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WHAT MAKES PEOPLE HAPPY: WELL-BEING AND SOURCES OF HAPPINESS IN RUSSIAN STUDENTS

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WHAT MAKES PEOPLE HAPPY: WELL-BEING AND SOURCES OF HAPPINESS IN RUSSIAN STUDENTS³

This paper presents an investigation of sources of subjective happiness and their relationships to subjective well-being, taking into consideration cross-cultural specificity. 76 participants from two different Russian cities (Moscow and Petropavlovsk) were asked to write down things which make them happy and then to evaluate their actual attainability for them. The data were compared with Italian data (Galati et al., 2006) from 133 participants. The results reveal some cultural and regional differences in sources of happiness and a large degree of similarity. Paradoxically, regional differences in both the importance and attainability of separate sources of happiness within Russia are more pronounced than the differences between Russia and Italy. The mean indices of the attainability of happiness were similar for Italian and both Russian samples. We also found significant correlations between the mean individual attainability of happiness and well-being, which were much higher in Moscow than in Petropavlovsk. Some interesting correlations between sources of happiness and demographic and personality variables are revealed. A cluster analysis of the sources of happiness distinguished two large clusters, one including common ‘mundane’ sources, and another more individual sources. The last finding is in line with Leontiev’s two-level model of happiness. A cluster analysis of participants was in line with the analysis of sources and revealed two groups: the first one tends to choose happiness sources ‘passively’ and the second choosing individualized happiness sources.

Key words: happiness sources; happiness attainability; well-being; cultural and individual differences.

JEL Classification: Z

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Many words in different languages are used for happiness (Galati & Sotgiu, 2004), although we are not even sure whether it is a process (e.g., an optimal experience), a state of mind or an emotion. The only agreement is that happiness is a construct of high complexity. There are two competing philosophical traditions, the one defining happiness in terms of the goods and virtues a person evidently possesses, and another stressing the subjective definition of happiness that cannot logically follow from the objectively registered virtues and possessions, which nowadays takes the form of alternative approaches to happiness in terms of either psychological and social well-being (e.g. Robinson & Ryff, 1999; Keyes & Waterman, 2003) or subjective well-being as it is felt (e.g. Diener et al. 1999, 2002, Lyubomirsky, 2001, Seligman, 2002). The distinction of hedonistic and eudaimonistic approaches to happiness (e.g., Diener et al, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001) highlights the role of personality variables and optimal experience for happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004). The next step is the idea that happiness may have qualitatively different forms depending on personal maturity levels (King, 2001; Leontiev, 2005, 2012). It is a personal existential project (Galati & Sotgiu, 2004) rather than a unidimensional quantitative measure of well-being, however we define it. This opens the possibility of studying the qualitative peculiarities of happiness as the progressive actualization of ‘life projects’ depending on both individual and cultural factors and linked to different life domains, such as health and family.

Previous research aimed at individual descriptions of such ‘projects’ (Galati et al., 2006) revealed 20 happiness and well-being components operationalized as the answers to a request to list what makes one happy. We prefer to speak of happiness sources rather than “happiness components” (Galati et al., 2006) to distinguish between the psychological emotional state of happiness and its reasons, the meaningful events that generate this state.

In their study Galati et al. found that the components of happiness most frequently cited and ranked as most important are health, family and money. There are significant differences in the subjective representation of happiness components according to age group (associated with health, money and friendship) and gender (associated with family and work). Having asked the participants to evaluate to what extent they attained each of the sources in their life, the authors showed that adolescents are less happy than adults, males less happy than females and unmarried people less happy than married people; no differences were found between inhabitants of Northern and Southern Italy.

However, there was no attempt to compare subjective sources of happiness and subjective well-being in different cultures. Our research investigates subjective sources of happiness and their relationships to subjective well-being taking into consideration cross-cultural specificity.

A necessary reservation concerns the concept of happiness and its cultural and linguistic specificity. It is widely acknowledged that the meaning of this concept varies across cultures, which sets limitations for direct comparisons. The focus of our study are, however, the sources of this state rather than the state happiness itself; operational definition of happiness as the highest intensive positive experience suffices for this study and needs no detailed specification.

AIMS

The present study has the following aims:

1. to identify a subjective representation of sources of happiness in Russian culture;
2. to compare the structure of happiness sources in different Russian regions and with Italian data (Galati et al., 2006);
3. to classify the sources of happiness;
4. to check the relationship between different sources of happiness, well-being, purpose in life, the attainment of sources of happiness and hardiness.

METHODS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Participants

37 students of Kamchatka State University (KamSU) (Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Far East, Russia), including 27 females and 10 males, average age 27 ± 7.1 and 39 students of Moscow State University (MSU) (26 females and 13 males, average age 25 ± 6.8) took part in the study. The data were compared with Italian data (Galati et al., 2006) of 133 participants (71 females, 62 males).

Procedure

The participants were asked to fulfil the procedure proposed by Galati et al. (2006) in their study of happiness as personal existential project. They were asked to write down at least 5 things that make them happy in order of their importance and then to evaluate the actual attainability of each of the listed sources of happiness in their life on a scale 0 to 10. They also filled out Russian versions of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS, Diener et. al, 1985; Russian version Osin, Leontiev, unpublished), Noetic Orientations Test NOT (Leontiev, 2000; a modified version of Purpose in Life Test by Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1981) and Hardiness Survey (Maddi, 1987; Russian adaptation by Leontiev & Rasskazova, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All the answers were classified into the 20 thematic categories proposed by Galati et al. (2006). The original category “success and self-actualization” was divided into 2 separate categories, because many Russian participants listed success (as related to extrinsic standards) and self-actualization (as related to intrinsic standards) separately. There were no answers fitting to the category “absence of unpleasant events” and “partner” in both Russian groups, no answers “helping others” at KamSU, no answers “home” and “faith” at MSU. Our participants mentioned “husband” (usually with “children”) rather than “partner”, which was coded as “family” or “love”. This is a reflection of more traditional cultural values in Russia, where the value of a partner usually depends on the value of the specific relationship (family or love). Frequencies, mean ranks and mean degrees of attainability for each category were computed.

Table 1 here

The sign test revealed that the Italian sample, compared to the Russian ones, mentioned “health” more often ($p < .01$) and “hobbies” less often ($p < .01$). Significant differences ($p < .05$) between the two Russian groups are only by categories “family”, “work” (more often in Petropavlovsk) and “helping others” (more often in Moscow). However, the general picture is completely different in both Russian samples (Table 1). The most widespread happiness sources in the Petropavlovsk sample were quite similar to Italian ones: family, love, money, friendship, work—a set of basic mundane values. For Moscow the leading happiness sources are quite different and highly affect-centred: positive emotions, pleasant events, love, success, friendship, hobbies, and good affective relationships. This can be explained by the fact that MSU students tend to live in the parental family home and be dependent to a large degree; their own family and work are not crucial for them, and they do not often have to earn their living.

Another regularity seen in Table 1 is that there are different kinds of happiness sources. Some of them are both widespread and top-ranked (we called them *leading sources*), like health and family in Italy, family and love in Petropavlovsk and love in Moscow. Some are no less widespread, but not usually ranked very high (*background sources*), like money, friendship, work and success in Italy and Petropavlovsk, positive emotions, pleasant events, success and hobbies in Moscow. Some are relatively rare but top-ranked by those who mention them at all; these may be special leading values characteristic of some groups (*special sources*), like culture and knowledge in Petropavlovsk, sex, values and helping others in Moscow. Besides, there are *occasional sources* (rare and low-ranked), and all kinds of intermediate variants.

The estimates of attainability of the listed sources varied across the samples in line with the differences presented above (see Table 2). For all the three groups friendship was among the most attainable sources of happiness. For samples from Italy and Petropavlovsk, but not for Moscow sample, money and pleasant events belonged to the least available sources. For Moscow students work was a special highly attainable source of happiness, whereas sex and positive emotions were special hardly attainable sources. For 10.9% of Petropavlovsk students culture and knowledge was one of the most important and most attainable sources of happiness. This may be because they are students who are enjoying a knowledge resource in the region where it is not commonly available. Having the opportunity to study, they especially appreciate this and are highly motivated.

Table 2 here

The mean attainability scores were similar for all the samples: 6.02 (SD=2.27) for Italy, 6.15 (SD=1.91) for Petropavlovsk, 5.87 (SD=1.61) for Moscow. According to World Happiness Database (Veenhoven, 2014) average happiness scores in Russia in 2005 made 5.7 on 10-point scale, somewhat lower than the scores in Italy (5.9 and 6.2 on two measurements in 2005). It is important to consider however, that students in Russia are happier than the rest of the population (Diener, Oishi, 2004).

To check the relationships between the direct appraisal of well-being and the attainability of happiness sources we computed the mean attainability score for each participant to see whether it covariates with SWLS. In both Russian samples well-being and mean attainability score correlated significantly; however, in the Moscow sample the Spearman rank correlation was extremely high ($\rho=.80$; $p<.00$) and in the Petropavlovsk sample just moderately high ($\rho=.33$; $p<.05$). We cannot offer a reasonable explanation for this difference.

Finally, in both groups there was a significant negative correlation ($\rho=-.35$, $p<.05$) between the attainability scores and the variance of these scores across different spheres. It seems that if having failed to attain happiness in the main life domains, people try to compensate for it by looking for happiness sources in other domains.

Choice of happiness sources and personal dispositions

We checked whether the choice of special happiness sources was related to age, general attainability of happiness sources, subjective well-being (Diener et. al, 1985), happiness, meaningfulness of life (Leontiev, 2000) and hardiness (Maddi, 1987). We consolidated the Russian sample (76 participants; there were no regional differences in well-being and hardiness). Only those happiness sources were analysed from the viewpoint which had been mentioned by at least 10 participants. As can be seen in Table 3, love was preferred by those who were younger,

whereas family, culture and knowledge were preferred by those who are older; knowledge covariated also with meaning in life. Those who mentioned health or money were less satisfied with life than those who did not mention them, whereas those who mentioned work were more satisfied with life and perceived their life to be more meaningful. The choice of money as a happiness source was related to a lower general attainability of happiness sources, whereas choice of work predicted a higher attainability of happiness sources. Money and health seem to be goals that are hard to attain, and they bring little satisfaction, whereas work may make life meaningful. The attainability of happiness sources was also high in people who mentioned friendship. Hardiness was higher in those who chose family, friendship, work and lower in those who chose good affective relationships. These sources provide more stability and social support in stressful situations.

Table 3 here

Cluster analysis of happiness sources

To identify general sources of happiness we made a cluster analysis of our participants' choices. As in the previous analysis, we used the combined data from both our samples (76 participants). While our data matrix was binary and showed whether every source of happiness was chosen or not, we used the Percent Disagreement distance measure.

Two large groups of happiness sources were distinguished in the Tree Diagram (Figure 1). The first one (the left part of the diagram) included mostly the most common basic sources important for everyone such as family, friends, love, work, success, and hobbies. Nearly all of them, except for hobbies, belong to the most widespread ones (see Table 1). The second group (the right part of the diagram) included more individual happiness sources which are not shared by everyone; they are more a matter of subculture and individual choice (serenity and well-being, value, good affective relationships, self-actualization, culture and knowledge, helping others, sex, possessions); money and health, resources rather than ultimate values or enjoyable states, joined this group at a later step. It is surprising that positive events and positive emotions were in the left cluster, while well-being was in the right. Generally, the results of the cluster analysis correspond to the two-level model of happiness (Leontiev, 2012): the first level reflects the subjective experience of basic need gratification determined by a stable individual range of happiness traits and favourable environmental conditions (passive happiness), and the second level the subjective experience of satisfying meaningful relationships and goal pursuit, individually chosen or created by the person (active happiness).

Figure 1 here

Individual differences in happiness sources

In order to find some individual differences in happiness sources mentioned by our participants we conducted a cluster analysis by cases. Here again we used the combined data. While our data matrix was binary and showed whether every source of happiness was chosen or not, we used Percent Disagreement distance measure.

As a result we distinguished two or four different groups of people (Figure 2). Since the interpretation of the four cluster structure was complex and ambiguous, we have analysed a more comprehensible two cluster structure.

Figure 2 here

The results of the cluster analysis by cases were similar to the cluster analysis by sources. The participants from the first group (the left part of the diagram) more often mentioned 'usual' sources like health, family, work and value (according to the sign test $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.0001$, $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$, correspondingly) than the participants from the second group (Figure 3). On the contrary, the participants from the second group tend to mention positive events ($p < 0.01$) and emotions ($p < 0.01$), good affective relationships ($p < 0.05$), home ($p < 0.05$) and hobbies ($p < 0.005$) more often.

We offer two possible interpretations of the results. First, our two groups could reflect hedonistic and eudaimonistic approaches to happiness. Although the participants from the second group do mention "hedonistic" sources more frequently than those from the first group, there is some contradiction in this explanation. Both groups equally often mentioned self-realization, success, and knowledge and culture, which are eudaimonistic sources, and money, friends, love and well-being, which could be conceived both eudaimonistically and hedonistically. Second, our results correspond to the two-level model of happiness (Leontiev, 2012): the first group mentions basic needs determined by stable individual range of happiness traits and favourable environmental conditions (passive happiness), and the second group prefers goal pursuit, individually chosen or created by the person (active happiness).

Figure 3 here

CONCLUSION

Our study was of an exploratory nature; putting forward no hard hypotheses, we approached the issue of happiness in terms of

- (a) its sources rather than as an emotional experience;
- (b) the descriptions produced by participants themselves rather than based on an *a priori* list ("operant", rather than "respondent" assessment methodology, in terms of McClelland, 1981), and
- (c) individual, cultural, and regional differences and commonalities.

Though our samples have been too small for definite conclusions, the results reveal cultural and regional differences in happiness sources and a large degree of similarity. Paradoxically, regional differences in both the importance and the attainability of separate sources of happiness within Russia were more pronounced than differences between Russia and Italy, while regional differences within Italy are negligible (Galati et al., 2006). The mean indices of the attainability of happiness sources were similar for the Italian and both Russian samples. We also found significant correlations between the mean individual attainability of happiness sources and SWLS, which were much higher in Moscow than in Petropavlovsk. Some interesting correlations between happiness sources and demographic and personality variables have been revealed. A cluster analysis of happiness sources distinguished two large clusters, one of them including common 'mundane' sources, and another of more individual sources. The last finding is in line with the two-level model of happiness (Leontiev, 2012). A cluster analysis of participants was in line with the analysis of the sources and revealed two groups: the first who chose happiness sources 'passively' and the second who chose individual happiness sources.

New hypotheses and methodological opportunities rather than established facts follow from our study. In particular, we suppose that

- (1) happiness is best described in terms of its meaningful sources in the world, rather than in terms of pure experience (see Leontiev, 2012);
- (2) connections between the quality and attainability of these sources and the state of happiness may vary both in a quantitative and qualitative respect;
- (3) style of life seems to be a more important predictor of happiness and to what extent, than cultural background;
- (4) 'passive' and 'active' components of subjective well-being should be distinguished.

Though these components merge in the general experience of happiness, they seem to be based on quite different mechanisms: only passive happiness is provided by favourable living conditions, but only active happiness can be taught and coached. The priorities for the investigations of happiness at this stage are first, qualitative, rather than quantitative approach; second, establishing differential, rather than general regularities; and third, considering the context of the person's activity and style of life, rather than just their environmental including cultural conditions. These preliminary conclusions deserve further detailed investigation.

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Figure 1. Tree Diagram of happiness sources. Ward's method.

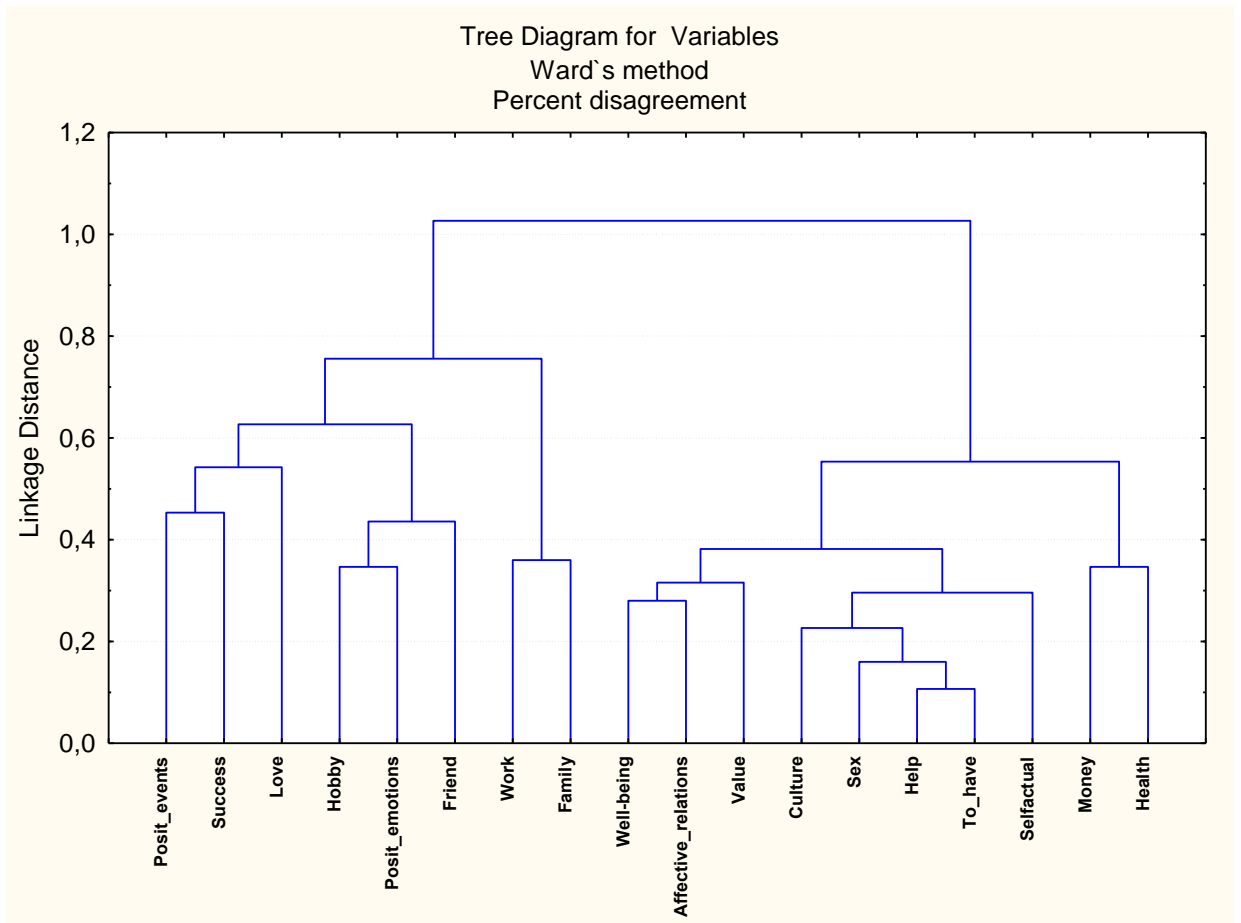


Figure 2. Tree Diagram of participants. Ward's method.

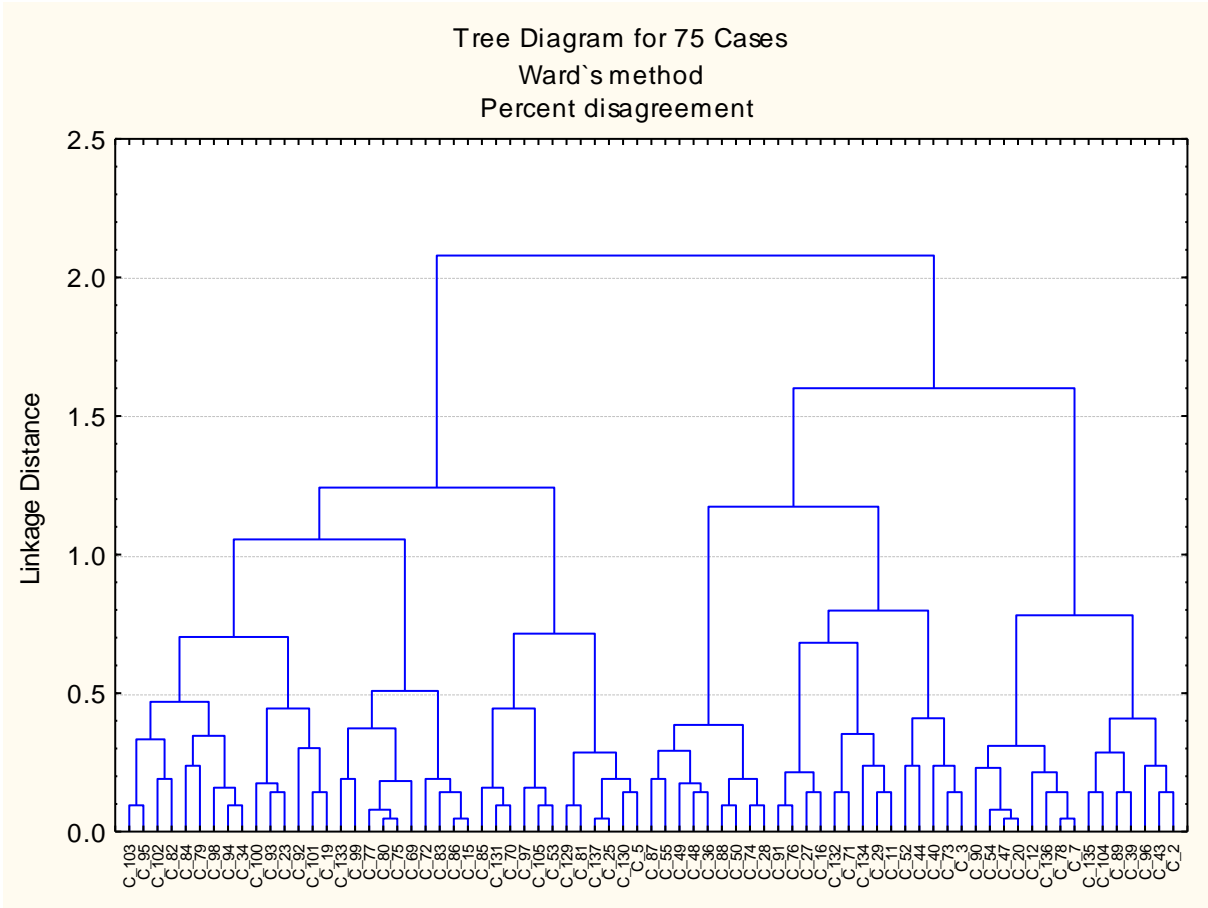


Figure 3. Frequency of happiness sources mentioned in two groups of participants

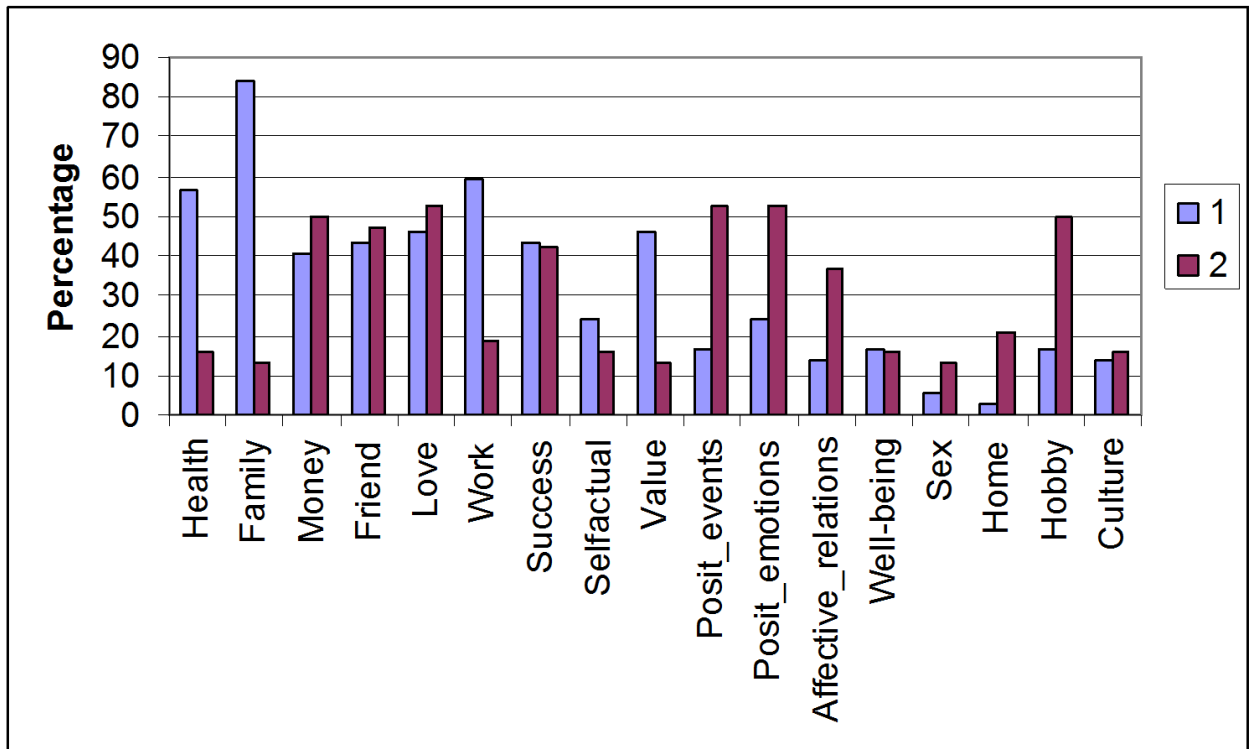


Table 1. Percentage and mean ranks of happiness sources in Italy and Russia regions.

	Italy		Russia, Petropavlovsk		Russia, Moscow	
	%	Mean rank	%	Mean rank	%	Mean rank
Health	58.6	1.96	34.8	3.19	13.8	4.25
Family	58.6	2.78	63	1.93	24.1	3
Money	56.4	4.12	43.5	4.1	20.7	3.33
Friendship	42.9	4.42	47.8	3.73	41.4	2.75
Love	39.8	3.25	50	2.26	48.3	2.36
Work	39.8	4.21	52.2	3.42	17.2	3
Success	37.6	4.16	41.3	3.74	44.8	3.15
Self-actualization			19.6	3.33	20.7	2.83
Values	30.1	4.7	23.9	3.91	13.8	2
Pleasant events	29.3	5.36	23.9	4.45	48.3	4.14
Positive emotions	25.6	3.94	30.4	4	51.7	3.13
Good affective relationships	21.8	4.9	19.6	3	34.5	2
Serenity and well-being	21.1	3.39	21.7	3.7	6.9	3.5
Partner	18.8	4	0	0	0	0
Faith	15.8	4.05	2.2	7	0	0
Helping others	12.8	5.29	0	0	13.8	3
Sex	14.3	4.05	8.7	3.75	10.3	2.67

	Italy		Russia, Petropavlovsk		Russia, Moscow	
	%	Mean rank	%	Mean rank	%	Mean rank
Absence of unpleasant events	12	3.81	0	0	0	0
Home	12	6.31	4.3	4.5	0	0
Hobbies	6	5.5	23.9	4	41.4	3.33
Culture and knowledge	5.3	4.71	10.9	2.8	20.7	3.67

Table 2. Evaluation of attainability of happiness sources in Russia regions.

	Russia, Petropavlovsk		Russia, Moscow	
	Mean	St Dev	Mean	St Dev
Health	6.75	2.18	6.00	1.83
Family	6.59	3.57	5.43	3.21
Money	4.48	2.66	5.33	1.03
Friendship	7.00	2.19	7.17	2.29
Love	5.57	3.75	5.29	3.89
Work	6.54	3.02	7.40	1.82
Success	5.68	2.21	6.00	1.96
Self-actualization	5.56	2.30	6.67	3.20
Values	6.25	2.56	5.00	1.00
Pleasant events	5.00	3.30	6.79	3.29
Positive emotions	6.93	2.73	4.60	3.16
Good affective relationships	6.67	2.50	5.80	3.08
Serenity and well-being	5.11	1.90	5.00	1.41
Faith	10.00			
Helping others			5.75	2.06
Sex	6.00	4.69	3.33	2.89
Home			7.50	3.53
Hobbies	7.85	1.91	6.58	2.78
Culture and knowledge	8.20	1.79	6.67	2.42

Table 3. Differences in age, attainability of happiness sources, subjective well-being, happiness, meaningfulness of life and hardiness between participants who mentioned and not mentioned the happiness sources.

Variable	The happiness source	Mean value of the variable in those who did name the source	Mean value of the variable in those who did not name the source	N of those who did name the source	N of those who did not name the source
Satisfaction with life	Health	19.1**	23.1	19	57
Age	Family	28.3**	25.2	35	41

Variable	The happiness source	Mean value of the variable in those who did name the source	Mean value of the variable in those who did not name the source	N of those who did name the source	N of those who did not name the source
Hardiness_Total	Family	102**	88.1	35	41
Hardiness Commitment	Family	43.1**	36.4	35	41
Hardiness Control	Family	32.5**	28.8	35	41
Satisfaction with life	Money	19.9*	23.4	25	51
SWL item 3	Money	3.5**	4.61	25	51
Sources attainment	Money	5.47**	6.34	25	51
Sources attainment	Friendship	6.59**	5.58	34	42
Hardiness_Total	Friendship	102**	89.41	34	42
Hardiness Commitment	Friendship	42.8**	37.32	34	42
Hardiness Control	Friendship	33.1**	28.73	34	42
Age	Love	24.8**	28.5	36	40
Satisfaction with life	Work	24.6**	20.3	29	47
Sources attainment	Work	6.68**	5.64	29	47
Purpose in Life	Work	112**	103	29	47
Hardiness_Total	Work	102**	89.9	29	47
Hardiness Commitment	Work	43.4**	37	29	47
Hardiness Challenge	Work	26.5**	23.1	29	47
Hardiness_Total	Good affective relationships	80.7**	101	19	57
Hardiness Commitment	Good affective relationships	34.8**	41.7	19	57
Hardiness Control	Good affective relationships	24.5***	33	19	57
Hardiness Challenge	Good affective relationships	21.4**	25.8	19	57
Age	Culture and knowledge	32.4**	25.7	11	65
Purpose in Life	Culture and knowledge	118**	105	11	65

* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01 (Mann-Whitney criterion)

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