The Impact of Social Policies on Happiness in the Case of Contemporary Turkey



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Abstract

In our rapidly changing world, governments are expected to focus on diversified demands of different groups of people for welfare distribution. In fact, there are many policy areas for governments to spend taxes such as education, social security, health, housing, social service, infrastructure, and cultural activities. The preferences of people depending on their characteristics (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) may vary among these areas of social policies. Apart from these differences, there are significant variations among these groups on happiness levels stemming from current social policy applications. In this study, we analyse various actors' happiness levels and their satisfaction with important social policies including education, social security, healthcare, housing, social services, and social-cultural activities.

For empirical analyses, we use a nationally representative survey (*N:* 1,630) conducted in 2016 based on a sample of Turkey. This dataset is the first representative survey focusing on welfare distribution and the perception of citizens on social policies in Turkey. Multiple regression results show that satisfaction stemming from education services, healthcare system, housing, and social services has no significant impact on happiness. On the other hand, satisfaction from social security and social and cultural services influence happiness positively. Primarily, the coefficient on the satisfaction from social security is considerably

substantial showing that old age pensions affects happiness mostly. Similarly, free social and cultural services provided by the state and municipalities become a distinctive way of increasing happiness levels in Turkey.

Keywords: Social Policy, Happiness, Life Satisfaction, Welfare State, Turkey

Acknowledgement: This research is supported by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey-TUBITAK (Project no: 114K117).

Introduction

Over the centuries, thinkers have studied on quality of life and happiness. Empirical research on happiness started in the mid-20th century in several branches of the social sciences. Nonetheless, due to lack of consensus on the definition of these concepts, thinkers have not been able to agree on the determinants of happiness and good life. In economics, objective indicators were used to analyse the effect of various factors on happiness, while subjective indicators were used to supplement traditional objective indicators in sociological studies. Therefore, thinkers' understanding of what defines life satisfaction has remained theoretical and debatable. Empirical studies introduced by social scientists, particularly psychologists and economists, have brought innovative approaches to comprehend the factors which affect life satisfaction,

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especially since the 1990s (Veenhoven, 1991; Easterlin, 1995, 2001; Christopher, 1999).

Life satisfaction frequently denotes chances and capabilities for a good life, such as high education level, health status, income level, leisure, social relationship. Galbraith (1998) asserts three broad goals for the life satisfaction of individuals: government investment in public education, the poverty mitigation, and the growth of the new occupations that consists of white-collar workers. To evaluate the success of the welfare state programs and human development, new concepts were introduced, such as happiness, wellbeing, and quality of life. Hence, happiness and life satisfaction became leading topics in the literature. Another central focus in this area is the welfare state differences and social policies across countries (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Castles, 2004). According to Anand (2016: 3), statistics on low levels of happiness or life satisfaction could help to identify issues that are potential priorities for social policies. It is important to note that the well-being of citizens and their satisfaction levels from social policies may contribute to the improvement of social policies for the governments as well as the overall increase of the average happiness levels of citizens. Even though there is a bunch of literature on many European welfare states and policy outcomes, there are few empirical studies on the Turkish welfare regime and its effects on happiness. Nevertheless, the Turkish welfare regime is an interesting case with the remarkable increase in public social spending and ongoing social policy reforms since the 2000s.

Based on a nation-wide empirical study (N: 1630) entitled 'Understanding the Welfare Regime of Turkey: Institutions and Individuals', this study aims to understand the effects of various welfare players, particularly social policy institutions, on welfare distribution and citizens' welfare perceptions and happiness levels. In this study, various factors affecting happiness will be analysed. A vital determinant among these factors is the welfare state policies that mitigate inequalities and improve human conditions. The research question, hence, is how do social policies affect happiness in Turkey?

This paper will first start with a brief discussion of

the life satisfaction and happiness in the literature. In this part, the relationship between social policies and happiness will also be analysed. In the second part, data and method will be given. In the third part, multiple regression results will be analysed. Finally, in light of the findings, the importance of social policies mitigating social inequality and increasing happiness in Turkey will be discussed.

Happiness, Life Satisfaction, and Social Policies

The concept of life satisfaction represents the quality of life and well-being. Quality of life denotes chances for a good life, such as having a good education or career, working in a prestigious job. According to Sen (2001), an individual's capability to live a good life is determined in terms of the set of valuable beings and doings such as being in good health or having good relationships with others. Sen (2001) claims that poverty must be understood as deprivation in the capability to live a good life, and development can be understood as capability expansion. Capabilities denoting individual's capacity to choose among different conditions and functional capabilities in his or her life.

In the literature, life satisfaction and happiness have been used interchangeably. Psychologists tend to emphasise the nature of happiness as a mood or emotional state. Besides, the majority of the psychologists have not used any particular definition; instead, they worked with descriptions of the dimensions of wellbeing (Dodge et al. 2012). Contrary to psychologists, economists use the concept happiness to refer to variables mainly concerning the material well-being of individuals and use more shared definitions. In sociology, subjective indicators (life satisfaction and happiness) are used to supplement traditional objective indicators (income, health, and education). Life satisfaction and happiness have been utilised as a chief subjective indicator of social performance since the 1970s (Andrews and Withey, 1976). In addition to sociologists, economists started to analyse the subjective indicators especially since the 2000s (Frey and Stutzer, 2010). While some are interested in latent

variables such as empathy, goal autonomy, discrimination, etc. (Anand et al. 2011), others focused on concrete factors such as employment status, income, and health status (Diener and Suh, 1997; Di Tella et al. 2001; Frey and Stutzer, 2010). The literature has shown that the effects of personal characteristics and economic variables on the level of happiness are strong. Among these studies, the impact of employment status on life satisfaction have been heavily discussed (Veenhoven, 2015). Di Tella et al. (2001) study how the unemployment rate, the inflation rate, and the unemployment influence the level of happiness based on Euro-Barometer Survey Series. They claim that when other factors are controlled for, unemployed people are less happy than employed people. Pittau et al. (2010) examined the role of economic factors on life satisfaction at the regional level. They found that income has a strong effect in poor regions than in rich regions. After having controlled individual characteristics and interaction effects, regional differences in life satisfaction are significant, confirming that regional dimension is very important in one's life satisfaction.

Layard (2005) advocates welfare-to-work programs, job security, and mental health services. Diener and Seligman (2004) suggest that if subjective wellbeing is to be improved, policies should seek to enhance human rights, support family and community networks and employment security. There is a positive correlation between subjective well-being and GDP per capita. Nevertheless, it would be an oversimplification to limit the assessment of well-being to that of GDP per capita. Many dimensions affecting wellbeing fall outside the scope of economic indicators, since they are noneconomic. Layard (1980, 2005) and Ng (2001, 2003) argue the use of subjective wellbeing as a goal for social policy. They claim that objective measures of well-being (e.g. infant mortality, life expectancy) or economic measures of well-being (e.g. GDP per capita), are inadequate to evaluate social policies.

Data and Method

Based on a nation-wide empirical study (N: 1,630), 'Understanding the Welfare Regime of Turkey: Institutions and Individuals-2016', this study aims to understand the effects of various welfare players, particularly social policy institutions, on welfare distribution and citizens' welfare perceptions and happiness levels. In this study, multiple factors affecting happiness will be analysed. The questionnaire contains 48 questions aimed to measure social welfare and happiness among Turkish people. In this study, only a part of the survey results, which includes questions related to happiness, demography, and satisfaction from public services, will be used. The selected control variables and independent variables are summarised in Table 1.

In this article, the effects of socio-demographic factors as well as social policies on happiness are examined in three dimensions of life—socio-demographic characteristics, economic characteristics, religiousness, getting aid from different institutions, and public services—using the 'Understanding the Welfare Regime of Turkey' dataset. The first two domains are among the most central determinants affecting one's happiness.

Respondents' answer to the dependent variable overall happiness question is coded on a 10-point scale ranging from 0 for 'extremely unhappy' to 9 for 'extremely happy.' The reason for using overall happiness variable to understand the good life or well-being of individuals is that subjective measures such as happiness and life satisfaction have been heavily used and considered as reliable measures by international studies and guidelines.

There are five sets of independent variables used in the multiple regression analysis. The first set of variables can be considered as control variables including age, gender, marital status, gender, place of residence, and ethnicity. The second set of variables consists of economic indicators and employment status variables namely, employment variables and income level. Employment status variable is recoded as the dummy. Four dummies (unemployed, retired, student, and homemakers) were created for employment status variable.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	mean	standard deviation	min	max
Gender	1630	0.506	0.5	0	1
Age	1630	39.283	14.645	18	92
City	1630	0.883	0.322	0	1
Married	1630	0.663	0.473	0	1
Divorced	1630	0.031	0.172	0	1
Kurdish ethnicity	1615	0.141	0.348	0	1
Arabic ethnicity	1615	0.006	0.078	0	1
Unemployed	1624	0.053	0.224	0	1
Housewife	1624	0.249	0.432	0	1
Student	1624	0.088	0.283	0	1
Retired	1624	0.115	0.319	0	1
Income	1568	2.293	0.711	1	4
Piety	1620	6.25	1.924	0	9
Social security	1617	0.887	0.316	0	1
Aid from relatives	1630	0.008	0.089	0	1
Aid from state	1630	0.061	0.24	0	1
Aid from NGO's	1630	0.002	0.049	0	1
Satisfaction from educational services	1548	2.928	1.237	1	5
Satisfaction from social security	1493	2.893	1.232	1	5
Satisfaction from health services	1614	3.358	1.174	1	5
Satisfaction from housing	1387	2.954	1.23	1	5
Satisfaction from social services	1502	3.169	1.226	1	5
Satisfaction from social and cultural activities	1434	3.013	1.198	1	5

Results

In this study, we determine factors related to happiness in Turkey. We mainly focus on public services and their impact on happiness. We divide public services into six categories as educational services, social security, health services, housing, social services, and

social and cultural services. We measure the satisfaction levels stemming from public services in these six different categories. Table 2 shows the basic relationships between satisfaction levels from public services and average happiness.

In general, as satisfaction levels increase, average

Table 2: Average Happiness on 0 to 9 Scale

	Completely Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Dissatisfied Nor Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Educational Services	5.135	5.481	5.689	5.797	6.888
Social Security	5.096	5.332	5.46	6.038	6.982
Health Services	5.189	5.154	5.646	5.757	6.287
Housing	5.208	5.101	5.774	6.051	6.316
Social Services	5.101	5.052	5.703	5.939	6.304
Social and Cultural Activities	5.044	5.003	5.686	6.095	6.575

happiness usually goes up. However, there are four exceptional cases. When satisfaction level increases from completely dissatisfied to dissatisfied for health services, housing, social services and social and cultural activities, we observe that average happiness decreases. Nevertheless, the preliminary analysis points out that the satisfaction levels from educational services, social services, health services, housing, social services and social and cultural activities have a positive impact on happiness. However, this analysis is very limited since we need to control other characteristics such as demographics to establish a clear relationship between satisfaction from public services and happiness. To accomplish this aim, we use five distinct models and apply regression analyses. We also check the robustness of the results using ordered logistic regression as an alternative approach to determine the relationship between satisfaction levels from public services and happiness. The results are given in Table 3.

We use only socio-demographic factors in Model 1. Table 3 shows that as age increases happiness decreases for Model 1. Married people are happier than divorced people, and being divorced decreases the level of happiness considerably. Moreover, people who belong to Kurdish ethnicity are less happy compared to Turkish ethnicity. The explanatory power of Model 1 is rather limited. However, if we establish Model 2 adding variables such as being unemployed, being homemaker, being a student, being retired and income level as dependent variables, the explanatory power of the model increases. Age does not lose its negative effect on happiness in Model 2. In addition, another variable as living in cities comes into prominence having a negative impact on happiness. Being divorced and belonging to Kurdish ethnicity have negative statistically significant coefficients, but the coefficient of being married loses its statistical significance. Unemployment variable has the most prominent negative effect on the happiness level in Model 2. Indeed, as income level increases happiness goes up. Lastly, Model 2 shows that retired people are happier compared to employed people.

Table 3: Regression Results (Dependent Variable: Happiness)

Variable	Model 1 Coefficient	Model 2 Coefficient	Model 3 Coefficient	Model 4 Coefficient	Model 5 Coefficient
Gender	-0.131	-0.101	-0.122	-0.106	-0.175
Age	-0.009*	-0.015**	-0.016**	-0.017**	-0.013*
City	-0.243	-0.469**	-0.455**	-0.475**	-0.384*
Married	0.31*	0.274	0.213	0.22	0.05
Divorced	-0.914**	-0.873**	-0.766*	-0.663	-0.76
Kurdish ethnicity	-0.612***	-0.472**	-0.49**	-0.384*	-0.276
Arabic ethnicity	0.494	0.416	0.33	0.458	1.169
Unemployed		-1.09***	-1.059***	-0.919**	-0.817*
Housewife		0.227	0.132	0.165	0.062
Student		-0.263	-0.212	-0.209	-0.104
Retired		0.559**	0.534**	0.485*	0.396
Income		0.539***	0.582***	0.499***	0.625***
Piety			0.174***	0.171***	0.087**
Social security				0.479*	0.251
Aid from relatives				-0.576	-1.491*
Aid from state				-0.503*	-0.61*
Aid from s				-0.401	-0.588
Satisfaction from educational services					-0.031
Satisfaction from social security					0.275**
Satisfaction from health services					-0.117
Satisfaction from housing					0.051
Satisfaction from social services					0.065
Satisfaction from social and cultural activities					0.186*
Constant	6.177***	5.365***	4.267***	4.103***	3.269***
# of obs.	1615	1549	1541	1530	1151
$\overline{R^2}$	0.024	0.078	0.099	0.106	0.166
adjusted R ²	0.02	0.071	0.092	0.096	0.149

Note: *, **, *** denote statistical significance at 5%, 1%, 0.1% level respectively.

In Model 3, we only add piety as a variable to Model 2 aiming to control the religiousness in the analysis. The explanatory power of Model 3 increases a small amount. None of the variable coefficients mentioned in Model 2 loses its statistical significance, and there are no changes in the signs. The coefficient on piety is positive and statistically significant indicating that the more people define themselves as pious, the more they have happiness. This result is quite interesting. Even though religiousness brings no materialistic gain, it motivates them to be more and more complacent. So, less can make a religious person happier compared to a person having lesser faith in religion in the Turkish context.

We add other control variables as having social security, getting aid from relatives, getting aid from the state, and getting aid from non-governmental organisations (s) to establish Model 4. The explanatory power of Model 4 is slightly higher vis-à-vis explanatory power of Model 3. Again, the coefficients on variables that are statistically significant in Model 3 do not lose their characteristics in Model 4 apart from small decreases and increases in the coefficient values. Only one exception is being divorced. Now, being divorced does not have any effect on happiness from a statistical point of view. However, two of the coefficients on newly added variables are statistically significant in Model 4. Participation in social security system has a positive effect on happiness. On the other hand, the impact of getting aid from the state is negative. In case we consider Turkish state aid system, this result is not exceptional since assistance provided by the state is usually not enough to obtain a decent life quality. Since the coefficient on piety gives us an interesting result, we check the effect of religious devotion on happiness in Model 4. It has a statistically significant and positive coefficient supporting our previous argument on austerity. Another interesting point in Model 4 is that people with Kurdish ethnicity continue to be less happy compared to Turks. Even though the coefficient on Kurdish ethnicity loses its negative impact on happiness as we add more control variables, it is observed to be a significant demographic factor playing a crucial role in the determination of happiness.

Model 5 given in Table 3 includes our most extensive analysis on the happiness with the explanatory power of 16.6%. In this model, variables related to the public service satisfaction take parts in the determination of the happiness level. The services are grouped into educational services, social security, health services, housing, social services, and social and cultural activities for this model. The coefficient of age variable is negative and statistically significant in Model 5. It shows that as people get older they become less happy. In addition, living in a city has a negative impact on happiness compared to living in rural areas. Interestingly, belonging to Kurdish ethnicity does not sustain its significant negative impact on happiness. This is actually an important result since it shows the effect of satisfaction from public services goes beyond ethnic origins. As satisfaction levels from public services take part in the model, the impact of belonging to Kurdish ethnicity shifts to these variables. Most probably, people are unhappy not because of racial discrimination, but they are actually in need of better public services. If the governments provide sufficient and higher quality services to generate higher levels of satisfaction, it can increase the happiness level for all people regardless of ethnicity. Unemployment sustains its negative effect on happiness in Model 5. However, being retired loses its positive impact. The level of income is statistically significantly positive as it is in four other models, but its impact on happiness increases to a much higher value. Again, religious piety appears to influence happiness positively in Model 5. The continuous statistical significance of the coefficient on devotion among distinct models highlights the importance of faith in social life to reach happiness. The coefficient on aid from relatives becomes significantly negative indicating that people get insufficient aid even from the inner social circle. In addition, the coefficient on assistance from state presents a similar negative impact on the level of happiness.

When we assess satisfaction for six classes of public services in Model 5, we observe that satisfaction stemming from educational services, health services, housing, and social services has no significant impact on happiness. On the other hand, satisfaction from social security and social and cultural activities influence happiness positively. Especially, the coefficient on the satisfaction from social security is considerably big showing that the old age pension influence happiness largely. Also, free social and cultural activities provided by state and municipalities become irreplaceable at modern times especially for the people in a developing country. Actually, by providing recreational activities in the social and cultural context, state transfers resources to the poor who lack money to satisfy even basic needs such as food, heating, and clothing. Hence, it has a substantial positive effect on happiness.

We check robustness of our results by applying ordered logistic regression in Table A.1. Our main results related to the variables on which we focus are very similar in two different approaches. There are some differences related to Model 1, Model 2, and Model 5, but these are very limited. Thus, we present Table A1 at the appendix showing variations of the results between two approaches in italic and underlined.

Happiness and the Turkish Welfare State

Large social welfare policy differences among these countries are apparent. The impact of welfare states and their various social policies on well-being of citizens are crucial. Countries with more generous benefit systems are happier than those countries, which have rudimentary and remnant social policies (Di Tella et al. 2003). The significance of social policies and institutional differences on life satisfaction necessitates considering welfare state variations across Europe. Esping-Andersen (1990) constructed the three-fold welregime classification to explain cross-national variations influenced by the role of the state, the market, and the family in the management of social risks. Later, some researchers included Southern European, Eastern European, Antipodean, East Asian, and Latin American welfare states to the welfare state typology. Turkey has some similarities with the Southern European welfare regime based on strong familialism, a residual form of public support and social assistance, patronage, and clientelism (Aysan, 2018).

All of these welfare states, which evolved through different historical and institutional paths, have very diverse labor market policies and life satisfaction levels. In both the 2003 and 2011 EQLS, Europeans gave quite a positive life satisfaction score with about 7.0 on average. In 2011, life satisfaction average of selected European countries remained stable, with a slight decrease to 7.0. Even though there is a significant increase on average life satisfaction score of Turkey during this period, Turkey has relatively lower score with 6.6 compared to rest of the Europe except Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia Greece, Kosovo, Latvia, Serbia, and Slovakia.

According to Pierson (2007), globalisation, demographic changes, and new social risks are three main challenges for the contemporary welfare regimes, including Turkey (Aysan 2018, 114). First, globalisation has given rise to various economic challenges to the Keynesian economic policies. The production system has evolved from a Fordist one based on large stocks (just-in-case), standardised products, and mass production to a post-Fordist production system based on flexible machinery, lean production, minimal (Krahn et al. 2007). The impact of outsourcing and the increase in precarious jobs also have a significant impact on unskilled workers and their social security in Turkey. Second, the demographic structure of the Turkish population poses noteworthy challenges in terms of meeting the needs of the aging population. In the contemporary world, it is difficult for aging populations to sustain generous retirement benefits and increasing health costs due to slow economic growth. Third, new social risks, particularly changes in family formation, legal and illegal immigration pose important challenges to the Turkish welfare regime. Especially in the beginning of the 21st century, Turkish families underwent rapid changes, such as increased flexibility in modes of entry into and exit from the labor force, increased variability in work-force participation across families, changes in the social meaning of parenthood, and new associations between gender and family earnings. Another important social challenge has been the huge migration flows from Syria and other neighbouring countries into Turkey. As of 2018, there are over 4 million immigrants in Turkey. In addition to the security issues, these migrants pose, their social and economic adaptation to Turkey will be some of the biggest challenges for the Turkish welfare regime in the years ahead. Alongside these three global trends, there are two other challenges peculiar to the Turkish welfare regime that limit the success of social-policy reforms: populism and patronage (Aysan 2018).

In light of these global and local challenges, some regulations can be suggested for the Turkish case (Aysan 2018, 116-117). While some of the regulations are relevant to the previous challenges pointed out in this article, some of them are crucial to improving social policies and associated institutions. Their successful implementation will be crucial for the future of the Turkish welfare regime. The Ministry of Family and Social Policies must be the central actor in social policies and its institutional infrastructure must be developed. Longitudinal and cross-sectional data on social assistance, social policies, and the needs of citizens must be collected regularly. Comprehensive and detailed social policies must be designed to meet the overlapping needs of various groups. Equity and justice must be the key determinants of social policies for all types of groups, whether based on gender, ethnicity, age, class, or religion. There must be sustainable social policies that will not threaten intergenerational equity and younger generations' welfare. New policies and regulations that address the needs of different types of families must be developed to strengthen families.

Conclusion

This paper empirically analyses what determines happiness with particular focus on social policies namely, health services, social security, housing, social services and social and cultural activities, using the national dataset 'Understanding the Welfare Regime of Turkey 2016'. Multiple regression results are consistent with that of previous literature. We found that satisfaction stemming from educational services, health services, housing, and social services has no significant impact

on happiness. On the other hand, satisfaction from social security and social and cultural activities influence happiness positively. Especially, the coefficient on the satisfaction from social security is considerably big showing that the amount of old age pension income influences happiness largely. Also free social and cultural activities provided by state and municipalities become distinctive in Turkey. Actually, by providing recreational activities in the social and cultural context, state transfers resources to the poor who lack money to satisfy even basic needs such as food, heating, and clothing. Hence, it has a substantial positive effect on happiness. In light of aforementioned variations across Europe, it can be concluded that particularly social security and social and cultural services do matter.

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Appendix

Table A1: Ordered Logistic Regression Results (Dependent Variable: Happiness)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Variable	Coefficient	Coefficient	Coefficient	Coefficient	Coefficient
Gender	-0.085	-0.035	-0.061	-0.048	-0.098
Age	<u>-0.007</u>	-0.014**	-0.015**	-0.015***	-0.012*
City	-0.221	-0.422***	-0.425**	-0.441***	<u>-0.333</u>
Married	<u>0.195</u>	0.131	0.072	0.062	-0.077
Divorced	-0.689**	-0.72**	-0.603*	-0.508	-0.535
Kurdish ethnicity	-0.502***	-0.375**	-0.398**	-0.291*	-0.158
Arabic ethnicity	0.314	0.295	0.231	0.336	1.033
Unemployed		-0.976***	-0.944***	-0.801**	-0.744*
Housewife		0.211	0.108	0.137	0.019
Student		-0.316	-0.258	-0.262	-0.177
Retired		0.494**	0.49**	0.448*	0.34
Income		0.438***	0.491***	0.422***	0.585***
Piety			0.187***	0.186***	0.119***
Social security				0.461*	0.241
Aid from relatives				-0.61	-1.408*
Aid from state				<u>-0.399</u>	-0.52*
Aid from 's				<u>-0.433*</u>	-0.651
Satisfaction from educational services					-0.039
Satisfaction from social security					0.241**
Satisfaction from health services					-0.111
Satisfaction from housing					0.069
Satisfaction from social services					0.06
Satisfaction from social and cultural activities					0.19*
# of obs.	1615	1549	1541	1530	1151
Log pseudo likelihood	-3355	-3166	-3120	-3089	-2286
pseudo R ²	0.005	0.017	0.025	0.027	0.045

Note: *, **, *** denote statistical significance at 5%, 1%, 0.1% level respectively.

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