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# Perception of Mutual Help among Alone-Living Europeans (before and after the Recession)

Anna Shirokanova  
LCSR, Saint-Petersburg

# Perception of Mutual Help among Alone-Living Europeans (before and after the Recession)

The initial goal of this project was to assess whether people living alone were hit harder than families by the financial crisis in 2008, often called the great recession.

I focus on Europe as a region :

- strong economies vs. austerity
- economic and political union
- all-European agenda

# Perception of Mutual Help among Alone-Living Europeans (before and after the Recession)

To assess the level of well-being and social solidarity experienced by Europeans, first, I used perception of mutual help in the local community.

Self-assistant networks are building blocks of social capital & community (Helliwell et al 2013 and others).



## Perception of Mutual Help among Alone-Living Europeans (before and after the Recession)

Grass-root self-support is a building block of social capital & community:

-if mutual help remains constant or increases after recession  $\Leftrightarrow$  vibrant communities and high social capital;

-if perception of mutual help falls down  $\Leftrightarrow$  the crisis has hit local communities, policy needed



## Perception of Mutual Help among Alone-Living Europeans (before and after the Recession)

I decided to look at those living alone as this is a relatively big (13%), yet probably vulnerable part of European societies: 1-20+ per cent of the population (Finland, Estonia, Hungary, Germany, etc.)

For **young people** living alone, overcoming a crisis might be easier than for a young family with a child (children). People of **older ages**, on the contrary, may benefit more from other people sharing the household with them rather than from being alone.

## Perception of Mutual Help among Alone-Living Europeans (before and after the Recession)

For **young people** living alone, overcoming a crisis might be easier than for a young family with a child (children). People of **older ages**, on the contrary, may benefit more from other people sharing the household with them rather than from being alone.

Hypothesis: young families with children and older people perceive less help in the local community after the 2008 crisis.

## Perception of Mutual Help among Alone-Living Europeans (before and after the Recession)

### Data:

I used two European Social Surveys, 2006 and 2012, each covering over 40,000 respondents in 22 countries

I estimated multilevel models on perception of help with socio-demographic controls; GDP change and country-level values. Key individual variables were living alone and age.

But the models explained about 5% of the variance. ☹️

Living alone had no significant effect.

## Data:

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The models explained about 5% of the variance.



I started to look for more sensitive indicators of well-being.

Feeling happy was a better indicator in this respect.





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# Happiness among Alone-Living Europeans (before and after the Recession)

Anna Shirokanova  
LCSR, Saint-Petersburg

Steps of research:

1. Individual-level regressions with interactions;
2. Back to multilevel.

The most important variables for me here were **age** and the **number of household members** of the respondent.

The most important variables for me here were **age** and the **number of household members** of the respondent:

- Age 1) as a deviation from the grand mean for Europe (~48 years);
- 2) as group-centred means by country;
- 3) as dichotomous variables for the younger (up to 35 years old) and the older (over 65 years) respondents.

The most important variables for me here were **age** and the **number of household members** of the respondent: pair-wise comparisons

Split file-> analysis

1-2 people in the household

1-3 people

1-4 people

1-5+ people



Three **age** measures by 4 **household** size measures \*  
by 2 **time** points ~ 48 cases for comparison:

- living alone vs. 2/3/4/5+people;
- younger vs. the others; older vs. the others (interaction);
- average age+- (interaction);
- grand-mean vs. group-mean centred (identical in dichotomous interactions);
- 2006 vs. 2012.

## **Models:**

DV – Happy (0-10)

IV – age, HH size, interaction

Controls – subjective health;  
trust; and  
perception of help.

\*Separate models for 2006 and 2012.

All models explained about 21-25% of the variance.

## Model:

*Happy = Age + Lives alone + Age \* Lives alone + (Trust + Perceives help + Health).*



## Hypotheses: two parts

1. **Individuals** cope better than families with children (~3 people and more) when young as they are more **flexible** in adjusting to the financial crisis (changing jobs, less often paying loans, etc.).
2. Older people cope better when living with family, they have more social capital and can benefit from it.



**Hypotheses:** two parts

## **Social flexibility vs. social capital**

In the long-term, if those living alone can cope as good as families, this would support the argument of “solo living” trend in developed societies put forward by Kleinenberg (2012) and others.

# Hands into data: Descriptives

	<b>2006</b>	<b>2012</b>
Minimal sample	48162	42992
Trust (0-10 scale)	Median 5	Median 5
Health (1best – 5 worst)	Median 2	Median 2
<b>Age</b> (14-101 years)	Median 46	Median 48
<b>Lives alone</b>	13% (SD .34)	15% (SD.36)
2 people in a household (HH)	30%	33%
3 people in a HH	22%	21%
4 people in a HH	21%	19%
5+people in a HH	14%	12%
<b>Happy (0-10)</b>	<b>Median 7</b>	<b>Median 8</b>

## Hard facts:

-when compared pair-wise, 2-3-4-5+ household dwellers are happier than living-alone Europeans (somewhat lower for older ages in 3+ households);

-people living in 2's are generally happier than those living alone, and pairs are even happier as they grow old.

## **Hard facts:**

- People living alone reported poorer health and feeling depressed more often.
- People living alone are generally older and receive less help, but for in a few Mediterranean countries

Since being depressed and being happy are strongly correlated, I could phrase the research question in the following way: Is the lower happiness of singles due to their age or due to their living alone?

# Were people living alone ever happier than the others in 2006 or 2012?

## **Is it important to be old to be happy then?**

Yes. And no.

Two stories: Sweden (21% live alone) – in 2006, young people and those living in 2 were happier than the rest. In 2012, people under 35 were less happy than those over 35 years old.

Russia (11% live alone) – in 2006, young people were happier in all cases; in 2012, only young people living alone or in 2 were happier than the older ones. In other words, it was the younger people who felt better, and this is a completely different situation.

# Which direction did the 2006-2012 change in happiness take?

## **Constant:**

- Older ( $>65$ ) people are happier in 1-3 people households;
- Younger ( $<35$ ) people are happier in bigger (3-5+) households.
- People are happier when they share households.

## **Changes in 2012:**

- Older people became unhappier in 4+ households;
- In 2-3 people households younger people became unhappier (negative interaction).

**Those living alone are happier only when compared to pairs. However, in a general case, 3+ households are happier than those, even young people, living alone.**

**Younger respondents were also unhappier in 2012 in Europe. The youth turned out more vulnerable to the crisis, to the opposite of traditional social policies and the ageing agenda.**

Younger respondents were unhappier in 2012 in Europe. The youth turned out more vulnerable to the crisis, to the opposite of traditional social policies and the ageing agenda.

This “unhappier youth” conclusion resonates with previous research that suggested well-being may improve with age (Labouvie-Vief & Blanchard-Fields, 1982; Lawton, 1996; Mroczek & Kolarz 1998, etc.).



This report was presented at the 5th LCSR International Annual Conference “Cultural and Economic Changes under Cross-national Perspective”.

November 16 – 20, 2015 – Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia.

<http://lcsr.hse.ru/en/conf2015>

Настоящий доклад был представлен на V ежегодной международной конференции ЛССИ «Культурные и экономические изменения в сравнительной перспективе».

16-20 ноября 2015 года – НИУ ВШЭ, Москва, Россия.

<http://lcsr.hse.ru/en/conf2015>