Does Age Matter? Life Satisfaction and Subjective Well-Being among Children Aged 10 and 12 in Russia

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Abstract

This study uses a developmental perspective to examine correlates of subjective well-being and life satisfaction among 10-year-old and 12-year-old students (N = 1,959) from the Tyumen region in West Siberia, Russia. Overall, children's satisfaction with life as a whole was positively associated with perceptions of family life across both age groups. As hypothesized, developmental differences were observed in the way children's reports of satisfaction with family, school and peers correlated with their reports of well-being. Among younger participants, subjective well-being was associated most strongly with satisfaction with school life, while for older participants, the strongest correlation was with satisfaction with family life. Results further revealed distinct, theoretically meaningful groups of children based on perceived satisfaction with life across three domains – family, school and friendships. These patterns differed between the two age groups. Among younger participants, two groups were identified: (a) *Generally Happy* (n = 609, 62.3%) and (b) *Somewhat Unhappy* (n = 368, 37.7%). Classification among older participants was more nuanced, resulting in four clusters that varied in the degree of satisfaction across life domains: (a) *Generally Happy* (n = 389, 39.6%), (b) *Unhappy at School* (n = 252, 25.7%), (c) *Mostly Unhappy* (n = 206, 21%), and (d) *Happy with Friends* (n = 135, 13.7%). Surprisingly, the clusters did not differ consistently on the measures of subjective well-being. Implications for educators as well as families with young children are discussed.

Keywords

Children's subjective well-being, overall life satisfaction, domain-based life satisfaction, cluster analysis

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in initiatives aimed at understanding and promoting children's well-being. Researchers, policymakers, educators, and parents in countries around the world are looking for answers to questions such as: What makes children happy? How can we measure the well-being of a child? What factors are likely to affect children's well-being? At what age are these factors most pertinent? International initiatives, such as the Health Behaviour of School-aged Children (HBSC) study commissioned by the World Health Organization, and the International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB), provided initial insights on how children in different parts of the world view their lives and what accounts for differences in children's assessments of their well-being (Currie et al., 2012; Rees & Main, 2015). Yet, many questions remain unanswered.

Russia has not been immune to the global trend towards reassessing childhood from the perspective of child well-being. Indeed, recognition that children and their well-being are central to the country's overall development is reflected in the national strategic plan for 2018 – 2027, which has been declared the Decade of Childhood (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018). An important aspect in bringing the strategic plan to life is to determine where children stand in terms of their own assessments of their lives.

This present article reports the results of a study that examined subjective well-being and life satisfaction among primary and middle-school students in one of Russia's largest regions: Tyumen region in West Siberia, Russia. Specifically, the study investigates the extent to which children are satisfied with their lives in general as well as with its particular aspects, such as satisfaction with family life, school and peers. Additionally, in keeping with a developmental perspective, the study explores the influence of age on children's self-reported well-being. Finally, recognizing that children do not comprise a homogenous group, the study compares how views on well-being can be used to form subgroups of children based on their views on well-being.

The article is organized as follows. First, a review of selected literature provides conceptual and empirical background on child well-being. This section also includes a review of major international initiatives aimed at measuring child well-being. Second, the article discusses research on correlates of child well-being, with a particular focus on studies involving samples from Russia. Next, a description of the methodology and analytical approach is provided, followed by the presentation of results. The article concludes with a discussion of study findings in relation to relevant literature and implications for policy and practice. Study limitations and contributions to the field of child well-being and related areas appear in the section as well.

Child Well-being: Conceptual and Empirical Background

'Well-being' has been conceptualized in many ways. Contested conceptualizations involve overlapping elements. On the one hand, well-being is viewed as a multidimensional construct and is considered in the context of various domains in which a person lives. On the other hand, there is a conceptualization of well-being as an overarching concept, which centers around an overall experience of living (Diener, 2000). Other conceptualizations involve affective (Diener, 2009) and psychological components (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

It should be noted that well-being has its roots in studies of life satisfaction among adults (e.g., seminal work of Andrews & Withey, 1976).

Although the rationale for focusing on child well-being might be self-evident, several points are worth highlighting. First, a surge in interest in understanding how children view their lives has been fueled, in part, by a nearly universal recognition that well-being in childhood lays the foundation for well-being in adulthood. Second, the adoption and rapid ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) promoted the idea that children have universal rights, which in turn, increased attention to children's issues in academic and political spheres. A related and perhaps the most important justification for studying children's well-being has to do with a recent shift in international norms for viewing children, which embraced the view of children as active participants of their life situations, as opposed to mere recipients of adults' protective efforts (Arnott, 2008; Smith, 2009). Rooted in children's rights ideology that proclaims the right of every child to have a say in matters affecting their lives, this paradigm shift prompted the creation of new legal codes and policies aimed at translating these principles into actual experiences for children. As well, research initiatives were introduced to track the achieved progress and identify gaps (e.g., Rees et al., 2020).

The first empirical attempt to document the state of child well-being globally goes back nearly four decades ago, when the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), a United Nations agency that is responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide, published its report on the *State of the World's Children* (for a review, see Ben-Arieh, 2011). As part of this initiative, children's well-being was conceptualized as consisting of the following components: material well-being, health and safety, education, behaviors and risks, and housing and environment. This review of basic indicators of children's survival and development was instrumental in creating global awareness of the need to monitor children's well-being.

Since then, a number of global and local initiatives have been implemented to monitor the state of childhood. For example, the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM), an initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), was launched to assess global progress toward achieving "education for all," an education target that is part of the Sustainable Development Goals framework (UNESCO, 2020). Although the primary focus of this initiative is education, it includes a variety of general social indicators that are important markers of child well-being. Moreover, a global consensus on what features of children's lives need to be considered has enabled a comparative assessment of the state of child well-being in various parts of the world.

Another large-scale initiative that takes on a comparative perspective in monitoring children's well-being is the Programme for International Students' Assessment (PISA) which tracks academic achievement among students from different countries (OECD, 2019). Similar to GEM, PISA is education-oriented and takes a holistic approach that considers multiple factors contributing to education success. To illustrate, the study documented a positive association between learning outcomes and students' well-being (Schleicher, 2019). Additionally, students' perceptions of learning support from teachers was associated with higher life satisfaction. The latter was also found to be positively related to students' sense of belonging to school.

Because many traditional global initiatives rarely involve the perspective of children themselves, an important milestone in research on child and adolescent subjective well-being was the development the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1991). In part, this instrument was designed to address limitations of traditional indicators of child well-being. Specifically, Huebner and colleagues argued that operationalization of life satisfaction in the context of various domains in which children live and develop provides a more accurate assessment of their lives. In proposing an innovative approach to measuring child well-being, Huebner at al. (1998) called for focusing on the following areas: family, friends, school, living conditions, and oneself. Equipped with this new instrument, researchers in various disciplines began producing accounts of life satisfaction among children and adolescents across the world (e.g., Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Rees et al., 2010).

A small but growing pool of studies that gathered information about well-being directly from children is based, for the most part, on samples from the Global North (Hanson, 2019). One exception to this is the International Children's Worlds Study which gathers nationally or regionally representative data on children's lives broadly as well as their daily activities. Among unique aspects of this study is that it includes young children (8 years of age and up) who provide their own assessment of their lives. Launched in early 2000s, the study has surveyed over 200,000 children in more than 40 countries across five continents (Rees et al., 2020). Because the primary goal of this initiative is to describe how children in different societies view their lives, the concept of subjective well-being is central in this endeavor. In this regard, it is important to note that the Children's Worlds version of subjective well-being is conceptualized as consisting of children's cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives. More specifically, the cognitive component includes both context-free and domain-based aspects of children's lives, while the affective component includes positive and negative affect. In discussing recent findings of this intercultural initiative, the authors noted that measurement remains one of the key challenges in research on children's well-being (Rees et al., 2020). Furthermore, incomplete evidence of the validity of cross-cultural comparisons further complicates efforts to produce an accurate account of how children around the world feel about their lives. Consequently, without a clear depiction of children's worlds in their own eyes, it is challenging to identify factors that influence children's well-being as they go about their daily lives in various parts of the world. To address this challenge, researchers called for contextualization of findings that considers all aspects of children's lives in a given context (Rees et al., 2010).

Correlates of Child Well-being

Within the literature on child subjective well-being, research involving factors that are associated with positive perceptions of life has been a robust area of inquiry. Given a broad scope of the construct of well-being, it is not surprising that there is a wide range of factors that researchers have considered. For example, there is an extensive list of studies linking various factors within family environment and students' overall well-being (e.g., Bokhorst et al., 2010; Lee & Yoo, 2015; Preedy et al., 2011). To illustrate, in their cross-national analysis of correlates of subjective well-being, Lee and Yoo (2015) found that child well-being correlated more strongly with frequency of family activities than socioeconomic factors. Similarly, a study of 1,306 sixth graders in China established links between children's perception of connectedness to their parents and positive subjective well-being (Lau & Li, 2011). A recent study conducted by Ignatjeva and colleagues with children in Russia (2020) further contributed to an extensive body of knowledge on the role of family in children's overall life satisfaction and their subjective well-being. They found that positive

perceptions of family relations were associated with increased life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Additionally, the more children reported engaging in family activities, the higher their reports of life satisfaction were.

Surveys from related large-scale studies, such as those summarized in the *Handbook of Behavior, Food and Nutrition* (Preedy et al. 2011), also conclude that frequent family meals are negatively associated with high risk behaviors or suicide. Extending the research base on the connection between family environment and child well-being, frequent family meals were found to be positively correlated with academic performance (Evans et al. 2018, Kutsar et al. 2019; Sandy & Goossens, 2006). Conversely, other authors reported a connection between children's anxiety and little time spent with the mother (Booth-LaForce et al., 2012). Notably, the links were established for different parenting styles, such as restrictive and nurturing parenting.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that supportive family networks might promote positive behavioral outcomes among children during a vulnerable stage of their development – transition to adolescence. Specifically, researchers argued that parental support may buffer children from the emotional effects of the transition from primary to secondary school (Evans et al. 2018). Together, these findings provide empirical evidence in support of an intuitive claim that family is an essential component in children's own assessment of their well-being.

Researchers studying child well-being in the context of school life documented several links between children's satisfaction with quality of relationships with teachers and peers and their overall sense of well-being (e.g., Bokhorst et al., 2010; Lee & Yoo, 2015). A large multinational assessment of 600 thousand students from 79 countries showed that students' perception of learning support from teachers was associated with higher life satisfaction (Schleicher, 2019). Of note, the same study established that students with a greater 'perceived disciplined learning environment' had a stronger sense of belonging to school and a higher life satisfaction than students in less disciplined classrooms. In a national survey of 4,673 students in secondary schools across England, Goswami (2012) found that children's reports of positive relations with friends at school and family had the highest effect of children's subjective well-being. Similar results were obtained by Lau and colleagues (2011) who surveyed school children in China.

However, not all aspects of school life contribute to well-being in the same way. For example, Huebner (1991) found that recent school grades did not correlate significantly with overall life satisfaction. Additionally, the impact of school context on child well-being is modified, to a large degree, by the age and maturity of each student. Among age-specific determinants of school influence is a well-document decrease in school satisfaction among students in primary and secondary school (Evans et al., 2018; Tobia et al., 2019). Some researchers explained this drop in rates of satisfaction with developmental changes that accompany transition to adolescence, that in turn frequently coincides with transition from primary to secondary school (Sandy & Goossens, 2006). As children mature and enter teenage years, they lose interest in school and learning ceases to be a leading developmental task of adolescents. Earlier waves of the Children's Words Study provided additional confirmation of age dynamics in school satisfaction by demonstrating that interest in school decreased from second to sixth wave (Kutsar, Soo, & Mandel, 2019).

Subjective well-being among children is also impacted by friendship and relations with peers. It is through relations with peers that children experiment with social roles, learn and practice control of aggression,

conflict management, discussion of feelings, appreciation of diversity, and develop and deepen awareness of the needs and feelings of others (Adamson, 2013, p. 40). A small but growing literature on the role of peer relationships in children's well-being focuses on various aspects, such as support, feeling of connection, involvement, and communication styles. For example, a study with students in Finland documented that social relationships in school and outside of school were among the strongest contributors to children's subjective well-being (Konu, Lintonen, & Rimpela, 2002). Similarly, according to results of a national survey of 4,673 children in secondary schools across England, positive relations with friends have the second highest effect on children's subjective well-being, after the influence of family relationships (Goswami, 2012). In Russia, researchers found similar associations. For example, recent evidence gathered as part of research with schoolchildren in the Russian Federation highlighted the importance of connection between children's subjective well-being and fulfilling relationships with peers (Golovey et al., 2017), satisfaction with school life (Gordeeva et al., 2019), and social connectedness (Arkhireyeva, 2017; Eliseeva, 2011). Although specifics of each investigation vary, research findings generally converge on one takeaway: positive, supportive peer networks and children's satisfaction with their lives go hand in hand.

In sum, although the evidence for various factors associated with child well-being is compelling, there is a notable lack of studies involving younger children and those living in countries outside of the Global North (Rees et al., 2020). Against this background and in light of the scarcity of relevant research involving children in Russia, the purpose of this investigation was to explore how young children in Russia perceive their well-being in the context of family, school and peer relationships, to examine patterns of life satisfaction among study participants, and to establish the extent to which age plays a role in the identified relationships and patterns.

Study Purpose

Informed by prior research, the present study aimed to explore the overlap in children's reports of satisfaction within each domain with (a) their subjective well-being and (b) overall level of life satisfaction (Ignatjeva et al., 2020). Recognizing the importance of examining multidimensional indicators of well-being simultaneously (Torney-Purta et al., 2008; Sianko, Kapllanaj, & Small, 2020), the study sought to identify clusters of children with similar patterns of responses to life satisfaction questions. Children's self-reports of life satisfaction were hypothesized to vary by age. The following three questions guided this comparison:

     1) How do children in Tyumen region perceive their lives? How do reports of overall life satisfaction and subjective well-being compare between children aged 10 and 12?

     2) To what extent does satisfaction with family, school and relationships with friends influence overall life satisfaction and subjective well-being?

     3) Can we identify groups of children based on their perceptions of satisfaction with life in different domains?

Method

Participants and Procedure

The current study is based on the third wave of the ISCWeB, a comprehensive multinational initiative conducted with children in 35 countries across the world (Rees et al., 2020). In particular, data for this study came from a regionally representative sample of children attending public schools in the Tyumen region in West Siberia, Russia. ISCWeB used a multistage stratified sampling strategy, with geographic region, urbanization level, gender and age as key strata. The target population was defined as students aged 10 and 12, which represents students of upper elementary level and early middle-school level. Out of 613 schools in the region, 24 schools were included in the study. Altogether, 1,959 students participated in the study, where 977 (49.9%) participants were students in elementary school and 982 (50.1%) were students in middle school. The sample contained slightly more girls ($n = 1,007$, 51.4%) than boys ($n = 952$, 48.6%). In terms of residency, the majority of the sample were children from urban areas ($n = 1,612$, 82.3%), while a small proportion lived in rural places ($n = 347$, 17.7%).

The study and its procedures were approved by the research ethics and integrity committee at the study-affiliated university and by administrators at each participating school. Paper-and-pencil surveys were used to collect data. To ensure accuracy, the survey was translated into Russian and back into English. Trained data collectors administered surveys to participants, which were completed in a school setting. Prior to administering the survey, each student provided a verbal assent. Time to complete the survey was between 30 and 40 minutes. All data collection took place during the 2018-2019 academic year.

Measures

The measures were based on the assessment framework developed by the research team of the Children's Words international study (Rees et al., 2020). The international team created a questionnaire that utilized multidimensional conceptualization of child well-being, focusing on various aspects of children's lives. Specifically, participants completed a questionnaire that asked about their background and attitudes and perceptions in relation to well-being in the following life domains: home and the people they live with, money and things they have, relationships with friends and other people, the area where they live, school and teachers, their health, leisure time and self-concept. For this study, only items measuring subjective well-being, life satisfaction within three domains (family, school, and relationships with friends) and affective subjective well-being were used. Each measure is described below. For technical details with regard to questionnaire development, please see the international report of the third wave of the study (Rees et al., 2020).

Subjective Well-Being

Children's well-being was measured using the Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale (CW-SWBS), an adaptation of the Student Life Satisfaction Scale by Huebner (1991). The measure consists of six items that assess cognitive subjective well-being. Sample items include the following statements: "I enjoy my life," "My life is going well," "I like my life" and "I am happy with my life." Response options were on a 11-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 10 (*totally agree*). The items are aggregated to form a scale, where higher scores indicate greater levels of subjective well-being. This instrument has been shown to have good reliability and validity in studies involving U.S. participants (Huebner & Hills, 2013), children in Portugal (Marques, Lopez, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2011) as well as Korean

adolescents (Park & Huebner, 2005). Cronbach's alpha for this measure in the current sample was .962 among 10-year-olds and .959 among 12-year-olds.

Overall Life Satisfaction

Children's overall satisfaction with life was measured using a single item that asked "How happy are you with your life as a whole?" Response options were on an 11-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 (*not at all satisfied*) to 10 (*totally satisfied*). This measure has been used widely in studies of life satisfaction in a variety of settings and with diverse populations (Rees et al., 2013; Tomyn & Cummins, 2011).

Domain-Based Life Satisfaction

Children's self-reported satisfaction with life in three specific domains was measured using a series of statements that included the following: "If I have a problem, people in my family will help me," "My teachers listen to me and take into account what I say," and "I and my friends get along well together." In total, 16 items were included in the overall domain-based life satisfaction, which assessed the level of satisfaction with family, school life and friendships. Response options were on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all satisfied*) to 4 (*totally satisfied*).

Positive and Negative Affect

Six items measured students' affective subjective well-being along two dimensions: positive and negative affect (Barrett & Russell, 1999). Students responded to a series of statements with regard to "how they felt during the past two weeks" on an 11-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*extremely*). Sample items included feeling bored, feeling full of energy, feeling calm, feeling sad, and feeling stressed.

Demographic Characteristics

The study questionnaire included several items to describe demographic characteristics of participants. In this study, the following variables were used: gender (*male* = 1, *female* = 0), age (*10-year-old* = 0, *12-year-old* = 1), participant's residence (*rural* = 1, *urban or suburban* = 0), presence of father in household (yes = 1, *no* = 0).

Analytic Approach

Data preparation, including data cleaning and missing values analysis was carried out by national and international teams of the project (Rees et al., 2020). For this study, data analytic procedures involved several steps. First, descriptive and reliability statistics were calculated for scaled variables. Frequency analyses were conducted on individual items to check for missing data and to screen for univariate outliers. Additional variables were examined to describe the socio-demographic background of participants. Exploratory factor analysis was used to analyze the dimensionality of the domain-based life satisfaction measure. Next, t-tests and correlation analyses were used to assess age differences and examine bivariate associations among study variables.

Finally, cluster analysis was conducted to examine groupings of children based on similarity of their responses to a series of domain-based life satisfaction statements. Three subscales within the domain-based life satisfaction measure were used in this analysis: (a) satisfaction with life in the family, (b) satisfaction with school life, and (c) satisfaction with friends. To validate the identified clusters and describe what student characteristics might explain membership in each cluster, follow-up analyses were carried out. Both descriptive and inferential statistics, such as analysis of variance and Chi-square tests, were used for this purpose. Of note, correlation and cluster analyses were conducted separately for two age groups. All analyses were conducted using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v. 23 (IBM Corp., 2016).

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 1 presents basic descriptive statistics of key indicator variables for the pooled sample as well as for the two age groups. Overall, students' scores indicate that, on average, students rated their general life satisfaction and subjective well-being at relatively high levels. Similarly, domain-based well-being was rated at moderately high levels. Notably, out of three domains, satisfaction with school life has the lowest scores (2.69 vs. 3.11 vs 3.25).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Main Study Variables

Variable	Full sample		10-yer-olds		12-year-olds		Range
	M	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*	
Overall life satisfaction	9.00	(1.76)	9.18	(1.65)	8.82	(1.85)	0 - 10
Subjective well-being	8.51	(2.10)	8.78	(1.94)	8.24	(2.21)	0 - 10
Satisfaction with family	3.25	(0.85)	3.27	(.84)	3.24	(.86)	1 - 4
Satisfaction with school	2.69	(1.02)	**2.94**	**(.90)**	**2.43**	**(1.08)**	1 - 4
Satisfaction with friends	3.11	(0.93)	3.10	(.94)	3.13	(.93)	1 - 4

Note: Values in bold indicate statistically significant differences between participants across two age groups at $p < .01$.

Further, comparisons between boys and girls revealed no statistically significant differences regarding satisfaction with family. At the same time, girls rated satisfaction with school or relationships with friends higher than boys and these differences are statistically significant. Table 2 presents these results.

Table 2. Results of t-tests for Life Satisfaction across Domains by Gender

Satisfaction with:	Gender	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Family	Boy	934	3.22	0.87	-1.344	1,917	.179
	Girl	985	3.27	0.83			
School	Boy	931	2.61	1.06	-3.243	1,932	.001
	Girl	1,003	2.76	0.99			
Friends	Boy	932	3.06	0.93	-2.429	1,905	.015
	Girl	975	3.17	0.95			

Next, the influence of age was examined. Table 3 illustrates these results. Age-related comparisons revealed that younger participants rated their well-being higher than older participants on nearly every measure. However, these differences were statistically significant only for the measure of satisfaction with school life, $t(1,959) = 11.346$, $p < .001$.

Table 3. Results of t-tests for Life Satisfaction across Domains by Age

Satisfaction with:	Age in years	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Family	10 years old	957	3.27	0.84	1.060	1,917	.289
	12 years old	962	3.23	0.86			
School	10 years old	968	2.94	0.90	11.346	1,959	< .001
	12 years old	966	2.43	1.08			
Friends	10 years old	955	3.10	0.94	-.762	1,905	.446
	12 years old	952	3.13	0.93			

Additionally, no statistically significant differences were established between children of different genders within the 12-year-olds group in relation to their assessment of family, school, and friends. However, among younger students, these differences were statistically significant. On average, girls rated their satisfaction higher than boys. Table 4 summarizes these results.

Table 4. Results of t-tests for Life Satisfaction across Domains by Age and Gender

Satisfaction with:	Gender	N	M	SD	t	df	p
10-year-olds							
Family	Boy	451	3.19	0.91	-2.740	955	.006
	Girl	506	3.34	0.76			
School	Boy	447	2.80	0.96	-4.499	966	.000
	Girl	521	3.06	0.82			
Friends	Boy	451	3.02	0.98	-2.546	953	.011
	Girl	504	3.17	0.89			
12-year-olds							
Family	Boy	483	3.25	0.83	.824	960	.410
	Girl	479	3.21	0.89			
School	Boy	484	2.43	1.11	-.061	964	.952
	Girl	482	2.43	1.05			
Friends	Boy	481	3.10	0.89	-.927	950	.354
	Girl	471	3.16	0.98			

Correlates of Well-being

Bivariate correlations revealed moderate statistically significant, at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), associations between the measures of subjective well-being and domain-based life satisfaction. Across both age groups, overall life satisfaction correlated the most strongly with satisfaction with family life, $r(975) = .31$, $p < .001$ and $r(980) = .32$, $p < .001$, for 10- and 12-year-old participants, respectively. On the measure of subjective well-being, the pattern of associations with domain-based life satisfaction differed between the age groups.

Specifically, among younger participants, subjective well-being correlated the most strongly with satisfaction with school life, $r(975) = .36$, $p < .001$, while for older participants, the strongest correlation was with satisfaction with family life, $r(980) = .35$, $p < .001$.

A closer inspection of correlation matrices revealed that within each life domain, indicators differentially related to subjective well-being and overall life satisfaction measures. For example, in the family life domain, the statement "My parents / caregivers listen to me and take what I say into account" had the highest correlation with both overall life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Of note, this pattern was observed among both younger and older participants. Next, in the school life domain, the item "I feel safe at school" most strongly correlated with subjective well-being and overall life satisfaction measures among 10-year-olds. For their older peers, a school domain indicator that was associated the most strongly with well-being measures was "If I have a problem at school my teachers will help me." Finally, in terms of satisfaction with friends, the item "My friends are usually nice to me" had the highest correlation with subjective well-being and overall life satisfaction among 12-year-olds. For 10-year-olds, overall life satisfaction had the highest association with the item "If I have a problem, I have a friend who will support me," while subjective well-being was associated most strongly with the item "I have enough friends." These results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlations Between Domain-Based Life Satisfaction and Well-being Measures

Indicator	Overall life satisfaction		Subjective well-being	
	10 years old	12 years old	10 years old	12 years old
Family Domain (overall subscale)	.310	.323	.324	.350
There are people in my family who care about me	.321	.217	.332	.253
If I have a problem, people in my family will help me	.335	.366	.370	.413
We have a good time together in my family	.340	.309	.409	.368
I feel safe at home	.298	.311	.269	.322
My parents/carers listen to me and take what I say into account	**.346**	**.380**	**.416**	**.488**
My parents and I make decisions about my life together	.285	.301	.303	.367
School Domain (overall subscale)	.294	.287	.359	.345
If I have a problem at school my teachers will help me	.298	**.310**	.347	**.357**
If I have a problem at school other children will help me	.310	.269	.372	.324
My teachers listen to me and take what I say into account	.298	.287	.377	.353
At school I have opportunities to make decisions about what is important to me	.265	.186	.298	.251

I feel safe at school	**.323**	.282	**.359**	.337
Friendship Domain (overall subscale)	.252	.121	.304	.211
I have enough friends	.321	.232	**.420**	.332
My friends are usually nice to me	.326	**.281**	.346	**.368**
Me and my friends get along well together	.272	.227	.331	.314
If I have a problem, I have a friend who will support me	**.330**	.143	.373	.221

Note: Values in bold indicate the strongest correlation among indicators within each domain. Correlations are significant at $p < .01$.

Life Satisfaction Clusters

Figures 1 and 2 present the results of cluster analyses that divided students into groups based on their responses to life satisfaction measures. As can be seen from the figures, two different patterns emerged: (a) a two-group cluster solution for students in elementary school and (b) a four-group cluster solution for students in middle school. Additionally, Table 6 summarizes the results of the cluster analysis, including the number of students in each group and means and standard deviations of the indicators used for clustering. Each group is described in detail below.

**Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Indicators across Clusters**

Cluster (#, *n*)	Satisfaction with					
	Family		School		Friends	
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)	M	(SD)
10-year-olds						
1: *Generally Happy* (*n* = 609)	3.65	(0.37)	3.41	(0.44)	3.50	(0.49)
2: *Somewhat Unhappy* (*n* = 368)	2.59	(1.01)	2.16	(0.93)	2.39	(1.11)
12-year-olds						
1: *Generally Happy* (*n* = 389)	3.62	(0.40)	3.30	(0.53)	3.55	(0.48)
2: *Happy with Friends* (*n* = 252)	3.59	(0.40)	1.85	(0.69)	3.52	(0.49)
3: *Unhappy at School* (*n* = 206)	2.83	(0.91)	1.89	(1.08)	1.68	(0.81)
4: *Mostly Unhappy* (*n* = 135)	1.86	(0.89)	1.77	(1.13)	3.09	(0.79)

Note. The range for all variables is 0 to 4.

The majority of 10-year-old students (62.3%) belong to the cluster titled *Generally Happy*. They scored above the average on the measures of satisfaction with life in all three domains: family, school and friendship. By contrast, students in the other cluster, titled *Somewhat Unhappy*, reported lower than average scores on the measures of life satisfaction. It should be noted that within each cluster solution, the level of

endorsement of each measure varied. For example, students in the *Generally Happy* cluster, rated satisfaction with school life higher in comparison with the other indicators. For students in the *Somewhat Unhappy* cluster, the lowest scores were recorded on the measure of satisfaction with family life. It is worth noting that out of all indicators of subjective well-being, the items that had the highest discriminant power were the following: "My teachers care about me," "My teachers listen to me and take what I say into account," If I have a problem at school my teachers will help me," and "My friends are usually nice."

Figure 1. Mean Life Satisfaction Scores for Clusters among 10-year-olds
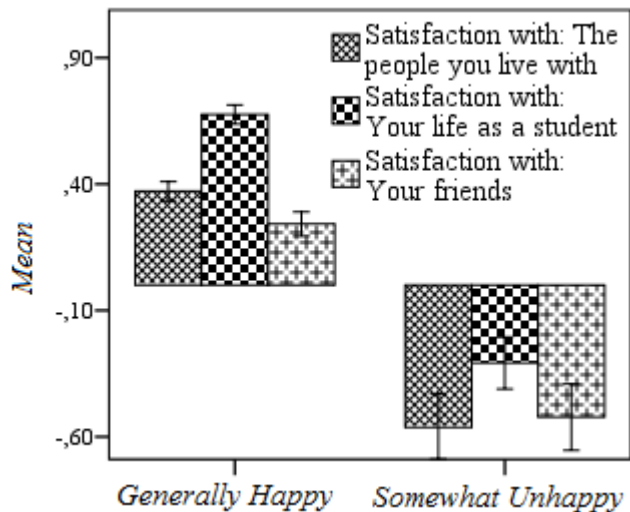
Turning to results of the cluster analysis with 12-year-olds (Figure 2), it can be seen that the largest group, containing nearly 40% of participants of this age, consists of students who rated their satisfaction with life in all three domains at higher-than-average levels. They were labeled *Generally Happy*. The second largest group, containing more than a quarter of the sample, is comprised of students who rated their satisfaction with family and friends at levels higher than students in the *Generally Happy* cluster. However, in their self-reports of satisfaction with school, their scores were lower than the average. In fact, students in this cluster reported the lowest scores on school satisfaction in comparison with students in three other clusters. This group was labeled as *Unhappy at School*. The third group, labelled *Mostly Unhappy*, stands out because students in this group reported lower than average scores on all measures of life satisfaction. Approximately one out five students belonged to this group (21%). Finally, the smallest group, containing about 14% of the sample, was classified as *Happy with Friends*. Students in this group rated their satisfaction with friends higher than average, while other domains were rated at lower-than-average levels.

Similar to the clusters among 10-year-olds, there was variation in the level of endorsement of life satisfaction statements within each cluster. For example, for students in the *Mostly Unhappy* category, the lowest levels of satisfaction were in the relationship with friends' domain. Students in the *Generally Happy* cluster rated satisfaction with school life the highest. Among all clusters, the group *Happy with Friends* stands out because the levels of satisfaction with family is the lowest among members of this group. In terms of indicators that had the highest discriminant power for this cluster solution, the following items were singled out: "My friends are usually nice to me," "My teachers listen to me and take what I say into account," and "My teachers care about me."

Figure 2. Mean Life Satisfaction Scores for Clusters among 12-year-olds
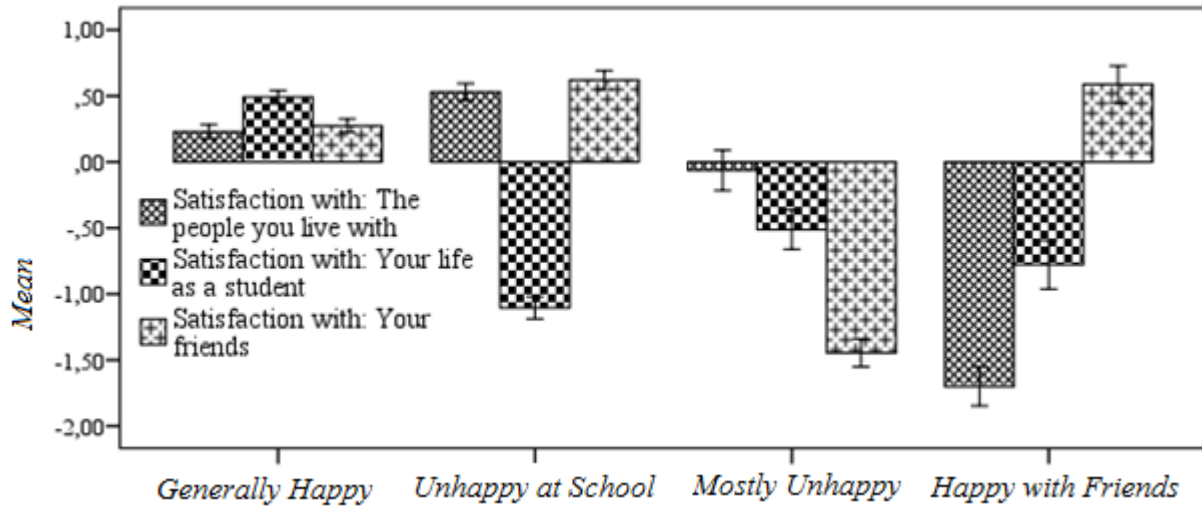
Describing Life Satisfaction Clusters

To examine whether students in specific life satisfaction clusters further differed on socio-demographic characteristics or well-being outcomes, follow-up analyses were conducted. Table 7 summarizes these results. Among 10-year-olds, slightly more girls belonged to the *Generally Happy* cluster in comparison with their peers in the *Somewhat Unhappy* group, 58.1% and 45.7%, respectively. The distribution of

Table 7. Characteristics of Life Satisfaction Clusters

Cluster (#)	Gender (% female)	Father at home (% yes)	OLS	SWBS	PAS	NAS
10-year-olds						
1: Generally Happy	58.1	85.1	9.6	9.43	25.8	9.6
2: Somewhat Unhappy	45.7	78.8	8.4	7.71	21.9	14.3
significance	<0.001	0.008	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
12-year-olds						
1: Generally Happy	47.8	77.6	9.4	9.12	25.2	11.2
2: Happy with Friends	54.4	76.6	9.0	8.63	23.5	13.4
3: Unhappy at School	44.2	72.3	8.3	7.20	21.2	16.1
4: Mostly Unhappy	52.6	60.0	7.4	6.55	20.3	19.2
significance	.006	<.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

Note: OLS = overall life satisfaction; SWBS = subjective well-being; PAS = positive affect scale; NAS = negative affect scale.

female and male students among clusters for 12-year-old participants reveled that girls comprised the majority in two out of four groups – *Happy with Friends* and *Mostly Unhappy*. The highest proportion of boys (55.8%) was found in the *Unhappy at School* cluster. Another demographic characteristic, presence

of a father or male caregiver at home, further helps describe students in each of the clusters. Among children of both age groups, clusters with "happy" in the group title, generally had a higher proportion of children who indicated that their father or a male caregiver lived in the home with them. The highest difference is observed among 12-year-olds, where more than three quarters of participants (77.6%) in the *Generally Happy* cluster reported living with a father/ male caregiver as opposed to 60% of participants in the *Somewhat Unhappy* cluster.

Turning to the results displaying differences among clusters in subjective well-being and emotional well-being measures, it can be seen that students in the *Generally Happy* cluster in both age groups have, on average, higher scores on the measures of life satisfaction and subjective well-being than students in other clusters. Conversely, the score on the negative affect measure is higher for students in the *Somewhat Unhappy* and *Mostly Unhappy* clusters across the age groups.

Discussion

This study explored how young children in a West Siberian part of Russia view their lives in general and to what extent they are satisfied with life in specific domains – family, school and relationships with friends. The findings of the study add to the literature on subjective well-being among children and youth in several ways. First, the study extends the knowledge base by adding confirmatory evidence of high levels of life satisfaction and subjective well-being in a different population of young children. On average, satisfaction with family and peers was rated higher than satisfaction with school by all participants, regardless of age and gender. The findings are similar to Bokhorst et al. (2010) who explored how children and adolescents aged nine to 18 perceived social support from parents, teachers, friends and classmates. They found that children of various ages viewed parents and friends as equally supportive. Additionally, there are similarities in the influence of gender on subjective well-being between this study and previous research (Huebner, 1991). Specifically, this study found that both female and male students rated their perceptions of various life domains in similar ways, suggesting the need to consider other factors in explaining variation in subjective well-being.

Further, statistically significant differences between children of 10 and 12 years of age were found in the assessment of school satisfaction. As described, 12-year-old schoolchildren evaluated all components of the school domain measure lower than 10-year-old schoolchildren. This finding aligns with research that established age-related difference in school satisfaction among children. For example, a recent study of 1,038 third- to eighth-grade school students in Italy also showed lower scores on school well-being among middle school students compared to primary school students (Tobia et al., 2019). Comparison of the present findings with previous research confirms developmental dynamics of school satisfaction and is in accord with insights form developmental psychology (Bokhorst et al., 2010). In short, the difference in school satisfaction between younger and older students could be attributed to the transition from primary to secondary school. A key feature of the transition from primary school to secondary school are changes in the leading developmental activity of a primary school student vs. a young teenager (Sandy & Goossens, 2006). Specifically, the leading activity for 10-year-old schoolchildren is learning. At the same time, for 12-years-old children, formal learning activities become less central, while communication with peers becomes the primary developmental task. Consequently, the driving force of child development among primary and early middle school differs, which in turn affects students' motivation for engaging in formal

learning activities at school. This is consistent with related research that revealed that children's interest in school decreases after transition from primary to secondary school (Evans et al., 2018; Kutsar et al., 2019; Sandy & Goossens, 2006).

In terms of correlates of subjective well-being and overall life satisfaction, the latter was found to be associated most strongly with family satisfaction. Although the relationships are better expressed among 12-year-olds, the association is statistically significant among both age groups. This finding broadly supports previous research that established that relationships between emotional, behavioral, social, and overall well-being are generally similar for children and adolescents (Gutman et al., 2012). Notably, the evidence of family impact on children's well-being is found in societies with different levels of economic development and democratic advancement. For example, in the context of rich industrialized societies, researchers claimed that family relationships are "the single most important contributor to children's subjective well-being" (Adamson, 2013, p. 40). Similarly, in their study with youth in the Russian Federation, Ignatjeva and colleagues (2020) showed that subjective well-being of adolescents and their overall life satisfaction is significantly associated with relations in the family overall and in particular, with the frequency of family activities. Overall, the present study strengthens the idea that understanding children's well-being requires a thorough understanding of the context in which close relationships form and develop (Adamson, 2013).

It is worth highlighting that perceived participation in family life and belief that parents listen to them and take their views into account had the highest correlation with overall life satisfaction among children of both ages. That is although many items contribute to satisfaction with family life, it appears that one such item, perceived respect and participation, is especially impactful when it comes to adolescents' assessment of their overall life satisfaction. This finding has important implications for how to unpack the complex concept of family environment in efforts to promote children's well-being. For example, it is important for parents to know that children who are listened to are satisfied with their life.

Next, the study revealed important nuances in how different factors contribute to children's subjective well-being. First, it was established that among 10-year-old students subjective well-being was associated most strongly with satisfaction with school life, while for older participants, the strongest correlation was with satisfaction with family life. On the one hand, these findings support previously described research that points to the profound influence that family environment has on children's well-being. On the other hand, these results are in contrast with other studies that explored the effect of age on the relationship between school satisfaction and subjective well-being. As Rees et al. noted, "looking at age-related differences, the influence of happiness with school on overall well-being appears to increase with age. Happiness with school, looked at in isolation, explains a much greater proportion of the variation in overall well-being for secondary school-aged children (27%) than primary school-aged children (10%) (2010, p. 12). It is not clear why among children in the current study the relationship is reversed, but several possibilities might explain the differing findings.

One reason for this could be related to the specific aspects of school life along with changes that accompany the transition from primary to secondary school. As described earlier, school safety was the strongest indicator in the relationship between school satisfaction and subjective well-being among 10-year-old students. For 12-year-olds, the indicator with the highest correlation was "if I have a problem at school, my

teacher tries to help me." As indicated earlier, in light of developmental peculiarities of children of primary school age, a teacher appears a principal figure in a child's life whose primary responsibility and interests are centered around learning. In turn, successful realization of these developmental tasks necessitates a safe environment. For older children, peers become another influential realm for fulfilling developmental tasks. Some authors have argued that children may begin to lose the need to feel support from teachers, even though teachers are likely to be a meaningful part of the child's social and support network, which is important for well-being (Evans et al. 2018).

One more explanation for this differing finding might involve a careful examination of the specific local context in which this study took place. In this regard, it should be noted that in Russia a teacher is a personality with indisputable authority whose influence at times might be greater than that of parents. For 10-years-old children, a teacher is an adult whose social role is realized, among other, by encouraging children to respond to educational demands. As children mature and enter the period of adolescence, they may feel the need to establish their independence by confronting adults.

Yet another explanation involving both a local and developmental perspective is plausible. In most schools in Russia, students typically have the same teacher and the same classroom throughout all the grades of primary school. With the transition to secondary school, children have multiple subjects that are taught by multiple teachers in different classrooms. As a consequence, there is a loss of connection and support from the only teacher children used to have in primary school. This change is indicated as detrimental by some authors as children still need guidance at this age (Eccles & Roeser, 2009; Robbers et al., 2018). Apart from these speculations, an important takeaway is confirmation of the crucial role that family and school satisfaction have on children's subjective well-being. This general observation fits well with the literature on child well-being and enriches it by adding a population that is not commonly studied.

Age-related peculiarities of subjective well-being and overall life satisfaction are further illustrated in the cluster groups. The key finding is that perceptions of life satisfaction do not form homogenous patterns. As described above, two patterns were identified that described how 10-year-olds view their lives. Among 12-year-old participants, four such patterns were uncovered. Overall, the cluster solutions that emerged point to differences in the way children perceive their life. To some degree, these differences are attributed to age. For younger students, the differentiation among life domains is minimal. It is plausible to suggest that children of late elementary school age may perceive their life in its entirety, without distinguishing among different domains. In general, 10-year-olds might view their life as either overall satisfactory or overall unsatisfactory. This is in contrast to how 12-year-old students perceive life satisfaction. For them, the extent to which they are satisfied with their life depends, in part, on a specific domain. Despite the fact that a large number of students (*Generally Happy*) tend to view most life domains positively, many students are dissatisfied with their lives. Importantly, for these students, dissatisfaction with life is domain-specific. Stated differently, there is not a cluster of students who rated their life satisfaction at consistently low levels across all examined domains. On the contrary, as results demonstrated, for over a quarter of students, school life does not live up to their expectations. However, it should be noted that a substantial number of students (e.g., *Unhappy at School* and *Mostly Unhappy)* reported low satisfaction in more than one domain.

To sum, a key finding of this study is that 10- and 12-year-old children in Russia report relatively high levels of life satisfaction. In terms of correlates of life satisfaction, the results of this investigation once

again reaffirm the importance of positive family environment for children's well-being. Next, correlates of life satisfaction differ depending, in part, on age and the measure of life satisfaction. As described above, overall life satisfaction is associated most strongly with family satisfaction. Notably, this association holds for both age groups. A more nuanced measure, subjective well-being, also appears to be most strongly associated with family satisfaction. However, this is the case only among 12-year-olds. For 10-year-olds, the strongest correlation between subjective well-being is observed with satisfaction with school life. Further, this study improves upon existing body of scholarship on subjective by using a person-oriented approach to explore heterogeneity among children and to provide a more comprehensive description of how children view their lives.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present article reveals the results of a study of the subjective well-being of children in the Tyumen region. Over the past years, the Tyumen region has been acknowledged the leader in the country in relation to living standards and quality of life. Accordingly, the results of this study cannot be considered as the picture of subjective well-being throughout the whole country. Further research involving other areas of Russia is recommended to build up an objective representation of the situation with children's subjective well-being in the whole country.

Overall, this study has important implications for understanding how children perceive their lives in various domains. As Russian authorities begin to implement the national strategic plan for the coming decade, more research is needed to inform policy efforts aimed to promote happy childhood among all children growing up in today's Russia. This study provides glimpses into how 10- and 12-year-olds view their lives. What is now needed is a more focused exploration of children's self-perceptions of life satisfaction across specific domains in which they live and develop.

On this point, an important line of research would be to describe further children in each of the identified clusters. For example, among 12-year-old participants, a quarter of respondents were categorized as belonging to the *Unhappy at School* cluster. This is a substantial number of children who are not satisfied with some aspects of their school life. Who are these children? What do we know about different aspects of school climate and culture in classrooms where children spend a significant amount of their time? Although ensuring that all children enjoy safe learning environments that are responsive to their needs is an overarching goal, it is perhaps more practical to prioritize policy and programming efforts on subgroups of children who report low satisfaction with school life. As Rees and colleagues (2020) noted in their recent report of the third wave of Children's Worlds Survey, "it seems more realistic to improve children's satisfaction with specific aspects of their life (e.g., school or neighbourhood), rather than attempt to increase their overall well-being" (p. 87). Clearly, before any policy can be designed and implemented, considerably more research is needed to clarify the nature of the connection between satisfaction clusters and other outcomes.

A natural progression would be to determine whether and to what extent membership in each cluster relates to children's behaviors and their time use. Uncovering whether or to what extent subjective well-being clusters match children's actions would be an important contribution to the literature not only in the context of Russia's youngest citizens but also for a larger pool of studies on children's well-being. In short,

directions to refine and add to the findings from the present investigation are many. Following any such route has the potential to contribute to research and policy aimed at promoting well-being among all children and to bring us closer to answering the question "What makes children happy?"

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