

## Age, gender and life satisfaction in early adulthood in the Far East of Russia

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**Abstract.** This study investigates the influence of demographic factors on life satisfaction in Early Adulthood. Personal Wellbeing Index was used as the method of data acquisition. It gives the opportunity to compare the results of this research with similar researches conducted in other countries. Participants of the study were 257 subjects from the Far East of Russia (59.9% females, aged 17-40). The research results showed that subjective well-being stays stable for Russian males and females in early adulthood. Multiple regression analysis indicated that gender is able to explain 16.3% of the variance in satisfaction with life as a whole. Males tend to be more satisfied with their life than females. Gender differences consist also in high satisfaction with different aspects of life.

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### Introduction

The studies of quality of life based on regular monitoring have become firmly established either in scientific terminology or in management practices connected with population welfare of the countries. Since the 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with the objective indicators of quality of life assessment the subjective ones began to be used. The satisfaction with life and its various spheres is one of these subjective indicators. During this time period different regularities of change in personal subjective well-being depending on personality traits and objective factors of human life were revealed.

Sirgy [1] in his review of demographic factors effects on subjective quality of life points out that approximately 10-15% of the variance in life satisfaction can be accounted for by demographic characteristics (including age and gender).

Current researches indicate that age has a less effect on satisfaction of life than gender. Even in the studies where the strongest relations between age and subjective well-being were found, age is accounted for only 3% of the variance in life satisfaction scores [2]. Most studies show that the effect of age is U-shaped with a minimum at middle adulthood [1-3]. But that effect depends on different domain satisfaction, methods of quality of life measure, and varies among countries. For example, international investigations of subjective well-being by Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) showed that life satisfaction tends to increase with age in Australia, Algeria [4], China [5], Thai [6], but it decreases in Croatia [7] and Russia [8].

As for gender effects to subjective quality of life, in most countries females tend to be more satisfied with their life than males [4, 6, 9-11]. At the

same time investigations across cultures indicated that the findings are not replicated across all countries [2, 7, 12, 13]. Gender differences in subjective well-being are explained by universal sex differences on the one hand and by different living conditions on the other hand. Universal sex differences consist in the fact that women experience of greater frequency and intensity of both pleasant and unpleasant emotions and have greater vulnerability to depression and anxiety. That has been linked to estrogen and progesterone production. Some authors consider important living conditions, which are different for men and women, such as national freedom, possibility to have higher status, prescribed gender roles, violence, powerlessness, access to individual resources and opportunity structures, etc.

Inglehart [14] demonstrated that significant gender-related differences in subjective well-being can be concealed by an interaction effect between age, gender and well-being. He showed that women under 45 tend to be happier than men; but older women are less happy.

Despite the international spread of subjective well-being researches, scientific works focused on the study of quality of life that take into account its subjective measures appeared in Russia only in the last decade. Moreover, the study of life satisfaction is realized by scientists through the use of various measures. As a result, the data received by different investigators are partially contradictory and therefore it complicates the comparison of Russian data with the international studies.

Thus, some reports on correlation of satisfaction with life as a whole and age demonstrate negative associations with subjective well-being and

age [15, 16]. Andreenkova [16] described that there are greatest differences in the level of subjective well-being between people under 30 and middle-aged population to approximately retirement age, then there is a slight increase in the level of life satisfaction, but after 70 it is reduced again. Monusova [17] showed U-shaped pattern of subjective well-being in Russia with a minimum at middle adulthood. This fact is not crucially different from results of other countries.

The account of both respondents' age and sex shows that the dependence of subjective quality of life on the age is found only in samples of women during the differentiated assessment of life areas. Their satisfaction with material well-being, character, profession, and personal health reduces with age. That determines the reduction of the total life satisfaction [18].

Reports on subjective well-being in Russia [18, 19] demonstrated that men have higher levels of satisfaction with life than women. Uglanova [19] suggests that the gender satisfaction gap exists mostly at the expense of elderly women, whereas in younger groups, females are even more satisfied than males. These findings are partially confirmed in the study of Barlas and Yekimova [20], which showed that men aged 14-26 are less satisfied with life as a whole than women. However, Andreenkova [16] showed that during adolescence and youth the level of boys and girls' satisfaction is almost identical. Whereas at the age of approximately 30 years, the level of women life satisfaction becomes significantly reduced and remains slightly lower than that of men during all the years of life, and begins to draw closer again only after 50 years.

The present study is aimed at clarifying the existing data on satisfaction either with life as a whole or with its domains for men and women in early adulthood.

### Participants and method

Subjective well-being was measured by the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) [21] that was translated into Russian by Dr. Ekaterina Uglanova with assistance of faculty and students of Dept. of Sociology, Saint-Petersburg Branch of State University – Higher School of Economics [22]. The scale comprises seven items measuring satisfaction with life domains as: Standard of Living, Personal Health, Achieving in Life, Personal Relationships, Personal Safety, Community-Connectedness, and Future Security. An additional item was included to probe participants' satisfaction with their life as a whole. Participants were required to indicate their satisfaction on a scale ranging from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied). All results

were converted to a 0–100 format as prescribed by the manual [23]. The mean of the domain scores was the measure of Subjective well-being (PWI-index).

Participants of the study were 257 subjects from the Far East of Russia. 154 subjects were females and 104 were males. The whole sample was divided into two age groups: 1) subjects at the age of early adult transition (60 males and 99 females, aged 17–22, students of universities) and 2) subjects at the age of early adulthood (44 males and 54 females, aged 23–40, employees of different places).

Means and standard deviations (SD) were calculated to describe the samples. The difference between various groups was found by the aid of Mann-Whitney U test. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between satisfaction with life as a whole and demographic characteristics of participants (age and gender).

### Results

The means and standard deviations for satisfaction with aspects of life across age and gender are presented in Table 1. Overall the average PWI was  $68.1 \pm 17.4$ .

**Table 1: Means and standard deviations for domains of PWI: gender and age effects**

Domains		Early Adult Transition (17–22)		Early adulthood (23–40)	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
PWI	Mean:	77.5	62.8	76.6	60.4
	SD	15.6	16.1	14.7	15.0
Standard of Living	Mean:	74.7	60.5	72.3	54.4
	SD	21.5	23.4	21.9	21.8
Personal Health	Mean:	80.0	54.9	79.1	54.4
	SD	19.9	23.8	20.6	19.4
Achieving in Life	Mean:	75.2	70.8	78.0	69.4
	SD	24.5	23.2	17.9	21.8
Personal Relationships	Mean:	86.9	64.3	82.3	62.6
	SD	17.0	24.6	16.5	23.0
Personal Safety	Mean:	79.5	68.8	78.2	66.7
	SD	23.6	28.9	20.9	24.8
Community-Connectedness	Mean:	69.7	58.6	74.5	55.4
	SD	30.7	25.4	22.4	24.0
Future Security	Mean:	76.2	61.8	72.3	60.0
	SD	22.5	20.0	23.1	18.6
Life as a whole	Mean:	77.2	61.2	76.4	54.6
	SD	20.1	20.4	19.1	19.7

Among seven domains of personal well-being for males (Table 1), the highest mean scores were for “personal relationships” (86.9 for males aged 17–23, 82.3 for males aged 23–40). The lowest scores were found for “community-connectedness” (65.6 for males aged 17–23), “future security” (72.3 for males aged 23–40), and “standard of living” (72.3 for males aged 23–40).

Among seven domains of personal well-being for females (Table 1), the highest mean scores were for “achieving in life” (70.8 for females aged 17–23, 69.4 for females aged 23–40). The lowest scores were found for “personal health” (54.9 for females aged 17–23, 54.4 for females aged 23–40) and “standard of living” (54.4 for females aged 23–40).

There were no significant age differences in the PWI score in all domains, but males scored significantly higher means than females in all domains of PWI except “achieving in life” in both age groups. Table 2 displays the regression of age and gender of life as a whole, including unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standardized regression coefficients ([beta]), semi-partial correlations ( $sr^2$ ), and R,  $R^2$ , and adjusted  $R^2$  after entry of all independent variables.

**Table 2: Multiple regression results to satisfaction with Life as a whole ([beta])**

	B	[beta]	p-level	$sr^2$
Age	-0.025	-0.08	0.159	0.003
Gender	1.811	0.407	0.000	0.163
		Adj. $R^2$	R	$R^2$
		0.163	0.412	0.169

The results of the regression show that age and gender are able to explain 16.9% of the variance in satisfaction with life as a whole. Regression coefficients indicate that only gender significantly predicts subjective well-being while age is actually non-significant.

## Discussion

Data research shows that the level of subjective well-being with age and gender during the early adulthood retains approximately at the same level. At the same time there are significant differences between subjective well-being of males and females. Males show greater satisfaction with aspects of life in all domains than females. Sex determinacy of life satisfaction is a vivid regularity that is found in many international studies. However, the characteristic feature here is a great life satisfaction of women than men. In our study, men show a significantly higher level of satisfaction with aspects of their life. PWI-index and satisfaction with their life as a whole is also higher for men than for women. Traditionally, sex differences in the level of subjective well-being are explained by a greater emotionality of women and their openness in the sphere of emotions, while the openness to positive emotions is meant. However, as a typical feature for the Russian mentality is an increased susceptibility to negative emotions and suffering [24], the same features of emotional sphere of women can explain their lower ratings of subjective well-being in comparison with men ones. Apparently, the regulatory sphere of women has a more delicate sensitivity, and keenly reacts to the deviation of their

real life from the desired one by reducing the level of satisfaction with their life.

Women have the highest satisfaction with their achieving in life compared with other aspects of life. This result can be explained by the fact that women's achievements are associated with success in their family life. If for men in early adulthood it's important to achieve professional goals, their promotion track, then the women's sphere of achievements is determined mainly by creation of a family and delivery of children, that is easily accomplished by the majority of women in this age. Success in their professional activity only consolidates the sense of satisfaction with their achieving in life. Women demonstrate the lowest satisfaction in the sphere of personal health, and with age it is complemented by the dissatisfaction with their standards of living. These facts can be explained by the possibility of women to influence on various aspects of their own life. Russian women feel more able to control and change in accordance with their ideas of the desirable thing the following domains: achieving in life, personal relationships and personal safety. Such aspects of life, as personal health and standards of living are less controllable for young women.

During the assessment of satisfaction with life aspects men report the highest satisfaction in the sphere of personal relationships, and the lowest one in the evaluation of their community (connectedness). This polarity of the two aspects of social life may indicate a fundamentally different meaning of close relationships and community relationships for men. Close relationships are largely influenced by the activity of the person who can choose his/her partners and build relationships that satisfy the person. Community relationships presuppose inclusion in the community, that doesn't always depend on the person, and that reduces the men's satisfaction with this aspect of life. Older men as well as older women put standards of living in the last place in the ranking the satisfaction, future security is also added to them. Modern sociopsychological situation in the Russian society is characterized by extreme volatility, contradictory manifestations of social processes, abrupt polarization of moods and attitudes in different social and age groups. In these circumstances, people lose optimism and confidence in the future, negative attitude towards reality and the state as a subject of social transformation is increasing. This greatly reduces satisfaction with future security and consequently satisfaction with their life as a whole.

## Conclusions

1. The research results showed that subjective well-being for Russian males and females stays stable, and age is not a significant predictor of satisfaction with life as a whole during the entire early adulthood.

2. The results of the regression indicated that gender is able to explain 16.3% of the variance in satisfaction with life as a whole. Male satisfaction with different aspects of life is significantly higher than female one.

3. Gender differences consist also in high satisfaction with different aspects of life. Among other domains males are more satisfied with their personal relationships, while females are more satisfied with their achieving in life. The least satisfying domains among others are changed at different age.

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