PRECONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION: THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDREN FROM CZECH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to determine what children aged 10–15 associate with happiness/satisfaction as well as to analyse which factors are related to their feelings of happiness and their evaluation of life satisfaction. A total of 954 children attending Czech primary schools from various socio-cultural backgrounds were surveyed using the incomplete sentence method. The levels of both their happiness and satisfaction were measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale and Students' Life Satisfaction Scale. The results indicate that the children considered themselves relatively happy and satisfied, and they understood happiness/satisfaction in terms of the concept of eudaimonia (personal growth, achievement of school goals, etc.). Happiness/satisfaction were indicated at a significantly lower level if the children did not feel accepted by their caregivers, described themselves as 'melancholic', were raised in a single-parent family, or spent their childhood in institutional care. Further, as the children grew older, their happiness/satisfaction levels declined. Neither gender nor spirituality were found to predict happiness/satisfaction.

KEYWORDS

Children preconception, Czech Republic, happiness, life satisfaction, quantitative research

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Highlights

- *The study features empirical data to explore an issue much neglected in research in the Czech Republic: the preconceptions of children aged 10–15 years regarding the happiness/satisfaction.*
- *Level of happiness/satisfaction is analysed through psychometrically validated scales which have not been used previously in Czech educational research.*
- *This study shows that psychosocial factors contribute significantly more to happiness/satisfaction than do sociodemographic factors.*
- *Children from a socio-culturally disadvantaged environment, e.g., youngsters who have spent their childhood in children's homes or other public or private institutions show a lower level of happiness/satisfaction.*

INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that based on their life experiences children develop intuitive ideas, lay theories, and conceptions regarding the world around them (Kyriakopoulou and Vosniadou, 2020). In school practice and in the research context, these ideas, theories, and conceptions are generally referred to as 'preconceptions' (Pivarč, 2017) through which children interpret and decode the reality of the external world. Preconceptions influence the child's behaviour, emotional experiences, as well as how the processes of teaching and learning are perceived. In any analysis, preconceptions must always be related to phenomena such as specific acts, subjects, concepts, processes, and natural laws. In terms of structural characteristics, a preconception is shaped by a *cognitive dimension* that reflects views and rational evaluations relating to a particular phenomenon; by an *affective dimension* that expresses an individual's emotional experiences and feelings towards the phenomenon; and a *structural dimension* representing thought associations with concepts (including relations among concepts) that represent the phenomenon in the individual's mind.

Since the 1960s, the conceptualisations of children regarding these phenomena have been a prominent subject of research interest, with many investigations undertaken in various fields of science and technology (Vosniadou, 2013). The number of studies involving research on preconceptions in the social sciences and humanities has also increased (Pivarč, 2017), with notable examples including examinations of children's

preconceptions of economic, political and legal phenomena (Barrett and Buchanan-Barrow, 2005) as well as analyses of children's conceptions regarding social pathologies (Xu et al., 2012), religious concepts (Aylward and Freathy, 2008), and intellectual disability (Pivarč, 2019).

Research interest in the constructs of happiness and life satisfaction has grown markedly since the 1980s (Stavrova, 2019). This interest has been motivated, *inter alia*, by a growing recognition that subjective experiences of happiness and satisfaction influence many areas of human life. It is often pointed out that the focus of research on happiness and satisfaction has been hitherto unbalanced, since studies in the adult population are much more prevalent than those focusing on children (Jiang et al., 2021).

The subject of child happiness and satisfaction – including studies on the well-being of primary school children – has received significant attention in international surveys (e.g., OECD, 2019[1]) and research (Delgado et al., 2020). In contrast, marginal attention has been devoted to this issue in the Czech context; for children aged 10–15, neither the factors influencing their happiness and satisfaction, nor what they associate these constructs with has thus far been explored in detail. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to analyse these issues using primary empirical data obtained from Czech primary school pupils. By comparing the findings of the present study to results found in Europe and other environments, increased awareness may be raised both domestically and internationally of this vital but relatively neglected issue.

The phenomenon of happiness and satisfaction: definitions and foundations

The terms *happiness* and *satisfaction* tend to be used inconsistently, vaguely, and sometimes interchangeably within the literature (Forgeard et al., 2011). Although many different theoretical approaches and terminological nuances have been explored, a general consensus has emerged that these concepts should be viewed through a paradigm that emphasises the subjectivity of evaluation (Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002). According to Ed Diener, who earned the nickname "Dr Happiness" due to the extensive time and effort he devoted to conceptualising constructs such as life satisfaction, the concept should be understood primarily as the individual's rational assessment of her/his own life (Diener et al., 1999). Satisfaction has been described as the conscious evaluation of the extent to which the current state of an individual's life approaches an ideal state according to criteria set by the individual (Bieda et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2021). On the other hand, happiness reflects affective experiences or positive emotional states (Lyubomirsky, King and Diener, 2005) wherein positive emotions have dominance over negative ones. A distinction is often made in research between what has been called the hedonic paradigm of well-being associated with Epicurean philosophy and Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia. The hedonic paradigm is understood as achieving emotionally experienced pleasure, joy or euphoria by the maximisation of pleasant experiences through sensory experiences and pleasure, thus it is episodic in nature. By contrast, the eudaimonic paradigm is based on the view that true happiness and satisfaction relate to a long-term paradigm of the overall meaningfulness of human existence, self-actualisation, personal growth, self-realisation, and living in virtue.

In this study, we proceed from the theoretical standpoints described above, i.e., we understand happiness as a state in which the experienced positive emotions dominate over the negative ones (affective dimension of preconceptions). Similarly, life satisfaction is defined as a rational assessment of one's own life (cognitive dimension of preconceptions), thus a person can be considered happy and satisfied if they indicate that they feel this way.

The psychosocial correlates of happiness and satisfaction in primary school children

Research on preconceptions of happiness and satisfaction in primary school children entails certain specificities which depend on the different stages of psyche ontogenesis as well as on individual peculiarities in the subject's cognitive and emotional development. Another specificity is that, while children may be more affected by some social factors than adults, they have less opportunity to influence the social environment, including the living conditions affecting them (e.g., material and economic conditions of the family, family background, social status of the family, social relations etc.) (Schütz et al., 2014). They also have less opportunity to make decisions about themselves and compared to adults they may not have a sufficiently developed range of strategies to overcome potential life difficulties. In addition, in terms of psychosocial development, adolescence represents a dynamic, sensitive and vulnerable period. It is therefore particularly important to devote attention (psychological, pedopsychiatric, pedagogical as well as research) to mental health. Besides caring for the overall subjective well-being of children, concerns include the early identification of difficulties that may result in the development of more serious problems which would later require care in the stages of adolescence and adulthood. As research shows (see below), the conditions that surround and influence children clearly impact how they assess their own happiness and life satisfaction as well as what they associate with these affective states.

A number of studies have shown that low levels of perceived happiness at school age have a significant effect on personality development and can affect intelligence, creativity, and school performance (Badri et al., 2018). Similarly, Izzaty (2018) highlights a link between experiencing unhappiness and emotional problems which have a negative impact on cognitive development, learning problems associated with low concentration, low memory capacity, along with behavioural problems that increase the likelihood of delinquency and criminality in adulthood. Other authors point to a negative correlation between a child's life satisfaction and problems such as depression, stress, interpersonal rejection, aggressive behaviour, substance abuse, and/or risky sexual behaviour (Siyez and Kaya, 2008; Proctor, Linley and Maltby, 2010;

1 Programme for International Student Assessment. In this survey, 65% of children from Czech schools reported being satisfied with their lives (OECD average 67%) (PISA, 2019).

Shek and Liu, 2014; Tian, Zhang and Huebner, 2015). On the contrary, a higher level of perceived satisfaction during school age acts as a 'buffer' against the negative effects of stress and the development of mental disorders. Further, high levels of satisfaction are also associated with better learning outcomes, more fulfilling interpersonal relationships (with peers, parents, and teachers), greater self-acceptance, a more positive self-image as well as higher indicated levels of self-efficacy, hope and positive attitudes towards school (Tian, Zhang and Huebner, 2015). In many developed countries, children's happiness and satisfaction are key considerations reflected in various strategies for education policies (OECD, 2011). In the Czech Republic, for example, in 2020 a program titled 'Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic 2030+' was initiated. This strategy identifies the well-being of primary school children as an important part of their psychosocial development (Strategy 2030+, 2020).

Several significant general conclusions have been determined so far from research findings in the Czech environment as well as internationally. One drawback is that most of the implemented studies, especially in the Czech context, have mostly focused on only one structural characteristic of preconceptions (e.g., on research into children's life satisfaction, Slezáčková et al., 2015). Surprisingly little attention has been devoted to a multidimensional perspective which would reflect both the cognitive dimension and the affective and structural dimension. In addition, studies have highlighted a range of inconsistent results or even conflicting findings in relation to the role of individual psychosocial correlates of children's happiness and satisfaction. A number of analyses of correlates of happiness/satisfaction in primary school children have shown that sociodemographic characteristics (such as gender and age) play a far less role than a child's individual characteristics (with temperament, spirituality, and quality of social relationships with adults and peers among the more significant) (Diener et al., 1999; Leto, Petrenko and Slobodskaya, 2019).

Based on a meta-analysis of research, Proctor, Linley and Maltby (2009) found that children/adolescents differ only slightly in their levels of happiness and satisfaction with respect to gender and age, with girls showed a marginally lower level of happiness and satisfaction during the onset of adolescence. By contrast, a study conducted in the Czech Republic by Slezáčková et al. (2015) showed that boys aged 8–14 were less happy than girls of the same age, and the boys' levels of satisfaction did not change much with age. In research focused on analysing the structural dimension of preconceptions of happiness, it was found that children aged 9–13 associated happiness primarily in terms of hedonistic concepts, in particular joy, pleasure, fun, and laughter. For older children (aged 14–16), the conceptualisation of happiness was expressed in terms of a eudaimonic perspective, as their ideas were more oriented towards achieving personal goals (e.g., better grades at school, other achievements) (López-Pérez, Sánchez and Gummerum, 2016).

Important correlates of happiness and satisfaction include personality traits and spirituality. It has been found that higher levels of happiness and satisfaction in children correlate positively with extraversion and negatively with neuroticism (Holder and Klassen, 2010). Proctor et al. (2009) claim that everyone has a predisposed level of subjective well-being. While adolescents may not yet have a fully developed personality, temperament may reflect origins of personality traits. By determining the relationship between temperament and subjective well-being in adolescence, it is possible to better understand how personality traits can help explain individual differences in the degree of happiness and satisfaction experienced. One important aspect of personality development during adolescence is represented by spirituality, which relates to an internal belief system the individual relies on to provides strength and comfort. Based on this characterization, spirituality is also seen during this period as a significant protective factor against emotional problems such as depression and anxiety which negatively affect well-being. Although in relation to personality factors numerous studies have shown a significant relationship between spirituality and the subjective well-being of adults, less research has been devoted to this issue in children/adolescents. As Holder, Coleman and Wallace (2010) point out, higher levels of spirituality have also been found to engender higher levels of happiness. Nevertheless, this research and many other similarly focused studies have been conducted on samples of respondents in countries with a strong Christian tradition and in countries with a higher degree of religiosity. This relationship is insufficiently mapped in countries where there is a high proportion of people who indicate a lower level of religious beliefs and practices such as the Czech Republic.

In the period of adolescence, life satisfaction and the happiness of children/youth cannot be separated from the influence of contextual factors and life events. For example, some studies have shown that weak or dysfunctional family ties and the separation or divorce of parents have a negative impact on children's happiness and satisfaction (Bjarnason et al., 2012; Shek and Liu, 2014). Institutional care and education are also negative influential factors, for instance affecting children who are placed in facilities such as children's homes, shelters, corrective institutes, diagnostic institutes, and psychiatric facilities[2]. Compared to other European countries, the Czech Republic has one of the highest numbers of children/adolescents placed in institutional care (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003; OECD, 2011). An average of 6,700 children/adolescents have been placed in such facilities every year in the past decade, with the highest percentage (76%) associated with children's homes with or without a school[3]. The number of children/adolescents in children's shelters is also high; in 2019, almost one third of all shelter home clients were under the age of 18 (approximately 2,200 children/adolescents) (Nešporová et al., 2019). Some studies (Schütz et al., 2014; Delgado et al., 2020) have shown that these children are less happy and satisfied compared to children from birth, foster or

2 Institutional care for children and adolescents in the Czech Republic consists of a wide range of facilities varying by, *inter alia*, age, user circumstances, duration of stay, or the on-site presence of educational and medical services. Examples of such institutions are youth homes, shelter homes, children's homes, children's homes with a school, diagnostic institutes, and corrective institutes.

3 Source data for our calculations were obtained from the publicly accessible database of Statistical yearbook of education from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (2022).

other complete families. These children are also more likely to fail at school or engage in risky behaviours (e.g., truancy, absconding, substance abuse, and risky sexual behaviour). They have also been found to feel less loved, less socially supported by the adults around them (especially carers) and less secure (Lausten and Frederiksen, 2016); these children also indicated having less choice about their leisure time as well as less stable lives (Dinisman, Montserrat and Casas, 2012). It is clear that the child's feeling of acceptance from the carer as well as an overall sense of security are important needs during this life cycle, including stimulus from the environment in which adolescents experience their maturation. All of these factors have also been linked to how children experience happiness and how they value satisfaction with their lives.

RESEARCH GOALS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Following from the above discussion and the current state of literature, the present research is guided by the following aims: (1) to analyse the structural, affective, and cognitive dimensions of preconceptions, i.e. to determine what children from Czech primary schools aged 10–15 associate happiness/satisfaction with, and to ascertain their levels of happiness/satisfaction; and (2) to examine selected factors (see below) and analyse whether they affect children's experiences of happiness/satisfaction.

Research studies conducted in the Czech Republic provide insufficient knowledge of the factors affecting children's happiness/satisfaction. Using primary empirical data, this study will therefore explore and analyse the characteristics and psychosocial factors that have been identified as significant in international literature (see an overview above).

The aim will be to answer the following research question: *How do the happiness/satisfaction levels of children (aged 10–15) from Czech primary schools differ based on*: (i) gender and age; (ii) the environment in which they have spent their childhood (at home in a complete family, at home in a single-parent family, or in institutional care settings) (referred to henceforth as 'childhood environment'); (iii) subjective assessment of the security and stimulation of their childhood environment (safe, unsafe, stimulating, non-stimulating); (iv) subjective assessment of the feeling of acceptance by their caregiver (feels accepted or does not feel accepted by the parent, foster parent, social worker, educator in an institution, etc.); (v) subjective assessment of spirituality (considers himself/herself a spiritual person or does not consider him/herself a spiritual person); (vi) subjective assessment of one's own personality typology (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic); and (vii) whether they associate happiness/satisfaction with the concept of hedonism or eudaimonia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research sample, data collection and research ethics

The research was conducted in the Czech Republic on 954 primary school children at the beginning of 2020 in the period before schools were closed as a measure against the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The age of the surveyed children ranged from 10 to 15 years (M = 13.26, SD = 1.49). Girls (n = 573, 60.1%) were represented more than boys in the research study. Non-probability sampling was used, specifically, a selection of children was available (as this research sample is not representative, the validity of the study findings cannot be applied to the entire child population; the research findings, however, may be viewed as detailing certain indicators that predict happiness/satisfaction of pupils from Czech primary schools). The sample was compiled in cooperation with primary schools and several other forms of institutional care centres (e.g., children's homes, shelters, corrective institutes, diagnostic institutes, and psychiatric facilities). All of these institutions were contacted and requested to participate in the research through e-mail contacts listed in the publicly available Directory of Educational Institutions of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic and in the Register of Social Service Providers in the Czech Republic. The institutions that expressed a willingness to participate in the research were selected. Data collection was carried out online with the informed consent of the headmaster, the head of the institution (or another person of appropriate competence), or the child's legal guardian. The administration of the questionnaires was provided by trained persons of the institution. In accordance with the Code of Ethics of Czech Educational Research Association and the guidelines specified in the American Psychological Association Manual (2009), the children were thoroughly acquainted with the research objectives and all the essential aspects associated with participation in the study (i.e., anonymity, voluntary participation, possibility of withdrawing from the research at any time). The study research plan was also evaluated and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the J. E. Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem (proceedings number pf_ujep_11/2022/02).

Research tools and processing/analysis of obtained data

The research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire with several parts. The first part introduced the objectives of the research and provided instructions for completion. The next part employed two scales, the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999) and the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS) (Huebner, 1991). The SHS was used in order to collect data on the affective dimension of preconceptions; this instrument consists of four items measured on a 7-point scale to determine the overall level of happiness. The total score indicated the level of happiness, with higher values indicating a higher level of happiness. The SLSS measures the cognitive dimension of preconceptions, and in our case was used to collect data on the subjective assessment of children's overall (global) life satisfaction. The SLSS contained seven statements, for which the children were able to express their level of (dis) agreement on a 6-point scale, with higher scores indicating higher life satisfaction.

As some other studies have noted, both scales are suitable for use with children aged 8 to 18 years, have satisfactory psychometric properties, and represent a unidimensional

construct in terms of factor structure (Holder, Coleman and Wallace, 2010; Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal, 2014; Jiang and Huebner, 2017; Dai and Chu, 2018; Leto, Petrenko and Slobodskaya, 2019). The individual items/questions from SHS and SLSS which were used in this research were translated by the author of this work from the English language into Czech. Subsequently, a back translation into English was performed in order to assess the conformity of the translation with the original version. Next, validation and adaptation of SHS and SLSS in the Czech environment were performed, with the psychometric properties of these scales verified (the results of the psychometric analysis of the SHS and SLSS in Czech primary school pupils are described in the Results section – see below).

To analyse the structural dimension of preconceptions, the incomplete sentence method was used in the questionnaire. This is a non-standardized method, the purpose of which is to identify concepts that come to the subject's mind in relation to happiness/satisfaction. The pupils commented on only one formulated unfinished sentence, namely '*When you say happiness/satisfaction, I think of…*'. The children's task was to name one key term that they would associate with happiness/satisfaction. As in another thematically-related study (López-Pérez, Sánchez and Gummerum, 2016), the chosen technique appeared to be suitable for subsequent comparison, categorical classification, and the statistical processing of associated terms. The last section of the questionnaire examined the children's sociodemographic characteristics along with living conditions and circumstances.

The obtained data was analysed using the SPSS program ver. 26 and SPSS AMOS ver. 23. In analyses, linear regression (Enter method) was applied as the main procedure. This regression was used to determine the effect of observed sociodemographic characteristics and psychosocial factors on the dependent variable. The summary raw score for both scales (SHS/SLSS) was calculated based on the arithmetic mean of the items (a higher value indicates a higher level of experienced happiness/satisfaction) and represents the dependent variable in the regression analysis. For the data obtained through the incomplete sentence method, a qualitative content analysis of the terms chosen by the children was performed. In the first phase of open coding, the terms were classified into a total of seven categories, i.e. happiness/satisfaction was conceptualised in terms of: '*interpersonal aspects of life*' (e.g. friendship, family, relationships with people); '*material well-being*' (e.g. money, home, computer); '*pleasure and leisure*' (e.g. joy, fun, sport); '*value of health*' (e.g. health, absence of disease); '*need for personal development*' (e.g. school, study, recognition, learning, autonomy, good performance); '*life harmony*' (e.g. peace, love, freedom, tranquillity); and '*does not know/did not answer*'. In the second phase of coding, the concepts were classified into categories that reflected the '*hedonic*' (e.g., money, entertainment) or '*eudaimonic paradigm*' (good performance, health, peace, recognition). The reliability of the coding into the above categories was estimated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient. The values obtained indicated a moderately strong, and therefore acceptable, degree of agreement in the coding of terms between the author of this work and an independent evaluator ($\varkappa = 0.43$; $p < 0.001$) (Landis and Koch, 1977). An analysis of the frequency of associated terms in these categories was performed and a dummy variable (hedonic vs. eudaimonic paradigm) was created which served in the linear regression analysis as an explanatory predictor of the children's happiness/satisfaction.

RESULTS

Validity and reliability of the Czech versions of the SHS and SLSS scales

The construct validity, including the factor structure of the SHS and SLSS questionnaires, was verified using confirmatory (CFA) factor analyses. For the 4-item SHS scale, the results of the CFA performed on a sample of 954 children (aged 10–15) from Czech primary schools showed that the assumed one-factor model adequately corresponds to the data. The chi-square test value (χ^2 (2.543) = 2, p = 0.280) served as an absolute indicator of the fit. Other relevant indices of the model's conformity with the data [(specifically the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA); Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR); Comparative Fit Index (CFI); and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)] also provided satisfactory results (RMSEA = 0.017 with 90% CI: 0.000, 0.069; SRMR = 0.016; CFI = 0.999; TLI = 0.998). The standardised factor loadings of the four SHS items within the factor were sufficiently high (with values ranging from 0.83 to 0.49).

The CFA results also confirmed the unidimensional structure of the 7-item SLSS scale and the overall good conformity of the model with the data. The chi-square test (χ^2 (25.667) = 14, $p < 0.05$) indicated that the model represented the data rather unsatisfactorily (the significant difference found between the observed covariance matrix and the covariance matrix implied by the model may be due to the sample size). However, the RMSEA values = 0.030 with 90% CI: 0.009, 0.047; SRMR = 0.032; CFI = 0.996; TLI = 0.994 were acceptable. In addition, the standardised factor loadings for the seven SLSS items within the factor were sufficiently high, ranging from 0.86 to 0.45.

With regards to reliability, the Cronbach's alpha (α) and McDonald's omega (ω) coefficients were used to estimate the internal consistency of the SHS and SLSS. The SHS can be considered reliable, as the coefficients had acceptable values ($\alpha = 0.775$, 95% CI [0.750, 0.798]; $\omega = 0.777$, 95% CI [0.755, 0.800]). The coefficients for the SLSS were also acceptably high, thus this instrument can also be considered reliable ($\alpha = 0.853$, 95% CI [0.838, 0.866]; $\omega = 0.854$, 95% CI [0.840, 0.868]). Verification of test-retest reliability was performed on a sample of 180 children from Czech primary schools one month after the initial administration of the questionnaires (SHS, $r = 0.615$, $p < 0.001$; SLSS, $r = 0.594$, $p < 0.001$). Both tools met the basic requirements for stability over time.

Following the model of the original SHS and SLSS instruments, it turned out that both tested Czech versions showed a unidimensional factor structure and high reliability. The Czech versions of the tools also contain an identical number of questionnaire items with an identical answer format.

Conceptualisations of happiness/satisfaction

Based on the incomplete sentence method, the structural dimension of preconceptions was identified, i.e., the concepts that children most often associated with happiness/satisfaction were ascertained (see Table 1).

The analysis showed that almost 27% of children from Czech primary schools did not indicate any term to describe what they associate with happiness/satisfaction. By contrast, about a fifth of the children associated happiness/satisfaction with the interpersonal aspects of life, i.e., with concepts that are in some way related to friendship, family, its individual members, relationships, society, etc. An interesting finding is that children associated happiness/satisfaction with the need for personal development rather than with material well-being or pleasure and leisure activities (e.g., travel, sports, etc.). Overall, about a tenth of all of the children, and therefore only a small portion, perceived happiness/satisfaction in terms of the harmony of life or the value of health.

A total of 697 terms from the above categories (with the exception of the 'does not know/did not answer' category) were submitted for the second-order analysis, which aimed to determine whether children view happiness/satisfaction in terms of eudaimonia or hedonism. This analysis showed that children associated happiness/satisfaction with the eudaimonial paradigm (n = 477, 68.4%) rather than with the hedonic one (n = 220, 31.6%).

Category	Absolute frequency of terms	Relative frequency of terms (in %)
Does not know/did not answer	257	26.9
The interpersonal aspects of life	194	20.3
The need for personal development	167	17.5
Pleasure and leisure	123	12.9
Material well-being	97	10.2
Life harmony	89	9.3
The value of health	27	2.8
In total	**954**	**100.00**

Table 1: Representation of associated terms in individual categories, 2022 (source: own calculation)

The levels of happiness and satisfaction

The values of the average score (M) given in Table 2 express the level of happiness (measured by the SHS) and the overall life satisfaction of the children (SLSS). The table 2 shows that the children from Czech primary schools described themselves as relatively happy and also assessed their own life satisfaction positively. Correlation analysis also showed a significant and positive link between the degree of happiness and the overall satisfaction rating ($r = 0.718$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 954$). The results of the research further show that the highest levels of happiness and satisfaction were declared generally by the boys as well as by those who spent their childhood at home in a complete family (i.e., with both mother and father), considered their environment safe and stimulating, and felt accepted by their caregivers. Regarding the subjective assessment of spirituality, it was found that those who considered themselves to be spiritual declared only a slightly higher level of happiness than those who did not. Table 2 also shows that children who described themselves as cheerful (labelling themselves as 'sanguine') achieved the highest average scores on both the SHS and SLSS. Also, children who associated happiness/satisfaction with concepts reflecting the hedonic paradigm showed higher values of the average score on the SHS/SLSS than those who associated happiness with the eudaimonic paradigm.

Exploration of the effect of sociodemographic characteristics and psychosocial factors on happiness/satisfaction

For the following analytical purposes, a strong correlation between happiness and satisfaction is considered. Therefore, one complex model (happiness/satisfaction) was analysed instead of two separate regression analyses for happiness and satisfaction. Tables 3 show the result of the regression analysis obtained by the standard Enter method. In accordance with the objectives of this research (see previous sections), the primary purpose of the analysis was to identify and describe how much of the variance of the dependent variable can be explained by predictors, or the influence that individual independent variables have on level of happiness/satisfaction. For a more accurate estimation of the predictive power (effect) of individual independent variables included in the model on the dependent variable, standardised regression coefficients (β) and values of squared structure coefficients (r_s^2)[4] have been interpreted (Courville and Thompson, 2001; Yeatts et al., 2017). Before performing the calculations, diagnostics of collinearity and outliers which might disrupt the parameter estimates were performed. The parameters of the Cook distance did not indicate outliers, which ranged from 0.000–0.043 for SHS/SLSS model. Regression model was not affected by multicollinearity, as shown by tolerance values of no less than 0.1 and a variance inflation factor (VIF) that ranged from 1.021 to 1.322.

4 The standardised beta coefficients (β) indicate the extent to which a particular predictor accepts 'credit' for the prediction of a dependent variable given that the effect of other predictors in the regression model is controlled. Structure coefficients (r_s) provide information on the predictive utility of predictors. The structure coefficients show how the predictor is related to the so-called Yhat ($\hat{Y}$) score independently of other predictors. The $\hat{Y}$ score then represents the predicted estimate of the resultant variable based on the synthesis of all predictors in the regression equation. Finally, the squared structure coefficient (r_s^2) shows how much variance the $\hat{Y}$ predictor itself can explain, that is how much deviation of the effect of R^2 it can explain.

		Happiness– SHS (scale 1–7)	Satisfaction – SLSS (scale 1–6)
	N (%)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Respondents	954 (100.0)	4.70 (1.30)	4.40 (1.04)
Male	381 (39.9)	4.85 (1.22)	4.45 (1.04)
Female	573 (60.1)	4.60 (1.34)	4.37 (1.04)
Environment in which children spent their childhood			
At home in a complete family	670 (70.2)	4.88 (1.24)	4.57 (0.94)
At home in a single-parent family	181 (19.0)	4.26 (1.41)	4.12 (1.08)
In institutional care	103 (10.8)	4.29 (1.25)	3.79 (1.26)
Subjective assessment of the feeling of security in the environment in which children spent their childhood			
Safe	815 (85.4)	4.77 (1.27)	4.50 (0.98)
Unsafe	73 (7.7)	4.08 (1.42)	3.63 (1.29)
Does not know	66 (6.9)	4.48 (1.39)	4.08 (1.05)
Subjective assessment of the stimulating nature of the environment in which children spent their childhood			
Stimulating	491 (51.5)	4.84 (1.25)	4.51 (1.01)
Non-stimulating	110 (11.5)	4.28 (1.30)	3.88 (1.23)
Does not know	353 (37.0)	4.63 (1.34)	4.42 (0.97)
Subjective evaluation of the feeling of acceptance by the caregiver			
Feels accepted	855 (89.6)	4.82 (1.24)	4.53 (0.95)
Does not feel accepted	56 (5.9)	3.39 (1.15)	2.92 (1.16)
Does not know	43 (4.5)	3.91 (1.40)	3.82 (0.96)
Subjective assessment of spirituality			
Considers him/herself spiritual	396 (41.5)	4.71 (1.32)	4.37 (1.04)
Does not consider him/herself spiritual	473 (49.6)	4.70 (1.30)	4.41 (1.06)
Does not know	85 (8.9)	4.64 (1.20)	4.52 (0.92)
Subjective assessment of the typology of one's own personality			
Sanguine	355 (37.2)	5.30 (1.09)	4.72 (0.84)
Choleric	178 (18.7)	4.36 (1.17)	4.25 (1.07)
Phlegmatic	148 (15.5)	4.91 (1.12)	4.58 (0.90)
Melancholic	273 (28.6)	4.02 (1.34)	3.99 (1.16)
Conception of happiness/satisfaction			
Hedonism	220 (31.6)	4.61 (1.26)	4.29 (1.10)
Eudaimonia	477 (68.4)	4.46 (1.29)	4.21 (1.01)

Table 2: Measurement values on the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) and Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS), 2022 (source: own calculation)

Taken together, the predictors in the regression model (Table 3) explained more than 30% of the variance of the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.320$, $F = 20.022$, $p < 0.001$). The substantive significance of the model was assessed using the Cohen index f^2, the value (0.47) of which indicates that the effect size was large (Cohen, 1988). Other calculations show that age, childhood environment, the feeling of acceptance by the caregiver, and the respondents' subjective assessment of their own personality typology had substantively significant effects on the level of happiness/satisfaction. The children who described themselves as 'melancholic' also declared significantly lower levels of happiness/satisfaction than other children. This predictor had the most significant effect in the regression model ($\beta = -0.334$, $p < 0.001$; $r_s^2 = 0.292$). If the children did not feel accepted by their caregiver, this had a clearly negative effect on their level of happiness/satisfaction ($\beta = -0.249$, $p < 0.001$; $r_s^2 = 0.354$). These two predictors were the most powerful. An evaluation of the effect of other variables in the model showed that the level of happiness/satisfaction is lower for older children ($\beta = -0.126$, $p < 0.001$). Compared to the children from complete families, the children who spent their childhood at home in a single-parent family ($\beta = -0.158$, $p < 0.001$) or in institutional care ($\beta = -0.158$, $p < 0.001$) showed substantively far lower level of happiness/satisfaction. The regression model also shows that the following factors did not have substantively significant effects on the level of the children's happiness/satisfaction: gender, the children's subjective evaluation of the safety and stimulation of environment, subjective evaluation of their own spirituality, and whether they associated happiness/satisfaction with the eudaimonic or hedonic paradigm.

Predictors	B	SE	β	r_s	r^2_s
Constant	6.368	(0.309)***			
Gender (ref. male)	0.006	(0.070)	0.003	-0.120	0.014
Age	-0.089	(0.023)***	-0.126	-0.328	0.108
Environment in which children spent their childhood (ref. at home in a complete family)					
At home in a single-parent family	-0.424	(0.087)***	-0.158	-0.275	0.076
In institutional care	-0.535	(0.113)***	-0.158	-0.316	0.100
Subjective assessment of the feeling of security in the environment in which children spent their childhood (ref. safe)					
Unsafe	-0.248	(0.136)	-0.063	-0.347	0.120
Does not know	-0.250	(0.136)	-0.060	-0.131	0.017
Subjective assessment of the stimulating nature of the environment in which children spent their childhood (ref. stimulating)					
Non-stimulating	-0.186	(0.114)	-0.057	-0.294	0.087
Does not know	-0.035	(0.075)	-0.016	-0.022	0.000
Subjective evaluation of the feeling of acceptance by the caregiver (ref. feels accepted)					
Does not feel accepted	-1.114	(0.156)***	-0.249	-0.595	0.354
Does not know	-0.650	(0.162)***	-0.128	-0.240	0.057
Subjective assessment of spirituality (ref. considers him/herself spiritual)					
Does not consider him/herself spiritual	0.024	(0.071)	0.012	0.005	0.000
Does not know	0.067	(0.126)	0.018	0.027	0.001
Subjective assessment of the typology of one's own personality (ref. sanguine)					
Choleric	-0.453	(0.096)***	-0.168	-0.178	0.032
Phlegmatic	-0.167	(0.102)	-0.057	0.136	0.019
Melancholic	-0.778	(0.085)***	-0.334	-0.540	0.292
Eudaimonian paradigm (ref. hedonic)	-0.101	(0.073)	-0.044	-0.080	0.006

*Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. R2 = 0.320.*

Table 3: Variables predicting the degree of children's happiness/satisfaction (SHS/SLSS scale), 2022 (source: own calculation)

DISCUSSION

In this research study, the preconceptions of children regarding their own happiness and satisfaction were investigated. These preconceptions were analysed as multidimensional entities consisting of cognitive, affective, and structural dimensions, i.e., with this research we sought to determine what children aged 10–15 years associate happiness/satisfaction with, and which sociodemographic characteristics and psychosocial factors are related to their experiences of happiness and overall satisfaction. The research was conducted with 954 Czech primary school children using the incomplete sentence method and the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999) and the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1991). As in other studies (Leto, Petrenko and Slobodskaya, 2019), both scales used in this study showed strong psychometric properties, and both met the conditions for use in the Czech cultural context and for the given age group in terms of adaptation and validation.

The theme of the preconceptions of pupils regarding their own happiness and satisfaction has been relatively neglected in the Czech research context. In addition, in the Czech educational context there is currently no targeted strategy or systemic support directed at strengthening and supporting the subjective well-being and mental health of pupils or teachers. We can contrast this with the situation in Ireland, for example, where this issue is a key educational priority. In Ireland, the "Well-being Policy Statement and Framework for Practice" has been adopted, a document which offers schools and educational institutions recommendations based on international research findings and practice in the area of support and evaluation of subjective well-being. As evidenced by a number of studies in various regions, the experience of happiness and overall satisfaction of children is a key predictor of their mental health, especially in the adolescent period. From the point of view of psychosocial development, adolescence is a dynamic, sensitive and vulnerable period. It is therefore particularly important to devote attention to the mental health of children in terms of psychological, pedopsychiatric, pedagogical as well as research work. This should include research on the early identification of difficulties that may lead to the development of more serious problems in later adulthood, as well as personality, social, contextual and other factors which affect the well-being of children.

The results of the present research show that almost one third of the children could not (or did not wish to) specify what they associate happiness/satisfaction with. For some children, this topic may have been too sensitive (the research was conducted on a sample that included children who are in institutional care); this may have been a factor influencing the children who

chose not to answer. It is also possible that the construct of happiness/satisfaction may be too abstract for these children, i.e., some children may not have been able to properly conceptualise the topic or to express in one word what they associate happiness/satisfaction with. An interesting finding of this research is that those who seemed able to conceptually grasp these constructs associated happiness/satisfaction mainly with interpersonal aspects of life and the need for personal development (e.g., in terms of success in school) rather than with material well-being or pleasure and leisure activities (travel, sports, etc.). The phenomenon of happiness/satisfaction was therefore viewed by the children mainly in accordance with the eudaimonial paradigm rather than the hedonic one. These findings echo those of López-Pérez, Sánchez and Gummerum (2016), who also found that Spanish adolescents aged 14–16 associated happiness mainly with the need for personal goals (to prove something or be someone).

Regardless of the effect of the analysed factors, the child respondents from Czech primary schools described themselves as relatively happy and satisfied. In terms of sociodemographic characteristics such as gender and age, the boys and girls did not differ significantly in their levels of happiness and satisfaction. Although some research studies on the adult population have found a minimal influence of age on life satisfaction and happiness (Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002), the situation appears to less equivocal for children/adolescents. The findings of our research are also in line with other research documenting that as children age, their happiness/satisfaction level tend to decline (Proctor, Linley and Maltby, 2009; Shek and Liu, 2014). Lower level of happiness/satisfaction with increasing age may be caused by societal pressure as well as by individual psychological factors and developmental specifics typical for the period of older school age. In terms of cognitive development, abstract thinking begins to develop at about age 11, with this development later accompanied by a number of changes characteristic to biological and sexual adolescence which are linked, for example, to hormonal changes. These changes can lead to emotional instability, and thus to lower levels of happiness and satisfaction. The period of older school age and adolescence is also significantly associated with hope, aspirations, and finding one's place in school and society, all of which are related to performance in school or at work as well as relationships with peers, often including comparisons with them. Level of happiness/satisfaction during this period also depend on how children/adolescents perceive, evaluate, and relate to themselves (self-image vs. ideal) (Povedano-Diaz, Muñiz-Rivas and Vera-Perea, 2020).

Our analyses of the empirical data showed that the most important predictors of the children's happiness/satisfaction, i.e., those which showed a more significant impact than did the measured sociodemographic characteristics (especially gender), include socialisation in the childhood environment, acceptance by their caregivers, and personality typology. By contrast, our research did not find a link between spirituality and the children's happiness/satisfaction. Further, no link was found between levels of happiness/satisfaction and whether the children consciously associated these constructs with the hedonic or eudaimonic paradigm.

Data from our research shows that children who have spent their childhood in a two-parent family were happier and more satisfied than children from single-parent families and those in institutional care. Socialisation in an environment that was assessed as unsafe and non-stimulating had a negative effect on the respondents' subjective assessment of happiness/satisfaction. The negative impact of a non-stimulating family environment and institutional care facilities on happiness/satisfaction as well as on the overall quality of life of children/adolescents has been demonstrated in a number of studies (Schütz et al., 2014; Leto, Petrenko and Slobodskaya, 2019; Delgado et al., 2020). Other research has also found that children/adolescents with this kind of socialisation experience are at a significantly higher risk of developing socially undesirable behaviour. For such individuals, the likelihood of receiving less social support from adult caregivers (including parents, educators, social workers in collective settings) is also higher, and they are more likely to be less well-placed in society. Among other applications, the results of our research can be useful for policy makers who make decisions regarding the implementation of actions to strengthen well-being strategies in education and to thus improve care for vulnerable groups of children. This is even more vital in countries such as the Czech Republic, where the policy of placing children at risk in institutional settings is still highly prevalent. As outlined in this study, the consequences of institutionalisation are associated with negative impacts on the well-being of these children.

In our study, the feeling of acceptance from the caregiver also showed a significant link to the subjective assessment of happiness/satisfaction, with the data showing that the children who did not feel accepted by their caregiver reported significantly lower levels of happiness/satisfaction. As Lausten and Frederiksen (2016) as well as Leto, Petrenko and Slobodskaya (2019) point out, family cohesion and family organisation – including the relationships among family members – are important factors related to subjective feelings of happiness/satisfaction. Among other effects, a positive relationship between the parent and child acts as a 'buffer' against the negative influences and stressful events that children face; positive relationships also help to promote in the child an overall positive perception of life (Shek and Liu, 2014). Establishing this kind of constructive relationship between a carer (e.g., educator or teacher) and a child in institutional care, however, is quite difficult. Research in this context has shown (Schütz et al., 2014) that a combination of factors, such as a weak feeling of acceptance by the caregiver as well as spending childhood in a non-stimulating environment, in an environment where conflicts are common and/or in institutional care can significantly increase the likelihood of emotional/social instability, stigmatisation and social exclusion.

The self-assessment of personality typology and the feeling of acceptance by the caregiver proved to be the two most important predictors of the happiness/satisfaction of the children in this research. Analyses showed that children who described themselves as having a 'cheerful personality [and] often laughing (sanguine)' were significantly happier/satisfied than children who categorised themselves as 'quick-tempered (choleric)', a 'calm person who does not often get

thrown off (phlegmatic)', or 'very thoughtful, rather reserved (melancholic)', with the 'melancholic' considering themselves the least happy and satisfied. The personality traits of melancholy are most associated with traits of neuroticism, while anxiety, clumsiness, sadness, anguish, depression or pessimistic behaviour, including lower adaptability, predominate in terms of emotional experience. The child's temperament may change during the periods of personality development, thus some of the traits which determine the emotionality of the personality may not yet be fully developed in the respondents of this research. Although from a psychological point of view it is necessary to view the development of personality in children/adolescents as a relatively variable construct, research in both the adult population and children shows that an individual's personality and happiness/satisfaction level are closely related. In the literature, views have been expressed intimating that satisfaction and happiness are determined primarily by predispositions (Keyes, Myers and Kendler, 2010), although other authors do not fully agree with this assessment and emphasise the effect of other factors. It appears that neuroticism is the major negative predictor of happiness/satisfaction and, conversely, extraversion is associated with a higher degree of happiness/satisfaction (Proctor, Linley and Maltby, 2010; Leto, Petrenko and Slobodskaya, 2019; Stavrova, 2019). Two theories may explain these associations. One theory is that extraverts are predisposed to experiencing more positive emotions, while neurotics are predisposed towards more negative emotions. The second purports that extraversion and neuroticism predispose individuals to experience certain situations that affect feelings of happiness. For example, extroverts may subconsciously seek out social situations that increase their feelings of happiness. Both theories have found support among particular groups of scientists (Holder and Klassen, 2010).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Certain limitations of our research should be mentioned. First, it can be argued that the research sample used was not representative, and therefore the degree of generalisation of the research results is debatable and rather limited, i.e., the results are merely indicative in nature. The use of the self-assessment scales in the questionnaire could also be considered problematic. Young children may have a lower ability to appropriately and objectively assess their own spirituality or personality typology, a possibility which could have influenced the results of this research. In this respect, it would be more appropriate to use a standardised multi-item tool (e.g., Piers–Harris 2 Children's Self-Concept Scale, ver. 2), despite the fact that these instruments come with their own sets of limitations. In this study, we used an analytical strategy that takes into account the strong relationship between happiness and satisfaction. In this regard, future studies should use more specific research instruments that can more precisely measure the individual domains of life satisfaction and happiness in more detail (e.g., assessment of satisfaction in relationships, with family background, school, etc.), i.e., not instruments that focus more on a general (global) rating of happiness and satisfaction.

The research conducted in the present work has focused on the analysis of a relatively small number of psychosocial factors. Nevertheless, the results of the research have revealed some interesting conclusions that could well present a promising subject for further analysis. Future work could focus on analysing related and insufficiently researched factors that may have an impact on the happiness/satisfaction of children in institutional care (e.g., the effect of the size and location of institutional care facilities, the effect of social inclusion, or the length of client stay in such a facility). In addition, the relationship between the happiness of primary school children and their overall satisfaction with their social relationships (especially the relationship with parents, siblings, peers, teachers, or with other important persons for children/adolescents) has received scant attention in research. Similarly, insufficient attention has been devoted to the long-term effects of childhood circumstances on happiness/satisfaction in adulthood.

In addition, the unfavourable situation associated with social lockdowns and school closures due to the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus only underscores the urgency of dealing with the concept of happiness and well-being in children. Although pre-pandemic results are reported in this study, follow-up work may also use the SHS and SLSS scales to provide empirical evidence to determine, for example, the extent to which subjective levels of happiness/satisfaction in children in other circumstances differ in comparison with the results presented in this study.

In relation to the structural dimension of preconceptions of children from Czech primary schools, this research has attempted to point out what happiness/satisfaction is most often associated with. In this study, only one sentence prompt to be completed with information from the respondent was used to identify the structural dimension of the subject's preconceptions. A limitation of this method is that these results in the form of associated terms may not capture the ideas of pupils about happiness/satisfaction to a sufficiently robust degree, i.e., the concepts identified can provide only a rather rough depiction of what pupils associate happiness/satisfaction with. Although this method has been used relatively often in the research context, it should be supplemented with another set of sentences or possibly with other techniques. Nevertheless, our findings can be used in follow-up studies as well as to compare and contrast work in areas related (both directly and indirectly) to the variables and population examined here, for example, using different research/diagnostic techniques. Other sets of preconceptions of children could be analysed in greater detail, for instance, through the technique of free writing or through phenomenographic interviews. Future studies might also devote attention to a deeper comparison of the perceptions of children with regard to happiness/satisfaction to investigate differences in terms of the effects of various personal or social factors, and/or with regard to the specific contextual conditions that affect children. In this sense, follow-up research might focus in more detail on different age cohorts, on children from different socio-cultural backgrounds as well as on groups of children with disabilities or who are otherwise disadvantaged. Longitudinal research in particular could prove quite useful to fulfilling the goal of providing empirical data from a sample of the child population over a longer period of time.

Perhaps most importantly, the knowledge and insights created through this research as well as by studies on similar themes

connected to the preconceptions of happiness and satisfaction of children is beneficial not only theoretically, but practically in the context of the inclusive education of diverse groups of children. Not only does such background and contextual information greatly help teachers and other school actors to fulfil their roles more effectively, but experts in pedagogical and/or psychological diagnostics would benefit as well from the additional knowledge as they advance their methods.

CONCLUSION

The study described in this paper analysed the preconceptions about happiness/satisfaction among pupils in Czech primary schools in a multidimensional perspective. We sought to explore both the structural dimension of the children's preconceptions (ideas about happiness/satisfaction) as well as the affective (measurement of happiness experienced) and cognitive (self-assessment of satisfaction with life) dimension. The learners most often associated happiness/satisfaction with interpersonal aspects of life and with the need for personal growth. Almost one-third of the pupils, however, mentioned no specific concept through which they could specify their own ideas about happiness/satisfaction. Through the Czech version of the SHS and SLSS questionnaire, a relatively high level of experienced happiness/satisfaction was identified among the respondents. Happiness/satisfaction was lower in children who described themselves in the following ways: 'melancholic', unaccepted by the caregiver, coming from a single-parent family, and spending their childhood in an institutional setting. These four personality and contextual factors contributed very significantly to the prediction of happiness/satisfaction. In contrast, weak effects were found for gender as well as subjective ratings of spirituality, with these factors overall contributing only marginally to the prediction of happiness/satisfaction.

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