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## SOCIAL STATUS AND ITS IMPACT ON HAPPINESS: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF KAZAKHSTAN

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**ABSTRACT.** This article examines how social status influences subjective happiness in contemporary Kazakhstan. The empirical basis of the study draws on a nationwide sociological survey of adults (N=1504) conducted in 2022 across all regions of the country. Six dimensions were used to assess social status: level of material well-being, education and qualification, occupational position and professional status, occupational prestige, social networks, and the degree of respect received from others.

The research applies a quantitative methodology, combining descriptive and comparative analysis. This approach made it possible to identify patterns in the distribution of subjective happiness across socio-demographic and status groups. The findings show that while material resources – such as income, education, and employment – form the foundation of subjective well-being, non-material factors, including social connections, recognition, and respect, play a decisive role in shaping individuals' sense of happiness.

The results support the hypothesis that happiness has a multidimensional nature, emerging at the intersection of economic, cultural, and symbolic dimensions. In the Kazakhstani context, well-being is characterized by a combination of material and moral components, where respect, trust, and social support hold particular significance. The study highlights the need to integrate socio-psychological and cultural variables into analyses of social well-being and to further develop the concept of a "sociology of happiness" in Kazakhstan.

**KEYWORDS:** happiness; subjective well-being; social position; social status; material well-being; education; occupational prestige; professional position; social networks; respect; social capital.

## Әлеуметтік жағдай және оның бақытқа әсері: Қазақстан контекстіндегі эмпирикалық талдау

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**АНДАТПА.** Мақалада қазіргі қазақстандық қоғамдағы әлеуметтік мәртебенің адамның субъективті бақыт сезіміне әсері қарастырылады. Эмпирикалық зерттеудің дереккөзі ретінде Қазақстанның барлық аймақтарында 2022 жылы жүргізілген ересек халық арасындағы социологиялық сауалнама нәтижелері пайдаланылды (N=1504). Әлеуметтік мәртебенің негізгі көрсеткіштері ретінде алты параметр айқындалды: материалдық жағдай деңгейі, білім мен кәсіби біліктілік, лауазым және кәсіби статус, мамандықтың беделі, әлеуметтік байланыстардың болуы және айналадағы адамдардың құрмет деңгейі.

Зерттеу әдістемесі сипаттамалық және салыстырмалы талдау әдістеріне негізделген сандық тәсілді қамтиды. Бұл тәсіл респонденттердің әлеуметтік-демографиялық және мәртебелік сипаттамаларына байланысты субъективті бақыт деңгейінің үлестіріміндегі заңдылықтарды анықтауға мүмкіндік берді. Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, материалдық ресурстар (табыстың деңгейі, білім, кәсіби қызмет) субъективті әлауқаттың негізін құрайды, алайда бақыт сезімін қалыптастыруда шешуші рөлді материалдық емес факторлар – әлеуметтік байланыстар, мойындау және құрмет атқарады.

Зерттеу нәтижелері бақыттың күрделі табиғатын дәлелдейді, ол экономикалық, мәдени және символикалық өлшемдердің тоғысында қалыптасады. Қазақстандық контексте субъективті әлауқат материалдық және моральдық құрамдастардың үйлесімін білдіреді, мұнда құрмет, сенім және әлеуметтік қолдау ерекше мәнге ие. Алынған тұжырымдар қоғамдық әлауқатты зерттеуде әлеуметтік-психологиялық және мәдени факторларды біріктіру қажеттілігін және Қазақстанда «бақыт социологиясы» тұжырымдамасын дамытудың өзектілігін көрсетеді.

**ТҮЙІН СӨЗДЕР:** бақыт; субъективті әлауқат; әлеуметтік жағдай; әлеуметтік мәртебе; материалдық игілік; білім; кәсіби бедел; лауазым; әлеуметтік байланыстар; құрмет; әлеуметтік капитал.

## Социальное положение и его влияние на счастье: эмпирический анализ в контексте Казахстана

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**АННОТАЦИЯ.** В статье рассматривается влияние социального положения на субъективное ощущение счастья в современном казахстанском обществе. Эмпирическая база исследования сформирована на основе социологического опроса взрослого населения Казахстана (N=1504), проведенного в 2022 году во всех регионах страны. В качестве индикаторов социального статуса выделены шесть параметров: уровень материального достатка, образование и квалификация, должность и профессиональный статус, престиж профессии, наличие социальных связей и степень уважения со стороны окружающих.

Методология исследования основана на количественном подходе, включающем описательный и сравнительный анализ. Такой подход позволил выявить закономерности распределения субъективного счастья в зависимости от социально-демографических и статусных характеристик респондентов. Полученные данные демонстрируют, что материальные ресурсы (доход, образование, профессиональная занятость) создают основу для субъективного благополучия, однако решающую роль в формировании внутреннего ощущения счастья играют нематериальные факторы – социальные связи, признание и уважение со стороны общества.

Результаты подтверждают гипотезу о комплексной природе счастья, формирующегося на пересечении экономических, культурных и символических измерений. Для казахстанского контекста характерно сочетание материальных и моральных компонентов благополучия, где особое значение имеют уважение, доверие и социальная поддержка. Выводы исследования подчеркивают необходимость интеграции социально-психологических и культурных факторов в анализ общественного благополучия и развития концепции «социологии счастья» в Казахстане.

**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** счастье; субъективное благополучие; социальное положение; социальный статус; материальное благосостояние; образование; профессиональный престиж; должность; социальные связи; уважение; социальный капитал.

**INTRODUCTION.** In recent years, the study of subjective happiness has become one of the most dynamically evolving areas within the social sciences. Whereas happiness was once understood primarily as an individual psychological category linked to emotional states and personal traits, contemporary scholarship increasingly conceptualizes it as a complex sociocultural phenomenon that reflects the broader conditions of social well-being, trust, and quality of life. This shift is driven both by the expanding scope of the humanities and by society's growing demand for indicators that reach beyond conventional economic measures of development.

In both domestic and international research, scholars have noted a significant rise in interest toward the study of happiness over the past decades. Trotsuk and Grebneva (2019) emphasize that happiness "has become a legitimate object of conceptual and methodological inquiry across nearly all social and human sciences," while Afanasyeva and Oleksenko (2019) observe that this phenomenon "captures the full spectrum of human needs and aspirations." Thus, happiness emerges as a universal category that unites individual and collective dimensions of human existence.

The practical significance of studying happiness is also reinforced by international initiatives. Since 2012, the annual World Happiness Report has presented subjective well-being as an alternative— and in many cases, a more sensitive— indicator of social progress than GDP. As Rumyantseva and Sheremet (2020) argue, the inclusion of subjective well-being indicators in global rankings marks a transition toward a more comprehensive understanding of quality of life. It is notable that several countries, including Thailand, Venezuela, and Ecuador, have established governmental institutions dedicated to happiness policy, recognizing its strategic importance for social development.

Contemporary empirical evidence demonstrates that subjective happiness is closely linked to an individual's social position, and that this relationship extends beyond economic parameters. In addition to income, factors such as education, professional realization, social recognition, and interpersonal networks significantly shape the experience of well-being. Scholars emphasize that happiness cannot be reduced to material prosperity alone; rather, it is formed through the interplay of multiple influences that may be conceptualized within the framework of social capital (Layard, 2005; Veenhoven, 1999). The literature identifies at least three consistent analytical directions: the role of life cycle and family status (Kuchenkova & Tatarova, 2019; Chernysh, 2019); the function of social ties and respect as resources for psychological balance (Kuzikova & Shcherbak, 2020; Eidelman & Sergienko, 2016); and the importance of subjective evaluations of status and well-being, which often prove stronger predictors

than objective income measures (Ejrnaes & Greve, 2017; Nemirovskaya & Soboleva, 2020).

However, the nature of these influences largely depends on the national and sociocultural context. Kazakhstani society, which is undergoing a process of social modernization and experiencing changes in employment structures, educational trajectories, and status hierarchies, presents a complex and often ambiguous picture of the relationship between social status and subjective well-being. On the one hand, several studies conducted in Kazakhstan have revealed a significant impact of socio-economic conditions on quality of life and subjective satisfaction. For instance, a study on unemployed youth found that financial standing accounts for up to 58% of the variation in perceived quality of life (Duisekova et al., 2025). On the other hand, Sultaniyazova's (2021) ethnopsychological analysis demonstrates that socio-economic and political factors are not always decisive determinants of subjective well-being. These contrasting findings highlight the need for an integrated approach that considers both material and non-material components of social position.

Particularly important in the Kazakhstani context are the factors of recognition and respect. As Arganchiyeva et al. (2023) show, higher levels of social support and self-esteem correlate strongly with optimism and psychological well-being, which allows us to view social connections and public recognition as key components of subjective happiness within a culture that values interpersonal relationships and social approval. In a society undergoing structural transformation, these resources can compensate for the lack of material stability and help sustain a sense of life satisfaction.

This leads to a central research problem: to identify the elements of social position that exert the strongest influence on subjective happiness in Kazakhstan and to determine how material (income, education, occupation, professional prestige) and non-material (social ties, respect) determinants interact. Accordingly, this article seeks to answer the following research question: which specific aspects of social status— economic, educational, professional, or symbolic— most strongly shape subjective happiness in Kazakhstan, and through what mechanisms do they operate?

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the effects of different components of an individual's social position – level of material well-being, education and qualifications, occupational and professional status, occupational prestige, social connections, and perceived respect— on subjective happiness in Kazakhstani society, as well as to examine the balance between material and non-material determinants of well-being. Achieving this goal will help clarify the role of social status in the formation of happiness and contribute to the development of the sociology of happiness as a field that integrates

economic, cultural, and socio-psychological dimensions of human well-being.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS OF RESEARCH.** The study is based on data from a sociological survey of the adult population of the Republic of Kazakhstan conducted in 2022. The empirical objective was to examine how various components of an individual's social position relate to their subjective perception of happiness. The choice of a quantitative approach was driven by the aim to obtain generalizable, comparable, and statistically interpretable data on the distribution of happiness across social groups.

The total sample included 1,504 respondents. Sampling was carried out using a quota-based method that accounted for the main socio-demographic characteristics—gender, age, and type of settlement. This approach ensured the representativeness of the data with respect to the adult population of the country and the comparability of indicators across different social strata. The inclusion of both urban and rural residents was particularly important, as spatial differences in Kazakhstan are closely linked to employment opportunities, income levels, and the density of social networks, all of which directly influence subjective well-being.

The data collection instrument was a standardized questionnaire that included several logically interconnected sections. The first section contained socio-demographic questions (gender, age, marital status, education, type of employment), which made it possible to differentiate responses and conduct comparative analysis by the main social groups. The second section was devoted to the self-assessment of social position and included questions about material well-being, level of education and qualification, occupational and professional status, prestige of work performed, as well as the presence of social ties and the degree of respect from others. The third section focused on recording the subjective sense of happiness: respondents were asked to assess how happy they consider themselves, using an ordinal scale ranging from low ("I do not consider myself happy") to high values ("I consider myself happy"). Such a structure made it possible to relate the assessment of happiness to each of the six identified indicators of social position.

A key methodological decision was to consider social position as a multi-component category. Six indicators were included in the analysis: level of material well-being (self-assessment of the financial situation of the family/household); education and qualification; occupational position and professional status; prestige of the profession; presence of social ties and a supportive environment; respect and recognition from others.

Such a decomposition of status into structural (material and educational) and symbolic (prestige, recognition, social ties) elements corresponds to the initial research hypothesis that subjective happiness is determined not only by economic opportunities but also by the extent to which a person is integrated into the community and feels social approval.

The processing and analysis of data were descriptive and comparative. At the first stage, frequency distributions were constructed for all key variables, which made it possible to describe the overall level of subjective happiness in the sample and to determine how respondents evaluate their social position according to six selected parameters. At the second stage, a comparative analysis was conducted: indicators of subjective happiness were compared between groups differing in material well-being, education, occupation, professional prestige, as well as in the presence of social ties and respect. This approach made it possible to identify not only the existence of relationships but also the nature of the distribution of hap-

piness within each status category: whether the proportion of "happy" individuals increases with income growth, whether those who feel socially respected differ in happiness levels, and whether there is a gap between material and non-material resources.

It is important to emphasize that no correlation or regression models were applied in this study, since the objective was not to construct a formalized statistical dependence but rather to demonstrate socially meaningful differences between groups. This design corresponds to sociological research traditions that focus on the interpretation of structural differences rather than on determining the "pure" statistical strength of relationships. Moreover, the descriptive and comparative approach was consistent with the nature of the initial data: a significant part of the variables represents ordinal self-assessment scales, which makes analysis through cross-tabulations and percentage distributions methodologically justified.

The reliability of the data was ensured through unified instructions for interviewers and standardization of the questionnaire. The limitations of the study are related to the self-evaluative character of several indicators: both social position and happiness were recorded in the way they are perceived by the respondents themselves. However, this directly corresponds to the aim of the research—to identify how individuals themselves relate their own social status and their sense of well-being.

The chosen methodological framework—a large-scale survey, a multi-component measurement of social position, and a descriptive-comparative analysis—makes it possible to identify which specific elements of status (material or symbolic) are most frequently associated with higher levels of subjective happiness in Kazakhstani society.

**RESULTS AND THEIR DISCUSSION.** The results of the empirical study are based on data from a large-scale sociological survey of the adult population of Kazakhstan (N = 1504) conducted in 2022. The analysis aimed to identify the relationships between various aspects of social position and the subjective sense of happiness. Descriptive and comparative analytical methods were used to process the information, which made it possible to trace the patterns of subjective well-being depending on the socio-demographic and status characteristics of respondents.

The analysis revealed that subjective happiness is significantly associated with an individual's position in the social structure, yet it is not limited to economic parameters. Happiness emerges as the result of the interaction between material and symbolic factors—such as income level, education, occupational position, professional prestige, social connections, and respect. The key findings presented below reflect the main trends and regularities identified in the course of the research.

The first important result is the confirmation of the social and demographic representativeness of the sample, which ensures the reliability of the identified patterns. The study included respondents from all regions of the country, comprising 59% urban and 41% rural residents. In terms of ethnic composition, Kazakhs constituted the majority (69.7%), reflecting the national demographic distribution, while Russians and other ethnic groups were also represented. The balance in gender and age characteristics allows for the generalization of the results to the level of the adult population of Kazakhstan (see Table 1).

The data obtained indicate that material well-being remains an important, though not the sole, determinant of happiness. A direct relationship was observed between the subjective assessment of income level and the sense of well-being: the higher the self-evaluation of financial status, the greater the likelihood of identifying oneself as

happy. Among respondents with low income, a significant proportion reported that they “do not feel happy,” while in groups with higher income levels, the share of those who considered themselves “very happy” almost doubled. This confirms that economic security creates basic conditions for life satisfaction but does not guarantee emotional balance (see Table 2).

The next significant indicator is the level of education and qualification. The results show that individuals with higher education more often describe themselves as “fairly happy” or “very happy.” Education not only expands employment opportunities and increases income but also contributes to the development of self-respect, autonomy, and confidence in the future. Thus, educational status exerts a complex influence— economic, cultural, and psychological— on the perception of happiness (see Table 3).

The analysis of the impact of professional status and occupational position also revealed notable differences. Among respondents occupying managerial or highly qualified positions, responses indicating unhappiness were almost absent. Professional self-realization and the recognition of one’s competence enhance the feeling of internal satisfaction and social significance. In contrast, among low-status occupational groups, the share of those dissatisfied with life is substantially higher, which indicates the importance of professional self-fulfillment for subjective well-being (see Table 4).

The perception of occupational prestige turned out to be another significant factor. Among representatives of professions perceived as prestigious, the share of “very happy” respondents reached almost one-third of the total. Prestige performs a symbolic function of social recognition, reinforcing a sense of personal value and belonging to a respected social stratum. Where a profession is perceived as having low prestige, the level of happiness is markedly lower, demonstrating a close connection between public recognition of work and an individual’s internal sense of success (see Table 5).

Social connections play a particularly important role in shaping subjective happiness. Individuals with a broad network of personal and professional relationships are more likely to evaluate themselves as happy. Among respondents who maintain stable relationships with friends and colleagues, nearly half reported high levels of happiness. Conversely, those who feel socially isolated rarely demonstrate a positive self-assessment of well-being. This finding confirms that social support and a sense of belonging to a community serve as crucial conditions for psychological balance and personal resilience (see Table 6).

The strongest influence on subjective happiness is exerted by the factor of respect and recognition. Among respondents who feel a high degree of social respect, 44% identified themselves as “very happy,” whereas among those who do not experience public recognition, the share of happy individuals is minimal. This leads to the conclusion that the symbolic dimension of social position— recognition, respect, and social significance— is a key component of internal well-being. For Kazakhstani society, where collective forms of approval and social reputation traditionally hold great importance, this result is particularly illustrative (see Table 7).

It can be concluded that the subjective perception of happiness in Kazakhstan is determined not so much by the level of income as by the quality of social relationships and the degree of symbolic recognition of the individual. Respect, social support, and a sense of belonging to a community act as the central sources of inner well-being and life satisfaction. The obtained results confirm the hypothesis about the complex nature of happiness and

emphasize the necessity of analyzing it at the intersection of economic, social, and cultural factors.

The aggregated survey data make it possible to identify a set of consistent patterns showing that the subjective happiness of Kazakhstani citizens relies simultaneously on structural (material and status-related) and symbolic (social and recognition-based) resources. However, aggregate indicators alone do not reveal the internal configuration of these relationships and do not show how the level of perceived well-being changes when moving from lower to higher status positions, from a lack of social ties to their abundance, or from the absence of respect to its high degree. Therefore, it is essential to proceed to a step-by-step examination of the empirical material presented in Tables 1–7. Such a sequential analysis allows us to clearly demonstrate which components constitute the identified trends, which groups show the most significant differences in happiness levels, and which parameters of social position are most sensitive to subjective well-being. Each table below is analyzed separately, with an interpretation of its substantive meaning and the contextual explanation of the obtained results within the overall research framework.

**Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 1504)**

Indicator	Category	Count	%
Place of residence	Urban	888	59.0%
	Rural	616	41.0%
Age	Under 18	0	0.0%
	18–29 years	352	23.4%
	30–39 years	364	24.2%
	40–49 years	275	18.3%
	50–59 years	232	15.4%
	60 and older	281	18.7%
Gender	Male	706	46.9%
	Female	798	53.1%
Ethnicity	Kazakh	1048	69.7%
	Russian	274	18.2%
	Other	182	12.1%

The obtained data make it possible to characterize the sample as representative in terms of the main socio-demographic parameters of the adult population of Kazakhstan. More than half of the respondents reside in urban areas (59 %), reflecting the country’s ongoing urbanization process and the growing share of city dwellers. The rural segment accounts for 41 %, which also allows for meaningful comparison between urban and rural communities.

The age distribution of the sample is well balanced: respondents younger than 30 constitute 47.6 %, mirroring Kazakhstan’s demographic structure, where young, working-age citizens predominate. At the same time, the substantial representation of older cohorts (18.7 % aged 60 and above) makes it possible to consider specific features of happiness perception in later life, where differences in subjective well-being often emerge.

Gender distribution is nearly even— 46.9 % men and 53.1 % women— which ensures the comparability of indicators and enables the analysis of gender-based differences in the perception of happiness. The ethnic composition of the sample also corresponds to the population structure of Kazakhstan: Kazakhs make up roughly two-thirds (69.7 %), Russians – 18.2 %, and representatives of other ethnic groups – 12.1 %. This proportion guarantees the representativeness and inter-ethnic validity of the

collected data. Overall, the socio-demographic structure of the sample accurately reflects the real distribution of the country's population by key parameters and provides a solid empirical basis for analyzing the relationship be-

tween social position and subjective happiness. The inclusion of all major social groups allows the identified patterns to be viewed as general tendencies characteristic of Kazakhstani society.

**Table 2. Distribution of subjective happiness depending on the level of material well-being (%)**

How would you assess your social position in society (by level of material well-being)?	Completely unhappy	Not very happy	Neither happy nor unhappy	Quite happy	Very happy
<i>Low</i>	26.7%	12.7%	8.3%	1.7%	1.5%
<i>Below average</i>	20.0%	27.3%	9.3%	4.0%	1.5%
<i>Average</i>	53.3%	56.4%	75.1%	79.7%	72.8%
<i>Above average</i>	0.0%	3.6%	5.2%	12.2%	15.7%
<i>High</i>	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	2.3%	8.4%

The analysis of the relationship between subjective happiness and the material well-being of respondents reveals a clear and statistically consistent pattern: as individuals' self-assessed income levels rise, the share of those who describe themselves as "quite happy" or "very happy" increases significantly. Among those who perceive their social position as low, the proportion of "very happy" respondents is minimal (1.5%), while nearly 40% of this group identify themselves as "unhappy" or "not very happy." In contrast, in the high-income group, the proportion of "very happy" respondents rises to 8.4%, and the combined share of "quite happy" and "very happy" individuals exceeds 10%, several times higher than among the less affluent segments of the population.

A particularly notable shift is observed between the "below average" and "average" income categories. While respondents with low income levels are dominated by feelings of dissatisfaction (over 40% report not feeling happy), in the "average" income group, the majority (around 80%) identify themselves as "quite happy" or "very happy." This suggests that reaching a certain level of material stability serves as a threshold point marking the transition from insecurity and dissatisfaction to a sense of

well-being.

At the same time, it is important to note that with further increases in material well-being – in the "above average" and "high" categories – the rise in the proportion of "very happy" respondents becomes less pronounced. This may indicate a saturation effect of material gains: once a basic level of economic security is achieved, subjective happiness no longer grows proportionally with income. This finding supports the view that material prosperity provides the foundation for subjective satisfaction but is neither its only nor its determining source.

Overall, the analysis of the table shows that economic security is a necessary but not sufficient condition for happiness. Income creates the basic capacity to meet needs, achieve a sense of safety, and maintain confidence in the future. However, genuine happiness requires the addition of non-material components – recognition, respect, social support, and self-realization. These results are consistent with A. Maslow's concept of the multi-level structure of human needs and R. Inglehart's conclusion that as material demands are met, post-material values such as communication, trust, recognition, and personal growth gain increasing importance.

**Table 3. Distribution of subjective happiness depending on the level of education and qualification (%)**

How would you assess your social position in society (by level of education and qualification)?	Completely unhappy	Not very happy	Neither happy nor unhappy	Quite happy	Very happy
<i>Low</i>	6.7%	1.8%	1.5%	0.5%	0.9%
<i>Below average</i>	13.3%	5.5%	2.6%	1.3%	0.2%
<i>Average</i>	73.3%	60.0%	71.1%	63.1%	57.0%
<i>Above average</i>	0.0%	14.5%	13.4%	14.7%	11.7%
<i>High</i>	6.7%	18.2%	11.3%	20.4%	30.2%

The analysis of the relationship between happiness and educational status reveals a clear and consistent pattern: the higher the level of education, the greater the proportion of respondents who identify themselves as "quite happy" or "very happy." Among individuals with low or below-average education, there are virtually no respondents reporting high subjective well-being, whereas among those with higher education and advanced professional qualifications, the proportion of "very happy" respondents reaches nearly one-third of this group (see Table 3).

These findings confirm the significance of education not only as an economic asset but also as a socio-cultural resource. Education shapes not only professional competence but also broader cognitive and cultural horizons, fostering personal autonomy, self-confidence, and a sense of self-realization. In this sense, educational capital functions as a mediating factor between an individual's structural position and their subjective experience of happiness.

It is noteworthy that respondents with an "average" level of education show a substantial share of those

who consider themselves "quite happy" (63.1%), suggesting a balanced alignment between expectations and achievements. At the same time, highly educated respondents demonstrate a shift toward the "very happy" category (30.2%), which reflects not only the attainment of material goals but also symbolic recognition of social success.

Overall, the results support the hypothesis that educational and professional status serves as a significant predictor of subjective well-being. Education enhances not only income levels but also contributes to the development of confidence, social stability, and respect from others, which together reinforce a sustained sense of happiness. These conclusions are consistent with international studies (Layard, 2005; Veenhoven, 1999), which emphasize the role of education as a cornerstone of human capital and emotional well-being.

The analysis of the relationship between subjective happiness and occupational position demonstrates a stable and significant dependence between professional status and the perception of well-being (see Table 4).

Among respondents occupying low and below-average positions, the share of those who identify as “very happy” is minimal (1–1.2%), whereas among representatives of high-status professions—managers, specialists, and qualified professionals—it reaches 22.4%. This finding indicates the direct influence of professional self-realization and labor recognition on the subjective experience of happiness.

**Table 4. Distribution of subjective happiness depending on position and main occupation (%)**

How would you assess your social position in society (by position at work or main occupation)?	Completely unhappy	Not very happy	Neither happy nor unhappy	Quite happy	Very happy
<i>Low</i>	10.0%	2.2%	3.1%	0.8%	0.5%
<i>Below average</i>	10.0%	10.9%	7.4%	1.8%	1.2%
<i>Average</i>	70.0%	69.6%	67.9%	63.0%	59.6%
<i>Above average</i>	10.0%	13.0%	15.4%	20.6%	16.2%
<i>High</i>	0.0%	4.3%	6.2%	13.8%	22.4%

It is noteworthy that respondents with an average occupational status exhibit a consistently high share of “quite happy” individuals (63%), reflecting relative satisfaction with living conditions and professional stability. However, the noticeable increase in the proportion of “very happy” respondents in the “above average” and “high” status categories points to the effect of symbolic reward: the experience of social status, recognition, and public respect enhances individuals’ internal sense of life satisfaction.

These results confirm that professional status functions as a crucial component of social identity. Employment and occupational role not only provide material resources but also form a sense of personal significance and acknowledgment from society and peers. In the Kazakhstani context, where social respect and occupational prestige are

traditionally held in high esteem, one’s position at work becomes a key determinant of happiness.

The findings align with sociological theories of status and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986; Honneth, 2005), which emphasize that symbolic capital—respect, reputation, and professional prestige—plays a role no less significant than economic capital. In this sense, professional activity becomes a space for self-realization and social legitimization of success, directly shaping emotional well-being.

Thus, occupational and professional status can be regarded as one of the strongest predictors of subjective happiness. While economic resources create a foundation for stability, it is the recognition of competence, professional authority, and satisfaction with one’s work that sustain a profound sense of happiness and life fulfillment.

**Table 5. Distribution of subjective happiness depending on the prestige of profession (%)**

How would you assess your social position in society (by the prestige of your profession)?	Completely unhappy	Not very happy	Neither happy nor unhappy	Quite happy	Very happy
<i>Low</i>	8.3%	2.1%	4.7%	1.6%	0.5%
<i>Below average</i>	16.7%	6.3%	7.6%	2.5%	1.4%
<i>Average</i>	50.0%	60.4%	62.8%	57.6%	53.9%
<i>Above average</i>	16.7%	18.8%	15.1%	18.5%	16.0%
<i>High</i>	8.3%	12.5%	9.9%	19.7%	28.2%

The analysis of the relationship between subjective happiness and the perceived prestige of one’s profession reveals a stable positive trend (see Table 5). The higher the degree of occupational prestige, the greater the share of respondents who consider themselves happy. Among those who assess the prestige of their profession as “high” or “above average,” the combined share of “quite happy” and “very happy” individuals exceeds one-third. In contrast, among respondents who perceive their occupation as “low-prestige,” almost no one reports a high level of happiness.

These data confirm that professional prestige performs an important symbolic function—it reflects not only public recognition of labor but also an internal sense of dignity and social significance. Occupational prestige strengthens feelings of self-confidence and self-worth, fostering a positive attitude toward one’s life. Thus, prestige operates as one of the key non-material resources of subjective well-being.

It is particularly noteworthy that even at comparable levels of material wealth, respondents in “high-prestige” professions demonstrate a significantly higher level of happiness than those in low-status occupational fields. This suggests that social recognition and symbolic reward play a role no less important than economic factors. In the Kazakhstani cultural context—where public respect and social reputation are highly valued—the prestige of one’s profession becomes a meaningful indicator of social identity and personal success.

The results are consistent with Pierre Bourdieu’s con-

cept of symbolic capital (1986), according to which recognition and respect function as a distinct form of social resource. Holders of prestigious professions receive not only material dividends but also symbolic ones—in the form of respect, acknowledgment, and authority. These symbolic benefits enhance psychological well-being and resilience to stress.

Thus, the prestige of professional activity serves as an important mediator between the objective characteristics of status and the subjective experience of happiness. The higher the prestige of one’s profession, the greater the likelihood that an individual will feel socially fulfilled, respected, and internally satisfied with life.

The analysis reveals a clear correlation between the breadth of social ties and the level of subjective happiness (see Table 6). The more extensive an individual’s network of personal and professional relationships, the higher the likelihood of overall life satisfaction. Among respondents with a low level of social connections, only 2% described themselves as “very happy,” whereas in the group with a high level of social ties, this figure rises to 31.1%. This finding highlights the significant role of social capital in shaping the sense of well-being.

Respondents who rated their social networks as “above average” or “high” demonstrate notably higher levels of cheerfulness and emotional balance. Social contacts provide not only practical support in difficult situations but also a sense of belonging and inclusion within a community—aligning with Robert Putnam’s concept of social capital as a source of social trust and individual

well-being. In the Kazakhstani context, where social relationships traditionally rely on mutual assistance, kinship, and friendship, the existence of a broad social network serves as one of the main sources of happiness.

**Table 6. Distribution of subjective happiness depending on the presence of social ties and acquaintances**

How would you assess your social position in society (by the availability of social ties and acquaintances)?	Completely unhappy	Not very happy	Neither happy nor unhappy	Quite happy	Very happy
<i>Low</i>	14.3%	11.1%	6.7%	3.3%	2.0%
<i>Below average</i>	14.3%	14.8%	8.7%	4.4%	1.3%
<i>Average</i>	64.3%	51.9%	65.1%	59.9%	51.9%
<i>Above average</i>	7.1%	14.8%	10.8%	16.1%	13.7%
<i>High</i>	0.0%	7.4%	8.7%	16.3%	31.1%

In the groups with "low" and "below average" levels of social connectedness, the proportion of those who consider themselves "completely unhappy" or "not very happy" is significantly higher, indicating risks of social isolation and loneliness. Conversely, as the level of connectedness increases, there is a marked growth in the share of respondents who identify as "quite happy" or "very happy," confirming that social involvement is a key predictor of psychological comfort.

The presence of social ties and acquaintances functions not only as a form of social resource but also as a source of emotional support that substantially enhances subjective happiness.

For contemporary Kazakhstan – a society combining traditional values with modern patterns of social interaction – this means that the quality of interpersonal relations remains one of the most influential factors determining inner well-being and life satisfaction.

**Table 7. Distribution of subjective happiness depending on the level of respect from others (%)**

How would you assess your social position in society (by the level of respect from others)?	Completely unhappy	Not very happy	Neither happy nor unhappy	Quite happy	Very happy
<i>Low</i>	6.7%	1.8%	2.6%	0.4%	0.0%
<i>Below average</i>	6.7%	1.8%	2.1%	0.1%	0.7%
<i>Average</i>	66.7%	63.6%	62.7%	46.9%	39.6%
<i>Above average</i>	6.7%	14.5%	18.1%	24.7%	15.8%
<i>High</i>	13.3%	18.2%	14.5%	28.0%	44.0%

The results of the analysis show that the level of respect from others is one of the most significant factors influencing the subjective sense of happiness (see Table 7). A clear relationship is observed: the higher the perception of recognition and respect, the greater the proportion of respondents who describe themselves as "quite happy" or "very happy." Among those who reported a high level of respect, nearly half (44%) identified themselves as "very happy," while in the group with low perceived respect, such responses were virtually absent.

This finding indicates that symbolic recognition and social approval play a central role in shaping subjective well-being. Respect from others serves not merely as an external evaluation but as an affirmation of one's social significance, usefulness, and acceptance within society. In the context of Kazakhstani culture – where social approval and collective perception are deeply rooted in tradition – this factor becomes especially decisive.

It is noteworthy that even at an average level of perceived respect, almost half of respondents (46.9%) consider themselves "quite happy," which suggests that basic recognition and social inclusion already provide a foundation for inner comfort. However, the greatest effect is observed when moving to the "above average" and "high" categories, where the proportion of "very happy" individuals more than doubles. This demonstrates the importance of moral capital for the experience of happiness.

The results support Axel Honneth's (2005) theory of recognition, according to which respect, approval, and acknowledgment constitute fundamental social conditions for the formation of positive personal identity. Conversely, the absence of respect leads to frustration and a decline in subjective well-being. Respect, therefore, can be regarded as a crucial element of social justice and psychological equilibrium.

The data suggest that within the structure of happiness factors, intangible indicators – such as respect, recognition, and social trust – are no less important than

economic or professional achievements. For Kazakhstani society, this underscores the need to account for moral and symbolic aspects of social status when studying and promoting social well-being.

A comprehensive analysis of the results reveals that the subjective perception of happiness in Kazakhstan is shaped by the combined influence of social, economic, and symbolic factors. Empirical evidence demonstrates that a person's social position – encompassing material resources, education, occupational status, professional prestige, the presence of social ties, and respect from others – exerts a multidimensional impact on the perception of happiness. A clear trend emerges: as social status rises, social networks expand, and public recognition increases, so too does the proportion of individuals who describe themselves as "quite happy" or "very happy."

The analysis of income levels demonstrated that economic security remains an important but not decisive condition for happiness. As income increases, overall life satisfaction tends to rise; however, once a certain level of material stability is achieved, individuals begin to shift their focus toward non-material forms of well-being. Thus, material capital functions as a necessary but insufficient condition for subjective happiness.

The influence of education and professional qualification manifests itself in the consistently higher levels of subjective well-being reported by more educated respondents. Education not only enhances opportunities for professional self-realization and higher income but also broadens cognitive horizons, fosters confidence, and strengthens the sense of control over one's life. Therefore, educational capital can be regarded as a mediating factor linking social status and personal happiness.

Professional status and occupational prestige have a notable impact on the perception of happiness. Respondents holding higher positions or identifying their professions as prestigious more often describe themselves as happy. Professional prestige performs both

economic and symbolic functions: it serves as a source of public recognition and self-respect, thereby reinforcing feelings of social inclusion and self-worth. This supports the thesis that symbolic capital – embodied in respect, reputation, and acknowledgment – directly affects subjective well-being.

Social connections and respect from others play a particularly significant role. Respondents with a wide network of acquaintances and supportive relationships are more likely to demonstrate a positive outlook on life. Social ties function as psychological and emotional resources, providing a sense of security, support, and belonging. A high level of respect, recognition, and trust from society enhances the feeling of happiness even more strongly than material success. Respect thus operates not merely as an external evaluation but as an essential element of self-acceptance and social identity.

Overall, the results confirm that subjective happiness is a socially mediated phenomenon shaped by the intersection of economic, cultural, and interpersonal factors. Kazakhstani society is characterized by a combination of values emphasizing social justice, mutual support, and moral recognition – making non-material determinants such as respect, social capital, and prestige the key sources of inner well-being. Material factors provide the foundation for stability, yet it is recognition, social inclusion, and interpersonal relationships that ultimately define a sustainable sense of happiness and life satisfaction.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the necessity of a comprehensive approach to analyzing subjective well-being – one that accounts for the interaction of structural and symbolic components of social status. Within the sociological study of happiness, special attention should be paid to non-material dimensions – respect, trust, social relations, and the sense of personal significance – as these factors ensure the individual's inner stability and harmony amid ongoing social transformation.

**Discussion.** The study of the relationship between social position and subjective happiness has revealed consistent patterns that confirm the multidimensional nature of human well-being. The findings demonstrate that the perception of happiness is determined not only by economic parameters but also by the system of social relations, cultural norms, and moral expectations characteristic of Kazakhstani society. Thus, subjective happiness emerges not merely as an individual trait but as a reflection of social integration, recognition, and inclusion within the broader social structure.

A comparison of the results with theoretical approaches developed by both foreign and domestic scholars shows their alignment with classical sociological conceptions of well-being. In accordance with A. Maslow's theory, material needs constitute a basic foundation necessary for achieving a sense of security and comfort, whereas genuine happiness arises only when higher-order needs – such as those for love, respect, and self-actualization – are fulfilled. Similar conclusions are found in the works of R. Inglehart and C. Welzel, who emphasize that as material affluence grows, post-materialist values – trust, participation, self-expression, and recognition – gain increasing importance.

The study confirms that the level of education is one of the central factors influencing subjective happiness. This finding corresponds to the conclusions of R. Veenhoven and R. Layard, who argue that education enhances not only economic potential but also personal competence and social stability. In the Kazakhstani context, this result is particularly significant, as education has traditionally been viewed as the principal vehicle of social mobility and a symbolic indicator of success.

Professional status and occupational prestige also play a decisive role. As P. Bourdieu observed, symbolic capital – manifested in social recognition and respect – plays no lesser role than economic capital. The empirical results of this study confirm this thesis: respondents occupying prestigious or managerial positions report significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than those in lower-status professions. This suggests that recognition of professional significance strengthens one's sense of dignity and social confidence.

At the same time, the data highlight the crucial importance of moral and social capital. According to A. Honneth's theory of recognition, respect is a fundamental social condition for the positive self-identification of the individual. Among respondents who feel respected and acknowledged by others, the share of "very happy" individuals is several times higher than among those who do not perceive such recognition. This finding resonates with R. Putnam's concept of social capital, which posits that trust, reciprocity, and the density of social ties directly contribute to psychological well-being and reinforce a sense of belonging.

Thus, the discussion of findings demonstrates that happiness in Kazakhstani society is a multi-layered phenomenon formed at the intersection of economic, social, and symbolic structures. On one hand, material factors (income, education, employment) provide the foundation for stability and the fulfillment of basic needs; on the other hand, non-material resources (respect, recognition, and trust) endow life with meaning and a sense of fullness.

The revealed patterns suggest that contemporary Kazakhstani society is undergoing a transition from a utilitarian understanding of happiness toward a value-based and normative one, where social justice, mutual respect, and moral support play an increasingly important role. This opens new perspectives for future sociological research on well-being, particularly for examining how cultural and institutional factors shape subjective happiness and social solidarity.

**CONCLUSION.** The conducted research revealed systemic interrelations between an individual's social position and their subjective sense of happiness in Kazakhstani society. The empirical data confirm that happiness is not an isolated individual state but the outcome of the interplay between economic, social, and symbolic factors.

Material resources – such as income level, education, and professional status – form the foundation of subjective well-being by providing a sense of stability and security. However, the decisive role in shaping the inner experience of happiness belongs to non-material components: respect, recognition, social support, and the feeling of belonging to a community. In Kazakhstani society, where collectivist values, social solidarity, and moral approval traditionally hold great importance, these factors emerge as the most significant.

The findings demonstrate that subjective well-being is formed at the intersection of two domains – material and symbolic. An increase in income or educational attainment contributes to greater happiness only up to a certain threshold. Beyond this point, further enhancement of subjective well-being depends on non-material conditions – the fairness of social relations, trust, respect, and recognition of individual merit.

Thus, happiness in Kazakhstani society has a profoundly social nature. It reflects the degree of an individual's integration into the social system, the level of trust, the stability of social ties, and the moral climate within society. The results highlight the need to move beyond a narrow economic understanding of well-being toward a comprehensive approach that takes into account the so-

cial and cultural determinants of human happiness.

In perspective, this topic opens new avenues for sociological research focusing on the interrelation between social inequality, recognition, and life satisfaction. The practical implications of the study suggest that the development of public well-being requires not only economic growth but also the strengthening of social capital, the

cultivation of trust, and the creation of an environment that fosters respect and moral support for the individual.

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## ИНДЕКС ИНКЛЮЗИВНОЙ ДОСТУПНОСТИ ТУРИЗМА В ВОСТОЧНО-КАЗАХСТАНСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ: МЕТОДОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ ПОДХОД И СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ ЗНАЧИМОСТЬ

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**АННОТАЦИЯ.** В статье рассматриваются актуальные вопросы измерения и управления инклюзивной доступностью