
The midlife well-being, gender and marital status

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ABSTRACT This paper provides an evaluation of subjective well-being in middle-aged Poles. 1776 healthy men and 1258 healthy postmenopausal women, aged 40-65 years, were polled in cross-sectional population-based study conducted between 2000-2003 in all but Eastern part of Poland. Satisfaction with life and 11 life domains was evaluated using Polish version of Life Satisfaction Index developed and validated by Campbell (1976). ANCOVA models were run to evaluate the main effects of age, gender, category of marital status, level of education and urbanization as predictive factors for variation in subjective well-being. Multiple Correspondence Analysis was run to evaluate satisfaction with particular life domains. The findings revealed the significance of gender in moderating the effects of marital status on subjective well-being. Partnered midlife men and women were likely to enjoy a higher level of well-being and fare better than their non-partnered peers on many life outcome variables. Gender, marital status and education, the three main predictive factors of midlife well-being and age as a covariate explained 29% of variation in subjective well-being. Marital status was the most powerful predictive factor for variation in males’ subjective well-being and education was the most powerful for women. The general picture for midlife Polish people drawn from the study indicated a moderate level of global life satisfaction and the lowest level of satisfaction in the following social life domains: income, standard of living and life in Poland.

KEY WORDS males, females, transitional period, individual experience, subjective well-being, life domains, satisfaction-dissatisfaction

Introduction

Long term pattern of demographic changes in Poland, the decrease in mortality and increase in life expectancy, has resulted in increasing numbers of people in middle and later life. The increasing numbers of midlifers, those being in middle adulthood, between the ages of forty and sixty five [BEE 1996], who remain employed in the workplace, has prompted a number of detailed studies of their health, resources and demands. It has also given an array of con-
flicting images regarding the understanding of this stage of life. Some of these emphasize the stability with the dominant view that nothing of interest takes place during this period of development [NOLAN 1986: 51]. Others view midlife as a time of profound physical and psychosocial changes. Midlife women experience the relatively sudden onset of ovarian failure that causesamenorrhea, infertility and estrogen deficiency (menopause). This abrupt transition from reproductive to non-reproductive stage of life is usually accompanied by a series of biological, endocrinological and clinical signs and symptoms [MCKINLEY et al. 1972, LEIDY 1996]. Midlife men perceive the gradual decline of endo- and exocrine testicular functions together with various clinical signs and symptoms [VERMEULEN 2000, WICK et al. 2000]. For some individuals, irrespective their gender, the midlife transition appears as a crisis which evokes feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction and which precipitates major life events such as divorce and career changes [LOMBRANZ et al. 1994]. For yet others, the transition that occurs in midlife is not stressful in itself, with stress ensuing only if loss occurs in relation to such change [WILCOX 1986, HOBFOLL et al. 1992]. While some midlife events are clearly negative there are many positive counterbalances, including: relief from the worry of pregnancy, grandparenting, increased freedom when children leave home, opportunities to develop new skills and sometimes an improved marriage [BUCK & GOTLIEB 1991, SHEEHY 1995]. Thus, both positive and negative life experiences affect its quality.

A concept of quality of life (QOL) has widely been used for evaluation of the state of public and personal well-beings [LANGLOIS & ANDERSON 2002]. Its objective measure (physical, social and economic) reflects the material aspect of life of a modern society and has value for identifying social inequalities and predicting trends. Its subjective measure refers to the psychological well-being, the feeling of being satisfied with one’s life rather than with consumer goods and indicates a quantum of satisfaction or happiness enjoyed by a person from feeling of being healthy, comfortable and having good relationships with others [ROGERSON et al. 1989, HEADEY 1993, HUGHES et al. 1995, REIS et al. 2000]. Thereby, psychological well-being demonstrates the quality of life circumstances people live in and the range of responses to events that occur episodically during the course of one’s life. It is evident that the individual’s sense of well-being and the objective circumstances of life are not isomorphic.

Many attempts have recently been made in order to identify predictive variables of life satisfaction in aging people, though the findings are still inconclusive. Some predictors have been found to be bivariately associated with life satisfaction, but their effects often disappear in multivariate models that include other variables (e.g. the effects of age and gender on life satisfaction disappear when marital status is controlled for) [GRAY et al. 1992]. Findings of various multivariate analyses have confirmed that gender, age, marital status, income and education, various health indicators are consistent for life satisfaction [DENNERSTEIN et al. 1994, MARKS 1996, MARKS et al. 1998, CHOU & CHI
1999, THIELE 2002, AVIS et al. 2004]. The results of some other studies are still inconclusive [KEHN 1995]. Contradictory findings as to the predictors of life satisfaction and a gap in the knowledge about the subjective well-being among midlife Polish people have stimulated interest in this question. The purpose of the present study was to describe the level of life satisfaction in Polish midlife men and women and to evaluate the contribution to its variation of the principal demographic and social factors.

### Materials and Methods

#### Study design and sample

This study was part of a larger cross-sectional population-based inquiry conducted between 2000-2003 in all but Eastern part of Poland. Participants were defined eligible for the study if they were healthy, over 35 years of age and expressed cooperativeness. They were selected by stratified random sampling from registered lists obtained from communal or municipal offices. The total sample consisted of 2509 male (out of a potential 4200) and 6429 female (out of a potential 8100) respondents yielding a 59.8% and 79.2% response rate. Data for this study were obtained from a sub-sample of 40 to 65 years old men and postmenopausal women after natural menopause. The natural menopause was defined as spontaneous cessation of menstruation recognized as the last menstrual period (LMP) determined after 12 months of amenorrhea [WHO 1981]. 8 women whose age at natural menopause was 38 and 39 years were included in age category [40,45]. Subjects were classed by gender, age, marital status, level of education and urbanization (Table 1).

The mean age of 1776 men from the sample was 49.9 years (SD 6.1 years). Of all men that participated in the study, 75% were currently employed, 90% lived with heterosexual partner (the partnered category of marital status including: married, remarried or unmarried living together) and 10% lived without a partner (the non-partnered category of marital status including: single never married, widowed, divorced or separated). Widowed men were the oldest (mean age 55.3 years) and divorced men the youngest (mean age was 49.6 years). Of the men sampled, 6% had primary education and 23% had academic education. 22% lived in a village and 78% in urban communities of whom 30% in a city with more than 500,000 inhabitants (Tab. 2).

The mean age of 1258 women from the sample was 56.0 years (SD 4.9 years). Of the women sampled, 53% were employed. 70% were married or heterosexualually partnered (the partnered category of marital status including: married, remarried or unmarried living together) and 30% were single of whom 19% were widowed, 5% never married and 6% divorced/separated. Widowed women were the oldest (mean age 57.9 years) and never married women the youngest (mean age was 54.4 years). Considering place of residence, 25% of women lived in a village and 75% in urban communities of whom 12% in a city. The pattern of female education was slightly different compared to men, with 19% of women having primary education and 17% an academic education. Individual age at menopause,
recalled retrospectively by the women, ranged from 38 to 58 years. Mean recall age at natural menopause was 49.98 (SD 3.46) years. Median age at menopause (by the probit estimate) was 50.84 years. Generally, the demographic characteristics of the sample correspond to figures for the Polish population with some exceptions relating to category of urbanization and education [Population Census 2002]. In the sample studied urban residents outnumbered rural ones as compared to global figures. The percentage of urban residents was 78% compared to 62% in the Polish population. The same holds for level of education. In this sample, the percentage of people having academic level of education ranges from 16% in females to 22% in males whereas global figures show 8-10%.

Table 1. Selected characteristics of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age categories</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>[40,45)</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>197</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>[45,50)</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[50,55)</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>368</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>[55,60)</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[60,65)</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnered</td>
<td>1598</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never partnered</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of residence</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Village</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>25.3</td>
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<td>30.5</td>
<td>385</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium to large town</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The city (over 500,000)</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>11.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>114</td>
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<td>246</td>
<td>19.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
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<td>319</td>
<td>25.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
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<td>495</td>
<td>39.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>15.8</td>
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<td>Occupation</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>1328</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 2. Mean age in the marital status categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>1776</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>1258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnered</td>
<td>1598</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never partnered</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Menopause- and Andropause-Specific Quality of Life Questionnaires (MAQOL) were distributed by fully-trained graduate student interviewers. For purposes of the present study, demographic, socio-economic and QOL aspects of the questionnaire were conducted. Subjective well-being (SWB) was evaluated within the framework of Cantril’s cognitive concept of SWB [Cantril 1965] and measured using the Polish version of the Life Satisfaction Index developed and validated by Campbell [1976]. Respondents were asked to describe the extent to which the perception of their present situation in each of eleven life domains differentiates from a desired situation they expected or felt deserved. They were given a 7-point rating scale, ranging from highly dissatisfied (1 and 2 score of this scale) through moderately dissatisfied/satisfied (scores 3, 4 and 5) to highly satisfied (scores 6 and 7), to evaluate their perception of 11 life domains: marriage, family, health, friends, work, housing, leisure time, standard of living, acquired education, income, life in Poland. In order to obtain global measure of subjective well-being, the reported scores were summed and divided by the 11 component items. Both global life satisfaction and satisfaction with particular life domain were analyzed.

**Data analysis**

Analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) of SWB were conducted to evaluate the main effects of predictive variables, age, gender, marital status, education, urbanization with age or BMI as covariate. For this purpose either a pooled sample of males and females were analyzed or they were separately analyzed. Qualitative data were presented in multiway tables and the Chi-square test was used to test their interdependence. Thereafter, the association among qualitative data was estimated using Euclidean distances obtained from the model of Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA). All computations were run using Statistica 6.0 programme package [StatSoft Inc 2003 Statistica for Windows].

**Results**

The perceived satisfaction with life and its predictive variables

Table 3 summarizes the significant differences in SWB in relation to the study variables. Its general indication is that men are more satisfied with life compared to women (mean SWB figures: 4.52 in males and 4.40 in females; difference $P < 0.05$). This picture however changes in relation to a defined variable. Age (within age range of 40 – 65) does not significantly differentiate SWB ($F = 1.7$ and $F = 0.2$ for males and females respectively) whereas marital status, education and urbanization do. The midlife people living with a partner feel most satisfied and partnered men are significantly more satisfied than partnered women (mean SWB of partnered men 4.57 and partnered women 4.47; difference $P < 0.05$). Least satisfied are single never married men and divorced/separated women (mean SWB 3.96 and 4.18 for men and women respectively; difference ns). Never partnered men and women differ significantly in amount of satisfaction (mean SWB 3.89 for men and 4.36 for women; difference $P < 0.05$) widowed and di-
Education and urbanization demonstrate significant influences on SWB ($P < 0.01$ and $P < 0.05$ respectively). For either gender, SWB mirrors education and urbanization gradients – lower/higher amount of well-being corresponds to lower/higher category of education and urbanization. Gender differences occur only between those having a primary education ($P < 0.05$).

The ANCOVA models examining the effects of the study variables on global SWB with age or BMI as covariates are shown in Table 4. Gender and marital status remain significant as factors in explaining variance in SWB when occurring in any combination with the main effect factors and age as a covariate. Gender remains significant as one main effect ($F = 4.3; P < 0.05$) and in combination with marital status as an additional main effect ($F = 4.2; P < 0.05$). Gender remains significant in combination with education and urbanization as two additional main effects ($F = 5.9; P < 0.05$). Gender is no longer a significant factor for variation in SWB in the three main effects model when education is added to gender and marital status as main factors and age as a covariate ($F = 0.6; P > 0.05$). Marital status remains significant for SWB in models with two and three predictive factors in combination with gender and

| Table 3. Within and between gender diversity in subjective well-being by age, marital status, education and urbanization |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Within - $F$ | Between - $t$ |
| Males | Females | M/F |
| Total sample | SWB = 4.52 | SWB = 4.40 | 2.6 |
| Age | n = 1776 | n = 1258 | 1.7 | 1.2 |
| Marital status | n = 1740 | n = 1220 | 18.4 | 2.9 |
| Partnered | -2.5 |
| Never partnered | 2.2 |
| Widowed | 0.2 |
| Divorced/Separated | 1.3 |
| Education | n = 1764 | n = 1250 | 32.7 | 37.7 |
| Primary | 2.8 |
| Vocational | 0.5 |
| Secondary | 0.9 |
| Academic | -0.3 |
| Urbanization | n = 1737 | n = 1238 | 2.8 | 9.1 |
| Village | 2.8 |
| Small Town | 0.5 |
| Med-Large Town | 0.9 |
| City | -0.3 |

Significance: **bold** $P < 0.01$, standard $P < 0.05$, italic – nonsignificant
education. Education and urbanization also significantly contribute to the variation of SWB as main factors in combination with gender and marital status and age as covariate. Gender remains significant factor for SWB in combination with marital status and age as main factors and BMI as a covariate. Age has a significant affect on SWB only when combined with gender and marital status. Interactions among study variables are not significant in the majority of ANCOVA models with some exceptions. There are significant interactions between gender and marital status in combination with age as a main factor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main effect</th>
<th>$F$ value</th>
<th>Main effect</th>
<th>$F$ value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>One main effect</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Covariate – Age</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two main effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>and Marital status</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariate – Age</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Gender x Marital status</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three main effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>and Marital status</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Age</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Covariate – BMI</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction effect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender x Marital status</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Gender x Age</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status x Age</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Gender x Marital status x Age</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>and Marital status</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Education</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>Covariate – Age</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction effect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender x Marital status</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Gender x Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender x Education</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Marital status x Education</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender x Marital status x Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>and Education</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Urbanization</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Covariate – Age</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction effect</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender x Education</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Gender x Urbanization</td>
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<td>Education x Urbanization</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>Gender x Education x Urbanization</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance: **bold** $P < 0.01$, standard $P < 0.05$, *italic* – nonsignificant
However, in three main effects model, gender in combination with marital status and education, the significant interaction between gender and marital status disappears. Gender, marital status and education explain 29% of total variation in SWB. A hierarchy of factors predictive for subjective well-being and some associations are gender specific. Life satisfaction is not related to female marital status when combined with urbanization ($F = 2.6; P > 0.05$). Men’s life satisfaction is not related to urbanization when combined either with marital status or education ($F = 0.7; P > 0.05$ and $F = 2.9; P > 0.05$ respectively). The three main effects model including gender, marital status and age with BMI as a covariate, reveals significant contribution of the age to variation in SWB.

**The perceived satisfaction with life domains**

The level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction in life domains expressed in terms of qualitative data, is plotted as Euclidean distances among satisfaction with life domains (DSWB) and predictive variables: marital status, education and urbanization. For purposes of clarity, only marital status (out of all the predictive variables) is indicated in Figure 1. The goodness of fit of the model, estimated by chi-square value, yields: global $\chi^2 = 29097.7$; with $df = 1600$; $P = 0$ for males and for females: global $\chi^2 = 46056.6$ with $df = 1296$ and $P = 0$. Two dimensions of Euclidean distances explain 22.4% of total chi-square distribution for males and 25.5% for females.

Three categories of DSWB are separately clustered in a similar way for men and women. The cluster of moderate DSWB is more consistent than two other clusters of high satisfaction and high dissatisfaction respectively. This implies that moderate DSWB is most often reported by midlife men and women. Within the cluster of high DSWB, two sub-clusters are seen: satisfaction with marriage being very close to satisfaction with family and satisfaction with standard of living being very close to income. Items of high dissatisfaction in the life domains cluster are widely scattered through the second dimension. Considering marital status in males, the profiles of four categories are distant more than 0.5 of the first dimension (P,W and N-P) and 1.5 of the second (Div/Sep). Men of various marital status differ in frequency distribution of reported DSWB. Partnered and non-partnered men are most distanced (1.2 of the first dimension). Partnered men having an academic education and living in cities correspond to high satisfaction with marriage and family (distance small or equal 0.5). This means that they constitute the largest frequency distribution of men being highly satisfied with marriage and family. The others, such as partnered men, having vocational and secondary education and living in villages and small to large towns, constitute majority of moderately dissatisfied with all but marriage and family life domains (distance 0.3). It means that greater portion of moderately satisfied men is composed of those defined above. Widowed men of all but academic categories of education and residents of all places but the city constitute the majority of men moderately dissatisfied with marriage and family. Men having primary education of any marital status as well as urbanization
Fig. 1. 2-D diagramme of co-ordinates for rows and columns representing the contents of multiway Burt’s table for marital status, education, urbanization and subjective well-being in life domains. Abbreviations: 1 – high dissatisfaction; 2 – moderate dis/satisfaction; 3 – high satisfaction. Life domains: A – Marriage; B – Family; C – Health; D – Friends; E – Work; F – Housing; G – Leisure time; H – Standard of living (SOL); I – Acquired Education; J – Income; K – Life in Poland; P – partnered; NP – never partnered; W – widowed; Div/Sep – divorced or separated. Marker points and labels for another factors are hidden.
constitute the majority of men highly dissatisfied with leisure time, income and life in Poland (distance 0.3). Non-partnered men are mostly distanced from the rest of men; the largest distance exists between them and their partnered peers. The frequency distribution of non-partnered men in three category of DSWB is similar, whereas divorced/separated men are in majority among those being highly dissatisfied with marriage and education (distance 0.3) health and standard of living (distance 0.6), friends and work (distance 0.5).

In the case of the women, profiles of partnered and widowed women lay very close each other indicating a similar frequency distribution of DSWB in these groups (distance 0.2), thus closer than for the men. Distance between profiles of never partnered and divorced/separated women is smaller than for men (distance 0.4 in women and 0.9 in men). Widowed women having vocational education and living in villages constitute the majority of those women who are moderately dis/satisfied in all study life domains (distance ranges from 0.05 to 0.3). Partnered women having secondary education and living in towns (small to large) are in the majority among those moderately satisfied with all study life domains. Women being highly satisfied with marriage, family, health, friends, work, housing and leisure time are those having an academic category of education and living in cities. Profiles of divorced/separated and non-partnered women are more distanced (0. 0.45) than their partnered and widowed peers. Divorced/separated women do not constitute a majority in any category of DSWB whereas non-partnered are in the majority among women highly dissatisfied with marriage, friends, family, health, work and life in Poland (distance 0.1 to 0.3).

The frequency distribution of the multiway table indicates the most and least appreciated life domain. The most appreciated life domain in which midlife people are highly satisfied varies in relation to marital status. The partnered men are highly satisfied with marriage, partnered women with family; non-partnered men with friends and leisure time, non-partnered women with friends, work and education. Widowed men first appreciate family, widowed women family and work. The prime choice of life domain satisfaction among divorced/separated men is work and among females, friends and family. Life domains in which midlife people are highly dissatisfied are: income and standard of living (partnered males and females and non-partnered males), marriage in non-partnered females, standard of living among widowed men and income among widowed women. Divorced/separated men are highly dissatisfied with life in Poland and their female peers with marriage and friends. Therefore, the main source of DSWB derives from satisfaction with personal life domains, such as marriage, family and friends, whereas the social domains of life satisfaction cause high dissatisfaction. These are: income, standard of living, life in Poland.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to estimate the diversity in subjective well-being in midlife Polish men and women and to evaluate predictive proficiency of selected demographic and social factors.
Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed. For the present findings, it should be noted that the analyses concern the life course stage of middle adulthood ranging 40 to 65 years, one set of outcomes of the multidimensional concept of psychological well-being (the level of satisfaction), and a defined set of demographic and social factors including gender, age, category of marital status, education and urbanization.

The life-span developmental approach defines middle adulthood as a period of transition particularly susceptible to crisis and change regarding bodily changes, family functions, and priorities in occupational life. Dissatisfaction is a prevalent characteristic of transitional period, leading to a questioning of an existing life structure and to possible future change. Evaluation of life domains in this period therefore has special significance. For the sample studied, the level of satisfaction with particular life domains ranged from 3.6 to 5.6 in men and from 3.6 to 5.4 in women. In qualitative terms this means a moderate level of subjective well-being. Numerous respondents were likely to evaluate their life domains just as a global life as “no good, no bad” which resulted in the mean score of global well-being as being 4.52 in males and 4.4 in females. The common view of life for Polish midlife men and women is one of moderate satisfaction. Comparison with a cohort of adults younger than 40 years revealed a significant difference in favor of the younger adults ($P < 0.01$). No significant difference was found between middle aged and elderly adults. These findings correspond to CZAPiN-SKI’S [2003] findings on psychological well-being in Polish adults aged over 18 years. CZAPiN-SKI observed fluctuating trends over time, stabilizing around 2000 towards a moderate level of life satisfaction.

The findings of this study reveal a gender pattern for subjective well-being. Men were likely to enjoy a significantly higher level of life satisfaction compared to women, consistent with results from other studies [KEHN 1995, FULLER et al. 2004]. The pattern of male satisfaction with life domains revealed the following order: marriage (5.6), family (5.5), housing (5), health (4.8), work (4.7), friends (4.6), education (4.4), leisure time (4.3), standard of living (4.2), income (3.7) and life in Poland (3.6). The pattern of female satisfaction with life domains indicated the following order: family (5.4), marriage (4.9), housing (4.8), friends (4.7), leisure (4.6), health (4.5), education and standard of living (4.3), life in Poland (3.8) and income (3.6). Results obtained in this study show that partnered midlife people were likely to enjoy higher life satisfaction compared to their non-partnered peers. Studies evaluating the relationship of marital status with subjective well-being have confirmed its protective perspective [KIM & MCKENRY 2002, MANSFIELD et al. 2003]. Living with a spouse has a physical health promoting [LIPOWICZ 2001, PRIOR & HAYES 2003]. The results of the study on census materials collected in Britain from 1921 to 1991 have confirmed the positive association between marriage and physical health within society. Married people consistently made less use of residential health and social care facilities than unmarried people. This relationship was true for all census years
In contrast to the protective role of marriage, considerable evidence has been produced linking marital disruption to higher rates of physical illness and disease mortality, suicide, homicide and alcohol abuse [Weingarten 1985, Ebrahim et al. 1995]. Randi et al. [2004] reported that never married people were at significantly increased risk of oral cavity and pharyngeal cancers compared to married people, whereas there was no consistent excess risk for divorced or widowed subjects. In addition to physical health, psychosocial or emotional resources are affected by marriage. Owen et al. [2004] reported lower loneliness scores in married people than for single or divorced subjects. The mediating role of psychological resource cannot be overestimated. Studies which demonstrate the psychological resources underlying the process of adaptation to changing situations that accompany process of aging have also been conducted [Windle & Woods 2004].

The differences in the effects of marital status on well-being are usually explained within a model of social selection or model of social causation. The social selection model postulates that there is a differential selection into marriage. Emotionally healthier persons are more likely to remain married, and are more likely to get selected for marriage than emotionally handicapped persons. The social causation hypothesis suggests that certain aspects of marriage make it more beneficial for mental health [Marks 1996: 920]. These two competing explanations are especially manifested during marital transition.

The predictive power of education and urbanization factors to subjective well-being was also consistent for subjective well-being of midlife people. Education, urbanization and income are among the factors that have frequently been linked to life satisfaction [Lohr et al. 1988, Ossberg et al. 1987, Chou & Chi 1999]. Moreover, as Kaczmarek & Skrzypczak [2002] claimed in their study on subjective well-being in middle-aged and elderly men, emotional complaints, together with demographic and social factors significantly differentiate the subjective well-being of aging men. Of all factors being studied, marital status in males and education in females were the strongest predictors of subjective well-being in midlife people. This gender differences may be explained, partly by the different mortality rates in midlife people resulting to higher number of single women compared to men, partly by the number and quality of the roles of the two genders during the course of life [Todd et al. 1990, Welon et al. 1999]

Conclusions

Four important findings are worthy of emphasis for the sample of Polish midlife men and women. First, the findings of bivariate analyses indicated that gender, marital status, education and urbanization were main predictors of global life satisfaction. Second, the findings showed that the bivariately significant relationships between life satisfaction and all except the urbanization factors remained significant in multiple models in any combination of the factors; their additive effect explain 29% of the total variation in subjective well-being. Third, that men enjoyed a higher level of subjective well-being than do
women, and partnered people fare better than their non-partnered peers on many life outcome variables. Fourth, the findings revealed the importance of gender in moderating the effects of marital status on subjective well-being.

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Streszczenie

Charakterystykę próby przedstawiono w tabelach 1 i 2. Zróżnicowanie subiektywne poczucia satysfakcji życiowej ze względu na badane czynniki demograficzne i społeczne, wśród mężczyzn i kobiet oraz pomiędzy mężczyznam i kobietami, przedstawia tabela 3. Wartości statystyki $F$ (ANOVA) wykazały, że stan cywilny, wykształcenie i miejsce zamieszkania istotnie różnicowały subiektywne poczucie satysfakcji życiowej wśród mężczyzn i kobiet. Wartości statystyki $t$ ujawniły istotnie wyższy poziom satysfakcji życiowej u mężczyzn niż u kobiet. Istotne różnice między płciami ujawniły się również w kategoriach stanu cywilnego (żonaty/zamężna oraz kawaler/panna), pomiędzy kobietami i mężczyznami wykształconymi w stopniu podstawowym oraz pomiędzy mężczyznami i kobietami zamieszkującymi wieś. Modele ANCOVA, przedstawione w tabeli 4, wykazały, że płc istotnie różnicuje subiektywne poczucie satysfakcji życiowej, a samoistny wpływ tej zmiennej nie zanieka w różnych konfiguracjach z zostałąmi czynnikami. Istotny wpływ płci na poczucie satysfakcji życiowej zanika w konfiguracji ze stanem cywilnym i wykształceniem. Oszacowano, że łącznie trzy czynniki – płc, stan cywilny i wykształcenie – wyjaśniają 29% całkowitej wariancji subiektywnego poczucia satysfakcji życiowej.

 Wyniki MCA przedstawiono w formie graficznej na rys. 1. Profile odległości geometrycznych między badanymi zmiennymi pozwoliły na pogrąbną analizę wcześniejszych wyników modeli ANCOVA. Okazało się, że większość mężczyzn i kobiet ocenił stan swojej satysfakcji życiowej jako umiarkowane niezadowolenie/zadowolenie. Wysokie zadowolenie, na przykład z małżeństwa i rodziny wyrazili mężczyźni, mieszkańcy wielkich miast, wykształcenie w stopniu wyższym. Podobną prawdopodobieństwo zaobserwowano wśród kobiet. Mieszkanki wielkich miast wykształcone w stopniu wyższym oceniały wysoko stopień zadowolenia z małżeństwa, rodziny, zdrowia, przyjaciół, pracy zawodowej, mieszkania i czasu wolnego. Wśród niezadowolonych największą frakcję stanowili rozwiedzeni/mężczyźni oraz nigdy niezamężne kobiety. Wybór najbardziej i najmniej satysfakcjonujących sfer życia różnił się w zależności od stanu cywilnego. Żonaci wskazywali na małżeństwo, zamężne na rodzinę, kawalerowie na przyjaciół i czas wolny, panny na przyjaciół pracę i wykształcenie, wdowcy na rodzinę. Wybór najbardziej satysfakcjonujących dziedzin życia, to: zarobki, standard życia oraz warunki życia w Polsce.