

Well being as health's indicator

Abstract

According to the World Health Organization, health is more than the absence of disease; it represents a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, tied closely to the enjoyment of fundamental human rights. Well-being can be understood through two traditions: the hedonic (which emphasizes happiness and the pursuit of pleasure), and the eudaemonic (which focuses on personal development and human potential). Another relevant dimension, the social well-being, evaluates societal functioning and support systems. Recent studies emphasize the importance of understanding well-being comprehensively rather than in fragmented perspectives. This study explored the different dimensions of well-being- subjective, eudaemonic, and social- among Argentine citizens. Results revealed generally high levels of subjective and eudaemonic well-being, with autonomy and personal growth standing out as key indicators, reflecting participants' sense of independence and dedication to self-development. Life satisfaction and vitality were also high, though social well-being scored below the theoretical average, indicating negative assessments of societal functioning. Experienced well-being revealed a balance of positive and negative experiences, with a tendency toward enjoyment and satisfaction. Differences in well-being were observed across gender, age, marital status, and perceived social class. Notably, religious practice was associated with higher social well-being, though it also linked to increased negative affect. Despite limitations in sample size and scope, findings highlight the complexity of well-being and the need for comprehensive approaches to address social needs and promote effective interventions.

Keywords: health, well-being, hedonic tradition, eudaemonic tradition, life satisfaction, affect

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Marcela Muratori,¹ Elena Mercedes Zubieta²

¹CONICET/Universidad de la Defensa Nacional, Argentina

²Facultad de Psicología, CONICET/Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina

Correspondence: Marcela Muratori, INDAE-Colegio Militar de la Nación, CONICET/Universidad de la Defensa Nacional, Argentina, Tel +5491144132713

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Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO),^{1,2} health is more than just the absence of disease; it is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, closely linked to the full enjoyment of the fundamental rights of human being.

Well-being has been approached primarily from two perspectives: one related to happiness (the hedonic tradition) and the other linked to the development of the human person (the eudaemonic tradition). Later, Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff³ expanded on these classifications, referring to them as subjective well-being and psychological well-being. While both constructs are related, they represent different facets of positive psychological functioning, and thus, of an individual's well-being.⁴

Initially, empirical studies considered happiness to be the only indicator of positive psychological functioning.⁵ However, subjective well-being now also includes people's beliefs and feelings about whether they lead desirable and rewarding lives.⁶ This perspective examines how and why people experience their lives positively, including cognitive judgments and affective reactions.⁷

While the hedonic approach emphasizes happiness by defining well-being in terms of the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of displeasure, the eudaemonic perspective focuses on the actualization of human potential. It considers well-being as the fulfillment or realization of this potential.⁸ Accordingly, studies on psychological well-being focus on personal development, the approach to life challenges, and the effort to achieve goals.⁵ Within this framework, social well-being is understood as individuals' assessment of the circumstances and functioning of society.¹ Hervás and Vázquez² argue that well-being comprises general, hedonic, eudaemonic, and social dimensions, considering it essential to approach the construct comprehensively rather than in fragmented ways.

At the local level, in a line of work initiated years ago, we began investigating well-being in relation to other relevant collective aspects. These included the perception of social problems, the collective affectivity predominant in the environment, which arises from the quality of the relationships established within it, and trust in institutions as mechanisms through which society responds to the people's needs.

Bases on the above, it is clear that studying well-being levels as diagnostic criteria for mental health is necessary.³ For this reason, the aim of this empirical study was to explore the different dimensions of well-being- subjective, eudaemonic, and social- among Argentine citizens. Additionally, it aimed to verify whether statistically significant differences exist based on sociodemographic and psychosocial variables such as gender, age, social class, importance attributed to religion, and ideological positioning.

Methods

Type of study and design: This is a correlational study (group difference study) and follows a cross-sectional, non-experimental design, with the general population serving as the unit of analysis.

Sample: The sample was selected through intentional non-probabilistic sampling and composed of 243 Argentines from various cities across the country (Table 1).

Instrument: The study utilized a self-administered questionnaire consisting of socio-demographic items and the following scales:

- Pemberton Happiness Index (Hervás & Vázquez, 2013). The Index consists of 21 items divided into two subscales. The Remembered Well-Being subscale, evaluates components from different well-being traditions (hedonic, eudaemonic, and social) through 11 items on a Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). This subscale demonstrated

satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = .90$). The Experienced Well-Being subscale assesses affective states and current feelings via 10 items, measuring the presence or absence of positive ($\alpha = .58$) and negative ($\alpha = .63$) experiences.

Table 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample

Category	Data
Gender	30.5% male 69.5% female
Age (Mean)	32.71 years (SD = 12.18; min = 18; max = 78)
Marital Status	Single: 64.6% Married/Cohabiting: 30% Divorced/Separated: 5.3%
Socioeconomic Class	Lower/Lower-Middle: 39.3% Middle: 42.7% Upper/Upper-middle: 18%
Political Orientation	Center-Right: 19.4% Center: 21.1% Center-Left: 59.5%
Importance of Religion	Not at all important: 58.9% Somewhat important: 26.1% Quite important: 9.1% Very important: 5.8%

Procedure: This study was approved as part of the UBACyT (P20020220200034BA) project, titled 'Well-being: Socio-cognitive Bases and Psychosocial Correlates,' directed by Dr. Elena Zubieta, with Dr. Marcela Muratori as a member of the responsible team. The project (Resolution No. RESCS-2022-881-E-UBA-REC) has been approved and is supported by the Secretariat of Science and Technology at the University of Buenos Aires of Argentina. The study adhered to ethical standards, including informed consent and the management of confidentiality and privacy. Participants were thoroughly informed about the purpose, methods, and benefits of the research prior to providing their consent. All participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the study. Furthermore, the questionnaire was administered anonymously, and participants were assured that the information collected would be utilized only for academic and scientific purposes. The questionnaire was administered individually via the Survey Monkey platform in December 2023.

Data analysis was conducted using the SPSS21 statistical package.

Results

As shown in Table 2, the averages related to well-being are generally high. The highest scores were recorded in eudaimonic well-being, encompassing the six dimensions of psychological well-being proposed by Ryff⁵. Notably, autonomy stood out, referring to the sense of self-determination, Independence, and personal authority. Personal growth also emerged as significant, reflecting participants' interest in developing their potential, as well as their belief in their ability to grow as individuals and enhance their capacities. Although slightly lower, participants still demonstrated high levels of life satisfaction and vitality. Conversely, social well-being scored below the theoretical average, indicating a relatively negative assessment of the circumstances and functioning of the society in which participants are embedded.

Table 2 Descriptive scores of the items in the Remembered Well-being subscale, corresponding to the traditions of well-being

Remembered Well-being subscale			M	SD
Subjective Well-being- cognitive		I feel very satisfied with my life	6.57	1.91
Subjective Well-being- hedonic	Positive affect	I enjoy many little things every day	7.09	2.35
	Negative affect	In my day to day life I have many moments when I feel bad(*)	6.22	2.47
Vitality		I feel energized enough to do my daily tasks well	6.21	2.23
Eudaemonic Well-being	Meaning of life	I feel that my life is useful and valuable	7.51	2.38
	Self-acceptance	I feel satisfied with the way I am	7.03	2.04
	Personal growth	My life is full of learning and challenges that make me grow	7.78	2.31
	Social relations	I feel very close to the people around me	7.58	2.28
	Perception of control	I feel capable of solving most of my day-to-day problems	7.3	2.03
	Autonomy	I feel that in the important things I can be myself	7.82	2.09
Social well-being		I feel that I live in a society that allows me to fully develop	4.49	2.54
Total score of Remembered Well-Being			6.86	1.58

Note. *Reverse item.

Regarding the well-being experienced (Table 3), participants reported a balance between positive and negative experiences, with a tendency towards satisfaction, enjoyment and fun. The percentage presented reflect the proportion of participants who declared having experienced the conditions described by each item.

Table 3 Descriptive scores of the items in the Experienced Well-being subscale, corresponding to the traditions of well-being

Experienced Well-Being Sub-scale		%
Positive experiences	Something I did made me proud	61
	I did something fun with someone Hice algo divertido con alguien	73
	I did something I really enjoy doing	79.6
	I learned something interesting	43.4
	I gave myself a treat	60.4
Negative experiences	At times, I felt overwhelmed	67.9
	I was bored most of the time	19.5
	I was worried about personal matters	71.1
	Things happened that made me very angry	32.9
	I felt disrespected	21.4

Next, we sought to analyze differential profiles based on socio-demographic and psychosocial variables. Regarding gender, only statistically significant differences were observed in subjective

cognitive well-being, with male people ($M = 7.09$) reporting feeling more satisfied with their lives than female people ($M = 6.41$) ($t(207) = -2.322$, $p = .02$).

In relation to well-being and age, different interesting associations were observed. As this increases, greater subjective well-being was observed both at the cognitive ($r = .201$, $p = .004$) and hedonic ($r = .212$, $p = .022$) levels, higher levels of vitality ($r = .160$, $p = .021$) and higher levels of eudaemonic well-being with respect to the meaning of life ($r = .144$, $p = .038$), self-acceptance ($r = .145$, $p = .036$), social relationships ($r = .187$, $p = .007$), perception of control ($r = .207$, $p = .003$), and autonomy ($r = .202$, $p = .004$). The only dimensions for which no statistically significant relationship were found were personal growth and social well-being.

Statistically significant differences were found concerning marital status (Table 4). Married individuals reported higher levels of life satisfaction compared to single individuals, as well as experiencing less negative affect. In the same line, in terms of eudaemonic well-being, married people felt a stronger sense of connection to those around them and perceived greater control over their daily lives compared to single people. Regarding autonomy, divorced people demonstrated the highest sense of being able to remain true to themselves in important matters, followed by married persons, and finally single ones.

Table 4 Statistically significant differences in well-being based on marital status

Well-being	Marital status			Anova
	Single	Married	Divorced	
Subjective-cognitive well-being	6.25*	7.24*	7.27	$F(2,206) = 6,406$, $p = .002$
Negative affect	5.15*	4.12*	4.18	$F(2,206) = 4,304$, $p = .015$
Eudaemonic well-being: social relation	7.21*	8.09*	7.64	$F(2,206) = 3,370$, $p = .036$
Eudaemonic well-being: perception of control	6.84*	8.10*	7.72	$F(2,205) = 9,257$, $p = .000$
Eudaemonic well-being: autonomy	7.46	8.2	8.36	$F(2,204) = 3,129$, $p = .046$

Note: The asterisks indicate statistically significant differences between groups according to Scheffé's post-hoc test.

With respect to perceived social class, people who identify as belonging to the low and middle-low class ($M = 6.88$) report feeling less connected to those around them compared to persons who consider themselves middle class ($M = 8.01$) (Social Relations: $F(2,205) = 5,688$, $p = .004$). Those in the high class category score slightly lower ($M = 7.69$).

Finally, people who place greater importance on religion exhibit higher levels of social well-being ($r = .229$, $p = .001$), but also higher levels of negative affect ($r = .167$, $p = .016$). No statistically significant differences were observed in well-being according to ideological positioning.

Discussion and conclusion

The results presented in this article generally corroborate the trends observed in previous studies.⁹⁻¹⁵ On the one hand, high levels of subjective and eudaemonic well-being were identified, even these values are higher than those reported in previous studies conducted in Argentina (Velázquez, Mikkelsen, Linares, & Celemín, 2010).¹⁶

However, social well-being levels were found to be low, confirming the notion that when the focus of assessment shifts to the social environment, well-being levels tend to decrease. In this sense, the most deficient dimension is the one that refers to the ability to perceive an environment that adequately supports the fulfillment of social needs.

When considering the gender variable, male participants reported greater satisfaction with their lives, whereas women displayed higher levels of pessimism in terms of negative affectivity within their environment. Analyzing age, results show that, as individuals grow older, they tend to achieve greater autonomy, have greater control over life events and experience more enjoyment from opportunities to develop their personal abilities.

Regarding differences according to the psychosocial variables, the findings suggest coherence in terms of fulfilling certain basic securities or a materialistic level overcome. This, even at a perceptual level, allows individuals to feel a sense of belonging to a bigger community, fostering self-efficacy and a stronger internal locus of control. Data reinforce, to some extent, finding from quality of life studies that emphasizes the benefits of religious practice for well-being, through the support and containment networks it provides to individuals (Barrientos, 2004).

Despite the limitations of this study in terms of number of participants and sample intentionality, these results highlight the importance of studies of well-being in various areas of life. The need to replicate studies, and carry out new ones adding different sociodemographic and psychosocial variables, lies in the complexity and plurality of the subject, which requires a comprehensive approach. Exploring well-being not only allows to recognize its complex nature, considering social and cultural factors, but also to detect social needs in order to promote effective interventions.¹⁷⁻²⁴

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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