INTRODUCTION

In a period marked by increasing personal dissatisfaction and widespread distrust toward institutions, it is crucial to investigate whether this discontent may influence adherence to social norms. The central question of this paper is: as personal dissatisfaction rises, does the tendency to justify behaviors that harm the public good also increase?

Émile Durkheim introduced the concept of anomie to describe situations in which social norms weaken or become confused, leaving individuals without clear moral reference points. Under these conditions, people may feel isolated and less motivated to comply with societal rules.

Robert K. Merton expanded this theory by explaining that deviance arises when there is an imbalance between the cultural goals promoted by society (such as success or security) and the legitimate means available to achieve them. When access to these means is restricted, individuals may adopt deviant behaviors as a form of adaptation.

These theories help to understand how personal dissatisfaction can translate into reduced respect for social norms, fostering attitudes that harm the collective interest.

To investigate this hypothesis, data from the European Values Study (EVS) 2017 were analyzed, with the aim of examining the relationship between life dissatisfaction and the justification of behaviors against the public good.
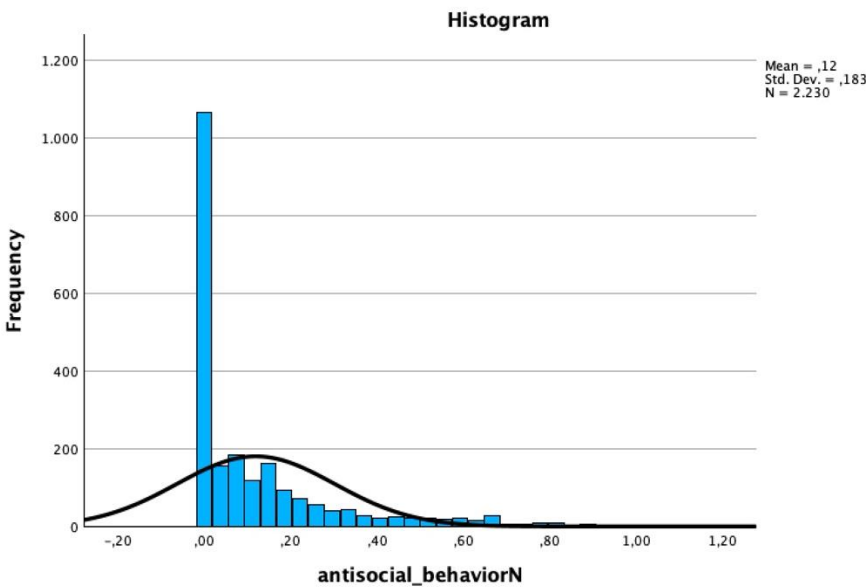
ANALYSIS

Table 1: Frequency distribution of the normalized additive index measuring justification of behaviors against the public good. N=2277; Source: EVS 2017 Italy.

The independent variable used is life satisfaction, measured on a scale from 1 to 10. The dependent variable is a normalized additive index representing the justification of behaviors against the public good. The index was constructed by aggregating four indicators that measure the level of justification attributed to: tax evasion, bribery, misuse of public benefits, and fare evasion in public transport. The index shows satisfactory internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha > 0.7.

The frequency distribution of the dependent variable reveals a skewness toward zero, where zero indicates refusal to justify behaviors against the public good, and one represents full justification. This pattern reflects a general tendency among respondents not to justify such behaviors.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
					Change Statistics				
1	,073ᵃ	,005	,005	,18300	,005	8,578	1	1622	,003

Coefficientsᵃ

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	,180	,021		8,710	<,001
	v39 how satisfied are you with your life (Q10)	–,008	,003	–,073	–2,929	,003

Table 2: Model 1: Bivariate regression between the independent variable life satisfaction (v39) and the dependent variable normalized antisocial behavior. N=2277; Source: EVS 2017 Italy.

The bivariate analysis shows a correlation coefficient (R) of 7.3%, indicating a weak but statistically significant relationship between personal dissatisfaction and justification of behaviors that harm the public good. The model reveals that for each one-point increase in life satisfaction (on a 1–10 scale), the justification of antisocial behaviors decreases by -0.008. Considering that the mean of the dependent variable is 0.12, each additional point corresponds to an average reduction of about -6.7%. This suggests that even small improvements in life satisfaction may significantly reduce the tendency to justify antisocial behaviors.

Report

antisocial_behaviorN

satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	dummy_gender dummy variable for female gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1,00 Low satisfaction	,00 Male	,1348	36	,18532
	1,00 Female	,1292	45	,18879
	Total	,1317	81	,18611
2,00 Medium satisfaction	,00 Male	,1410	487	,19511
	1,00 Female	,1235	508	,17808
	Total	,1321	995	,18672
3,00 High satisfaction	,00 Male	,1140	595	,17902
	1,00 Female	,1007	558	,17771
	Total	,1076	1153	,17843
Total	,00 Male	,1264	1118	,18671
	1,00 Female	,1123	1111	,17855
	Total	,1194	2229	,18278

Table 3: Trivariate analysis between the recoded independent variable life satisfaction (v39) in three categories, the dependent variable antisocial behavior (normalized), and the dummy variable for gender. N=2277; Source: EVS 2017 Italy.

By recoding life satisfaction into three categories and including gender as a dummy variable, the mean values of justification for antisocial behaviors were compared. Preliminary results indicate that individuals with lower satisfaction levels tend to justify such behaviors more often. Furthermore, a slight tendency can be observed (though its statistical significance requires further testing), suggesting that men justify these behaviors slightly more than women.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
					Change Statistics				
1	,073[a]	,005	,005	,18300	,005	8,578	1	1622	,003
2	,130[b]	,017	,014	,18214	,012	4,842	4	1618	<,001

a. Predictors: (Constant), v39 how satisfied are you with your life (Q10)

b. Predictors: (Constant), v39 how satisfied are you with your life (Q10), dummy_gender dummy variable for female gender, v102 political view: left–right (Q31), edu_medium Medium education, edu_high High education

Table 4: Model 2: Multivariate regression including dummy variables for education and gender, and political

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	,180	,021		8,710	<,001
	v39 how satisfied are you with your life (Q10)	−,008	,003	−,073	−2,929	,003
2	(Constant)	,151	,024		6,182	<,001
	v39 how satisfied are you with your life (Q10)	−,007	,003	−,061	−2,461	,014
	edu_medium Medium education	−,018	,010	−,048	−1,742	,082
	edu_high High education	−,037	,014	−,071	−2,573	,010
	dummy_gender dummy variable for female gender	−,001	,009	−,002	−,083	,933
	v102 political view: left–right (Q31)	,006	,002	,080	3,213	,001

a. Dependent Variable: antisocial_behaviorN

orientation. N=2277; Source: EVS 2017 Italy.

In the multivariate model, dummy variables were added for medium and high education (with low education as the reference), along with the gender dummy and political orientation on a 1–10 scale (from left to right). The inclusion of these variables improved the model, increasing R to 13% and the adjusted R^2 to 0.014, thus enhancing overall significance. The model explains 1.4% of the variance in the dependent variable.

Results show that medium education is not significant, whereas high education has a significant effect: individuals with higher education justify antisocial behaviors 0.037 units less than those with low education. The gender variable loses its significance in the model, suggesting that its effect is mediated by other included variables.

Ultimately, political orientation influences the justification of antisocial behaviors: for each additional point toward the right of the ideological spectrum, justification increases by +0.006 (approximately +5% compared to the mean of the dependent variable). Although modest, this effect is statistically significant and may reflect underlying value differences across ideological positions.

antisocial_behaviorN3 antisocial_behaviorN (normalized antisocial behavior) in three categories * satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories * dummy_gender dummy variable for female gender Crosstabulation

dummy_gender dummy variable for female gender				satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories			Total
				1,00 Low satisfaction	2,00 Medium satisfaction	3,00 High satisfaction	
,00 Male	antisocial_behaviorN3 antisocial_behaviorN (normalized antisocial behavior) in three categories	1,00 Good behavior	Count	21	282	383	686
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	70,0%	67,6%	73,9%	71,1%
		2,00 Moderate behavior	Count	5	81	89	175
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	16,7%	19,4%	17,2%	18,1%
		3,00 Poor behavior	Count	4	54	46	104
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	13,3%	12,9%	8,9%	10,8%
	Total		Count	30	417	518	965
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
1,00 Female	antisocial_behaviorN3 antisocial_behaviorN (normalized antisocial behavior) in three categories	1,00 Good behavior	Count	28	305	384	717
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	66,7%	69,5%	76,5%	72,9%
		2,00 Moderate behavior	Count	10	93	77	180
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	23,8%	21,2%	15,3%	18,3%
		3,00 Poor behavior	Count	4	41	41	86
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	9,5%	9,3%	8,2%	8,7%
	Total		Count	42	439	502	983
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
Total	antisocial_behaviorN3 antisocial_behaviorN (normalized antisocial behavior) in three categories	1,00 Good behavior	Count	49	587	767	1403
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	68,1%	68,6%	75,2%	72,0%
		2,00 Moderate behavior	Count	15	174	166	355
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	20,8%	20,3%	16,3%	18,2%
		3,00 Poor behavior	Count	8	95	87	190
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	11,1%	11,1%	8,5%	9,8%
	Total		Count	72	856	1020	1948
			% within satisfaction3 life satisfaction in 3 categories	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 5: Trivariate analysis with categorical variables: life satisfaction (v39) recoded into three categories, dependent variable recoded into three categories, and gender dummy as control variable. N=2277; Source: EVS 2017 Italy.

A trivariate analysis was conducted using a contingency table, with life satisfaction recoded into three categories as the independent variable, the normalized dependent variable recoded into three categories, and gender (dummy) as the control variable. The dependent variable was recoded using arbitrary thresholds (0.00–0.11 = good behavior; 0.15–0.41 = moderate behavior; 0.44+ = poor behavior) to account for its skewed distribution and to avoid empty cells, given the general tendency not to justify such behaviors.

The analysis indicates that greater personal dissatisfaction is associated with a higher level of justification of behaviors against the public good. Consistent with the previous multivariate regression results, gender does not appear to have a significant effect, as percentages are similar for both men and women, and statistical tests confirm the absence of a meaningful gender difference. However, some cells contain few cases, which may reduce the reliability of the estimates.

CONCLUSION

The analysis revealed a weak but statistically significant relationship between personal dissatisfaction and greater justification of behaviors against the public good.
Among the study's limitations are the loss of information resulting from the recoding of a skewed dependent

variable and the small number of cases in certain subcategories of the trivariate categorical analysis. A useful extension could involve the application of a logistic regression model, which would allow the estimation of the effects of independent variables through odds ratios, providing more interpretable results for policymakers and facilitating the translation of empirical findings into actionable insights for targeted social policies.

References:

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