

Trends and Gender Differences in Students' Subjective Well-Being (SWB): An International Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

This research verifies the main factors determining the well-being of 15 and 16-year-old students, drawing on data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 and 2022, the analysis covers five countries, The United Arab Emirates, Spain, Hong Kong (China), Mexico, and Panama, selected due to the availability of comparable well-being indicators across both assessment cycles. Students' life satisfaction is employed as the core indicator of well-being and analyzed through Ordered Logit models, complemented by Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition to examine gender disparities and their underlying mechanisms. The results indicate that school-related factors, particularly bullying, sense of belonging, and school location, play a central role in shaping adolescents' life satisfaction. Family support and socioeconomic resources are also positively associated with well-being, while mental health variables, especially anxiety and body image, emerge as increasingly influential over time. Furthermore, the analysis identifies persistent gender gaps in life satisfaction, with girls systematically reporting lower levels of well-being than boys. The study reveals that these gaps are predominantly driven by factors beyond observable characteristics that remain unexplained. These findings underscore the complex interplay of school climate, family environment, and individual mental health in shaping adolescent well-being, highlighting the need for targeted, gender-sensitive educational policies.

Keywords: Subjective well-being; Satisfaction with life; Adolescence. Happiness; Gender differences