


Article

Family Climate and Life Satisfaction in 12-Year-Old Adolescents in Europe

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Abstract: This research aimed to examine the association between life satisfaction and family climate indicators in 12-year-old European adolescents. Cross-sectional data from the second wave of the Children’s Worlds project—an international survey of children’s lives and well-being—were examined. Specifically, data from participating European countries were analyzed: i.e., Estonia, Spain, Germany, England, Romania, Norway, Poland, and Malta. This sample of 9281 adolescents (50.3% girls) filled in self-report measures of life satisfaction and some indicators of family climate. Descriptive statistics and regression analyses were performed by country. Furthermore, a confirmatory model was tested to examine the association between family climate and life satisfaction. The results pointed out that having a good time together with family and being treated fairly by parents/carers were the indicators with the greatest positive effects on life satisfaction. In general, a more positive family climate was associated with higher life satisfaction among 12-year-old adolescents in the participating eight European countries.

Keywords: family; life satisfaction; adolescence; Europe; cross-sectional

1. Introduction

Research to explore the opinions and perceptions of adolescents about their well-being is highly necessary [1,2] in order to incorporate that knowledge into the design of plans and programs that would positively result in their healthy development, either from the point of view of prevention or as treatment and rehabilitation. In this sense, this knowledge can contribute to the fact that, among others, political, social, educational, and psychological actions in the field of childhood and adolescence are characterized by a principle of reality and usefulness insofar as it is based on first-hand information [3,4]. As pointed out by Bender [5], subjective well-being refers to a person’s subjective assessment of the quality of his or her life. Furthermore, subjective welfare measures offer information that can positively revert to the prevention, early detection, treatment, and rehabilitation of at-risk populations. Thus, it could help to identify the focuses in which to intervene, with the ultimate objective of increasing well-being [6,7] during adolescence as a developmental transition period between childhood and adult life that requires psychological well-being to cope with developmental tasks.

Many studies to date have shed light on the correlations between lower life satisfaction with depression, disruptive behaviors, drug use, suicidal ideas and attempts, and low self-esteem, among others [6,8–10]. At the same time, there seems to be a buffering effect of life satisfaction against the negative effects of stress and the development of psychopathological problems [9]. The approach to the study of subjective well-being in adolescents should start from the presupposition of the complexity of scenarios and the actors that are acting. In this line, the family, the school, and the neighborhood, with their different primary and secondary actors (parents, siblings, grandparents, parenthood styles, teachers, classmates, school climate and culture, peer groups, or community resources, among others)

are scenarios that, by itself and in interaction, must be taken into account in the research because of their specific weight in the well-being of adolescents. From our point of view, socio-educational and psychosocial interventions would constitute the appropriate platforms on which to place educational, political, and welfare actions. Thus, subjective well-being should be fostered from the integration of the possible psychosocial actions: i.e., the individual dimensions with the socio-communitarian ones [11].

Research in the field of subjective well-being has underscored the importance of knowing the judgments on the good and bad elements of life [12]. These perceptions are not only cognitive judgments about the degree of satisfaction with life—i.e., towards the circumstances that surround him/her [13]—but they are also more incardinated in that which Blanco and Valera [14] considered overall social welfare: that is, the adjustment of the person with the environmental and social contexts. In general, the concept of subjective well-being refers to the evaluations that people have with respect to their lives in general or to certain aspects of their lives: i.e., the family, the school, the neighborhood, and, in short, everything that challenges adolescent life. Other authors [7,11,15] refer to the fact that subjective well-being is translated into the global valuations that people make of their life opportunities. We are not only talking about a reflection, but also about interactive processes of cognition and emotion [15]. Bradshaw and Richardson [16] indicate, in this line, that the study of subjective well-being in childhood provides a research framework responding to the principles of non-discrimination, the principle of the best interests for the children, and the principle of self-expression.

The other pillar that justifies this research is family, which constitutes, together with the school, one of the main contexts of socialization during adolescence, based on affective relationships [17] in which the adolescent learns the guidelines to develop in society. Family has a fundamental meaning for today's society, with good family relations constituting an important element for both parents and children [18]. Moreover, following other researchers [19,20], the family climate refers to the shared perception that parents and children have about how the family works: that is, how the communication is, the feelings that are shared or not, and the cohesion that characterizes it. The importance of the family climate is reflected in previous literature that indicates the interrelation between a good family climate and positive personal adjustment in adolescence [21–23]. It has been observed that adolescents who have experienced frequent conflicts within the family context, communication difficulties between parents and children, scarce parental support, and inadequate parental styles are more likely to manifest disruptive and antisocial behaviors [24–27], serious emotional problems, such as anxiety and depression [28,29], general adaptation problems [30], or drug use problems [31].

Moreover, as the latest study report by the Health Behavior in School-aged children (HBSC) Study: International Report from the 2009/2010 Survey [32] suggests, the support from family—and, particularly, good communication with parents—is key in establishing the family as a protective factor, helping young people to deal with stressful situations. Moreover, young people who report good communication with their parents and a sense of parent/family connectedness are also more likely to report higher life satisfaction and less psychological complaints [33,34]. Thus, overall family climate is expected to have a crucial role in psychological adjustment during adolescent transition. Despite evidence of the importance of family relationships for subjective well-being in adolescent populations, more research is needed to jointly examine multiple indicators of family climate. Furthermore, more research is needed to provide evidence from different countries and cultures.

The main objective of the present research is to examine the association between different indicators of family climate and subjective well-being in a wide sample of adolescents belonging to different European countries. This also includes the attempt to explain overall life satisfaction based on family climate in the total sample and by country. We believe that the results of the study may contribute to improving interventions with families that are aimed at promoting the well-being of adolescents.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. General Study Design

The data used in this publication came from the second wave of the Children's Worlds project: an international survey of children's lives and well-being [35]. In the present work, data from 12-year-old adolescents from participating European countries were analyzed: i.e., Estonia, Spain, Germany, England, Romania, Norway, Poland, and Malta. This study followed a cross-sectional and descriptive design, in which a self-report questionnaire was administered to a representative adolescent sample in each country during school time. The data collection was conducted during winter, 2013, and spring, 2014. The study received ethical approval from the appropriate ethics boards within each country, including parental and adolescent informed consents. The data collection respected privacy, confidentiality, and the anonymity of participants.

2.2. Participants

In the present study, the total sample was composed of 9281 adolescents aged 12 years old (50.3% girls). By country, the sample was composed of 1029 Estonian adolescents (50.5% boys), 1667 Spanish adolescents (52.8% boys), 852 German adolescents (52.5% girls), 1319 English adolescents (51.2% boys), 1507 Romanian adolescents (51.4% boys), 974 Norwegian adolescents (57.3% girls), 1017 Polish adolescents (51.1% girls), and 942 Maltese adolescents (51.6% girls). In the overall sample, 92.4% of the sample was born in the country where they lived. Concerning home characteristics, 50.7% reported always sleeping in the same home, 40.4% indicated usually sleeping in the same home but sometimes sleeping in other places, and 7.6% reported regularly sleeping in two homes with different adults. Moreover, 98.8% indicated that he/she lived with his/her family, 0.6% lived in a foster home, 0.4% lived in a children's home, and 0.2% lived in another type of home. Each participant country had a sampling procedure, with the goal of reaching a representative sample of at least 1000 children in each age group surveyed. As the inclusion criteria, participants were all enrolled at a school selected for the study, and they attended class the day of the fieldwork and provided informed consent.

2.3. Instrument

Questionnaires were translated and back translated from English to the native language in each country, and they were previously piloted to test the psychometric properties. As well as demographics (i.e., gender, age, nationality, and home characteristics), family climate and life satisfaction indicators were included in the questionnaire of the second wave of the Children's Worlds project.

Family climate: this scale was created based on five indicators, which represented some characteristics of family climate—i.e., “I feel safe at home,” “I have a quiet place to study at home,” “my parents (or the people who look after me) listen to me and take what I say into account,” “we have a good time together in my family,” and “my parents (or the people who look after me) treat me fairly.” These statements were introduced by the question “how much do you agree with each of these sentences?” with five Likert-type response options: “I do not agree,” “agree a little bit,” “agree somewhat,” “agree a lot,” and “totally agree.” An overall mean score was calculated based on the respective items. Good internal constancy reliability was found in this scale, with Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$. A confirmatory factor analysis proved good factorial validity, reaching a good overall data fit: $\chi^2 (5, N = 9281) = 179.52, p < 0.001$, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.988, goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.992, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.02, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.063, 90% confidence interval (CI) of RMSEA = 0.055–0.071. All measurement equations were significant and standardized residuals were below 0.1.

Life satisfaction: a five-item scale was composed of four indicators from the Student Life Satisfaction Scale, four items [36]—i.e., “my life is going well,” “my life is just right,” “I have a good life,” and “I have what I want in life”—and one indicator adapted from the Satisfaction With Life Scale [37]—i.e., “the things in my life are excellent.” These items were introduced by: “here are five

sentences about how you feel about your life as a whole. Please tick a box to say how much you agree with each of the sentences." A 11-point Likert-type scale was presented to answer each statement, from "not at all agree (0)" to "totally agree (10)." Based on the respective items' scores, an overall mean score was calculated. Excellent internal constancy reliability was found, with Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$. Good factorial validity was observed in a confirmatory factor analysis. The Lagrange multipliers test suggested the association between items 4 and 5 ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$), and a good overall data fit was found: $\chi^2 (4, N = 9281) = 101.23, p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.998, GFI = 0.996, SRMR = 0.01, RMSEA = 0.052, 90% CI RMSEA = 0.043–0.061. Moreover, all measurement equations were significant and standardized residuals were very low.

2.4. Data Analysis' Design

First, the descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation) of the separate indicators of family climate and life satisfaction was examined, as well as of their overall scores, in the total sample and by country. Second, bivariate Pearson zero-order correlations were calculated between the indicators of both scales in the total sample. Third, stepwise regression analyses were conducted to explain overall scores in life satisfaction based on the demographics in step 1 (i.e., gender, nationality, and home characteristics) and separate family climate indicators in step 2. F, R^2 , and standardized coefficients (β) were reported in the total sample and by country. These analyses were carried out with SPSS 21.0. Fourth, a structural equation model tested the association between a factor composed of family indicators and a factor that included the life satisfaction indicator. The overall model fit was studied by calculating the χ^2 test, comparative fit index (CFI), goodness of fit index (GFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and a 90% confidence interval of RMSEA, following the instructions of Hu and Bentler [38] and Jöreskog [39]. Furthermore, measurement equations were analyzed and standardized coefficients were reported. This structural equation model was developed with the program EQS 6.1 [40].

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics of Indicators of Family Climate and Life Satisfaction

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics—i.e., mean and standard deviation (in parentheses)—of family climate and life satisfaction indicators, as well as their overall scores, in the total sample and by country. Overall scores indicated very good family climate and notable life satisfaction. Small differences by country were observed in overall family climate— $F(7, 8731) = 31.45, p < 0.001, \eta^2 p = 0.03$ —and in overall life satisfaction— $F(7, 9024) = 74.47, p < 0.001, \eta^2 p = 0.06$ —with differences within one standard deviation.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of family and life satisfaction indicators in the total sample and by country.

	Total	Estonia	Spain	Germany	England	Romania	Norway	Poland	Malta
I feel safe at home	3.69 (0.73)	3.74 (0.67)	3.69 (0.65)	3.48 (1.94)	3.71 (0.65)	3.60 (0.81)	3.78 (0.64)	3.83 (0.60)	3.65 (0.69)
I have a quiet place to study at home	3.28 (1.03)	3.33 (1.00)	3.21 (0.98)	3.08 (1.13)	2.98 (1.16)	3.41 (0.94)	3.40 (0.97)	3.82 (0.65)	3.01 (1.12)
My parents/carers listen to me and take what I say into account	3.30 (0.98)	3.24 (0.98)	3.33 (0.95)	3.13 (1.09)	3.31 (0.96)	3.19 (1.06)	3.45 (0.88)	3.35 (0.97)	3.38 (0.93)
We have a good time together in my family	3.43 (0.94)	3.59 (0.78)	3.35 (0.97)	3.10 (1.12)	3.38 (0.97)	3.36 (0.99)	3.68 (0.72)	3.49 (0.91)	3.59 (0.79)
My parents/carers treat me fairly	3.50 (0.88)	3.50 (0.82)	3.56 (0.81)	3.13 (1.10)	3.49 (0.88)	3.62 (0.77)	3.58 (0.82)	3.44 (0.99)	3.54 (0.84)
Overall Family Climate	3.46 (0.68)	3.49 (0.65)	3.45 (0.62)	3.19 (0.93)	3.40 (0.71)	3.47 (0.64)	3.59 (0.62)	3.61 (0.65)	3.45 (0.60)

Table 1. Cont.

	Total	Estonia	Spain	Germany	England	Romania	Norway	Poland	Malta
My life is going well	8.69 (1.89)	8.34 (1.91)	8.78 (1.69)	8.15 (2.14)	8.45 (2.11)	9.42 (1.34)	9.06 (1.61)	8.10 (2.30)	8.84 (1.73)
My life is just right	8.45 (2.16)	7.51 (2.26)	8.33 (2.14)	7.75 (2.46)	8.20 (2.39)	9.41 (1.41)	8.89 (1.84)	8.35 (2.24)	8.75 (1.93)
I have a good life	8.88 (1.90)	8.55 (1.98)	8.89 (1.81)	8.41 (2.18)	8.61 (2.11)	9.51 (1.36)	9.22 (1.63)	8.51 (2.23)	9.04 (1.70)
I have what I want in life	8.40 (2.15)	8.26 (2.20)	8.27 (2.11)	7.90 (2.41)	8.40 (2.21)	9.11 (1.73)	8.18 (2.17)	8.05 (2.33)	8.74 (1.89)
The things in my life are excellent	8.35 (2.25)	7.92 (2.39)	8.19 (2.15)	7.91 (2.40)	8.21 (2.48)	9.17 (1.65)	8.81 (1.78)	7.60 (2.76)	8.76 (1.92)
Overall Life Satisfaction	8.56 (1.86)	8.11 (1.88)	8.50 (1.73)	8.03 (2.12)	8.38 (2.10)	9.34 (1.27)	8.85 (1.61)	8.13 (2.16)	8.83 (1.63)

The greatest scores in overall family climate were found in Poland and Norway, and Germany presented the lower average. The indicator with the higher mean in the overall sample was “I feel safe at home,” while the lower score was observed in “I have a quiet place to study at home.” Norway and Poland presented the greatest scores in the reported safety at home, while the lowest means regarding a quiet place to study were found in England and Malta. The greatest mean score in fair treatment was observed in Romania, while Norway had the greater score concerning having a good time together. With regard to the indicator “my parents/carers listen to me and take what I say into account,” Norway also presented the greatest mean.

Furthermore, the greatest scores in overall life satisfaction were reported in Romania, Norway, and Malta, while the lowest values were observed in Germany, Estonia, and Poland. Within the life satisfaction indicators, in the overall sample, higher scores in “I have a good life” were presented, while “the things in my life are excellent” showed the lower ones. Romanian and Norwegian adolescents reported higher scores in having a good life. Polish, German, and Estonian adolescents reported lower valuation concerning the things in their lives. Finally, concerning “my life is going well,” “my life is just right,” and “I have what I want in life,” Romanian adolescents reported the highest satisfaction.

3.2. Bivariate Correlations between Family and Life Satisfaction Indicators

Table 2 shows bivariate zero-order correlations between the indicators of family climate and life satisfaction in the total sample. The results pointed out that: (a) family climate indicators were positively interrelated, reaching high values between 0.41–0.59; (b) the indicators of life satisfaction showed positive associations, with very high coefficients between 0.66–0.83; and (c) positive associations were observed between family climate and life satisfaction indicators, with moderate coefficients between 0.26–0.40. The greatest interrelation between the indicators of each dimension was found between “my parents/carers treat me fairly” and “I have a good life,” and between “we have a good time together in my family” with “my life is going well” and “the things in my life are excellent.” The lowest coefficients of correlations were presented in the association between “I feel safe at home” with the following indicators of life satisfaction: “my life is just right,” “I have what I want in life,” and “the things in my life are excellent.” Finally, the results also indicated a positive and high association between overall family climate and overall life satisfaction: $r(8487) = 0.49, p < 0.001$. The higher association was found in Estonia— $r(968) = 0.56, p < 0.001$ —while the lowest one was observed in Romania: $r(1341) = 0.36, p < 0.001$. In the other countries, positive correlations were also shown between both overall scores: Spain, $r(1515) = 0.55, p < 0.001$, Malta, $r(856) = 0.54, p < 0.001$, Norway, $r(917) = 0.52, p < 0.001$, Poland, $r(931) = 0.51, p < 0.001$, England, $r(1179) = 0.50, p < 0.001$, and Germany, $r(780) = 0.48, p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Pearson bivariate correlations between family and life satisfaction indicators in the total sample.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. I feel safe at home	1									
2. I have a quiet place to study at home	0.44 ***	1								
3. My parents/carers listen to me and take what I say into account	0.46 ***	0.43 ***	1							
4. We have a good time together in my family	0.50 ***	0.44 ***	0.55 ***	1						
5. My parents/carers treat me fairly	0.49 ***	0.41 ***	0.59 ***	0.56 ***	1					
6. My life is going well	0.29 ***	0.28 ***	0.35 ***	0.40 ***	0.39 ***	1				
7. My life is just right	0.26 ***	0.29 ***	0.33 ***	0.38 ***	0.37 ***	0.82 ***	1			
8. I have a good life	0.29 ***	0.28 ***	0.35 ***	0.39 ***	0.40 ***	0.83 ***	0.81 ***	1		
9. I have what I want in life	0.26 ***	0.28 ***	0.34 ***	0.37 ***	0.38 ***	0.66 ***	0.67 ***	0.70 ***	1	
10. The things in my life are excellent	0.26 ***	0.27 ***	0.34 ***	0.40 ***	0.38 ***	0.77 ***	0.77 ***	0.78 ***	0.76 ***	1

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

3.3. Linear Regression of the Family Climate Correlates of Life Satisfaction

Table 3 shows the results of stepwise regression analyses to explain overall life satisfaction based on family climate indicators and controlling demographics (i.e., gender, nationality, and home characteristics) in the total sample and by country. In the total sample, demographics explained only 2% of the variance of life satisfaction. Gender differences were observed, so that boys ($M = 8.66$, $SD = 1.74$) reported a bit more life satisfaction than girls ($M = 8.47$, $SD = 1.96$), $t(9004) = 5.11$, $p < 0.001$. The greatest gender effects were observed in Germany, England, and Norway. Adolescents who were born in the country where they completed the survey showed more life satisfaction ($M = 8.60$, $SD = 1.83$) than those who were born in another country ($M = 8.19$, $SD = 2.11$), $t(8998) = -5.42$, $p < 0.001$. The greatest effects by nationality on life satisfaction were found in Poland and England. Furthermore, adolescents who always slept in the same home reported greater life satisfaction ($M = 8.77$, $SD = 1.73$) than those who sometimes slept in other places ($M = 8.38$, $SD = 1.93$) or regularly slept in two homes ($M = 8.06$, $SD = 2.07$), $F(2, 8899) = 70.92$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 p = 0.02$. The greatest effects of this variable were found in Malta and Estonia. Moreover, adolescents who lived with their families showed more life satisfaction ($M = 8.58$, $SD = 1.83$) than those who lived in a foster home ($M = 7.99$, $SD = 2.26$), lived in a children's home ($M = 7.20$, $SD = 3.68$), or lived in another type of home ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 3.03$), $F(3, 8990) = 19.90$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 p = 0.01$. The countries in which this variable had a bigger effect on life satisfaction were Poland and Germany.

Table 3. Linear regression of the family correlates of overall life satisfaction in the total sample and by country.

		Total	Estonia	Spain	Germany	England	Romania	Norway	Poland	Malta
Step 1	<i>F</i>	50.88 ***	3.17 *	9.36 ***	8.26 ***	7.18 ***	1.34	4.08 **	11.34 ***	9.23 ***
	<i>R</i> ²	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.05	0.04
Boy or Girl	β	-0.05 ***	-0.03	-0.04	-0.11 **	-0.11 ***	0.01	-0.10 **	-0.03	-0.05
Whether born in this country	β	0.05 ***	0.05	0.06 *	0.01	0.09 **	-0.02	0.07	0.10 **	0.03
Same or different homes	β	-0.12 ***	-0.10**	-0.08 **	-0.08 *	-0.08 *	-0.01	-0.08 *	-0.05	-0.19 ***
Which of the following best describes the home that you live in?	β	-0.06 ***	-0.01	-0.11 ***	-0.15 ***	-0.02	-0.06 *	-0.03	-0.16 ***	-0.04
Step 2	<i>F</i>	325.40 ***	50.82 ***	75.97 ***	35.16 ***	46.89 ***	25.03 ***	38.31 ***	45.73 ***	39.42 ***
	<i>R</i> ²	0.26	0.32	0.31	0.30	0.27	0.15	0.29	0.31	0.30
Boy or Girl	β	-0.06 ***	-0.01	-0.05 *	-0.15 ***	-0.09 **	-0.01	-0.10 **	-0.07 *	-0.07 *
Whether born in this country	β	0.02 *	0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.04	-0.03	0.03	0.07 *	-0.04
Same or different homes	β	-0.07 ***	-0.02	-0.04 *	-0.06	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.08 *
Which of the following best describes the home that you live in?	β	-0.02 *	0.03	-0.05 *	-0.10 **	0.01	-0.03	0.04	-0.11 ***	-0.01
I feel safe at home	β	0.02	0.10 **	0.13 ***	-0.04	0.12 ***	-0.05	0.10*	0.03	0.07 *
I have a quiet place to study at home	β	0.09 ***	0.15 ***	0.13 ***	0.12 **	0.12 ***	0.13 ***	0.06	-0.09 *	0.11 **
My parents/carers listen to me and take what I say into account	β	0.10 ***	0.12 **	0.10 ***	0.06	0.09 **	0.03	0.10 *	0.26 ***	0.15 ***
We have a good time together in my family	β	0.21 ***	0.19 ***	0.24 ***	0.30 ***	0.20 ***	0.25 ***	0.16 ***	0.23 ***	0.23 ***
My parents/carers treat me fairly	β	0.20 ***	0.18 ***	0.13 ***	0.14 **	0.10 *	0.09 **	0.24 ***	0.15 ***	0.17 ***

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. DV: Overall Life Satisfaction.

In the second step, family climate added a 24% explained variance of life satisfaction in the total sample. The countries with more added explained variance were Estonia and Spain, while the country with the lowest increase was Romania. In the total sample, all family climate indicators presented a positive effect except for "I feel safe at home," which did not reach statistical significance. The indicators with more effect on life satisfaction were "we have a good time together in my family" and "my parents/carers treat me fairly." Then, the indicators' effects by country were compared. Concerning feeling safe at home, it had a significant positive effect in Spain, England, Estonia, Norway,

and Malta, while no significant effects were observed in the other countries: $F(7, 9164) = 22.64$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 p = 0.02$. Furthermore, having a quiet place to study was especially important in Estonia, while it was not significant in Norway: $F(7, 9126) = 80.58$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 p = 0.06$. In Poland, it showed a negative effect on life satisfaction. Regarding “my parents/carers listen to me and take what I say into account,” the countries in which this variable showed a bigger positive effect were Poland and Malta, while no significant effect was observed in Romania and Germany: $F(7, 9112) = 11.24$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 p = 0.01$. The final two indicators presented positive effects in all participating countries; however, some differences may be reported in both having a good time together— $F(7, 9143) = 37.16$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 p = 0.03$ —and being fairly treated: $F(7, 9094) = 28.85$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 p = 0.02$. Thus, having a good time together was especially important in Germany, while less important in Norway. Being fairly treated had a bigger effect in Norway and less in Romania.

3.4. Structural Equation Model of the Association between Factors of Family Climate and Life Satisfaction

Figure 1 describes the structural equation model tested, in which two factors were interrelated and composed of family climate and life satisfaction indicators, respectively. Standardized solutions were presented in Figure 1. Measurement equations were significant in both factors and standardized residuals were very low (between -0.1 and 0.1). A good overall data fit was observed: $\chi^2(31, N = 9307) = 198.80$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.992, GFI = 0.989, SRMR = 0.022, RMSEA = 0.042, 90% CI RMSEA = 0.039–0.045.

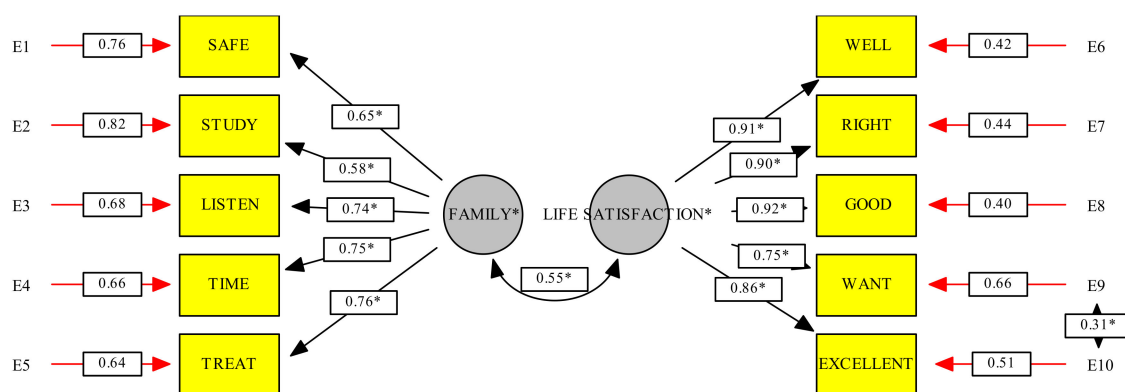


Figure 1. Structural equation model of the association between family indicators’ factor and life satisfaction indicators’ factor. * Significant standardized coefficients at $p < 0.05$.

High positive loadings were observed in the indicators of both factors: over 0.75 in the case of life satisfaction and over 0.58 in the family climate factor. Lagrange multipliers test suggested a positive association between the measurement error of items 4 and 5 in the life satisfaction factor. The association between family climate and life satisfaction factors was high and positive, so that better family climate was related to better life satisfaction, and vice versa.

4. Discussion

Among the results of our research, we must first highlight that there are small differences between the various countries analyzed, and overall scores indicated very good family climate and notable life satisfaction—mainly marked by the idea of having a good life. The greatest scores in overall family climate were found in Poland and Norway, and Germany presented the lower average. By indicators, the greatest mean score in fair treatment was observed in Romania. These results are related to others found by international studies that show that adolescents from Eastern European countries feel that they have better communication with their families than those from Western Europe [32].

Concerning bivariate correlations between the indicators of family climate and life satisfaction, the data pointed out that family climate indicators were positively interrelated, indicators of life

satisfaction also showed positive and strong associations, and, finally, positive associations were observed between family climate and life satisfaction both in general and by indicators, highlighting the interrelation between “my parents/carers treat me fairly” and “I have a good life,” and between “we have a good time together in my family” with “my life is going well” and “the things in my life are excellent.” Results that coincide with those of other studies show a high relationship between good family relationships—and particularly good communication with parents—and the degree of vital satisfaction experienced by the adolescent [33]. Results from the structural equation model of the association between factors of family climate and life satisfaction underline that high positive loadings were observed in the indicators of both factors, and that the association between family climate and life satisfaction factors was high and positive.

The results of stepwise regression analyses to explain overall life satisfaction revealed that, in the total sample, demographics explained only 2% of the variance of life satisfaction. Bearing this in mind, there are some interesting results that we will now comment on. Boys reported a bit more life satisfaction than girls, which is consistent with previous research [41], where girls report poorer self-rated health, low life satisfaction, and multiple health complaints. This may be explained by different internalization and externalization patterns, with different expressions of problems, feelings, and emotions. It can also be explained by the fact that, since girls experience the changes of puberty earlier, most of the girls in our study can find themselves fully engaged in the physical, psychological, and social changes of puberty, while many of their peers are not yet experiencing them. In this context, it is no wonder that girls show greater dissatisfaction with their body image, which affects their self-esteem, mental health, and life satisfaction [42]. Persistent gendered patterns in self-rated health and life satisfaction require attention by educational and health services.

The adolescents who lived with their families showed more life satisfaction than those who lived in a foster home, lived in a children’s home, or lived in another type of home. There were even differences in the sense that adolescents who always slept in the same home reported greater life satisfaction than those who sometimes slept in other places or regularly slept in two homes. All this may indicate that adolescents need security and stability in their lives in order to feel more satisfied, the main source of security being having permanent family ties. However, differences were even noticed between those who always slept in the same house and those who regularly or occasionally spent the night in different places. We do not have data to explain what these differences are due to, since there may be different underlying factors, such as family conflicts in separations or divorces or parents’ difficulties in caring for children, or having to go to other people for night care of their children. Perhaps in future studies, we could ask about these issues in a more concrete way in order to know exactly what it means in each case to sleep in homes that are not their habitual home, and its possible detrimental consequences.

Furthermore, adolescents who were born in the country where they completed the survey showed more life satisfaction than those who were born in another country. As with the explanation of the differences observed in relation to the place where the adolescents of our study slept, in this case, we do not have any more data to know if the differences in this case were due to the effects that emigration may have caused on the minors, the lack of resources of these immigrant families, or the lack of a complete adaptation to the host country. We believe that this may be a limitation of this study that should be corrected in later editions of the international study. In the second step, family climate added a 24% explained variance of life satisfaction in the total sample. The countries with more added explained variance were Estonia and Spain, while the country with the lowest increase was Romania. In the total sample, all family climate indicators presented a positive effect, but “I feel safe at home” reached no statistical significance. The indicators with the greatest effects on life satisfaction were “we have a good time together in my family” and “my parents/carers treat me fairly.”

These results are in line with previous literature. Other works in different countries have concluded the association between life satisfaction and separate indicators of family functioning, such as perceived support [43], ease of communication [33], psychological control and family context [44], attachment [45],

or quality of leisure time in family [46], among others. The present research collected the interrelations of different indicators of family climate, also integrating results from a cross-national study. Thus, this work has provided further evidence for the relevance of family climate for life satisfaction in middle adolescence in samples from eight European countries.

Some limitations may be acknowledged. Because self-report measures were used, only subjective information was collected. A future research line may be suggested based on objective measures and multiple informants (i.e., measures from parents). Furthermore, the cross-sectional design only allows for establishing associations between variables. A longitudinal design during adolescence is recommended in order to examine directionality in the relationships. Moreover, concerning psychological well-being in adolescence, variables concerning other developmental contexts should be assessed, too, such as school adjustment or the quality of peer relationships. Finally, in order to explore cross-cultural differences in family climate and/or life satisfaction, a future research line may come from collecting data from countries in different continents.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to examine the associations between different indicators of family climate and life satisfaction in a sample of 12-year-old adolescents from different countries in Europe. Evidence was provided concerning the most remarkable family indicators for adolescent well-being, as well as their respective relevance in all countries examined. In conclusion, and always bearing in mind that both family climate and life satisfaction measures in our study are based on the subjective evaluation of adolescents, which could be complemented by more direct or multiple informant measures, the data from our study reveal the unquestionable relationship between these two factors. Taking into account the existing consensus regarding the correlation between a good family climate and personal adjustment in adolescence [21–23] and the negative effects on the mental health of adolescents with the use of inappropriate parenting styles and the existence of difficulties in parent–child relationships [24–30], the results of our study highlight and insist on the need for positive parenting-based interventions to promote well-being in adolescence.

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