

Predictors of Well-Being: An Examination of Age Differences

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Initial receipt: 11.08.2015 Final revision received: 22.01.2016 Accepted: 15.02.2016

Abstract: Well-being has an adaptive function and is associated with a number of positive outcomes in terms of psychological, physical and social function. Purpose of this study is to identify the predictors of well-being into three large categories of variables which are: personality, family and the emotional regulation mechanisms and to analyze the age difference of the predictors of wellbeing. Statistical analyses (hierarchical multiple regression) processed the responses of 516 subjects, aged between 14 and 34 ($M = 18.62$, $SD = 3.32$). From the personality factors, emotional stability is the strongest predictor of well-being. Emotional experience during childhood stage is significant for adolescent, whereas in young adults, it bears significance for the positive dimensions of wellbeing only. With regards to the adult attachment style, the relationship with both parents is relevant (for teenagers), and the attachment relationship with the father is the main predictor (for young adults). In the emotion regulation strategies, expressive suppression is, for adolescents, the main predictor of wellbeing, whereas for young adults, it is the cognitive reappraisal. Well-being depends on the structure of personality, the emotional experiences in the family of origin and also on the strategies enabled in regulating emotions. Personality factors are the strongest predictors of well-being. Of these, emotional stability contributes the most to the variance of the predictive model and presents significant links to all four dimensions that operationalize well-being.

Keywords: well-being; personality; emotion socialization; adult attachment; emotional regulation.

1. Introduction

An increased and stable level of well-being has an adaptive function and is associated with a number of positive outcomes in terms of psychological, physical and social function (Tomyn, Fuller Tyszkiewicz & Norrish, 2014). The models used in this paper identify the predictors of well-being into three large categories of variables: personality (i.e. five factors), family (i.e.

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parental strategies for the socialization of emotions during childhood, and adult attachment style) and the emotional regulation mechanisms (i.e. cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) for adolescents and young adults.

1.1. Personality. There is a lot of empirical evidence that significant relationships occur between personality and well-being. Extraversion and neuroticism are two fundamental traits of personality that reflect individual differences in terms of positive and negative affects as well as, cognitive style and attitudes (Canli, Ferri & Duman, 2009). Recent research has discovered and explained the cause of these links based on structural equations. Neuroticism and extraversion influences positive and negative affects indirectly through cognitive reappraisal, while expressive suppression has no mediating role for neuroticism, nor for extraversion. Therefore, personality dimensions are reflected in the positive and negative affects depending on the emotion regulation strategies (Wang, Shi & Li, 2009).

1.2. Emotion regulation is a complex concept that influences well-being, social skills, physical and mental health, successful development, improvement in interpersonal relationships and work performance (Bariola, Gullone & Hughes, 2011; Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema & Schweizer, 2010; Horn, Possel & Hautzinger, 2010; Neumann, van Lier, Gratz & Koot, 2010). Data on the influence of emotions and emotion regulation strategies on wellbeing are consensual; however, the results of specific emotion regulation strategies (i.e. suppression and cognitive reappraisal) are contradictory. Suppression is associated both with a low level of satisfaction and wellbeing (John & Gross, 2004), and also with high levels of satisfaction and wellbeing (Schutte, Manes & Malouff, 2009). Cognitive reappraisal is related to positive emotions, well-being and life satisfaction (Haga, Kraft & Corby, 2009; Gross, 2001; Aldao et al., 2010, John & Gross, 2004; Boden, Westermann, McRae, Kuo, Alvarez, et al., 2013).

1.3. The parental style for emotion socialization allows the child not only to explore emotions and events around him/her, but also to learn how to regulate their emotions and understand troublesome situations (Baker, Fenning & Crnic, 2010). Direct socialization of emotions is achieved through the reactions of parents to the child's emotions, which may be supportive (i.e. reward) or non-supportive (i.e. punishment, avoidance, and neglect). Punishment, neglect or amplification of sadness and fear, and the responses that inhibit the expression of negative emotions (such as emotional socialization styles, the Malatesta Magai model) were associated with high levels of psychological distress up to adult age (Garside, 2003).

Although the topic of emotional socialization bears importance and relevance in many areas of psychology, there are few studies that have examined the socialization of specific negative (i.e., fear or anger) or

positive (i.e., happiness) emotions by mothers and fathers (Root & Denham, 2010).

1.4. *The attachment style* as expressed by the quality of parent-child interactions forms the basis for the attachment relationships, and has profound implications for the child's emotional experience (Jaffe, Gullone & Hughes, 2010). Gullone and Robinson (2005), Armsden and Greenberg (1987) found interesting results that attachment in this period correlates with self-esteem, life satisfaction and affective status (i.e. depression, anxiety, resentment are consequences of alienation as an attachment type); and is associated with the tendency of using problem solving-oriented coping strategies.

1.5. *Well-being*. Although well-being was varied operationalized in the literature, a comprehensive review of studies in this area has found a number of constant variables: life satisfaction, high levels of positive affects and low levels of negative affects (Schutte, Manes & Malouff, 2009; Haga, Kraft & Corby, 2009). Also, there are authors who add to these dimensions: self-acceptance, the existence of a clear purpose in life, a high sense of autonomy, optimism and good relationships with others. Clark and Watson, Folkman and Moskowitz believe that positive and negative affects have a unique importance in understanding both well-being and mental health (Al-Yagon, 2012).

Purpose of Research

The aim of this study is to examine personality, family and emotional regulation strategy predictors of general well-being, and to analyze the age difference of the predictors of wellbeing. We measured the impact of personality factors, the attachment style of the mother/father and the parenting style of socializing (i.e. mother/father's), internalizing (i.e. fear, sadness) and externalizing (i.e. anger, happiness) emotions during childhood; and the impact of the emotion regulation strategies (i.e. cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression) on the general well-being during adolescence and young adulthood.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The sample consists of 516 pupils and students from Eastern Europe. In order to control the *type of family of origin* variable, we selected only those questionnaires from the respondents coming from families where both parents are biological. The structure of the sample according to gender, age group and status is presented in Table 1. The 516 subjects, adolescents and young adults, are aged between 14 and 34 ($M = 18.62$, $SD = 3.32$).

Table 1. *The participants in the study*

		Number	Average/SD of age	Percent
As per <i>gender</i> variable:	female	342	18.83/ 3.15	66%
	male	174	18.21/ 3.59	34%
As per <i>age</i> variable:	adolescent	273	16.10/ 1.42	52%
	young	243	21.46/ 2.44	48%
	adult			

2.2 Instruments

Personality was assessed through the FFPI –*Five-Factor Personality Inventory*, source: CAS + + (Miclea, Porumb, Cotârlea & Albu, 2009). The instrument has 100 items rated on a five-step Likert-type scale. The Alpha Cronbach coefficients have the following scale values: 0.84 - extraversion, 0.80 - friendliness, 0.80 - conscientiousness, 0.81 - emotional stability and 0.78 – autonomy.

The parental style for emotional socialization was operationalized through EAC, *Emotions as a Child Self-Rating Scale*, (Version 2- Klimes-Dougan, Brand, Zahn-Waxler, Usher, Hastings et al., 2007). The parents' reaction for internalizing (i.e. fear, sadness) and externalizing (i.e. anger) emotions is measured for the mother and father separately. This instrument has 15 items for each emotion and five scales corresponding to the five emotion assessment strategies: reward, punishment, avoidance, neglect and amplification. Therefore, following the translation and adaptation of the instrument for Romanian population, the resulting internal consistency coefficients were similar to those of the translated instrument.

The attachment style was measured using IPPA - *Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment* (Greenberg & Armsden, 2009). This instrument measures the three attachment styles for the mother and father separately: communication, trust, and alienation from middle and late adolescence up to early adulthood. It has 25 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The Alpha Cronbach internal consistency coefficients of the scales translated into Romanian shows the following values: 0.76 - *alienation mother* scale, 0.79 - *alienation father* scale, - 0.85 - *communication mother* scale , 0.88 *communication father* scale, 0.85 - *trust mother* scale, 0.87 - *trust father* scale, 0.70 - *total mother* and 0.77- *total father*. Hence, the coefficients are comparable with the (total) original IPPA values.

Adaptive (cognitive reappraisal) and maladaptive (emotional suppression) emotion regulation strategies were measured using different scales of the ERQ- *Emotion Regulation Questionnaire*, (Gross & John, 2003). This instrument has 10 statement-type items, distributed on two scales

(cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression). The answers to the questionnaire items were aimed at the level of agreement with the statements contained in the items, and were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale. The instrument translated and adapted for the Romanian population has adequate validity coefficients: 0.76 for cognitive reappraisal and 0.75 for expressive suppression.

Well-being was measured by three different scales: *PANAS*, *SWLS* - *The Satisfaction with Life Scale* and *EDP* - *Emotional Distress Profile*. *PANAS* (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) has two scales: positive affects (10 items - emotions) and negative affects (10 items - emotions) rated on a 5-step Likert scale. The Alpha Cronbach coefficients after the translation and validation of the Romanian population are: 0.75 - positive affects and 0.84 - negative affects. *SWLS* (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) has 5 items rated on a 7-step Likert scale with an Alpha Cronbach coefficient of 0.76. *EDP* (David, 2009), the emotional distress profile, is a 26-item scale that measures functional and dysfunctional negative emotions belonging to the category of "fear" and "sadness/depression". Thus, the items were rated on a 5-step Likert scale and the Alpha Cronbach coefficient applied for the instrument is 0.95.

2.3 Procedure

The eight tools were applied in different educational contexts (courses, seminars and class hours). They were administered in paper-and-pencil format, with the average time of completion being 60-70 minutes. In order to avoid a tendency to façade answers, the questionnaires were anonymous (except for the participants who wanted to see their personal results as they wrote their names or initials).

3. Results

We used hierarchical multiple regression. The results reflect the picture of the predictive factors of well-being, as per age (Table 2, Table 3).

At the personality level, *emotional stability* is the most significant predictor for most dimensions of well-being for adolescent. In other words, emotional instability predicts negative affects ($\beta = .55, p = .000$), emotional distress ($\beta = .52, p = .000$) and life satisfaction ($\beta = .16, p = .02$). *Conscientiousness* is a significant variable when it comes to predicting positive affective dimensions of well-being: positive affects ($\beta = .20, p = .003$) and life satisfaction ($\beta = .14, p = .02$).

The block of variables reflecting *childhood emotional experience* brings forth the emotion of *anger*. Hence, the way of managing anger, especially in the relationship with the father, is a predictor for well-being at adolescence.

While the *anger punishment* by the mother has a negative influence on positive affects ($\beta = -.22, p = .009$), the same answer by the father has a positive impact on positive affects ($\beta = .20, p = .02$). And the *reward-type response* of the father to the same emotion is a predictor for positive affects ($\beta = .30, p = .002$). If properly managed by the father (in early childhood), happiness is an emotion which has the potential to lead an adolescent to be dominated by positive affects ($\beta = .26, p = .01$). The emotional influence of the mother in early childhood concentrates around the emotion of fear. *Fear neglect* by the mother has implications for negative affects ($\beta = .25, p = .003$) and emotional distress ($\beta = .16, p = .05$). Just like anger, *sadness* is a strong emotion imprinted by the gender of the parent: the reward-type response is positively associated with life satisfaction when coming from the mother ($\beta = .19, p = .02$) and negatively associated with life satisfaction when it comes from the father ($\beta = -.21, p = .03$).

The block of variables concerning the *attachment style* contains both the maternal and paternal figure. Hence, the relationship with the mother is important for the adolescent, and the alienation in the relationship with the mother is a predictor for both negative affects ($\beta = .17, p = .03$) and distress ($\beta = .20, p = .01$).

Out of the two emotion regulation strategies analyzed, *expressive suppression* is negatively associated with the positive affects of adolescents ($\beta = -.15, p = .01$).

As for young adults, of all the personality factors, *emotional stability* is the most significant predictor. Therefore, an emotionally balanced young man will experience significantly fewer negative emotions ($\beta = -.46, p = .000$), less emotional distress ($\beta = -.34, p = .000$) and fewer positive affects ($\beta = .23, p = .003$). *Extraversion* reduces emotional distress ($\beta = -.19, p = .02$) and predicts life satisfaction ($\beta = .27, p = .002$), while *autonomy* is a predictor for positive affects ($\beta = .18, p = .04$).

Emotional experience of childhood is a predictor only for positive dimensions of well-being of young adults. *Fear reward* by the mother is a negative predictor for positive affects ($\beta = -.24, p = .04$), while the *fear punishment* by the father predicts life satisfaction ($\beta = .21, p = .02$). For *sadness*, the desirable answer by the father, which becomes predictive of positive affects, is avoidance ($\beta = .25, p = .02$).

The analysis of the *attachment relationship* reveals very interesting data: young adults have an intense need to develop attachment relationships especially with the father. *Alienation* in the relationship with the father is a predictor for emotional distress ($\beta = .36, p = .001$), *negative affects* ($\beta = .31, p = .003$) and life satisfaction ($\beta = -.25, p = .02$). *Trust* is a negative predictor for negative affects ($\beta = -.28, p = .01$). For young adults, positive

affects are directly related to a functional style of emotion regulation, and *cognitive reappraisal* ($\beta = .12, p = .04$).

Synthetic Model – Well-Being (teens and young adults)

Table 2. Summary of the results of the hierarchical regression analysis for positive and negative affects for teens (N = 273) and young adults (N = 252)

VARIABLES	Positive Affects		Negative affects		
	Teens	Young adults	Teens	Young adults	
Personality	Extraversion	.18*	.04	.00	-.11
	Conscientiousness	.20**	.09	-.04	-.05
	Autonomy	.10	.18*	.03	.09
	Emotional stability	.03	.23**	-.55***	-.46***
Parental style for socializing	Punishment_Ha_M	.12	.20*	.12	.08
	Amplification_Ha_M	.10	.23*	.05	-.01
	Neglect_Ha_F	.02	.01	-.06	-.01
	Reward_Ha_F	.26**	.08	-.00	-.06
	Punishment_Ang_M	-.22**	.10	.10	-.14
	Neglect_Ang_M	.03	-.19*	-.02	-.01
	Punishment_Ang_F	.20*	-.09	.04	-.00
	Reward_Ang_F	.30**	-.09	.17*	.01
	Amplification_Ang_F	-.05	-.04	.04	.09
	Neglect_Fe_M	-.03	-.05	.25**	.10
	Reward_Fe_M	-.10	-.24*	-.05	.10
	Reward_Fe_F	.01	-.01	-.03	.07
	Punishment_Fe_F	.01	-.06	-.03	.15
	Reward_Sa_M	-.05	-.11	-.01	-.08
	Reward_Sa_F	-.08	.06	-.07	.05
Amplification_Sa_F	.10	-.02	.05	-.08	
Avoidance_Sa_F	-.09	.25*	.04	-.02	
Attach ment	Trust_F	.10	-.07	.05	-.28**
	Alienation_F	.19*	.03	.06	.31**
	Alienation_M	-.00	.06	.17*	.06
ER	Reappraisal	.10	.12*	.05	.04
	Suppression	-.15**	.06	.05	.02
R² adjusted		.34	.32	.51	.41

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001;

Note: All the values for R² adjusted are significant for p<.01 except for emotional distress (young adults), p<.001

Table 3. Summary of the results of the hierarchical regression analysis for emotional distress and life satisfaction for teens (N = 273) and young adults (N = 252)

VARIABLES	Emotional Distress		Life satisfaction		
	Teens	Young adults	Teens	Young adults	
Personality	Extraversion	-.04	-.19*	.02	.27**
	Conscientiousness	-.08	.02	.14*	.04
	Autonomy	.15**	.13	-.04	.03
	Emotional stability	-.52***	-.34***	.16*	.02
Parental style for socializing emotions	Punishment_Ha_M	-.00	.11	-.04	-.12
	Amplification_Ha_M	.10	-.01	.10	.27**
	Neglect_Ha_F	-.02	-.02	.19*	-.03
	Reward_Ha_F	-.01	-.05	.08	.01
	Punishment_Ang_M	.07	-.05	-.05	-.03
	Neglect_Ang_M	-.11	.05	-.02	-.03
	Punishment_Ang_F	-.02	-.05	-.12	-.06
	Reward_Ang_F	.03	-.05	-.01	-.15
	Amplification_Ang_F	-.03	.02	.21**	-.09
	Neglect_Fe_M	.16**	.04	.04	.01
	Reward_Fe_M	-.04	.14	.02	.13
	Reward_Fe_F	-.13	.13	.23*	.02
	Punishment_Fe_F	.04	.15	.00	.21*
	Reward_Sa_M	-.05	-.04	.19*	.09
	Reward_Sa_F	.07	.08	-.21*	-.25*
	Amplification_Sa_F	.01	-.10	.02	.23**
Avoidance_Sa_F	.04	-.12	.13	-.02	
Attachment	Trust_F	.09	-.10	.22*	.11
	Alienation_F	.02	.36***	-.00	-.25*
	Alienation_M	.20**	-.01	-.01	.15
ER	Reappraisal	.03	-.00	-.01	.10
	Suppression	.04	-.00	-.11	.01
R² adjusted		.49	.37	.39	.29

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001;

Note: All the values for R² adjusted are significant for p<.01 except for emotional distress (young adults), p<.001

4. Discussion

Well-being depends on the structure of personality, the emotional experiences in the family of origin and also on the strategies enabled in regulating emotions.

Personality factors are the strongest predictors of well-being. Of these, emotional stability contributes the most to the variance of the predictive model and presents significant links to all four dimensions that operationalize well-being. For adolescents and girls, emotional stability is the strongest predictor of negative affects. In the case of adolescents, extraversion predicts only positive affects, whereas for young adults, it is a predictor for emotional distress only. Autonomy and conscientiousness are two significant dimensions of personality in our predictive model, yet they are less reported in the literature in relation to well-being. Interestingly, while for adolescents, conscientiousness is a predictor for positive affects and life satisfaction, it is absent in the case of young adults. Autonomy generates positive affects for young adults and emotional distress for adolescents. In the literature, extraversion and neuroticism is reflected in the individual differences for both positive and negative affects (Canli, Ferri & Duman, 2009).

The parental style for socializing emotions is the block with the largest number of variables (forty). In the case of adolescents, anger management during childhood is an important predictor for well-being. The analysis by gender variable emphasizes the role of the father in the boys' well-being. Although for girls, the involvement of both parents in the management of all emotions is significant (with a greater focus on the sadness area); and the father's influence is particularly strong – the sadness neglect by the father is a negative predictor of life satisfaction.

In the case of adult attachment, of the six variables entered in this analysis, only four remained in the predictive models: trust mother/father and alienation mother/father. The differentiated analysis at the age stage reveals that the mother's influence is more visible in predicting well-being in adolescents, whereas the father figure is exclusively noticed for young adults.

Also, gender selected well-being predictive variables are differentiated: for boys (as well as for young adults), the father is the exclusively significant parental figure. For girls, it is the attachment relationship with both parents that is relevant, but alienation with the mother has dual consequences: it is a positive predictor for both negative affects and life satisfaction.

The impact of the parental variables differs by parent gender, with paternal correlates having a stronger influence on well-being. In the literature on parenting, the greatest importance of the father in the child's cognitive development is often highlighted. Even if studies over the last six decades conducted in communities where the role of the traditional rules was still strongly felt, suggesting that mothers have a stronger impact on the emotional

development of children while fathers have it in their cognitive stimulation, recent research conducted in the emotional socialization paradigm indicate a different aspects. Consequently, we are in agreement with other studies which claim that the father's figure is a representative in the emotional life of a child. Baker, Fenning and Crnic (2010) found stronger links between emotion socialization by the father and the child's social and emotional skills.

Emotion regulation is a predictor for affects only (emotional distress and life satisfaction, as dimensions of well-being, are not predicted by how we regulate our emotions). For adolescents, expressive suppression is a prediction of positive affects; for young adults, it is a cognitive reappraisal; for girls, both emotional regulation strategies are predictive variables; whereas for boys, none of the emotion regulation strategies analyzed is a predictor.

Conclusions

Our findings plus those in the literature, open at least two future routes: one type of research is to elucidate gender differences in the socialization of emotions (Baker, 2010), and the other is an intervention for a more careful valorization of the personality structure and positive emotionality in the process of emotional education.

As stated by the results of our research, personality is a construct which should not be neglected when it comes to predicting well-being. Thus, this has also been stated by a series of other studies before us (Canli, Ferri & Duman, 2009; Hwang, 2006).

While the adolescent and young adult restructure their relationships with their parents and reassess their needs vis-à-vis the family or plan to even leave the family environment, the role of the family and parents remains crucial to well-being and emotional balance. The way emotions were managed during childhood stage was transmitted as a wave effect, ten years later which explains well-being clearly. From this perspective, good parenting means the involvement of both parents in a child's education. There was a time that the maternal figure was valued particularly, yet studies over the past thirty years has integrated the impact of the father. Hence, the data shown in this present research are an argument to this effect, and it reveals the significance of harmonizing the maternal and paternal responses.

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