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PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF WELL-BEING AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VALUES: RESULTS FROM A EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to explore links between happiness, optimism, resilience and meaningfulness, and socio-demographic factors in 25 European countries.

Research methods. Experts-generated single-item questions from European Social Survey round 6 were used to assess happiness, optimism, resilience, meaningfulness in life.

Results. Greater number of years of completed education relates to higher scores of happiness, optimism, meaningfulness and resilience in most European countries. However, in Western Europe and Scandinavian countries age does not relate or positively relates with psychological aspects of well-being, however, in most Post-Soviet countries this relationship is negative.

Conclusions. Happiness, optimism, meaningfulness and resilience in most European countries were related to age and years of completed education with no specific differences between regions.

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Keywords: Optimism, resilience, happiness, meaningfulness, demographics, Europe.

1. Introduction

The concept of well-being, including psychological and subjective well-being, is widely used in current research studies in the context of quality of life, physical or mental health, satisfaction with life, etc. The concept of well-being is widely used in such areas as psychology, sociology, public health, economy and may serve as the reason why understanding of well-being is very diverse (Kaliatkaitė, Bulotaitė, 2014).

In general, well-being can be divided into the subjectively perceived and the objective one. The so-called objective well-being is usually understood as the amount of gross domestic product per person (GDP per capita) – it is assumed that greater GDP means greater well-being. GDP concept as a measure of well-being is usually used by economists (NEF, 2014). However, such definition of well-being, based on material issues, is not appropriate – research findings had shown that the increase of GDP was not related to the increase of life satisfaction (e.g. Diener, Seligman, 2004). So attention has to be paid to subjective aspects of well-being as well, not only to objective ones.

The subjectively perceived well-being may be classified into subjective and psychological well-being (Lambert, Passmore, Holder, 2015). Subjective well-being, or happiness, is usually understood as low negative, high positive affect and high satisfaction with life (Huta, Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2006 in Lambert, Passmore, Holder, 2015). The concept of hedonic well-being is similar to subjective well-being and is often used as a synonym. Psychological well-being is understood as feeling good and functioning effectively (Huppert, 2009). The concept of eudemonic well-being is similar to psychological well-being and is usually used as an equivalent.

As far as both subjective and psychological well-being are wide concepts scientists choose to investigate only certain aspects of psychological and/or subjective well-being. For example, happiness is usually considered as a core aspect of subjective well-being (Diener, Lucas, Oishi, 2002), in psychological well-being one of frequently analyzed aspect is meaningfulness (Ryff, 2014). Meaningfulness refers to "people's concerns with the purpose, predictability, and comprehensibility of each of their own lives" (European social survey, 2013, p. 12). Optimism refers to "positive feelings or evaluations about the future (long term or short term). It has both an affective element (hopefulness) and a cognitive element (positive expectation)" (European social survey, 2013, p.21). Resilience refers to "positive adaptation in the context of risk or adversity" (European social survey, 2013, p. 11). On the other hand, optimism and resilience are not usually considered as parts of psychological and subjective well-being, but research findings demonstrate that optimism can be a significant contributor of both – psychological and subjective well-being (Ryff, 2014; Daukantė & Žukauskienė, 2012). Resilience is also important for psychological well-being because resilience allows to maintain high levels of psychological well-being or even increase them (Ryff, 2014). Other authors suggest that resilience is an important predictor of subjective well-being (Burns, Anstey, Windsor, 2011).

Both subjective and psychological well-being are beneficial for people: literature analysis performed by Pressman and Cohen (2006) concluded that positive emotions (aspect of subjective well-being) were related to better physical and mental health. Other findings also demonstrate that psychological well-being is important for adaptive human functioning and better health (Huppert, 2009; Ryff, 2014).

2.   Problem Statement

Links between separate aspects of well-being and socio-demographic variables are not unambiguous. Some researchers have demonstrated that men had higher levels of well-being than women (Stephens, Dulberg, & Joubert, 1999), yet others suggest that women scored more in some aspects of psychological well-being which are related with social functioning (Ryff & Singer, 1998 in Huppert, 2009).

It is common to think that links between well-being and age show that the highest levels of psychological well-being are in young and old people and the lowest ones are in the middle age or in the elderly (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008). Nevertheless, links between subjective well-being and age are not so clear. Heliwell & Putnam (2004) argue that generally subjective well-being (happiness) is decreasing with age because health becomes worse due to ageing, still, in older people of the same health status subjective well-being was higher as compared to younger ones. Nevertheless, there are studies arguing that it is more important how people feel about their age rather than their actual age is (Ryff, 2014) – in other words, old people can feel that they are rather young and this feeling can affect their well-being. There are findings demonstrating that links between happiness and age are not u-shaped, i.e. Frijters, Beatton (2012) argue that this relationship is more likely wave-like shaped. Thus links between age and psychological and subjective well-being need more analysis.

It is widely accepted that higher levels of education relate to higher levels of psychological well-being and better health (e.g. Ryff, 2014), nevertheless some studies show that over-education (very high levels of education) is linked with depressive symptoms which, in turn, are associated with lower levels of well-being (Bracke, Pattyn, dem Knesebeck, 2013). These findings demonstrate that the links between education and well-being are not apparent.

It may be assumed that well-being is related to a person's main activity. There is no doubt that employment is related with higher levels of subjective well-being (e.g. Huppert, 2009), but it is possible that other activities, not only employment, might be related to higher levels of psychological and subjective well-being, e.g. Ryff (2014) posits that volunteering is linked with higher levels of psychological well-being.

To conclude, it is clear that relationship between certain aspects of well-being and socio-demographic values are not yet fully researched. It is possible that links between well-being and socio-demographic values can be different in various European countries. For example, Diener, Suh, Smith, Shao (1995) compared students of North America and Asia (Japan, South Korea, and China) and found that people in these countries differ by levels of happiness. It is possible that subjective and psychological well-being is influenced by country's experience, culture, and even by perception of well-being. To our knowledge there is no comprehensive analysis which demonstrates links between certain aspects of subjective and psychological well-being and socio-demographic values in 25 European countries.

Therefore, the aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between happiness, optimism, meaningfulness, psychological resilience as aspects of psychological and subjective well-being and socio-demographic variables in 25 European countries

3.   Research Questions

How happiness, optimism, meaningfulness, psychological resilience, as aspects of psychological and subjective well-being, relate to socio-demographic variables in 25 European countries?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship among happiness, optimism, meaningfulness, psychological resilience, as aspects of psychological and subjective well-being, and socio-demographic variables in 25 European countries.

5. Research Methods

The data from European Social Survey, ESS, (www.europeansocialsurvey.org) round 6 was used to assess links between happiness, optimism, meaningfulness, psychological resilience and socio-demographic variables, such as age, years of completed education and main activity. The European Social Survey (ESS) is an academically driven cross-national survey that has been conducted every two years across Europe since 2001. The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behavior patterns of diverse populations in more than thirty nations. ESS monitors social change in Europe since 2002. The data is freely available on the website and can be used for non-commercial purposes. The data and documentation can be accessed by round (year), by theme or by country. The data is available for download and online analysis. The ESS questionnaire consists of a collection of questions that can be classified into two main parts – a core section and a rotating section. The core section (also referred to as the 'core module') focus on a range of different themes that are largely the same in each round. The rotating section (also known as 'rotating modules') is dedicated to specific themes, which are sometimes repeated in later rounds of the ESS. Survey questions have been created by experts, every module includes theoretical background as well as the argumentation for the need of research. According to survey requirements sampling must be representative for people aged 15 and over, strict random probability methods must be used at every stage, substitution of non-respondents is not permitted at any stage. The dataset is composed of questions measuring happiness (hedonic well-being) ("Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?") where 0 – "extremely unhappy", and 10 – "extremely happy", optimism ("Always optimistic about the future") and meaningfulness ("Feel what I do in life is valuable and worthwhile"), resilience ("When things go wrong in my life it takes a long time to get back to normal"), where 1 means that a subject agrees strongly with that item and 5 - disagrees strongly. Socio-demographic variables include gender, age, years of completed education and main activity. Years of completed education refer to a number of years spent in any kind of education (including primary, secondary, higher education). Main activity reflects what a participant was engaged in the last 7 days, where 1 is "paid work", 2 – "education", 3-4 – "unemployed", 5-6 – "disabled or retired".

Resilience refers to "returning to, and speed of return to, a previous level of good functioning following difficult times or severely disturbing experiences." (European social survey, 2013, p. 12). Optimism measures "positive evaluations about one's personal future… It measures a trait-like characteristic, that is the

extent to which optimism is a fairly permanent aspect of cognition and emotion, rather than optimism in a given time period" (European social survey, 2013, p. 21-22). Meaningfulness "aims to assess to what extent people find meaning in their daily activities" (European social survey, 2013, p. 13).

A total number of respondents which was interviewed in 2012 are 48445 (45.57 per cent of males and 54.47 per cent of females). Respondents' age was from 15 to 103, but the majority of respondents were aged 15 to 79 (95.6%). Years of completed education were from 0 to 51, but the majority of respondents had between 10 and 20 years of education (71.9%). Most of participants were engaged in paid work (47.1%), 19.9% were retired, 15.7% were engaged in household activities. The 25 countries were grouped according to the United Nations geographic scheme for Europe into four groups: Western (Germany, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Netherlands), Eastern (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Ukraine), Northern (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Great Britain, Ireland, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden) and Southern (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia).

6. Findings

Links between happiness and socio-demographic variables in males and females in all countries is presented in Table 01.

Table 01. Links between happiness and age, completed years of education, main activity in different European countries and gender.

Countries	Geographic area	Happiness M(SD)		Age		Years of completed education		Main activity	
		Males (n=21970)	Females (n=26197)	Males (n=22080)	Females (n=26365)	Males (n=21961)	Females (n=26175)	Males (n=3150)	Females (n=5635)
Bulgaria	E	5.41(2.65)	5.17(2.71)	-0,246**	-0,242**	0,296**	0,348**	-0,293**	-0,256**
Czech Republic	E	6.66(2.06)	6.62(2.03)	-0,151**	-0,172**	0,149**	0,102**	-0,322*	-
Hungary	E	6.01(2.25)	6.18(2.25)	-0,175**	-0,205**	0,186**	0,225**	-	-0,190**
Poland	E	7.30(2.02)	7.34(2.01)	-0,117**	-0,192**	-	0,113**	-	-0,174*
Russian federation	E	6.24(2.17)	6.21(2.14)	-0,206**	-0,174**	0,137**	0,132**	-0,302**	-
Slovakia	E	6.56(1.82)	6.71(1.88)	-0,148**	-0,179**	0,112**	0,158**	-	-0,174*
Ukraine	E	5.92(2.27)	6.17(2.30)	-0,161**	-0,301**	-	0,115**	-0,433**	-
Denmark	N	8.39(1.41)	8.37(1.51)	0,100**	-	-	-	0,126*	-
Estonia	N	6.65(2.02)	6.94(2.03)	-0,213**	-0,263**	0,160**	0,179**	-0,340**	-0,337**
Finland	N	8.02(1.31)	8.15(1.37)	-0,076*	-0,098**	-	0,065*	-	-
United Kingdom	N	7.45(1.94)	7.54(1.94)	-	0,138**	-	-	-	-
Ireland	N	6.96(2.00)	7.15(1.92)	0,102**	-	0,085**	0,116**	0,312*	-
Iceland	N	8.11(1.50)	8.30(1.45)	0,105*	-	-	-0,108*	-	-0,145*
Lithuania	N	6.40(2.06)	6.36(1.97)	-0,381**	-0,350**	0,275**	0,278**	-0,368**	-0,203*
Norway	N	8.16(1.42)	8.16(1.49)	-	-	-0,076*	-	-	-
Sweden	N	7.83(1.52)	7.81(1.60)	0,076*	-	-	-	-	-
Spain	S	7.67(1.84)	7.48(1.90)	0,075*	-0,110**	-	-	-	-0,261*
Italy	S	7.17(1.97)	7.02(1.97)	-	-0,125**	-	-	-	-
Portugal	S	6.56(1.88)	6.36(1.98)	-0,163**	-0,229**	0,185**	0,199**	-0,558**	-
Slovenia	S	7.22(1.92)	7.29(2.03)	-0,196**	-0,215**	0,152**	0,106**	-	-0,231*
Belgium	W	7.71(1.47)	7.66(1.57)	-	-0,101**	-	0,111**	-	-
Switzerland	W	8.06(1.50)	8.10(1.50)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Germany	W	7.56(1.81)	7.71(1.81)	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	W	7.15(1.72)	7.18(1.78)	-	-0,122**	-	0,06*	-0,427**	-
Netherlands	W	7.83(1.35)	7.79(1.48)	-	-0,091**	0,069*	0,106**	-	-0,152*

Notes: - means not significant * - $p < 0.05$ ** - $p < 0.001$; geographic areas: E – Eastern N – Northern S – Southern W – Western.

As can be seen from Table 1 happiness in Western Europe relates with age and years of completed education (except in Germany and Switzerland), in Eastern Europe it relates with all socio-demographic variables, in Northern Europe with age and years of completed education (except age in Denmark and years of completed education in Norway), in Southern Europe with age (in all Southern European countries).

Links between optimism and socio-demographic variables in males and females in all countries is presented in Table 02.

Table 02. Links between optimism and age, completed years of education, main activity in different European countries and gender.

Countries	Geographic area	Optimism M(SD)[1]		Age		Years of completed education		Main activity	
		Males (n=22003)	Females (n=26207)	Males (n=22080)	Females (n=26365)	Males (n=21961)	Females (n=26175)	Males (n=3150)	Females (n=5635)
Bulgaria	E	2.50(1.08)	2.64(1.15)	0,270**	0,236**	-0,241**	-0,3**	0,242**	0,244**
Czech Republic	E	2.44(0.98)	2.55(1.05)	0,171**	0,16**	-0,16**	0,158**	0,313*	-
Hungary	E	2.68(1.14)	2.60(1.08)	0,152**	0,226**	-0,093**	-0,202**	-	0,185**
Poland	E	2.25(0.84)	2.32(0.90)	0,088**	-	-	-	-	-
Russian federation	E	2.30(0.94)	2.27(0.93)	0,255**	0,244**	-0,140**	-0,219**	0,346**	0,154*
Slovakia	E	2.42(0.90)	2.41(0.94)	0,162**	0,145**	-0,150**	-0,125**	-	-
Ukraine	E	2.32(1.12)	2.24(1.11)	0,204**	0,280**	-	-0,132**	0,216*	0,179*
Denmark	N	1.91(0.80)	2.06(0.90)	-	0,09*	-	-	-	-
Estonia	N	2.27(0.91)	2.30(0.95)	0,203**	0,134**	-0,107**	-0,073**	0,312**	0,232*
Finland	N	2.10(0.82)	2.14(0.86)	-	-	-	-	0,325*	-
United Kingdom	N	2.27(0.84)	2.28(0.88)	0,096**	-	-	-0,095**	-	-
Ireland	N	2.19(0.87)	2.14(0.84)	0,062*	-	-0,106**	0,120**	-	0,266*
Iceland	N	2.22(0.89)	2.11(0.85)	-	-	-	-	-	0,241**
Lithuania	N	2.41(0.92)	2.49(0.93)	0,484**	0,417**	-0,356**	-0,324**	0,57**	0,398**
Norway	N	2.05(0.79)	2.15(0.86)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sweden	N	2.04(0.76)	2.12(0.80)	-	0,086**	-0,081*	-0,066*	-	-
Spain	S	2.28(0.96)	2.52(1.02)	-	0,07*	-	-	-	-
Italy	S	2.36(1.03)	2.59(1.07)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Portugal	S	2.57(0.99)	2.68(0.98)	0,197**	0,216**	-0,172**	-0,19**	0,566*	-
Slovenia	S	2.07(0.80)	2.17(0.92)	0,151**	-	-	-0,122**	-	-
Belgium	W	2.30(0.96)	2.44(0.97)	-	0,071*	-	-	-	-
Switzerland	W	2.00(0.77)	1.98(0.77)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Germany	W	2.01(0.73)	2.09(0.79)	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	W	2.44(1.11)	2.54(1.10)	0,09**	-	-	-	-	-
Netherlands	W	2.30(0.89)	2.37(0.91)	-	-	-0,089**	-0,07*	-	-

Notes: - means not significant * - p < 0.05 ** - p < 0.001; geographic areas: E – Eastern N – Northern S – Southern W – Western, 1 – higher score means lower optimism.

Results show that optimism in Western Europe relates only with age among Belgian females and French males, in Eastern Europe it relates with all socio-demographic variables (except main activity in Poland, Slovakia, and years of completed education in Poland), in Northern Europe - with age and years of completed education (except Finland, Iceland, Norway), in Southern Europe with age in all countries (except Italy).

Links between meaningfulness and socio-demographic variables in males and females in all countries are shown in Table 03.

Table 03. Links between meaningfulness and age, completed years of education, main activity in different European countries and gender.

Countries	Geographic area	Meaningfulness M(SD)[1]		Age		Years of completed education		Main Activity	
		Males (n=21970)	Females (n=26087)	Males (n=23710)	Females (n=28338)	Males (n=23592)	Females (n=28150)	Males (n=3310)	Females (n=6021)
Bulgaria	E	2.29(0.88)	2.31(0.97)	0,107**	0,179**	-0,319**	-0,299**	0,278**	0,318**
Czech Republic	E	2.24(0.80)	2.30(0.81)	-	-	-0,202**	-0,204**	-	-
Hungary	E	2.28(0.93)	2.27(0.97)	-	0,133**	-0,155**	-0,276**	0,160*	0,285**
Poland	E	1.99(0.71)	1.98(0.73)	0,068*	-	-0,115**	-0,145**	-	-
Russian federation	E	2.32(0.83)	2.32(0.88)	0,99**	0,083**	-0,191**	-0,215**	0,321**	-
Slovakia	E	2.17(0.81)	2.09(0.74)	0,112**	0,075*	-0,142**	-0,158**	-	-
Ukraine	E	2.37(0.97)	2.30(1.00)	-	0,09**	-0,073*	-0,097**	-	0,285**
Denmark	N	1.85(0.81)	1.83(0.89)	-	-	-	-0,085*	0,117*	0,179**
Estonia	N	2.09(0.71)	2.08(0.76)	-	0,086**	-0,103**	-0,163**	-	0,239*
Finland	N	2.01(0.65)	1.94(0.67)	-	-	-	-0,123**	-	-
United Kingdom	N	2.06(0.72)	2.04(0.72)	-	-	-0,081*	-0,127**	-	-
Ireland	N	2.03(0.79)	1.90(0.75)	-	-	-0,108**	-0,142**	-	-
Iceland	N	1.99(0.65)	1.84(0.61)	-0,124*	-	-	-0,203**	-	0,308**
Lithuania	N	2.26(0.79)	2.27(0.74)	0,241**	0,249**	-0,322**	-0,37**	0,386**	0,444**
Norway	N	1.95(0.64)	1.90(0.65)	-	-0,101**	-	-0,127**	-	-
Sweden	N	2.05(0.66)	2.01(0.66)	-	0,081*	-0,069*	-0,179**	-	0,298**
Spain	S	2.06(0.76)	1.99(0.72)	-0,119**	-0,081*	-	-	0,342*	-
Italy	S	1.91(0.67)	1.96(0.68)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Portugal	S	2.00(0.70)	2.09(0.70)	0,109**	0,199**	-0,163**	-0,202**	0,675**	0,553**
Slovenia	S	1.96(0.71)	1.97(0.78)	0,136**	0,150**	-	-	-	-
Belgium	W	1.98(0.67)	2.01(0.67)	-0,095**	-	-	-0,064*	-	-
Switzerland	W	1.89(0.63)	1.86(0.63)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Germany	W	2.05(0.65)	2.00(0.66)	-0,086**	-0,091**	-0,089**	-0,104**	0,15**	-
France	W	1.95(0.73)	1.91(0.72)	-	-	-	0,073*	-	-
Netherlands	W	2.00(0.65)	2.02(0.67)	-0,081*	-	-	-0,084**	-	-

Notes: NS - not significant * - p < 0.05 ** - p < 0.001; geographic areas: E – Eastern N – Northern S – Southern W – Western, 1 – higher score means lower meaningfulness.

Meaningfulness in Western Europe mostly relates with (table 3) years of completed education (except in Switzerland were meaningfulness does not relate with socio-demographic values at all), in Eastern Europe it relates with years of completed education in all countries and genders, in Northern Europe it relates with years of completed education, in Southern Europe it mainly relates with age (except Italy where no relationship with socio-demographic variables were observed).

Links between resilience and socio-demographic variables in males and females in all countries are presented in Table 04.

Table 04. Links between resilience and age, completed years of education, main activity in different European countries and gender.

Countries	Geographic area	Resilience M(SD)		Age		Years of completed education		Main activity	
		Males (n=21866)	Females (n=26077)	Males (n=23710)	Females (n=28338)	Males (n=23592)	Females (n=28150)	Males (n=3310)	Females (n=6021)
Bulgaria	E	2.97(1.04)	2.69(1.03)	-0,21**	-0,19**	0,206**	0,291**	-0,233**	-0,236**
Czech Republic	E	3.44(1.08)	3.11(1.06)	-0,136**	-0,078*	0,098**	0,137**	-	-0,260*
Hungary	E	3.35(1.08)	3.36(1.10)	-	-0,123**	0,151**	0,251**	-0,145*	-0,155**
Poland	E	3.48(0.97)	3.24(1.06)	-0,149**	-0,231**	0,205**	0,206**	-	-0,234**
Russian federation	E	3.22(0.94)	3.01(0.94)	-0,134**	-0,134**	0,111**	0,135**	-0,222*	-
Slovakia	E	3.24(0.98)	3.11(0.99)	-0,113**	-0,131**	-	0,117**	-	-
Ukraine	E	3.04(1.05)	2.90(1.05)	-0,1**	-0,163**	0,092*	0,108**	-0,238*	-0,176*

Denmark	N	3.87(0.91)	3.73(0.97)	-	-	0,088*	0,076*	-	-
Estonia	N	3.31(1.03)	3.22(1.05)	-0,178**	-0,189**	0,15**	0,194**	-	-
Finland	N	3.69(0.92)	3.57(0.95)	-0,174**	-0,113**	0,151**	0,113**	-	-
United Kingdom	N	3.49(1.02)	3.41(1.03)	-	-	0,074*	0,12**	-	-
Ireland	N	3.45(0.99)	3.36(1.04)	-	-	0,085**	0,179**	-	-
Iceland	N	3.62(0.95)	3.46(0.99)	-	-	-	0,209**	-	-
Lithuania	N	3.18(0.88)	3.00(0.87)	-0,175**	-0,188**	0,178**	0,152**	-	-0,209*
Norway	N	3.86(0.85)	3.71(0.88)	-	-	0,135**	0,108**	-	-
Sweden	N	3.70(0.92)	3.53(0.96)	-	-	0,139**	0,09**	-	-
Spain	S	3.29(1.00)	3.14(1.02)	-	-0,089**	0,083*	0,190**	-0,366*	-
Italy	S	3.42(1.08)	3.19(1.15)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Portugal	S	3.28(0.96)	3.12(1.00)	-0,147**	-0,179**	0,158**	0,175**	-	-0,322*
Slovenia	S	3.35(1.00)	3.19(1.08)	-0,098*	-0,151**	-	0,193**	-	-0,311**
Belgium	W	3.44(1.05)	3.30(1.08)	-0,079*	-	0,083*	0,111*	-0,196*	-
Switzerland	W	3.69(1.01)	3.42(1.04)	-0,136**	-0,103**	-	0,138**	-	-
Germany	W	3.60(0.95)	3.42(1.03)	-0,086**	-0,167**	0,085**	0,106**	-0,178**	-0,165**
France	W	3.39(1.24)	3.27(1.29)	-	-0,067*	0,093**	0,166**	-	-0,358**
Netherlands	W	3.55(0.95)	3.39(1.03)	-	-0,109**	0,122**	0,139**	-	-0,215**

Notes: - means not significant * - p < 0.05 ** - p < 0.001; geographic areas: E – Eastern N – Northern S – Southern W – Western.

As shown in table 4 resilience in Western Europe mostly relates with age and years of completed education, in Eastern Europe it also mainly relates with age and years of completed education, in Northern Europe it mainly relates with years of completed education, in Southern Europe it mainly relates with all socio-demographic values (except in Italy where no relation with socio-demographic values was observed).

7. Conclusion

In the present study we examined links between social and demographic factors (age, years of completed education, main activity) and certain aspects of subjective and psychological well-being (happiness, optimism, meaningfulness, resilience) in 25 European countries. Results revealed that relationships between greater happiness and socio-demographic variables confirms that in majority Western Europe countries greater happiness relates with lower age and higher education level, in Eastern Europe - with lower age, higher education levels and higher activity, in most Northern Europe - with lower age and higher education level , in Southern Europe with lower age.

Relationships between higher optimism and socio-demographic variables differs: in Western Europe greater optimism relates only to younger age in Belgium and France, in most Eastern Europe it relates to younger age, higher education level and higher activity, in most Northern Europe - with younger age and higher education level, in most Southern Europe only with younger age.

Relationships between higher meaningfulness and socio-demographic variables shows that in most European countries greater meaningfulness relates with higher education level, especially in Eastern Europe. Exception was in Southern Europe there greater meaningfulness relates with lower age.

Greater resilience in most European countries relates with lower age and higher education level. Exceptions was seen in most Northern Europe where greater resilience mainly relates with only higher education level and in most Southern Europe where greater resilience relates with lower age, higher education level and higher activity.

When analyzing the data in the countries, grouped according to the UN geographical criteria, no marked tendencies were observed, but when looking into classification of countries, based on cultural and historical differences one may notice that basic distinctions were seen among Scandinavian and Post-Soviet countries. The highest levels of happiness were observed in Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway) and Switzerland, whereas the lowest levels were observed in Post-Soviet countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Russia, Slovakia, Lithuania, and Estonia). In Western countries (Denmark, Ireland, Island, Sweden, Spain) happiness was related to older age, which is quite the contrary case with Post-Soviet countries. Education did not differentiate these countries in relation to happiness.

 Optimism was higher in Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Western countries, such as Switzerland and Germany, and lower in Post-Soviet countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Lithuania).

One more marked difference was noticed analyzing meaningfulness – citizens of Post-Soviet countries (except Poland) were more likely to regard their lives as less valuable and worthwhile.

Interesting tendency was observed with Germany, Switzerland and Italy – these countries in at least two aspects of subjective or psychological well-being do not relate to socio – demographic variables. The situation with Germany and Switzerland can be explained by higher levels of economic well-being. However, Italian economy differs from that of Germany and Switzerland. As can be seen in countries facts site Index Mundi, Italy has about four times more people below poverty line and nearly twice lower gross domestic product per capita as compared with Switzerland. This inconsistency may be explained by huge differences in economics of Northern and Southern Italy (The economist, 2015), still there is a need for deeper analysis of this phenomenon.

Other studies (Keyes, Shmotkin, Ryff, 2002) also found links between North Americans age, years of completed education and their subjective and psychological well-being. However, they did not estimate optimism and resilience.

It is possible that happiness, optimism, meaningfulness and resilience can also be affected by other social-demographic variables, e.g. political activity, neighbourhood. There is evidence that higher political activity (voting) and neighbourhood is related with lower mortality from coronary heart disease in Sweden cohort of 2,8 million people (Sundquist, Johansson, Yang & Sundquist, 2006), other findings showed higher political activity relating with higher community resilience in England (Poortinga, 2012). A cohort study in Finland showed that in respondents with lower (22 years) and higher (32 years) age, higher meaningfulness, self-esteem and lower distress relates with higher level of education and more qualified occupation (not-mechanical occupation) (Kiviruusu, Huurre, Haukkala & Aro, 2013), which are pretty similar to our findings, but some other studies found that happiness did not relate with levels of education in most countries as well as unemployment (Peiro, 2006), and these results differ from ours.

In conclusion, happiness, optimism, meaningfulness and resilience in most European countries were related to socio-demographic factors (especially age and years of completed education) with no specific

differences between European regions according to UN geographic scheme. For similar analysis of the data further studies should consider another classification scheme based on historical – cultural classification..

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