

# THE SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING OF RUSSIAN YOUTH AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EDUCATIONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC STRATEGIES

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## Abstract

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) is an essential, integral economic indicator that characterizes the level of human capital development. It forms social moods like optimism and pessimism, which influences the population's activity in various spheres of public life: politics, economy, labour and education. The article shows how indicators of SWB and social moods of a socio-demographic group of young people can determine their choice of various types of life strategies. Conclusions are based on the results of a survey of students and young employees conducted in six large industrial regions of Russia (N=3600, age of respondents from 18 to 30 years). We found that the expectation of changes in society (positive or negative) correlates with young people's life plans and strategies. Respondents with negative social expectations focus on achieving material wellbeing and implementing demographic attitudes towards starting a family and having children. As a rule, respondents with positive social expectations tend to choose strategies and plans that involve improving the level of education, professional development, entrepreneurial and creative activity.

**Key words:** subjective wellbeing, youth, life strategies, demographic strategies

**JEL Code:** J17, J24, O15

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## Introduction

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) is an essential and integral economic indicator that characterizes the level of human capital development. We can observe serious attention to the issues of the SWB of the population and the ways to appraise it from various researchers-economists, sociologists, psychologists (references (Ong, Dowthwaite, Vallejos, Rawsthorne, & Long, 2021), (Montero, Vargas, & Vasquez, 2021), (Park, Joshanloo, & Scheifinger, 2019). SWB is usually associated with life satisfaction combined with a positive or negative emotional component (Schultz, Ryan, Niemiec, Legate, & Williams, 2015), (Park et al., 2019).

In recent studies on individual and social SWB, we found that most of the research focuses on the impact of various factors on the SWB of the population or its separate category (for example, the elderly or the young people). British researchers D. Gray, H. Pickard & L. Munford, based on longitudinal data on individuals in Great Britain, studied the correlation between political conduct and life satisfaction and proved that support of the ruling party had a positive impact on the individual SWB (Gray, Pickard, & Munford). The research of L. Aldieri, B. Bruno and C.P. Vinci proved that technological innovations measured by patents have a negative impact through such channels as income, use of IT, inequality, and unemployment (Aldieri, Bruno, & Vinci, 2021).

I. Ramia, M. Voicu studied the relationship between different strategies for staying active in old age with life satisfaction and happiness, cognitive and affective indicators of subjective quality of life (Ramia & Voicu). Zeland K. Preston, A. Grimes have found that migration has a gender-specific positive impact on SWB (Preston & Grimes, 2019).

There is much less research on the reverse process – how SWB indicators affect people's behaviour. Nevertheless, some research proves the impact of SWB on the social mood - pessimistic and optimistic - which impacts people's political, economic, labour, and educational activity. Lee, Peng and Wang et al., studied the SWB of employees during the global COVID-19 pandemic and found that positive psychology of SWB gives employees a sense of security, makes them settle down in the job (Lee, Peng, Wang, Hung, & Jong, 2021).

Thus, we can conclude that there is a lack of efforts to study the impact of SWB indicators on the choice of life goals, the formation of professional, educational, and other population and specific social groups, which forms a knowledge gap we are willing to fill. In this regard, the main task of our article is to study the SWB indicators and social attitudes impact of young people as a socio-demographic group on their choice of various types of life strategies: either related to the goals of self-development - the desire for professional growth, improving the level of education and competencies, entrepreneurship, or related to practical life goals, such as starting a family, having children, providing the desired level of well-being for them and their family.

Young people, as a particular socio-demographic group, are usually considered as the most valuable resource for the economic and innovative development of society (Gvozdeva & Gvozdeva, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how young people assess the socio-economic conditions in which they will build their life trajectory. In our opinion, the SWB is a complex factor that reflects the objective institutional needs of young people's lives, on the one

hand. On the other hand, it determines their attitude to these conditions and motivation for choosing a life strategy.

## **1 Data and Method**

We regard subjective well-being within the framework of the classical approach of E. Diener (reference Diener, 2012) as the satisfaction of young people with living conditions, which is a generalized assessment of these conditions divided into four groups:

1) Assessment of the current conditions for the development and satisfaction of the personal needs (in obtaining education, professional skills, material needs, ensuring good health, etc.).

2) Assessment of ability to improve these conditions in the future.

3) Indicators of satisfaction with the current state of affairs in the country in the main areas, primarily in the economy and politics.

4) Assessment of the probability of a change in the situation in the country for the better or for the worse, which can be conditionally designated as a social mood of optimism and pessimism.

Our conclusions are based on the survey results conducted with students and young employees in six large industrial regions of Russia (N=3600, resp. 18 to 30 yo). The respondents were young workers with technical and higher education, employed at enterprises of high-tech industries in the studied regions (rocket engineering, mechanical engineering, satellites and communications, IT, etc.), as well as students of universities and colleges with training programmes for the personnel in these industries (the 2nd year students of technical schools and colleges and the 3rd year students of universities).

## **2 Results**

The survey results showed that the SWB of young people in the studied regions is quite contradictory and is generally characterized by low indicators.

### **2.1 SWB**

Speaking about SWB indicators (Table 1), respondents are most satisfied with socio-psychological parameters, such as relationships with relatives and friends, relationships with colleagues or classmates. While the parameters that are more related to institutional influence, such as material condition, education, place of work or study, the state of the environment -

received relatively low ratings. As a rule, they were rated by young people below four points out of five possible; in particular, respondents are not satisfied with their material condition and the environment. It is especially true for young employees of enterprises, who, in comparison with students, represent an older age cohort of young people who already have an education, a job and, in most cases, their own family, which is their responsibility.

**Tab. 1: SWB indicators (assessment of conditions for personal needs satisfaction), average points (avrg.pts.)**

Are you satisfied or not satisfied with following aspects of your life? (1 - totally not satisfied; 5 – totally satisfied)	Students	Employees
Material condition	3,03	2,87
Health	3,59	3,71
Place of study/work	3,60	3,56
Education	3,68	3,84
Relationships with family and friends	4,20	4,43
Relationships with groupmates and colleagues	4,04	4,21
Environment	2,78	2,60

Source: authors calculations

After that, we examined how young people assess their ability to improve their individual SWB in various areas of life, including information and legal opportunities and the availability of social and economic mobility abilities, such as education or entrepreneurship.

Although, average scores of opportunities are not high: from 2,49 to 3,64 pts. on a 5 pts. scale. The structure of assessments of opportunities to improve the conditions for the needs of students and young employees satisfaction is quite similar (Table 2). Young people are most optimistic about the prospects to improve their educational and professional level and maintain their health. The respondents rated the political and legal opportunities (legal protection and reliable and objective information about events and facts of public life) significantly worse (Table 2). Young people are the least satisfied with the opportunities to start their own business and engage in entrepreneurship.

**Tab. 2: The opportunities to improve the conditions for meeting personal needs, avrg.pts.**

Do you have limited or broad opportunities in following? (1 - very limited; 5 – very broad)	Students	Employees
Provide yourself with legal protection if necessary	3,09	2,77
Start your own business, engage in entrepreneurship	2,77	2,49
Get a quality education or improve its level	3,64	3,45
Maintain health at the necessary level, healthy lifestyle	3,62	3,60
Provide yourself with an objective information about events and facts of public life	3,21	3,12
Fulfil professional potential	3,43	3,45

Source: authors calculations

## 2.2 Satisfaction with the conditions in the country and the social expectations of young people

Analyzing the data above, we see that the individual SWB indicators are at an average level in the range of 2 to 4 points. However, when moving to the social SWB indicators, which characterize satisfaction with the social conditions in the country and opportunities for their improvement in the future, the picture becomes even more negatively colored. Thus, the estimates of youth satisfaction with the current situation in the country do not reach even three points, while the students rated the situation more critically and negatively than young employees (Table 3). It is obvious that the most acute and conflicting discontent among young people is caused by unresolved economic problems against the background of a stagnant economy and a permanent decline in living standards in the last decade.

**Tab. 3: How youth evaluate the current situation in the country, avrg.pts.**

Are the situations in the country going in the right or wrong way in the following areas: (1 – totally wrong; 5 – totally wright)	Students	Employees
In economics	2,27	2,35
In politics	2,33	2,67
In social sphere	2,51	2,46
In culture	2,88	2,94

Source: authors calculations

It should be noted that the youth survey was conducted in 2019 before the escalation of protest sentiments among Russian youth observed today. We can assume with a high degree of probability that by now these estimates may be even more negative.

The social mood of young people as an emotionally-colored SWB component is largely manifested through their attitude to possible changes in the situation in the future for the better or for the worse. In this regard, we studied the mood of young people regarding the public outlook in the next three years.

Social pessimism (bad expectations) and social optimism (good expectations) are about equally characteristic of young people (Table 4). The young people majority (58% of students and 55% of young employees) showed, at first glance, a neutral attitude to social changes in the country (expect no changes). However, if we compare with the negative assessments of the current situation (Table 3), then such responses of respondents can be characterized as "latent pessimism" - the type of mood, which could be described in a phrase: "now is bad, and in the next three years nothing will change" - indicates the predominance of negative emotional well-being, self-perception of young people regarding social, political and economic conditions in society.

**Tab. 4: Social attitudes of young people regarding possible changes in society, %**

Do you think the situation in our society will change or will not change in the next 3 years?	Students	Employees
Yes, it will change for the worse (pessimism)	23,3	22,0
Yes, it will change for the better (optimism)	18,7	23,0
No, nothing will change (latent pessimism)	58,0	55,0
Attitude index	-4,6	+1,0
Total:	100,0	100,0

The index is calculated as the difference between the share of positive ratings (optimism) and the share of negative ratings (pessimism), excluding latent pessimism, %. Source: authors calculations

The attitude index shows that the relative difference between student and young employees in satisfaction with the current situation in the country is even more pronounced in social expectations.

### 2.3 Youth life strategies and their relationship to SWB

Based on the examination of young people's life goals, we derived three types of strategies:

1) Professional success and career strategy, which entails the following indicators of life success - high professional achievements, career and achievement of high official positions;

2) Creativity and implementation of ideas (including business ideas) strategy, which entails such life priorities as the opportunity to engage in creativity and implement ideas, as well as opportunity to start a business, to implement a business project;

3) Economic well-being strategy, which implies utilitarian life goals as achieving economic well-being, buying a home, starting a family, and having children.

The results of priority life goals measurement show that the most significant are the practical values of economic well-being and family for students and young employees. This strategy prevails among young people, especially among young employees of enterprises, who usually already have families and children and must ensure their well-being (Table 5). At the same time, more than a quarter of respondents indicated their housing availability as an essential indicator of life success. Professional achievements and career are crucial life goals for many respondents, both students and young employees. The opportunity to engage in creativity and develop their business projects is more interesting for students than for young employees (Table 5).

**Tab. 5: The significant life goals of youth, %**

Choose from the list below the success indicators that are significant to you	Students	Employees
Good family, children	61,5	78,8
High economical status and income	53,0	51,1
High professional achievements	39,5	44,3
Career, high official positions achievement	31,5	29,0
The opportunity to engage in creativity, to implement your ideas	37,3	25,4
Own housing	27,4	27,7
Business, the implementation of a business project	26,4	20,3

Respondents could choose from several answers. Source: authors calculations

We did not find a significant statistical relationship between the choice of life strategy and the personal SWB of young people (satisfaction), nor did we see a significant relationship between the choice of life strategy and the assessment of the current situation in the country.

However, we found that the expectation of changes in society (positive or negative) correlated with young people's life goals and strategies (Table 6).

**Tab. 6: The relationship between the type of life strategies and the social attitudes of respondents, %\***

Do you think the situation in our society will change or will not change in the next 3 years?	Strategies		
	Professional success and career strategy	Creativity and implementation of ideas (including business ideas) strategy	Economic well-being strategy
No, nothing will change (latent pessimism)	54,1	54,5	59,1
Yes, it will change for the worse (pessimism)	18,7	21,9	27,8
Yes, it will change for the better (optimism)	27,2	23,7	13,1
Total:	100,0	100,0	100,0

\* Kramer's V is significant [0..1]: 0.103, Error probability (significance): 0.000. Source: authors calculations

Respondents with negative social expectations (pessimists) focus on achieving economic well-being, creating a family, and having children. Respondents with positive or neutral social expectations tend to choose strategies related to education and career, professional development, creativity, and entrepreneurship.

In addition, among young students, negative social expectations are also associated with migration moods. They plan to leave Russia to study and work in countries with a higher standard of living. At the same time, according to our data, 15% of students would like and plan to emigrate in the next five years, working youth show less potential migration mobility (no more than 2%) due to relatively greater social rootedness – established family, professional and other social ties.

## Conclusion

Thus, we found that the SWB indicators of students and young employees, in general, are higher than the estimates of satisfaction with the situation in the country in various areas. Unfavourable social expectations about the situation in the economy are characteristic, especially for young people. Social attitudes of pessimism about the prospects associated with possible social changes prevail among both cohorts of young people.

Our hypothesis about the correlation between the preferred life strategies of young people and SWB indicators partially confirmed.

There was no significant correlation between the choice of life strategy and the personal SWB of young people and between the choice of life strategy and the assessment of the current situation in the country. Still, we found that the expectation of changes in society (positive or negative) correlated with young people's life goals and strategies.

Respondents with negative social expectations focus on achieving material well-being and implementing demographic attitudes towards starting a family and having children. As a rule, respondents with more favourable social expectations tend to choose strategies and plans that involve improving education, professional development, entrepreneurial and creative activity.

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