201 . Families and Households

Have parents of large family higher life satisfaction? Policies, resources, and values of large families in Europe

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Abstract

This study analyses the impact of resources, values, and family policy on the well-being of parents of large families with children. We use European Social Survey (ESS) data from 23 countries and information taken from the OECD and Eurostat databases to describe family policies. The countries are divided into five groups based on their support for large families and general family policy. On average, there were no statistical differences between the life satisfaction of families with four or three children and that of other families. However, the results show differences in components of life satisfaction of fathers and mothers of large families. The life satisfaction of men with four children was primarily shaped by differences in income and working status. Income and work status did not differentiate the well-being of mothers with four or more children from that of other women. Family policy did not have a direct impact on large family well-being, but may function as an indirect factor of life satisfaction via economic coping impact.

Keywords: large family, four children, family policy, values, resources, income

Introduction

The share of families that have four and more children is declining in Europe, and studies of large families have been abandoned due to a lack of demographic interest and reliable data. International comparisons of large families, in particular, are missing. In this paper, we use international European Social Survey (ESS) data to analyse life satisfaction, the resources and values of large families in 23 countries within different family support systems. The analysis concentrates mainly on the life of parents with four and more children, but comparisons with parents with three children are also provided.

The aim of paper is to analyse the well-being and its components, including the values and resources, of large families. The main dependent value is life satisfaction, which captures a general evaluation of the goodness of life and is therefore a good composite indicator of overall well-being. We compare the lives of parents in families with four children with those of families with three children and the rest of the population. Values and resources might explain the particularity of large families and progress from being two-child to large families. The assumption is that the choice to become a large family is selective and depends on the values and resources of parents. Additionally, a supportive family policy can help families with children and raise life satisfaction due to the additional resources made available. Due to an interaction of all these components, values, resources, and family policy indicators are combined in the analysis.

The final number of children in a family can be interpreted as a fertility choice, therefore, research on fertility behaviour components might be useful in explaining diversity in the life satisfaction of families. Different economic and value theories provide explanations of how parents make their decisions and are also helpful in understanding large families.

The paper answers three questions: (1) is the life satisfaction in families with four and more children different from that of families with three children and of the rest of the population? (2) are the values and resources of large families different from those of families with three children and of the rest of the population; and (3) how do values, resources, and social policy influence the life satisfaction of large families?

Life satisfaction and families with children

The benefits of having children may vary under different social and economic conditions (Nauck, 2014). Children might provide positive life satisfaction to parents, and several investigations seem to support this argument (Vignoli, Pirani, & Salvini, 2014; own, 2015). At the same time, raising children requires additional resources (Becker, 1991), and children thus place an additional burden on their parents. Previous studies investigating the impact of number of children on a family's well-being had found a positive association between the first child and an increase in the life satisfaction and happiness of the parents, but the birth of the second and additional children might have a different impact on mothers' and fathers' well-being in different countries (Aassve, Goisis, & Sironi, 2012; Kohler, Behrman, & Skytthe, 2005; Vignoli, Pirani, & Salvini, 2014; Van der Lippe, Voorpostel, & Hewitt, 2014; Myrskylä & Margolis, 2014) or no effect at all (Zimmermann & Easterlin, 2006). The research of large families has been neglected; therefore, study of the particularities of families with four and more children provides a valuable contribution to the scientific debate. Moreover, comparative analyses of the components of life satisfaction of parents in families with four children are lacking.

Most previous studies on the number of children in a family and life satisfaction investigate the situation in a single country. Cross-country comparative analyses are still limited and reveal different results. This study uses data from 23 countries in Europe.

Values and resources shape the number of children families choose to have and are therefore essential components in our analysis as well. Furthermore, we test the impact of social policy on life satisfaction in four-children families. Previous research (Sirgy, 2021, p. 93) indicates that the welfare state might elevate life satisfaction due to not only satisfying material needs and securing work-family life balance but also ensuring greater perception of reliability and security in society.

In conclusion, most previous empirical studies of the life satisfaction of parents are either limited to one country or do not analyse large families. In this paper, we use a comprehensive list of life satisfaction variables (such as health, values, partnership, values, and resources; see Graham, 2009) in combination with the family policy environment to analyse the well-being particularities of large families.

Values and large families

Values are the guiding forces explaining human behaviour and motivating action. Becoming a parent of a large family might be predetermined by individual values. The list of values is long, and different scientific approaches identify different values. In this paper, we are interested in what values shape family decisions and might influence the life satisfaction of parents.

The value of children theory argues that fertility choices are dependent on the value of children for parents. According to Hoffman and Hoffman (1973), the value of children is determined by the individual values of parents, such as religious norms, altruism, success and creativity, power and influence, competition and social comparisons, and the economic benefits. Trommsdorff and Nauck (2005) developed the value of children theory and added several resource-dependent components to these values, such as the perceived cost of children and support from society.

One of the most influential theories about family behaviour is Hakim's (2003) preference theory. Preferences have a close connection with values and, according to Hakim, are the result of socialisation at a young age and remain quite stable over a lifetime. Hakim defines two opposite preferences, namely, career orientation and family orientation, as well as several combinations of the two. Hakim states that people make choices about their lives, including family matters, according to their values. Choice of a more family-oriented or career-oriented path is one component of family behaviour. For example, Retherford, Ogawa and Sakamoto (1996) found that important value changes affecting fertility were related to educational and job gains by women as these led to greater economic independence and more emphasis being placed on the values of individualism and equality between the sexes.

The other central value theory is elaborated by Schwartz (1994). Schwartz also argues that values tend to be stable across an individual's life, but he defines a large set of values. According to Schwartz's value cycle, career orientation is, for example, closely related to achievement and power values while Hakim's family orientation is closely related to group values concerning benevolence. This paper uses these values in its analysis.

As values guide human behaviour, more home-oriented persons should have more, and career-oriented persons fewer, children, especially in societies where work and family life compete. For career-oriented persons, the cost of having children is higher in societal arrangements that do not support the integration of family life and career. For example, Holland and Keizer (2015) found that non-family-oriented persons were less likely to become parents at all. Higher home values are, in turn, related to higher fertility and large families (Stastna, 2007).

Many empirical studies (McQuillan, 2004) have found that religious people are likely to have higher fertility and more children. Interestingly, this relationship works only on an individual

level and not on a country level. For example, many religious South European countries have the lowest fertility and smallest core families in Europe. Moreover, Guetto, Luijkx, and Scherer (2015) point out a macro–micro paradox regarding the role of values in family behaviour. The most secularised and gender-egalitarian societies have the highest female labour market participation rates and the highest fertility, but at the individual level religiosity is positively correlated with fertility and housewifery. They also found that these correlations are stronger in more traditional countries and believe that a combination of cultural and family policy explanations can provide possible explanations for this paradox.

Although religion sets certain family behaviour norms, the final choice of number of children depends on many more factors. Several authors (Hayford & Morgan, 2008; Gubernskaya, 2010) argue that religiousness mainly leads to higher values being ascribed to the home and children, and, accordingly, to a higher level of wished-for children, but that more religious women are not better at realising their fertility intentions (Gubernskaya, 2010). There is, however, some evidence that religious people tend to perceive the cost of child-rearing as lower (Stier & Kaplan, 2020; Peri-Rotem, 2020; Bein, Mynarska, & Gauthier, 2021), and this might lead to higher life satisfaction.

Vogl and Freese's (2020) research in the USA demonstrated that conservative values have a similar impact on fertility as religion. Both religiousness and conservative values depend on educational level. More religious, less educated people have larger families and more conservative views on the family. Simultaneously, higher religiousness is mostly connected with higher life satisfaction (Sirgy, 2021), although this relationship might be complex (Pöhls, 2023).

As some people (according to the ESS, about 22% of the population aged 25–60) are not religious, we also need some measure to cover norm obedience and the inclination toward

modesty of the secular population in contemporary society. We therefore combine religiousness and conformity values from Schwartz's (1994) value cycle in later analyses. Conformity, which is close to conservative values, is restraint of that which may upset or hurt the group or society and violate social rules and expectations (Castaño & Lino, 2013).

Schwartz (1994) also measures hedonistic values, which are opposite to conservative benevolence values in the value cycle. Under hedonistic values, individual enjoyment of life is the main goal and can contribute to people having higher well-being (Messner, 2023). However, parents of large families might need to sacrifice their individual hedonism for the well-being of their children.

As a result of literature review and theoretical frameworks, four main values are used for analysis in this study: 1) conformity as an opposite to 2) hedonistic values and 3) career-oriented values as an opposite value to 4) caring values. Previous research shows that hedonism, conformity, and care should lead to higher life satisfaction and that materialism, career, and power exert a negative average effect on subjective well-being (Sirgy, 2021; Messner, 2023).

Material and other resources and the life satisfaction of large families

Money, social relations, non-discrimination and perceived acceptance in society, health, and time are important life resources and have an effect on well-being (Sirgy, 2021). Resources might have an even stronger impact on large families than values. For example, Retherford, Ogawa and Sakamoto (1996) compared value change and economic and social change jointly with fertility change in Japan. They found that values tend to change more slowly than fertility behaviour but that economic and social conditions fit better with fertility curves. Moreover, Becker's (1960) new home economics theory argues that the number of children in a family is resource-dependent and that parents are influenced by the direct and indirect

cost of children. Empirical studies show that life satisfaction of families with children depends on how families cope economically (own, 2019; Vignoli, Pirani, & Salvini, 2014). Income lifts the subjective life satisfaction of people on low incomes more than that of wealthy ones (Cummins, 2000).

However, due to controversial value distribution in different income groups, the link between choice of number of children and the cost of children might not be simple. Limited resources serve as a penalty and less well-off people express higher anxiety about the costs of raising children (Utomo, McDonald, Utomo, & Hull, 2021), but increased wealth does not always lead to more children (Furuoka, 2012). Higher wealth groups show lower fertility (Weerasinghe & Parr, 2002), partly due to different values. This finding holds in country-level research.

The link between employment status and number of children in family is also controversial. Many European countries with higher female employment also have large families on macro level (Wesolowski & Ferrarini, 2018). However, limited labour market opportunities might lead to the birth of an additional child (Wood & Neels, 2017). Women with low education or a migrant background, in particular, are more likely to choose a large family instead of labour market participation, whereas for highly educated women labour market participation is more positively related to childbearing.

Own (2015) demonstrated that children generally might not provide higher life satisfaction but that life satisfaction is more shaped by partnership and partnership type. Married couples with children and cohabiting families are the groups with the highest life satisfaction. After individual selectivity among these groups is considered, marriage without children remains the most rational choice to achieve the highest life satisfaction. A lack of economic difficulties in a household makes life with children as good as (but not better than) that in

households without children. The authors did not find clear positive effects of children on life satisfaction.

Policies and life satisfaction of large families

Previous studies of the impact of family policies show that the influence of policies is more visible in families starting from the second child (Harknett, Billari, & Medalia, 2014). Therefore, parents with four and more children might be more affected by policies.

The role of family policies is to provide additional resources (fiscal, time, security) for parents and to reduce the cost of rising children. A large amount of scientific research shows the impact of family policy on parents' decisions about an additional child (see an overview by Kudla & Walczyk, 2018), however, large families with four or more children remain an unstudied group of families, and studies of the impact of policies on general life satisfaction are also rare.

The previous research about family benefits and life satisfaction provides different results.

Vignoli, Pirani, & Salvini, (2014) studied the life satisfaction of all families with children and concluded that life satisfaction differences can be largely attributed to socioeconomic differences. The authors used two country-level family policy variables in the analysis – net social protection benefits and full unemployment benefits – but these indicators did not help to explain the life satisfaction differences between family types. "Own" (2017) compared the life satisfaction of different families in Europe and found a direct effect of overall family policy support on the life satisfaction of families with children.

Most countries in Europe encourage both child-raising and labour market participation by parents. Affordable and accessible childcare and leave schemes have an important role in this aim (Baizan, Arpino, & Delclos, 2016; Hoem, Prskawetz, & Neyer, 2001; Wood & Neels, 2019; Glass, Andersson, & Simon, 2016), especially in-low fertility countries (Wesolowski &

Ferrarini, 2018). The impact of childcare on parental well-being is mainly seen as enabling parents to continue their working life or better reconcile work and family life, with stronger positive effects for more vulnerable families (Luci-Greulich & Thevenon, 2013; Thevenon & Gauthier, 2011; Rindfuss, Guilkey, Morgan, & Kravdal, 2010; Rønsen, 2004). However, research shows that this relationship might be country-specific and that this impact may, in some cases, be lacking (Salles, Rossier, & Brachet, 2010; Rindfuss, Choe, & Brauner-Otto, 2016).

The effect of policies may also depend on the overall level of support given to parents in society and not only on a single type of benefit. Therefore, it is frequently argued that a successful family policy is complex, involving different spheres of life (Hoem, 2005), and that we need more general, rather than specific, indicators of family policy to capture the influence of policies. This paper groups countries according to family policies regarding the economic support given to large families and the childcare situation.

Method

We use data from 23 countries to study a combination of values, family types, policies, and resources on parents' life satisfaction. Both country-level and individual-level variables are used in the analysis.

The individual-level data are derived from the 2018 round of the European Social Survey (ESS, 2021). The ESS is an international comparative survey and part of the European scientific infrastructure. The survey sample represents the population in a country from the age of 15 and has no upper age limit. ESS data follow the highest quality standards for international comparisons.

The number of children is calculated from household grid information, and respondents are grouped into three groups according to the number of children in their household: parents

with four and more children, those with three children, and all others (Table 1). To avoid age and life stage bias, we only use adults aged 25–60 in the analysis. The aim of the upper age limit is to exclude parents living in the same household with their grown-up children from analysis, and the lower age limit excludes those who are too young to have reached the main family formation age.

We selected for analysis all 23 countries who participating in the ESS survey in 2018 (Table 1), and who also belong to the OECD, which provides important information about family policy for comparative purposes. These countries represent a variety of demographic situations in Europe (Table 1). Table 1 also shows the distribution of parents with three, four, and more children in the sample.

Table 1. ESS sample size and distribution of parents by number of children in the household.

Life satisfaction was measured with the following question: 'all things considered, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Please answer using this card, where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 means extremely satisfied'.

Resources

To enable a comparison of families according to resources, the major domains of well-being were covered, namely, economic well-being, social relations, health, and acceptance in society.

Economic well-being was measured with a question about the subjective evaluation of income level: 'which of the descriptions comes closest to how you feel about your household's income nowadays?: 1) living comfortably on present income; 2) coping on

present income; 3) finding it difficult on present income; and 4) finding it very difficult on present income'. We also use parents' employment situation (during the last 7 days) in the models (Table 2).

Health was measured through a self-reported health assessment question: 'how is your health in general? Would you say it is 1) very good, 2) good, 3) fair, 4) bad, or 5) very bad?'

From different questions about social relations, we chose to use the frequency of social contact through the following question: 'how often do you meet socially with friends, relatives, or colleagues?' The answer was given on a scale: 1) never, 2) less than once a month, 3) once a month, 4) several times a month, 5) once a week, 6) several times a week, and 7) every day.

Social acceptance and non-discrimination were measured with the following question: 'would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in this country?' The answers were 1) yes and 2) no.

Partnership status (lives currently with a partner or not) was another essential indicator in the analysis, being a well-known source of life satisfaction.

Values

Values were measured in four groups: hedonic, conformity, care, and career values.

Hedonic values were captured with an index from Schwartz's (1994) value items through the following question: 'please listen to each description and tell me how much each person is or is not like you. (1) Having a good time is important to them. They like to 'spoil' themselves; and (2) They seek every chance they can to have fun. It is important to them to do things that give them pleasure'. Both questions were measured on a scale from 1) very much like me to 6) not at all like me. The index was an average of both items with a reversed scale such that a

bigger number shows a higher value. The Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency between items) is 0.63.

Conformity value was formed from two items: agreement with a statement that a person 1) believes that it is important to be humble and modest and not draw attention to themselves and 2) believes it is important to always behave properly and avoid doing anything people would say is wrong. The Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency between items) in this sample is 0.46.

For a career value, several items from Schwartz's (1994) power and achievement group value items were merged into an index. Both achievement and power can motivate progress in a career. The index is an additive index to responses to four statements: 1) being very successful is important to them. They hope people will recognise their achievements; 2) it is important to them to be rich. They want to have a lot of money and expensive things; 3) it is important to them to show their abilities. They want people to admire what they do; and 4) it is important to them to get respect from others. They want people to do what they say. For a better interpretation, the values of the index were reversed such that a higher number shows a higher value. The internal reliability of this index is quite good (Cronbach's alpha = .718).

Care values were measured with one question: 'it is very important to them to help the people around them. They want to care for their well-being'.

Religion affiliation was measured with the following question: 'regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are? Please select answers from 0 = not at all to 10 = very much'.

Family policy

The original four family-policy variables were used to create country types that could capture in a more complex way the essence of support for families. The country types are part of the

analysis. Here, the original variables in the cluster analyses forming those types are described.

The general support for families with children was captured by family benefits for all families as a purchasing power standard per inhabitant from the Eurostat database (Tables by benefits, 2023). Previous analyses have shown that relative income has greater predictive validity than absolute income for well-being (Brady, Curran, & Carpiano, 2023), and therefore the purchasing power parity (PPP) standard was used.

Secondly, the OECD provides information about family benefits separately for fourth- and third-born children in a two-parent, two-earner family with the youngest child aged 6, a percentage of average full-time earnings in 2018. These are unique variables and particularly relevant for analysis of situation of large families. The policy calculations are based on comparisons with earning situation if one parent is working full-time (40 hours per week) and one parent working part-time (20 hours per week), both on median wages. Children are aged three years apart. Average full-time earnings are gross wage earnings paid to full-time, full-year workers before deductions. As these policy data are only available for 2018, we only can ran an analysis for this year.

Finally, the indicator about the usage of childcare is used, namely, the share of children aged 3 up to school age who do not attend childcare (Children in formal childcare, 2023). There can be various reasons for not going to kindergarten, but we consider this indicator as an composite indicator of the parents' possibilities.

Family life can mean different life situations for men and women; therefore, the models were run separately for men and women. All models also included a country-level average life satisfaction variable.

Table 2 provides information about all the main variables in the analysis for the three main family groups. The asterisks in Table 2 indicate the T-test difference between people in different family groups and those of the same age with four children.

Table 2. Main indicators in the analysis.

Policy types

The hierarchical cluster analysis method allowed to merge the countries into groups according to their similarity of family policy. The countries that are closest to each other are connected by a shorter line. The shorter the horizontal line, the smaller are the differences between the countries (Figure 1). The analysis considers all four policy variables. Two of these characteristics – support for the third child and support for the fourth child – are directly related to large families. The childcare variable and the overall level of family policy are general family policy characters but remain important for large families as well.

Table 3 gives description of the country groups. The groups of countries differ from each other mainly in terms of the level of support for large families and the level of general family policy, which is why we also use these levels in the names of the groups. At the same time, childcare indicators are a logical addition to them.

Figure 1. Groups of countries according to their family policies towards large families

Table 3. Description of country groups

In the countries in the first group (low–low type), family support policy is generally weak, and large families are also weakly supported. Moreover, in this group, on average, kindergarten no attendance is high. This group includes seven South and East European countries - Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Latvia, Slovakia. The second (high–low) group of countries is, in many ways, similar to the first group, but their special feature is the very large support given to large families. Although the general support level for all children is also better, compared to Type 1 group, it remains below the European average. About 15% of children, on average, do not attend kindergarten and this is above an average of observed countries. Five countries belong to this group - Hungary, Netherlands, Slovenia, Estonia, Poland

The third group of countries (low–average) includes six countries (Belgium, Ireland, Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Iceland) and does not stand out in any way in terms of supporting large families and is average in terms of overall support for families with children. The fourth group (average–high) including Austria, Sweden and Finland is average in terms of supporting large families, but in general, these countries contribute significantly more to families with children generally than the average European country. Here, the attendance of children in kindergarten is higher than in previous groups. The fifth group (low-high) consists of Germany and Norway, and these countries give the highest support to families with children but do not pay much attention to large families.

Results. Life satisfaction of large families

Simple group comparisons (Table 2) reveal no differences in average life satisfaction between families with four children and other groups. Parents in families with three or more children are more partnered, which might have a positive impact on their life satisfaction. At the same time, parents of families with four children have more economic problems and

participate less in paid work than parents with three children or other people. Families with four children report more discrimination and are more religious. They have also more conformity- and care-oriented values and fewer career and hedonic values (Table 2).

As a next step, the models analysed the interaction of all variables using a generalised linear regression model. All models included average life satisfaction on the country level. The step-by-step approach allowed investigation of the interaction between variables and their impact on families with four and more children. Models were run separately for men (Table 4) and women (Table 5).

The main interest of the step-by-step approach was to see whether some factors change the well-being of families with four and additional children significantly more compared to other families. Simple comparisons of average results did not reveal statistically essential differences in life satisfaction by family types (Table 2), not even considering average country-level life satisfaction differences.

Additional models including values, resources and policies showed some improvement in model goodness estimates (AIC, BIC). The first model added resources and values as explanatory variables. Model shows that all factors influence life satisfaction in an expected direction, but life satisfaction of families with four or more children remained statistically indifferent from the life of other people. It applies to both men and women. There is a strong and persistent positive relationship between life satisfaction with partnership, health, non-discrimination, social relations, hedonism and caring values, but an orientation toward career-related values makes both men and women less satisfied with life.

Two factors behave differently in men's and women's subsample, namely, religiousness and conformity values. For women, there is a strong positive correlation between religiousness and life satisfaction and a strong negative association between conformity and life

satisfaction. For men, conformity is positively associated with life satisfaction, and religiousness has no statistical significance to life satisfaction in the first model.

The second model adds some economic variables, namely an employment status and household income assessment to the interactions. These additions do not change the main result for women but explains some life satisfaction differences for fathers of four and more children. The life satisfaction of father with fewer than four children drops or in other words life satisfaction of fathers of four becomes statistically higher than that of men with less children. Higher incomes and employment are associated with greater life satisfaction and lower incomes and non-working status with lower life satisfaction for men. This link is missing in the women's sample.

The last model takes into account also policy types, but it does not change the life satisfaction difference between family types with four children and other families. Men with less than three children remain less satisfied with their lives compared to fathers with four children, and there are no significant changes in life satisfaction of women. The only new interesting result in this model is that it shows, that general life satisfaction for men is higher in countries with more comprehensive family policy (Type 5 and Type 4), but for women, the association between policy type and life satisfaction is more complex. Women's life satisfaction is higher in Type 4 and Type 2 countries compared to Type 5 and Type 1 and lowest in Type 3 countries (Table 5). For this study it is mainly essential that the inclusion of policy types in the analyses does not lead to the life satisfaction rise or drop of families with four children, compared to other family types.

Table 4. Comparison of the life satisfaction of fathers of four and more children in a household with that of other men (generalised linear model). All models include average life satisfaction on the country level (N = 10927).

Table 5. Comparison of the life satisfaction of mothers of four and more children in a household with that of other women (generalised linear model). All models include average life satisfaction on the country level (N= 11202).

Since perceived income and employment were the only important life satisfaction differentiating aspects in the lives of families with four children, we also provide an additional analysis of income differences by family policy types (Table 6).

Table 6. Perceived income differences in five family policy groups. Comparison with parents with four and more children with other families.

The largest income gap for large families is in low family policy support to all kind of families group (Type 1). However, the income gap for four and more children families is also essential in the type 5 countries that generally provide high support to families but have comparatively low support to large ones (Type 5). The fourth group of countries, which gives high support to all families with children and average support to large families, seems to guarantee the most equal distribution of income by family types. Families with four children are also less economically different in Type 3 countries.

It can be concluded that although the policies do not have a large discriminating effect on the well-being of different families, family policy is still related to income differences and can therefore have an indirect effect on well-being via income.

Conclusion

The paper analysed the life satisfaction of families with four and more children in Europe and filled the gap in international comparisons of the well-being of families of this type. Although the share of this type of families is not large in Europe, the study sheds light on the life of parents with many children. Life satisfaction as the central indicators of goodness of life was used as the main depends variables in analyses.

We used indicators about resources, values, and family policy as explanatory characteristics of life satisfaction and considered 23 countries with different backgrounds in the analysis. A large number of countries increases the reliability of the results; at the same time, it makes it more difficult to find general trends that are typical in all countries.

Family policy is complex, and OECD data about the family policy support given to four and three children in combination with the Eurostat family-policy data allowed us to distinguish five types of countries in Europe according to their support for large families, overall support for families with children, and children's participation in kindergarten. The types consider policies for large families, including fiscal transfers and are therefore somewhat different from some other classifications based more on work-family reconciliation policy data from the same period (see Chzhen, Gromada, & Rees, 2019). Although family policies did not seem to affect the well-being of parents with four children differently than others family types, additional analyses showed that countries with average support to large families and high support to all families (Austria, Finland, Sweden) produced economically most equal situation for families with four children.

Although the lack of direct impact of policy indicators on people's well-being is not rare, it is appropriate to ask why family policy indicators "did not work well"? There are several possible explanations. First family policy type did not explain the life satisfaction differences

of large families, in the models where income level, employment opportunities, general life satisfaction level were already included, and eroded the effect. Secondly, this article compared families with four children to families with other children, and several overall family policy factors affecting families with four children may equally affect the well-being of families with fewer children. Thirdly, specific support for the fourth and subsequent children is not powerful enough to change the well-being of children rich families.

Analysis also showed that the **life satisfaction** of parents of four or more children do not differ statistically from other persons aged 25–60 on average in European countries, although parents of four children have more economic problems and they participate less in paid work than parents of three children or other people. Parents with four and more children also feel more discrimination, are more religious, and have more conformity- and care-oriented values but fewer career and hedonic values.

Each of the separate factors like partnership, social contact, non-discrimination, health, hedonism, care, and career and conformity values had an important impact on life satisfaction but that they did not explain the life satisfaction differences between large families and other people. One explanation may be the large heterogeneity among parents with four and more children.

Previous research shows that the well-being of families with children generally is influenced by economic security (Vignoli, Pirani, & Salvini, 2014; own, 2017), therefore we would expect it to affect families with four children as well. Income and job opportunities turned out to be important factors in the well-being of families with four children and distinguished them from the other family types, but this paper also revealed differences between men and women. The life satisfaction of fathers of four or more children is strongly influenced by economic coping assessment and employment status, and working fathers of four with equal

economic coping are even happier than men with less children. Some previous studies also report that fathers might be more distressed by the financial strains of parenting, and changes in work and income can affect them more than women. Especially men with lower life satisfaction are more vulnerable (Vignoli, Mencarini, & Alderotti, 2020) or men in more income and career-oriented societies (Havasi, 2013).

Employment and income status were not important differentiators in **the women's model.** Although income was also an important component of life satisfaction for women, women with four children did not differ in this respect from the other groups of women. Non-employed status did not make women less satisfied with life, probably due to less problems for them with acceptance of another roles in life. Women tend to stay more at home because of children, and benefit from leave subsidies. In this study, we did not measure parents' sources of income, but asked about their satisfaction with the overall financial situation of their household. However, income assessment did not explain the life satisfaction differences of women with four differently from the other women.

Why are mothers with four different from fathers? Psychological rewards theory argues that the economic costs of parenthood are counterbalanced by psychological rewards, therefore parenting may increase women's life satisfaction more than men's life satisfaction, because women are more involved in child-rearing than men (Mikucka & Rizzi, 2020). However the same authors found that it is not an universal phenomenon, because this explanation does not work in individual countries. This study used values as a proxy for other values, but they also did not provide any good explanation for the additional well-being of women with four children.

Finally, although it is suggested that that mothers' emotional well-being may benefit more from public policies designed to reduce the fiscal and opportunity costs of parenting (Glass,

Andersson, & Simon, 2016), analyses provided more scattered picture about life satisfaction of women and family policy. While for men there was a clear positive connection between the strength of family policy support and life satisfaction, women were most satisfied with life in countries with generally strong family policy and support for large families on least average level, and good kindergarten traditions - Type 4 countries. This result is in line with policy support hypothesis, but the rest of country groups need more in depth analyses in future.

In conclusion, the paper shows that income and employment opportunities play a key role in understanding the well-being of fathers in large families. This article showed that material well-being plays an important role in the well-being of large families. Income is especially important from the point of view of men. Life satisfaction of men was better described by the models, compared to women; therefore, women's lives need a more detailed analysis. It is possible that women as mothers differ less from each other in families of different sizes than fathers, and this might be one explanation for missing differences. The other explanation may be, contrary, a large diversity among women in different countries, what does not allow see clear single pattern.

Much attention has been paid on parental leave and kindergarten policies in the recent European family policy literature (Pollmann-Schult, 2018), and the role of policy as a compensator for the additional cost of children has been somewhat neglected.

Family policies are in constant change (Janta, Davies, Jordan, & Stewart, 2019). In this article data only from 2018 was used, because calculations of the policy support for large families are not available for other years, but the well-being of large families deserves to be investigated over a longer period in future.

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Table 1. ESS sample size and distribution of parents by number of children in the household.

	TFR (2010-2018)*	Sample of 25 - 60 year old people	% of parents with 3 children in hh	% of parents with 4+children in hh
Portugal	1.3	599	4.0	2.2
Cyprus	1.3	471	10.2	5.5
Spain	1.3	1022	4.6	1.2
Italy	1.4	1505	4.7	0.7
Poland	1.4	860	4.7	2.4
Hungary	1.4	954	3.4	1.2
Slovakia	1.4	638	5.3	2.7
Bulgaria	1.5	1221	2.0	0.9
Austria	1.5	1483	4.9	1.4
Germany	1.5	1276	5.3	2.3
Switzerland	1.5	888	6.6	2.0
Slovenia	1.6	745	5.9	1.5
Latvia	1.6	540	7.5	2.1
Estonia	1.6	1099	4.5	2.0
Netherlands	1.7	929	7.8	2.7
Finland	1.7	934	5.1	2.8
Belgium	1.7	1000	10.0	2.7
Norway	1.8	770	8.6	2.7
Great Britain	1.8	1337	6.4	2.4
Sweden	1.9	923	7.9	2.2
Ireland	1.9	1309	13.1	8.4
Iceland	1.9	510	14.9	3.9
France	2.0	1122	6.2	2.9
Total/Average	1.6	20166	6.4	2.5

* Eurostat data

Table 2. Main indicators in the analyses.

Variables			With 4 and more children N = 550	With 3 children N = 1410	Else N = 20106
	Min	Max	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Life satisfaction	0	10	7.26 (2.176)	7.41 (2.091)	7.15 (2.077)
With partner (0 no, 1 yes)	0	1	0.89 (.309)	0.89 (.318)	0.67 *** (.471)
Gender (1 male, 2 female)	1	2	1.54 (.499)	1.53 (.499)	1.50* (.500)
Income (1 = comfortable, ... 4 = very difficult)	1	4	2.10 (.944)	1.93*** (.843)	1.92*** (.825)
Paid work (0 no, 1 yes)	0	1	0.64 (.481)	0.77*** (.420)	0.80*** (.398)
Health assessment	1	5	2.03 (.829)	1.92* (.776)	2.03 (.839)
How often meet socially (1 never, 7 every day)	1	7	4.65 (1.691)	4.73 (1.529)	4.84* (1.500)
Discriminated (1 yes, 2 no)	1	2	1.86 (.351)	1.90* (.306)	1.91*** (.290)
How religious (1 not at all, 10 very)	1	10	5.65 (3.227)	4.81*** (3.206)	4.15*** (3.073)
Hedonic values	0	5	2.81(1.162)	3.04*** (1.058)	3.12*** (1.093)
Conformity values	0	5	3.46 (.988)	3.33* (.996)	3.26*** (.998)
Career values	0	5	2.34 (.960)	2.47* (.966)	2.55*** (.968)
Care values	1	6	5.03 (.867)	5.00 (.878)	4.87*** (.953)
Family benefits …					
for all families	279.1	1388.9	734.57 (281.301)	736.36 (297.926)	694.68** (306.021)
for fourth parity children	0	49.1	17.44 (10.856)	16.94 (10.514)	18.01 (11.62)
for third parity children	0	25	8.74 (5.205)	8.53 (5.128)	9.32* (5.741)
Children who do not attend childcare %	1.40	40.7	12.63 (10.986)	12.43 (10.881)	14.03** (10.974)

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Table 3. Description of country groups

Country group		Support to fourth child (SD)	Support to third child (SD)	PPP (SD)	Children not in childcare % (SD)
1 Low-low	Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Latvia, Slovakia	11.7 (8.5)	6.8 (4.5)	320.0 (30.2)	14.3 (9.5)
2 High-low	Hungary, Netherlands, Slovenia, Estonia, Poland	32.1 (16.5)	15.2 (7.8)	515.7 (73.8)	15.6 (14.4)
3 Low-average	Belgium, Ireland, Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Iceland	14.3(6.6)	6.8(2.7)	743.8 (59.6)	14.0 (16.8)
4 Average-high	Austria, Finland, Sweden	16.4 (3.6)	9.6 (4.8)	1020.7 (27.1)	11.8 (5.9)
5 Low-high	Germany, Norway	13.6 (8.1)	6.7 (3.9)	1339.4 (69.9)	11.1 (0.8)
Total	N = 23	17.5 (12.1)	8.7 (5.8)	696.2 (339.1)	13.2 (11.5)

Table 4. Comparison of the life satisfaction of fathers of four and more children in a household with that of other men (generalised linear model). All models include average life satisfaction on the country level (N = 10927).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Other persons	-0.111	(0.1216)	-0.373**	(0.1147)	-0.350***	(0.1146)
With 3 children	-0.190	(0.1406)	-0.403**	(0.1325)	-0.386***	(0.1321)
With 4+ children (ref.)	0a		0a		0a	
Does not live with a partner	-0.797***	(0.0415)	-0.569***	(0.0402)	-0.567***	(0.0400)
Subjective general health	-0.631***	(0.0227)	-0.448**	(0.0222)	-0.459***	(0.0223)
Discrimination	-0.719***	(0.0665)	-0.535***	(0.0629)	-0.541***	(0.0629)
How often meet socially	0.200***	(0.0129)	0.156***	(0.0123)	0.152***	(0.0125)
How religious	0.005	(0.0062)	0.023***	(0.0059)	0.028***	(0.0059)
Value_ Hedonism	0.133***	(0.0193)	0.093***	(0.0182)	0.086***	(0.0182)
Value_ Care	0.121***	(0.0213)	0.113***	(0.0200)	0.107***	(0.0201)
Value_ Career	-0.114***	(0.0204)	-0.093***	(0.0192)	-0.074***	(0.0197)
Value_ Conformity	0.047*	(0.0202)	0.037*	(0.0190)	0.052**	(0.0190)
No paid work last week			-0.149**	(0.0551)	-0.146**	(0.0549)
Income: Living comfortably			2.622***	(0.1029)	2.553***	(0.1033)
Income: Coping			2.003***	(0.1002)	1.964***	(0.1002)
Income: Difficult			1.064***	(0.1052)	1.055***	(0.1049)
Income: Very difficult (ref.)			0a		0a	
Type low-low					-0.441***	(0.0649)
Type high-low					-0.314****	(0.0652)
Type low-average					-0.395****	(0.0622)
Type average-high					-0.053	(0.0760)
Type low-high (ref.)					0a	
AIC	37600.861		36466.623		36406.216	
BIC	37700.892		36595.234		36563.407	

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, ^ p < 0.1

Table 5. Comparison of the life satisfaction of mothers of four and more children in a household with that of other women (generalised linear model). All models include average life satisfaction on the country level (N= 11202).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Other persons	0.187	(0.1137)	0.078	(0.1090)	0.050	(0.1091)
With 3 children	0.121	(0.1312)	0.097	(0.1255)	0.089	(0.1253)
With 4+ children (ref.)	0a		0a		0a	
Does not live with a partner	-0.620***	(0.0401)	-0.400***	(0.0390)	-0.395***	(0.0389)
Subjective general health	-0.665***	(0.0223)	-0.527***	(0.0219)	-0.537***	(0.0220)
Discrimination	-0.462***	(0.0617)	-0.346***	(0.0590)	-0.332***	(0.0592)
How often meet socially	0.200***	(0.0125)	0.154***	(0.0121)	0.163***	(0.0123)
How religious	0.023***	(0.0059)	0.036***	(0.0057)	0.037***	(0.0057)
Value_ Hedonism	0.127***	(0.0178)	0.096***	(0.0171)	0.092***	(0.0172)
Value_ Care	0.149***	(0.0214)	0.134***	(0.0204)	0.145***	(0.0206)
Value_ Career	-0.112***	(0.0197)	-0.105***	(0.0188)	-0.110***	(0.0193)
Value_ Conformity	-0.078***	(0.0188)	-0.052*	(0.0180)	-0.045*	(0.0181)
No paid work last week			-0.066	(0.0424)	-0.050	(0.0425)
Income: Living comfortably			2.401***	(0.1028)	2.397***	(0.1032)
Income: Coping on present income			1.865***	(0.0997)	1.857***	(0.0997)
Income: Difficult			1.066***	(0.1049)	1.069***	(0.1047)
Income: Very difficult (ref.)			0a		0a	
Type low-low					-0.018	(0.0655)
Type high-low					0.171*	(0.0648)
Type low-average					-0.121*	(0.0631)
Type average-high					0.167*	(0.0773)
Type low-high (ref.)					0a	
AIC	38583.340		37693.248		37660.755	
BIC	38683.803		37822.415		37818.626	

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

Table 6. Perceived income differences in five family policy groups. Comparison of different family types with parents with four and more children.

	With 4 children	With 3 children (SD)		Other	SD
Type 1. Low-low	0	-0.320**	(0.104)	-0.521***	(0.091)
Type 2. High-low	0	-0.254*	(0.098)	-0.157*	(0.086)
Type 3. Low-average	0	-0.109	(0.067)	-0.128*	(0.056)
Type 4. Average-high	0	0.014	(0.106)	-0.086	(0.093)
Type 5. Low-high	0	-0.333*	(0.114)	-0.340***	(0.098)

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$