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More children, more happiness: relationship between number of children and subjective happiness in Russia

Introduction

According to surveys, every fifth Russian woman calls family and motherhood the main components of happiness¹. At the same time, there is a stable ideal of a two-child family in Russia. Almost 20% of Russians cite the acquisition of happiness through the birth of children as a significant reason to become parents². However, in Russia, as in most developed countries, there is a tendency both to postpone parenthood and to abandon it altogether.

An analysis based on data from the World Values Survey for 86 countries in the early 2010s showed that, in general, with an increase in the number of children in the family, subjective happiness decreases. However, these results depend on both age and context: in post-socialist countries, including Russia, respondents feel happier the more children they have after the age of 40, and before the age of 40, on the contrary, those with fewer children are happier (Margolis&Myrskylä, 2011).

In this paper, we separately analyze the relationship between the number of children and the subjective assessment of happiness only for Russia.

Data and methods

We used data from the World Values Survey³, Wave 7 conducted in Russia in 2017. The total number of respondents was 1,810 men and women aged 18 to 91 years.

The dependent variable is the respondent's subjective assessment of happiness. The question is formulated as follows: "Speaking generally, can you say that you are: very happy, quite happy, not very happy, not at all happy". We recoded this variable from 1 to 4 in ascending order of happiness and treated it as a pseudo-interval.

The key explanatory variable is the number of the respondent's children. We recoded the number indicated by the respondent as no children, one child, two children, three or more children.

Other independent variables

Other independent variables included the respondent's age, gender, marital status, subjective assessment of social class, and subjective assessment of income level.

The age of the respondent was recoded into the following categories: 18-19 years old, 20-29 years old, 30-39 years old, 40-49 years old, 50 years old and older.

Marital status: married, living together in an unregistered marriage, divorced/separated, widower/widow, never married.

Social class was determined by the respondent's subjective attribution of himself to a particular class based on the answer to the question "People sometimes say that they belong to some class. And which class of those that I'm going to list now would you consider yourself to be?" We have

¹ <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/zhenskoe-schaste-rossiiskaja-versija>

² <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/skolko-detei-nuzhno-dlja-schastja>

³ <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

combined the categories as "Higher/Upper middle class", "Lower middle class", "Working/lower class".

A subjective income assessment is an answer to the question: "This card shows an income scale, where 1 means the lowest income group and 10 means the highest income group in our country. What income group does your family belong to?" The subjective income groups are grouped as 1-3 – low income, 4-7 – average income, 8-10 – high income.

Method

We used a linear regression model to identify the impact of the number of children born on the respondent's subjective assessment of happiness.

Results

The average self-assessment of happiness among Russians in the sample is 2.98. The average number of children per respondent is 1.3.

We have built two regression models. Model 1 provides estimates of the impact of the number of children on the happiness, controlled by gender and age. In model 2, estimates of the impact of the number of children on the happiness are controlled for gender, age, marital status, social class and income group. According to the results of the modeling, it was revealed that, compared with childless people, respondents with two or three or more children have a significantly higher happiness score. Thus, having two children increases the respondent's happiness score by 0.14, and three or more children by 0.19. At the same time, the inclusion of additional control variables of self-assessment of income and social class does not change the direction of this relationship, however, in the case of two children, they make the relationship less significant.