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# SOCIAL CAPITAL AND HAPPINESS AT YOUTH IN SOCIAL RISK

**Abstract:** Numerous studies show that high levels of social capital are associated with higher level of happiness around the world. However, it is not known whether this association extends to young people at social risk. It is essential for this people to be in a state of positive feelings and satisfaction in order to thrive and leave healthier. A huge deficiency is the lack of research on the subject for this group of people in Republic of North Macedonia and it is very important to make national analysis because of the cultural differences between the countries that can produce different conclusions. Also, it is not known which indicators of the broad concept of social capital are associated with happiness at youth in social risk. Social capital is a complex multidimensional concept without unified definition. One easy way to explain the social capital is through benefits that arise from social activity of one individual. Among many distinctions of social capital are distinctions of structural and cognitive social capital and distinction based on relationships such as strong, weak, vertical, horizontal, bonding, bridging or linking. In this paper, we took the distinction of structural and cognitive social capital. We examine the association between different types of individual structural social capital and individual cognitive social capital with level of happiness at youth in social risk. Therefore, the subject of this paper is to examine social capital and its different dimensions and their association to happiness of youth in social risk. Main goal of this paper is to determine which dimensions of individual social capital are positively associated with happiness among youth in social risk. Thus, paper hypothesis is: structural and cognitive dimensions of social capital are positively associated with happiness among youth in social risk.

Data is gathered through conducted survey on youth in social risk from 16 to 35 years in February 2022. These youth are participants in project "Youth empowerment enabling prospects", which goal is to increase the employability and find employment for youth in social risk. The project is operating in

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four cities in Republic of North Macedonia: Skopje, Tetovo, Prilep and Bitola. The data comes only from project participants in the city of Skopje. Out of 140 project participants in Skopje, 75 gave valid answers to the questionnaire which was consisted of 13 questions about demographics, happiness and social capital.

The individual structural social capital is measured as bonding and bridging network of people and network frequency, while individual cognitive social capital is measured by quality of social relationships through trust, receiving and giving social support, positive and negative experience with others. Happiness is measured through self-perceived happiness at the moment. We first use Ordinary Least Square regression to model happiness as a function of different proxies of individual structural and cognitive social capital, controlling for age, education and income. The results of the first regression analysis suggest no statistical significance. Because of the results in the first regression, second multiple linear regression was developed via method of eliminating independent variables which had lowest level of statistical significance. After excluding age, trust, positive and negative experience with others, number of different friends and frequency of time spent with different friends, new regression model results were obtained. The results from the second regression analysis suggests that level of education and receiving social support from friends are the only variables that have statistical significance and are positively associated with level of happiness. Receiving social support variable is positively correlated with variable frequency of bonding social capital, which means that the latter is associated with greater level of happiness. Therefore, the results from the regression analysis confirm the hypothesis that some dimensions of cognitive and structural social capital are positively associated with happiness among youth in social risk.

This paper shows that in order to increase level of happiness of youth in social risk, activities should be taken to increase social support among youth in social risk as peer to peer support, increase level of education and increase frequency of time spent with friends that have similar socioeconomic characteristics.

**Keywords:** social capital, happiness, youth in social risk

**JEL Classification:** I31, C20

## Introduction

Many researches from social sciences and international organizations are focused on happiness. This measure is consisted in the third SDG's of United Nations – Good health and well-being. Therefore, there is a huge interest in research focused on contributing factors for increasing happiness level of people.

There are lots of studies in different fields such as sociology, psychology and economics that are analyzing subjective well-being. In these studies, for explaining the variation of subjective well-being are used individual characteristic and demographics such as age, gender, marital status, employment, education and income. As additional factors, there are studies that explain variation in subjective well-being through social capital. The association is observed through different forms of social capital such as social support, volunteering and trust. Institutionalized trust is also associated with life satisfaction, as trust in family, friends, relatives and people in the local community.

Social capital is also very popular subject in the research field. Its influence is researched by institutions such as World Bank and OECD. Because social capital is a very complex and multidimensional concept, a lot of researchers are using proxy measures for analyzing its particular individual aspects and associations to other concepts. Multidimensionality is the reason why it is needed to analyze different aspects of social capital and their association with subjective well-being.

Contribution in the research topic of association of social capital and subjective well-being at youth in social risk is very needed, as this research topic on the specific target group is not much developed. According to the Law of Social Protection in Republic of North Macedonia, social risk is social condition that has the potential to disable and harden the living conditions of the individuals, families or specific groups who may need institutional social support. In this category enters: youth without parental care, recipients of institutional social support, people with disabilities, people living in poverty, single parent families, victims of family violence, long term unemployed people and other categories. It is essential for this people to be in a state of positive feelings and satisfaction in order to thrive and leave healthier. A huge deficiency is the lack of research on the subject for this group of people in Republic of North Macedonia. It is very important to make national analysis because of the cultural differences between the countries that can produce different conclusions about the subject.

Research subject of this paper is social capital and its association with happiness among youth in social risk. The goal of this paper is to determine which of the different dimensions of social capital are associated with happiness at youth in social risk. General hypothesis of the paper is: individual social capital is positively associated with happiness at youth in social risk. In order to achieve the goals of the paper and to prove the hypothesis, this paper will elaborate about happiness and individual social capital and up to date research, and will make a linear regression analysis. The analysis will be made on the basis of data obtained from a previously conducted questionnaire on a representative sample of youth in social risk participating in the project "Youth empowerment enabling prospects", which recruits youth in social risk in order to increase their employability and employ them. The conclusion follows in the final part.

## 1. CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS AND ITS BENEFITS

Subjective well-being (SWB) is defined as the evaluation of one's own life (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002). Veenhoven (2008) further extended the concept by defining SWB as an overall judgment of life using two sources. These sources were cognitive comparisons regarding what the good life means, and affective information regarding how an individual may feel the majority of the time. This concept is recognized in Sustainable Development Goals of United Nation because of its significant meaning for the social progress that may be otherwise hard to measure. The former Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, gave a speech in 2012 regarding the use of SWB indicators as a relevant measure of sustainable growth and prosperity.

Rojas (2007), approach SWB as inherently subjective, acknowledges the authority of the person, is inferential and transdisciplinary. The SWB approach assumes that well-being is essentially subjective phenomena experienced by the actor living life. Individuals are the most appropriate evaluators of their own life satisfaction.

Veenhoven (2008) applied social constructionist theory to SWB that proposes that humans attach meanings to phenomena and construct reality. Because humans belong to different cultures, the meanings created may be relative and relevant to the specific culture, in other words, the shared notions of what it means to live well or to be happy may vary between the cultures. Another theory is social comparison theory which states that people compare their life using referential standards in order to make judgments about whether

they are living well. Lucas (2007) elaborate about adaptation theory which postulates that individuals adapt to good and bad life events because individuals SWB has a biological set-point that typically remains constant.

From the theory, it can be seen that life satisfaction and feelings of happiness are two separate aspects of SWB. Feelings of happiness is defined as affective component of SWB, and life satisfaction is considered as more stable and evaluative process that is referring to individual life events, in other words it represents evaluation of the level of realization of individual potentials relative to nature and aspiration of that individual (Diener 1984). Many scientist and institutions are using these measures as proxy measures of SWB. In most of the scientific papers, life satisfaction is measured by following question, "All thing considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days", on a scale from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied)[1]. Other studies for measuring the feelings of happiness use different measures on different scales from 0 (very unhappy) to 10 (very happy), or on a scale form 1 (not very happy) to 3 (very happy).

Happiness may lead to better life outcomes. Although this high subjective well-being tends to help people function better, it is of course not a cure-all. Happiness is like any other factor that aids health and functioning; with all other things being equal, it is likely (but not guaranteed) to help[2]. There is initial evidence about happiness and its beneficial outcomes. For instance, happiness has positive effects on health and longevity such as reduced inflammation (Appleton 2011); (Slopen 2012), improved cardiovascular and immune system (Ong 2010), lowered risk of heart disease (Davidson, Mostofsky, & Whang 2010), practicing good health behaviors (Blanchflower, Oswald, & Stewart-Brown 2012), survival and longevity (Pressman & Cohen 2012). Happiness also have positive effects on individual's income and productivity: more positive individuals delivered better results at work (Oswald, Proto, & Sgroi 2012), happy workers are more highly rated (Peterson, Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Zhang 2011), happiness can increase curiosity, creativity, and motivation (George & Zhou 2007), happiness is positively associated with individual earnings and can predict the future earnings (Judge, Piccolo, Podsa-

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koff, Shaw, & Rich 2010). Other benefits of happiness are in the field of social behavior. Survey evidence shows the probability of re-employment within one year is higher among individuals who are happier (Krause 2012). Well-being increases interest in social activities leading to more and higher quality interactions (Myers 2000). Also, positive moods lead to more engagement in social activities (Mehl, Vazire, Holleran, & Clark 2010). The happiness and social interaction link are found across different cultures and can lead to the transmission of happiness across social networks (Tay & Diener 2011). This means that, generally, we observe a dynamic relationship between happiness and other important aspects of our lives, with influence running in both directions. Therefore, happiness can be considered as a means — rather than an end in itself.

## 2. DISTINCTION OF THE SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ITS ASSOCIATION TO HAPPINESS

One easy way to explain the social capital is through benefits that arise from social activity of one individual. The main idea of this type of capital is that networks and relations have value. Social capital is aspect of the social context (the "social" part) which have productive benefit ("the capital" part). This capital includes solidarity and good will between the people.

There is no unified definition for social capital. Coleman (1988) defines social capital as a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures and they facilitate certain action of actors within the structure. Putnam (1993) defines social capital as features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that can facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), define social capital as the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through and derived from the relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Iyer, Kitson and Toh (2005) define social capital as institutions, relationships, attitudes and values governing interactions amongst people[3]. From these definitions, one can see the multidimensionality of the social capital concept. Hence the problem with unified definition and measure of social capital.

Researchers in this field, often make distinction based on relationships. Hence, the social relationships can be strong, weak, vertical, horizontal, bond-

[3] https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/current-definitions-of-social-capital/

ing, bridging or linking. Most common used distinction is of bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Bonding social capital are ties between individuals within the same social group or with others who are primarily like them. Bridging social capital are ties that link people together with others across a cleavage that typically divides society (like race, or class, or religion), and linking social capital are social ties (often a bridging social ties) to those with power that provides one with the capacity to gain access to resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the community.

There are other distinctions of social capital such as distinction of structural and cognitive social capital (Uphoff 1999), and structural, relational and cognitive social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). In this paper, we took the Uphoff distinction of structural and cognitive social capital. In this distinction, the cognitive social capital includes the relational social capital. Structural social capital is related to different forms of social organization such as roles, rules and procedures and different types of networks. This type of social capital is related to features and type of networks that one has developed, or the people that individual knows and can use them for benefits such as information, material or non-material support. Typically, this capital on individual level is measured as structure and position of social network, number of network memberships, types of social networks, frequency of social relationships. Measures are presented in Table 1.

Cognitive social capital derives from mental processes and resulting ideas, reinforced by culture and ideology, specifically norms, values attitudes and beliefs. This type of social capital is related to characteristics and quality of social relationships and networks. It is associated with trust, obligations, mutual respect and empathy. On individual level, it is measured by quality of social interactions, social relationships, social networks, social support, social cohesion, mutual care, helping, trust, trustworthiness, norms, obligations, expectations, identity, vision and values. Because cognitive and relational social capital are derived from mental and not material world, researchers usually are summing these two aspects into one dimension: cognitive social capital.

**Table 1: Distinction of social capital on individual level**

| STRUCTURAL | RELATIONAL | COGNITIVE |
|---|---|---|
| Social structure:<br>- Social networks and relationships<br>- Membership in organizations and clubs<br>- Bonding, Bridging and Linking social networks and ties | Nature and quality of relationships:<br>- Trust and trustworthiness<br>- Norms and sanctions<br>- Obligations and expectations<br>- Identity and identification | Shared understandings:<br>- Shared language, codes, and narratives<br>- Shared values, attitudes and beliefs<br>- Shared goals, purpose and vision |

*Source:* https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/relational-social-capital/,*Claridge Tristan, What is Relational Social Capital?, 10.02.2022.*

Because of the complexity and multidimensionality of social capital and not having unified measure, researchers usually use proxy measure for social capital that are theoretically connected with the variable of interest. Hence, one paper shows that individuals who have greater social support, who volunteer and have bigger level of trust in others, have greater level of life satisfaction and positive feelings (Calvo, Zheng, Kumar, Olgiati and Berkman 2012). Data of this paper are gained from conducted research in 142 countries. Social support is measured by asking respondents "if you were in trouble, do you have friends and relatives you can count on to help you whenever you need them, or not". Volunteering was measured by asking respondents "Have you volunteered your time to an organization in the past month" and social trust was measured by asking "Do you think people can be trusted or not".[4]

However, there are not many papers that focused on association of social capital and subjective well-being at people in social risk. One paper that explores the association of social capital and SWB at older adults with Non-communicable diseases, suggests that social capital was associated with increased subjective well-being of adults in all the six countries that were included in the research (Ghana, China, India, Mexico, Russia and South Afri-

[4] Calvo R., Zheng Y., Kumar S., Olgiati A., Berkman L.: Well-Being and Social Capital on Planet Earth: Cross-National Evidence from 142 Countries. PLoS ONE, 2012, p.4.

ca). The positive association between social capital and subjective well-being was higher for those with a single chronic condition than those with multiple chronic conditions in India and South Africa (Christian, Adekunle Sanuade, Adu Okyere and Adjaye-Gbewonyo 2020).

## 3. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ABOUT SOCIAL CAPITAL AND HAPPINESS AMONG YOUTH IN SOCIAL RISK IN REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Main purpose of this paper is to contribute to scientific evidence of association of different types of individual social capital to happiness among youth in social risk in Republic of North Macedonia. In addition, in using different proxy measures for measurement of structural and cognitive social capital on individual level, this paper makes significant contribution to the research focused on enhancing happiness levels of people in social risk. These kind of research topics are very rare in Republic of North Macedonia, either from social capital or social risk category research perspective.

### 3.1 Research methodology

Research was conducted on a sample of youth in social risk that participate in the project: "Youth empowerment enabling prospects", in order to prove the association of individual social capital with happiness among youth in social risk. The aim of the project is to increase the employability of youth in social risk and employ them. The project works with youth in social risk from 16 to 35 years and is operating in four cities in Republic of North Macedonia: Skopje, Tetovo, Prilep and Bitola. The data comes only from project participants in the city of Skopje. The research was conducted in the period of 7$^{th}$ till 14$^{th}$ February 2022. In order to gather data, questionnaire was developed in google forms and distributed to youth in social risk via e-mail, social media, platforms for communications. The questionnaire consisted 13 questions regarding demographics, structural social capital, cognitive social capital and happiness. Out of 140 youth in social risk that participate in the project, 75 youth gave valid responses of the questionnaire that were used for analysis.

This research was conducted on youth in social risk in the following categories: youth without parental care, single parent families, youth in poverty, victims of family violence, receivers of institutional support, youth that

live in family that have disability person, long term unemployed youth (above 6 months).

Data will be used to perform linear regression analysis. As control variables for the linear regression analysis, are used demographic variables: age, education and income. Happiness is measured by proxy measure using the question" How happy do you feel?", on a scale from 0 (very unhappy) to 10 (very happy). This measure is the dependent variable in the regression analysis.

As independent variables are used measures for structural and cognitive social capital. Structural social capital is measured by: number of similar friends, number of different friends (similarities and differences are related to socio-economic characteristics), frequency of time spent with similar friends and frequency of time spent with different friends, that are measured on a scale from 1 (very rare) to 7 (everyday). Cognitive social capital is measured by: level of trust by answering "Most people can be trusted" on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree); level of receiving social support by answering "If you were in need, how easy can you receive support from your friends" on a scale from 1 (very difficult) to 7 (very easy); giving social support by answering "If people you know have need, how often do you help them" on a scale from 1 (very rare) to 7 (always); level of positive experience with people in local community by answering "how often do you have positive feelings experience with people from local community. For example, someone is treating you friendly and make you feel happy and pleasant" on a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (very often); level of negative experience with people from local community by answering "how often do you have negative feelings experience with people from local community. For example, someone is treating you badly and make you feel stressed or discomfort", on a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (very often).

### 3.2 Analysis of the results

In order to analyze the association of different levels of individual social capital and happiness among youth in social risk, linear regression analysis was developed:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta p X ip + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

Multiple linear regression model contains one dependent variable – happiness. As independent variables are structural and cognitive social capital, and controlling demographics variables.

Two different regression models were developed. The first model contains all mentioned variables. From this model (Table 2) it can be seen that determination coefficient is $R^2$= 0,23, which mean that 23% of the variation in happiness can be explained by the variation in independent variables. This model doesn't have statistically significant F-test, suggesting that not even at least one independent variable is associated with happiness, and that this model is not statistically significant. Also, the results suggest that none of the independent variables have statistically significant t-test, which means that none of the variables have significant effects on dependent variable.

Because of the results in the first regression, second multiple linear regression was developed via method of eliminating independent variables which had lowest level of statistical significance. After excluding age, trust, positive experience, negative experience, number of different friends and frequency of time spent with different friends, new regression model results were obtained:

(2) Happiness =1,255 + 0,608*Education - 0,190*Income + 0,45*Receiving social support + 0,426*Giving social support + 0,04*Number of similar friends. - 0,17*Frequency of time spent with similar friends.

New regression model has coefficient of determination $R^2$= 0,21, which mean that 21% of the variation in happiness can be explained by the variation in independent variables. This model, also has statistically significant F-test. From Table 2, can be acknowledged that independent variable from cognitive social capital – receiving social support, has statistically significant positive association with happiness after conducting t-test. For one level increasing of perceived social support, happiness is increasing for 0.45 on the scale of measurement. Also, from the table, it can be observed that demographic variable education is statistically significant on 10% level, showing that increasing one educational level is associated with 0.608 increasing of happiness level. Other variables are not statistically significant.

**Table 2: Multiple linear regression analysis**

| HAPPINESS | | |
|---|---|---|
| Source | Model 1 | Model 2 |
| | Value | Value |
| DEMOGRAPHICS | | |
| AGE | -0,013 | |
| EDUCATION | 0,631 | 0,608* |
| INCOME | -0,192 | -0,190 |
| COGNITIVE SOCIAL CAPITAL | | |
| TRUST | -0,077 | |
| RECEIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT | 0,349 | 0,45** |
| GIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT | 0,364 | 0,426 |
| POSITIVE EXPERIENCE | 0,230 | |
| NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE | 0,012 | |
| STRUCTURAL SOCIAL CAPITAL | | |
| BONDING FRIENDS NUM | 0,034 | 0,04 |
| BRIDGING FRIENDS NUM | -0,003 | |
| BONDING FRIENDS FREQUENCY | -0,192 | -0,17 |
| BRIDGING FRIENDS FREQUENCY | 0,036 | |
| $R^2$ | 0,23 | 0,21 |
| F test (p value) | 0,144 | 0,01 |

Note: ** significant at 5% level; *10% level

*Source: Author's research*

Table 3 shows correlation between all variables that are included in the second regression model. It can be seen that the variables receiving social support and frequency of time spent with similar friends have correlation coefficient of 0.603. This data show that these two variables are supporting each other, or to be more specific, frequency of time spent with similar friends in local community contributes to receiving social support or vice versa, which in turn happiness of youth in social risk. From the other correlations it can be seen that there is no high multicollinearity.

**Table 3: Correlation matrix – regression model 2**

| Correlation matrix: | EDUCATION | INCOME | RECEIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT | GIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT | BONDING FRIENDS NUM | BONDING FRIENDS FREQUENCY | HAPPINESS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EDUCATION | 1 | 0,408 | 0,021 | 0,085 | -0,179 | -0,001 | 0,173 |
| INCOME | 0,408 | 1 | -0,097 | 0,081 | 0,031 | -0,168 | -0,007 |
| RECEIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT | 0,021 | -0,097 | 1 | 0,365 | 0,244 | 0,603 | 0,361 |
| GIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT | 0,085 | 0,081 | 0,365 | 1 | 0,045 | 0,183 | 0,299 |
| BONDING FRIENDS NUM | -0,179 | 0,031 | 0,244 | 0,045 | 1 | 0,218 | 0,146 |
| BONDING FRIENDS FREQUENCY | -0,001 | -0,168 | 0,603 | 0,183 | 0,218 | 1 | 0,147 |
| HAPPINESS | 0,173 | -0,007 | 0,361 | 0,299 | 0,146 | 0,147 | 1 |

*Source: Author's research*

This analysis has limitations that need to be addressed in the next papers. First limitation is the small sample of youth in social risk. Because of this, it cannot be made conclusion about the population of youth in social risk in Skopje and in Republic of North Macedonia. There is a need of bigger sample. Second limitation is the cross-sectional analysis which cannot show causality of the variables. Other papers should use panel data to address this limitation.

## Conclusion

Social capital is complex concept that is hard to measure and is in the category of so-called umbrella concepts. As such, this type of capital is multidimensional and each dimension have different influence on specific variable of interest.

This paper showed theoretical concepts of happiness and its benefits and social capital on individual level through two dimensions: structural and cognitive social capital. The association of these concepts was analyzed for youth in social risk that participate in the project "Youth empowerment enabling prospects", for employment support in city of Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia.

Two linear regression analysis were conducted in order to gain results. In the first model, none of the independent variables had statistically significant association with happiness. From the second model, it can be concluded that receiving social support from friends and education are positively related to happiness. Because of high correlation between receiving social support from friends and frequency of time spent with similar friends, these variables are supporting each other and through this relation, frequency of time spent with similar friends is associated with happiness. The later independent variable belongs to structural social capital category.

Results of this paper show that while working with youth in social risk, it should be worked on increasing the perceived level of received social support from people, increasing the levels of education and increasing the frequency of time spent with similar friends in order to increase the level of happiness, which in turn will have positive effect on other important thing in life such as health, income and productivity and personal development.

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