



# ARE WE GETTING HAPPIER?

## The significance of education, age and income for mental well-being in Poland

English version of conference materials  
prepared for the press conference on 1 December 2021,  
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“Harmonized longitudinal data on social structure:  
Polish research in a cross-national perspective”

## On the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN

The Polish Panel Survey POLPAN provides data infrastructure to analyse dynamics of social inequality from a life-course perspective. Historical events shape the study's research design, including its origin. In 1987-1988, 5,817 randomly sampled men and women aged 21-65 are interviewed in what is still state socialist Poland. Soon after, their lives are upended by the profound transformations that the anti-communist revolutions in Eastern Europe triggered. To understand how people transition to the emerging social structure and with what consequences, close to half of the respondents are re-interviewed in 1993. This sample serves as a panel that we follow every five years since, with the most recent fieldwork in 2018. Starting with 1998, renewal samples of the youngest cohort are added to each POLPAN wave and become part of the panel. Participants are interviewed face-to-face on a wide range of topics that include educational and occupational careers, psychological functioning, physical and mental health, political behaviours, and social attitudes, among others. Taken together, these topics address POLPAN's overarching research problem of how social position influences individual biographies and friendship networks, and how peoples' capacity to make choices that biographies and networks reflect, in turn influences later position in the social structure.

For an extensive description of POLPAN, see: Irina Tomescu-Dubrow, Kazimierz M. Slomczynski, Zbigniew Sawiński, Anna Kiersztyn, Krystyna Janicka, Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek, Ilona Wysmułek, Michał Kotnarowski. *The Polish Panel Survey, POLPAN. European Sociological Review, 2021, Volume 37, Issue 5, October 2021, Pages 849–864.*

### Are we getting happier?

#### *The significance of education, age and income for mental well-being in Poland*

##### **What has driven the level of happiness in Poland?**

Since the fall of communism in Poland, the sense of happiness experienced by Poles has risen significantly. One can distinguish two periods of this growth. The first one was in the 1990s, which can be linked to the liberated economic potential as a direct result of the transition to market economy. In the second period, which begins with Poland's accession to the European Union, this growth accelerates further. It is driven by Poland's getting closer to the centre of the global system and the country's full participation in global exchange, both in economic and cultural terms.

##### **How has the level of happiness increased in Poland?**

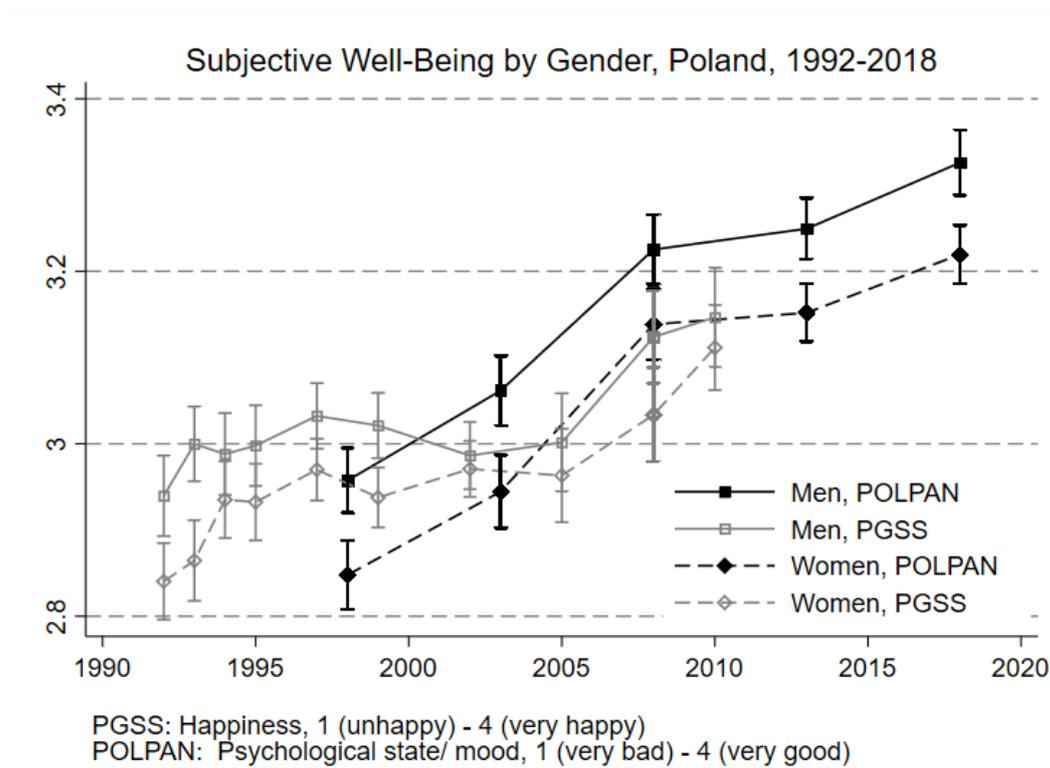
Over the thirty years since the political transition in Poland, we have observed a similar increase in the level of mental well-being in all essential social groups. The average sense of happiness has evolved in a similar way among women and men, better and less educated Poles, among farmers,

workers and the intelligentsia. As regards psychological well-being, the systemic transition did not bring about an increase in inequalities in the essential dimensions of the social structure.

### Happier – but are Poles equally happy?

Significant differences persist as regards the level of happiness between different social categories. Wealthy people are happier than those who are worse off. The higher the level of education, the higher the psychological well-being. Older people are less happy than young ones. Interestingly, women in Poland are less happy than men, although the situation is reversed in the vast majority of developed countries.

Thanks to POLPAN data, we can also observe to what extent the increased average sense of happiness in Poland is driven by shifts in the social structure towards happier groups. Ever more Poles get higher education and enjoy a good living standard, which partly explains the increase in average well-being.



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## Experts on the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN 1988-2018

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### Recent books on the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN (in English)\*

- Tomescu-Dubrow, Irina, Joshua K. Dubrow, Anna Kiersztyn, Katarzyna Andejuk, Marta Kołczyńska, and Kazimierz M. Słomczyński. 2019. *Subjective Experience of Joblessness in Poland*. Cham, CH: Springer.
- Tomescu-Dubrow, Irina, Kazimierz M. Słomczyński, Henryk Domanski, Joshua Kjerulf Dubrow, Zbigniew Sawinski, and Dariusz Przybysz. 2018. *Dynamics of Class and Stratification in Poland*. Budapest – New York: Central European University Press.
- Słomczyński, Kazimierz M. and Irina Tomescu-Dubrow (with Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek and Ilona Wysmułek), eds. 2016. *Dynamics of Social Structure: Poland's Transformative Years, 1988-2013*. Warsaw, PL: IFiS Publishers.
- Słomczyński, Kazimierz M. and Ilona Wysmułek, eds. 2016. *Social Inequality and the Life Course: Poland's Transformative Years, 1988-2013*. Warsaw, PL: IFiS Publishers.

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\* An extended list of POLPAN publications, including books, book chapters, and journal articles in English (and in Polish) is provided on the web-site [polpan.org](http://polpan.org).