

# Happy Index and Social Well-Being of Russian Students

Adelia KAVEEVA, Farida ISHKINEEVA, Karina OZEROVA, Simbul AHMETOVA

**Abstract:** *The article is devoted to the phenomenon of happiness of Russian students, an understudied topic, in contrast to social well-being and its components, including satisfaction with the quality of education and the conditions for receiving it. The results of mass surveys conducted among students of Kazan in 2013-2018 are discussed. The level of happiness, along with the state of health and well-being, is a criterion for the comfort of a given society for life. By analogy with the indices of happiness, which are calculated for residents of countries and cities, the index of happiness of students is calculated.*

*The article shows the relationship between the level of happiness and the ways of daily life of students. Comparison of the obtained data with the index of happiness of Russians shows opposite trends: the index of happiness of Russians from 2013 to the present has been growing steadily, while the index of happiness of students - decreasing. This is probably due to the constant reform of the higher education system and its ambiguous consequences. There are alternative forms of education in addition to the traditional. It can be concluded that the level of students' happiness is a complex, multi-level phenomenon, which is mainly subjective in nature and depends on many factors, the main of which, in addition to health, are the realistic prospects for professional self-realization, as well as the conditions of students' daily life.*

**Keywords:** *student, phenomenon, happiness, life, marriage.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Studying the phenomenon of happiness is a promising area of research in the social sciences. Measurements of the index of happiness in various countries have become a well-established practice; annual ratings of countries on this indicator are formed. Although the methods for measuring happiness are different, they are united by the conviction that the happiness of the population is a characteristic of a prosperous society, along with a developed economy and public health.

This study focuses on the determinants of subjective well-being of the social group of students. This makes it important to determine the index of happiness in connection with: the gender and educational level of students. The generally accepted view of the correlation of age and level of happiness is to state that the influence of age is close to zero [Frey and Stutzer 2002; Alkhateeb, 2019]. However, many researchers find that young people feel happier than older people (Hirvonen and Mangelojä have shown that older Finns

seem less happy than younger ones). These data are confirmed by studies of the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM), according to which the happiest groups are young people aged 18-24 (88%) and people with high incomes (95%) [Happy index of Russians, VTsIOM]. A study by Blanchflower and Oswald [1997] also showed that fears about the misfortune of young people in the US and Europe (excluding Finland) were unfounded. The level of happiness among young people increased in the period 1970-1990. One of the explanations for this growth suggested by researchers is education. According to surveys of education and happiness [Diener et al. 1999 and Argyle 2002], education can increase the level of happiness, but only indirectly and only after receiving it. This study focuses on students during their education process.

The question of the happiness of students becomes especially relevant when the efforts of educational reform in Russia are concentrated almost exclusively on the academic achievements and employment of graduates. However, many researchers [Lyubomirskii et al. 2005; Laureano, 2018] show that people reporting higher levels of happiness and satisfaction with life show higher rates of labor productivity, have prestigious jobs, higher incomes, are more likely to marry and live longer than people with lower rates of satisfaction life. In addition, studies of adults have shown that individuals with a very high level of life satisfaction report less psychological stress and more positive social relationships [Diener and Seligman 2002; Friedman et al. 2002; Abishov, 2018]. However, recent studies have shown that a positive linear relationship between levels of life satisfaction and perceived adaptive outcomes is not necessarily maintained in all areas of society, especially for outcomes that require self-improvement motivation and analytical skills. According to Oishi et al, people from the “happiest” group showed better results in academic performance, productivity, and income than people at the “highest level of happiness”. Oishi et al suggest that extreme levels of positive emotions are not always “optimal” for certain life outcomes, especially those that require self-improvement.

Do modern Russian students feel happy? What affects their feeling of happiness? The article presents an analysis of data on this issue.

## II. METHODS

In 2013-2018, five representative sociological surveys were conducted on students' social well-being.



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The questionnaire included, in particular, the question of how happy a student feels at a particular moment in time, taking into account all the circumstances of his life. The calculation of the happiness index is based on the VTsIOM methodology. This allows you to focus on all-Russian indicators of the level of happiness in determining the lower threshold for the index, as well as to compare the obtained indicators with data for Russia.

The choice of the object of study is due to the following, those that Kazan students are a large multiethnic group, which in its demographic, geographical, social composition is typical for Russian students. The universities under consideration reproduce organizational features characteristic of the country's higher education (academic load, study and living conditions, measures of social support, forms of educational activity).

The student happiness index is calculated on the basis of respondents' answers to the question: "Given all the circumstances of your life, do you feel happy now?":

1. I definitely do
2. Rather yes than no
3. Fifty fifty
4. Rather no than yes
5. I definitely don't

The index is calculated as the difference between the sum of positive answers ("Definitely yes" and "More likely yes") and negative answers ("Most likely no" and "Definitely no"). The index is measured in percentage points and can range from -100 to 100.

$$I = (P_1 + P_2 + P_3) - (P_4 + P_5),$$

where:

- I - index of happiness,  $P_1$  - percentage of positive answers, "Definitely yes" in %,
- $P_2$  - the proportion of positive answers, "Rather yes" in %,
- $P_3$  - the proportion of neutral responses in %,
- $P_5$  - the percentage of negative answers, "Rather no" in %,
- $P_4$  - percentage of negative answers, "Definitely no" in %.

The lower threshold (extremely critical) value for the index of happiness is considered to be 51.8 points. An extremely critical indicator should be understood as the minimum permissible value, going beyond the borders of which indicates a threat to the life of the company due to a disruption in the normal course of the processes reflected by this indicator [Glaziev, Lokosov 2012; Rasooli & Abedini, 2017]. The average value of the index of happiness for Russians is 62 points. The lower threshold and average value are calculated on the basis of VTsIOM data on the level of happiness of Russians for the period of 2008-2018. [Index of happiness of Russians, VTsIOM]. The lower threshold is calculated as the difference between the average value and standard deviation (Table 1):

**Table 1. Indices of happiness of Russians in 2008-2018**

| Period         | Index of happiness | Deviation from mean | Square deviation |
|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 2008 March     | 62                 | 0                   | 0                |
| 2009 March     | 48                 | 14                  | 196              |
| 2009 September | 51                 | 11                  | 121              |
| 2010 March     | 55                 | 7                   | 49               |
| 2010 September | 48                 | 14                  | 196              |
| April 2011     | 42                 | 20                  | 400              |
| 2011 September | 41                 | 21                  | 441              |
| 2012 March     | 69                 | -7                  | 49               |
| April 2012     | 59                 | 3                   | 9                |
| April 2013     | 59                 | 3                   | 9                |
| 2013 September | 66                 | -4                  | 16               |
| April 2014     | 64                 | -2                  | 4                |
| 2014 November  | 59                 | 3                   | 9                |
| 2015 November  | 70                 | -8                  | 64               |
| April 2016     | 68                 | -6                  | 36               |
| 2016 November  | 66                 | -4                  | 16               |
| April 2017     | 73                 | -11                 | 121              |
| July 2017      | 72                 | -10                 | 100              |
| 2017 December  | 76                 | -14                 | 196              |
| 2018 March     | 73                 | -11                 | 121              |
| July 2018      | 69                 | -7                  | 49               |

|                                   |             |        |        |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|--------|--------|
| November 2018                     | 7<br>1      | -<br>9 | 8<br>1 |
| <b>Mean</b>                       | <b>62</b>   |        |        |
| <b>Standard deviation</b>         | <b>10.2</b> |        |        |
| <b>Lower (critical) threshold</b> | <b>51.8</b> |        |        |

below the average (less than 62), and 3) critically low (less than 51.8).

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of student surveys showed that for 2013-2018 there was a decrease in the percentage of students who consider themselves happy (Table 2). Moreover, in general, the share of happy people in Russia is growing, and one of the happiest groups is young people aged 18-24.

The calculated indicators of the average value and the lower threshold allow us to evaluate the happiness indices obtained from the survey as: 1) above the average (more than 62), 2)

**Table 2. Distribution of students by their level of happiness, 2013-2018, %**

| Student self-assessed level of happiness | 2013 | 2014 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|
| Very happy                               | 38   | 36.7 | 12.4 | 17.9 | 12.6 |
| Quite happy                              | 35   | 33.4 | 62.9 | 45.4 | 49   |
| Neutral                                  | 23   | 25   | 16.7 | 22.2 | 24.1 |
| Rather unhappy                           | 3    | 3.7  | 3.4  | 6.1  | 7.7  |
| Very unhappy                             | 1    | 1.2  | 0.5  | 2.5  | 2.5  |
| Hard to answer                           | * -  | * -  | 3.7  | 5.8  | 4.1  |

\* The answer option "Difficult to answer" was not offered in the surveys of 2013 and 2014

Based on the data, the student happiness index is calculated. The table and the diagram show the dynamics of

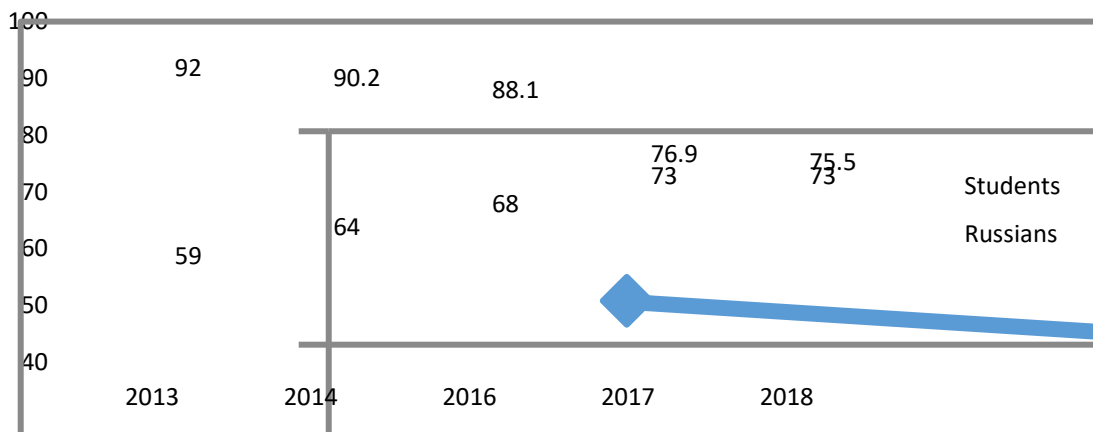
the students' happiness level and its comparison with Russian values.

**Table 3. Index of happiness for students and Russians, in percentage points**

| Year  | 2013 | 2014 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|
| Index of happiness of students              | 92   | 90.2 | 88.1 | 76.9 | 75.5 |
| Index of happiness of Russians <sup>1</sup> | 59   | 64   | 68   | 73   | 73   |

First of all, we should note a very high initial level of student happiness (2013) - 92 points, significantly higher than the average index value (62 points), while the initial happiness index of Russians - 59 - is below the average value. As can be seen in the table and graph, the students' happiness index has been decreasing since 2013, but its values remain high for the entire period under review - above the average.

The happiness index of Russians throughout the country tends to increase - up to 73 in 2018, which is above the average. As a result, both indicators - the student happiness index and the Russian happiness index in 2018 are approximately equal (75.5 and 73, respectively), which is higher than the average.



**Figure 1. Dynamics of students and Russians' happiness indices**



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The curves on the graph indicate the convergence of the values of the indices of students and Russians, which can apparently be interpreted as follows: the level of students' happiness falls slightly, although it remains high; among Russians, on the contrary, the level of happiness grows in relation to the initial low value.

A significant indicator associated with the university is adaptation to student life. Among those who noted the option "I feel easy and comfortable at the university", 71% consider themselves happy. This is almost three times more than students who noted that they could not get accustomed to the university (only 26% of them were happy and 35.3% were

unhappy). The correlation coefficient of these signs is 0.249 ( $p < 0.01$ ).

A significant indicator, presumably, is overall satisfaction with learning. The proportion of happy students is higher among those who are satisfied with the quality of teaching at the university. Only 5.4% of students who are satisfied with the quality of education consider themselves unhappy, and among dissatisfied students this figure is already 19% (Table 5). However, the statistical relationship of signs is weak (0.193,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 5. Indicators of the correlation between the level of satisfaction with studies and the student happiness index, 2018, %**

| The level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching professional subjects | Students' happiness level |             |         |                |              |                | Total |
|--|---------------------------|-------------|---------|----------------|--------------|----------------|-------|
|  | Very happy                | Quite happy | Neutral | Rather unhappy | Very unhappy | Hard to answer |       |
| Yes  | 21.8                      | 50.9        | 18.1    | 3.6            | 1.8          | 3.9            | 100.0 |
| Partly   | 8.2                       | 51.0        | 26.8    | 26.8           | 2.1          | 3.3            | 100.0 |
| No   | 6.9                       | 39.4        | 29.1    | 12.8           | 6.2          | 5.5            | 100.0 |
| Hard to answer   | 14.0                      | 32.3        | 21.5    | 14.0           | 2.2          | 16.1           | 100.0 |

Ideas about one's own demand in the labor market after graduation can also make a significant contribution to the perception of happiness. The correlation coefficient of indicators of happiness and perceived demand on the labor market is not significant and is only 0.146 ( $p = 0.01$ ), however, the data in the contingency table are indicative. Among those who are confident in their own demand in the labor market after graduation, only 5% consider themselves unhappy (the proportion of happy students is 76.5%). Among those who do not see positive prospects, 42% are happy, 19.6% are unhappy. Other factors that are not directly related to the university influence the level of students' happiness: these are the state of health, financial situation, type of housing, the presence of friends, gender, and the course of study.

The academic environment significantly affects the health of students. Previous studies have shown that in general, students' health deteriorates as they study at the university. Moreover, the majority of happy students are observed among those who noted that their health during their studies at the university became better - 84%. Among the remaining students, 9.6% of those who do not consider themselves either happy or unhappy, and unhappy students - 5.4%. The average values of indicators of happiness are observed in those who did not notice any changes in their state of health in the process of receiving education (68% are happy, 6.6% are unhappy). The group that chose the option "health has become worse", however, included half of the happy students (52.5%), 14% unhappy students, and 29% with neutral state. It turned out that the happiest are not those students who never get sick but those who rarely get sick (66% of them are happy). The proportion of happy students in the "often sick"

and "never sick" groups of students is approximately the same (51.7% and 52.4%, respectively). It is noteworthy that among the "never sick" students, the highest percentage of unhappy students compared to others (22.6%).

The relationship between the levels of material wealth and happiness is obvious. The least happy group of students are those who chose the option "I almost lack money for the most necessary food products" (48% of them are happy, 21% are unhappy). As income increases, the proportion of happy students also grows: 74% of materially well-off people consider themselves happy. At the same time, the happiest are students who provide for themselves and at the same time receive financial assistance from their parents (66% are happy). The combination of support from close and own achievements distinguishes them from other students.

A factor close to material wealth is the type of housing: the happiest are those living in a student dormitory (64.6%), a private house (65%), their own apartment (60.4%), and a rented apartment (59%). Least of all happy students living in a rented room (43%). The results obtained may indicate that students who are forced to rent housing experience financial difficulties, as well as a feeling of loneliness, which is absent in those who live in the hostel. At the same time, students living in their own home (most likely with their parents) experience less inconvenience, because they do not leave the comfort zone and do not pay for housing.

In addition, a significant factor is the presence of friends at the university, which positively affects students' feelings of happiness.

Among those who have friends, only 8% of students reported to feel unhappy; among those who do not have friends at the university, the proportion of unhappy is already 31.4%.

The gender aspect of the study indicates that among girls there are 10% more happy people than among boys (64.6% and 54%, respectively). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that these differences are statistically significant.

Analysis of data by years of study shows an increase in the share of happy students over the entire period of study: in the first year, slightly more than half of the students (56%) said they were happy, in the last year there were more happy students (68.5%). This may indirectly confirm the proposition that education really makes a person happy.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Russian students represent a relatively happy group of society. The students' happiness index in 2018 is 75.5, which significantly exceeds the average value for Russia calculated over 10 years, as well as the lower critical threshold. Two groups of factors presumably affect the level of student happiness. Firstly, these are factors directly related to the process and the result of training (adaptation to the university environment, satisfaction with the quality of education, assessment of one's own demand in the future in the labor market). Secondly, these are factors that are either indirectly associated with the university or have nothing in common with it: the state of students' health, financial situation, financial independence, type of housing during training, the presence of friends at the university, gender aspect, and the year of study. The analysis and synthesis of empirical data showed that students' 'feelings of happiness are positively affected by satisfaction with the quality of education and confidence in the demand for their profession in the labor market after graduation, positively affect students' perceptions of happiness in terms of material well-being, as well as friends. Health status is an ambiguous criterion for determining the level of happiness. Among the students who noted positive changes in their state of health during the period of study at the university, there are more happy people than among those who do not see any changes or evaluate them as a deterioration in their health.

Studies of the phenomenon of happiness and the factors that influence it are a definite contribution to obtaining information about such a large and significant social group in society as students. The characteristics of students from the perspective of the phenomenon of happiness can serve as one of the indicators of the effectiveness of the higher education system.

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