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The Effect of Inequality and Social Class on Well-Being in Spain

Felipe Manuel Rosa-González¹, Daniel Bianchi² & Leopoldo Cabrera²

1) *Department of Mathematics, Statistics and Operational Research, Universidad de La Laguna, Spain*

2) *Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Universidad de La Laguna, Spain*

Abstract

Assessing individuals' well-being involves considering their mental state and overall life satisfaction. This article examines well-being in Spain, focusing on both objective and subjective social classes, using data from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) surveys over the past decade. Happiness and emotional satisfaction as dependent variables are analyzed using some adscriptive variables, alongside the Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarero (EGP) model and subjective social class. The study reveals that well-being in Spain is generally positive and influenced by social class, irrespective of gender and age. Income disparities in Spain are wider than disparities in subjective well-being, highlighting that assessing personal well-being should consider not only income but also individuals' subjective experiences and life satisfaction. This research underscores the importance of a holistic approach to well-being, recognizing that it encompasses both objective and subjective dimensions, thus providing a more accurate reflection of individuals' overall life satisfaction in Spain, facilitating a better understanding of the realities of the contemporary Spanish society.

Keywords

Happiness, social stratification, life quality, socioeconomic status, income inequality

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Corresponding author(s): Felipe Manuel Rosa-González

Contact address: frosag@ull.edu.es

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Efecto de la Desigualdad y la Clase Social en el Bienestar en España

Felipe Manuel Rosa-González¹, Daniel Bianchi² & Leopoldo Cabrera²

1) *Departamento de Matemáticas, Estadística e Investigación Operativa, Universidad de La Laguna, España*

2) *Departamento de Sociología y Antropología, Universidad de La Laguna, España*

Resumen

La evaluación del bienestar de las personas implica considerar su estado mental y satisfacción general con la vida. Este artículo examina el bienestar en España, centrándose tanto en las clases sociales objetivas como subjetivas, utilizando datos de las encuestas del Centro de investigaciones sociológicas (CIS) de la última década. La felicidad y la satisfacción emocional se analizan como variables dependientes utilizando algunas variables adscriptivas, junto con el modelo EGP de Erikson, Goldthorpe y Portocarero y la clase social subjetiva. El estudio revela que el bienestar en España es generalmente positivo y está influenciado por la clase social, independientemente del género y de la edad. Las disparidades de ingresos en España son más amplias que las disparidades en el bienestar subjetivo lo que destaca que la evolución del bienestar personal debe considerar no sólo el ingreso, sino también las experiencias subjetivas y la satisfacción con la vida de los individuos. Esta investigación subraya la importancia de un enfoque holístico hacia el bienestar, reconociendo que abarca dimensiones tanto objetivas como subjetivas, ofreciendo así una reflexión más precisa de la satisfacción general de vida de los individuos en España, permitiendo una mejor comprensión de la realidad de la sociedad española actual.

Palabras clave

Felicidad, estratificación social, calidad de vida, estatus socioeconómico, desigualdad de ingresos

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Correspondencia Autores(s): Felipe Manuel Rosa-González

Dirección de contacto: frosag@ull.edu.es

Introduction

The income of the middle class (households with incomes between 50% and 200% of the national average income) has barely ground in most OECD countries over the past 30 years (OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development], 2019). During this period, the cost of living for the middle class increased more rapidly than inflation, and average income grew one-third less than those of the top 10% of the population with the highest incomes (OECD, 2019). In Spain, the middle class constitutes a social group with a healthy quality of life and reasonable financial stability. Until 2008, this middle class improved its weight in society. The financial crisis shattered this improvement. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent high inflation in Europe have reduced the weight of the middle class in Spain to 32% of the population in 2021 (compared to 43% in 2000) and the proportion of people in the lower class has increased (OECD, 2019; Ayala, 2018; Ayala & Cantó, 2021; Artola et al., 2022). Spain is one of the countries with the highest income inequality in the EU: the income received by the top 20% of the population in the EU is five times higher than the income received by the bottom 20% (Eurostat, 2022b); while, in Spain, this ratio is 6.19 (France 4.42, Italy 5.86, Portugal 5.66). Still, the personal, family, and social effects of income inequality are less well-known (Cabrera et al., 2021; Requena & Stanek, 2015), as the usual model of wealth and income inequality primarily focuses on economic factors and does not analyze their effects on people's living conditions, health satisfaction, and happiness (Conceição & Bandura, 2008).

Subjective well-being (SWB) is understood as a personal state of mind that generates feelings of happiness and satisfaction with life (family, social, health, and economic conditions) that people indicate in surveys at a specific moment in time. It is argued that SWB is dependent on social class (both objective and subjective) and that the mean differences in SWB between social classes are much smaller, almost negligible, compared to income differences in the population, as found in advanced societies (Kelley & Evans, 2017; Tan et al., 2020; Howell & Howell, 2008; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Diener et al., 1993). In other words, income is an integral part of people's well-being, but it is not their well-being itself. This implies that the SWB of people in Spain is more closely related to Spain's position in periodic reports from Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations, which use multiple indicators, not just income, but also life expectancy, educational achievement, environment, healthcare, security, and other factors (UN [United Nations], 2022a; 2022b; OECD, 2022a; 2022b; 2021; Eurostat, 2022a; Green et al., 2022; Cantó et al., 2022). The relevance of studying subjective well-being derives from its implications for people's quality of life, health, and life expectancy at birth (WHO [World Health Organization], 2022).

Previous studies have established the existence of a relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) with life satisfaction, happiness, self-rated health and, in general, subjective well-being (Wang et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022; Kezer & Cemalcilar, 2020; Navarro et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2020; Botha et al., 2017; Jivraj & Nazroo, 2014). This association has been found to be mediated by country wealth—in richer countries objective SES becomes a weaker predictor of SWB— (Howell & Howell, 2008; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002), as well as by some institutional and cultural features of countries (Li et al., 2019), such

as social cohesion, so that countries showing higher levels of social support or institutional trust tend to have less pronounced SES-SWB relationships (Bottoni & Addeo, 2024). Previous research also shows that subjective well-being is influenced by different sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, and marital status (Simon, 2014). Subjective well-being tends to decrease with age (Bedin & Sarriera, 2015; Shmotkin, 1990) and increases among married people (Diener et al., 2000; Mastekaasa, 1993). On the other hand, differences in subjective well-being between men and women are generally slight and inconsistent (Batz-Barbarich et al., 2018; Meisenberg & Woodley, 2014). Despite our focus will be on the relationship between social class and subjective well-being, we do not want to lose sight of these interrelated dimensions of social inequality.

Most studies using objective SES have focused on education or income as indicators of socioeconomic status (Tan et al., 2020), which only reflect partial pictures of an individual's class location. Better education gives access to occupations with higher earnings and more social prestige. Wage structure surveys reflect clear income differences between people in ISCO-08 occupations 1 and 2 (the vast majority, over 90%, with university education) compared to other occupations¹. These three dimensions (education, income and status) are captured jointly by Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarero (EGP) social class scheme, which proposes, adapts, and updates an individual's social position based on their material wealth, including ownership and control of resources, social prestige, and political power (Gil-Hernández & Vidal-Lorda, 2022). To our knowledge, this scheme has been used by few studies in this field so far (Zhao et al., 2017).

Another important predictor of well-being is the subjective evaluation that individuals make of their resources and perceived social support (Patrick et al., 2001). The subjective dimension of social class is attracting growing attention (Li et al., 2023; Shifa & Leibbrandt, 2018; Präg et al., 2016; Curhan et al., 2014; Kraus et al., 2013; Adler et al., 2000), since it has been showed to be more strongly related to subjective well-being (Navarro et al., 2020; Diener et al., 1993). Theoretical explanations highlight the role of comparison processes, as people, when placing themselves in a socioeconomic 'ladder', make judgements about their position in relation to others within a specific context (Tan et al., 2020). As Tan et al. (2020) and Navarro et al. (2020) point out, there is still little knowledge on how objective SES and subjective SES are related in their effect on subjective well-being. We aim to fill part of this gap with a context-specific empirical analysis of the Spanish population over the last decade.

The objective of this research is to analyze subjective well-being (SWB) and its relationship with the objective social class (EGP model) and subjective social class of Spaniards (Erikson et al., 1979; 1982; 2010). Additionally, the study examines the satisfaction that Spaniards expressed with their quality of life, family life, social life, health, and happiness. The working hypothesis is that well-being varies according to characteristics of individuals, and mainly, by objective and subjective social classes and social variables related to class position in the social structure, such as educational attainment and occupational position (Palomino et al., 2019; Kerbo, 2012).

This article takes advantage of a multidimensional holistic measure of well-being (SWB), including values for people's happiness and values for their satisfaction with life (family, social, health, and living conditions). The SWB model in this article includes happiness and four subjective measures of personal satisfaction with family life, social life, health and living

conditions. In Spain annual public opinion studies conducted by the Center for Sociology Research (CIS) include questions related to these five aspects of SWB. This multiplicity of subjective valuations allows for a holistic picture of SWB. The five specific areas stem from subjective evaluation that Spaniards make on a scale of 0 (no satisfied, not happy at all) to 10 (completely satisfied, completely happy). SWB is measured on the same scale and is derived from the arithmetic mean of the five areas of satisfaction and happiness that each person indicates. The files also include descriptive variables and variables of social inequality (educational attainment and occupational position), and a subjective social class variable. With the information from the file variables, an objective social class variable is constructed following the EGP model of Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarero. The data are freely accessible and available on the CIS website in the annual periodic studies usually conducted in July under the title Public and Fiscal Policy, with considerable sample sizes (between 2,500 to 3,000 Spaniards each year).

Materials and Methods

The aim of this article is to study the relationship between subjective well-being and social class, with the hypothesis that SWB varies according to individuals' position in society. For this purpose, the article uses a data file consisting of nine microdata files (barometers) from public opinion surveys conducted by CIS between 2014 and 2023. The surveys were carried out annually in July and, in exceptional cases in September, with sample sizes ranging from 2,500 to 3,000 respondents. Microdata are publicly available on the CIS website (CIS [Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas], 2023)². By combining these files, the author generated a database consisting of 26,143 respondents. The sampling errors of each of the nine sample files were $\pm 2.0\%$ or lower. The created file was weighted based on the sample selection size, using data from the CIS technical file of each barometer. All the tables and figures presented in this work were produced by the authors using the information collected from the aforementioned sources. This sample size allows for more detailed statistical studies for Spain than those derived from the World Happiness Report [WHR], which has 1,000 interviews per country (Gallup World Poll) where Spain is ranked 29th out of 146 countries. The data are freely accessible and available on the CIS website in the annual periodic studies usually conducted in July under the title Public and Fiscal Policy, with considerable sample sizes (between 2,500 to 3,000 Spaniards each year).

The dependent variables analyzed in this study include self-reported levels of happiness, satisfaction with family life, satisfaction with health, satisfaction with social life, and satisfaction with standard of living. These variables were measured on a scale ranging from 0 (unhappy or dissatisfied) to 10 (happy or satisfied). The main variable of interest, well-being, was created by taking the arithmetic mean of the five aforementioned variables, with a scale ranging from 0 (bad) to 10 (good). This SWB indicator follows the conceptual line proposed by the World Happiness Report (WHR), whose central idea is that “the true measure of social progress is the happiness of the people” (Helliwell et al., 2022). Despite it raises the question of whether a single number or index can sufficiently capture society's well-being or goals to guide all policy decisions (Barrington-Leigh, 2022), the idea is still appealing and has been

echoed by previous studies in Spain (Requena & Ayuso, 2022), considering happiness as a proxy for SWB (Requena, 2016; Sarracino, 2012). This SWB model can be included in the hedonic tradition, which studies SWB related to the people's evaluation of both pleasurable and unpleasurable life situations (Hepper & Dennis, 2023; Zeng & Chen, 2020; Sirgy, 2012; Meléndez et al., 2008; Meléndez et al., 2011; Waterman, 2007; Díaz et al., 2006; Pinguart & Sorensen, 2001; García & González, 2000). This model is more robust than that used by Palomino et al. (2019), which only shows data on overall life satisfaction in the European Union (EU) in 2021, or the model used by Helliwell et al. (2022), which focuses on happiness. The proposed SWB indicator's holistic nature makes sense because the correlations between happiness and satisfaction with various aspects of Spaniards' lives are not perfect, though they are relevant (0.5). This indicates that the five variables that make up SWB do not measure exactly the same thing but rather complement each other. Spanish SWB scores 7.81 and have significantly increased from 7.66 in 2014 to 7.93 in 2022. Satisfaction with family (8.55) is the highest average value of well-being, while the level of living conditions (7.07) is the lowest. Happiness (7.72), health (7.85), and social life (7.82) are all over around the general well-being average. Similarly, to Eurostat's (2022a) data, SWB increases with education and decreases with age, and men and women have almost equal levels of life satisfaction on average.

The independent variables examined include such as gender and age, and indicators of social inequality, such as the educational attainment (measured by the ISCED classification from UNESCO, 2011) (UNESCO, 2011), occupation (measured by the ISCO-08 classification from the ILO, 2012) (ILO [International Labour Organization], 2012), and subjective social class. The EGP model of social class was used as an objective measure of social class, and subjective social class was self-reported by respondent.

The EGP social class model (Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero, EGP model) described above was utilized to define categories of variables (Erikson et al., 2010; 1982; 1979). The proposed model reduces social class to three categories identified as EGP3 (lower, middle, high). The categories for the social class are as follows:

- *High social class*: I and II. This category includes Managers and professionals (ISCO-08: 1 and ISCO-08: 2).
- *Middle social class*: IIIa and IIIb. This category includes Technician and Clerical support workers, Service and Sales workers; IVa, IVb and IVc, Small Entrepreneurs (with or without workers), Farmers, Tenant farmers, Forestry and Fishery; and V and VI, Technician (low level) and Supervisors, Skilled workers (ISCO-08: 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10).
- *Lower social class*: VIIa. This category includes unskilled workers and VIIb, Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery workers (ISCO-08: 6, 9).

The variable "subjective social class" comes directly from the initial coding and subsequent recording of an open and spontaneous response variable included in the CIS data files, which is constructed with the question: "What social class would you say you belong to?". The final responses were later grouped into five categories: upper class, upper middle class, middle class, lower middle class and, working (lower) class, which were reduced to four by the combination of upper class and, upper middle-class categories.

The authors created all the tables and figures in this study utilizing the information gathered from the preceding sources.

Results

The following table (Table 1) shows the existence of a relationship between the two dimensions of social class, but also the inconsistency of objective and subjective class position: there are almost no respondents who identify themselves as belonging to the upper class (0.5%), and even individuals who objectively belong to the upper class subjectively position themselves in lower classes (29.4% and 11%). Spanish respondents tend to position themselves in lower classes than those they objectively belong to (see Table 1) (García-Carro & Sánchez-Sellero, 2019). The chi-square test conducted has a p-value < .001.

Table 1

Contingency table for subjective versus objective social class variables

% Within Social class		Subjective class				Total
		Upper and upper-middle	Middle	Lower-middle	Working (Lower)	
Objective class	Lower	1.3%	20.8%	37.4%	40.6%	100.0%
	Middle	5.1%	30.6%	39.4%	24.9%	100.0%
	High	14.5%	45.1%	29.4%	11.0%	100.0%
	Total	7.8%	34.4%	36.0%	21.9%	100.0%

Source. Own elaboration from CIS data (years: 2014 - 2023) N = 25,705 individuals.

The SWB reflects the evaluations that Spaniards make about their lives in different aspects such as happiness and satisfaction. Relevant correlations (around 0.4 - 0.5) have been detected between happiness and the satisfaction that Spaniards have with their family life, social life, living condition, and health (see Table 2). Therefore, the SWB can be seen as a multidimensional holistic indicator that globally captures the satisfaction of Spaniards with their life.

Table 2

Superior Triangular Matrix: Pearson coefficients; Inferior Triangular Matrix: Spearman coefficients. All p-values < .001 (significant at the .01 level, 2-tailed).

	Happiness	Family life	Health	Social life	Standard of living	Well-being
Happiness		.506	.421	.512	.471	.766
Family life	.502		.362	.457	.367	.706
Health	.421	.400		.478	.398	.726
Social life	.510	.488	.497		.476	.790
Standard of living	.462	.342	.386	.465		.737
Well-being	.747	.682	.725	.781	.723	

Source. Own elaboration from CIS data (years: 2014 - 2023) N = 25,705 individuals

The data analysis shows that the SWB of Spaniards in the last nine years has been relatively high, ranging from 7.6 to 8.0 points in the period considered from 2014 to 2023 (see Table 3). The one-way ANOVA test shows significant differences in average subjective well-being between years, indicating significant variation over time. The same applies to the individual variable that makes up the composite variable of well-being. The trend is similar for each individual variable, with the lowest values for quality of life and the highest for satisfaction with family. The lower values are always with quality of life, being lower in 2014 than in 2023. On the contrary, the highest satisfaction corresponds to family life, which is around 8.5 for the nine years of the series. The line that identifies the means of the SWB by year almost overlaps with the lines that reflect happiness and satisfaction with social life of the individuals and is almost identical to the line of satisfaction with health which could be considered a proxy of general well-being in other SWB studies.

Table 3 depicts the evolution of the average values for each analyzed variable. It can be observed that the average well-being remains relatively stable over time.

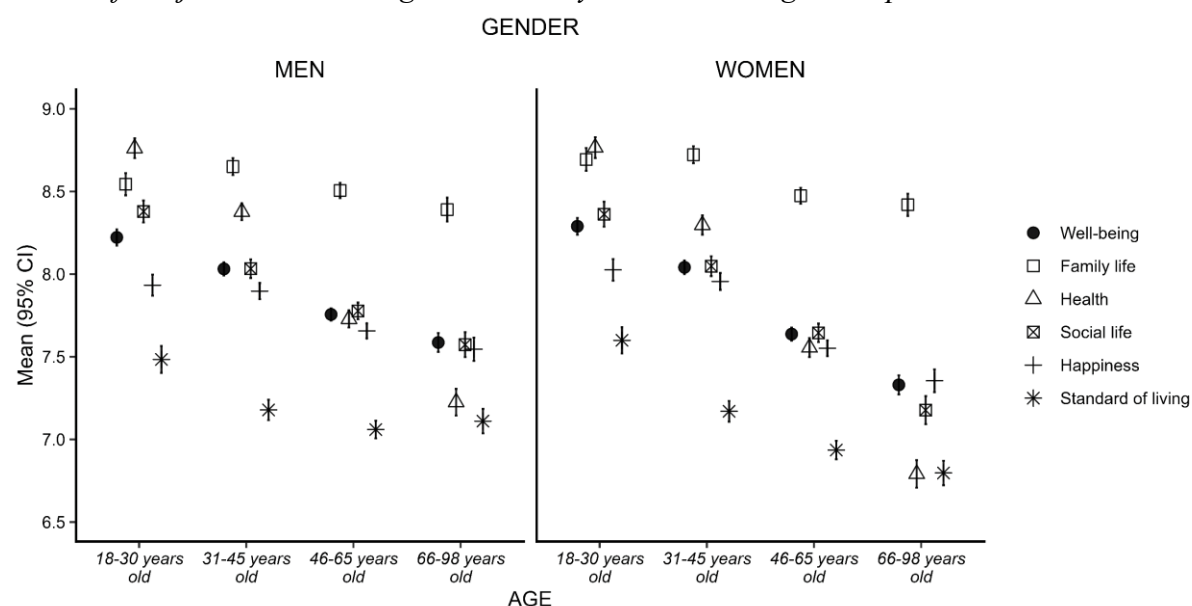
Table 3

Average of SWB (Well-Being and its Components: Happiness, Family life, Health, Social life, Standard of Living, on Scale

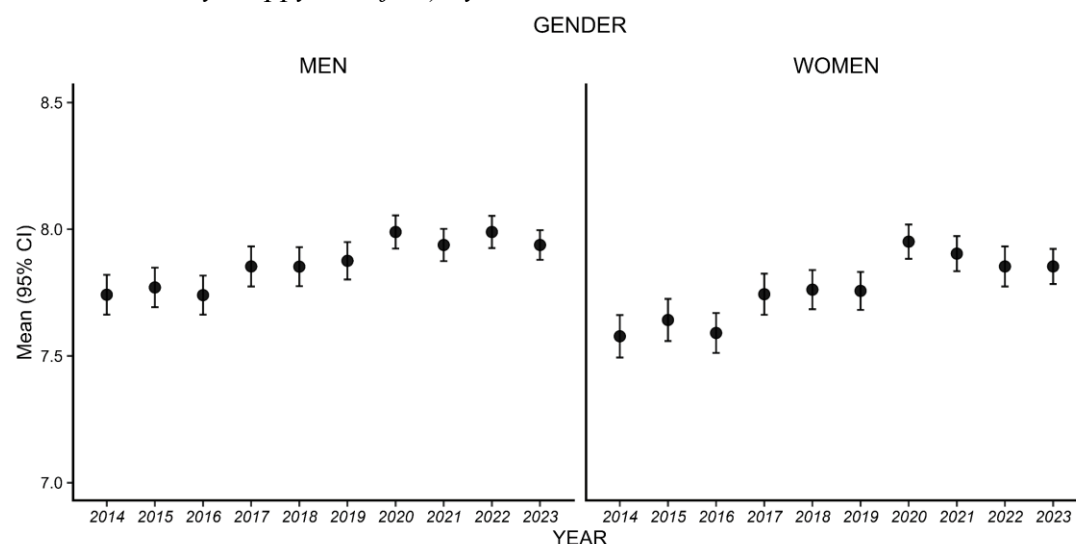
Year	Happiness	Family life	Health	Social life	Standard of living	Well-being
2014	7.55	8.47	7.82	7.72	6.62	7.66
2015	7.58	8.47	7.78	7.80	6.84	7.70
2016	7.57	8.46	7.76	7.80	6.65	7.66
2017	7.72	8.55	7.85	7.85	6.91	7.80
2018	7.74	8.51	7.72	7.84	7.13	7.81
2019	7.76	8.44	7.71	7.89	7.24	7.81
2020	7.85	8.67	8.09	7.85	7.36	7.97
2021	7.84	8.63	7.95	7.75	7.43	7.92
2022	7.80	8.68	7.93	7.88	7.37	7.93
2023	7.69	8.54	7.93	7.88	7.43	7.90
Total	7.71	8.54	7.86	7.83	7.12	7.82

Source. Own elaboration from CIS data (years: 2014 - 2023) N = 25,705 individuals.

However, age generates a statistically significant and different well-being pattern: the SWB decreases with age in each year of the series, with women having significantly worse well-being than men from the age of 56 years old (see Figure 1).

Figure 1*Means of Subjective Well-Being Indicators by Gender and Age Group*

The well-being of Spaniards has improved over the years, especially in the last three years (2020 to 2022) compared to the first three years of the series (2014–2016), without gender differences being observed for each individual year (see Figure 2)

Figure 2*Mean and Error Bars (95% C. I.) of Well-Being on Scale 0: Extremely Unhappy/Dissatisfied to 10: Extremely Happy/Satisfied) by Gender and Year*

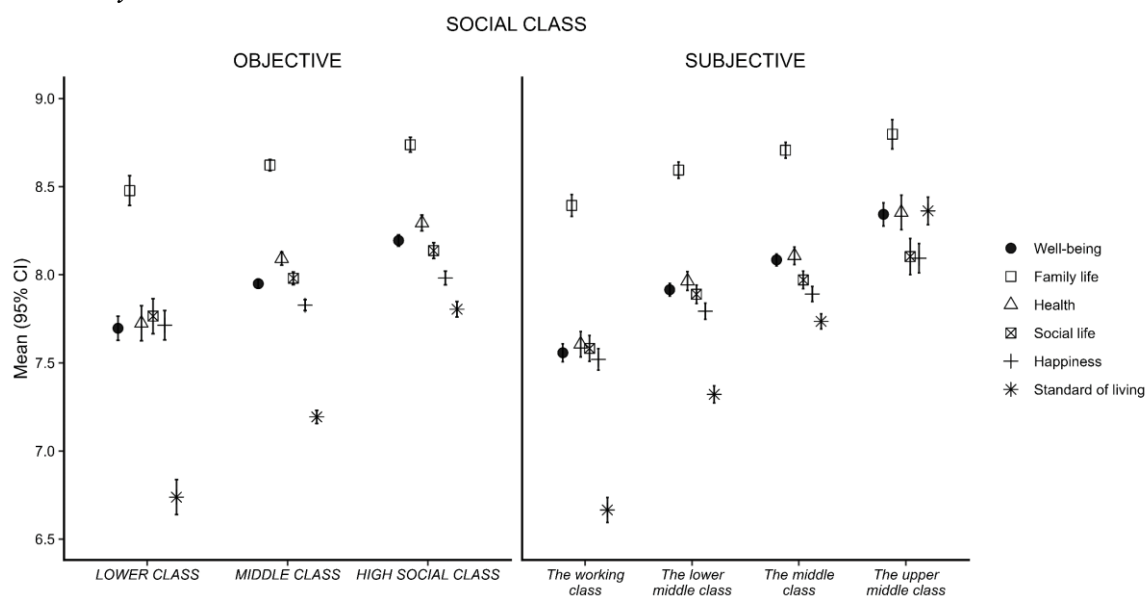
Source. Own elaboration from CIS data (years: 2014 - 2023) N = 25.705 individuals

The variability of well-being, and each of its components, is statically significant for both objective and subjective social classes. One-way ANOVAs provide statistically significant variability for each individual variable and for the SWB. The multivariate error bar charts clearly display such significant differences, supporting the working hypothesis. Note that at the

extremes, family life is clearly above average, while living conditions are below average, with class placement (objective or subjective) showing greater variability and statistical significance (see Figure 3). The variability of well-being is also visible in other variables of social inequality such as educational attainment (see Figure 4), for both men and women.

Figure 3

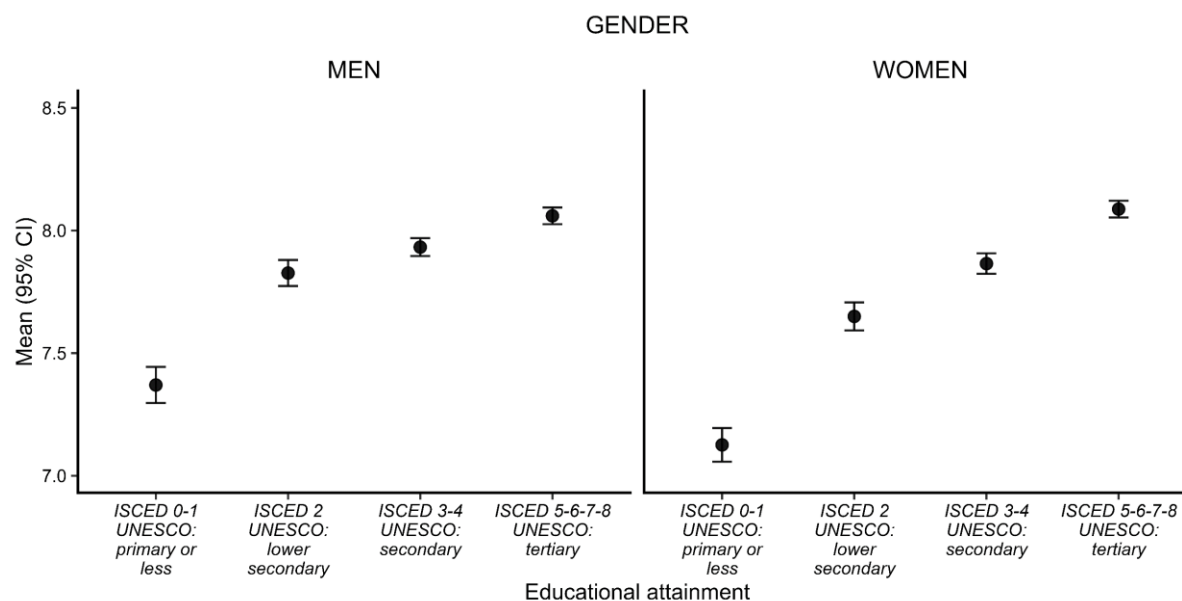
Mean and Error Bars (95% C. I.) of Well-Being and its Components: Happiness, Family life, Health, Social life, Standard of Living, on Scale 0: Extremely Unhappy/Dissatisfied to 10: Extremely



Source. Own elaboration from CIS data (years: 2014 - 2023) N = 25.705 individuals.

Figure 4

Mean and error bars (95% C. I.) of Well-Being on Scale 0: Extremely Unhappy/Dissatisfied to 10: Extremely Happy/Satisfied) by Gender and Educational Attainment



Source. Own elaboration from CIS data (years: 2014 - 2023) N = 25.705 individuals.

It is important to consider in the analysis of the results of well-being that variables of social inequality and social classes in Spain are implicitly associated with different salary incomes. According to INE [Instituto Nacional de Estadística] (2023), individuals from higher social classes, who have higher education and hold managerial or professional positions, have salaries ranging from 38,000 to 58,000 euros per year; those from lower social classes earn between 14,000 and 20,000 euros, and middle-class individuals earn around 25,000 euros. The salaries of the individuals from higher social classes are almost three to four times higher than those of lower social classes and, almost double the salaries of middle-class individuals. Therefore, social class position is a proxy for income. Thus, class inequalities represent inequalities in educational and occupational position and, collectively, income inequalities. This is partially evidenced in the assessment of living conditions, the subjective indicator that could be seen as closest to income, and precisely the indicator where lower satisfaction levels are detected among Spanish.

Upon examination of the percentiles of well-being and their components (see Table 4), it is evident that the ratios between these positions (90th/10th percentiles) are around 1.6 times higher for SWB, happiness, and satisfaction with families (9.4 or 10/6 points), and twice as high for health and satisfaction with social life and living conditions (10/5 points). These ratios decline when using the values of well-being and their components with the 75th and 25th percentiles as a benchmark. It is apparent that the ratios are considerably lower than the ratios of social inequality shown by the income of Spaniards, with a reach of 4 to 6-7 times higher for individuals in the highest income bracket (90th or 80th percentiles) compared to those in the lowest income positions (10th or 20th percentiles). These data suggest the distribution of incomes is less comprehensive than the distribution of SWB and each of its components.

Table 4

Percentiles of SWB (Well-Being and its Components: Happiness, Family life, Health, Social life. Standard of living, on Scale 0: Extremely Unhappy/Dissatisfied to 10: Extremely Happy/Satisfied).

Percentile	Happiness	Family life	Health	Social life	Standard of living	Well-being
5	5.0	5.0	4.0		4.0	5.4
10	6.0	6.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	6.0
25	7.0	8.0	7.0	7.0	6.0	7.2
50	8.0	9.0	8.0	8.0	7.0	8.0
75	9.0		9.0	9.0	8.0	8.8
90		10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	9.4
95	10.0					9.8

Source. Own elaboration from CIS data (years: 2014 - 2023) N = 26.143 individuals.

Discussion

Results support our hypothesis that well-being varies depending on individuals' class position in the social structure. Well-being is significantly higher in higher social classes (8.19 in

objective classes and 8.36 in subjective classes) than in middle social classes (7.96 in objective classes and 7.98 and 7.53 in medium-low and low subjective classes respectively). This variation is so robust that it applies to each component of well-being: family satisfaction, health, social satisfaction, and happiness. The study also revealed that demographic characteristics, particularly objective and subjective social class, as well as social position variables, such as education attainment and occupational status, significantly influence well-being. Furthermore, the research findings indicated that groups with lower levels of educational achievement and unskilled or skilled occupational position in the agricultural and fishing sector -considered classic variables of social inequality- reported significantly less well-being than those with higher educational levels and occupational status, such as managers or professionals. Specifically, those in the former group reported SWB, ISCED 0-1: score of 7.36 and ISCO-08 6-9: 7.64 and 7.70 respectively, while those in the latter group reported, ISCED 5-8: score of 8.06 and ISCO-08 1-2: 8.15 and 8.19 respectively. These relatively high values of SWB in Spain suggest that the economic well-being values derived from univariate analyses of income levels may be overestimated. Despite the significance of income and material condition in their life, these factors appear to be relatively less important in determining individuals' state of happiness and overall life satisfaction.

Typically, welfare studies compare the positions of countries based on blocks of indicators, at institutional, governmental, and non-governmental organizations levels (UN, OECD, EU, WHO, etc.). These studies generally attempt to provide a complex welfare picture that structurally positions a country in comparison to others, assuming implicitly that what happens on average in a country is what happens to most of its citizens. Until a few years ago, welfare indicators were mainly economic. Traditional economic indicators, with national averages, do not show how citizens feel within each country and how satisfied they are with their lives (Conceição & Bandura, 2008).

Survey research collects citizens' feelings through public opinion polls, where they are asked about their happiness and affection with life. This is a good attempt to approach how citizens feel and to have a subjective image of their welfare (Barrington-Leigh, 2022). For example, Eurostat (2022a) reports on people's life satisfaction in European Union countries (7.2 in 2021 EU, equals Spain). It disaggregated this information from each country by gender, age and educational level of the people interviewed: Life satisfaction was highest in Austria (8.0 points), Finland (7.9), Romania (7.7) and the Netherlands (7.6) and lowest in France (7.8) and Bulgaria (5.7). Life satisfaction increases with education and decreases with age in the EU, and on average, the level of life satisfaction of men and women was slightly lower for women: 7.2 and 7.1 points, respectively.

The EU values suggest that life satisfaction is not necessarily tied to rich economic countries in the EU or, in general, to income. Previous studies have pointed in this direction (Kelley & Evans, 2017). This is also evident in the case of Spain, where income inequalities are irrelevant to individuals' happiness, neither harming nor helping. The ratios between the top 90% and bottom 10% and between the top 75% and bottom 25% of SWB and its components are no greater than double. This is in stark contrast to income inequality in Spain, where the top 90% and 80% of earners make four or six times more than the bottom 10% and 20% of earners, respectively (Ayala, 2018; Ayala & Cantó, 2021; Artola et al., 2022; Eurostat, 2022b; Chancel

et al., 2022). These data suggest that the distribution of SWB is less dispersed and more inclusive than the distribution of income.

This paradox that shows a differential distance between the well-being and income of Spaniards could be explained, according to Mijs (2021), with data from 25 years of research from the International Social Survey Programme, because citizens believe that income inequality is deserved. This would explain why citizens live their lives concerned about their income, but not solely about it.

The literature suggests that life satisfaction is related to wealth, but not exclusively (Diener et al., 2010; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). It is also related to health (Palencia-Esteban & Salas-Rajo, 2023), and social acceptance (Patrick et al., 2001). Generally, it can be concluded that wealth facilitates the freedom to choose one's life path, contributing to one's SWB (Inglehart et al., 2008). The positive association between income and life satisfaction is more likely to occur when people have higher incomes (Boyce et al., 2010; Howell & Howell, 2008), who are more satisfied with their finances and are more optimistic about their financial situation (Diener et al., 2013).

In detail, the SWB shown in this study utilizes the battery of question from the CIS on happiness and satisfaction with family life, social life, health and living conditions in Spain. The sample size of these studies allows for disaggregation and more complex models to analyze SWB by variables of social inequality, not just gender and age. The disaggregated analysis of well-being by descriptive characteristics and, as a whole, with a multidimensional model, profile the dimension of well-being and shows how equal/unequal well-being is among men and women and among people of different ages. If well-being is analyzed by levels of education, occupation, and social classes (objective and subjective), this study demonstrates significant differences in people's well-being based on their objective and subjective social classes. This helps to understand that a country where macro well-being is high may not necessarily be a country where citizens are happy and satisfied with their life. The main idea that transcends this study is that, despite evidence of correlation and reciprocal and unique relationships between well-being, health, life conditions, life expectancy, and quality of life, a high level of macro well-being in a country does not necessarily imply that its citizens are happy and satisfied with their lives. Furthermore, this study reveals that the significant income inequality in Spain is not accompanied by a comparable level of well-being.

Looking at the percentiles of well-being and its components (see table), it is observed that the ratios between these positions (90th/10th percentiles SWB) are around 1.6 time for SWB, happiness, and satisfaction with families (9.40 or 10/6 points) and 2 times for health and satisfaction with social life and living conditions (10/2 points). These ratios decrease when the values of well-being and its components are referred to in the 75th and 25th percentiles. As can be seen, these ratios are much lower than the social inequality ratios that income levels of Spaniards show, which reach distances of 4 times and up to 6-7 times those of high-income position (90th or 80th percentiles) compared to low income. Positions (10th or 20th percentiles). These findings suggest that income distribution is less inclusive than the distribution of SWB and each of its components.

These findings show close correlations between happiness and satisfaction with family life, social life, health, and living conditions, as found by (Yu et al., 2020; Hagerty & Veenhoven,

2003; Veenhoven & Hagerty, 2006), and that the upper classes (associated with those who have more wealth) declare them-selves happier than the poor (Lucas & Schimmack, 2009).

It is also found that the average values of SWB by year are practically coincident with those of happiness, satisfaction with social life, and especially with satisfaction with health, which allows the use of these individual variables of happiness, satisfaction with life, and satisfaction with health, as a proxy for general well-being in other SWBS studies.

Conclusion

The SWB is an essential measure of how individuals feel about their lives, how satisfied they are with their family life, social life, living conditions, health and how happy they feel. A holistic variable generated from this partial evaluation of each aspect shows that the SWB of Spaniards is relatively high, almost 8 points on a scale of 0 to 10. The average values of SWB are very similar to the values of satisfaction with health and to the average values of happiness in each considered year, which allows the exploitation of these individual variables in more survey studies as holistic variable of SWB.

The SWB and each of its components are relatively high in Spain, surprisingly high if it is implicitly associated with the idea that income inequality leads to unhappiness in low-income people and happiness in high-income people. Nothing could be further from the truth in Spain, where income inequality seems to be irrelevant to individuals' happiness and life satisfaction, confirming the results found by Kelley & Evans (2017) in advanced societies. The distances found between SWB and income ratios between high and low percentiles (90/10) do not double the subjective values of well-being, while they quadrupled or sextuple the income values.

The partial values of SWB found are high, with the lowest (within the high values) being personal satisfaction with living conditions. This aspect is the closest to the economic and financial aspects of individuals, which are typically measured and studied as indicators of economic well-being and wealth distribution, based on income deciles or variations in earnings by occupation or education. At the aggregate level, this income indicator places Spain in a more disadvantaged position compared to other countries. However, when health indicators (such as life expectancy) or social indicators (such as educational achievement) are added, Spain's position improves substantially, because it is unlikely that Spain would have such a high life expectancy as a whole if a significant portion of the population did not approach this life expectancy (Macarrón, 2012). The same is true for educational achievement and other socioeconomic indicators that are different from income.

The SWB indicator used in this study provides a more detailed picture of Spain, with a high valuation of the SWB of the Spanish population, similar in both men and women, which decreases with age and is dependent on objective and subjective social class position. Additionally, it has a statistically significant component of social inequality: the SWB and its components vary significantly by social position of Spaniards (by education and occupation), with higher level of well-being observed in individuals with higher education and white-collar occupations (ISCO-08 1 and 2), which are also those with higher salaries in Spain.

Improving the well-being of people in a country should be a critical point of political and social action, a commitment to making people feel better, a live better, and thereby improve

society as a whole. As the well-being in Spain is related to educational attainment, occupational position, and social class (Palencia-Esteban & Salas-Rojo, 2023), reducing social inequality is presented as a collective action in favor of the general well-being of the population (Cantó et al., 2022; Kelley & Evans, 2017), their satisfaction with life in multiple facets, with health, and with living conditions. Everything indicates that taking action to improve people's living conditions will give a boost to personal well-being. The option of a universal basic income in Spain could be a reference point to alleviate the deficiencies of the most disadvantaged people (Amat-Salas & Feràs, 2019).

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Notes

¹See INE (2023). Salary Structure Survey, accessible at https://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Datos.htm?t=28186#_tabs-tabla.

²The technical details of the questionnaire and the data collection process by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas can be consulted at: <https://www.cis.es/catalogo-estudios/resultados-definidos/barometros>

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the writing and development of this article. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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