

IMPORTANCE OF LENGTH OF STUDYING AND ATTITUDES TOWARD OTHERS FOR LIFE SATISFACTION

Andrius Šmitas^{1*}, Loreta Gustainienė^{**}

*University of Applied Sciences, Kaunas, Lithuania; **Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Abstract. Introduction. Life satisfaction has been a major goal of both the individual and society since ancient times. Nevertheless, relatively little is known about which personal characteristics can affect our satisfaction with life. It may be assumed that higher levels of education, being related to better health, may also be a factor increasing one's cognitive element of well-being i.e., life satisfaction. It is also known that satisfaction with one's life is also related to positive attitudes towards other people. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether education is directly related to satisfaction with life or via certain attitudes. The **purpose** of the study is to analyze links between the length of education and satisfaction with life with regard to positive attitudes toward others using a representative sample. **Methods and data.** Expert-generated single-item questions were used to measure the level of satisfaction with life and attitudes towards other people. The study is based on the data (N=1127) of the Lithuanian National Science Programme "Welfare society". Respondents were between 18 and 97 years of age (M=48). For statistical analysis correlation and simple mediation models were used. **Results.** The analysis of the data showed that higher levels of life satisfaction were predicted by years of completed education directly, and indirectly – through more positive attitudes towards others, while controlling for age, gender, level of income. **Discussion.** The study confirms previous findings that education is related to life satisfaction through more positive attitudes towards others and suggests that education impacts on life satisfaction not only as a promoter of higher income. **Conclusion.** Longer duration of studying (learning) is related to higher satisfaction with life and more positive attitudes towards others independently of gender, age and income.

Keywords: learning, attitudes, life satisfaction, representative sample, adults.

¹ Address for correspondence: Andrius Šmitas, Kauno kolegija/University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Business, Department of Tourism and Leisure management, Pramonės pr. 20, Kaunas, Lithuania, andrius.smitas@go.kauko.lt

INTRODUCTION

Questions about “the good life” have already been analyzed in the ancient works of Aristotle. Nowadays this question is still important, especially when elaborating a welfare society with a strong accent on well-being for its members.

The concept of well-being is normally used when talking about quality of life, physical and psychological health, life satisfaction, etc. Thus, the concept of well-being is widely used in psychology, sociology, public health, economics, and this might be the reason why there is no unified concept of well-being (Kaliatkaite & Bulotaite, 2014).

Well-being can be measured objectively and subjectively. Objectively well-being is usually measured by the amount of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. It is assumed that increasing GDP increases well-being of citizens while the decrease of GDP decreases their well-being (NEF, 2014). Such materialistic understanding of well-being faces many challenges (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Research shows that while GDP per capita is increasing there are no meaningful changes in average life satisfaction (Diener & Seligman, 2004), so it is wrong or even dangerous to assess well-being only through economic indices, i.e., if a person believes that his/her personal happiness depends on his/her income, there is a great chance that he/she will try to earn more and more while ignoring other aspects of well-being, and finally will get sick or die without a sense of happiness, just tired (Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2015). So, analysis of well-being should incorporate aspects of subjective assessment as well.

In academia, the subjective aspect of well-being is usually analyzed through the lenses of subjective and psychological well-being (Bhullar, Schutte & Malouff, 2013; Lambert, Passmore & Holder, 2015), and subjective well-being is usually understood as a phenomenon which includes positive and negative affectivity (emotional aspect) and life satisfaction (cognitive aspect) (Diener, Scollon & Lucas, 2009). Psychological well-being is usually defined as a multidimensional construct which covers effective functioning and feeling good (Huppert, 2009). Ryff offers six main dimensions of psychological well-being: autonomy, personal growth, positive relationships, self-acceptance, purpose in life and environmental mastery (Ryff, 2014; Ryff, 1989). Although both subjective

and psychological well-being are interrelated, they are considered as separate constructs.

There is a great amount of longitudinal and experimental research which proves that both subjective and psychological well-being have a positive impact on personal health and health-related indices (e.g., Huppert, 2009; Ryff, 2014).

There is evidence that one of the most important predictors of satisfaction with life could be education (Andersson & Glanville, 2016; Economic and Social Research Council, 2014). However, Ryff (2014) warns that a higher level of education frequently and closely relates to higher levels of responsibility, and higher occupational load, thus high levels of education could act not only as promoters of well-being, but also as predictors of occupational burnout which decreases personal well-being and negatively impacts health.

Evidence shows that a higher level of education predicts a person's health in the middle-aged citizens of the United States of America (Andersson & Glanville, 2016), but other evidence suggests that in other countries predictors of well-being, as well as the levels of well-being, differ significantly (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Springer, Pudrovskaya, Hauser, 2011; Ryff, 2014; Steptoe, Deaton & Stone, 2015; Ludban, 2015; Šmitas & Gustainienė, 2017).

While analyzing factors which predict well-being, and differences between research samples, it can be seen that in most samples higher education predicts higher levels of well-being (Economic and Social Research Council, 2014). Some authors argue that higher levels of education protect against the decrease of a person's well-being in middle age (Steptoe, Deaton & Stone, 2015); however is not clear in what way the level of education could affect well-being, although the importance of education on happiness and subjective well-being is evident (Veenhoven & Bakker, 1977; Office for National statistics, 2012; Krašovec & Kump, 2014, Lamont, 2014).

Education is achieved through learning. The process of lifelong learning closely relates not only to acquisition of study material (formal knowledge), but also to a person's thoughts about study material and its impact on him/her. It is believed that the impact of learning is long-term rather than short-term (Economic and Social Research Council, 2014). This idea raises the question in what way lifelong learning has a positive

impact on well-being. It is believed that higher levels of education and satisfaction with the achieved level of education could form a positive social identity (Economic and Social Research Council, 2014), which in turn would positively affect life satisfaction. However, according to the Social Identity theory, social identity is closely linked with society (Tajfel, 1982) and according to the biopsychosocial approach towards health one could think that not only social identity, but also individual factors could be important for one's satisfaction with life. We argue that one of the most important psychological factors which affect life satisfaction could be one's attitudes.

Attitudes are usually defined as a person's emotional, cognitive and behavioral reaction to a specific object (Rosenber & Hovland, 1960). Most frequently a three-component structure of attitudes is used, which consists of emotional, cognitive and behavioral reactions, which are reciprocally related (e.g., cognitions reciprocally relate to emotions and behavior) (Breckler, 1984). The concept of attitudes is broad – when we talk about attitudes towards learning we could talk about attitudes toward teachers and the ratio of responsibility, but we could also talk about academic fairness or the skepticism of a teacher (Gardner, 1975). Some authors raise the idea that attitudes can have a significant impact (a positive or a negative one) on satisfaction with life in both the short and long-term perspective (Bailey, Kang & Schmidt, 2016).

It is believed that education could affect attitudes through positive experience, students and teachers in the education process could serve as role models, which, in turn, shape a person's attitudes (Lipnevich, Glicali & Krumm, 2016). Some evidence proves the importance of a role model for attitudes towards others (e.g., Krahé & Altwasser, 2006). A human being can be understood as a social animal (Mulgan, 1974), therefore interpersonal relationships between people have a great impact on the society and even on the survival of humans. Attitudes towards each other and forms of communication between the members of the society are crucial both for a person and society (Leonard, Graham & Bonacum, 2004). Education gives an opportunity to shape and reshape attitudes (Zimbardo & Ebbesen, 1969), but attitudes still affect learning – negative attitudes towards learning reduce the positive impact of learning (Osborne, Simon & Collins, 2003). Research suggests that attitudes toward others become more positive in various contexts when the level of

education increases (Teye, Sirakaya & Sonmez, 2002; Helliwell & Putnam, 1999; Freitag & Bauer, 2016).

It is still unclear how higher education affects life satisfaction. Importance of higher education is usually explained by greater income (NEF, 2014) or more positive social identity (Economic and Social Research Council, 2014). Statistical data confirm that income levels of people with lower and higher education levels are beneficial for the latter (Eurostat, 2016). Still, income and social identity do not fully explain the importance of education towards life satisfaction, because such psychological factors as attitudes could be as equally important as economic and social factors.

There is some evidence that the level of satisfaction depends on a person's age and gender (Šmitas & Gustainienė, 2017), and changes over the lifespan (Baird, Lucas & Donnellan, 2010), so there is a need to control for these biological aspects of human life in order to evaluate the importance of attitudes for life satisfaction.

In this paper well-being is understood as a person's satisfaction with life, because life satisfaction is one of the key components of subjective well-being.

The purpose of the study is to assess the importance of length of education towards life satisfaction both directly and indirectly (through attitudes).

The research object is the years of completed education, attitudes towards others (thinking that people are usually inclined to help others, tendency to trust other people) and life satisfaction.

We hypothesize that longer duration of studying (learning) relates to life satisfaction via attitudes towards others.

RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHODS

In order to achieve the research purpose the data from the second round of the Lithuanian National Science Programme (LNSP) "Welfare society" collected by Kaunas University of Technology research group (Krupavičius, Bartuškaitė, Butkevičienė, Balžekienė, Telešienė, Žvaliauskas) on the topic "Assessment of Work and Social Well-being in Lithuania" was used.

The National Science Programme “Welfare Society” was launched by the Government of Lithuania, with the purpose “to do research which in complex manner evaluates the predictors and the development of the society of welfare in Lithuania”. The National Science Programme was one of the instruments to achieve goals raised in the strategy of Lithuania’s progress “Lithuania 2030” (Lietuvos Respublikos Švietimo ir Mokslo Ministerija, 2015).

Research data for registered users for non-commercial purposes can be freely accessed through the repository of Lithuanian Humanities and Social Science data (www.lidata.eu/en/). For the present study data which measure life satisfaction (“Generally speaking, how much are you satisfied with your daily life?”), attitude toward trust of other people (“Generally speaking, can most people be trusted or should you be very careful?”), attitudes toward other people’s help (“In your opinion, do most people try to help others or do they care only for themselves?”) were used. Answers to these questions were coded from 0 to 10. 0 means that the person states that he/she is fully dissatisfied with his/her life/one should be very careful with others/people only care about themselves. 10 means that the person states that he/she is fully satisfied with life/most people can be trusted/most people try to help others as well. Beside sociodemographic questions about the length of studying/learning (How many full years were you learning?) in which respondents indicate how many years they have studied (participants were encouraged to include also the length of compulsory learning), questions related to age, gender, level of income have been analyzed as well.

The level of income was measured by a single-item question about the average personal income per typical month after taxes. A person is encouraged to indicate the average amount of his/her monthly income. It common to think that typically a person is capable of assessing his/her average income quite precisely.

Typical practice of wide-scale research is that the phenomena researched are normally measured by single-item questions which are usually created by experts. In this case common psychometric properties (e.g., internal consistency) cannot be measured, but it is argued that selected questions allow us to evaluate certain individual characteristics, such as length of learning, specific attitudes and life satisfaction which are analyzed in the present study. However, there is some doubt about

the possibility of evaluating the phenomena with only one statement/question. Nevertheless, in large-scale research the measurement of the phenomena with single-item questions/statements is common practice because it reduces administrative costs and the danger of over-surveying, which, in turn, causes higher levels of non-response (Diamantopoulos, Sarstedt, Fuchs, Wilczynski & Kaiser, 2012).

The survey was conducted in Lithuania from 14 November 2015 through 01 December 2015. The research population was 18+ year-old household units (citizens) of Lithuania. The research sample was created using the multistage stratified clustered address method and household addresses were taken from the state enterprise "Centre of Registers".

Total sample of the study consists of 1,127 respondents: 519 (46.1%) male, and 608 (53.9%) female. Median age of the respondents was 48 years; the youngest respondent was 18, the oldest was 97 years old.

Average length of study (learning) was 13.69 years, the majority (72.4%) of the respondents studied between 11 and 16 years; the shortest duration of learning (studying) was 2 years, the longest was 28 years.

Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM Statistics package; the PROCESS (Hayes, 2017) module for IBM Statistics program was used for mediation models. The independent variable was the length of learning (study), attitudes towards other people were used as mediators, life satisfaction was used as the dependent (outcome) variable. Gender, age and levels of income were used as covariates. Digits represented in models are unstandardized regression coefficients (B), digits in brackets show 95% confidence intervals. Bolded and marked with "*" coefficients of regression show statistically significant effect towards the direction of arrow.

RESULTS

Firstly, we assessed the relationships between the length of studying, the tendency to think that people could be trusted, and that other people were helpful and the levels of life satisfaction in groups of males and females.

Results are presented in Tables 1 and 2 for males and females, respectively.

Table 1. Relationship between the length of learning and attitudes toward others in males

Males (N=519) <i>M^{educ}</i> =13.69	Tendency to think that other people are helpful	Tendency to think that other people can be trusted	Life Satisfaction
Length of learning (studying)	.079	.099*	.172**

* p <.05; ** p <.01

The correlation analysis revealed that in males greater length of learning (studying) was related to the tendency to think that people could be trusted and with higher life satisfaction.

Table 2. Relationship between the length of learning and attitudes towards others in females

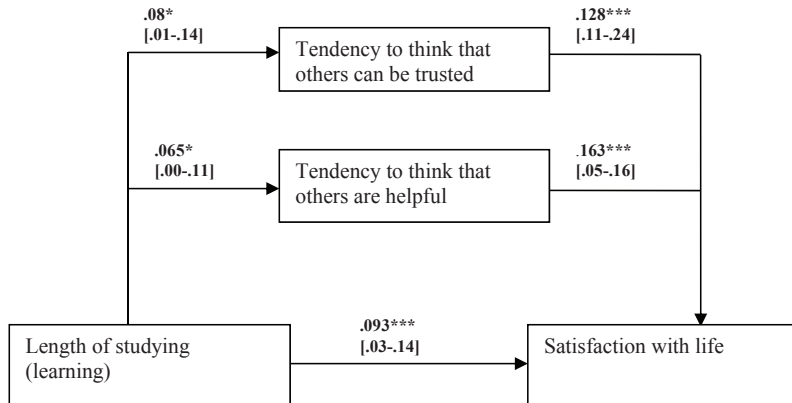
Females (N=608) <i>M^{educ}</i> =13.69	Tendency to think that other people are helpful	Tendency to think that other people can be trusted	Life Satisfaction
Length of learning (studying)	.115**	.164**	.233**

* p <.05; ** p <.01

The correlation analysis results revealed that in females greater length of learning (studying) was related to the tendencies to think that people were helpful, could be trusted, and with higher life satisfaction.

To evaluate whether the length of the learning (studying) predicts life satisfaction via the attitudes towards others, mediation analysis was conducted (fig. 1). Gender, age and level of income were used as covariates.

Mediation analysis showed that the length of studying (learning) predicted higher life satisfaction via the attitudes towards others. Direct effect on life satisfaction is .0932, p< .001, indirect effect is .1142, p< .0001.



* - $p < .05$ *** - $p < .001$

Fig. 1. Relationship between the length of studying (learning) and satisfaction with life mediated by attitudes towards others

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study confirm the hypothesis that longer duration of learning positively relates to more favorable personal attitudes to others which, in turn, increases life satisfaction independently of gender, age and the level of income.

Study results also confirm the importance of formal and informal (e.g., Third-age Universities) education for higher levels of life satisfaction independently of age, gender and the level of income.

The importance of education is usually based on economic factors – higher levels of education predict higher levels of income and higher income increases quality of life, subjective and psychological well-being and higher life satisfaction (NEF, 2014); still some authors disagree with the idea (e.g., Diener & Seligman, 2004). The research findings confirm that education is an important factor of life satisfaction not only through higher levels of income, but also through more positive attitudes to other people. That could be explained by the facts that learning and the processes of learning not only give specific knowledge, but also affect

a person's point of view. The results not only confirm previous research findings that education is an important factor for increasing life satisfaction (e.g., Šmitas & Gustainienė, 2017; Ludban, 2015; Ryff, 2014), but also expand previous knowledge by explaining how higher levels of education promote life satisfaction (through more positive attitudes to others).

One could ask how attitudes could affect a person's life satisfaction? According to the Cognitive Hierarchy Model (Homer & Kahle, 1988) a person's attitudes affect that person's behavior. So, if one thinks that other people are helpful, he/she will more likely interact with people with a similar viewpoint and because his/her social network will more likely be based on people who are helpful, the person will more likely get help from others. According to Broaden-and-Build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) help from other people makes the solution of daily hassles be more effective, and more effective problem solving will subsequently evoke more positive emotions which would in turn increase satisfaction with life.

This study also raises some questions, e.g., whether the length of studying (learning) affects a person's attitudes to others independently of the country of residence? Previous research suggests that life satisfaction and its predictors differ in different countries (e.g., Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Springer, Pudrovska & Hauser, 2011; Steptoe, Deaton & Stone, 2015), so it is not clear would the length of studying (learning) predict more positive attitudes to others and whether these attitudes predict higher levels of life satisfaction in other countries as well. Future studies could be initiated to answer these questions.

An obvious strength of this study is that the analysis was conducted on the representative data. The limitation of the study is that the phenomena were investigated using single-item questions. There is a chance that respondents might have understood these questions differently than the experts.

It can be concluded that a longer duration of studying (learning) is related to higher life satisfaction via positive attitudes to others independently of gender, age and income.

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MOKYMOSI TRUKMĖS REIKŠMĖ NUOSTATOMS Į KITUS IR PASITENKINIMUI GYVENIMU

Andrius Šmitas*, **, Loreta Gustainienė**

*Kauno kolegija, Lietuva; **Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, Lietuva

Santrauka. Įvadas. Jau nuo antikos laikų pasitenkinimas gyvenimu buvo asmens ir visuomenės dėmesio centre. Vis dėlto santykinai mažai žinoma, kokios asmens savybės gali sąlygoti pasitenkinimą gyvenimu. Galima manyti, kad aukštesnis išsilavinimas, siejamas su geresne sveikata, gali būti vienas iš veiksnių, padidinančių kognityvinį gerovės aspektą – pasitenkinimą gyvenimu. Taip pat žinoma, kad pasitenkinimas gyvenimu siejasi su teigiamu požiūriu į kitus žmones. Vis dėlto nėra aišku, ar išsilavinimo lygmuo tiesiogiai siejasi su pasitenkinimu gyvenimu, ar per tam tikrus požiūrius (nuostatas). Tad šio tyrimo **tikslas** yra įvertinti mokymosi trukmės reikšmę nuostatomis į kitus ir pasitenkinimui gyvenimu reprezentatyvioje Lietuvos gyventojų imtyje. **Tyrimo metodai ir duomenys.** Tiriamųjų pasitenkinimas gyvenimu ir požiūris į kitus žmones buvo vertinami ekspertų sukurtu vieno klausimo metodu. Straipsnis parengtas naudojant duomenis, surinktus nacionalinės mokslo programos „Gerovės visuomenė“ metu. Šio tyrimo imtis sudaryta iš 1127 asmenų, kurių amžius – nuo 18 iki 87 metų (M=48). Statistinė analizė atlikta taikant koreliacinę analizę ir paprastuosius mediacijos (tarpininkavimo) modelius. **Rezultatai ir išvados.** Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė, kad ilgesnė mokymosi trukmė tiesiogiai prognozuoja teigiamas nuostatas į kitus asmenis, o netiesiogiai – per labiau teigiamas nuostatas į kitus žmones (kontroliuojant amžių, lytį ir pajamų lygį). Tyrimo rezultatai patvirtinta išsilavinimo reikšmę pasitenkinimui gyvenimu per teigiamą požiūrį į kitus žmones ir veikia pasitenkinimą gyvenimu ne tik kaip aukštesnių pajamų prediktorius. Ilgesnė mokymosi trukmė per labiau teigiamas nuostatas į kitus prognozuoja aukštesnį pasitenkinimą gyvenimu nepriklausomai nuo amžiaus, lyties ir pajamų lygio.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: mokymasis, nuostatos, pasitenkinimas gyvenimu, reprezentatyvi imtis, suaugusieji.

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