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## LIFE SATISFACTION AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN SERBIA<sup>4</sup>

### Zadovoljstvo životom i pozitivan razvoj mladih u Srbiji

**ABSTRACT:** *Life satisfaction is closely related to emotional, behavioural, social, and environmental youth functioning. Starting from the hypothesis that positive youth development (PYD) qualities such as aspects of eudaimonic well-being lead to higher youth life satisfaction (the hedonic aspect of well-being), we explored predictions of Serbian youth life satisfaction based on the Five Cs on a sample of 215 Belgrade secondary school students (34.9% male students). The research results show that: the youth were mostly satisfied with their friends, their living environment, themselves, and their families, and least satisfied with their school; the Five Cs variables explain the highest percentage of variance in youth satisfaction with the family, and the lowest for satisfaction with the living environment; higher impacts on domain-specific life satisfaction were observed for connection (self-satisfaction, satisfaction with the family and school), confidence (satisfaction with the family and school), and caring (satisfaction with the living environment, school and friends), while competence only predicted self-satisfaction. Providing support for PYD promotion leads to greater satisfaction with different aspects of youth development ecology.*

**KEY WORDS:** *life satisfaction, PYD, Five Cs, Serbia*

**APSTRAKT:** *Zadovoljstvo životom je usko povezano sa emocionalnim, bihevioralnim i socijalnim funkcionisanjem adolescenata. Polazeći od hipoteze da kvaliteti pozitivnog razvoja mladih (eudaimonični aspekt blagostanja) dovode*

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*do većeg zadovoljstva životom (hedonički aspekt blagostanja), ispitano je da li "5C" kvaliteti pozitivnog razvoja mladih predviđaju njihovo zadovoljstvo životom na uzorku od 215 beogradskih srednjoškolaca (34,9% učenika muškog pola). Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na to da su mladi najviše bili zadovoljni prijateljima, lokalnom zajednicom, sobom, porodicom, i na kraju svojom školom. Kvaliteti ("5C") pozitivnog razvoja objašnjavaju najveći procenat varijanse u zadovoljstvu mladih porodicom, a najmanji za zadovoljstvo krajem u kome žive. Od "5C" kvaliteta pozitivnog razvoja kao najveći prediktori zadovoljstva mladih životom izdvajaju se: povezanost (u objašnjenju zadovoljstva sobom, porodicom i školom); samopouzdanje (u objašnjenju zadovoljstva porodicom i školom), briga (u objašnjenju zadovoljstva lokalnom zajednicom, sobom i prijateljima), dok su kompetencije mladih doprinosile samo zadovoljstvu sobom. Promovisanje pozitivnog razvoja mladih dovodi do većeg zadovoljstva različitim aspektima ekologije razvoja.*

**KLJUČNE REČI:** *zadovoljstvo životom, pozitivan razvoj mladih, 5C, Srbija*

## Introduction

The positive youth development (PYD) perspective is based on a proactive, strengths-based approach to youth development. Epstein and associates (2003) provided four assumptions are crucial for the strengths-based approach: all children have unique strengths; focusing on strengths instead of deficits increases motivation and achievement; failure to perform activities which constitute a specific skill should be seen primarily as an opportunity to learn; and interventions which focus on strengths rather than weaknesses are more accepted by children, parents as well as the environment. The historically dominant deficit-based, reactive approach to youth development is oriented towards the identification, reduction, and prevention of factors considered to compromise healthy development. The aim of eliminating the onset of problems or minimising their adverse consequences was institutionalised in terms of policy formulation and programmatic funding (Benson et al., 2004). The loudest critics indicate the racial, class, and political bias of the deficit-based model (Valencia, 1997). Certain authors consider that despite policy reforms and transformations to practice, a deficit focus has been partially retained which is especially visible in the youth justice system (Creaney, & Case, 2021), expressed by advocates of genetic reductionist ideas (Lerner et al., 2019), etc.

Based on the strengths perspective, PYD models indicate that youth are no longer viewed as problems, but as whole young people with their own potentials. Other authors noted that the PYD model has a long past but a short history (Lerner et al., 2019). Lerner and colleagues (2005) explained that the Five Cs Model proposes that young people thrive when they show evidence of the five "Cs": Competence (including intellectual ability and social and behavioural skills); Caring (empathy and sympathy for others); Confidence (positive self-

regard and a sense of self-efficacy); Character (integrity, a sense of right and wrong, and moral values); and Connection (positive bonding with people and institutions). The 7Cs model expands on the 6C indicators of PYD (competence, confidence, character, caring, connection and contribution) to include creativity conceived as a novel and adaptive, problem-solving ability meaningful within social and cultural contexts (Dimitrova et al., 2021). Benson et al. (2003) argued that PYD could be shaped by both external and internal assets, thus contributing to adolescent well-being and prosocial outcomes. Developmental assets consist of eight conceptually coherent categories, four of which are grouped by external and four by internal assets. External assets reflect a developmental context consisting of a set of experiences, relationships and activities along life domains in which youth are well supported, empowered, set boundaries and expectations, as well as encouraged to use their free time constructively. Internal assets include a set of personal qualities within commitment to learning, positive values, social competence, and positive identity. A special model from the prevention science paradigm recognise 15 indicators of PYD: bonding, resilience, social competence, emotional competence, cognitive competence, behavioural competence, moral competence, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in the future, recognition for positive behaviour, prosocial involvement, and prosocial norms (Catalano et al., 2002). Damon's (2008) PYD model is based on the development of purpose which would direct young people. Within his model, purpose involves seeking to accomplish something which is meaningful to the self and makes a contribution beyond self-interest. At the latent-variable level all conceptions contend that the promotion of thriving among youth (e.g. whether that may be through the measures of the purported Five Cs of PYD— i.e. competence, confidence, connection, caring, and character; youth purpose; or individual and ecological developmental assets) rests on the relative plasticity of development and identifying or creating the mutually influential relations between individuals and contexts (Lerner et al., 2019). Among all PYD modalities Lerner's Five C's model of PYD has garnered the most empirical support on samples of global youth (Petersen et al. 2017). Research on the Norwegian youth population confirms that the Five Cs of PYD represents similar concepts in each country, on the basis of which it is concluded that these analyses generally support invariance across cultures, although they have found differences in the factor structure of Character (Holsen et al., 2017).

Shifting the focus from a traditional deficit and prevention approach to one of strength building and promotion might be only one side of the coin. Examining youth life satisfaction may serve to provide us with a whole picture of both competent and happy young persons. As an operational definition, subjective well-being is most often interpreted to mean experiencing a high level of positive affect, a low level of negative affect, and a high degree of satisfaction with one's life (Deci, & Ryan, 2008). The concept of subjective well-being has frequently been used synonymously with "happiness", meaning that maximising one's well-being has also been viewed as maximising one's feelings of happiness (Deci, & Ryan, 2008). However, people's reports of being happy do not necessarily

mean that they are psychologically well (Deci, & Ryan, 2008). As represented in the Eudaimonic Activity Model, the eudaimonic and hedonic aspects of well-being are closely related (Martela & Sheldon, 2019). Life satisfaction is one of the most important indicators of youth well-being and represents their cognitive evaluation of their quality of life (Gilman & Huebner, 2003). It is conceptualised as an indicator of hedonic well-being which is regarded as a consequence of PYD attributes (Martela & Sheldon, 2019). It can be conceptualised as general life satisfaction judgment or one within specific life domains (e.g. satisfaction with friends, family, and school experiences) (Huebner, 1994, 2000). The author described the variability in satisfaction ratings across the five domains, with youth reporting the greatest dissatisfaction with their school experiences. For example, it was found that although satisfaction with school was at the lowest level, students were more satisfied than unsatisfied with school overall. Friend satisfaction and self-satisfaction proved to be extremely high (Antaramian, Huebner, & Valois, 2008). Cultural differences among students from different countries might serve as an explanation. The authors found that school satisfaction was more important for Korean than for American youth (Park & Huebner, 2005). Individual differences in life satisfaction were not associated with demographic variables (age, grade, gender, parent marital status, and parent occupational status), but were related to personality characteristics (Huebner, 1991). Students' high life satisfaction was connected to higher self-reported measures of self-esteem, internal locus of control, and extraversion combined with lower measures of anxiety and neuroticism. Satisfaction with family life was more strongly associated with high overall satisfaction than satisfaction with friends (Huebner, 1991).

Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies show that PYD qualities positively predict youth life satisfaction (Valois et al., 2009; Sun, & Shek, 2010, 2012; Shek, & Shai, 2020; Zhou, Shek, & Zhu, 2020; Gomez-Baya, Gaspar de Matos, & Wium, 2022). Based on a review of 141 scientific research studies of youth life satisfaction it was found that: life satisfaction tends to decline slightly with the onset and progression of adolescence; the relationships between demographic variables (i.e. age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status) and life satisfaction are weak; youth's perceptions of their ability to be competent in social settings lead to increased life satisfaction; high levels of life satisfaction are related to a high level of social support from all sources, low levels of neuroticism and emotional and behavioural problems, and high levels of academic, emotional, and social self-efficacy (Proctor, Linley, & Maltby, 2009). The research findings about the relationships between PYD and perceived life satisfaction on a sample of 3477 American public school students suggest that life satisfaction is related to youth developmental assets, although moderated by gender and race differences while controlling for socioeconomic status (Valois et al., 2009). Life satisfaction was found to be unrelated (across all race/gender groups) to two of the developmental assets: empowerment and perceived school support. In contrast, the developmental asset of perceived support by parents was significantly associated with increased life satisfaction across all race/gender groups in this

study (Valois et al., 2009). Researchers found (Sun & Shek, 2010) and replicated (Sun & Shek, 2012) relationships between life satisfaction, PYD and problem behaviour on samples of more than 7 thousand Chinese youth. As predicted, PYD and life satisfaction were positively correlated, and both of them had negative relationships with problem behaviour. Youth with higher levels of PYD are more satisfied with life and exhibit less problem behaviour, thus showing the bidirectional relationship between life satisfaction and problem behaviour (Sun & Shek, 2010, 2012). Research results indicate that PYD qualities positively predict youth life satisfaction. For example, the results of a longitudinal study including 2312 secondary school students from Hong Kong show that youth with more PYD qualities in the first wave were more satisfied with their life after two years in the third wave (Shek & Shai, 2020). Based on data from a longitudinal study comprising 2648 Chinese secondary school students it was found that PYD qualities positively predicted life satisfaction and reversely life satisfaction showed a positive predictive effect on PYD qualities over time (Zhou, Shek, & Zhu, 2020). The Five Cs of PYD predicted subjective happiness with the partial mediation of optimism and gratitude on a sample of Spanish emerging adults from Andalusia (Gomez-Baya, Gaspar de Matos, & Wiium, 2022).

Theoretically, PYD qualities as eudaimonic aspects of well-being lead to higher youth life satisfaction (Martela & Sheldon, 2019). Very few studies have examined the relationships between PYD qualities (measures of eudaimonic well-being) and life satisfaction (measure of hedonic well-being), and as far as we know no such research has been carried out in Serbia. Moreover, existing data are either Western or Chinese. We found only one European study aimed at examining this relationship but with older youths from Spain (Gomez-Baya, Gaspar de Matos, & Wiium, 2022). In the present paper, we tend to examine the relationship between the Five Cs of PYD (Caring, Connection, Confidence, Competence and Character) and domain-related satisfaction with life (family, friends, school, the living environment and self-satisfaction) among Belgrade youth. Serbian youth are expected to be more satisfied with family, self and friends than with their living environment and school (affected by the specific context of school after reopening due to the pandemic), and that most domain-specific areas of satisfaction will be mainly related to the assets involving youth relationships with important others than with for example confidence or competence as is the case in more individualistic cultures. We hope that a closer examination of the contribution of the Five Cs of PYD to youth life satisfaction might serve for practical recommendations in designing and setting up evidence-based PYD interventions focused on fostering domain-specific and youth life satisfaction in general. Additionally, the youth in Serbia today are facing problems of uncertainty unlike previous generations and have to steer through the uncertainty of everyday life and prolonged social crises. During these processes, young people mostly rely on their own competences, resources and actions, as well as the resources, support and help from informal networks, primarily parents and friends (CESID, 2019).

## Sample

The measures were collected from 215 Belgrade secondary school students. The sample consisted of 140 female participants (65.1%) and 75 males, aged between 14 and 18 (from the 1<sup>st</sup> to fourth grade). The research was conducted in person during the second semester of 2020 at the Patrijarh Pavle Gymnasium, the Vocational School of Zaharija Stefanović Orfelin and the Belgrade Medical School. Participation in the research was voluntary.

## Measures

The Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) (Huebner, 1994). The MSLSS is designed to provide a holistic assessment of the wellbeing of young people. It comprises five subscales: family, friends, school, living environment and self. The family domain consists of seven statements referring to satisfaction with relationships within the family (e.g. *My parents treat me fairly*). The school domain items represent satisfaction with school life (e.g. *I enjoy school activities*). The friends domain covers satisfaction with the peer relationships (e.g. *My friends will help me if I need it*). Self-satisfaction refers to the opinions of the students or other people about themselves (e.g. *I like myself* or *Most people like me*). Satisfaction with the living environment involves perceptions of neighborhood relationships (e.g. *I like my neighbours*). This is a 40-item 6-point Likert-type self-report response scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree), designed for children aged 8 to 18. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the sub-scale of satisfaction with the family (0.91), the sub-scale of satisfaction with school (0.84), the sub-scale of self-satisfaction (0.83), the sub-scale of satisfaction with friends (0.82), and the sub-scale satisfaction with life (0.79) reflect good internal consistency.

The short version of the Five Cs of PYD questionnaire (PYD – VSF) (Geldhof et al., 2013) consists of 17 items answered on a 5-point Likert scale (with responses ranging from 1 – *strongly disagree* to 4, or 5 – *strongly agree*). This is 17-item 4-point Likert-type response scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) for students from 8th to 12th grade (secondary school students). The items measure the 5Cs: Caring (three items representing empathic response, e.g. *When I see someone being taken advantage of, I want to help them*), Connection (to family, peers and school, e.g. *In my family I feel useful and important*), Character (has a social conscience, values diversity, conduct behaviour, and personal values, e.g. *How important is it in your life to help to make the world a better place to live in?*), Confidence (self-worth, positive identity, and physical appearance, e.g. *Is this statement really true for you: Some kids are happy with themselves most of the time*) and Competence (academic, social, and physical, e.g. *Is this statement really true for you: Some kids have a lot of friends*). According to the results of the reliability analysis, the alpha coefficients are either good or acceptable: the sub-scale of caring (0.82), the sub-scale of connection (0.68), the sub-scale of character (0.60), the sub-scale of confidence (0.67), and the sub-scale of

competence (0.64). The range of acceptability of Cronbach's alpha is sometimes set as higher than 0.60 (e.g. Athanasiou & Mavrikaki, 2013; Griethuijsen et al., 2014). Researchers found similar Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the short form of the Five Cs scale, for example Caring (0.81), Competence (0.52), Confidence (0.60), Character (0.57) and Connection (0.76) (Newland, Newton, Moore, & Legg, 2019).

## Results

The Research results indicate that the young people in our study were mostly satisfied with their friends, their living environment, themselves, and their families, and least satisfied with their school. Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to assess the associations between the Five C PYD outcomes (Caring, Connection, Confidence, Competence and Character) and satisfaction with life (family, friends, school, living environment and self-satisfaction) among Belgrade's youth. The descriptive statistics, correlations and intercorrelations are presented in Table 1. As can be seen, the intercorrelations between the students' life satisfaction subscales are low (.163) to moderate (.416), which confirms the consistency of the life satisfaction dimension and the differentiation between the different types of life satisfaction which contribute to the overall dimension. Satisfaction with family was significantly associated with self-satisfaction as well as satisfaction with school and with friends, thus indicating the key role of family in the students' self-satisfaction, and that with school and friends. A significant correlation was also found between self-satisfaction and satisfaction with friends, and then between self-satisfaction and satisfaction with the living environment. This indicates the significant contribution of friendship and the environment to overall self-satisfaction.

The intercorrelations of the PYD subscales are selective, in other words, only individual subscales build statistically significant associations. We found significant correlations between confidence and competences (.487), and also between character and caring (.484). Confidence is not statistically significantly associated with character and caring, while connection has a weak correlation with the other subscales.

The life satisfaction subscales have selective correlations with the PYD subscales. It is noticeable that the character and confidence subscales are not statistically significantly associated with the satisfaction with family subscale. Caring and satisfaction with family exhibits very weak correlations. Caring and character have a very weak association with self-satisfaction. If we connect these findings with the previous analysis in which we found that self-satisfaction and satisfaction with family are significantly associated, similar to character and caring, then it is understandable that the weak association of caring with self-satisfaction, and satisfaction with family is in turn accompanied by a weak association of character with self-satisfaction and satisfaction with family. Character shows weak correlations with satisfaction with school, the living environment and friends. These weak associations could be explained by the

fact that character is associated with the adoption of rules of conduct, morals and other standards acquired by socialisation, and aimed at adapting youth to the social environment, and thus limiting in terms of behaviours allowed and reducing satisfaction with certain aspects of life. Connection is the only one which is statistically significantly associated with all aspects of life satisfaction, which speaks of the importance of the individual's participation in social life so as to achieve life satisfaction. A significant correlation was found between connection and satisfaction with family, which could mean that the family is the most important factor for the development of connection among youth and the ability to cope in all types of social relations. Significant associations were also found between confidence and self-satisfaction, and connection and self-satisfaction. This indicates the importance of belief in oneself, as well as that of adequate connections with other people for self-satisfaction. The moderately expressed correlation between competences and satisfaction with family can be interpreted as the consequence of support and acceptance in the family due to positive feelings resulting from the mastery of competencies.

Table 1. Pearson's correlation coefficients, means and standard deviations

	SWF	SSC	SSE	SFR	SLE	CAR	CON	CHA	COM	CNF
SWF										
SSC	.280**									
SSE	.416**	.270**								
SFR	.306**	.313**	.378**							
SLE	.163*	.196**	.361**	.280**						
CAR	.168*	.343**	.192*	.303**	.268**					
CON	.548**	.367**	.427**	.313**	.160*	.210*				
CHA	.123	.273**	.168*	.294**	.258*	.484**	.238*			
COM	.410**	.339**	.279**	.263**	.134	.177*	.280*	.219**		
CNF	.167	.184*	.490**	.246**	.222*	.121	.351**	.093	.487**	
Mean	32.81	23.19	33.62	36.51	33.86	13.16	14.91	14.67	8.59	9.04
SD	7.96	5.00	6.36	3.93	5.35	2.38	3.26	2.75	2.20	2.49

Note. SWF – satisfaction with family; SSC – satisfaction with school; SSE – self-satisfaction; SFR – satisfaction with friends; SLE – satisfaction with the living environment; CAR – caring; CON – connection; CHA – character; COM – competence; CNF – confidence. Notes: \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01.

In order to examine the predictive validity of the PYD qualities along with age and gender, five hierarchical regression analyses were performed with satisfaction with family, satisfaction with school, self-satisfaction, satisfaction with friends and satisfaction with the living environment as the dependent variables. Competences, Caring, Connection, Confidence, Character, age and gender explained 41% of the variance in satisfaction with family, 32% of satisfaction with school, 40% of self-satisfaction, 23% of satisfaction with the living environment and 24% of satisfaction with friends. All the regression functions are significant at the .001 level.



Table 2 presents the characteristic of the predictors in the regression models. Satisfaction with family was positively predicted by connection ( $p < .01$ ) and confidence ( $p < .01$ ). Self-satisfaction was positively predicted by connection ( $p < .01$ ), competence ( $p < .01$ ) and caring ( $p < .05$ ). Age negatively predicted satisfaction with school ( $p < .05$ ), and positively caring ( $p < .05$ ), connection ( $p < .01$ ) and confidence ( $p < .01$ ). Only caring ( $p < .01$ ) positively predicted satisfaction with friends. Caring ( $p < .01$ ) positively predicted satisfaction with the living environment, while gender (being male) ( $p < .05$ ) predicted higher satisfaction with the living environment.

Table 2. Characteristics of the life satisfaction predictors

Criterion	SWF		SSC		SSE		SFR		SLE	
	B	Se	$\beta$	Se	$\beta$	Se	B	Se	$\beta$	se
Gender	-.05	1.40	.04	.86	-.10	1.01	-.04	.71	-.18*	.97
Age	-.07	.59	-.16*	.37	-.02	.44	-.01	.31	-.04	.42
CAR	.15	.33	.22*	.20	.18*	.24	.31**	.17	.35**	.23
CON	.47**	.20	.27**	.20	.36**	.15	.18	.10	.15	.14
CHA	-.02	.26	.05	.16	-.02	.19	.04	.14	.08	.18
CNF	.29**	.28	.24**	.20	-.04	.24	.10	.17	-.08	.23
COM	-.11	.33	-.05	.18	.36**	.21	.08	.15	.14	.20

Note. SWF – satisfaction with family; SSC – satisfaction with school; SSE – self-satisfaction; SFR – satisfaction with friends; SLE – satisfaction with the living environment; CAR – caring; CON – connection; CHA – character; CNF – confidence; COM – competence. Notes: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

This study investigated the predictive effects of PYD qualities on youth life satisfaction in Serbia. The research results indicate that these young respondents were mostly satisfied with their friends, their living environment, themselves and their families, and least satisfied with their school. The relationship between the Five Cs of PYD and the youth life satisfaction criteria showed positive associations as was expected. The proposed Five Cs proved to be useful for the explanation of each dimension of life satisfaction

The research results show that the variables associated with the Five Cs explain the highest percentage of variance in youth satisfaction with family, and the lowest in satisfaction with the living environment. As previously assumed and according to previous research (e.g. Huebner, 1991), the demographic variables proved not to be linked to life satisfaction. The findings indicate that the strongest relationships with domain-specific life satisfaction were observed for connection (predicted self-satisfaction, and satisfaction with family and school), confidence (predicted satisfaction with family and school), and caring (predicted satisfaction with the living environment, school and friends), while competence only predicted self-satisfaction. The reason for greater youth satisfaction through relationships with important others might lay in the current research context since the study was conducted straight after

the school reopening during the coronavirus pandemic. Academic and other competences had developed through fewer group interactions compared to the prepandemic period, and students often felt abandoned (Kovács Cerović, Mičić, & Vračar, 2022). Character was not recognised as a significant predictor of any life satisfaction domain which is rather unexpected. It has been suggested that the influence of character on life satisfaction is quite universal across Western (e.g. Moreira et al., 2015) and non-Western contexts (e.g. Zhou, Shek, Zhu, & Lin, 2021). A possible explanation for this finding might be that Serbian society shows less appreciation for the values related to developmental assets linked to character. The life of youth in Serbia is largely influenced by the social environment, which exerts a significant impact on negative trends in the behaviour of young people, such as fostering pseudo-values, joining counter-cultural and sub-cultural movements, as well as indulging mass-cultural, non-cultural challenges and conformity (Jovanovic, 2004). In such an environment, individuals who have developed their character are deprived of the opportunity to express their moral values and receive respect, to value and appreciate their own merits, as well as the possibility to change the existing situation in society. Therefore, youth with character become passively resistant and dissatisfied with all aspects of life. It was found that Serbian youth highly rate those values which are important for relationships with their family and friends the most, and social responsibility and multiculturalism the least (Popović, Pavlović, & Mihailović, 2019). The recent health crisis and related uncertainty might have influenced emotional distress, which in turn may have affected basic psychological needs and their impact on Serbian youth life satisfaction (e.g. Šakan, Žuljević, & Rokvić, 2020).

Relational Developmental Systems Theory postulates that youth can thrive through a bidirectional relational process between individuals and their complex context (Lerner & Callina, 2014). In line with the Bioecological Model of Human Development youth live with the complexity of interactions between subjective and objective environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The introduction of the concept of proximal processes has highlighted that for the purpose of development a person must be involved in activities, which to be effective must take place regularly over a long period of time, and be bi-directional with other individuals, objects and symbols. Competence and dysfunction are recognized as the outcomes of proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, & Morris, 2006). Even collectivistic cultures rely more on family than individualistic ones. Data from Western countries (known for individualism) show the same, that youth are most satisfied with the family (Huebner, 1991). Speaking in terms of social comparison theory (Fujita, 2008) Serbian youth satisfaction with the family is accompanied by certain minor discrepancies between family life-as-it-is and how family life should be. The pandemic has brought about the greater realignment of family resources globally and in Serbia alike, adding the threat of emotional and behavioural problems (Cordini, & De Angelis, 2021; Stevanovic et al., 2021). Luckily, research results indicate that family cohesion has buffered the negative consequences of the coronavirus crisis (Zeng, Ye, Zhang, & Yang, 2021).

Since we consider that family and school interactions follow most of the proximal processes criteria (as given in the Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)) and are the most intensive and long lasting it was expected that Serbian youth would be more connected to them, than to the living environment for example. In addition to connectedness, confidence also predicted higher satisfaction with family. The evidence provided on the correlations between these two competences (e.g. Ja, & Jose, 2017) and with life satisfaction (e.g. Gomez-Baya, Gaspar de Matos, & Wium, 2022) has been widely recognised among researchers. Confidence was even recognized as a mechanism to explain family, school and peer connectedness to identity formation (Ja, & Jose, 2017). Based on the given research review it can be concluded that the majority of the studies connecting PYD qualities and life satisfaction have been predominantly conducted in Western societies or in China. In Serbian society strong family values are predominant and youth have high expectations of family support. The latest data pertaining to youth leisure activities in Serbia indicate that 77% of them frequently spend more time with family than going to clubs/restaurants or engaging in sports activities (Popović, Pavlović, & Mihailović, 2019). A significant source of support for Serbian youth when growing up is the family, which provides them with financial, emotional and social support. However, families assume numerous responsibilities which should actually be taken on by the community, which represents a great burden for them considering the rather modest resources at their disposal (Popović, Pavlović, & Mihailović, 2019). Confidence as a PYD construct closely related to individualism and the autonomous self is more closely linked to the life satisfaction of youth in Western cultures than in Eastern ones (Diener, & Diener, 2009). The research findings gained on a sample of 5803 youth in Iceland indicate that positive social experiences were both directly and indirectly (mediation effects through high self-esteem) related to life satisfaction. Finally, self-esteem was more strongly related to life satisfaction among youth reporting family conflict/violence or sexual abuse than those who did not report such experiences (interaction effects) (Asgeirsdottir & Sigfusdottir, 2021). This finding seems to be very interesting in the context of further exploring youth resilience. Future research studies from Serbia should seek to answer the question of which individual and environmental factors lead to the subjective well-being of vulnerable youth. As found in the present study, connectedness and competence might determine self-satisfaction and thus serve to build resilience among students to cope with external stressors such as that presented by the coronavirus pandemic (as found in Holzer et al., 2021). Based on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the research results show that the perceived competence (large effect) and relatedness (minor to small effect) of students during the pandemic positively predicted psychological well-being (Holzer et al., 2021). Similar to previous findings related to the importance of volunteering for life satisfaction among emerging adults (aged 15–24) (Jovanović, & Joshanloo, 2019), caring Serbian students were more satisfied with their friends, school and living environment.

## Conclusion and limitations

The present findings reinforce the thesis that the promotion of PYD attributes in youth can help to improve their well-being and mental health in general. The similarities between the present findings and Western and Chinese research results suggest that the benefit of PYD attributes on adolescent subjective well-being exists in different cultural contexts with non-WEIRD (Western, educated, industrial, rich and democratic countries) participants. The study of PYD qualities is a neglected research area in Serbia, where Benson's developmental assets model is only sporadically studied (e.g. Popović-Čitić, Bukvić Branković, & Kovačević Lepojević, 2021; Uka et al., 2021). All life satisfaction studies carried out in Serbia focus on adult participants or young adults (e.g. Stanojević, Tomanović, & Ljubičić, 2016; Jovanović, & Brdar, 2018). Prior to the completion of this paper we had failed to find one study from Serbia linking PYD qualities and youth life satisfaction.

The presented research methodology has certain limitations. For example, it is difficult to explain whether these young students do not have certain Five Cs qualities because of their low domain-specific life satisfaction or due to their dissatisfaction with their current life domain and consequent lack of PYD qualities. Longitudinal and experimental studies are needed to provide more precise information. Some research results show that life satisfaction might not be only an outcome by indicating the positive predictive effect of life satisfaction on PYD attributes over time (Zhou, Shek, & Zhu, 2022). Certain authors state that the well-being of individuals entails important information about the quality of the social system in which they live, and on the other side, this is also likely to affect the functioning of other social systems, such as the family, school, and friendship networks (Veenhoven, 2008). Hence, individual subjective well-being is both an outcome of social systems and a factor in their functioning (Veenhoven, 2008). Another limitation is the absence of a global multifactored measure of life satisfaction. The research context of the pandemic is also not adequately explored in this study. The data would be more informative if certain measures of COVID-related stress and its externalising and internalising consequences were examined in relation to PYD qualities and life satisfaction. Based on the assumption of the importance of some objective indicators of well-being for understanding youth life satisfaction, the inclusion of more demographic variables is also recommended. There is a need to include the youth life satisfaction construct in educational assessment, further evaluation, and the implementation of PYD programmes. Recent promising evidence suggests that PYD programmes can be effective in low- and middle-income countries (Catalano et al., 2019).

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