

***TITLE: LIFE SATISFACTION OF THE ELDERLY IN POLAND -
EVIDENCE FROM THE PANEL DATA***

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Background and purpose of the research:

Despite the fact that in Poland like in other OECD countries declared life satisfaction progressed remarkably (OECD 2009), Poles' life satisfaction is still below the OECD average. Might it be attributed to the increasing share of older persons who feel deprived under radical economic and social changes initiated by reforms of the 1990s? There are also several symptoms of their difficulties to adapt to changing labour market requirements, to stay longer in work place, and to participate in social life (Kotowska et al. 2011, Bukowski (ed.) 2010). Studies on demand and supply for care and support show also, there is a remarkable share of the elderly whose demand for support is not fulfilled (Abramowska-Kmon, Kotowska 2009). This constitutes a point of departure for our paper which aims to analyse changes in the life satisfaction of the elderly (aged 65 or more) in Poland and their determinants taking into account several aspects of well-being.

Among a wide range of macro- and micro-level determinants of individual well-being those related to individual and household traits like age, sex, human capital, health status, a type of living arrangements, household welfare, life styles, social networks and support seem to be of a special interest when studying well-being of the elderly.

In general, elderly women report lower life satisfaction than aged men. However, this may be related to the other characteristics influencing well-being of women such as worse health status, lower income and lower educational level and living alone remarkably more frequently than men. It is generally assumed that life satisfaction among the elderly declines with age, mostly due to deterioration in health status. But the empirical results show the mixed and inconsistent effects. As for livings arrangements there is empirical evidence that those living with partner are more satisfied with life than those living without partner (even living in multi-person households). In addition, health problems in terms of disability and different health disorders lower well-being of the elderly. High levels of education and indirectly linked to it an advantageous financial situation have positive influence on life satisfaction of the old people. What is more, there is evidence that individuals engaged in different social and cultural activities, as well as those who stay longer in work, seem to report higher life satisfaction than others. Similarly, older people who could rely on support from their family and social networks seem to be more satisfied with their lives than those without support.

Data and methods:

The data used come from the panel survey “Social Diagnosis – living conditions and quality of life of Poles”, carried out in Poland since 2000. The Social Diagnosis Survey includes data on the economic (labour market status, income, material situation, etc.) as well as non-economic aspects (psychological well-being, lifestyle, health care, social contact, participation in culture, use of modern technologies of communication, etc.) of household living conditions.

Thus, the variable of interest is based on set of questions concerning several aspects of life. Among others, the individuals were asked about satisfaction with the following aspects (items): financial situation of the family, relationship with close family members, health status, work, children, marriage, education, situation in the country etc. The possible answers were: very satisfied, satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat unsatisfied, unsatisfied, very unsatisfied, not applicable. On the basis those question one synthetic variable will be created by use of principal factor analysis. In the next step the regression model based on panel data will include not only the basic demographic individual variables (sex, age, marital status, place of residence, level of education), but also household living arrangements (living alone, with partner only, with partner and other people, without partner but with other people) and economic (household income, poverty indicators) variables. Moreover, since health status is

one of most important determinants of well-being a health status variable (disability and several ailments) will also be incorporated in a model. Additionally, variables related to different of forms of activities (for example social activity, participation in cultural events, sport or physical activities) and family and social contacts will be also accounted for.

Main expected results:

It is expected that life satisfaction of the elderly in Poland will decrease with age both for men and women, but probably females will be less satisfied with life than males will. Disability and experienced health problems will affect negatively the well-being of the elderly, while higher level of education and income will have the opposite effect. Furthermore, it may be anticipated that family situation depicted by living arrangements will influence the life satisfaction in two possible ways: firstly, the old people married and living with partner only will report higher life satisfaction than those without partner living with other people, secondly, people living alone may be more satisfied with life than those without partner, but living in multi-person households. We also predict that high engagement in different social activities (sport, culture, social affairs (etc.) will increase satisfaction of life among the elderly in Poland. Similarly, the same influence refers to people who could rely on family and social support if needed.

Literature:

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