Personal well-being in the rapid society development: factors affecting the well-being index

Bienestar personal en el rápido desarrollo de la sociedad: factores que afectan el índice de bienestar

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ABSTRACT:

In developing countries, the personal well-being index plays an important role in assessing the quality of life in the country. This applies to all categories of citizens, regardless of their social status and the income level. The personal well-being index indicates the comfort of living conditions in a particular country, as well as the psychological state of the individual. However, not all countries are able to ensure an adequate well-being level. The purpose of our research is to measure the well-being level of Russian students, as well as to assess its dependence on the economic component. We have conducted an empirical study, which is a survey of 700 bachelor students of the first and fourth years of study in various specialties. The results of the study showed that the majority of the respondents have an average level of well-being and believe that the financial component can increase this indicator. We have also singled out the problems that negatively affect the well-being level. They are low wages, the inability of students to combine work and study, as well as insufficient financial support from universities. The research and its results may be relevant for other surveys or for comparing statistical data of different years.
Keywords: subjective well-being, economical approach, economics and well-being, gross-national happiness

RESUMEN:

En los países en desarrollo, el índice de bienestar personal desempeña un papel importante en la evaluación de la calidad de vida en el país. Esto se aplica a todas las categorías de ciudadanos, independientemente de su estatus social y el nivel de ingresos. El índice de bienestar personal indica la comodidad de las condiciones de vida en un país en particular, así como el estado psicológico del individuo. Sin embargo, no todos los países son capaces de garantizar un nivel de bienestar adecuado. El propósito de nuestra investigación es medir el nivel de bienestar de los estudiantes rusos, así como evaluar su dependencia del componente económico. Hemos llevado a cabo un estudio empírico, que es una encuesta de 700 estudiantes de licenciatura del primer y cuarto año de estudio en diversas especialidades. Los resultados del estudio mostraron que la mayoría de los encuestados tienen un nivel promedio de bienestar y creen que el componente financiero puede aumentar este indicador. También hemos señalado los problemas que afectan negativamente el nivel de bienestar. Son salarios bajos, la incapacidad de los estudiantes para combinar trabajo y estudio, así como un apoyo financiero insuficiente de las universidades. La investigación y sus resultados pueden ser relevantes para otras encuestas o para comparar datos estadísticos de diferentes años.

1. Introduction

The level of happiness, health and well-being of the population is an important indicator of how comfortable it is to live in the country (Raibley, 2012). The idea of measuring subjective well-being has become increasingly important since the beginning of the 1970s. In recent years it has been used as a global indicator for assessing the quality of life, which is more universal and objective than economic indicators of GDP and inflation.

At the moment, there are several general criteria indicating the lack of society well-being (Kusel, 2001):

 - social instability. This phenomenon is usually regarded as an undesirable one. It is taken as temporary if it is necessary for the transition to a new stable order;

- lack of diversity. A society able to provide its members with a big variety of high quality goods and services is usually perceived better than a society that provides a little variety of low quality goods and services (Zhao, 2009);

- lack of common values. It is generally accepted that a social organization should emphasize basic values. However, there is a dispute on what values and how they should be emphasized (Fan & Chan-Kang, 2005).

On the other hand, there are several criteria for a prosperous society. They are:

- stability. Social Darwinism drew attention to this criterion. The society success is regarded as analogous to the success of species. Success is continuation in time, conquest of more territories, reproduction and timely adaptation to a changing environment. Social stability may also include stagnation or even degradation. This often leads to cruel oppression by the ruling class. Thus, this criterion cannot be the only condition for well-being, but it plays an important role (Møller, 2007);

- productivity. Currently, the success of different countries is measured by the number of goods and services they produce. This criterion is mainly used for market goods, but it can also be applied to non-market services. For example, to support the elderly based on the inter-generational family support. The society is addressed to as a social mechanism for the production of goods and is assessed by their quantity, quality and diversity. However, productivity cannot be the main criterion of viability (Lehtola & Ståhle, 2014);

- comfort. The viability of society is the extent to which its requirements meet the needs and capabilities of its members. For example, a society is not viable if it does not provide decent institutional "safety" mechanisms (there is no legislation system). The criterion of comfort partially coincides with the above mentioned criteria for a prosperous society. The viability of society requires at least some continuity of the system, a minimum productivity level and some conformity between the ideal and reality. However, despite these criteria being high, a society may not be suitable for a comfortable life. Repressive societies are usually quite stable, but not very viable. High-performance societies may negatively affect their members through the promotion of wrong things.

The government often initiates reforms in order to stimulate economic growth, increase per capita income, reduce poverty and improve economic well-being. Increased well-being is positively reflected by the improved levels of human development; professional development through technological advancement; infrastructure development, including the financial one (Suri et al., 2011). The government pays more and more attention to inclusiveness, elimination of inequality and poverty. This may also result in improved public health, sanitation, education and basic needs. Achieving these goals will not only help achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but will also accelerate the economic growth (World Bank, 2007).

However, to increase happiness, economic growth opportunities are limited. Once a country achieves a certain level of well-being, stagnation or even a decrease of its well-being is

observed. In the short term, in some developing countries and countries with transition economies in Eastern Europe, economic growth and personal well-being can grow and fall at the same time. Thus, an imbalance between declining personal well-being and economic growth can be currently observed (Junqiang et al., 2013).

According to the climate-economic theory, the culture of behavior and self-perception of a person is determined by the combination of needs arising from climatic conditions and a set of resources depending on the country's well-being. People in more developed countries have more economic and social resources to adapt to extreme weather conditions. This contributes to the high level of their well-being, both material and psychological (Fischer & Van de Vliert, 2011). In addition, the conducted studies prove the relationship between the income level of the population and the indicator of personal happiness. In this case, it was concluded that the increase in wages gives only a temporary effect of increased satisfaction, then a person gets used to a new standard of living and the happiness indicator gradually returns to the previous level. This is confirmed by the fact that the level of happiness in many states has remained at the same level for several decades, despite their significant economic growth (Dorn et al., 2007).

The above mentioned theses suggest that the index of personal well-being is affected by a combination of several factors. However, it can be said that the economic component is a key criterion. It plays an important role in meeting all other criteria.

Thus, the purpose of our research is to study the index of Russian students' well-being; to identify the role of the economic component in this system; to identify the factors negatively affecting the well-being index, including from the economic point of view; to justify recommendations for solving problems in this area.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

To achieve the goals set, an empirical study was conducted. We interviewed bachelor students at Russian state universities. A total of 700 intramural students aged from 18 to 21 took part in the survey, among them: 54% of women and 46% of men. The most appropriate sampling method was purposive sampling. In order to expand the survey coverage, it was conducted among the first and four-year students of several educational institutions. The survey consisted of two stages. The first stage was aimed at determining the personal well-being index while the second one determined the impact of the economic component on this index.

The survey involved the students from five universities: Moscow State University; Bauman Moscow State Technical University; Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University); Higher School of Economics; Moscow Power Engineering Institute (National Research University).

The survey involved 150 students studying "Medicine" and "Russian language and literature" at Moscow State University; 140 students studying at the faculties of "Engineering Technology" and "Computer Science and Management Systems" at Moscow State Technical University; 143 MGIMO students studying "Linguistic and Social Studies and Intercultural Communication" and "Journalism" ; 137 "Philology" students from the Higher School of Economics and 130 students studying "Mechatronics and Robotics" and "Power Engineering" at Moscow Power Engineering Institute (National Research University).

The expansion of the survey coverage can be explained by the fact that the data on the personal well-being index may vary depending on the type of activity.

The first questionnaire was compiled on the basis of the personal well-being scale (Échelle pour l'évaluations subjective du Bien-être), developed in 1988 by the French psychologist A. Perrudet-Badoux. In the first stage, the students were asked to choose how much they agree (strongly agree; agree; fairly agree; not sure; fairly disagree; disagree; strongly disagree) with the proposed statements.

Table 1
Questionnaire 1

No.	Statement
1	I have been in a good mood recently.
2	My studies put pressure on me.
3	If I have problems, I always have someone to ask for help.
4	I have been sleeping well lately.
5	My daily activities rarely seem boring and monotonous to me.
6	I often feel lonely
7	I enjoy spending time with my family and my friends.
8	Sometimes I feel anxious without any reason.
9	I find it difficult to get up in the morning and start work.
10	I am optimistic about the future.
11	I like my daily activities.
12	I have been overreacting to minor obstacles and failures recently.
13	I have been feeling great recently.
14	I want to stay alone more often.
15	I have been very distracted recently.

All the questions can be categorized into three groups:

- internal emotions (seven questions), which are aimed at determining emotional stability, directly related to the well-being index, since the emotional state has a great influence on everyday life and happiness. This group of the questions was aimed at determining the level of anxiety and depression or satisfaction with life;

- daily activities (five questions). It cannot be denied that daily activities (for example, work or study) affect one's emotional and physical state. These components affect the personal happiness index. A person dissatisfied with his/her daily activities, is expected to have a lower indicator of the personal happiness index.

- relationship with others (three questions). Interpersonal relationship is an important component of one's life, directly affecting the personal happiness index. This indicator is similar to the indicators of the second group, since problems in relations with other people have a negative impact on personal well-being.

The second questionnaire was aimed at determining the importance of the subjective well-being economic component for the students.

Table 2
Questionnaire 2

Question	Answer
1. Do you think that the economic component is one of the most important factors of subjective well-being?	Yes, no, not sure.
2. Do you agree that the richer a country is, the happier its population is?	Yes, no, not sure.
3. Do you think your life would be better if you had higher income?	Yes, no, not sure.
4. Do you think that you (your fellow student) get sufficient scholarship to live comfortably?	Yes, no, not sure.
5. Do you think that students have enough opportunities to combine work and study?	Yes, no, not sure.
6. Do you think that student earnings are enough for a comfortable life?	Yes, no, not sure.
7. Do you think that at the moment wages in all areas are sufficient to live comfortably?	Yes, no, not sure.
8. Would you agree to be paid cash-in-hand (without deduction to the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation) if it is higher that the official payment?	Yes, no, not sure.
9. Do you think that the economic situation in our country prevents you from achieving comfort?	Yes, no, not sure.

First of all, this questionnaire was developed to determine whether the economic component is important when assessing personal well-being. Then, the students were asked to assess the connection between the well-being of the state and the level of happiness of its citizens.

The students were also asked to express their opinion on how a higher income influences personal happiness and whether the financial support from the university (scholarship) can ensure comfortable living conditions.

Employment opportunities of students who have to combine work and study are another important factor in the context of the economic component. The respondents were asked to evaluate their opportunities to combine work and study, as well as to answer the question about the adequacy of the level of students' earnings for a comfortable life.

Next, the students had to assess whether employees from different regions of the country earn enough money to live a comfortable life, which also affects the personal well-being index.

In the last but one question, the respondents were asked about the possibility of choosing between being paid officially and being paid cash-in-hand, provided that the latter option is higher. This allowed us to assess how important higher income is now, even to the detriment of the future.

In the last question, the students had to assess whether economic conditions in our country

contribute to a comfortable life.

2.2 The participant's selection criterion

The survey involved first and four-year students in various specialties. The selection criterion can be explained by the fact that the data on the personal well-being index may vary depending on the type of activity, age and gender.

2.4 Research issues and restrictions

The study involved only university students. In addition, the survey was not conducted among working people of different ages and professions, as well as unemployed adults and pupils. All respondents live in Moscow and the Moscow region. This does not allow us to identify the problem on a larger scale. That is why a number of problems and difficulties identified in the study, as well as the recommendations for solving them can be applicable only to this group of respondents. Further research can include postgraduates, workers in different economy sectors, high school students, as well as the residents of other cities and other countries.

The obtained results showed that the recommendations for achieving a higher level of personal well-being of university students should be justified both from a general and economic perspective.

2.5 Statistical analysis

The analysis of Questionnaire 1 was conducted on the basis of the criteria developed specifically for it. The questions were divided into "direct" and "reverse" points. The result of the questionnaire is equal to the sum of the "direct" and "reverse" points.

"Direct" points (the number of the selected answer directly corresponds to the score) – No. 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15.

Table 3
"Direct" scores

Number of the respondent's answer (question)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Score	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

"*Reverse*" points (scores are given in the reverse order) – No. 2, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14.

Table 4
"Reverse" scores

Number of the respondent's answer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Score	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

The scale consists of 15 points associated with interpersonal relationships, physical and emotional state. The average survey score is converted into a standard ten score (the mean value is 5.5, standard deviation is 2). This is the basis for interpreting the survey results.

The analysis of the second questionnaire was carried out in the STATISTICA system. This Microsoft Windows software is used for statistical analysis as well as data visualization. The error is 5%. It was found out that about 30 questionnaires were incorrectly filled in (some respondents did not answer all the questionnaire questions or chose more than one option).

3. Results

When interpreting the survey results, it was revealed that there are three levels of personal well-being:

- a high level of personal well-being. The respondents who fall into this category have a high level of personal well-being, which indicates the absence of problems and complete emotional comfort;

- moderate level of personal well-being, which indicates a lack of quality. The respondents are characterized by moderate subjective well-being, which indicates the absence of serious problems and incomplete emotional well-being;

- low level of personal well-being. The respondents are characterized by a low level of personal well-being, which indicates serious life problems and poor emotional well-being.

According to these criteria, the students were divided into three categories. The results are presented in the diagram.

Figure 1
Differentiation of students'
personal well-being index
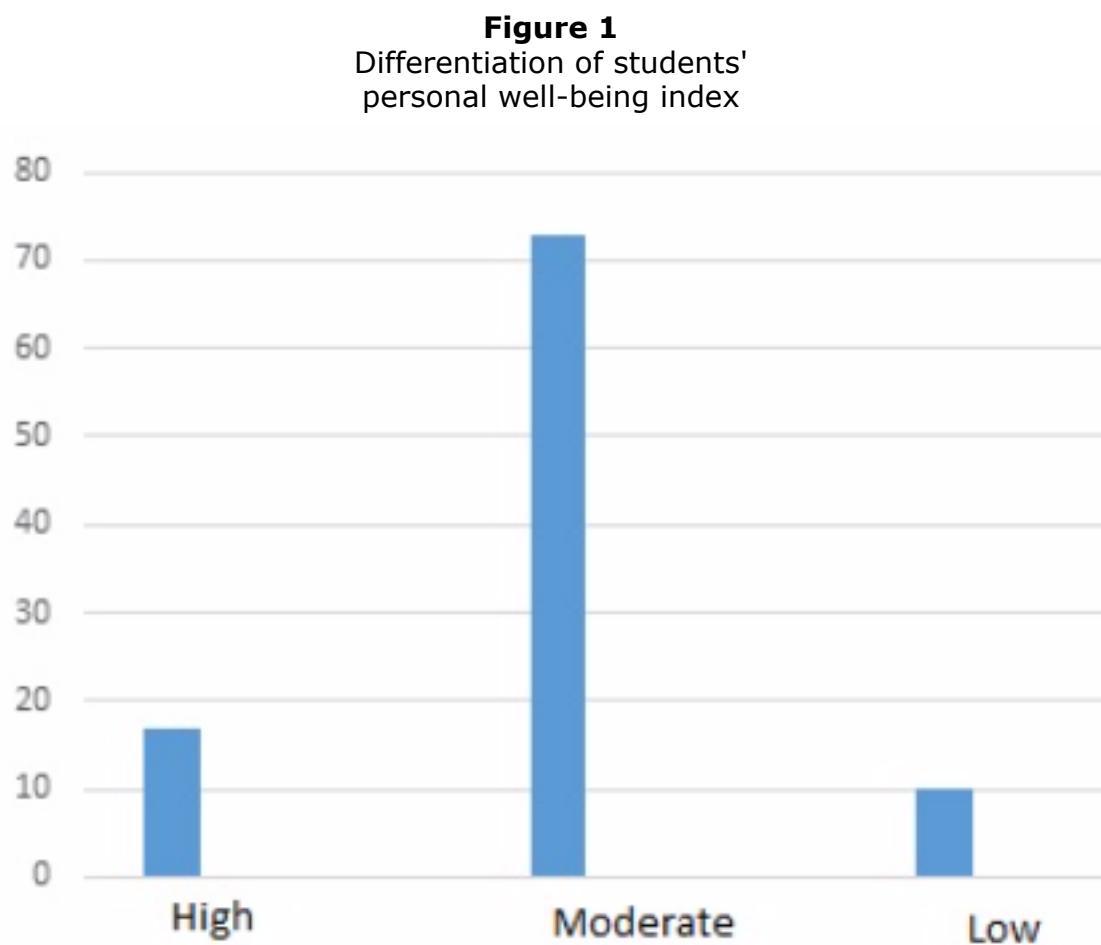
According to the diagram, the overwhelming majority of respondents (73%) have an average level of personal well-being index. This may indicate higher life satisfaction and a rather stable emotional state. However, the students have some problems, as 17% of the respondents showed a high level of personal well-being index and 10% showed a low level.

The results of questionnaire 1 may indicate that the living conditions of students (including emotional well-being) are sufficient to ensure a comfortable life. In addition, it should be noted that the age and gender of the respondents did not affect the results.

The purpose of the next questionnaire was to determine how important the economic component is in terms of well-being. The students were asked to answer nine questions.

When analyzing the first question, it was found that the overwhelming majority of respondents (87%) agree that the economic component is one of the most important elements of personal well-being. This means that the students realize that nowadays to live comfortably a decent individual income and a high economic performance of the country are required.

According to the analysis of the second question, the majority of students (78%) agreed that the country's well-being is directly related to the well-being of its population. This indicates that the respondents are aware of the connection between the income of a certain state and its potential for providing comfortable living conditions.

The results of the next question were almost equal, as 56% of the respondents believe that

a higher income will make their lives better. Despite the fact that the respondents agreed on the importance of the economic component for a comfortable life, it is likely that other criteria necessary for its provision are also important for them.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (91%) concluded that the scholarship paid in their educational institutions is not enough for a comfortable life and financial support from university cannot be considered sufficient at the moment.

The next two questions were related to student employment opportunities. According to the results, 65% of the respondents concluded that there are not enough conditions for combining work and study in our country. A fairly high percentage of the respondents (54%) noted that student earnings may not be enough for a comfortable life. The results of these two questions may indicate that financial opportunities of Russian students are limited. This leads to a decrease in the quality of life and personal well-being.

According to the results, 68% of the students find the level of wages in various areas to be insufficient. This also seems to be a problem and negatively affects the well-being index.

Forty-eight per cent of the respondents believe that it is better to get cash-in-hand payment provided it is higher than the official one, and 52% of respondents are ready to earn less, but with the provision of official guarantees. This shows that the students are aware of the importance of financial support for comfortable living conditions.

Most of the respondents (77%) showed their dissatisfaction with the economic situation in the country in the last question. Such indicators are resulting and are based on the influence of various criteria, some of which were covered in the questionnaire (scholarship, salaries, etc.). However, it cannot be denied that such a situation can be considered problematic.

Summing up, we can say that the personal well-being level of Russian students is quite high, but serious measures must be taken to improve it. One of the criteria negatively affecting it is the economic situation in the country. It has a direct impact on achieving the required standard of living. Of course, this problem requires a systematic approach to its solution.

The followings recommendations for solving the problem of improving the quality of life should be highlighted:

- psychological training. Everyday problems affect emotional stability. This may result in anxiety and other negative phenomena that contribute to a decrease in the personal well-being index. As one of the most important components of the well-being index is psychological comfort, educational institutions and organizations should organize psychological trainings for everybody to reduce such negative effects;

- better financial support for students. According to the survey results, both educational institutions and the government can solve the problem of insufficient financial support. The quality of life of non-working students can be improved by an increase in scholarship, as well as the introduction of additional discounts for those who study on a commercial basis (for example, for good academic performance). This will also contribute to improved academic performance of students;

- employment opportunities. The most important step towards improving the quality of life of students can be the creation of favorable employment opportunities by introducing flexible schedules in organizations, developing a system of remote work and improving the educational policy of universities regarding working students (without harming the educational process). Such measures will provide conditions for combining work and study;

- higher wages. One of the most important components of a comfortable life is decent wages. The state is responsible for solving the problem of wages. The implementation of effective economic reforms will lead to increased wages, as well as better quality of life of the population and higher personal well-being index.

Discussion

The study of the dependence of the personal well-being index on the economic situation was conducted in China (Junqiang et al., 2013). The data used in this study were taken from the China General Social Survey provided by the *National* Survey *Research Center at Renmin University* of *China* (NSRC) . The authors of the article conducted five surveys from 2003 to

2010, which involved 44166 respondents. The urban/rural population ratio, as well as the gender ratio in the samples for 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2010 were analyzed in accordance with the annual population data of China Statistical Yearbook 2011. In 2003 the data were obtained only from cities and towns, but in order to expand the study coverage, the sample was retained in the vast majority of studies (Easterlin et al., 2012). The questionnaire for 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2010 was developed in order to determine the level of happiness: "How do you currently feel?" with the following options "very unhappy", "unhappy", "neutral", "happy" and "very happy". In 2008 the question was a bit different as the term "happy" was replaced with "cheerful". Since these terms are synonymous, people in everyday life cannot distinguish between them (Di Tella et al., 2007). For each answer, the respondents received from 1 to 5 points (1 = very unhappy, 2 = unhappy, 3 = neutral, 4 = happy, 5 = very happy). The analytical indicators of the document were obtained with the use of the Stata software to integrate the relevant variables for each year.

The statistical analysis showed that there was a noticeable increase in happiness of Chinese citizens from 2003 to 2010. Based on the obtained results, it can be said that the improvement of China's economic and social indicators contributed to the personal well-being of its citizens. In addition, the problems covered by the media are important, but they do not reflect the real situation. The population is often happier than the media reflect (Gustaffson et al., 2008).

There was another similar in China (Knight & Gunatilaka, 2011). The indicators used in this study were taken from the 2002 National Household Survey. Urban and rural population participated in the survey. The personal well-being index was also assessed based on the question "How happy are you currently?" There were five possible options to choose: very happy, happy, not so much, unhappy and not at all happy. The answers to this question form a dependent variable in most of the analysis. According to the methodological study conducted by Ferrer-i-Carbonnel & Frijters (2004), there were no significant differences between the results using these two indicators. This study also assessed China's ambition for higher income, which will positively affect personal well-being. They were asked the following question: "What is the minimum income required to maintain a household during the year?" The answers to this question were analyzed and the results were included as an additional argument in the pursuit of income for the rural sample (Knight & Gunatilaka, 2012). The authors of the study concluded that current income has a positive and significant effect on the happiness level. However, neither of these samples has a significantly high index of current income. Obviously, there are other important determinants of the personal well-being index (Gustaffson et al., 2008).

In 2006, there was a study on the relationship between income and the well-being index in Slovenia (Verbič & Stanovnik, 2006). The income satisfaction analysis was based on the household expenditures review, which is conducted annually by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia. The survey consisted of the questions related to the subsistence minimum (whether the respondents believe that it is sufficient), family expenditure, income, etc. According to the results, the majority of Slovenians were satisfied with their income. This indicates a high personal well-being index. However, it should be mentioned that during inflation, the incomes of citizens decreased. This also had a negative impact on their level of happiness.

Another study of the relationship between the level of economic development and the personal well-being index was conducted in Mexico (Rojas, 2007). The survey involved 1,540 people living in five states in central and southern Mexico, as well as in the federal district (Mexico City). The stratified random sampling divided the urban and rural population by household income and by gender. All national income categories were represented by the respondents. However, due to the multi-layered nature of the sample, there was some fragmentation in the lower categories of national income (in terms of per capita family income in the national deciles (Muellbauer & Van de Ven, 2003). The study showed that economic satisfaction increases if the household income goes up; but it decreases if the number of dependents in these households rises. According to the result analysis, the economic satisfaction in Mexican families is significantly reduced depending on the number of family members (Székely et al., 2004). It has been established that when another child is

born in the family, the economic burden becomes higher than the one when another adult comes to the family. This is unexpected, since it is usually believed that children carry a lower economic burden than adults. According to the results of this study, it should also be noted that in Mexico a fairly strong economic stratification can be observed. It influences the results of such surveys. In addition, this fact suggests that for different social groups, the personal well-being index can vary greatly in terms of their income and quality of life (Rojas, 2007b).

3. Conclusions

Personal well-being is an important component that reflects the level of economic development of the country. A high personal well-being index of the population means that the country is developed and able to ensure a higher quality of life. It cannot be denied that the economic component is one of the main conditions for achieving a higher level of personal well-being. This statement is true both for states with effective economic policies aimed at providing a higher level of security, employment, production of goods and services, and for individual citizens with a higher income level — consumers of more comfortable housing, high-quality medical and educational services, etc. Together, these factors contribute to the quality of life and the personal well-being index.

In order to study the level of personal well-being, as well as its dependence on the economic component, we conducted a survey among the students from five Russian universities. According to the survey results, the majority of respondents showed an average level of personal well-being. This means that there are some problems which prevent them from reaching the maximum indicator, but these problems are not critical. It was also proved that the personal well-being index directly depends on the economic situation. In addition, we identified the problems reflecting the shortcomings of the economic situation and reducing personal well-being.

The respondents' biggest problem is the lack of sufficient financial support from educational institutions and / or the impossibility of combining work and study.

We can suggest some possible solutions to the above mentioned problems: psychological trainings, changing the financial policy of universities, providing special conditions for working students, increasing wages for everybody.

In the future, the study can be relevant for postgraduate students, workers in various economy sectors, high school students, as well as the residents of other regions and states. The research and its results may be relevant for conducting future surveys or comparing statistical indicators of different years.

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