

Original research article

EXPLORING FAMILY COMMUNICATION AS A PREDICTOR OF HAPPINESS

Armin Nuhic^{1*}, Denis Karahasanovic², Mirzeta Nuhic³, Rebeka Lekse⁴,
Mirko Prosen⁴

¹ General Hospital Izola, Izola Emergency Centre, Izola, Slovenia

² University of Primorska, Faculty of Health Sciences, Izola, Slovenia

³ General Hospital Izola, Division of Internal Medicine, Izola, Slovenia

⁴ University of Primorska, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing, Izola, Slovenia

Abstract

Introduction: Family communication is a key factor in shaping an individual's psychological well-being and subjective happiness. This study aimed to examine the association between the quality of family communication and subjective happiness in the general population.

Methods: A quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive design was used. Data were collected through an online questionnaire including the Family Communication Scale (FCS) and the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS). The sample included 125 participants (\bar{x} = 34.28 years). Both scales showed high internal consistency (FCS α = 0.924; SHS α = 0.796). Due to non-normal distribution, non-parametric tests and Spearman's correlation were applied.

Results: Participants reported above-average family communication (\bar{x} = 37.81; s = 7.56) and relatively high subjective happiness (\bar{x} = 20.43; s = 4.60). A moderately strong positive correlation was found between family communication and happiness (r_s = 0.489; n = 125; p < 0.001).

Discussion and conclusion: Individuals who perceive family communication as more open and emotionally supportive report greater happiness. These findings highlight the importance of fostering emotionally intelligent family interactions as a protective factor for mental health.

Keywords: Emotional support; Interpersonal relationships; Psychological well-being; Resilience

INTRODUCTION

The family is one of the most important social institutions because it provides an individual with basic support, safety, and emotional security from birth. In addition to meeting basic life needs, the family also plays a significant role in shaping an individual's psychological well-being, emotional development, and subjective happiness (Szcześniak and Tulecka, 2020). In recent years, an increasing number of studies have emphasized the importance of family communication as one of the key factors influencing an individual's experience of

happiness and life satisfaction (Yuan et al., 2024).

Family communication encompasses both verbal and non-verbal exchange of information, expression of emotions, interpersonal understanding, and conflict resolution among family members (Gómez-López et al., 2019). When communication is open, respectful, and supported by a positive attitude, it contributes to greater family cohesion and the strengthening of interpersonal relationships, which in turn enhances the sense of safety, belonging, and emotional well-being (Viejo et al., 2018). In contrast, dysfunctional communication –

characterized by ignoring, criticism, or lack of support – can lead to feelings of isolation, misunderstanding, and, consequently, lower levels of subjective happiness (Okur et al., 2025).

The quality of family communication significantly influences an individual's psychological resilience, emotional regulation abilities, and the development of a healthy self-image and an optimistic outlook on life (Szcześniak and Tułeczka, 2020). Family communication is not only important in childhood – it also plays a crucial role in shaping life satisfaction and happiness during adolescence and early adulthood (Xiang et al., 2020). During adolescence, a period when individuals seek greater autonomy, open and supportive communication within the family fosters a sense of understanding and emotional security, which enhances inner contentment and overall well-being (Bi and Wang, 2021).

It is important to emphasize that the significance of family communication becomes even more pronounced during times of stress or societal change. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was observed that families with strong communication ties were better able to maintain psychological stability and a sense of happiness, highlighting the protective role of such communication (Gómez-López et al., 2019). Similarly, the World Happiness Report (Rojas et al., 2025) pointed out that the size of a household has less impact than the quality of relationships and communication among its members.

An additional aspect emphasized by contemporary psychology is the role of emotional intelligence as a mediating factor. Families in which communication is emotionally intelligent, which means that it includes empathy, active listening, and appropriate emotional expression, are more likely to raise individuals with a high level of life satisfaction (Szcześniak and Tułeczka, 2020). The connection between family functioning and subjective well-being is therefore often mediated through greater awareness and regulation of one's own and others' emotions (Gómez-López et al., 2019).

Subjective happiness, also known as subjective well-being (SWB), refers to an individual's internal experience of happiness and life satisfaction. According to Diener et al. (2018), subjective well-being consists of three main components:

- 1) life satisfaction – the cognitive evaluation by an individual of the overall quality of their life;
- 2) frequency of positive emotions – how often an individual experiences pleasant feelings, such as joy, calmness, and excitement;
- 3) rarity of negative emotions – how infrequently an individual experiences unpleasant feelings such as anxiety, sadness, or anger.

Since subjective happiness is not merely a result of external circumstances but largely reflects an individual's experience of themselves and the world, it makes sense to explore the impact of family dynamics – and especially communication – on this experience. This topic is particularly relevant from the perspective of preventive psychological support, because strengthening quality family communication represents an effective strategy for improving psychological health and life satisfaction across different age groups.

Purpose and objectives

Attentive communication strengthens resilience, self-esteem, and life satisfaction across all stages of life, especially during stressful periods or times of change. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between family communication and individuals' subjective experience of happiness. Accordingly, the research objectives are:

- 1) to determine how communication within the family influences individuals' subjective experience of happiness;
- 2) to analyze the impact of sociodemographic factors on the quality of family communication and the subjective experience of happiness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research paper is based on a quantitative research approach and a descriptive method. Quantitative research is a research method that focuses on the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data (Abbadia, 2023).

Description of the instrument

For our study, the first part of the questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions re-

lated to participants' demographic data (such as gender and age). In the second part of the questionnaire, two validated scales were used: the Family Communication Scale (FCS) and the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), for which we obtained permission from the authors to use (Fan et al., 2024; Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999).

The Family Communication Scale consists of 10 statements describing characteristics of communication within the family. Participants rate their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score indicates a more positive experience of family communication. The baseline Cronbach's α for the FCS scale is 0.96, indicating high reliability (Fan et al., 2024).

The Subjective Happiness Scale consists of four statements related to individuals' experience of happiness. Participants rate their level of agreement with these statements on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A higher score indicates a higher level of subjective happiness. However, the last statement is reverse-coded, which means that a higher score on that item corresponds to a lower level of subjective happiness. The Cronbach's α for the SHS ranges from 0.79 to 0.94, depending on the study and sample, indicating high reliability (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999).

Both questionnaires were first translated into Slovenian using a multi-step translation process. The translation was carried out carefully, with attention paid to preserving the meaning of individual items, ensuring the content maintained its semantic and conceptual accuracy and was understandable within the Slovenian linguistic and cultural context. To verify the quality of the translation, a back-translation method was used where the Slovenian versions of the questionnaires were translated back into English and compared with the originals. A high degree of consistency was found between the versions, confirming the core meanings of the items were retained and the questionnaires appropriately reflected the content of the originals. It is important to note that although both questionnaires were translated and back-translated to ensure semantic and conceptual equivalence, the Slovenian versions were not formally validated in the target context. Therefore, the

psychometric properties of the instruments in this study (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.924$ for FCS; $\alpha = 0.796$ for SHS) should be interpreted as indicative of internal consistency within this sample only and do not substitute for a formal validation process.

Sample description

The convenience sample included 125 participants from the general population, aged between 18 and 58 years ($\bar{x} = 34.28$, $s = 10.42$). Demographic data are presented in Table 1, with females predominating ($n = 77$; 61.6%).

Description of the research procedure and data processing

Data collection took place from May 11, 2025, to May 28, 2025. An online survey was conducted using the snowball sampling method. Participants were also invited to participate via social media. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Data were managed using the online tool EnKlikAnketa – 1KA and analysed with SPSS software, version 30.0.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Basic descriptive statistics were performed, including frequency distribution, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Analysis of data distribution normality showed that the data for the SHS and FCS scales were not normally distributed (Shapiro–Wilk, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, non-parametric statistical tests were used in further analyses.

The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Helsinki-Tokyo Declaration (World Medical Association, 2024) and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Primorska (No. 4264-19-6/23; January 17, 2023).

RESULTS

The Cronbach's α for the FCS scale was 0.924, indicating high reliability. Respondents agreed most strongly with the statement, "Family members can tell each other what they need" ($\bar{x} = 4.04$; $s = 0.893$), and least with the statement, "Family members rarely speak negatively about each other when they are angry" ($\bar{x} = 3.58$; $s = 1.025$). The results of the 10 statements related to family communication are presented in Table 2.

Table 1 – Demographic data

Variables	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	48	38.4
Female	77	61.6
Level of education		
Secondary education	53	42.4
Higher vocational education	53	42.4
Master's or university degree	19	15.2
Employment status		
Employed	106	85.5
Unemployed	3	2.4
Student	15	12.1
Place of residence		
Rural (village)	60	48.0
Urban (city)	65	52.0
Current living arrangement		
Living with both parents	24	19.2
Living with one parent	4	3.2
Living alone	19	15.2
Living with a partner	69	55.2
Living with partner and/or children	7	8.6
Frequency of personal contact with parents		
Almost never	3	2.4
Less than once a week	14	11.3
Once a week	28	22.6
Several times a week	77	62.1
No contact with parents	2	1.6

Note: *n* – number, % – percent

Table 2 – Statement results of the FCS scale

Statements	Min	Max	\bar{x}	s
Family members are satisfied with their mutual communication.	1	5	3.80	0.967
Family members are good listeners.	1	5	3.66	1.039
Family members express love towards each other.	1	5	3.81	1.006
Family members can openly express their needs to each other.	1	5	4.04	0.893
Family members can calmly discuss problems with each other.	1	5	3.70	1.002
Family members can discuss their thoughts and beliefs with each other.	1	5	3.80	0.950
When family members ask each other questions, they get honest answers.	1	5	3.93	0.872
Family members strive to understand each other's emotions.	1	5	3.74	1.054
Family members rarely speak negatively about each other when angry.	1	5	3.58	1.025
Family members express genuine emotions to each other.	1	5	3.74	0.991

Note: Min – minimum, Max – maximum, \bar{x} – average, s – standard deviation

As shown in Table 2, respondents agreed with the statements related to family communication most strongly. The Cronbach's α for the SHS scale was 0.796, indicating high reliability. Table 3 presents the results of the

scale's 4 statements concerning individuals' subjective perception of happiness. Participants most agreed with the statement, "In general, I consider myself a happy person" (\bar{x} = 5.61; s = 1.194), while the least agree-

ment was expressed for the reverse-coded statement, "Some people are not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never

seem as happy as they might be. How well does this description fit you?" ($\bar{x} = 4.46$; $s = 1.746$).

Table 3 – Statement results of the SHS scale

Statements	Min	Max	\bar{x}	s
In general, I consider myself a happy person.	1	7	5.61	1.194
Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself happier.	1	7	5.19	1.474
"Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what's happening, getting the most out of everything." How well does this description fit you?	1	7	5.16	1.393
"Some people are not very happy. Although they're not depressed, they never seem as happy as they could be." How well does this description fit you?	1	7	4.46	1.746
<i>Note:</i> Min – minimum, Max – maximum, \bar{x} – average, s – standard deviation				

The FCS scale is scored so that respondents can achieve between 10 and 50 points. The median score of the scale is 30. A higher score indicates better communication within the family. The results show that respondents have above-average quality of family communication because they scored on average 37.81 points ($s = 7.56$, 95% confidence interval [36.47; 39.15]), which exceeds the midpoint

of the scale (median set at 30 points). This suggests that respondents generally report above-average good family communication. Table 4 presents the results related to other demographic data and characteristics of the respondents, where potential differences between groups were analysed using the Mann–Whitney and Kruskal–Wallis tests.

Table 4 – Scoring family communication scale

Variables	\bar{x}	s	U/χ^2 test	p
Gender				
Male	37.31	7.11	1656	0.329
Female	38.12	7.85		
Level of education				
Secondary education	36.11	8.39	4.894	0.087
Higher vocational education	38.72	6.83		
Master's or university degree	40.00	6.27		
Place of residence				
Rural (village)	37.50	8.18	1903.5	0.818
Urban (city)	38.09	6.99		
Employment status				
Employed	37.92	7.00	2.320	0.314
Unemployed	28.67	12.06		
Student	37.53	9.43		
Frequency of personal contact with parents				
Almost never	41.33	1.16	14.631	0.006
Less than once a week	33.21	8.31		
Once a week	34.54	8.24		
Several times a week	39.48	6.56		
No contact with parents	42.00	11.31		
<i>Note:</i> \bar{x} – average, s – standard deviation, U/χ^2 test – Mann–Whitney / Kruskal–Wallis test, p – statistical significance				

The average level of family communication was slightly higher among women than men. However, the Mann–Whitney test did not show statistically significant differences between genders ($p = 0.329$). Similarly, no significant differences in the quality of family communication were found based on place of residence ($p = 0.818$). When comparing education levels, statistical significance was not reached ($p = 0.087$), although individuals with higher education (professional master's/university degree) reported better family communication. No statistically significant differences were found regarding employment status ($p = 0.314$), although unemployed respondents reported below-average family communication. However, due to the small number of unemployed individuals in the sample, these differences cannot be generalized.

A statistically significant difference in the quality of family communication was found based on the frequency of personal contact with parents ($p = 0.006$). The highest averages were reported by those who do not maintain contact with their parents ($\bar{x} = 42.00$) or those who almost never have contact ($\bar{x} = 41.33$).

The SHS scale is scored from 4 to 28 points, with a median of 16. A higher score indicates a higher level of subjectively experienced happiness. The results show that respondents experience happiness above average, with a mean score of 20.43 points ($s = 4.60$; 95% confidence interval [19.62; 21.25]), which exceeds the scale's median. This means that, on average, respondents report a moderate or neutral level of subjective happiness.

Table 5 presents the results related to other demographic and characteristic variables of the respondents, where Mann–Whitney and Kruskal–Wallis tests were used to examine potential differences between groups.

The average level of subjective happiness was slightly higher in women than in men. However, the Mann–Whitney test did not show statistically significant differences between genders ($p = 0.364$). Similarly, no significant differences were found based on place of residence ($p = 0.949$). When comparing education levels, no statistically significant difference was observed ($p = 0.816$), although individuals with higher education reported somewhat higher levels of happiness more frequently. Statistical significance was also not reached regarding employment status

Table 5 – Scoring subjective happiness scale

Variables	\bar{x}	s	U/χ^2 test	p
Gender				
Male	20.06	4.76	1669.50	0.364
Female	20.66	4.51		
Level of education				
Secondary education	20.21	5.57	0.407	0.816
Higher vocational education	20.75	3.68		
Master's or university degree	20.16	4.03		
Place of residence				
Rural (village)	20.43	4.85	1937	0.949
Urban (city)	20.43	4.39		
Employment status				
Employed	20.65	4.30	4.269	0.118
Unemployed	14.00	5.29		
Student	19.53	5.66		
Frequency of personal contact with parents				
Almost never	22.00	3.60	6.017	0.198
Less than once a week	17.71	4.98		
Once a week	19.89	5.00		
Several times a week	20.88	4.21		
No contact with parents	23.50	6.36		

Note: \bar{x} – average, s – standard deviation, U/χ^2 test – Mann–Whitney / Kruskal–Wallis test, p – statistical significance

($p = 0.118$). Unemployed respondents showed a lower level of subjective happiness, but the small number of participants in this group prevents a reliable interpretation of the results. Likewise, no statistically significant differences were found in subjective happiness based on the frequency of personal contact with parents ($p = 0.198$), although the highest happiness levels were reported by respondents who indicated very rare or no contact with their parents.

Spearman's correlation showed a statistically significant moderate positive association between the quality of family communication and subjective happiness ($r_s = 0.489$; $n = 125$; $p < 0.001$), which means that better communication within the family significantly contributes to a higher level of experienced happiness.

DISCUSSION

Open, supportive, and respectful communication contributes to greater connectedness among family members and a higher sense of happiness. The quality of communication is especially important during childhood and adolescence because young people develop a sense of security, belonging, and self-worth through their family relationships. The positive effects of such communication often carry over into later stages of life, influencing not only the quality of relationships with parents but also the formation and maintenance of healthy interpersonal relationships with others. Thus, in the long term, good family communication contributes to greater satisfaction and emotional stability across all generations (Jeriček Klanšek et al., 2018; Laursen and Collins, 2012; Lombergar et al., 2025; Tacol et al., 2019).

The main aim of this study was to determine how family communication affects individuals' subjective experience of happiness. We found a significant association between the quality of family communication and subjective happiness. Individuals who perceive family communication as open, supportive, and emotionally expressive more often report higher levels of personal happiness. This means that good communication within the family contributes to a sense of security, belonging, and inner satisfaction. Similar find-

ings have been confirmed in international studies.

For example, Bi and Wang (2021) conducted a study in China involving 442 students to examine the connection between the quality of communication between parents and adolescents and the adolescents' life satisfaction. They found that higher quality communication positively influenced adolescents' sense of autonomy and future orientation, which in turn led to greater life satisfaction. Although our study did not measure these specific mediating factors, the results support the general conclusion that quality family relationships significantly contribute to an individual's psychological well-being, regardless of age.

Okur et al. (2025) conducted a study in Turkey with 277 adults aged 20 to 55. The aim was to investigate whether better family communication contributes to higher levels of subjective happiness, and whether an individual's adaptability, flexible thinking, and effective coping with daily life challenges play an important role. Although our study did not include individual adaptability as a mediating factor, the core finding of both studies aligns: the quality of family communication significantly contributes to higher subjective happiness in adults. This suggests that the family is not only important as a developmental context during childhood and adolescence, but also as a source of emotional stability in mature life stages.

Similar conclusions were drawn from a longitudinal study by North et al. (2008) in the United States, which included 274 participants aged 18 to 82 (average age 37). The study aimed to examine the influence of family income and support on happiness among married adults. The results indicated that family support was strongly associated with both current and long-term happiness, while income was not related to changes in happiness over time. In other words, an increase in family support meant more happiness, while a decrease meant less happiness. This confirms the thesis that the quality of family relationships is not only important for current emotional well-being, but also for long-term psychological stability.

Our study also confirms that family communication is one of the key factors contributing significantly to the experience of happiness across different life stages.

We were also interested in how sociodemographic factors influence the quality of family communication and, consequently, the experience of happiness. We found that gender, education, place of residence, and employment status are not decisive factors affecting the quality of family communication or subjective happiness. The quality of relationships within the family is therefore not directly determined by an individual's demographic characteristics but rather by the nature of those relationships and the manner of mutual communication.

These findings align with the study by Cava et al. (2014) who conducted research in Spain on a sample of 1,795 adolescents aged between 11 and 18 years (average age 14.2). The aim was to determine how communication with parents influences life satisfaction among adolescents, as well as its impact on adolescents' self-esteem, feelings of loneliness, and a more positive perception of the school climate – which together contribute to greater life satisfaction. Although our study focuses on a broader population and measures general subjective happiness, the findings confirm that quality relationships and open communication within the family are an important source of personal happiness, regardless of age.

Similarly, North et al. (2008) found that changes in subjective happiness were related to family support rather than demographic factors, such as income. An interesting finding from our study is that respondents who rarely or never maintain contact with their parents reported a high quality of family communication. This result could indicate the importance of the current family environment (e.g., partner, children) because family is the primary source of communication and emotional support, which could be the subject of further research. It may also suggest that individuals who maintain infrequent contact experience it as less conflictual, resulting in communication being subjectively rated as better.

An unexpected finding of this study was that participants who reported having little or no contact with their parents exhibited the highest average levels of subjective happiness. One possible explanation is that, for some individuals, limited contact may reduce exposure to unresolved family conflicts, negative communication patterns, or emotionally dis-

tressing interactions, thereby contributing to a more positive overall emotional state. Another consideration is that the primary source of family communication for these participants may have shifted to their current households (e.g., partners, children), where relationships are perceived as more supportive and harmonious. It is also possible that such participants have developed stronger external social networks or coping strategies that enhance their well-being. Nevertheless, due to the small size of this subgroup and the cross-sectional nature of the data, these interpretations remain speculative and should be explored in future research.

The study by Izzo et al. (2022) found a positive relationship between family functioning and happiness across different cultures and age groups. These findings suggest that family-related factors play a crucial role in shaping the happiness of children and adolescents, complementing evidence from our study that highlights the importance of open, supportive, and respectful family communication. While Izzo et al. (2022) emphasize the broader role of family functioning, our findings provide more specific insights into how communication patterns within the family contribute to subjective happiness across life stages. Nevertheless, many aspects remain insufficiently understood, and further research (particularly longitudinal studies) is needed to clarify the causal relationships and potential bidirectionality between family variables and happiness.

In general, none of the cited studies identified demographic factors, such as gender or education, as key explanations for differences in the experience of happiness, which further emphasizes the influence of relationship quality over external factors.

Overall, our findings confirm the insights of Okur et al. (2025), Bi and Wang (2021), and North et al. (2008) that the quality of family relationships is one of the key factors for an individual's subjective well-being. Regardless of gender, age, or education, the positive effects of family communication appear as a universal factor that can significantly contribute to feelings of happiness and life satisfaction. These results support the idea that happiness is not something permanent or unchangeable but can fluctuate according to the quality of family relationships. The quality of

family relationships thus represents a fundamental factor in an individual's experience of happiness at various stages of life. This means that happiness is not completely stable or fixed but can improve or worsen depending on the quality of the family environment.

It is important to emphasize that the identified association between the quality of family communication and subjective happiness does not allow for causal inferences. Due to the cross-sectional design of the study, it cannot be concluded that better family communication directly causes higher levels of happiness, as other unmeasured factors may also influence the relationship.

Limitations

Due to time constraints, the sample of 125 participants was obtained through convenience snowball sampling via an online questionnaire conducted over a 14-day period, which limits the representativeness and generalizability of the findings. The data are based on self-reported assessments, which may be influenced by social desirability bias and the participants' current mood. Although the scales used demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.924$ for FCS; $\alpha = 0.796$ for SHS), the Slovenian translations have not yet undergone formal validation. Certain demographic subgroups (e.g., unemployed individuals, participants with no contact with their parents) were very small in number, which limits the reliability of between-group comparisons. The cross-sectional design of the study allows for the identification of associations but not causal relationships. The unexpected finding that participants with rare or no contact with their parents reported higher levels of happiness remains unexplained and warrants further investigation.

CONCLUSION

The quality of family communication and subjective experience of happiness remain important factors for an individual's mental health and overall well-being. The results of our study show that individuals who report better communication within the family are also happier, confirming the importance of the family environment as a source of emotional stability and support. Although education did not show an impact on the level of happiness or communication, this emphasizes that key roles in life satisfaction are not played solely by external factors but primarily by the quality of interpersonal relationships. In modern society where relationships are often fragmented or superficial, high-quality family communication becomes increasingly important. Therefore, attention should be focused on promoting relationships based on openness, understanding, and emotional support. In the future, it would be beneficial to develop programs aimed at strengthening communication skills within the family environment and raising awareness about the importance of interpersonal connection as a key source of happiness and psychological health.

It should be noted that, due to the cross-sectional design of this study, no causal inferences can be made. The identified positive correlation between family communication and subjective happiness does not imply a direct cause-effect relationship.

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Ethical aspects and conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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* **Corresponding author:** Armin Nuhić, General Hospital Izola, Emergency Department, Polje 40, 6310 Izola, Slovenia; e-mail: armin.nuhic@sb-izola.si
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