ABSTRACT
for the dissertation submitted for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
in the specialty "8D03101 – Sociology"
by Shyryn Muratkyzy Tlenchiyeva
on the topic: "Sociological Measurement of the Level of Happiness in Kazakhstan (on the Example of Urban and Rural Areas)"

General Characteristics of the Dissertation. The dissertation research is devoted to a comprehensive sociological analysis of subjective well-being among the population of Kazakhstan, the dynamics of happiness levels in the period following the country's independence, and an examination of the key factors shaping how Kazakhstanis perceive happiness. The author systematized and empirically tested various groups of determinants (socio-economic, cultural-value, institutional, and socio-demographic), identifying their structural and regional specificities, as well as differences by type of settlement (urban vs. rural).

The empirical basis of the study includes international and national representative datasets analyzed using correlation, factor, regression, and cluster analysis methods. The obtained results make it possible to refine and further develop theoretical approaches to understanding subjective happiness and to formulate practical recommendations aimed at improving the level of life satisfaction among the population of Kazakhstan, taking into account regional specificity and settlement differences.

Relevance of the Dissertation Research. At the present stage, both in international and Kazakhstani social science, interest in the study of subjective well-being has been significantly increasing. In recent decades, global sociology and social policy have shown a stable trend of shifting from assessing well-being solely through objective economic indicators – such as income levels, GDP, and material welfare – to incorporating subjective aspects of quality of life, including happiness and individuals' satisfaction with their own lives.

The study of subjective well-being has also become a priority for the Republic of Kazakhstan, which is actively integrating into international social and scientific initiatives and aligning itself with the priorities of influential global organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations, and the World Bank. At the national level, the study of subjective well-being is directly linked to the priorities of the state policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as expressed in national development strategies and the annual addresses of the President, which emphasize the importance of improving quality of life, social justice, and overall public satisfaction.

The relevance of the research is further strengthened by the specific historical context of contemporary Kazakhstan. In recent decades, the country has undergone significant economic, social, and cultural transformations, accompanied by rapid urbanization, changes in lifestyle, shifts in family and cultural values, and evolving levels of trust in social institutions and interpersonal relationships. These transformations create new conditions for studying subjective happiness and well-

being, underscoring the timeliness and importance of empirical analysis of these processes.

Purpose of the Dissertation Research. The aim of the dissertation research is to identify and sociologically substantiate the structure and key individual, socio-economic, institutional, and cultural-value determinants of subjective well-being among the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This is achieved through a comparative analysis of international and national sources and empirical data from representative surveys. Additionally, the research seeks to determine how these factors manifest in urban and rural areas and to identify regional differences in the perception of happiness and life satisfaction.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the main theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of subjective well-being, and to define key concepts, components, and applicable methods for measuring happiness and life satisfaction.
2. To identify the specifics and characteristics of subjective well-being in Kazakhstan through a comparative analysis of international data and national sources, and to determine the country's position among post-Soviet states.
3. To describe the relationship between the level of subjective well-being among Kazakhstanis and their socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, type of settlement), assess the stability of these correlations, and determine the extent and nature of the impact of subjective evaluations of material status, living conditions, and social standing on happiness levels, comparing these with the influence of objective economic indicators (income, standard of living, economic inequality).
4. To examine the impact of cultural and value-based factors (family values, religiosity, ethnic self-identification, social expectations and attitudes) on the subjective well-being of Kazakhstan's population and to assess their contribution relative to economic factors.
5. To study the role of social capital (interpersonal and institutional trust, social support, and the quality of social ties) in shaping subjective well-being.
6. To conduct factor analysis to determine the structure of subjective well-being and identify the key factors characterizing differences between urban and rural populations in Kazakhstan.
7. To determine the regional specifics of subjective well-being in Kazakhstan and to provide substantiated recommendations for differentiated social policy aimed at increasing happiness and improving quality of life.

Object of the Research

The object of the research is the subjective well-being of the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Subject of the Research

The subject of the research comprises the socio-economic, demographic, and sociocultural determinants and regional features of subjective well-being among Kazakhstanis, as well as differences in its perception between urban and rural populations.

The scientific novelty of the dissertation is reflected in the following:

A systematic examination of international databases (World Database of Happiness, World Values Survey, Gallup World Poll) was conducted to identify key trends in the level of subjective well-being in Kazakhstan, to perform a comparative analysis of the country's position relative to comparable states, and to contextualize the interpretation of the findings.

A comprehensive analysis of large national datasets was carried out to assess the long-term dynamics of subjective well-being and its regional stratification. Differences in the structure of determinants of subjective well-being between urban and rural populations in Kazakhstan were clarified using factor analysis.

The indirect nature of the influence of economic factors on subjective well-being – mediated through individuals' subjective assessment of their material conditions and living standards – was empirically substantiated. The relative contribution of social, economic, and cultural factors to explaining variations in subjective well-being among Kazakhstanis was determined through regression analysis.

Regional profiles of subjective well-being were identified and empirically validated through cluster analysis. The research constructs (assessment of social status, cultural values, shifts in expectations, quality of social ties, social expectations, and perceptions of the normative level of optimism) were operationalized and validated with consideration of the Kazakhstani context.

Methodological and Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical and methodological foundation of the dissertation is built upon fundamental sociological approaches as well as contemporary empirical concepts and methods for studying subjective well-being. The sociological basis of the research is grounded in the classical theory of Émile Durkheim, particularly his approach to analyzing social integration and normative regulation. Durkheim's ideas are applied to reveal the social nature of happiness, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relationships, trust, and social support as key factors determining the level of subjective well-being in Kazakhstani society.

The primary empirical and methodological foundations of the study are the modern concepts of subjective well-being developed by Ed Diener and Ruut Veenhoven. Diener's approach, which conceptualizes subjective well-being as a cognitive-affective phenomenon (life satisfaction, positive and negative emotions), and Veenhoven's comprehensive four-dimensional model of happiness (objective and subjective conditions and life evaluation) provide theoretical and methodological completeness for the analysis and inform the selection of appropriate research instruments.

Empirical Base of the Study

The empirical component of the dissertation is based on a combination of authoritative international datasets and representative national surveys. The international sources include the World Values Survey, the Gallup World Poll, and the World Database of Happiness. The latter contains a bibliography of 18 scholarly publications on happiness in Kazakhstan (2006–2020), 69 indicators reflecting the average level of happiness in the country, and 480 correlation results, providing a broad foundation for comparative-historical and correlational analysis in the

international context. These sources enabled the comparison of the level and structure of subjective well-being in Kazakhstan with global and post-Soviet trends (cross-country context).

The main national empirical sources used in the study include:

Primary statistical data from the "Quality of Life of the Population" survey conducted by the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2000–2023 (N = 11,951). These data were used to assess the dynamics and regional stratification of subjective well-being.

Data from mass surveys conducted within national and academic research programs:

The PCF scientific program "Social Modernization of Kazakhstani Society: Ideological and Worldview Foundations, Conceptual Models, Sociocultural Processes, and Socio-Political Technologies" (N = 1,500) for 2021–2023.

The GF project "Processes of Religious Studies in Kazakhstan: Characteristics, Trends, and Impact on Social Development and Human Capital (Interdisciplinary Analysis)" (N = 1,500) for 2021–2023.

The scientific project "Comparative Analysis of Factors Influencing Happiness Across Regions of Kazakhstan" (N = 500) for 2024–2026.

The empirical data from these thematic surveys were used to analyze the influence of value-based, religious, and sociocultural determinants at the level of specific subgroups.

Theoretical and Practical Significance

Theoretical significance. The theoretical significance of the dissertation lies in the comprehensive expansion and refinement of sociological knowledge on subjective well-being in the context of contemporary Kazakhstani society. The findings complement existing theoretical and methodological approaches to studying subjective happiness, particularly in relation to transitional post-Soviet societies undergoing profound economic, social, and cultural transformations.

The research clarifies and empirically tests the conceptual propositions of social capital theories and cultural-value approaches to the study of happiness. The dissertation contributes to the development of the sociology of happiness and subjective well-being by specifying the structure of happiness determinants and offering the operationalization of such variables as social expectations, interpersonal trust, and family values, taking into account regional and settlement-specific contexts.

Practical significance.

The practical significance of the dissertation is determined by the potential application of its results in developing evidence-based social policy aimed at increasing life satisfaction and improving the quality of life of the population of Kazakhstan. The findings regarding differences between urban and rural residents in their perception of happiness and the conditions shaping it enable a differentiated approach to designing and implementing social programs. For urban areas, it is important to consider factors such as social expectations and professional fulfillment, whereas in rural regions priority should be given to strengthening family support and improving material and living conditions.

Empirically validated conclusions about the role of family values, religious and ethnic self-identification, and interpersonal trust provide a foundation for designing targeted socio-cultural initiatives and programs aimed at strengthening social cohesion and interpersonal ties.

The materials of the dissertation may be used in academic teaching, particularly in courses on the sociology of happiness and subjective well-being, social policy, as well as in the professional training of specialists in social protection and public administration.

Thus, the dissertation contributes to the expansion of theoretical knowledge and methodological approaches, forming a basis for further research on subjective well-being in Kazakhstan and other countries with comparable socio-cultural conditions.

Structure and Scope of the Dissertation

The structure of the dissertation is determined by the logic of the research derived from the stated aim and primary objectives. The work consists of an introduction, six chapters (including 26 sections), a conclusion, a list of references, and appendices.