

## Chapter #9

# FACTORS RELATED TO LIFE SATISFACTION, CULTURAL RESILIENCE AND EMIGRATION INTENTIONS AMONG SLOVAK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

We focused on satisfaction with state's economy (ECONOMY), state of education (EDUCATION), job satisfaction (JOB) and satisfaction with household income (INCOME) as possible factors related to life satisfaction (LS) of young people in Slovakia. Cultural resilience (CR) was also hypothesized to affect emigration intentions (EI). We also considered life satisfaction (LS) as a potential intervening variable of the relationship between CR and EI. The main objective was to explore various factors related to LS. Relationship between CR, LS and EI was also addressed. Two samples were used in the data analysis. Sample 1 was ESS (European Social Survey) sample (young Slovak people <30yr, N=117, M=25.7, SD=2.8) and sample 2 consisted of Slovak university students (N=443, M=22.1, SD=1.72).). Linear regressions were used for the analyses. All factors, i.e. EDUCATION, JOB, ECONOMY and INCOME significantly contributed to LS of young people in Slovakia. CR affects EI directly as well as indirectly through LS, which was found to be a significant mediator of this relationship in sample 2. University students who scored lower in LS had stronger intentions to emigrate.

*Keywords:* emigration intentions, life satisfaction, cultural resilience, Slovak university students.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

International migration is considered an important and challenging topic in the process of globalization in the 21st century (Divinský, 2007). Due to its significant impact on almost all aspects of people's lives, it can be seen as either a positive or as a negative phenomenon. It is a positive phenomenon in the case of their future return as the well-educated workforce, but it also can be seen as a negative phenomenon in the case they choose not to return to their home country. In Slovakia, there is an increase in the number of students who aim to move abroad. Káčerová and Horváthová (2014) show that according to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, the educational status of the Slovak emigrants is most frequently at the level of secondary school (53.68%), followed by those with university education (21.55%). Divinský (2007) estimated that about 10 000 students leave Slovakia every year, which is about a third of university graduates. It is mostly for economic reasons. Many of them consider moving abroad as a necessary step for their future career opportunities. The data from the Eurostat survey (Drozd, Frkáňová, & Kubovičová, 2012) conducted in 2010 show that migration to study is the third most frequent reason for moving to another EU country. According to Bermudez (in Mihi-Ramirez & Kumpikaite, 2013), due to the development of many EU programmes as well as the foundation of international institutions and agreements between individual universities, the number of students studying abroad is increasing. Almost

23.5% of university students plan to move abroad for longer than a year or plan to move to another country permanently (Kulanová & Orosová, 2016). According to Káčerová and Horvátová (2014), in Slovakia there is a long-term process of migration to the Czech Republic, USA, Great Britain, Germany, and Austria. In this study, we mainly focused on socioeconomic factors related to life satisfaction of young people in Slovakia because if overall satisfaction with one's life is important for making the decision to emigrate, then it is relevant to ask whether economic and social factors are somehow related to life satisfaction itself or if they are only related to intentions to emigrate.

It has also been found that university students, who planned to go abroad for a longer period of time, reported a lower level of resilience and perceived barriers for emigration (Kulanová & Orosová, 2018). Resilience can be addressed not only as a capacity to cope with difficult situations or as an ability to adapt to changes but also from a cultural perspective. Most children are raised by parents who are surrounded by traditions and customs which shape their world's perspective and which give them a sense of knowing what they see as culturally "belonging to them" and what does not. In Slovakia, traditions still play a big role in the lives of young people so it may be relevant to ask whether there is a relationship between culturally resilient people and their migration behavior. Therefore, it is important to study especially young generation and their subjective life satisfaction because, according to Ivlevs (2015), a higher level of subjective well-being leads to greater work productivity, better physical health and enhanced social skills which are always beneficial in building healthy personal and work relations in daily life. This is in line with Kremský (2015) who also confirms that the study of our young generation, which intends to go abroad or has already left, can be of a great benefit regarding the gained education, language proficiency, acquisition of a more complex worldview, new experiences and contacts which young people can use for the benefit of their country.

## **2. OBJECTIVE**

Firstly, the objective of this study was to explore whether socioeconomic factors such as satisfaction with state's economy, quality of education, job satisfaction and satisfaction with household's income are related to the overall life satisfaction among young people (<30yr) in Slovakia. Secondly, we investigated the relationship between life satisfaction and intentions to emigrate among university students in Slovakia. We also hypothesized that cultural resilience would affect emigration intentions and that this relationship would be mediated by life satisfaction. Therefore, we considered life satisfaction as a potential intervening variable of this relationship.

## **3. RESEARCH SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE**

Two separate samples of data were used. The first sample consisted of 117 young people from Slovakia (51.3% men) who had participated in the European Social Survey (ESS). This cross-national survey is aimed at measuring attitudes and beliefs regarding various issues of diverse populations. We have used the data from the sixth round (2012). The mean age for these participants was 25.7 (SD=2.8). In this ESS sample, the data were collected via face-to-face interviews in all participating countries, including Slovakia. The second sample consisted of 443 university students from Slovakia (M=22.1, SD=1.72) from which 78.1% were women, who participated in the Student Life Cohort Study (SLiCE 2016) which focuses on risk behaviour and emigration/migration intentions of university students. The data for this sample were collected via an online survey.

#### 4. MEASURES

The factors related to life satisfaction in the first ESS sample were measured by the following variables (measures in the first sample):

- Life satisfaction was measured by a single item assessing how were young people satisfied with their life as a whole (from 0 - extremely dissatisfied to 10 - extremely satisfied).
- Satisfaction with state's economy (ECONOMY), satisfaction with quality of education (EDUCATION) and job satisfaction (JOB) were measured by single items assessing how satisfied were young people with each domain (from 0 - extremely dissatisfied to 10 - extremely satisfied). Satisfaction with household's income (INCOME) was also measured by a single variable asking how they felt about household's income nowadays (from 1 - difficult to live on present income to 4 - living comfortably on present income).

Relationship between life satisfaction and emigration intentions in the second sample (SLiCE 2016) was measured by the following variables (measures in the second sample):

- Life satisfaction in the second sample (SLiCE 2016) was measured by The Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) which consists of five items measuring subjective well-being of respondents (from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha was 0.83. Higher overall score indicates a higher life satisfaction with life.
- Intentions to emigrate were measured by a 5-item scale (Chan-Hoong & Soon, 2011) which required respondents to rate the frequency with which they thought about working or living in another country for the following reasons: (1) overseas education, (2) better job prospects, (3) setting up a business, (4) to work and live in another country for an extended period of time, and (5) emigrating to another country to live there permanently. Each of these five items were scored on a 5-item Likert scale from 1 - never to 5 - all the time. Cronbach's alpha was 0.86. Higher overall score denotes a greater desire to migrate.
- Cultural resilience was measured by a 5-item scale (Ungar, 2008) in which respondents rated the intensity of their relation to cultural traditions and people in their country of origin (in this case Slovakia). Higher score indicates a higher level of cultural resilience (Not at All - A Little Somewhat - Quite - A Bit - A Lot). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.77.

In the first sample, linear regression was used and the analysis was adjusted for gender and state of health services in the country. In the second sample, linear regression analysis was used and was adjusted for gender. Sobel test was also used to confirm the significance of the meditational effect of life satisfaction in the relationship between cultural resilience and emigration intentions.

#### 5. RESULTS

The results from the first sample (ESS) show certain significant gender differences among young people in Slovakia (<30yr). Male's perception of the current quality of education was significantly higher than among females. Women showed significantly higher job satisfaction. Further details can be found in the Table 1.

*Table 1.*  
The descriptive characteristics in the measured variables according to gender in the first sample (ESS).

<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>Theoretical range</b>	<b>T-test value</b>
<b>How satisfied with life as a whole</b>	M=6.65 (SD=2.27)	M=7.27 (SD=2.14)	0 - 10	-2.267
<b>Satisfaction with present state of economy</b>	M=3.63 (SD=2.43)	M=3.68 (SD=2.32)	0 - 10	-0.147
<b>State of education in country nowadays</b>	M=5.41 (SD=2.48)	M=5.17 (SD=2.08)	0 - 10	0.852*
<b>Job satisfaction</b>	M=6.1 (SD=2.23)	M=7.3 (SD=1.7)	0 - 10	-3.364*
<b>Satisfaction with household's income</b>	M=2.46 (SD=0.85)	M=2.36 (SD=0.83)	1 - 4	0.949

M – Mean; SD – Standard deviation; \*p <0.05

As we can see below, we have not found any significant differences among university students in Slovakia in the second sample (SLiCE). Further details are displayed in the Table 2.

*Table 2.*  
The descriptive characteristics in the measured variables according to gender in the second sample (SLiCE).

<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>Theoretical range</b>	<b>T-test value</b>
<b>Emigration intentions</b>	M=12.78 (SD=5.19)	M=13.49 (SD=5.01)	5 - 25	-1,198
<b>Life satisfaction</b>	M=16.25 (SD=4.08)	M=16.06 (SD=4.45)	5 - 25	0.390
<b>Cultural resilience</b>	M=11.65 (SD=1.87)	M=11.58 (SD=1.87)	7 - 15	0.341

M – Mean; SD – Standard deviation

Factors Related to Life Satisfaction, Cultural Resilience and Emigration Intentions among Slovak University Students

The results in the first ESS sample showed that there were significant associations between life satisfaction and all socioeconomic factors. Our model explained 29.5% of variance in life satisfaction of young people in Slovakia ( $p < 0.001$ ). The linear regression analysis revealed that the factor ECONOMY was positively associated with the overall life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.285$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) as well as the factor EDUCATION ( $\beta = 0.206$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), the factor JOB ( $\beta = 0.248$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and the factor INCOME ( $\beta = 0.213$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These findings indicate that a higher satisfaction with the state of economy, better quality of education, higher job satisfaction and a higher household income are positively related to life satisfaction. More details can be found in the Table 3.

Table 3.

*The results of linear regression analysis for each socioeconomic factor in relation to life satisfaction of young people in Slovakia (adjusted for gender and state of health services).*

Socioeconomic factors	$\beta$	t	p
Satisfaction with present state of economy	0.285	2.991	0.003
State of education in country nowadays	0.206	2.104	0.038
Job satisfaction	0.248	2.693	0.008
Satisfaction with household's income	0.213	2.351	0.02

*Dependent variable- life satisfaction*

The results in the second sample (SLiCE) further showed that there was a significant negative association between life satisfaction of university students in Slovakia and their intentions to emigrate ( $\beta = -0.225$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, students who perceived their life as more satisfying reported a lower level of emigration intentions.

Following the finding that life satisfaction negatively affects emigration intentions, we focused our attention on cultural resilience as a possible predictor of intentions to emigrate and life satisfaction. We found that cultural resilience was negatively associated with emigration intentions ( $\beta = -0.291$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and positively associated with life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.668$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Further details can be found in the Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4.

*The results of linear regression for cultural resilience in relation to emigration intentions of university students in Slovakia (adjusted for gender).*

Factor	$\beta$	t	p
Cultural resilience	-0.291	-2.217	0.027

*Dependent variable- emigration intentions*

*Table 5.*  
*The results of linear regression for cultural resilience in relation to life satisfaction of university students in Slovakia (adjusted for gender).*

<b>Factor</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Cultural resilience</b>	0.668	6.561	<0.001

*Dependent variable- life satisfaction*

Next, after adding life satisfaction to this model as a potential intervening variable, the direct relationship between cultural resilience and emigration intentions became insignificant ( $\beta = -0.154$ ), as can be seen in Table 6.

*Table 6.*  
*The results of linear regression for cultural resilience and life satisfaction in relation to emigration intentions of university students in Slovakia (adjusted for gender).*

<b>Factor</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Cultural resilience</b>	-0.154	-1.135	0.257
<b>Life satisfaction</b>	-0.205	-3.371	0.001

*Dependent variable- emigration intentions*

The Sobel test confirmed that life satisfaction had a significant mediational effect in the relationship between cultural resilience and emigration intentions ( $z = -2.98$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

## **6. DISCUSSION**

Although the relationship between socioeconomic factors and plans to move abroad has been relatively well examined, we focused on these factors in relation to the overall life satisfaction of young people in Slovakia. We confirmed that satisfaction with state's economy, job satisfaction, satisfaction with household income as well as the quality of education in the country, all significantly contribute to the explanation of life satisfaction. Furthermore, we found that life satisfaction of university students in Slovakia significantly influences their intentions to emigrate from their country of origin. These findings are supported by Otrachshenko and Popova (2014) who used the Eurobarometer data to show that in the Central and Eastern Europe, people less satisfied with their life are more likely to report intentions to migrate – both internationally and domestically. This is also in line with the findings of Mihi-Ramirez and Kumpikaite (2013) who found that economic factors are the most dominant with respect to students' motivation to leave or not to leave as well as to the decision to stay living in a foreign country. Economic factors were also found to be relevant for choosing the country for migration. These results confirm and highlight the importance of developing the economy, education and social services especially for young people in Slovakia. The loss of a well-educated and skilled young generation, also known as the "brain drain", is a serious and current problem we have to face nowadays in Slovakia.

The brain drain is especially characteristic for workforces in developing countries from which people tend to move to more developed or highly industrialized countries (Battistella & Liao, 2013). It is important to mention the indirect form of the “brain drain” by students who leave to study abroad because these students often start their career abroad as well, and do not return to their home country. Therefore, it is necessary to prevent this negative impact on Slovakia in terms of the loss of human capital, workforce, and well-educated young generation.

We also found that intentions to emigrate can be to certain extent explained by cultural resilience both directly and indirectly through life satisfaction, which has a significant mediational effect in this relationship. The findings of Piotrowski and Tong (2010) suggest that people are more willing to stay in their home country or come back if they have significant ties with children, partners and parents from their original household. Traditions are mostly shared within families and communities and this could indicate that strong connections with people and culture reduces people’s desires to move to another country. However, it must be said that these findings are limited to the context of Slovakia.

Limitations: Our study used two different samples, which is the reason why we couldn’t study possible mediational effect of life satisfaction in the relationship between the socioeconomic factors (satisfaction with state’s economy, quality of education, satisfaction with a job, satisfaction with household’s income) and intentions to emigrate to another country. Future research should focus on studying this relationship since life satisfaction was found to be a significant mediator and an intervening variable in the relationship between perception of economic threat and intentions to emigrate (Kalina, Orosová, & Kulanová, 2017). Furthermore, in this study we used only single item measures to explore relatively complex relationships. In the future, it would be helpful to direct our attention to a more complex examination of the relationship between life satisfaction and intentions to emigrate and include additional socioeconomic factors important for students’ efforts to emigrate.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

In this study, we have addressed socioeconomic factors such as satisfaction with household income, job satisfaction and current state of economy as well as the quality of education as important factors related to life satisfaction among young people in Slovakia. We have found that cultural resilience affects emigration intentions of university students in Slovakia directly as well as indirectly through life satisfaction which was found to be a significant mediator of this relationship. We have found that students who want to leave their home country report a lower level of satisfaction with life. These results support the existing research of migration of young people in Slovakia and addresses the main goal to explore and deeply understand this process on its macro and micro level. Like other European countries, Slovakia is also facing globalization and exodus of young and well-educated people to countries with more developed economy and better career opportunities. Many countries, including Slovakia, naturally try to prevent their skilled and educated young people from leaving, so we think it is necessary to understand and support these factors, especially among young people, who are naturally more prone to emigration.

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