# Personality and subjective well-being: One neglected model of personality and two forgotten aspects of subjective well-being

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Previous research on the relations between personality and subjective well-being (SWB) often overlooked the distinction between the affective and cognitive components of SWB. The main aim of this study was to investigate the role of personality traits in predicting separately affective well-being and satisfaction with life. We used Zuckerman's Alternative Five Factor Model of Personality, which is rarely used as a framework to operationalize personality traits in the field of SWB. Results of this research clearly show that personality traits have different predictive power in explaining individual differences in affective well-being and satisfaction with life. None of the personality traits had a unique contribution in explaining satisfaction with life, showing that they do not have a direct effect on the cognitive aspect of well-being. On the other hand, Neuroticism-Anxiety and Activity proved to have a direct effect on the affective component of SWB. Theoretical and practical implications of the results were discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Subjective well-being (SWB) is one of the most attractive fields in modern psychology. A sudden increase of interest for studying this phenomenon has especially been expressed in the last 10 years, from establishing positive psychology as a scientific discipline (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002) and recognizing the significance of SWB on the level of an individual and the society as a whole (e.g. Diener & Seligman, 2004; Veenhoven, 2004).

Instant popularisation of the research into SWB made it a potentially risky field that could descend into chaos. According to our opinion, in the domain of SWB, there are at least two mutually related inconsistencies: terminological and conceptual, that create quite a confusion in this field.

Firstly, among the researchers there is no uniform use of the terms when it comes to the phenomena that refer to SWB. Some of the most famous researchers in this field use the term happiness as a synonym for SWB (e.g. Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). On the other hand, there are authors who use the term happiness in a more specific meaning – either in the sense of positive affect or in the sense of satisfaction with life (e.g. Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008). Inconsistent and non-universal use of the terms is particularly problematic in the context of investigating individual differences in SWB, since it limits the generalizability of the results obtained.

Despite considerable terminological chaos, researchers have a unique opinion on what the SWB structure consists of. Summarizing previous research, Diener (1984) has defined SWB as a construct, which consists of three components: satisfaction with life, positive affect and a low level of negative affect. Satisfaction with life represents the cognitive aspect of SWB and it refers to global evaluation of a person on how his/her life looks like (Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997). Positive affect implies frequent experiences of pleasant emotions, and low level of negative affect implies a relative absence of unpleasant emotional states. Such a tripartite structure of SWB was confirmed in a number of studies (e.g. Arthaud-Day, Rode, Mooney, & Near, 2005; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996).

Therefore, the essential theoretical conceptualization of SWB is represented by a distinction between the affective and cognitive components of this construct (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), which are related but still can be distinguished on several levels (Schimmack, 2008). However, previous research on the relations between personality and subjective well-being (SWB) often overlooked this distinction.

There are a number of research reports on personality traits as predictors of SWB, but, it is not specified to which aspect the prediction refers – affective or cognitive (e.g. Hills & Argyle, 2001). In addition, in different researches there are various instruments used that capture either the affective or the cognitive evaluation only and hence, the authors determine them as the general measures of SWB or happiness (e.g. Cheng & Furnham, 2003). An additional problem is the fact that SWB is often operationalized through a global measure obtained when a negative affect is subtracted from

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the sum of positive affect and satisfaction with life (e.g. Sheldon & Hoon, 2007; Vittersø, 2001).

Few studies have addressed relations between personality and separately the affective and cognitive components of SWB. One of them is a study conducted by Schimmack, Schupp, and Wagner (2008). The results of this research have shown that extraversion and neuroticism are the strongest predictors of affective and neuroticism of cognitive components of SWB, but that effect is lost when the affective component is introduced in a regression equation as a predictor. The conclusion of the authors is that affective and cognitive components represent different aspects of SWB and that the research should take that distinction into consideration, because the results obtained by examining affective well-being cannot be generalized on satisfaction with life and vice versa. In accordance with this view, in this research we define SWB as a phenomenon that includes two components: cognitive well-being (CWB) and affective well-being (AWB). CWB is defined as satisfaction with one's life, and AWB as a balance of positive and negative emotions.

When examining relations between personality traits and SWB, previous research mostly leaned on the Five Factor Model (FFM), as a dominant one in personality psychology (Larsen & Buss, 2008), and showed that neuroticism and extraversion were the strongest correlates of SWB (e.g. DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Steel et al., 2008).

In the present research, we have used Zuckerman's Alternative Five Factor Model of Personality (AFFM) (Zuckerman, 2005), which has attracted little or no attention with regard to SWB, although it had undergone extensive testing, especially in the field of psychopathology (Zuckerman, 1999). The relationships between the AFFM and positive aspects of functioning are still largely unknown. This research aimed to fill this gap and represents a first step to understanding the usefulness of the AFFM in the prediction of SWB.

The AFFM postulates five biologically based dimensions of personality: Activity (Act) covering the need for general activity and preference for challenging and hard work, Sociability (Sy) involving interacting with many people and intolerance for social isolation, Aggression-Hostility (Agg-Host) including antisocial behaviors, Impulsive Sensation Seeking (ImpSS) relating to the tendency to act impulsively, the seeking of exciting experiences and the willingness to take risks and Neuroticism-Anxiety (N-Anx) involving a disposition to feel upset and anxious.

Several studies compared the AFFM and the FFM and concluded that there was a high convergence between the two models (e.g. Zuckerman, Kuhlman, Teta, Joireman, & Kraft, 1993). Comparing the AFFM and the FFM, Aluja, Garcia, and Garcia (2002) found that N-Anx was strongly related to Neuroticism ($r = .81$) and Sy correlated positively with Extraversion ($r = .66$), but that the Activity scale is poorly represented in the NEO-PI-R. It seems that the main difference between the two models is the presence of a single dimension in each model (Openness to Experience and Activity) that has no equivalent in the other (Joireman & Kuhlman, 2004).

In our opinion, the AFFM can be useful for understanding the role of extraversion in SWB, because it does not integrate sociability and activity into a single trait (extraversion) as do most personality models, but it postulates them as two separate basic personality dimensions. According to the AFFM, sociability and activity should be associated with positive affect, since they share a common neurobiological basis in the form of dopamine (Zuckerman, 2005).

In the context of SWB, a particularly interesting component of the AFFM is the ImpSS dimension. ImpSS is found to be significantly negatively correlated ($r = -.53$) with the NEO-PI-R Conscientiousness dimension (Aluja et al., 2002), which is an important predictor of SWB (Hayes & Joseph, 2003). Most research has dealt with examining the dimension of sensation seeking as the predictor of behaviors that compromise health and impair psycho-social functioning (e.g. Kalichman, Simbayi, Jooste, Cain, & Cherry, 2006).

A number of researches have shown that sensation seeking is related to maladaptive behavior patterns such as risky sexual behavior (Hoyle, Fejfar, & Miller, 2000) and drug abuse (Pedersen, 1991). However, as far as we know, there is no research that has focused on the relations between sensation seeking and positive aspects of functioning.

Hence, due to the limitations of the previous research, two main objectives of this research were established:

First, examining the distinctiveness of the affective and cognitive components of SWB, concerning their relations with personality traits.
Second, examining the predictive power of personality traits according to the AFFM.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

The research was carried out on a sample of 226 (117 females, 109 males) undergraduate students in various departments of the University of Novi Sad. The mean age of the participants was 21.7 years (SD = 1.56), with a range of 19–30 years. The measures were administered to participants who agreed to complete the study voluntarily, in the classrooms, at the beginning of the school year. All the questionnaires were anonymous and did not contain any personal information.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Personality traits

Personality traits were assessed by means of the Serbian translation of the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire Cross-Cultural 50-item version (ZKPQ-50-CC; Aluja et al., 2006), which shows good psychometric properties (Mitrovic, Colovic, & Smederevac, 2009). The ZKPQ-50-CC consists of 50 items (10 per - scale), that measure the following personality dimensions of AFFM: Activity (Act), Sociability (Sy), Aggression-Hostility (Agg-Host), Impulsive Sensation Seeking (ImpSS) and Neuroticism-Anxiety (N-Anx). For the current sample Cronbach's alphas for the scales ranged from .61 to .76.

#### 2.2.2. Cognitive well-being (CWB)

CWB was measured with the Serbian version of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The SWLS is a five item scale for assessing the cognitive component of SWB. The response to each item ranges from 1-strongly disagree, to 7-strongly agree. This scale has been widely used and has shown good psychometric properties (e.g. Pavot & Diener, 1993). Cronbach's alpha in the current sample was .82.

#### 2.2.3. Affective well-being (AWB)

AWB was assessed with the Serbian Inventory of Affect based on the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule-X (SIAB-PANAS; Novovic & Mihic, 2008). This is a Serbian translation and adaptation of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule-X (PANAS-X; Watson & Clark, 1994), which proved to be a reliable and valid measure in previous research (Novovic, Mihic, Tovilovic, & Jovanovic, 2008). In the current research we used the short form to measure Positive affect (PA) and Negative affect (NA), with ten items each. The affective component of SWB was operationalized as hedonic balance, i.e. the average of NA was subtracted from the average of PA (Schimmack et al., 2008). Cronbach's alpha for AWB measure was .84.