

Cognitive and Affective Well-Being Differences in Subjective and Objective Socioeconomic Status Groups

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Abstract: *Objective:* This study aimed at identifying the relationship between socioeconomic status and psychological well-being in the Lithuanian population.

Background: Socioeconomic status implies that not all individuals have equal opportunities to achieve their goals, because not everyone has equal access to education, health, even business support services, and the psychological well-being of some may be significantly reduced solely by lack of material resources.

Method: The main method of research in the article is an interview method at the respondent's home. Also, various assessment tools were used in the Lithuanian population survey. In this survey, the authors applied the following scales: Flourishing Scale; The Satisfaction with Life Scale; The Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale and The Positive and Negative Emotional Experience Scale.

Results: The results of the study showed statistically significant differences in psychological well-being (psychological flourishing, life satisfaction, happiness, positive and negative emotional experiences) between different income quintile groups, with average psychological well-being constructs in the lowest income quintile being about twice lower than in the highest income quintile. The study showed that the mean ranks of the happiness score in the most deprived group were almost seven times lower than in the middle class.

Conclusion: The research has established that strong and lasting negative emotional experiences are related to diminished well-being and can cause direct and indirect public damages. Authors indicate that additional research is needed.

Keywords: Groups, socio-economic status, quality of life assessment, emotional states.

INTRODUCTION

Theories of psychological well-being explain the relationship between psychological well-being and socio-economic status differently [1-5]. The theory of needs claims that psychological well-being depends mostly on the satisfaction of needs [6]. If a society meets basic human needs, then it is likely that such a society will demonstrate higher levels of psychological well-being of its members, and this applies not only to material needs but also to psychological needs [7]. Dissatisfaction with material needs may be related to dissatisfaction with psychological needs (people who experience consumption exclusion may have low self-esteem, negative self-image and negative attitudes towards their own future). Therefore unmet material needs may directly or indirectly promote negative emotionality (or risk of developing negative emotionality) [8].

The theory of goals states that psychological well-being depends on how well one achieves one's goals or lives according to one's values [9,10]. Interestingly,

psychological well-being is enhanced not only by the goal attained but also by approaching the goal [11]. If a person belongs to a group of society which, due to lack of material resources, cannot reach the goal, it is likely to lead to diminished psychological well-being [12, 13].

The theory of comparative standards states that absolute satisfaction of baseline needs is important, but well-being is more influenced by how one compares and interprets available resources with resources available to others, or how one interprets alterations in available resources [8, 14]. People regard the lives of others, including material well-being, as standards of comparison. Psychological well-being depends on how we feel about ourselves or how we compare our present life with our past. If we perceive a "rising curve" or a positive result when comparing our material well-being with the material well-being of others or the well-being of our past lives, then psychological well-being is likely to be positive. Factors that can reduce psychological well-being: suppose some people have the ambition to increase their income over the years significantly, but if they fail to do so, they may feel frustrated, ashamed, helpless, desperate, and not self-confident anymore. So the more the ambitions and the real conditions coincide, the happier the person is. Although the theory of comparative standards helps

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explain some of the changes in psychological well-being, it also receives considerable criticism. For example, a materially deprived person may not want to compare himself or herself to others. From the idea that "others are materially more afflicted," the psychological pain and needs may not diminish at all. In addition, research findings show that absolute income has a more significant impact on psychological well-being than comparable domestic income [15, 16].

In the activity theory, psychological well-being is understood as a by-product of the individual's enjoyment and motivation in various activities (work, social, etc.) [17]. It is clear that socio-economic status may limit the scope for the expression of the innate activism of the poorest segments of society. Not being able to be active to the best of their ability, some individuals may experience intense, long-term negative emotional consequences, including anxiety, helplessness, sadness, despair [18]. If people lack the skills to overcome such conditions constructively, they may begin suppressing negative emotional responses through involvement in damaging health behaviours like consumption of alcohol or psychotropic substances. Based on the theory of activity, it is partly possible to explain why some individuals at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid become addicted to alcohol or psychotropic substances.

When analysing a person's psychological well-being, it is also very important to evaluate the individual's emotional reactions to life events [19, 20]. According to Diener, psychological well-being and, at the same time, a person's creative/productive potential can be considered high if the person's positive emotions outweigh the negative emotions in the continuum of life experiences. A person with a high potential for psychological flourishing, as well as creative and productive potential, has a high level of positive emotionality (more often positive emotional experiences such as peace, hope, compassion, joy) and a low level of negative emotionality (less common negative emotional experiences such as severe anxiety or sadness) [21].

Different models of psychological well-being directly or indirectly emphasise the importance of material resources and meeting basic needs [22, 23]. It can be assumed that socio-economic status, when a part of society is unable to meet important needs adequately, can lead to reduced psychological well-being, reduced positive emotionality and creative potential. In economic terms, it can be detrimental to the state itself.

On the other hand, it is not clear whether objective or subjective socio-economic status is more important for psychological well-being. Our study aimed to find out cognitive and affective well-being differences in subjective and objective socioeconomic status groups.

METHODOLOGY

The study of Lithuanian population was carried out by multilevel probability sampling. In other words, the sample of respondents is designed so that every resident of Lithuania has an equal probability of being interviewed. All subjects were personally asked to participate in the study, the interview method at the respondent's home. The study was conducted in 20 cities and 29 villages. The total number of respondents is 1001 persons (499 men and 502 women; average age - 39 years; 230 teachers, 170 salesmen, 35 office workers, 312 builders, 2 programmers, 8 waiters, 75 cooks, 169 drivers; average income in Euro - 500). The authors described and assessed both objective and subjective socio-economic status.

Various assessment tools were used in the Lithuanian population survey. In this survey, we applied the following scales: Flourishing Scale, created by Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener [8]. The Flourishing Scale is a brief 8-item summary measure of the respondent's self-perceived success in important areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. The scale provides a single psychological well-being score. The structure of subjective well-being has been conceptualised as consisting of two major components: the cognitive or affective component and the judgmental or cognitive component - SWLS, created by Diener *et al.* [24]. The Satisfaction With Life Scale was developed as a measure of the judgmental component of cognitive well-being. Hadley Cantril's Self-Anchoring Striving Scale (1965) is an example of one type of well-being assessment. At the same time, research has revealed that measurement of well-being is multifaceted, including a continuum from judgments of life (life evaluation) to feelings (daily effect) [25, 26]. Different measures of well-being provide different perspectives on the process by which respondents reflect on or experience their lives. The Cantril Scale measures well-being closer to the end of the continuum representing judgments of life or life evaluation. Emotional factors of psychological well-being were assessed using the Positive and Negative Emotional Experience Scale (SPAN, by Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener [8]) The internal consistency of all scales

in Cronbach alpha was sufficient (0.632-0.891) to be considered valid and reliable for the results obtained.

The evaluation of the objective socio-economic status based on the person's income. We subdivided the study sample into income quintiles. In the lowest income group, quintile Q1, there was 17.2% of the respondents (172 persons). In Q2, the second quintile, there were 19.9% (199 persons), in Q3, the third quintile, there were 24.9% (249 persons), in Q4, the fourth quintile, there were 19.4% (194 respondents), and in Q5, the fifth quintile, the highest income group, there were 18.6% of respondents (187 persons). Because the data were distributed asymmetrically across the groups, non-parametric statistics were used to analyse the data, and Kruskal-Wallis independent sample intergroup comparisons were performed. The limitations of this part of the analysis are, of course, the specifics that other assets or debts of the individual were not taken into account, because the income received monthly does not necessarily reflect the actual economic situation of the individual.

In this study, we aimed to evaluate the role of subjective socioeconomic stratification. Therefore we have also analysed subjective socioeconomic status assessment. We applied the modified Subjective Social Class Measure, which measures a person's subjective socio-economic status, and based on the results, we divided the respondents into five groups:

- affiliating themselves with the wealthy, who live a rich and privileged life, who have a lot of money and feel themselves as VIP;
- assigning themselves to the middle class who have enough money to live a normal life;
- assigning themselves to the middle class, who sometimes have limited amounts of money (do not always have the money to live as they want);
- affiliating themselves with the poor, who have no money for a normal life;
- assigning themselves to the poorest of the poor who do not have the money for basic everyday needs.

According to the subjective assessment of the socio-economic situation, only one person attributed himself to the rich, so we did not investigate this further. As the remaining four groups were distributed asymmetrically, non – parametric statistics were used to analyse the data, and Kruskal – Wallis independent sample intergroup comparisons were performed.

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. A study was approved by The Central (National) Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Health of Lithuania, October 7, 2019, No 1325-L. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

RESULTS

The results of the study showed statistically significant differences in psychological well-being between groups of different income quintiles. As we can see in Table 1, statistically significant differences in life assessment (from worst case to best case) between different income quintile groups ($H(2) = 182.796$, $p = 0.001$) for Hadley Cantril's Self-Anchoring Striving Scale (1965).

To find out whether groups of different income quintiles differ in terms of psychological flourishing, life satisfaction, and positive and negative emotional experiences, as measured by three scales (Flourishing scale [8]; SWLS [24]; SPANE [23]), we performed

Table 1: Intergroup Comparisons of Independent Quintile Income Groups by Life Assessment, Kruskal – Wallis Test (n = 1001)

| | Income quintiles | No | Mean ranks | H (2) Chi-square | df | p |
|---|------------------|-----|------------|------------------|----|--------|
| Significant differences in life assessment (from worst case to best case) | 1 | 172 | 306.69 | 182.796 | 4 | <0.001 |
| | 2 | 199 | 449.99 | | | |
| | 3 | 249 | 468.91 | | | |
| | 4 | 194 | 595.61 | | | |
| | 5 | 187 | 678.59 | | | |

Table 2: Intergroup Comparisons of Independent Quintile Income Groups on the Scales of Psychological Flourishing, Life Satisfaction, and Positive-Negative Emotional Experience, Kruskal-Wallis Test (n = 1001)

| | Income quintiles | No | Mean ranks | H (2) Chi-square | df | p |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----|------------|------------------|----|--------|
| Psychological flourishing | 1 | 172 | 316.83 | 179.299 | 4 | <0.001 |
| | 2 | 199 | 439.89 | | | |
| | 3 | 249 | 477.31 | | | |
| | 4 | 194 | 564.95 | | | |
| | 5 | 187 | 700.63 | | | |
| Satisfaction with life | 1 | 172 | 353.85 | 143.665 | 4 | <0.001 |
| | 2 | 199 | 436.48 | | | |
| | 3 | 249 | 472.33 | | | |
| | 4 | 194 | 551.61 | | | |
| | 5 | 187 | 690.68 | | | |
| Positive emotions | 1 | 172 | 339.96 | 130.592 | 4 | <0.001 |
| | 2 | 199 | 425.13 | | | |
| | 3 | 249 | 505.19 | | | |
| | 4 | 194 | 571.07 | | | |
| | 5 | 187 | 651.59 | | | |
| Negative emotions | 1 | 172 | 611.59 | 60.650 | 4 | <0.001 |
| | 2 | 199 | 540.05 | | | |
| | 3 | 249 | 518.31 | | | |
| | 4 | 194 | 423.63 | | | |
| | 5 | 187 | 414.94 | | | |

Kruskal-Wallis cross-group comparisons of independent groups. As we can see in Table 2, statistically significant differences in psychological flourishing between the different income quintile groups ($H(2) = 179.299, p = 0.001$), with mean ranks in the lowest income quintile being more than twice lower than in the highest income quintile. Life satisfaction evaluations were also statistically significantly different between different income quintile groups ($H(2) = 143.665, p = 0.001$), and were twice as low in the lowest income quintile as in the highest income quintile.

Positive emotional experiences were more strongly expressed in higher-income groups ($H(2) = 143.665, p = 0.001$), while negative were more strongly expressed in lower-income groups ($H(2) = 143.665, p = 0.001$).

We also conducted Kruskal-Wallis cross-group comparisons of independent groups to determine whether groups of different income quintiles differ in terms of happiness (on a 10-point scale). Statistically significant differences in happiness between the different income quintile groups showed in Table 3 (H

Table 3: Intergroup Comparisons of Income Quintile Independent Samples on a 10-Point Happiness Scale, Kruskal – Wallis Test (n = 1001)

| | Income quintiles | No | Mean ranks | H (2) Chi-square | df | p |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-----|------------|------------------|----|-------|
| Terms of happiness (10-point scale) | 1 | 172 | 340.16 | 130.802 | 4 | 0.001 |
| | 2 | 199 | 436.12 | | | |
| | 3 | 249 | 492.97 | | | |
| | 4 | 194 | 573.09 | | | |
| | 5 | 187 | 653.89 | | | |

(2) = 130.802, p = 0.001), with mean ranks in the lowest income quintile being more than twice lower than in the highest income quintile.

The results of the research showed statistically significant differences between the worst-case and best-case scores in life assessment (Hadley Cantril's Self-Anchoring Striving Scale, 1965) (H (2) = 283.228, p = 0.001), with mean ranks for the subjectively poorest group being nearly seven times lower than for the middle-class group. Interestingly, when analysing life assessment in terms of real monthly income in Euro, the mean ranks of life assessment in the lowest income group were more than twice lower than in the highest income quintile, suggesting that not a real income is more important for the quality of life, but the way a person perceives his / her socioeconomic situation.

To determine whether self-attribution to different socio-economic groups is associated with different evaluations of psychological flourishing, life satisfaction, and positive and negative emotional experiences, as measured by three scales (Flourishing scale [8]; SWLS [24]; SPANE [23]), we performed cross-group comparisons of Kruskal-Wallis independent groups. As we can see in Table 4, statistically significant differences in psychological flourishing between different groups of subjective

socioeconomic stratification (H (2) = 175.236, p = 0.001), with the mean ranks in the subjectively poorest group being more than three times lower than in the subjectively richest group. Evaluations of life satisfaction also differed statistically significantly between different groups of subjective socioeconomic status (H (2) = 216.956, p = 0.001). They were three and a half times lower in the subjectively poorest group than in the subjectively richest group. Positive emotional experiences were stronger in the subjectively richest group (H (2) = 78,898, p = 0.001), and negative experiences were stronger in the subjectively poorest group (H (2) = 61,297, p = 0.001).

We also conducted Kruskal – Wallis cross-group comparisons of independent samples to determine whether self – attribution to different socioeconomic status groups was associated with different levels of happiness (10 – point scale). Statistically significant differences in happiness between the different subjective socioeconomic status groups showed in Table 5 (H (2) = 239.185, p = 0.001), with the mean ranks in the subjectively poorest group being more than three times lower than in the subjectively richest group.

We also attempted to evaluate how a socioeconomic status may be related to positive or negative emotional experiences in a representative

Table 4: Intergroup Comparisons of Independent Samples of Subjective Socioeconomic Stratification by Psychological Flourishing, Life Satisfaction, and Positive-Negative Emotional Experiences, Kruskal-Wallis Test (n = 998)

| | Subjective stratification | No | Mean ranks | H (2) Chi-square | df | p |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-----|------------|------------------|----|--------|
| Psychological flourishing | Middle class, enough money | 125 | 612.88 | 175.236 | 3 | <0.001 |
| | Middle class, not enough money | 552 | 570.36 | | | |
| | Poor, not enough money | 276 | 359.29 | | | |
| | Poorest of the poor | 45 | 175.24 | | | |
| Satisfaction with life | Middle class, enough money | 125 | 699.04 | 216.956 | 3 | <0.001 |
| | Middle class, not enough money | 552 | 554.21 | | | |
| | Poor, not enough money | 276 | 358.68 | | | |
| | Poorest of the poor | 45 | 137.89 | | | |
| Positive emotions | Middle class, enough money | 125 | 598.82 | 78.898 | 3 | <0.001 |
| | Middle class, not enough money | 552 | 539.32 | | | |
| | Poor, not enough money | 276 | 411.13 | | | |
| | Poorest of the poor | 45 | 277.14 | | | |
| Negative emotions | Middle class, enough money | 125 | 415.63 | 61.297 | 3 | <0.001 |
| | Middle class, not enough money | 552 | 466.33 | | | |
| | Poor, not enough money | 276 | 566.87 | | | |
| | Poorest of the poor | 45 | 726.17 | | | |

Table 5: Intergroup Comparisons of Subjective Socioeconomic Stratification by Happiness on a 10-Point Scale, Kruskal-Wallis Test (n = 998)

| | Subjective stratification | No | Mean ranks | H (2) Chi-square | df | p |
|--|--------------------------------|-----|------------|------------------|----|--------|
| Terms of happiness (10-point scale) | Middle class, enough money | 125 | 694.63 | 239.185 | 3 | <0.001 |
| | Middle class, not enough money | 552 | 565.26 | | | |
| | Poor, not enough money | 276 | 330.51 | | | |
| | Poorest of the poor | 45 | 187.32 | | | |

sample of the Lithuanian population. Positive emotional states (mean ranks) were almost twice stronger expressed in the highest income quintile to compare to the lowest income quintile ($H(2) = 105.914, p = 0.001$), and the same applies to the positive feelings experienced in the last four weeks ($H(2) = 110.113, p = 0.001$), pleasant states ($H(2) = 82.185, p = 0.001$), happiness ($H(2) = 83.982, p = 0.001$), joy ($H(2) = 76.072, p = 0.001$), satisfaction ($H(2) = 80.316, p = 0.001$), peace of mind ($H(2) = 73.350, p = 0.001$), vigor ($H(2) = 91.140, p = 0.001$). While positive emotional experiences were more strongly expressed in higher income groups, negative ones were in lower income groups ($H(2) = 40.807, p = 0.001$), including unpleasant emotional experiences ($H(2) = 31.423, p = 0.001$), sadness ($H(2) = 40.882, p = 0.001$), anxiety ($H(2) = 45.548, p = 0.001$), feeling depressed ($H(2) = 42.248, p = 0.001$).

DISCUSSION

The study also sought to determine the impact of subjective socio-economic stratification, not only on actual income. The results of the study showed statistically significant differences in emotional states between different groups of subjective socioeconomic stratification. Positive emotional states (mean ranks) were about twice as likely to be expressed in the subjectively richest group than in the subjectively poorest group ($H(2) = 60.756, p = 0.001$), and the same was true for the positive four-week experiences ($H(2) = 92.448, p = 0.001$): pleasant states ($H(2) = 54.305, p = 0.001$), happiness ($H(2) = 65.487, p = 0.001$), joy ($H(2) = 44.354, p = 0.001$), satisfaction ($H(2) = 49.671, p = 0.001$), peace of mind ($H(2) = 46.424, p = 0.001$), vigor ($H(2) = 75.552, p = 0.001$). While positive emotional experiences were more strongly expressed in the subjectively richest group, negative ones were subjected to poor subjects ($H(2) = 41.305, p = 0.001$), including unpleasant emotional experiences ($H(2) = 54.305, p = 0.001$), sadness ($H(2) = 44.493, p = 0.001$), anxiety ($H(2) = 28.975, p = 0.001$), feeling depressed ($H(2) = 33.782, p = 0.001$).

(2) = 44.493, $p = 0.001$), anxiety ($H(2) = 28.975, p = 0.001$), feeling depressed ($H(2) = 33.782, p = 0.001$).

Research has confirmed that strong and lasting negative emotional experiences can cause health problems and direct and indirect loss to the state [4]. Tilmann von Soest [27] have found that lower socioeconomic status is uniquely associated with lower levels of self-esteem and/or steeper declines in self-esteem over the 5-year study period [27]. Following the intrapersonal perspective, socioeconomic status might be a source of self-esteem, because high education, high income, and high-status occupations are generally highly valued in Western societies. Moreover, as noted by some authors, low socioeconomic status may lead to social marginalisation and may consequently be significant for self-esteem according to the interpersonal perspective [28]. Furthermore, various psychological well-being models claim that only a happy person can be the creator of a happy society [29-31].

The results of the study showed statistically significant differences in psychological well-being (psychological flourishing, life satisfaction, happiness, positive and negative emotional experiences) between different groups of subjective socio-economic status. The mean ranks of the constructs reflecting psychological well-being were more than three times lower in the subjectively poorest group to compare to the subjectively richest group. The study showed that the mean ranks of the happiness score in the poorest group were almost seven times lower than in the middle class. It can be assumed that the assessment of one's quality of life is not about real income but about how one perceives his or her socio-economic situation.

The authors revealed statistically significant differences between positive and negative emotional experiences in different income groups. Positive emotional states were almost twice higher in the highest income quintile than in the lowest income quintile, and the same was true for the states of

happiness, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, peace, vigour over the last four weeks. While positive emotional experiences were statistically significantly stronger in higher-income groups, negative ones were expressed stronger in lower-income groups, including unpleasant emotional experiences, sadness, anxiety, and feelings of humiliation.

CONCLUSIONS

Psychological well-being depends on how we feel about ourselves (our income and material well-being versus other people's income or material well-being) or how we compare our present life with our past (current material resources with resources in the past). In this study, we aimed to evaluate the role of subjective socioeconomic stratification. Therefore we have also analysed subjective socioeconomic status assessment. We applied the modified Subjective Social Class Measure, which measures a person's subjective socioeconomic status, and based on the results, we divided the respondents into five groups. In the Lithuanian population survey, the authors applied the following scales: Flourishing Scale; The Satisfaction with Life Scale; The Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale and The Positive and Negative Emotional Experience Scale.

The results of the study showed statistically significant differences in psychological well-being between groups of different income quintiles. Research has confirmed that strong and lasting negative emotional experiences can cause health problems and direct and indirect loss to the state. Moreover, low socioeconomic status may lead to social marginalisation and may consequently be significant for self-esteem according to the interpersonal perspective. Furthermore, various psychological well-being models claim that only a happy person can be the creator of a happy society. The research has established that strong and lasting negative emotional experiences are related to diminished well-being and can cause direct and indirect public damages. Authors indicate that additional research is needed.

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