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| **Title of Research Presentation** Good governance for children: A three-country comparison of the power of the Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| **Background/Objectives**Children make up about a quarter of the population but by virtue of age they are excluded from voting and policy-making. Childhood is a vital time for human health and development, a process strongly influenced by social and physical environments, which are in turn shaped by policy. Children have a major stake in the future and hence, are important but disenfranchised stakeholders. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) aims to alleviate that power imbalance. This research explored policy-maker views about the extent to which CRC impacted on policy in New Zealand (NZ), Australia and Sweden. Sweden has some of the world’s best child outcomes whereas NZ does poorly for a high-income country and Australia is intermediate.**Methods**A qualitative three-country comparative policy case study underpinned by CRC and political and sociological theory. We conducted 45 semi-structured interviews with senior politicians, political advisors, bureaucrats, advocates, and academics. Purposive sampling included indigenous people and views from across the political spectrum. We asked about the key influences on policy development for children, and if needed, asked about CRC. We performed thematic analysis with NVivo11.**Results**In Sweden there was high awareness of CRC. Its impact was multi-faceted and child rights were progressively institutionalised. All except one of the Australian interviewees described ‘zero’ or minimal impact. Most NZ interviewees described some impact but it was not strong or consistent and mostly related to the reporting process. While all countries had gaps for indigenous and marginalised children, there were profound failings in NZ and Australia although the nature varied. We identified multiple social, political and historical explanations for the differential impact.**Discussion**More than 25 years after the ratification of CRC there are marked disparities in impact across the three countries. Explanations were complex. A more rights-based and holistic view of children was embedded in Sweden in stark contrast to Australia and NZ, countries in which policy problems appeared more complex but responses were fragmented, narrow and reactive. A child rights approach has the potential to improve the quality of policy, improve outcomes, increase equity, and importantly, improve children’s experiences of their world. It requires sustained community and political action, changing attitudes, and progressively institutionalising CRC.**Keywords**Children, human rights, public policy, Sweden, New Zealand, Australia, Convention on the Rights of the Child |