NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

Happiness Among Alone-Living Europeans of Old and Young Age

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This presentation is about the following

Why happiness?

Happiness.

- In some countries there is a written right to pursue happiness.
- Economists have used happiness to measure well-being as an alternative to GNP since the 1970s (see the map).
- But can one really manipulate the happiness of multitudes? Isn't it all about economy/culture or SES?
- Studying happiness and its factors in a comparative perspective could provide arguments about social well-being above and beyond political claims or year-to-year economic counts alike.

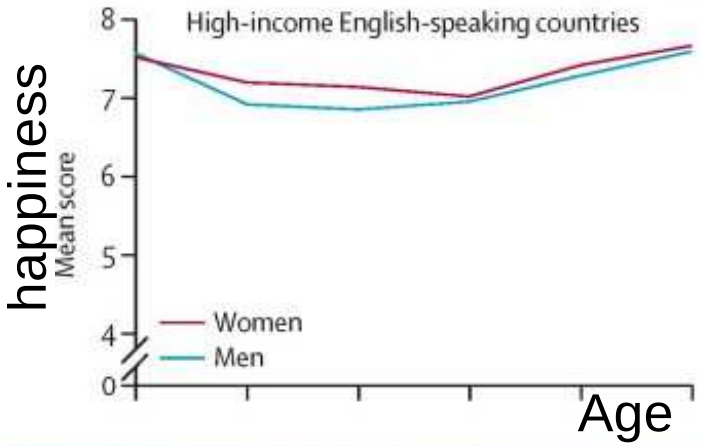
White, A. G.(2007). A Global Projection of Subjective Well-being (fragment)

This project: Europe as a macro-region

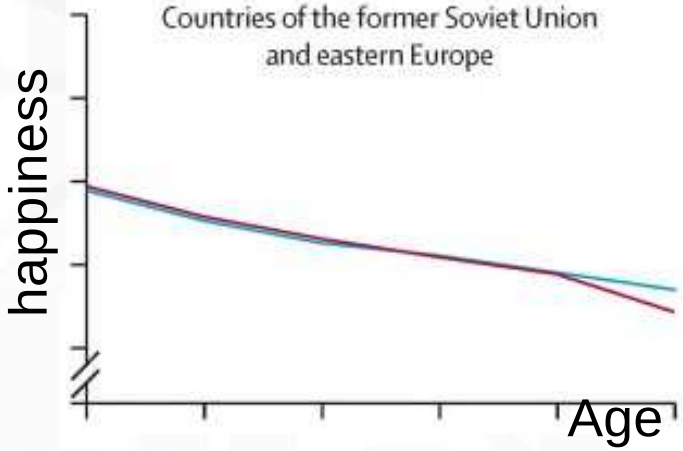
The goal of this project is to explore and compare the role of age and living alone for happiness across Europe.

'Europe' here consists of at least **two regions** with more or less distinct patterns of age-happiness link:

- U-shaped link vs.
- downwards decline (Steptoe, Deaton & Stone 2015).



West and East of Europe



This project: Happiness ~ Age*Marriage

This project has a **double focus**
on age and happiness,
on the one hand,
and marital status and happiness,
on the other.

The initial research idea was to discover more about the reportedly growing number of **adult** singles living **independently** in the cities -- and about their **happiness**.|
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However, as social and survey reality would both have it, it turned out not easy at all to catch these ‘new singles’ between their marriages/relations with traditional survey categories.

Theories of Happiness over Age

There are plenty of theories explaining the greater life satisfaction at the old age or the consistency in happiness over life, when those are observed in the data:

- socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, Fung & Charles 2003);
- hedonic adaptation theory (Kahneman 1999);
- social capital theory (Coleman 1988);
- set-point theory of life satisfaction (Lucas 2007), etc.

Previous Findings

Previous studies showed the following factors to be linked with **happiness**:

individual (positive association):

•social capital > social **trust** (Calvo et al. 2012; Cooper et al. 2011),

•being **married** (Stack and Eshleman, 1998; Giordano and Lindstroem 2011),

•**employed**, and better **educated** (Ulloa, Mueller & Sousa-Poza 2013).

contextual (negative association):

•GDP or social inequality do not exert direct effect on individuals' well-being in Europe; it is the periods of growing inequality that drag down life satisfaction (Schroeder 2016);

•Post-communist transition as a loss for older generations (Steptoe, Deaton & Stone 2015).

Hypotheses

H1

Older people living alone in post-communist countries will be much less happy/less satisfied with life than their counterparts in western Europe.

H2

Individuals living alone in the countries with greater changes in Gini index over 10 years prior to the survey will be less happy/less satisfied with life, irrespective of age.

Operationalization

‘Traditional’ indicators:

1. 'Taking all things together, would you say you are happy?'
2. 'All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?'

Wider construct recently (Kahneman et al. 2003):

Well-being = hedonic WB + eudemonic WB + life evaluation

Let’s see what the data have for us.

Data & Procedure

Data

European Values Study 2008 – old data and indicators but robust sample for MLM that can help test the hypotheses;
48 countries and territories around Europe;
Individual observations: ‘over 9000.’

Procedure

1. Fit ordinal multilevel models to check whether the chosen predictors have the hypothesized effect on happiness.
2. Repeat the same analysis on life satisfaction, as a robustness check.
3. Look closer at the most and least happiest country:
   - decision trees
   - ordinal regression

Model

Happiness/Life satisfaction =

widowed + divorced + never married + living with partner
+
age groups
+
(controls) education + income + control over life + health + materialists + male + religious + trustful
+
ln GNI PPP + Gini change in 10 yrs + post-communist

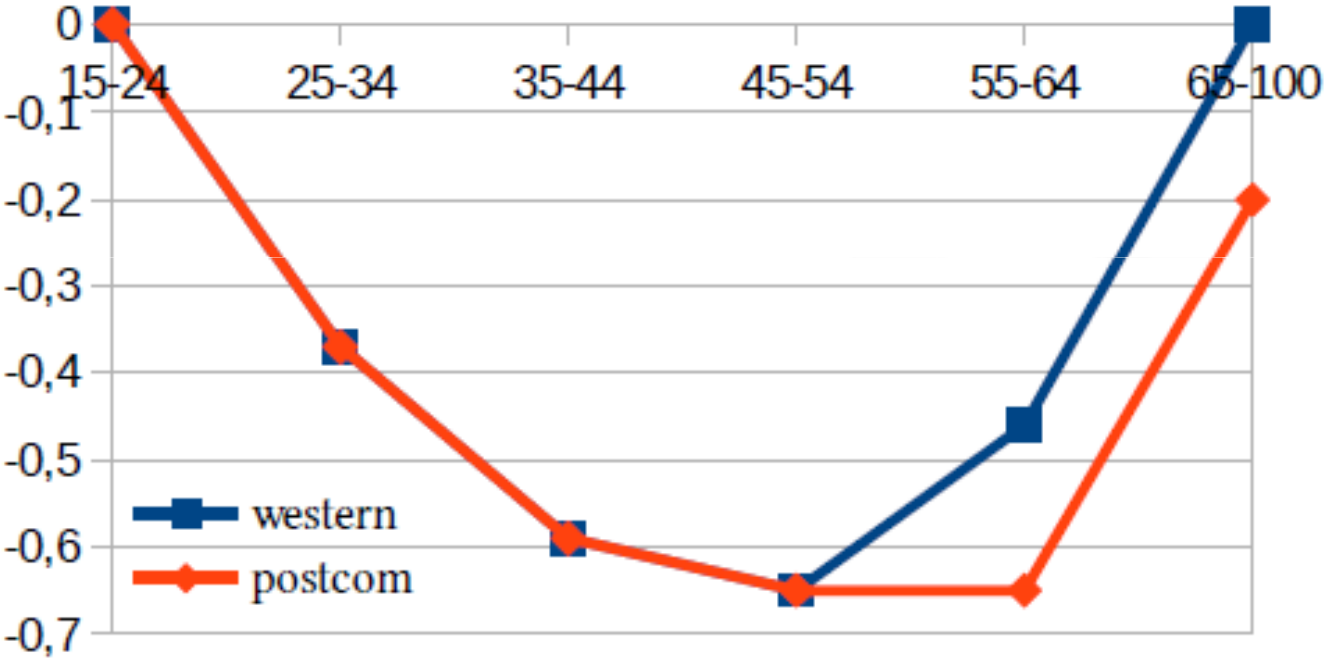
Results I

Happiness =

widowed -0.35***
divorced -0.39***
never married -0.33***
living with partner +0.57***
(in postcommunist country -0.20*)
age groups: 25-34 -0.38***
35-44 -0.59***
45-54 -0.65***
55-64 -0.46***(postcom -0.19**)
65+ ns (postcom -0.19*)

log GNI PPP +0.37***
Gini change ns
postcommunist ns

Results I: Interaction of age and happiness in the west and east of Europe



Summary of Results I

Support of **H1**: older people do report differently about their happiness in post-communist countries, even when those are regarded in the widest sense
Known limitations: as of 2008, without cohort effect.

No support to **H2**: none of the effects of Gini index were significant (either as a direct effect or as an interaction with never being married.
Known problems: substantial noise in the data on inequality.

Results I: Check on Life Satisfaction

Life Satisfaction =

widowed ns
divorced -0.17**
never married ns
living with partner +0.47***
(in postcommunist country -0.16**)
age groups: 25-34 -0.28***
35-44 -0.34***
45-54 -0.32***
55-64 ns (postcom -0.17*)
65+ +0.22* (postcom -0.27***)

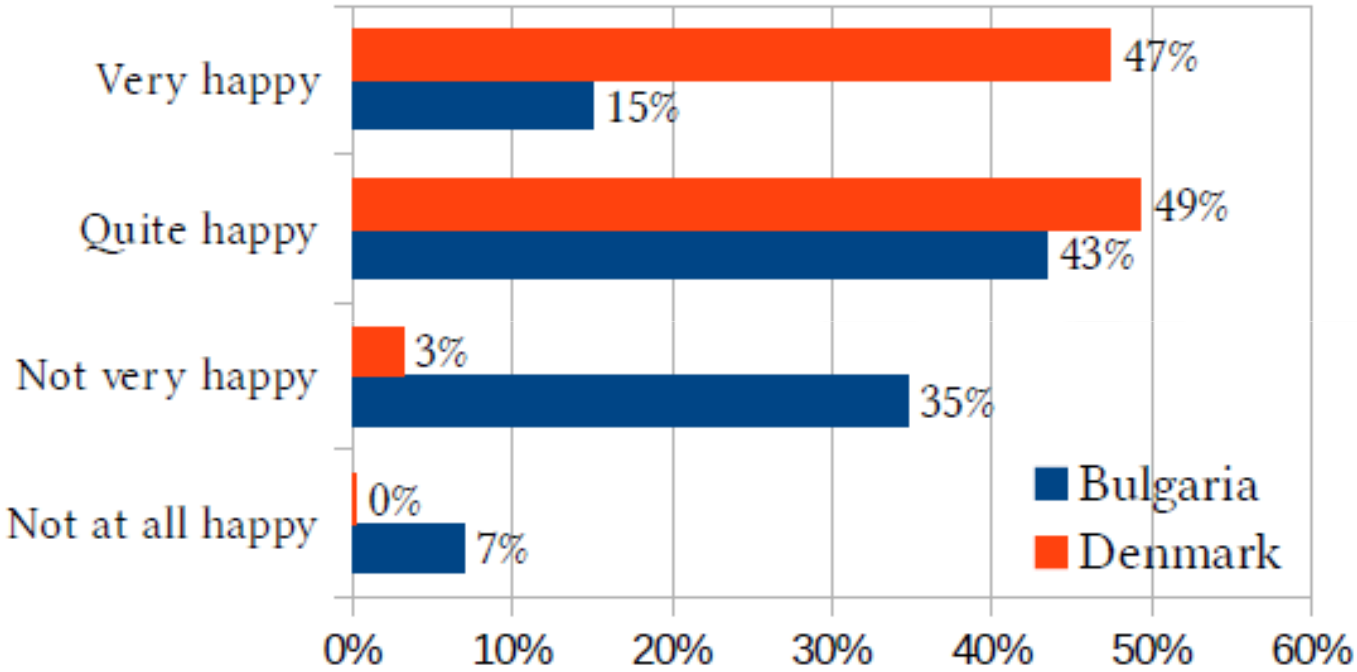
log GNI PPP +0.42***
Gini change ns
postcommunist ns

Summary of Results I: Check

- People of 55+ years unhappier than their western European counterparts
- no such effect for younger age groups
- age in western Europe demonstrates a U-shape link with life satisfaction that is not observed in post-communist countries

- Neither Gini nor its change over the precedent decade produces an interpretable effect on life satisfaction.

Results II: the stories of Bulgaria and Denmark



Data: European Values Study 2008

Results II: the stories of Bulgaria and Denmark

Decision trees (Exhaustive CHAID method):

best predictors of happiness in the model are health, control over life, and religiosity (Bulgaria) or living with a partner/spouse (Denmark).

The models obtained are not reliable, with correct prediction at 20% in Bulgaria and <5% in Denmark (96% of the sample in Denmark fall into 2 categories out of 4).

Results II: the stories of Bulgaria and Denmark

Ordinal regression:

For **Denmark –** the difference is between ‘Quite happy’ and ‘Very happy’:

*not living with a partner

*being 35-44 y.o. (unhappiest period)

(Nagelkerke ~13%, low quality model)

=> **A dip in happiness around 45 years**

For **Bulgaria** – all 4 categories are different:

* not living with a partner

*every age group over 24 y.o. is unhappier

(Nagelkerke ~13%, low quality model)

=>**Happiness and life satisfaction go gradually down**.

➔ U-shaped link in one case, and a line in another one.

Well, well, well, but
What do these findings tell us?

1.1 Different patterns for different parts of Europe hold (more or less) as of the 2008 data: U-shaped link for age in western Europe, a gradual decline in eastern Europe.

1.2 Modernization theory would have it that this situation could pass with time, given favourable economic conditions in eastern Europe.

1.3 As of today, there are different 'stories' behind happiness in different parts of Europe which require different models.

Well, well, well, but
What do these findings tell us?

2.1 Living with a partner (as opposed to living alone) increases happiness in general, but less so in eastern Europe.

3.2 Causality in the positive link between happiness and living with a partner should be further investigated on panel data (cf. Stutzer&Frey 2005).

3.3 Communist regimes are sometimes recalled with nostalgia in eastern Europe. Ironically, so far having that past and the postcommunist experience have only delivered negative interaction effects on happiness.

Thank you for your attention!

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https://lcsr.hse.ru/en/seminar2016

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