

Author's response

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Title: "Effect of volunteering and pensions on subjective wellbeing of elderly—are there cross-country differences?"

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Contents

1	Response to Editor	1
2	Response to Reviewer #1	2
3	Response to Reviewer #2	3
4	Response to Reviewer #3	5
5	Tracked Text Changes	8

1 Response to Editor

Dear Professor Shek,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a revised draft. I list below in inline format my brief responses to reviewers' comments and attach at the end tracked changes that show precisely the additions and deletions.

Best,
Author

2 Response to Reviewer #1

The aim of this study is relevant and the dataset can provide an answer.

na

In my view, the wrong variable is selected as the dependent; that is the CASP scale. The substantive meaning of this measure is unclear

CASP is a relatively standard measure when evaluating elderly wellbeing, its been used widely in the literature and it has desirable psychometric properties—see our paper for references. Now we also elaborate on its substantive meaning. But we agree that life satisfaction measure is useful as well, especially for the audience of this journal, and we added it.

and several of its items are so close to the independent variable that they produce autocorrelation. Some examples are; - volunteers are more likely to feel that 'life has meaning' and to feel 'full of energy' - pensioners are more likely to feel that they are 'left out of things' and that 'age prevents me to do the things I like to do'

Yes, it is a good point—and we make it in the paper now. And another reason to use life satisfaction measure as a dependent variable. CASP is still used as an alternative measure of SWB, a robustness check. Another point is that CASP is an index of 12 variables, so it is not very close to these 2 particular variables.

The authors better use the life-satisfaction item, which is mentioned in the online appendix, but not used in the analysis

Yes, good idea! We actually had it in the earlier version of the paper.

3 Response to Reviewer #2

It is wise to use an additional happiness-measure if possible (perhaps life-satisfaction or Cantril-ladder). CASP is primarily directed at meaning/purpose and affective happiness, and the CASP-items create a rather self-evident correlation with volunteering. An additional SWB-measure can create more understanding.

Yes! and we make this point now in the body of the paper.

The selection of respondents (sampling, page 3,4) deserves more attention. It might be more transparent to concentrate on people without paid jobs and without social security. This is more informative if authors want to concentrate on relative importance of volunteering and pensions for swb.

There are arguably many ways to do it, and indeed, different reviewers point to different ways, and it's impossible to satisfy everyone. Also note that we control for labor income and various types of social transfers. Simply removing respondents with paid jobs and social security would arguably lead to biased results. We, however, do understand merit in your reasoning and present your point in discussion.

And we do this exercise in appendix as elaborated below (this point is similar to another point below).

How are pensions measured? % of previous income? Or just amounts in ppp/c.

amounts; its explained in the paper

Causality, and in particular the direction of causality, deserves more attention. The title (Effect of...) is somewhat premature in the context of this cross-sectional exercise.

Yes, of course, we explicitly say this now in abstract and conclusion.

I submitted some comments before, but I am not sure it has had any impact. Here it is again:

Most crucial: there are several types of income:

1. Income by labor, with substantial differences between people. 2. Welfare benefits, e.g. in case of unemployment, disability, sickness etc. Low level, differences are very limited. 3. Income by wealth, e.g. interest, dividend, royalties, rents, profits, etc. Differences are very substantial. This income is obviously related to (household-) wealth but it is not the same. We can expect some correlation but not enough to use actual wealth as a substitute proxy for income by wealth. 4. Pensions, with three possible pillars: A. State pensions for everybody. B. Collective pensions for employees. C. Individual arrangements like annuities. Only A is about social transfers, B and C are not about social transfers! The level for A is usually rather low and there are no differences. The levels for B and C can be somewhat higher, but are usually still limited because people use tax-facilities to finance these pensions. Differences between people are also somewhat limited for the same reason.

It would be much better for this article to leave out people who still have some (substantial) income by labor (1) and to leave out people with welfare benefits or social assistance (2). Then the authors can leave out many mixed and annoying situations, and concentrate on people with pensions and possibly with wealth-related income. It would make this article much more comprehensible. In this set-up authors can analyze the relation between (3), (4) and (3+4) on volunteering and happiness. It is interesting to observe that wealth-differences contribute substantially to differences in income for retired people. In view of the diminishing impact of income on happiness by income we may indeed expect that differences in pensions at a lower level have more impact on happiness than wealth-related differences. But it is also important to look at the importance of social security. In nations with less social security wealth and wealth-related income will have more impact on happiness than in nations with more social security. See:

Hochmann, O., & Skopek, N., The Impact of Wealth on Subjective Well-Being: A Comparison of Three Welfare-State Regimes, Research in Social Stratification and Mobility (2013), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2013.07.003>

As reviewer suggests, "leave out people who still have some (substantial) income by labor (1) and to leave out people with welfare benefits or social assistance (2)"—this would change the focus of the paper. Indeed, it would be another paper (that we may write in the future!). Please note that here our goal was to analyze differential effect of pensions but taking into account other economic resources (multiple sources

of income) v volunteering (also taking into account other social resources and controlling for them)

We think that what reviewer suggest are good ideas and we cite them for future research, almost verbatim.

Addition of requested life satisfaction measure (requested by two reviewers) already doubled the analyses conducted. And we do not wish just replace analyses conducted here with what reviewer suggests but conduct them in addition.

And again, there is a value in exploring different combinations of money streams and sub-populations and we note that in discussion.

Yet, to be thorough, we followed your advice in appendix. We dropped those who still have some income by labor (1) [$>1k$ euro] and those with welfare benefits or social assistance (2).

It reduced sample size by 33 percent! (another reason not to do it).

Results are in appendix "Robustness check: dropping respondents with labor income or welfare benefits/social assistance" And we provide brief discussion there.

Very important: explain volunteering first and then the impact on swb!

It would be better to explain volunteering first and then, in a second step, the impact of volunteering (+other variables) on swb. This would make the argument and the message of this article more specific and convincing.

done

It would also be better to apply a step-wise regression in the explanations, instead of everything simultaneously, as now in table 2 and 4. It is sufficient to report standardized betas (same significance as standardized) Perhaps for swb: 1. Just volunteering +ctrls, then + income by pensions + ctrl, then+ wealth-related income + ctrl, then + household wealth + ctrl. It is interesting that the household-situation and the life-style are apparently very important for swb (and perhaps also for volunteering!!). The importance of such conditions deserves more attention in the text.

Right, we understand, most of our research does this sequential elaboration of models. We don't do it here for 2 reasons. We are doing it in another concurrent paper that has a different focus. And as we not it in the paper, with the focus of this paper on cross-country differences, sequential elaboration is impractical—there are already multiple regressions and multiplying their number by factor of 5 or 10 or so, would make the analyses incomprehensible.

4 Response to Reviewer #3

This paper focuses on the effects of pension and volunteering on SWB in Europe based on the SHARE survey.

Comments:

Introduction, 2nd sentence: This sentence doesn't make sense here as the reader wonders why binge drinking seems to be an issue. Delete, rephrase or place somewhere else.

agreed! rephrased

"We hope to produce new knowledge in this area." Is not expected scientific language. Rephrase.

rephrased

Next sentence and the sentence thereafter "There have been many studies on cross-country differences ..." and "Among studies about volunteering across ..." are redundant. Please clean up.

Page two, "SAT" - every-time an abbreviation is being used please spell out.

done

1 Subjective Well Being This is poorly defined on the basis of instrument; however instruments follow a theoretical approach. This is clearly missing here.

SWB is widely used in the literature, and life satisfaction measure (now added in the body of the paper) is arguably the most popular measure used in the field. And ARIQ is one of a handful dedicated journals in this field, hence, for this audience, it should be pretty clear. We added, however, more elaboration per CASP.

The rational for not being able to volunteer in a nursing home per se is not clear. There can be volunteering within the nursing home. Please justify with a better rational (sickness, physical limitations etc.)

Yes, agreed, it is not a clear cut decision! Rephrased a bit from typically not being able to volunteer to having limited opportunities.

And note that there are many ways to select respondents for the study, and indeed, different reviewers point to different ways, and it's impossible to satisfy everyone.

Also note that only about one percent of the sample are in the nursing homes.

Purchasing Power Parity: it might not be familiar with all readers of the journal, please explain.

done

The rational for CASP factor analysis is unclear and described in a shortened way.

elaborated

Please rephrase "We know that in case of happiness ..."

done

Please report correlation like $r = .xx$ - thank you.

ok, done

Wording: the poorer the country - again, please use proper language and define what "poor" means in the subjective perception of the authors.

done

Please report in more accurate scientific language: e.g. "about half" of countries. Either report the exact number, or the proportion. "about half" is not scientific language.

done; although pls note that using simple words over fancy/scientific words is always preferable, in science, too, as long as it is clear enough, for reference pls see

<https://www.amazon.com/Writing-Well-Classic-Guide-Nonfiction/dp/0060891548>

In the figures, please use acceptable international abbreviations: e.g. DEU is not a standard international abb. and it remains unclear to which country this might refer? Germany?

we disagree; deu is in fact a stranded abbreviation as per ISO standard:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ISO_3166_country_codes

And all country codes are defined in first table

Also the reflection on countries such as DEU, SWE or AUT in Fig. 3 are not sufficiently represented in the text. In addition to the graphs (which are helping understanding the data), please present the actual data in a table. This is most important for comparing in the future with other studies and also gives a better indication of "0" was part of the confidence interval or not. This is not always evident from the graphics quality.

All the coefficients from figures in the body of the text are in the appendix.

Conclusion, Please provide numbers for "very low rates of volunteering"

done

The claim "Volunteering could be induced—there are many ways to activate this yet unused potential of idle elderly" is not sufficiently backed up by the data that this is a means of truly improving SWB. So why follow this path (if not based on the data provided).

we meant in general, and now cite the literature little better

Also the general assumption that pension or/and volunteering affects SWB is short in respect of the argument that social welfare states in general provide more services (not only through pension) that covers the volunteering aspects of highly individualized countries with less social welfare. Hence it would be beneficial to not use only simple indicators such as volunteering or Purchasing Power Parity but reflect on the socio-economic system of the respective countries.

yes! agreed! it's just this paper that focuses on volunteering, but now we make your good point in the paper

Please reword and check for typos: "While SHARE is a rich dataset, it does not contain any item on motives for volunteering—and it is a imitation—we know that egoistic motives do not pay off much in SWB ..."

fixed

what does [ac] [ep] means ... please spell out

it is explained in appendix: [imputed], [ac], and [ep] pertain to SHARE modules.; now we spelled it out:
ac: Activities ep: Employment and Pensions

The annex and the explanations are not well linked with the main paper; numbers presented in the tables should also include relevant CI etc. etc.

we link now better

Significance is denoted with significance stars referenced in tables footnotes; tables are already dense and so adding CI there would lower readability, and note that CIs are shown in the body of the paper for the key variables!

5 Tracked Text Changes

(see next page)