DYNAMICS OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING IN KAZAKHSTAN: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PECULIARITIES

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ABSTRACT. The indicators of life satisfaction and happiness are key indicators characterizing the subjective well-being of the population and depend on many factors, including place of residence, gender, age and other parameters. However, in Kazakhstan the degree of interrelation between these variables is not sufficiently studied.

The main purpose of the article is to study and analyze the relationship between the subjective well-being of Kazakhstanis, including life satisfaction and the level of happiness, with the place of residence and the main socio-demographic characteristics - gender, age and location of residence. The work is aimed at studying the degree of influence of these factors on subjective well-being and assessing changes in their relationships.

The research utilizes data from national surveys on the quality of life of the population conducted by the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the period from 2018 to 2023. Methods of descriptive and correlation analysis were used to process empirical data. Weak and moderate statistically significant relationships were found between gender, place of residence and subjective well-being in Kazakhstan. These results emphasize the importance of taking into account social and demographic factors in the development of social policy focused on improving the welfare of the population.

KEYWORDS: level of happiness, subjective well-being of the population, social research, level of satisfaction, demographic characteristics.

ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ СУБЪЕКТИВТІ ӘЛ-АУҚАТТЫҢ ДИНАМИКАСЫ: ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК-ДЕМОГРАФИЯЛЫҚ ЕРЕКШЕЛІКТЕРІ

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АҢДАТПА. Өмір сүру деңгейіне және бақытына қанағаттану көрсеткіштері халықтың субъективті әл-ауқатын сипаттайтын негізгі көрсеткіштер болып табылады және көптеген факторлармен байланысты, соның ішінде тұрғылықты жері, жынысы, жасы және т.б. Бірақ Қазақстан жағдайында бұл айнымалылар арасындағы байланыстардың тығыздығы нашар зерттелген. Мақаланың мақсаты – қазақстандықтардың субъективті әл-ауқаты, оның ішінде өмірге қанағаттану мен бақыт деңгейі мен тұрғылықты жері мен негізгі әлеуметтік-демографиялық факторлар – жынысы, жасы және тұрғылықты жері арасындағы байланысты анықтау және талдау. Зерттеу осы факторлардың субъективті әл-ауқат көрсеткіштеріне әсер ету дәрежесін анықтауға және олардың өзара байланысының динамикасын бағалауға бағытталған.

Зерттеу барысында Қазақстан Республикасы Стратегиялық жоспарлау және реформалар агенттігінің Ұлттық статистика бюросы 2018-2023 жылдар аралығындағы халықтың өмір сүру сапасы бойынша жүргізген ұлттық зерттеулерінің деректері пайдаланылды. Эмпирикалық деректерді талдау үшін сипаттамалық және корреляциялық деректерді талдау әдістері қолданылды. Қазақстан халқының әл-ауқатын арттыруға бағытталған әлеуметтік саясатты қалыптастыру кезінде әртүрлі әлеуметтік факторлар мен демографиялық ерекшеліктерді есепке алу үшін маңызды болып табылатын жынысы, тұрғылықты жері және Қазақстандағы субъективті әл-ауқат арасындағы әлсіз және орташа статистикалық маңызды байланыстар анықталды.

ТҮЙІН СӨЗДЕР: бақыт деңгейі, халықтың субъективті әл-ауқаты, әлеуметтік зерттеу, қанағаттану деңгейі, демографиялық ерекшеліктер.

ДИНАМИКА СУБЪЕКТИВНОГО БЛАГОПОЛУЧИЯ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ: СОЦИАЛЬНО-ДЕМОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ

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АННОТАЦИЯ. Показатели удовлетворенности уровнем жизни и счастья являются основными показателми, характеризующими субъективное благополучие населения и связаны со многими факторами, в том числе местом проживания, полом, возрастом и т.д. Однако в условиях Казахстана плотность связи между указанными переменными малоизучена. Целью статьи является выявление и анализ взаимосвязи между субъективным благополучием казахстанцев, включая удовлетворенность жизнью и уровень счастья и местом проживания и основными социально-демографическими факторами – полом, возрастом и метосм проживания. Исследование направлено на определение степени влияния этих фактров на показатели субъективного благополучия и оценку динамики их взаимосвязей.

В исследовании использованы данные национальных опросов по качеству жизни населения, проведенных Бюро национальной статистики Агентства по стратегическому планированию и реформам Республики Казахстан в период с 2018 по 2023 годы. Для анализа эмпирических данных были применены методы описательного и корреляционного анализа данных. Были выявлены слабые и умеренные статистически значимые взаимосвязи между полом, местом проживания и субъективным благополучием в Казахстане, которые важны для учета различных социальных факторов и демографических характеристик при формировании социальной политики, направленной на улучшение благосостояния населения Казахстана.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: уровень счастья, субъективное благополучие населения, социологические исследования, уровень удовлетворенности, демографические особенности.

INTRODUCTION. The issue under analysis on the satisfaction with living conditions is a significant indicator that determines well-being of not only an individual, but also the quality of life of a society as a whole. The population of Kazakhstan and its characteristics are determined by its geographical location, social, and demographic, also economic status, place of residence, gender and age difference. Simultaneously, these considerations are the main factors that influence on the determination of level of happiness among population.

Investigations on changes in quality of life and satisfaction of the population of Kazakhstan have been conducted previously by G. N. Nyussupova et.al. The article discusses the quality of life of the population assessed as one of the important tasks of regulating the social policy of the republic. The authors analyzed the socio-demographic and economic indicators of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the period of 1991 to 2014, and while using two-dimensional statistical-dynamic analysis, they developed a typology and assessment on the level of quality of life of the population of Kazakhstan by regions [1].

Besides, Zhanazarova, Z.J. and Shnarbekova M.K. observed the social well-being of the population as a subjective and important indicator of life quality, including certain interrelated clues, and studied the dynamics of the main indicators as social well-being indicator in a certain period of time. The authors analyzed public welfare in the context of accumulated knowledge about public consciousness and real life conditions [2].

Camilla L. and Giovanni P. reviewed the recent works by authors who studied the relationship between urbanization and subjective well-being. Although most previous studies have demonstrated a strong dichotomy between urban and rural regions, recent studies have showed that urban regions are characterized by higher levels of well-being [3].

Yunxiao Dang et al. examined the impact of urban growth in the People's Republic of China on people's happiness and found that city size has a non-linear correlation with the happiness of its residents, with personal satisfaction with urban life and income mediating the relationship between urban context and happiness [4]. The next study was by Steptoe A. (2015) et al.which considered the relationship between happiness and health across the lifespan in different cultures [5].

H. Tian, J. Chen (2022) examined the previous studies on happiness at the level of individual countries, and allowed those measures to be used for international comparisons [6]. According to Oishi S., Shimmack W. (2010), one of the important factors of social analysis are related with the cultural differences in the perception of happiness [7].

Riff K.D. and Singer B.H. (2008) described the influence of self-awareness on psychological well-being [8]. Park N. and Peterson K. (2011) examined the correlation between personality traits and life satisfaction among young people [9]. Diener E. (2017) analyzed recent data on subjective well-being relevant to psychologists and social researchers [10].

Veenhoven R. and Vergunst F. tested the "Easterlin paradox" and concluded that "economic growth in countries does not bring greater happiness to the average citizen." The study was conducted by using time-trend data available in the World Happiness Database, which included 1,531 data points in 67 countries. For this study, 199 data series were involved ranging from 10 to 40 years. As a result of the analysis, the authors revealed a positive correlation between GDP growth and happiness growth in nations. Both GDP and happiness increased in many countries, and the average level of happiness went up in nations with the fastest growing economies: r = +0.20 p < .05. On average, an increase in per capita income of 1% per year from 0 to 10 was accompanied by an increase in the average level of happiness on the scale by 0.0034; Thus, it was determined that the growth in happiness for the entire industry would continue for 60 years with an annual economic growth of 5% [11].

Ruggeri K. (2020) analyzed a multidimensional approach to well-being and quality of life based on data from 21 countries and substantiated the creation of targeted social programs [12].

Social analysis of the level of happiness of the population in Kazakhstan is an important aspect of public policy, therefore in the last ten years; researchers have paid great attention to the level of happiness and satisfaction with living conditions.

On the basis of previous scientific works, we can distinguish the main factors affecting the level of happiness of the population:

- Economic factors: income, employment and financial stability;

- Social support and environment: availability of close ties, functioning of state and public institutions;

- Living conditions and ecology: access to medical care, opportunities for education and personal development, ecological condition and conditions for leisure.

In addition, it is important to consider the impact of psychological and physical stress, as well as the availability of psychological help.

The relevance of the study lies in the need for a deeper analysis of the impact of socio-demographic and geographical factors on the level of life satisfaction. The aim of the article is to identify and analyze differences in the level of life satisfaction depending on such parameters as place of residence (urban or rural), gender and age. In order to realize the goal, the following tasks were set:

To assess the relationship between overall life satisfaction and place of residence;

To determine how gender affects the level of life satisfaction and happiness;

To investigate life satisfaction and happiness in different age groups with regard to place of residence.

The results of the study demonstrated a positive correlation between overall life satisfaction and place of residence, which indicates a significant dependence of the level of happiness on the living conditions. In addition, a negative correlation between happiness levels has been found as a result of age and gender analysis. It has been explored that the negative correlation between age and happiness levels is especially pronounced among young and old people. The results of this study show that happiness varies by age and gender and differing social factors influence on life satisfaction and happiness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS OF RESEARCH. As for the research of the work, the methods of descriptive and correlation analysis were used for the data obtained as a result of the study on the "Quality of Life of the Population" for 2018-2023, conducted by the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan throughout the territory of Kazakhstan. While analyzing the subjective well-being of the population, the following variables were selected from the questionnaire:

- "How satisfied are you with your life in general?"

The above question was assessed by survey participants on the following scale:

1 – satisfied
2 – not satisfied
3 – not satisfied
4 – fairly satisfied
5 – fairly satisfied
6 – fairly satisfied
7 – fairly satisfied
8 – satisfied
10 – satisfied
10 – satisfied

- "How happy do you feel?"

Answers for the question on determining the level of happiness, it was evaluated by the survey participants based on the following scale:

1 - I don't feel happy
2 – I don't feel happy
3 – I don't feel happy
4 – fairly happy
5 – fairly happy
6 – fairly happy
7 – fairly happy
8 – I am happy
9 – I am happy
10 – I am happy

The respondent's socio-demographic characteristics - gender, age, place of residence - were considered as independent variables, and the obtained data were analyzed in the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 program.

In this study, correlation analysis was used to define the level of relationship between the level of life satisfaction and happiness of socio-demographic characteristics, that is, gender, age and place of residence. IBM SPSS Statistics 25 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is software for statistical data analysis. It is widely used in social sciences, marketing, health care and other fields to process and analyze quantitative data.

Using IBM SPSS Statistics 25, we determined how these independent variables influence perceptions of happiness and life satisfaction in different population groups.

RESULTS AND THEIR DISCUSSIONS. As it's shown in Figure 1, we see instability in the dynamics of subjective well-being of Kazakhstanis during the period of 2018-2023. Over the past 6 years, the average level of happiness of the population was 8.02 (on a 10-point scale), between 2019 and 2023 the happiness index fell below 8 points (-0.05 and -0.4)

Overall, we see from the table the highest indicators of well-being during the years of 2020 and 2021. Therefore, despite the global pandemic situation, the most residents concluded that they were satisfied with the overall life situation and considered themselves feeling happy.

Considering the overall life satisfaction level of the population by place of residence and gender, we see the differences between the responses of rural and urban residents, as shown in Table 1. In 2018, the overall life satisfaction level of urban residents was 54.9%, and in 2019 and 2020, it increased to 59.7%. And in 2022, this figure dropped sharply to 42.1%. If we consider the indicators of the rural population, the overall satisfaction index is higher than that of the urban population during the research period, especially between 2018-2021, it's noticeable that the satisfaction level of the rural population is quite special (7.9% higher on average). At the same time, the share of satisfaction with life in general among rural residents grew steadily until 2020, but in 2022 it sharply decreased by 26.40%.

While we compared the level of satisfaction of respondents by gender, it turned out that men were more satisfied with their lives than women. For example, from the Table 1 we notice that men and women in 2020, who showed the highest indicator, had an overall satisfaction which was 4% higher. However, it was found that the level of satisfaction with life of the population as a whole was high before 2021, and after 2022 it decreased (Table 1).
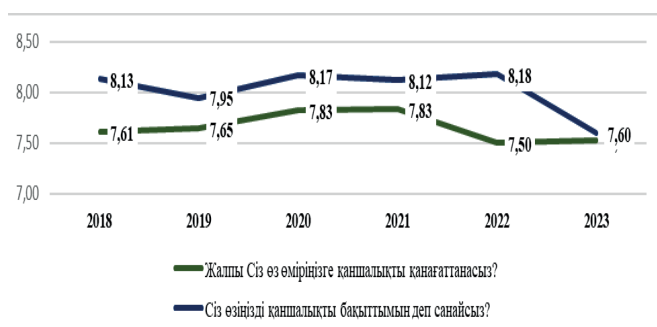
Furthermore, reflecting on the distribution of

Figure 1 - The dynamics of subjective well-being of Kazakhstanis during the period of 2018-2023

the data obtained for our second indicator of the analysis, which is included in the subjective well-being indicator, we notice that the level of happiness of the population is higher than the level of satisfaction with life in general. Over the first three years (2018–2020), the difference between urban and rural areas fluctuated from 6.7% to 8.7% in favor of rural areas, and in 2021, urban residents, compared to rural ones, felt happy for the first time (71.5%). In 2022, the situation recovered again, and the gap between the happiness index in the village and the city increased to 6.4%. In the last year, there has been a significant decrease in the level of happiness in both localities, and the decrease is more pronounced in cities (52.6%) than in rural areas (58.3%) (details are given in Table 2).

As shown in Table 2, men were happier than women in 2018–2020, but the share of happiness among women increased sharply in 2021. However, in recent years, we observe a downward trend in women's happiness (Table 2).

When determining the trend in subjective well-

being by age, we obtain the same data as in Figures 2 and 3. Speaking about the level of overall life satisfaction by age, the survey has been conducted in the age group of 15-99 years, but we notice that there is no difference in the average values by age. In general, the average level of satisfaction for the study period is 7.58. In 2018-2020, the overall level of life satisfaction of young people under 24 years of age demonstrates an indicator within 7.93-8.43 points, and from 2021 a downward trend begins, that is, in 2023 it fell to about 7.71 points. At the same time, there are no significant changes in the level of satisfaction of residents aged 25-73 years compared to other groups (on average, the change ranges from 0.68 to 0.20 points).

It is worth noting that the satisfaction level of residents of age groups over 73 varies from a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 10 points. For example, the satisfaction level of 78-year-olds in 2021 was 8.09, and in 2021 this number dropped to 7.05. The satisfaction level of 93-year-old residents in 2019 was only 4 points, while in 2023, on the contrary, it rose to 7. By age, such as gender and locality criteria, 2022 showed a sharp decrease in the level of satisfaction. The overall average level dropped to 7.1-7.8, with the most pronounced decrease observed among people over 55 years old (-0.36).

As the data shows, happiness levels also vary across age groups, with the highest averages in 2018-2020 and a significant decline in 2023. The most significant downward trend is seen among young people (15-30 years) and older people (80+) where there are considerable decrease, while middle-aged people (35-50 years) are more stable and in decline.

In assessing subjective well-being by age

Table 1 – the level of satisfaction of respondents by gender

		How satisfied are you with your life in general?					
		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
The type of region	Urban	54,9%	56.9%	59.7%	58.0%	42.1%	43.1%
	Rural	61,4%	65.4%	68.4%	68.0%	41.6%	44.6%
Gender	Man	60,8%	62.6%	66.0%	64.9%	45.7%	46.3%
	Woman	56,2%	59.5%	62.0%	60.9%	39.3%	42.1%

Table 2 – Happiness according to gender distribution

		Do you consider yourself happy?					
		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Urban	66.5%	64.3%	68.0%	71.5%	67.2%	52.6%
	Rural	75.2%	71.0%	76.0%	68.1%	73.6%	58.3%
Respondent's age	Man	74.2%	69.5%	73.9%	64.4%	73.0%	56.5%
	Woman	68.2%	65.9%	70.1%	75.7%	68.1%	54.3%
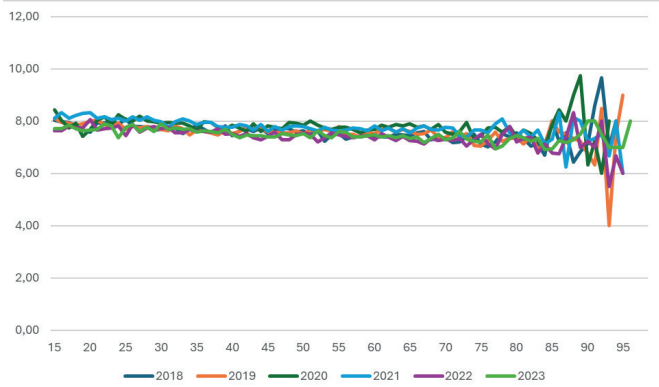
Figure 2 – The trend in the level of satisfaction
with living conditions

Figure 3 – The trend of Happiness

distribution of the population mentioned above, we cannot conclude that the deviation of the average level of satisfaction of the elderly population is large, since it should be noted that there are significant differences in the number of control groups. For example, in some age groups over 90 years old, the average value has been prepared based on the answers of only 1 or 2 respondents. In addition, it is important to understand how the location of residence affects the subjective well-being of Kazakhstani people, including life satisfaction and happiness.

The results of the correlation analysis show that there is a positive significant but weak correlation between overall life satisfaction and rural residence (2018: r=0.073**; 2019: r=0.102**; 2020: r=0.094**; 2021: r=0.122**; 2022 and 2023: r=0.036**). This may suggest that the rural environment can have a positive impact on life satisfaction, but the strength of this relationship has significantly decreased in recent years. A similar trend is observed for the level of happiness, where the type of residence also indicates a weak positive correlation (in 2021: r=0.132**; in 2023: r=0.067**). Thus, the results show that living in a rural area, although weakly, is associated with higher quality of life and life satisfaction, indicating the potential importance of place of residence for subjective well-being.

At present, we observe a weak negative relationship (r=-0.11**) between rural residence and adolescent satisfaction, which suggests that adolescents living in rural areas may experience lower levels of subjective well-being, which is mostly characteristised due to the social environment in rural areas.

This result is consistent with the outcome of a study conducted by Sorensen (2014). The research work explored that rural residents of twenty-seven EU countries felt significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than residents of EU cities [14]. Correspondingly, based on the results of 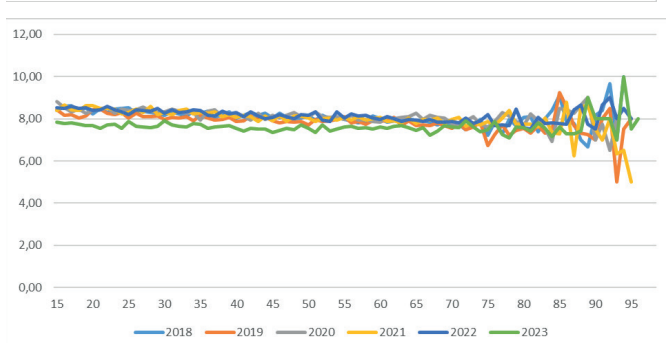studies conducted in only one country, from the work of the following researchers, it's seen that the subjective well-being of rural residents is higher than that of urban residents.

Knight and Gunatilaka (2010) [15] on China, Winters and Lee (2016) [16] on settlements in the United States, Okulich-Kozaryn and Mazelis (2018) [17], Morrison and Weckroth (2018) reported on the situation in Finland [18]. However, the situation in our country contradicts the results of the main study.

Peiraud (2006), referencing to the data from fifteen countries around the world, underlined that the claim about the subjective well-being was higher in rural areas should not be supported [19].

Nevertheless, using the data from twenty-five member states of the European Union (EU) [20] Shucksmith et al (2009) in their study results suggested that there was no difference in subjective well-being between rural and urban areas.

The results of the study revealed a very weak negative correlation between the gender of respondents, life satisfaction and happiness (e.g. in 2021: r=-0.048**; in 2023: r=-0.032**).). Although these results are statistically significant, their small size indicates a weak relationship, which is not enough to confidently conclude that women in Kazakhstan are actually less happy or less satisfied with their lives than men. Such weak correlations may only indicate minor trends that require more detailed study taking into account additional factors affecting subjective well-being.

Based on the results of the Gallup World Poll, World Values Survey and European Social Survey, Arrosa and Gandelman (2016) proved the existence of gender differences in happiness levels [21]. However, according to Kazakhstani data, referring to global studies, women's happiness levels are higher than men's. Similar results were obtained by Gerhard Meisenberg and Michael A. Woodley (2015) in their research of social and cultural conditions were stated that "...in most cases, women feel happier and more satisfied with life [22]." These social and cultural factors may have different effects on women's subjective well-being,

which also reflects the specifics of the Kazakhstani context.

Correlation analysis by age showed a weak negative correlation between the age of respondents and life satisfaction in all years, although the strength of this relationship varied. The weakest correlation was observed in 2020 (r = -0.063**), and in 2021 the relationship reached its maximum value (r = -0.112**), indicating a moderate negative relationship. And the correlation between the level of happiness and the age of the respondent was also negative, indicating that happiness decreases with age. For example, the strongest correlation was in 2021 (r = -0.128**), and the weakest was in 2023 (r = -0.036**).

This reflects a general trend similar to that observed in other countries. For example, Wunder et al. (2013), based on household survey data in the UK and Germany, found that subjective well-being follows a wave-like pattern: life satisfaction declines until midlife, then begins to increase, and declines again in old age [23]. This finding was supported by the study of Biermann et al. (2019), who found a cubic functional relationship between age and well-being [24], thus confirming a complex non-linear relationship.

CONCLUSION. The results of correlation analysis show weak but statistically significant relationships between gender, place of residence and subjective well-being in Kazakhstan. Women in the country may demonstrate a slightly lower level of life satisfaction and happiness compared to men. However, the weak strength of this relationship does not allow us to claim significant differences. This contradicts the results of international studies, which more often record the opposite picture, where women have higher levels of happiness. This result may be due to the peculiarities of the Kazakhstani context.

Analysis of age groups revealed a weak negative correlation between age and life satisfaction or happiness, indicating a decrease in these indicators with increasing age. The data are consistent with world studies, where life satisfaction usually decreases by middle age, then increases slightly, but falls again in old age.

We also found a weak positive correlation between living in rural areas and overall life satisfaction, which indicates a small positive impact of living conditions on the level of happiness. However, this relationship remained weak throughout the years of the study and has declined in recent years. Rural adolescents show a weak negative correlation with subjective well-being, which may reflect the influence of social and infrastructural factors specific to rural areas.

Although the observed correlations are too small to draw conclusions, they indicate some consistent trends that should be taken into account when studying life satisfaction and happiness across different demographic and social groups. Further research taking into account other factors such as income, education, and marital status, as well as using more sophisticated analytical methods, would be useful to gain a deeper understanding of these relationships. The results of the study also show the importance of taking into account various social factors and demographic characteristics when formulating social policies aimed at improving the well-being of Kazakhstani people.

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