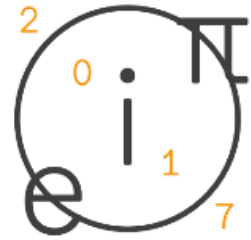


PROCEEDINGS OF THE
XXIII SCIENTIFIC
CONFERENCE



EMPIRICAL STUDIES IN PSYCHOLOGY

MARCH 24-26, 2017

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE



INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOLOGY
LABORATORY FOR EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

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Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade



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Belgrade 2017

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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN AFFECTIVE AND COGNITIVE WELL-BEING IN SERBIA¹

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This paper examines the gender differences in affective and cognitive component of subjective well-being in the case of Serbia. Subjective well-being is defined as the sum of positive and negative affect and the overall life satisfaction. On a nationally-representative sample of the Serbian population, consisting of 17,187 respondents, aged 15 to 96 years ($M = 48.88$; $SD = 18.77$) with 51.2% of females and 48.8% males, interviewed within the Survey on Income and Living Conditions in 2013, we examined the gender differences in frequency of experiencing (during the past four weeks) of two positive (feeling calm and peaceful, and being happy) and three negative (being very nervous, feeling down in the dumps, and feeling downhearted or depressed) affects, and the overall life satisfaction. In accordance with most previous research, we expected no gender differences in life satisfaction, and greater positive and negative affectivity among females. The results showed that, first, there are no gender differences in feeling very nervous, and calm and peaceful, but that females significantly more feel downhearted or depressed, down in the dumps, and happy. Second, there are no significant gender differences in overall life satisfaction. Greater affectivity among females may be explained by gender roles.

Keywords: gender, subjective well-being, Serbia

Introduction

Gender is one of the most frequently studied variables in terms of association with subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is most commonly defined the affective and cognitive evaluation of life (Diener et al., 2003), i.e. affective (experiencing of positive and negative affect) and cognitive (general life satisfaction) well-being.

Most of the previous research suggest that the gender differences in life satisfaction are very small or non-existent (WHR, 2015; Di Tella et al., 2003); regarding affective well-being, the picture is somewhat less consistent. Some studies suggest no gender differences in experiencing affect also (e.g., Charles et al., 2001), however more numerous ones found that females experience both positive and negative affect more frequently (Lucas & Gohm, 2000, in: Diener et al., 2002; Fujita et al., 1991), so that the overall subjective well-being is not to a

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great extent different between males and females. Some other studies show that females experience negative affects more frequently, though they experience the positive affects in equal degree (e.g. OECD 2013). Many researches indicated a positive correlation between affective and cognitive well-being (Diener et al., 2009; Diener & Suh, 1999), although this relationship is unlikely to have one set value and it depends on numerous factors (Diener, 2009; Busseri and Sadava, 2011).

Affective and cognitive well-being have already been examined in Serbia (e.g. Jovanović & Novović, 2008; Novović et al. 2008), however not in the context of the gender differences, and not by using nationally representative samples. Further, comparing to countries where previous researches were conducted, Serbia has relatively large gender unemployment gap (World Bank, 2015). Therefore, the subject of this research is gender association to affective and cognitive components of subjective well-being in case of Serbia. The aim of the research is to determine whether males and females in Serbia differ regarding these components of well-being, and to what extent.

Method

For the purpose of this research, we used nationally representative sample of the Serbian population consisting of 17,187 respondents, aged between 15 and 96 years ($M = 48.88$; $SD = 18.77$), with 51.2% females and 48.8% males. Respondents were interviewed in 2013 within European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

We examined the relationship between the frequency of experience (during the past four weeks) of two positive (feeling calm and peaceful, and being happy) and three negative (being very nervous, feeling down in the dumps, and feeling downhearted or depressed) affects, and the overall life satisfaction on one side, with gender, on the other side.

Having in mind the results of the largest number of the previous research from other countries, we expected no significant gender differences in overall life satisfaction, and greater positive and negative affectivity among females.

Data on the experiencing of affects are obtained using the questions: “How much of the time, during the past four weeks have you: been very nervous; felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up; felt calm and peaceful; felt down-hearted and depressed; been happy?” Answers were given on a five-point scale, where 1 meant “*All the time*” and 5 “*None of the time*”. Data on life satisfaction were obtained using the question: “All things

considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? 0 means not at all satisfied and 10 means you are completely satisfied”.

Results

The significance of differences of these components of subjective well-being between males and females is tested by t-tests for independent samples. As it is shown in table 1, t-tests show that there are no significant gender differences in being very nervous, and feeling calm and peaceful, and that females feel downhearted or depressed, down in the dumps, and happy significantly more. Regarding cognitive well-being, there are no significant gender differences in overall life satisfaction.

Both males and females most frequently feel calm and peaceful, and happy. Of the remaining, negative affects, both genders most frequently feel very nervous, than, down in the dumps, and the least frequently downhearted or depressed.

Table 1

Results of t-tests for gender differences in affective and cognitive well-being

	Gender	M	SD	t	df	p
Being very nervous	M	3.62	1.148	1.444	12240	0.149
	F	3.59	1.123			
Feeling down in the dumps	M	4.35	.980	2.328	11923.460	0.020
	F	4.30	1.006			
Feeling calm and peaceful	M	2.56	1.012	-1.544	12250	0.123
	F	2.59	.994			
Feeling downhearted or depressed	M	4.41	.941	4.179	11930.580	< 0.001
	F	4.34	.973			
Being happy	M	2.75	1.058	3.455	12194	0.001
	F	2.68	1.048			
Overall life satisfaction	M	4.92	2.427	-.477	12275	0.634
	F	4.94	2.444			

Discussion

In Serbia there are no gender differences in life satisfaction. Further, females more frequently experience some of positive and negative affects (feeling down in the dumps, feeling downhearted or depressed, and being happy), while other (being very nervous, and

feeling calm and peaceful) experience in equal degree as males. These findings are consistent with a large number of previous researches, so the case of Serbia is not different from cases of numerous other countries. That is especially referred to paradoxical findings that females experience both depression and happiness more than males (in: Fujita et al., 1991).

The explanation for such results may be in different social standards of suitable and desirable behavior for males and females, which may lead to the fact that females experience and express affects relatively more (Diener et al., 1999; Fujita et al., 1991). In this regard, the female roles consider them to be emotionally expressive and unstable, and sensitive to the needs of others. Women's traditional role involves greater responsibility as caregiver, which may encourage more emotional responses. The male roles, on the other hand, consider them to be non-expressive and emotionally stable, and less emotionally responsive (e.g. Nolen-Hoeksema & Rusting, 1999).

Given that the data used in this survey provide an opportunity to examine the differences in experiencing only five types of affects, it would be useful within further research to raise this number. Also, it would be useful to examine the moderating variables (such as age or income) effects on this relationship, in case of Serbia.

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