In the present paper we assessed levels of happiness depending on socio-demographic factors among Romanian young adults who just have finished high-school and enrolled to universities or started to work. N=1444 (863 woman, 584 man) young adults were included in our study. Happiness and demographics including sex, residential area, ethnicity, education, and marital status were assessed. Overall, Romanian young adults consider themselves happy. Moreover, average score of happiness was a little over US college students averages. Woman, those living in urban, being married or having a stable partner reported higher levels of happiness. We consider these findings valuable that complements previous study data on youth subjective happiness.

Keywords: happiness, well being, young adults, Romania

1. INTRODUCTION

Happiness became an intensely studied domain in positive psychology because its correlates with important social and psychological factors also with educational outcomes. A consolidated literature proved that subjective happiness provides useful insight into an individual’s quality of life and a reliable source of information about people's well-being (Diener, 2000). Happiness was weakly but constantly associates across studies and across cultures with socioeconomic status, education, employment, emotional stability, marriage, success, longevity, health (Diener & Diener, 1995; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999).

Surveys evidenced along these years that the level of individual self-reported happiness in Central Eastern Europe in general is much below that in Western Europe (World Database of Happiness, 2005,2013). While in most Western European countries, over two-thirds of the population say they are satisfied, in Central-Eastern Europe this number is generally less than half. This difference cannot be attributed simply to cultural differences or economic situation and causal explanations are multifactorial. The causes of this division may go back to the Communist era which seems to have placed an ironcurtain of unhappiness.

According to the World Values Survey carried out 1999, in the majority of Eastern European countries including Romania, only 6 % -10% of people felt happy while this proportion in Iceland or the Netherlands was 40 %. Despite, the proportion of people feeling happy in Romania has increased in the last decade. According to a National Happiness Survey (2008) realized on a sample of 1002 respondents only four in ten Romanian adults are considered happy, 14.3% reported feeling truly happy and 24.8% happy.

Beginning with 2012 a worldwide survey was initiated called the “World Happiness Report” is a landmark survey of the state of global happiness. The WHS reveals fascinating trends in the data judging just how happy countries really are. On a scale running from 0 to 10, people in over 150 countries, surveyed by Gallup. In the 2013 Happiness database Romania was ranked on the 90th place from 150 countries included in the study. Little more happy than Romanians were Latvians and Ukrainians, less happy than Romanians were neighboring Bulgarians and Hungarians.

In the 2015 evaluation came up to the 86th place right after China and Zambia, overtaking Serbia and Latvia. Hungary was ranked at the 104th place from 151 countries . The Report also shows the major beneficial side-effects of happiness. Happy people live longer, are more productive, earn more, and are also better citizens. Well-being should be developed both for its own sake and for its side-effects.
Data regarding components of well-being and quality of life of young generation is not very well documented in Romania thus studies regarding components of well being and life quality are welcomed. Transition from adolescents to young adulthood is a particularly vulnerable period of life bringing new challenges, frequent changes in educational goals, jobs, partners or living conditions. The present paper provides new empirical evidence over the younger growing up generation by analyzing the socio demographic correlates of subjective happiness in Romania.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The present study is a part of a larger research project aiming to investigate social and psychological aspects of transition from adolescents into adulthood. Data analysed in this paper is comprehensive and belongs to the second wave of a three year longitudinal study.

2.1. Sample

N=1444 young adults (ages 19–23, M=21.6(1.3) years, 59.0% female, 41% male, 24% living in rural, 76% living in urban residential area) participated in the study. The majority of the sample was students enrolled in universities (74%) or technical schools (7.6%). The remaining of the sample (17%) was working or staying home.

2.2. Procedure

Respondents were recruited with the assistance of school inspectorates during the first wave of the study and re introduced when we obtained their contact data and agreement to participate in our study. The surveys were mainly conducted online, questionnaires being completed on our project website: www.viitoradult.ro. In some targeted regions, without internet, project team members and trained students assessed participants individually.

2.3. Measures

Happiness was measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS, Lubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The SHS has high internal consistency, which was found to be stable across samples. Test-retest and self-peer correlations suggested good to excellent reliability, and construct validation studies of convergent and discriminant validity confirmed the use of this scale to measure the construct of subjective happiness (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Each of item is completed by choosing one of 7 options that finish a given sentence fragment. The options are different for each of the four questions. Items related to demographics and socio-economic status was taken from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS, http://www.ggp-i.org). Demographic data has been recorded based on standard questions used in public opinion barometers.

3. RESULTS

Data were analysed using SPSS version 22 for Microsoft Windows. Three main analyses were run. Descriptive statistics were used to reveal the distribution of responses to the study measures/variables. Mean comparison and variance analysis was used to estimate differences according to sociodemographic factors and health risk behaviors.
Figure 1. Average scores on SHS scale by (N=1497) Romanian youth

Overall score on SHS ranged from minimum 1.5- to a maximum of 7, the average of SH on the overall sample was $M=5.16$ (SD=1.09). The psychometric properties of the scale were calculated over the whole sample, $N = 1457$ (96% responses) Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .67. All item-test correlations were higher than .58, suggesting good psychometric properties. Scores on each item of the SHS scale is presented in figure 1. Differences in SH score according to sex, place of residence, education, work status, marital status; and ethnicity were carried out (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t(df)</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>(1442)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>-2.24</td>
<td>&lt;.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
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<td>-2.02</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>-2.39</td>
<td>&lt;.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Romanian</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungarian</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>Ns.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rroma</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working or at home</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical school</td>
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<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>Ns.</td>
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<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Mean comparisons for happiness depending on socio-demographic variables

Woman and those living in urban residential area reported being happier than man and those living in rural. Married individuals score significantly higher than unmarried individuals $t(1442)= -2.39$, p<.005. Because in the present sample only a small number of participants reported being married (N=19) this data is just for guidance, and instead we analyzed relationship status. Participants reporting to have a stable relationship were significantly more satisfied with their lives than singles $t(1443)= -2.02$, p<.001.

Unexpectedly, finishing high school, obtaining BA degree or choice of continuing education was not related to happiness level in the current sample. We found a weak correlation with BA degree grades ($r=.366$, p<.001) and with university grades ($r=.421$, p<.001).

Although there was no difference according to educational choices, differences in happiness level were felt on a motivational level. Accordingly, those who choose to study after high school because they, “felt passionate about a certain area of study” $M=5.26$ (1.00) or “because they liked to learn” $M=5.26$ (1.23), were happier $F(8, 1184) =1.83$, p<.05, compared to those who said they continue studying “because they parents wanted them to” $M=4.08$ (1.19) or the study “to enhance their chances in the labor market”.

Those who were employed studying $M=4.82$ (1.34) were unhappier $t(1473)=2.85$, p<.001 compared with the rest of the sample $M=5.19$ (1.01). Again motives behind choices counted for happiness. Those who choose to work while studying for the purpose of “gaining experience and to learn” $M=5.4(0.98)$ were happier, $t(1474)=3.03$, p<.001, compared to those who “must had to work in order to earn a living” or “to pay for their studies” $M=5.08$(1.16).
Based on other studies usually minorities are less happy and satisfied with their lives. Although Hungarians and rroma participants scored below the average of happiness level of the present sample, differences were not significant regarding levels of happiness.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study investigate the level of happiness in a sample of Romanian in relation with sociodemographic correlates. Overall score on SHS was $M=5.16$ (SD=1.09). The average happiness score runs from about 4.5 to 5.5. College students tend to score lower (averaging a little below 5) than working adults and older, retired people (who average 5.6). This score is over than US college students average (4.8-5.07) and close to high school samples (5.13) but below of adult or retired adults community sample (5.62) according to scale standards (Lubomirsky & Lepper, 1999).

According to our data, woman were happier than man and those living in rural areas. These results were somewhat contradictory to previous research data that mainly disfavored woman. This results may be explained by the fact that subjective happiness was weakly influenced by educational success in woman, relationship status and other factors not analyzed by the present study (mental health). In our sample more woman finished high school successfully, had higher grades and choose to continue education in universities than man and more woman reported being in a stable relationship.

In spite with common beliefs, and contrary to previous studies participants from the urban area were not happier than coming from the countryside. The first though would be that individuals living in cities are also more stressed, and stress is strongly associated with unhappiness, but this result to be explained needs further clarification.

Based on other studies usually minorities are less happy and satisfied with their lives. Although Hungarians and rroma participants scored below the average of happiness level of the present sample, differences were not significant regarding levels of happiness. This results may be explained first by the fact that nowadays minorities rights are well respected in Romania and they enjoy the same conditions as Romanians. Rroma particpants were under represented in the sample thus in this aspect data is just for guidance.

In line with other studies, married individuals were happier in our sample. Participants reporting to have a stable relationship were significantly more satisfied with their lives than singles. Belonging to someone brings more safety, joy, reason and satisfaction to one’s life that leads to happiness. The majority of the studies consistently found a positive impact of marriage and intimate relationships on individuals’ life satisfaction and happiness (for a review, see Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999).

We expected that educational choices, educational status and success will influence overall level of happiness. Participants, who got their bachelor’s degree as well as those who decided to continue with education, were not happier than those who failed the final exam or decided to find a job or stay home suggesting that happiness was independent on educational choices. The sample was very young, they have just finished high school thus it is understandable that educational choices did not have a strong influence on their happiness level yet. Although in our previous studies realized on the same sample we found that satisfaction with life was related to educational status, educational success (grades) and educational choices (continuing or not education after high school) (Vincze, Haragus and Roth, 2015). Based on our previous finding happiness is also strongly predicted by positive individual resources accumulated in adolescents (Vincze, Roth & Haragus, 2015) and these individual factors after a while can overwrite the effect of demographic factors in case of such a personal feeling like happiness.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion we consider Romanian youth happy, probably happier than the past generations. Data regarding influence of demographic factors is contradictory in some aspects with data found on adult population or by other studies. Level of happiness in Romanian youth with the mean age of 21 was higher in woman and was not dependent of place of living, educational status or ethnicity but was influenced by being in a relationship and motives behind choices. These results are expected when taking in consideration the characteristics of this age group. The present study brings valuable finding that complements previous study data regarding youth happiness. Future studies should work on a more complete and detailed happy youth profile and explore the causes of unhappiness in Romanian youth.
6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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7. REFERENCES


