of this panel data to construct parent–child dyads who are observed at the same age, and so avoid the life-cycle bias that appears in much existing work on intergenerational correlation. We find that well-being is transmitted across generations, but to a lesser extent than are income and education. Observed economic outcomes only slightly mediate this relationship, and the estimated transmission is similar across different types of parents and children. Exploiting the panel structure of the data, where both parents and their children are observed repeatedly over time, we show that well-being is transmitted across generations not only in levels, but also in terms of the way in which it changes over the life cycle.

JEL classification

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life satisfaction, GHQ, intergenerational transmission, UK

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1. Introduction

Intergenerational transmission captures the extent to which advantages and disadvantages persist across generations. Empirical work in this area has often focused on the intergenerational transmission of income and education. The meta-analysis in Fleury and Gilles (2018) produces an intergenerational education correlation coefficient of 0.15, while there is substantial cross-country variation in the analogous figures for income (ranging from 0.15 to 0.50 in Corak, 2013). More-recent work has also highlighted significant within-country heterogeneity with respect to geographical areas and parental income (Chetty *et al.*, 2014; Landersø and Heckman, 2016; Chen *et al.*, 2017; Güell *et al.*, 2018; Dong *et al.*, 2019; Eriksen and Munk, 2020; Helsø, 2021, Hjorth-Trolle and Landersø, 2025).

This research on the transmission of economic outcomes is informative from a welfare perspective, as these form part of how individuals experience their lives. But many other aspects of life undoubtedly matter as well (see Clark *et al.*, 2018), so that the transmission of economic outcomes provides only a partial view of the persistence of welfare: as Davis *et al.* (2025) underline, subjective variables such as life satisfaction may provide a more holistic view of how welfare is transmitted across generations.

There are a number of reasons why the well-being of parents and children may be correlated. Some channels may operate through biological or psychological predispositions, including health-related traits, personality and emotional regulation. Others may reflect the intergenerational transmission of economic and social resources, such as income, education, housing, exposure to adversity, social networks, and family patterns. Parental well-being may also shape the environment in which

children grow up, including parenting behaviour, emotional support, and the stability of family life.

Consistent with this range of potential channels, the existing empirical evidence has found that in a variety of countries parents' subjective well-being, mental health, and related outcomes are positively associated with those of their children (Headey *et al*., 2014; Landstedt and Almquist, 2019; Dang and Abanokova, 2022; Augustijn, 2022; Vera-Toscano and Brown, 2022; Bütikofer *et al*., 2024; Kollamparambil, 2024; Hervé *et al*., 2025; Hsieh *et al*., 2025; Ishii *et al*., 2025; Davis *et al*., 2025). The size of this correlation varies across these contributions, as might be expected given the differences in data, measures of well-being, samples, and empirical analyses. The available UK evidence, which is the most-directly relevant for the research we present here, falls within this cross-country range rather than standing out as an outlier (Johnston *et al*., 2013; Bencsik *et al*., 2023; Simpson *et al*., 2023).[1]

This transmission may be found not only for levels of well-being, but also well-being trajectories. Families may transmit ways of responding to life events, coping with adversity, or adapting to changing circumstances, so that parents and children resemble each other not only in how high or low their well-being is at a given age, but also in how their well-being evolves over time.

We here provide a direct estimate of the intergenerational transmission of well-being using long-run panel data from the British Household Panel Survey and its successor, Understanding Society. These provide panel data for up to 30 years or more, which allows us to construct dyads of parents and their children who are interviewed at the same age but in different calendar years (with this

[1] Although our focus is on subjective well-being and mental health, our research is also related to the broader literature on the intergenerational transmission of physical health. For a recent contribution on parent-child correlations in longevity, as well as a discussion of the related literature, see Black *et al*. (2023).

gap in calendar years reflecting the parent's age at the time of the child's birth). We can thus compare well-being scores across generations using the same survey measure, while avoiding life-cycle bias. We consider two widely-used well-being measures that have featured prominently in the literature across the Social Sciences: life satisfaction, and psychological distress as measured by the 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (Clark, 2018; Borga *et al.*, 2022).

We find that well-being is transmitted across generations: parents with higher well-being scores at a given age have children with higher well-being scores when at the same age. Income plays a small mediating role in this intergenerational relationship, whereas education does not. This is consistent with income playing a larger systematic role in the determination of well-being. Our estimate of the intergenerational transmission of well-being remains substantial even after controlling for many of the main objective determinants of well-being that have appeared in the literature (perhaps suggesting a role for preferences and psychological traits), and we find no evidence that the strength of transmission varies systematically across different types of parents and children.

While well-being is clearly transmitted across generations, this estimated persistence is smaller than the analogous figures calculated for income and education using data from the same survey. As such, these measures of economic transmission only imperfectly capture the transmission of welfare. Equally, the finding that well-being transmission remains even when introducing controls for economic outcomes indicates that welfare mobility cannot be inferred from economic mobility alone.

Beyond the intergenerational transmission of well-being levels, we present evidence of an intergenerational correlation in the way in which well-being evolves over the life cycle. The panel

structure of the data allows us to estimate regressions that include parent-child dyad fixed effects, which absorb all of the time-invariant characteristics that are shared by parents and their children. We here find that the within-dyad changes in parents' well-being over time are correlated with the changes in their children's well-being. This correlation persists even when controlling for any contemporaneous changes in observed life circumstances for both parents and children, indicating that the intergenerational link in well-being reflects the transmission of factors other than stable traits or the common timing of life events.

This paper contributes to the relatively-small but growing literature on the intergenerational transmission of subjective well-being and health outcomes in at least two ways.

First, existing research has documented the association between parents' and children's well-being or mental health in a variety of countries (see the list of research contributions in Appendix A). One common feature of these analyses is that parents and children are typically interviewed at similar calendar dates, so that they are at very different stages of their life cycles. The resulting intergenerational estimates then refer to the correlation between older adult parents' outcomes and those of their younger adult children, and are subject to life-cycle bias as they conflate transmission with age-related patterns in well-being. As we discuss in Section 2 below, they also may suffer from simultaneity and reverse-causality bias. We are able to tackle these issues by the use of long-run panel data in which we can observe parents and their children at the same age, and in which the outcome in question (subjective well-being) is measured via the same survey questions. To our knowledge, we are the first to carry out this kind of calculation of the intergenerational elasticity of well-being that can deal with life-cycle bias. The contributions that are the most-similar to ours – such as Johnston *et al.* (2013) using the British Cohort Study and Dang and Abanokova (2022) using Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey data – reduce this bias by minimising the

differences in the age at which parents and children report their well-being, but are not able eliminate them entirely.

In addition, existing research has relied primarily on data in which there is only one observation per dyad. By combining same-age dyads with parent–child fixed effects, we add to the calculation of intergenerational transmission in level of well-being by providing new evidence on the intergenerational transmission of the way in which well-being changes over the life course.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 describes the data, the construction of the parent–child dyads and the empirical strategy, and Section 3 presents the main results on the intergenerational transmission of subjective well-being. Last, Section 4 concludes.

2. Data and Empirical Strategy

a. Parent-child Dyads in British Panel Data

This paper uses data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and its successor Understanding Society (the UK Household Longitudinal Study: UKHLS). The BHPS began in 1991, following approximately 5,500 households and their members annually. In 2009, the BHPS sample was incorporated into a new larger panel survey, the UKHLS, which continues to follow the original BHPS respondents as well as new sample members.

One important characteristic of both surveys for our purposes is that they follow all of the original sample members over time, including children who leave the parental home to form their own households. This reduces the co-residence bias that sometimes appears in the estimation of relationships between family members: as these members have to be observed in the same

household when the interviews take place, they are interviewed at the same calendar date but at different ages. The structure of the British panel data used here means that children and their parents do need to be observed living in the same household in at least one wave (so that we know that they are related) but not at every wave. A second key characteristic is that many of the questions in these two surveys have remained unchanged since the start of the BHPS, so that we have the same well-being measure for the matched parent-child dyads. We then have many thousands of repeated observations on individuals who were first interviewed as young adults when living with their parents and are now observed repeatedly as adults (whether living with their parents or not). This allows us to compare well-being scores across generations using the same question, with information from parents and their children who are at comparable points in their life cycles.

The central unit of analysis used to establish the intergenerational transmission of well-being (or any other outcome) is the ‘parent–child dyad’. In our case this dyad is defined as a matched observation between one parent and one child, where both individuals are observed at the same age (and therefore in different calendar years). Formally, we match the outcome of the child when observed at age a to the same outcome of that child’s parent when that parent was observed also at age a. When $a = 25$, for example, we will match information from the child’s interview at age 25 to the same information given by the parent when the parent was interviewed at age 25, a number of decades earlier. The size of this gap in survey years will reflect the parent’s age when the child was born.

b. Measures of Subjective Well-being

We focus on two widely-used measures of subjective well-being that are available in most waves of the BHPS and UKHLS: psychological distress and evaluative well-being.

Psychological distress is measured using the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), which appears in the same form in every BHPS and UKHLS wave. The GHQ-12 captures multiple dimensions of mental health, including anxiety, being able to concentrate, loss of confidence, and the enjoyment of day-to-day activities: the full list of the 12 GHQ questions appears in the Appendix B. For each of these 12 items respondents report their recent psychological state as compared to their 'usual' state, using a four-point (0-3) response scale from "More so than usual" to "Much less than usual". One way of creating a summary GHQ score from these 12 questions is to calculate the sum of the answers to the 12 questions (after reverse-coding the negatively-couched questions): this produces a scale from 0 to 36, where higher values indicate worse mental health.[2] For simplicity, we will sometimes refer to this well-being measure as 'GHQ'.

The second well-being measure is life satisfaction, where respondents indicate how satisfied they are with their life overall on a scale from one to seven. The life satisfaction question appears in all BHPS waves from Wave 6 onwards (apart from Wave 11) and all UKHLS waves. As was the case for the GHQ, the question is identical in the BHPS and the UKHLS.

Life satisfaction is a global evaluation of life overall, whereas the GHQ focuses on mental health and psychological distress. However, they are both commonly used as measures of subjective well-

[2] An alternative is to count the number of questions out of 12 for which the response is in one of the two 'low well-being' categories. This count, called the Caseness score, runs from zero (no responses indicating poor psychological health) to 12 (all 12 responses indicating poor psychological health). The conclusions are unchanged if we use this Caseness score, as shown in the robustness tests in Section 3b.

being and are fairly strongly correlated. For instance, in Wave 15 of the UKHLS (the last wave currently available), the correlation coefficient between the two is around 0.6 (in absolute value). This is consistent with the two measures capturing some common underlying dimension of well-being, while remaining sufficiently distinct to warrant separate analysis.

We therefore expect the intergenerational transmission for these two outcomes to be in the same direction, but not necessarily of the same size. Psychological distress may be more sensitive to the transmission of mental-health predispositions, exposure to family stress, adversity, and coping styles. Life satisfaction, by contrast, may depend more on the transmission of broader life circumstances, aspirations, economic resources, and family trajectories. Similar patterns across the two outcomes would therefore suggest a broad intergenerational association in subjective well-being, while any difference may reveal differences in the channels through which psychological distress and evaluative well-being are transmitted.

c. Regression Specification

The empirical analysis evaluates the correlation between the subjective well-being of adult children and their parents, with both being measured at the same respondent age. The basic regression equation is:

$$SWB_{i,a,t}^{c} = \alpha + \beta SWB_{i,a,t'}^{p} + \gamma' X_{i,a,t}^{C} + \delta' X_{i,a,t'}^{P} + \mu_t + \mu_{t'} + \epsilon_{i,a,t} \quad (1)$$

where $SWB_{i,a,t}^{c}$ is the subjective well-being of child i observed at age a in survey wave t, and $SWB_{i,a,t'}^{p}$ the subjective well-being of the parent of the same individual i, measured when that parent was also age a, in survey wave t'. To ensure comparability across generations and the

alternative measures of subjective well-being (psychological distress and life satisfaction), both $SWB^{c}_{i,a,t}$and $SWB^{p}_{i,a,t'}$ are standardised (with zero mean and unit variance) using their pooled distribution across children and parents. The coefficient of interest in Equation (1), β, captures the intergenerational association in subjective well-being at a given age.

The vectors $X^{C}_{i,a,t}$ and $X^{P}_{i,a,t'}$ contain a variety of symmetric control variables for the children and their parents respectively. The baseline specification includes age fixed effects, which are common to parents and children by construction, and the two wave fixed effects μ_t and $\mu_{t'}$ (these will pick up any country-wide phenomena that affected subjective well-being at the time of the two interviews). In other specifications these will also include information on gender, real net monthly household income in logs, years of education, marital status, employment status, the number of children in the household, region fixed effects and the number of GP visits over the previous 12 months.[3] These variables are defined identically for both parents and children, and again always appear pairwise so that the comparison between parents and children is based on the same set of observed characteristics. We also add a dummy variable for the waves in which the child and the parent lived in the same household in $X^{C}_{i,a,t}$. Equation (1) is estimated using OLS (we will discuss the choice of estimator in the robustness checks) and standard errors are clustered at the dyad level.

The estimated β coefficient in the baseline specification reveals the total intergenerational transmission of subjective well-being, without holding constant any factors that are themselves potentially transmitted across generations (such as education and income). The extended specifications add a variety of control variables, and in particular include education and income:

[3] We use GP visits to reflect physical health as the question appears consistently in all BHPS and UKHLS waves and is not reported on an evaluative Likert-scale item (unlike self-reported health or health satisfaction). This latter characteristic reduces concerns about common method variance.

these latter have been central in the intergenerational mobility literature and are known to be correlated with subjective well-being. By holding these variables constant we can assess the extent to which the parent–child correlation in subjective well-being is explained by the transmission of socioeconomic characteristics. This specification should therefore be interpreted as capturing the intergenerational transmission of subjective well-being net of the channels that have often been emphasised in the literature (Layard *et al.*, 2014; Clark and Lepinteur, 2019).

Last, we exploit the panel dimension of the data by estimating a version of Equation (1) that includes dyad fixed effects, as we have repeated observations on the same parent–child dyad at different ages. In these specifications, the identification of the β coefficient comes from within-dyad variation over time rather than from any comparison between dyads. The inclusion of dyad fixed effects absorbs all of the time-invariant characteristics that are shared by the parent–child pair, including fixed family traits, genes and in general any permanent differences in their levels of subjective well-being. The estimated coefficient in this specification then no longer reflects the intergenerational correlation in parent and child well-being levels, but rather the extent to which changes in parental well-being over the life cycle resemble those in their children's well-being at the same ages. These panel specifications therefore shift the interpretation from the transmission of well-being levels to that of slopes.

We are not the first to analyse the intergenerational transmission of subjective well-being, although we believe that our approach is novel. Appendix A lists a number of contributions from a variety of different countries. However, all of these rely on the cross-sectional correlation between parents and children (in the sense that the regressions are estimated on only one observation per dyad). In addition, they often consider the well-being levels of parents and children that are measured at the same point in time (and therefore of parents and children at very different ages). This latter

introduces a risk of simultaneity bias from shared contemporaneous circumstances. These can be either aggregate (for example local labour-market conditions) or rather at the household level (health problems of another household member, say). These will mechanically increase the parent–child correlation in well-being, but do not reflect intergenerational transmission. Measuring parental and child well-being at the same time also raises concerns about reverse causality, whereby parental well-being may be lower because of problems experienced by the child.

The distinctive feature of our empirical analysis, relative to existing work, is that we compare the well-being of parents and children who are the same age, a, and so observed in different calendar years (t and t' in Equation (1) above). We believe that this matching by age helps identify the intergenerational correlation as it reduces concerns about contemporaneous shocks affecting both generations. We therefore interpret the estimated β coefficient in Equation (1) as an age-adjusted intergenerational association, and later report additional robustness checks that further address concerns about reverse causality and omitted variables.

d. Estimation Sample and Descriptive Statistics

The estimation sample is drawn from the BHPS and UKHLS, and consists of parent–child dyads of the same age. Age is measured in completed years at the time of interview, and a dyad is formed whenever the child is observed at a given age and the parent had also been observed at that same age in the past. Children can therefore appear in the same dyad at different ages (matched to their mother when both were aged 22 and 23, for example) and in different dyads at the same age (matched to both their mother and father at age 22, say); equally, parents can appear in multiple dyads if they have more than one child. It is worth emphasising that the parent need not have had

a child at age a: a child who is interviewed at age 20 for example can be matched to their parent's interview at age 20, even if the child was only born when the parent was age 25.

The gap in terms of survey year between parents and children is mechanically given by the parent's age when the child was born. In our data, this gap ranges from a minimum of 15 years to a maximum of 33, with an average value of 24. There are of course parents who have children at ages above 33, but we do not (yet) have observations on these parents and their children when they are the same age. In the data we analyse, all of the information on the children at age a comes from the UKHLS and that on the parents at the same age from the BHPS; as the UKHLS continues we will be able to identify dyads of this kind both of whom are interviewed in the UKHLS.

In addition to identifying the dyads above, we require that the dyad observations have non-missing information on the set of parent and child characteristics that appear in the empirical analysis. We impose this requirement with respect to the variables in the most complete of the extended specifications, so that the baseline and various extended regressions are all estimated using the same observations. This ensures that any differences in the results across specifications do not reflect changes in sample composition.

The two subjective well-being measures do not appear in exactly the same waves. The GHQ appears in all BHPS and UKHLS waves, whereas life satisfaction only appeared starting in BHPS Wave 6 (1996) and was not present in BHPS Wave 11. We therefore have two estimation samples: a larger one for the analyses using the GHQ, and a smaller one for those on life satisfaction. The GHQ estimation sample consists of 8,979 observations on 2,293 dyads, while that for life satisfaction sample includes 2,896 observations on 1,098 dyads.

The dyads in our sample are observed an average of 3.9 times in the GHQ sample and 2.6 times in the life-satisfaction sample. The latter sample has more dyads that are only observed a few times: 33.2% of dyads only appear once and almost three quarters (73.0%) have three or fewer observations. In the longer GHQ sample, these figures are 24.5% and 54.8%. At the other end of the scale, 19.4% of GHQ dyads are observed seven or more times, but almost no life-satisfaction dyads are (2.6%). In both samples, around 60% of dyads include parents who appear in more than one parent–child pair, and roughly one-third of dyads correspond to families in which only one parent is observed.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the GHQ and life-satisfaction samples. As shown in the last column, the mean values of a number of characteristics are significantly different from each other in the two samples. However, these differences are mostly only small in size so that the two samples are in practice comparable in terms of these observable variables.

The first row of Table 1 shows the dyad-level variable that is common to the parent and child, namely age. The average age at interview is around 36 in both of these same-age parent-child dyad samples.[4] The remainder of the table is split into child and parent characteristics. One way to read the table is by row, comparing the average child and parent outcomes measured at the same age: this comparison highlights the differences across generations net of lifecycle effects. Parents and children almost certainly differ along one important dimension by construction: selection into parenthood. The parents in the sample either already have children or will have in the sample, whereas not all of their children will be observed as parents themselves. This selection likely

[4] As an example, age 36 corresponds to a parent born in 1960 interviewed in 1996, who had a child when aged 22 (in 1982) who is interviewed when also age 36 in 2018.

explains part of the child-parent differences in Table 1. For example, the percentage married is almost twice as high for parents than for their children.

Children are more educated than their parents on average. A little over half of dyad observations are on daughters, and around two-thirds involve mothers rather than fathers. This gender imbalance among parents is unsurprising: mothers are often younger than fathers at the time of childbirth, and the smaller age gap to their children mechanically makes them more likely to be observed in age-matched dyads. In addition, fathers are more likely to drop out of the survey following partnership dissolution and may be harder to track in subsequent survey waves, increasing attrition among men at the parent level.[5]

3. Results

a. The Intergenerational Transmission of Well-being Levels

Before turning to the multivariate regression results, we present some simple evidence from the raw data. Figure 1 plots the well-being gaps between children and their parents at the same age. The distributions of both the GHQ and life satisfaction gaps are fairly tightly centred around zero,

[5] It is also useful to compare the parents and children who are observed at least once in a valid dyad to those who are not. Appendix Tables C1 and C2 reveal a number of differences between the two samples. Some of these are mechanical, and reflect the age-matching used to construct the estimation sample. Parents in the estimation sample are on average younger than those who are not, reflecting that older parents are less likely to have a child who is observed at the same age in the BHPS/UKHLS data (which spans around 35 years). The mirror image of younger parents is the presence of relatively older children in the estimation sample. These age differences are reflected in household incomes. Individuals in valid dyads are also a little less educated, although the differences are only small in size. We also see that sample respondents have somewhat lower wellbeing (higher GHQ scores and lower life satisfaction). The standard BHPS/UKHLS weights were not designed for the specific selection problem we face here, which depends jointly on parent characteristics, child characteristics, and the timing of their observations. However, Appendix Tables C1 and C2 do not suggest that selection lies behind our estimates. If anything, given the positive interactions between transmission and parental education/income reported in Table 5, reweighting towards the broader parent population would increase, rather than reduce, the estimated intergenerational transmission of wellbeing.

in line with considerable intergenerational association in subjective well-being. Table 2 then provides a first estimate of this association in the form of a regression coefficient. The parent–child association in psychological distress is 0.107 and statistically significant; the analogous figure for life satisfaction is almost the same, at 0.118. These are non-trivial figures, but notably smaller than the corresponding correlations in two standard socioeconomic outcomes using the same sample: 0.141 for income and 0.325 for years of education. They are also smaller than the correlations in a number of measures of marital and labour-force status that appear in Table 2.

As noted in Section 2.c above, these correlation coefficients refer to parents and children at the same age (and therefore different survey waves). We argued there that the (more-common) correlation between parental and child outcomes measured contemporaneously may well be biased upwards by simultaneity and reverse causality. To show how our age-matching affects these correlations, we take the same dyads as above, and instead calculate the average well-being of the parent in all of the waves in which they are interviewed, whether they are the same age as their child or not, and the analogous measure for the child. The parents and children have to be observed at least once at the same age (to be in the dyad) but most of the observations in this exercise refer to similar survey waves but different ages. The correlations between child and parental well-being here are notably larger than those in Table 2, at 0.224 for psychological distress and 0.244 for life satisfaction. It is worth noting that the same coefficient inflation is found for the intergenerational correlation of income: in Table 2 this was 0.141, whereas the figure without matching by age is much larger at 0.407.

The finding that the intergenerational correlation is smaller when dyads are matched by age can also be seen in the existing work listed in Appendix A. Many of these do not impose age comparability between parents and children, and broadly produce larger figures for

intergenerational correlation. A smaller number of papers do partially address age comparability (Johnston *et al.*, 2013; Dang and Abanokova, 2022; Vera-Toscano and Brown, 2022; Kollamparambil, 2024), and these generally yield smaller intergenerational coefficients. We will return to the effect of age matching in the estimation of intergeneration correlations in the robustness checks.

Table 3 then presents the various estimates from Equation (1). The baseline specification in column (1) only controls for age and the survey waves in which the child and parents were interviewed. In the child psychological distress regression, the estimated coefficient on parental psychological distress is 0.105, with the analogous figure for life satisfaction being 0.115. Both coefficients are precisely estimated and closely mirror the estimated coefficients with no controls in Table 2, so that differences in age profiles and survey timing account for little of the observed intergenerational correlation.

We now turn to potential mediation by two of the variables that have been the focus of much of the literature on intergenerational correlation: income and education. Controlling for child and parent income in column (2) leads to a noticeable, but modest, drop in the estimated transmission coefficients to 0.095 for psychological distress and 0.099 for life satisfaction. By contrast, holding child and parent education constant in column (3) barely affects these estimates, which at 0.104 and 0.115 are almost identical to their baseline values. The same conclusion holds when comparing columns (2) and (4), which latter controls for both income and education at the same time. While both income and education are intergenerationally correlated (see Table 2), the difference in mediation reflects that subjective well-being is only weakly correlated with education in our sample whereas the correlation with income is larger.

Introducing a full set of demographic and socioeconomic controls for both parents and children in column (5) leads to a further, although still moderate, attenuation of the coefficients. The intergenerational transmission coefficient is now 0.073 for psychological distress and 0.064 for life satisfaction, around 30 to 40 per cent lower than their baseline values.

The conclusion from Table 3 is then that there is significant intergenerational persistence in subjective well-being, even after controlling for the transmission of income, education, labour-force status, marital status, the number of children and health, and that this persistence is remarkably similar for life satisfaction and psychological distress.

b. Robustness Checks

Table 4 reports the results of a number of robustness tests, applied to the extended specification in column (5) of Table 3. Columns (1) to (4) consider alternative indices of psychological distress from the 12 GHQ questions. The first uses the Caseness score, which is the count of questions for which the response is in one of the two 'low well-being' categories (and thus runs from 0 to 12), and the next three consider the main sub-components of the GHQ score. In all four cases, the intergenerational transmission coefficients are positive, statistically significant, and similar in size to those in Table 3. Columns (5) and (6) then show the results from ordered probit regressions of psychological distress and life satisfaction respectively: the estimated intergenerational coefficients remain positive and significant.

One concern is that our main estimates may partly reflect reverse causality or omitted variables operating through the child. The well-being of parents observed after the birth of their child may

be affected by the child's early health, behaviour or wellbeing. These early child characteristics are also likely predictive of the child's later wellbeing. To address this potential omitted-variable issue we re-estimate the specifications in Table 3 on the sub-sample of dyads for which parental wellbeing is measured before the child's birth. This restriction very substantially reduces the sample size, from 8960 to 1316 observations for the GHQ sample and 2982 to 312 observations in the life-satisfaction sample. Nevertheless, the full-specification estimates reported in Column (5) of Appendix Table C3 are similar in size to those in Table 3, providing some reassurance that the main results are not explained by reverse causality.

As life satisfaction is measured on a bounded Likert scale, our results may in principle be sensitive to monotonic transformations of the response scale (Bond and Lang, 2019). Recent work by Kaiser and Lepinteur (2025) shows that such transformations can, in some cases, lead to reversals in the sign and the loss of statistical significance of the estimated coefficients in well-being regressions. We apply the tests proposed in Kaiser and Lepinteur (2025) to assess the robustness of our results on the intergenerational transmission of life satisfaction to positive monotonic transformations of the child's response scale.[6] We find that there exists no transformation of this scale that would reverse the sign of the estimated intergenerational transmission coefficient. Statistical significance may, in principle, be lost under some transformations, but the minimal transformation required for this to come about corresponds to a 'cost' figure of 0.76, which is well above the range of reasonable transformation costs (up to 0.10-0.15) that Kaiser and Lepinteur (2025) deem plausible

[6] We do not carry out this test for the GHQ, as it is constructed from multiple items and therefore does not rely on a single bounded response scale subject to arbitrary monotonic rescaling in the same way as the single-item life satisfaction measure does.

based on experimental evidence on scale use. We therefore conclude that our life-satisfaction results are robust to risks of reversal.

Another issue is that the estimated intergenerational correlations for variables measured on bounded scales may be affected by floor or ceiling effects. Appendix Table C4 thus shows the results after excluding observations in which either the parent or the child appears in the top or bottom wellbeing category, producing estimates that are very similar to those using the baseline sample.

Our last test relates to the role of exact age matching in the estimation of intergenerational correlations. Figure 2 plots the estimated intergenerational coefficients for GHQ, life satisfaction and income for samples that progressively widen the age window used to define the estimation sample. The first point on the left in each graph refers to exact age matching and plots the values in Table 2. The next point keeps the same dyads as in the exact age matching but now calculates the average well-being or income of the parent and child adding points where the parent is one year older/younger than the child. The second point again calculates averages and adds points where the age gap is ±2 years, and so on up to ±20 years. As the age gap widens, the measures increasingly combine observations referring to parents and children who are at different stages of the life cycle. The estimated intergenerational coefficients for all three measures rise steadily as the age intervals widen, and converge towards the coefficients when there is no age matching noted at the beginning of Section 3.a above (0.224, 0.240 and 0.407 for GHQ, life satisfaction and income, respectively).

c. Heterogeneity

Our results so far have treated the intergenerational transmission of subjective well-being as homogeneous across families. However, the literature on the intergenerational transmission of income and education often finds evidence of heterogeneity: advantaged parents may be better able to protect their children from downward mobility, transmit resources, or buffer them against adverse circumstances (Holm and Jaeger, 2008; Obermeier and Schneider, 2015). We therefore ask whether there is heterogeneity in well-being transmission across a number of child, parent and dyad characteristics, interacting parental well-being in Equation (1) with dummy variables for the child being female, the parent being the mother, gender concordance between parent and child, dyads above the median age, parents who are more educated and have higher income, parents who are married, parents and children living in the same region, and parents with higher levels of well-being. As GHQ is a measure of psychological distress, high well-being is defined as low parental GHQ and high parental life satisfaction in the relevant regressions. The estimated interaction coefficients appear in Tables 5 and 6 for psychological distress and life satisfaction respectively.

There is overall little robust evidence of heterogeneity in intergenerational well-being transmission. Some of the estimated interaction terms are non-negligible in size, but rarely statistically significant and are not consistent between psychological distress and life satisfaction. For example, the interaction with above the median dyad age is negative for psychological distress but positive for life satisfaction, while the gender interactions are small and statistically insignificant in both tables. The interactions with parental education, income, marital status and well-being are often positive and sometimes sizeable, especially in the life-satisfaction regressions, but are generally imprecisely estimated. This imprecision is important: the heterogeneity analysis splits an already restricted parent-child-age matched sample into smaller cells, and the resulting

statistical power is particularly limited for life satisfaction. We therefore interpret these results as exploratory. They do not rule out the presence of heterogeneity in the intergenerational transmission of well-being, but also do not provide strong evidence of systematic differences in the coefficients in Table 3 across the dimensions considered here.

d. The Intergenerational Transmission of Well-being Slopes

Of the 2,293 and 1,098 parent–child dyads in the GHQ and life satisfaction samples, 1,731 and 734 respectively are observed at multiple ages. This within-dyad age variation allows us to include parent–child dyad fixed effects. These latter will absorb all of the time-invariant characteristics of the child-parent pair, so that identification comes from within-dyad variation over different ages. The estimated coefficients here therefore reflect the intergenerational correlation in changes in subjective well-being at given ages rather than in their levels.

For psychological distress as measured by the GHQ, the intergenerational coefficient remains positive and statistically significant in the dyad fixed-effects specification. In Column (1) of Table 7, parental psychological distress at age a that is one-standard-deviation above the parent's mean level is associated with child psychological distress at the same age that is 0.034 standard deviations above the child's mean level ($p = 0.01$). This association is robust to the inclusion of time-varying controls in Column (2).

By contrast, the corresponding estimates for life satisfaction in Columns (4) and (5) are smaller and not statistically significant (although they are also not significantly different in size from those in the psychological distress regressions). The smaller coefficients for life satisfaction may reflect

the particularity of the (shorter) sample period over which the information was collected,[7] that there may be less variation in the (1-7) life satisfaction score within individuals than in the (0-36) GHQ measure, or that there is less panel depth for the former (with only 28 life satisfaction dyads that are observed more than 7 times, for example, as opposed to a figure of 445 for the psychological distress dyads). As future waves of the UKHLS become available, the increasing number of observations on dyads for both well-being measures will allow for the more-accurate estimation of the difference (if any) in the intergenerational correlation of well-being.

4. Conclusions

We here set out to examine whether the established finding of intergenerational persistence in a number of economic outcomes also applies to subjective well-being. While income and education have often been the focus of the literature on intergenerational transmission, it can be argued that they are valued largely because of their presumed effect on how individuals experience and evaluate their lives.

The central and novel feature of our empirical approach is that we compare parents and children at the same age, who are thus interviewed many years apart. By matching generations along the age dimension, we avoid life-cycle bias in well-being correlations, and reduce the risk that the estimated intergenerational correlation reflect simultaneity bias or reverse causality. We find clear evidence of intergenerational persistence in well-being, although substantially smaller in size than that for income and education. Income accounts for a small part of this well-being transmission,

[7] However, re-estimating the GHQ regression in column (2) using only the observations for which life satisfaction is also observed for both parents and children, produces a higher standard error in the GHQ regression but a point estimate that is essentially unchanged (0.030 with a standard error of 0.022).

but educational transmission seems to play almost no role. This is consistent with income being more strongly correlated with well-being than is education. The correlation between child and parent well-being also continues to hold when controlling for labour-force status, marital status, health and number of children, and seems remarkably stable across different family contexts. We last estimate fixed-effect regressions and show that changes in parents' well-being over the life cycle are associated with changes in their children's well-being at the same ages.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the established finding of intergenerational correlation in economic outcomes does not necessarily inform us about the same correlation in terms of well-being. The intergenerational correlation in well-being is smaller than that for income, for example, and the finding that well-being continues to be correlated between children and their parents even when income and education are held constant underlines that well-being persistence is different from economic persistence. Measuring well-being directly therefore provides novel information about the intergenerational transmission of welfare.

More broadly, our results highlight the value of longitudinal data that allow for the comparison of well-being across generations of related individuals. We find that the well-being of children and their parents are indeed correlated, in levels and slopes: this suggests that the transmission across generations does not only apply to economic resources. Understanding how this comes about, for example in the way in which related individuals report their well-being (Oswald, 2008) or the intergenerational transmission of culture (Bisin and Verdier, 2000), represents an important avenue for future work. This will require both longer-running UK data, to establish whether the patterns documented here persist across cohorts and over a wider part of the life cycle, and comparable long-run data from other countries, to assess whether they generalise beyond the British institutional context.

From a policy perspective, our results should not be read as showing that policies which improve the well-being of one generation will necessarily raise the well-being of the next. Our estimates are intergenerational associations, and do not identify the causal mechanisms that lie behind them. They nevertheless suggest that well-being may be an additional dimension along which advantage and disadvantage persist across generations. This is normatively ambiguous. The transmission of high well-being may be viewed positively, but the transmission of low well-being may reinforce inequalities in welfare that are not fully captured by income or education. The policy implication is therefore not simply that current generations should be prioritised in the hope of indirect benefits for their children, but rather that interventions aimed at reducing persistent low well-being may have broader intergenerational relevance. Where future research establishes causal channels, cost-effectiveness evaluations should take seriously the possibility that some benefits accrue beyond the directly-treated generation.

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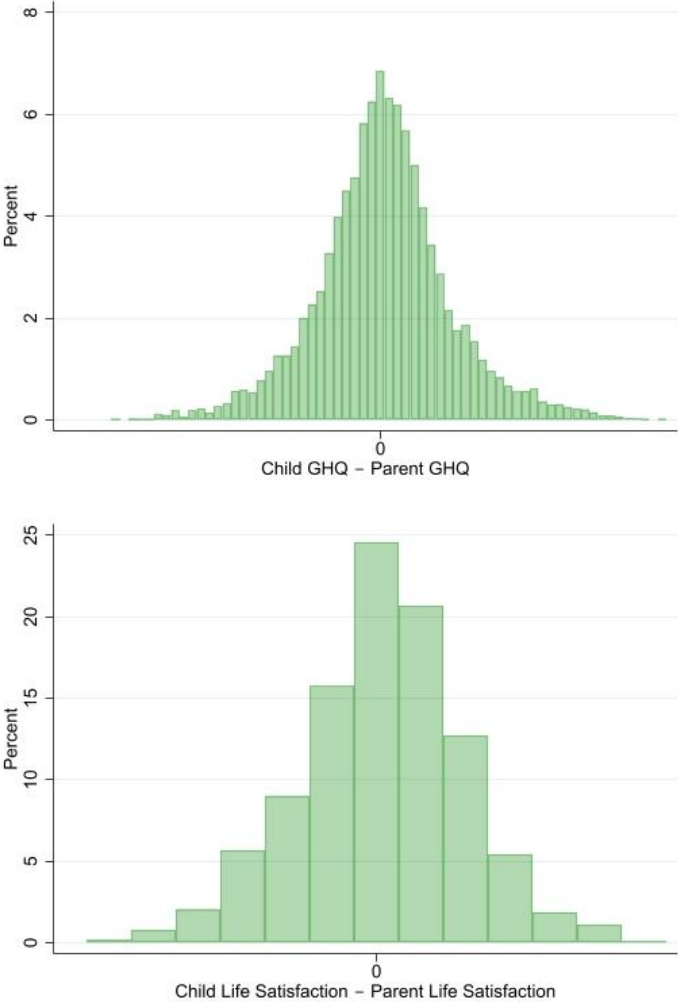
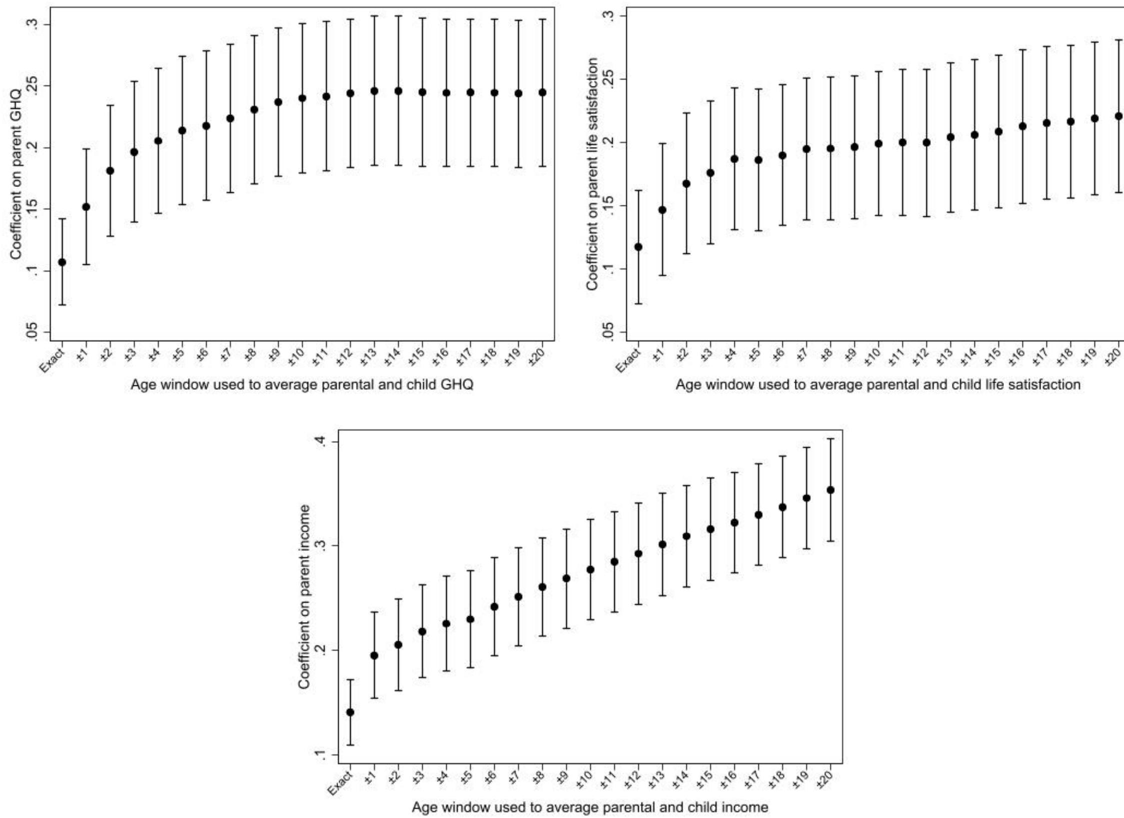
Figures and Tables

Figure 1: The gap in GHQ and life satisfaction between children and parents at the same age



Note: The sample consists of children with GHQ/life satisfaction scores for whom there is information on the GHQ/life satisfaction of their parents at the same age.

Figure 2: Regression coefficients with different degrees of age matching



Notes: Each point shows the coefficient from a regression of the child outcome on the corresponding parental outcome using the same dyads as in Table 2. The specification on the left (with the label "Exact") uses parent and child outcomes measured at the same age. The remaining specifications plot the estimated correlation between averages of parent and child outcomes within symmetric age windows around the matched age, ranging from ±1 year to ±20 years. Standard errors are clustered at the dyad level. The vertical bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics – Estimation Sample

	GHQ Sample		Life Satisfaction Sample		Difference in means - P-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Dyad Variable:					
Age	36.33	11.52	36.66	11.93	0.19
Child Variables:					
GHQ (0-36)	12.31	6.07			
Life satisfaction (1-7)			5.09	1.38	
Female (%)	54.50		54.98		0.65
Still lives with mother (%)	22.32		23.37		0.24
Still lives with father (%)	13.98		12.93		0.15
Employed (%)	76.13		74.72		0.13
Unemployed (%)	5.59		6.09		0.32
Out of the labour force (%)	18.28		19.19		0.27
Number of own children in household	0.74	1.02	0.70	1.02	0.04
Never married (%)	37.90		40.35		0.02
Married (%)	55.64		52.70		0.01
Separated (%)	1.86		1.49		0.18
Divorced (%)	4.06		5.01		0.03
Widowed (%)	0.54		0.45		0.57
Log net monthly household income	7.97	0.64	7.93	0.65	0.00
Years of Education	13.48	2.10	13.32	2.06	0.00
No. GP visit: zero (%)	33.06		35.06		0.05
Parent Variables:					
GHQ (0-36)	11.92	5.68			
Life satisfaction (1-7)			4.91	1.39	
Mother (%)	68.00		75.79		0.00
Employed (%)	67.23		63.04		0.00
Unemployed (%)	5.23		4.60		0.18
Out of the labour force (%)	27.53		32.37		0.00
Number of own children in household	1.19	1.23	1.11	1.21	0.00
Never married (%)	18.37		22.41		0.00
Married (%)	68.43		61.20		0.00
Separated (%)	2.67		2.84		0.63
Divorced (%)	8.16		10.30		0.00
Widowed (%)	2.38		3.25		0.01
Log net monthly household income	7.88	0.67	7.84	0.68	0.00
Years of education	11.92	1.67	11.73	1.48	0.00
No GP visits (%)	23.48		21.54		0.03
Observations	8960		2892		
Dyads	2290		1096		

Notes: The sample consists of children with GHQ/life-satisfaction scores for whom there is information on the GHQ/life satisfaction of their parents at the same age. The last column lists the p-values for the differences in means between the GHQ and life-satisfaction samples.

Table 2: Simple Regression Coefficients

Outcome	Parent–child coefficients	N
Never married	0.528	8960
Years of education	0.325	8960
Married	0.313	8960
Employment	0.220	8960
Out of the labour force	0.153	8960
Real net monthly household income (in logs)	0.141	8960
Life satisfaction	**0.118**	**2892**
GHQ	**0.107**	**8960**
Unemployment	0.053	8960
No GP visits	0.032	8960
Other marital status	0.030	8960

Notes: The sample consists of children with GHQ/life satisfaction scores for whom there is information on the GHQ/life satisfaction of their parents at the same age. Continuous variables are standardised to have zero mean and unit variance using the pooled distribution across children and parents. The outcome variables are ordered by the size of the regression coefficient. All of the coefficients are significant at the 1 per cent level.

Table 3: The Intergenerational Transmission of Subjective Well-being – Pooled Results

	GHQ (Child)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
GHQ (Parent)	0.105***	0.095***	0.104***	0.095***	0.073***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Observations	8960	8960	8960	8960	8960
Dyads	2290	2290	2290	2290	2290
Child Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Parent Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Child Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Controls	.	.	.	.	✓
Child Controls	.	.	.	.	✓
	Life Satisfaction (Child)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Life Satisfaction (Parent)	0.115***	0.099***	0.115***	0.101***	0.068***
	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.021)
Observations	2892	2892	2892	2892	2892
Dyads	1096	1096	1096	1096	1096
Child Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Parent Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Child Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Controls	.	.	.	.	✓
Child Controls	.	.	.	.	✓

Notes: The sample consists of children with GHQ/life satisfaction scores for whom there is information on the GHQ/life satisfaction of their parents at the same age. The measures of GHQ and life satisfaction are standardised to mean zero and unit variance using the pooled child–parent distribution within each measure. All regressions include dummies for the interview waves of the child and the parent, and the age of the child. “Child Income” and “Parent Income” correspond to the real net monthly household income in logs. “Child Education” and “Parent Education” are expressed in years of education. “Parent controls” are gender, marital status, labour-force status, the number of children, a dummy for no visits to a GP over the last 12 months and region fixed effects and are measured when the parent was the same age as their child. “Child controls” are the same as those for the parent, and a dummy for living with the parent. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the dyad level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 4: The Intergenerational Transmission of Subjective Well-Being – Robustness Checks

	Child:					
	Caseness GHQ	Social Dysfunction	Anxiety and Depression	Loss of Confidence	GHQ	Life Satisfaction
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Parent:						
Caseness GHQ	0.070^{***}					
	(0.015)					
Social Dysfunction		0.055^{***}				
		(0.013)				
Anxiety and Depression			0.065^{***}			
			(0.015)			
Loss of Confidence				0.072^{***}		
				(0.017)		
GHQ					0.077^{***}	
					(0.016)	
Life Satisfaction						0.084^{***}
						(0.024)
Observations	8960	8960	8960	8960	8960	2892
Dyads	2290	2290	2290	2290	2290	1096

Notes: The sample consists of children with GHQ/life satisfaction scores for whom there is information on the GHQ/life satisfaction of their parents at the same age. Measures of GHQ and life satisfaction are standardised to mean zero and unit variance using the pooled child–parent distribution within each measure. Columns (5) and (6) report marginal effects from ordered probit regressions. All regressions include all the same parent and child controls (gender, real net monthly household income in logs, years of education, marital status, labour-force status, the number of children, a dummy for no visits to a GP over the last 12 months, region fixed effects and wave of interview), child age dummies and a dummy for the child still living with the parent at the time of the UKHLS interview. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the dyad level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 5: The Intergenerational Transmission of GHQ – Heterogeneity Analysis

	GHQ (Child)								
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
GHQ (Parent)	0.073***	0.080***	0.065***	0.100***	0.061***	0.068***	0.027	0.100***	0.100***
	(0.022)	(0.029)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.034)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Interacted with:									
Daughter	-0.001								
	(0.032)								
Mother		-0.009							
		(0.035)							
Same-gender dyad			0.015						
			(0.032)						
Above median age (Dyad)				-0.053*					
				(0.029)					
High education (Parent)					0.042				
					(0.033)				
High income (Parent)						0.009			
						(0.029)			
Married (Parent)							0.054		
							(0.038)		
Live in the same region (Dyad)								-0.042	
								(0.030)	
Low GHQ (Parent)									-0.042
									(0.030)
Observations	8960	8960	8960	8960	8960	8960	8960	8960	8960
Dyads	2290	2290	2290	2290	2290	2290	2290	2290	2290

Notes: The sample consists of children with GHQ scores for whom there is information on the GHQ of their parents at the same age. GHQ is standardised to mean zero and unit variance using the pooled child–parent distribution within each measure. All regressions include all the same parent and child controls (gender, real net monthly household income in logs, years of education, marital status, labour-force status, the number of children, a dummy for no visits to a GP over the last 12 months, region fixed effects and wave of interview), child age dummies and a dummy for the child still living with the parent at the time of the UKHLS interview. 'High education' and 'High income' refer respectively to parents with education and income above the median in the sample. 'Low GHQ' refers to parents with GHQ score below the median in the sample. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the dyad level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 6: The Intergenerational Transmission of Life Satisfaction – Heterogeneity Analysis

	Life Satisfaction (Child)								
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Life Satisfaction (Parent)	0.055*	0.095**	0.062**	0.056*	0.054**	0.046*	-0.015	0.062*	0.042
	(0.030)	(0.041)	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.024)	(0.027)	(0.051)	(0.034)	(0.031)
Interacted with:									
Daughter	0.024								
	(0.042)								
Mother		-0.035							
		(0.047)							
Same-gender dyad			0.012						
			(0.042)						
Above median age (Dyad)				0.022					
				(0.042)					
High education (Parent)					0.066				
					(0.051)				
High income (Parent)						0.057			
						(0.041)			
Married (Parent)							0.096*		
							(0.056)		
Live in the same region (Dyad)								0.010	
								(0.043)	
High Life Satisfaction (Parent)									0.154
									(0.108)
Observations	2892	2892	2892	2892	2892	2892	2892	2892	2892
Dyads	1092	1092	1092	1092	1092	1092	1092	1092	1092

Notes: The sample consists of children with life satisfaction scores for whom there is information on the life satisfaction of their parents at the same age. Life satisfaction is standardised to mean zero and unit variance using the pooled child–parent distribution within each measure. All regressions include all the same parent and child controls (gender, real net monthly household income in logs, years of education, marital status, labour-force status, the number of children, a dummy for no visits to a GP over the last 12 months, region fixed effects and wave of interview), child age dummies and a dummy for the child still living with the parent at the time of the UKHLS interview. 'High education', 'High income' and 'High Life Satisfaction' refer respectively to parents with education, income and life satisfaction above the median in the sample. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the dyad level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 7: The Intergenerational Transmission of Subjective Well-Being – Panel Results

	Child Outcomes			
	GHQ		Life Satisfaction	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Parent Outcomes:				
GHQ	0.034***	0.029**		
	(0.013)	(0.013)		
Life Satisfaction			0.016	0.018
			(0.028)	(0.028)
Observations	8960	8960	2892	2892
Dyads	2290	2290	1096	1096
Parent Controls	.	✓	.	✓
Child Controls	.	✓	.	✓

Notes: The sample consists of children with GHQ/life satisfaction scores for whom there is information on the GHQ/life satisfaction of their parents at the same age. Measures of GHQ and life satisfaction are standardised to mean zero and unit variance using the pooled child–parent distribution within each measure. All regressions include dummies for the interview waves of the child and the parent, dummies for the age of the child, and dyad fixed effects. "Child Income" and "Parent Income" correspond to the real net monthly household income in logs. "Child Education" and "Parent Education" are expressed in years of education. "Parent controls" are marital status, labour-force status, the number of children, a dummy for no visits to a GP over the last 12 months and region fixed effects, and are measured when the parent was the same age as their child. "Child controls" are the same as those for the parent, and a dummy for living with the parent. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the dyad level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Appendix A: Some Existing Work on the Intergenerational Correlation of Subjective well-being

Authors	Year of data	Country - Survey	Measure of SWB	Observed at the same age	Size of correlation
Johnston *et al.* (2013)	1975 - 2008	UK - BCS	Subset of Malaise score	Partial	OLS coefficient = 0.13-0.19
Headey *et al.* (2014)	1984 - 2008	Germany - SOEP	Life satisfaction in 5-year bands	No	Correlation coefficient is 0.25-0.40
Landstedt and Almquist (2019)	1953 - 2016	Sweden - SBC Multigen	Mental health problems from register data	Partial	Odds ratio = 1.97
Dang and Abanokova (2022)	1994 - 2019	Russia - RLMS	Life satisfaction	Partial	OLS coefficient = 0.11
Augustijn (2022)	2013 - 2017	Germany - SOEP	Life satisfaction	No	OLS coefficient (mothers) = 0.14 OLS coefficient (fathers) = 0.07
Vera-Toscano and Brown (2022)	20019 - 2019	Australia - HILDA	Mental health from Satisfaction-36	Partial	OLS coefficient = 0.20
Bencsik *et al.* (2023)	1991 - 2017	UK - BHPS/UKHLS	SF-12 based measures	No	OLS coefficient = 0.15-0.21 Correlation of percentile ranks = 0.17-0.20
Simpson *et al.* (2023)	2009 - 2019	UK - UKHLS	GHQ for mothers, SDQ for children	No	Correlation of percentile ranks = 0.10-0.15
Bütikofer *et al.* (2024)	1992 - 2020	Norway - Matched administrative records	Objective measures of health (e.g. health-care visit with a mental-health specialist)	No	OLS coefficient = 0.09-0.10
Kollamparambil (2024)	2008 - 2017	South Africa - NIDS	Life satisfaction	Partial	Correlation coefficient same t = 0.40 10 years apart = 0.20 10 years apart plus age restrictions = 0.08
Hervé *et al.* (2025)	2015 - 2022	India - ASER	Depression and Anxiety (GAD-7 and PHQ-9)	No	Correlation of standardised scores = 0.7
Hsieh *et al.* (2025)	2016 - 2024	US - PSFD	Psychological distress scale	No	OLS coefficients = 0.05-0.10
Ishii *et al.* (2025)	2004 - 2018	Japan - JHPS	Lifetime life satisfaction	No	Correlation of percentile ranks = 0.25
Davis *et al.* (2025)	1984 - 2024	Six countries - CPF	Average life satisfaction harmonised 1-5 by ventile	No	Correlation coefficient 0.16-0.55

Notes: Parents are observed around age 36 and children around age 30 in Johnston *et al.* (2013). Parents are observed between 1953 and 1972 and children between 1973 and 2016 in Landstedt and Almquist (2019). Parents are observed when the childhood of their children and children around age 25-35 in Vera-Toscano and Brown (2022). Parents and children are observed with an age gap of 10 years in some regressions in Kollamparambil (2024). All estimations are cross-section (only one observation per dyad in the empirical analysis). The four approaches that are closer to ours (Johnston *et al.*, 2013; Dang and Abanokova, 2022; Vera-Toscano and Brown, 2022; Kollamparambil, 2024) produce smaller coefficients than the others in this table, and ours (with exact age matching) are even smaller.

Appendix B: The 12-item General Health Questionnaire

The 12 GHQ questions appear in the BHPS/UKHLS as follows:

"The next questions are about how you have been feeling over the last few weeks.

1. Have you recently been able to concentrate on whatever you're doing?
2. Have you recently lost much sleep over worry?
3. Have you recently felt that you were playing a useful part in things?
4. Have you recently felt capable of making decisions about things?
5. Have you recently felt constantly under strain?
6. Have you recently felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?
7. Have you recently been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?
8. Have you recently been able to face up to problems?
9. Have you recently been feeling unhappy or depressed?
10. Have you recently been losing confidence in yourself?
11. Have you recently been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?
12. Have you recently been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered?"

The responses to all 12 of these questions are on a four-point scale: 'More so than usual', 'About the same as usual', 'Less so than usual', 'Much less than usual'.

Appendix C: Additional Tables

Table C1: Differences in means between parents included and not included in our estimation sample

	Part of the dyads:		Difference	
	Yes N=9198	No N =39034	Mean	S.E.
GHQ (0-36)	11.78	11.46	0.322***	(0.064)
Life satisfaction (1-7)	4.994	5.130	-0.135***	(0.018)
Mother (%)	68.60	59.18	9.423***	(0.564)
Age	35.90	37.70	-1.807***	(0.106)
Employed (%)	75.00	75.32	-0.330	(0.500)
Unemployed (%)	3.588	4.068	-0.481*	(0.226)
Out of the labour force (%)	21.42	20.61	0.810	(0.470)
Never married (%)	20.77	19.69	1.080*	(0.463)
Married (%)	67.17	66.92	0.251	(0.545)
Separated (%)	2.457	3.074	-0.617**	(0.196)
Divorced (%)	8.719	9.330	-0.611	(0.335)
Widowed (%)	0.891	0.994	-0.103	(0.114)
Log net monthly household income	7.650	7.698	-0.048***	(0.009)
Years of education	12.35	12.63	-0.281***	(0.023)
No GP visits (%)	25.55	26.32	-0.772	(0.509)

Notes: The first column reports the average value of a number of variables for the parents who are observed at least once in our estimation sample. The second column reports the same statistics for those who are parents but for whom we do not observe a valid dyad. The sample used to calculate the average values of life satisfaction is smaller (6038 against 27946 observations). * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table C2: Differences in means between children included and not included in our estimation sample

	Part of the dyads:		Difference	
	Yes N=9724	No N =10378	Mean	S.E.
GHQ (0-36)	12.09	11.794	0.299***	(0.084)
Life satisfaction (1-7)	5.125	5.182	-0.057**	(0.020)
Female (%)	55.39	53.54	1.852**	(0.703)
Age	35.49	32.41	3.083***	(0.191)
Employed (%)	72.80	62.90	9.897***	(0.656)
Unemployed (%)	5.348	5.839	-0.492	(0.325)
Out of the labour force (%)	21.85	31.26	-9.405***	(0.621)
Never married (%)	41.86	61.88	-20.03***	(0.691)
Married (%)	51.84	33.86	17.98***	(0.686)
Separated (%)	1.615	0.954	0.661***	(0.158)
Divorced (%)	4.247	2.573	1.674***	(0.255)
Widowed (%)	0.442	0.732	-0.290**	(0.108)
Log net monthly household income	8.053	8.028	0.025*	(0.012)
Years of education	13.54	13.38	0.160***	(0.030)
No GP visits (%)	40.09	40.79	-0.702	(0.693)

Notes: The first column reports the average value of a number of variables for the children who are observed at least once in our estimation sample. The second column reports the same statistics for those who are identified as 'children' but for whom we do not observe a valid dyad. The sample used to calculate the average values of life satisfaction are smaller (9708 against 10362 observations). * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table C3: The Intergenerational Transmission of Subjective Well-being – Pooled Results for Dyads at Age before birth of Child

	GHQ (Child)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
GHQ (Parent)	0.074*	0.078*	0.080**	0.083**	0.070*
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.036)
Observations	1316	1316	1316	1316	1316
Dyads	602	602	602	602	602
Child Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Parent Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Child Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Controls	.	.	.	.	✓
Child Controls	.	.	.	.	✓
	Life Satisfaction (Child)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Life Satisfaction (Parent)	0.074	0.070	0.100	0.096	0.084
	(0.074)	(0.073)	(0.068)	(0.067)	(0.070)
Observations	312	312	312	312	312
Dyads	183	183	183	183	183
Child Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Parent Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Child Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Controls	.	.	.	.	✓
Child Controls	.	.	.	.	✓

Notes: The sample consists of children with GHQ/life satisfaction scores for whom there is information on the GHQ/life satisfaction of their parents at the same age before the children were not born. The measures of GHQ and life satisfaction are standardised to mean zero and unit variance using the pooled child–parent distribution within each measure. All regressions include dummies for the interview waves of the child and the parent, and the age of the child. "Child Income" and "Parent Income" correspond to the real net monthly household income in logs. "Child Education" and "Parent Education" are expressed in years of education. "Parent controls" are gender, marital status, labour-force status, the number of children, a dummy for no visits to a GP over the last 12 months and region fixed effects and are measured when the parent was the same age as their child. "Child controls" are the same as those for the parent, and a dummy for living with the parent. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the dyad level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table C4: The Intergenerational Transmission of Subjective Well-being – Pooled Results with Trimming by Well-Being Score

	GHQ (Child)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
GHQ (Parent)	0.089***	0.079***	0.087***	0.079***	0.061***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.015)
Observations	8851	8851	8851	8851	8851
Dyads	2284	2284	2284	2284	2284
Child Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Parent Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Child Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Controls	.	.	.	.	✓
Child Controls	.	.	.	.	✓
	Life Satisfaction (Child)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Life Satisfaction (Parent)	0.074***	0.058**	0.074***	0.061**	0.036
	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.025)
Observations	2284	2284	2284	2284	2284
Dyads	950	950	950	950	950
Child Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Parent Income	.	✓	.	✓	✓
Child Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Education	.	.	✓	✓	✓
Parent Controls	.	.	.	.	✓
Child Controls	.	.	.	.	✓

Notes: The analysis here drops dyads in which at least one of the observations has a well-being score in the top or bottom category (0 or 36 for GHQ; 1 or 7 for life satisfaction). The sample consists of children with GHQ/life satisfaction scores for whom there is information on the GHQ/life satisfaction of their parents at the same age. The measures of GHQ and life satisfaction are standardised to mean zero and unit variance using the pooled child–parent distribution within each measure. All regressions include dummies for the interview waves of the child and the parent, and the age of the child. "Child Income" and "Parent Income" correspond to the real net monthly household income in logs. "Child Education" and "Parent Education" are expressed in years of education. "Parent controls" are gender, marital status, labour-force status, the number of children, a dummy for no visits to a GP over the last 12 months and region fixed effects and are measured when the parent was the same age as their child. "Child controls" are the same as those for the parent, and a dummy for living with the parent. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the dyad level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.