

# WELL-BEING AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH EMOTIONAL CLIMATE, PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

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## Abstract

From a psychosocial perspective, the perception of the social context plays a fundamental role in well-being. Not only does it matter how individuals value their relationships, but also how they interpret broader factors that influence their bond with the environment. This study analyzes the relationship between well-being and social variables such as perceived social problems, emotional climate and institutional trust. The sample was purposive and included 243 Argentines aged 18 to 78 years. Although the results indicate satisfactory levels of well-being, the participants reported a large number of social problems, a negative perception of emotional climate and low institutional trust. In terms of gender, women reported lower life satisfaction and perceived a more negative climate. Regarding age, older adults showed higher hedonic and eudaemonic well-being compared to younger adults. In general, well-being is positively associated with a positive emotional climate and greater institutional trust. Conversely, lower well-being was associated with higher negative affectivity. Likewise, a high perception of social

RECEIVED: 09-07-2025 / ACCEPTED: 13-09-2025 / PUBLISHED: 22-12-2025

**How to quote:** Muratori & Zubieta. (2025). Well-being and its relationship with emotional climate, perception of social problems and institutional trust. *Almanaque*, 46, 133 - 146.  
<https://doi.org/10.58479/almanaque.2025.176>



problems is related to lower social well-being. People who feel part of their community, have positive attitudes towards others and are optimistic about the social future tend to experience a more positive emotional climate. Conversely, a negative emotional climate is associated with lower institutional trust and greater perception of social problems.

**Key words:** well-being, emotional climate, social problems, institutional trust.

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## Introduction

Well-being has been studied mainly along two lines: the hedonic and the eudaimonic tradition, which gave rise to new conceptualizations that include subjective, psychological and social dimensions of human well-being. This comprehensive view allows us to analyze how people evaluate their lives not only from the point of view of happiness or personal development, but also in relation to the social environment in which they live. This study focuses on the need to understand how social variables such as the perception of emotional climate, perceived social problems and institutional trust are associated with people's levels of well-being.

## Objective

The objective of this work is, first, to describe the different dimensions of well-being (subjective, psychological and social), as well as other social variables such as perception of social problems, emotional climate and institutional trust. Secondly, we seek to evaluate whether there are differential profiles according to socio-demographic variables and, finally, to analyze whether there is a relationship between well-being and social criteria.

## Development

### Well-being

Well-being has been studied mainly from two traditions: hedonic, focused on happiness and the search for pleasure, and eudaimonic, focused on personal development. Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) extended this classification by studying subjective and psychological well-being as distinct but complementary dimensions of positive functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2008). At first, happiness was considered the only indicator of well-being but, nowadays, cognitive and affective evaluation of life is also included (Diener, 1994, 2012). Thus, the hedonic perspective emphasizes enjoyment, while the eudaimonic perspective highlights the realization of human potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In this framework, psychological well-being is related to personal growth and the way in which life challenges are faced (Ryff, 1989). Then, social well-being is included, understood as the valuation of functioning in society (Keyes, 1998). Finally, Hervás

and Vázquez (2013) propose to approach it in an integrated way, considering its general, hedonic, eudaimonic and social dimensions.

## Perception of social problems

With regard to social problems, it is important to differentiate between objective facts and the subjective assessments made of them. In this sense, Blumer (1971) argues that not every objectively harmful social condition automatically becomes a problem for society, since these only acquire the status of a *social problem* when they are perceived as such by the community. There are even times when certain sectors may ignore them or downplay their importance. For a social problem to be considered as such, in addition to its recognition, it must be socially legitimized and occupy a place in public debate (e.g., in the media, schools or parliament). In turn, this collective perception is influenced by factors such as beliefs, ideologies, media or political interests. Therefore, including the perception of social problems is essential to understand the context in which people evaluate their well-being.

## Emotional climate

de Rivera (1992, 2012, 2014) proposes the concept of *emotional climate* as the prevalence of certain emotional scenarios over time, shaped by basic emotions and social representations of the world. These emotions are not only experienced by individuals, but are perceived as predominant in their social environment (de Rivera & Grinkis, 1986). Thus, the emotional climate expresses the affective state of a group according to its socio-political context, and there may be climates of hope or despair, trust or distrust, security or insecurity, joy, sadness or anger. Although socially constructed, the emotional climate is perceived as something objective, since it reflects what the majority feels at a given moment. As a predictor of collective behaviors, it influences how certain events are interpreted, making some situations generate greater sensitivity than others (Techio et al., 2011; de Rivera, 2014).

## Institutional trust

Several studies in Latin America, and particularly in Argentina, show a growing unease linked to the lack of institutional trust. This political distrust, understood as the negative assessment of its functioning, has been considered as a sign of social alienation. According to Inglehart et al. (2004), the loss of trust in institutions and social norms can hinder consensus building and lead to deviant behavior. Along the same lines, Rodríguez Kauth (2001) points out that this scenario of distrust generates feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, weakening social cohesion

and solidarity, and promoting individualism. Benbenaste, Etchezahar and Del Río (2008) argue that high levels of social anomie can alter not only the quality of life, but also attitudes towards institutions, further deteriorating the link between individuals and the institutional framework.

From the above we can deduce the need to study the relationship between levels of well-being, emotional climate, perception of social problems, perception of control and institutional trust in order to account for how the subjects thus configure a certain perception of the social context.

## Analysis and explanation

### Method

This is a correlational, group difference, non-experimental cross-sectional design study, with the general population as the unit of analysis.

The sample, a non-probabilistic purposive sample, was composed of 243 Argentinian people from different cities in the country. The 30.5% were male and 69.5% were female. The mean age was 32.71 ( $SD = 12.18$ ; min.= 18; max.= 78).

The instrument, in a self-administered format, was composed of socio-demographic questions and the following scales:

- *Pemberton Happiness Index* (Hervás and Vázquez, 2013). The Pemberton Happiness Index is represented by two subscales that, in total, group 21 items. The Remembered Well-Being subscale evaluates the components of the different traditions of well-being (hedonic, eudaimonic and social). It is composed of 11 items on a *Likert* scale, with a response continuum ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*). The reliability of this subscale was satisfactory with  $\alpha = .90$ . The Experienced Well-Being subscale probes the affective states and feelings of the person at the present moment. In 10 items one must respond regarding the absence or presence of positive ( $\alpha = .58$ ) and negative ( $\alpha = .63$ ) experiences.
- Perceived Social Problems Scale (Páez et al., 2004). It evaluates the socio-economic problems perceived in the social environment. It is composed of 6 items with a response continuum from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The reliability coefficient was satisfactory ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ).
- Emotional climate scale (Páez et al., 1997). It evaluates the perception of positive emotions (joy, hope, solidarity), negative emotions (sadness, fear and anger) and the social processes that reinforce them (trust in institutions, calmness to talk). It

is composed of ten items with a response continuum from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Reliability coefficients were satisfactory for the subscale of positive emotional climate (6 items:  $\alpha = .80$ ) and negative emotional climate (3 items:  $\alpha = .74$ ).

- Institutional Trust Scale. Similar to what is done in international studies (e. g. Inglehart et al., 2004), participants were asked to indicate trust regarding eight social institutions. Response options ranged from 1 = *no trust* to 4 = *a great deal of trust*. Reliability indices were satisfactory:  $\alpha = 0.71$ .

Regarding the procedure, participation was voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire, which consisted of informed consent, was administered through the *Survey Monkey* platform. The application was individual. The SPSS statistical package was used for data analysis. In the first stage, a descriptive analysis of the data was performed and then the corresponding statistical calculations for the objectives of group differences and variable correlations.

## Results

As can be seen in Table 1, the means with respect to well-being are generally high. The highest scores were obtained in relation to eudaimonic well-being, which encompasses the six dimensions of psychological well-being developed by Ryff (1989). Autonomy, which refers to the feeling of self-determination and of maintaining independence and personal authority and personal growth, was highlighted, reflecting that the participants are interested in developing their potential and that they believe they can grow as persons and develop their capabilities. Although lower, participants show relatively high levels of life satisfaction and a good degree of vitality. On the other hand, social well-being obtained a score below the theoretical mean, which shows a relatively negative evaluation of the circumstances and functioning of the society in which they develop.

Regarding experienced well-being, there is a balance between positive and negative experiences, with a greater tendency towards satisfaction, enjoyment and fun.



Table 1.  
Descriptive scores of the items, subscales and traditions of wellbeing

			M	SD
Sub-scale Recalled Well-being				
Subjective-cognitive well-being		I feel very satisfied with my life	6.57	1.91
Subjective-Hedonic Well-Being	Positive affect	I enjoy many little things every day	7.09	2.35
	Negative affect	In my everyday life I have many times when I feel bad (*)	6.22	2.47
Vitality		I feel I have the necessary energy to perform my daily tasks well.	6.21	2.23
Eudaimonic Well-being	Sense of life	I feel that my life is useful and valuable	7.51	2.38
	Self-acceptance	I feel satisfied with the way I am	7.03	2.04
	Personal growth	My life is full of learnings and challenges that make me grow	7.78	2.31
	Social relationships	I feel very close to the people around me.	7.58	2.28
	Perception of control	I feel capable of solving most of my day-to-day problems.	7.30	2.03
	Autonomy	I feel that in important things I can be myself.	7.82	2.09
Social well-being		I feel that I live in a society that allows me to develop myself fully	4.49	2.54
Total score of Well-being remembered			6.86	1.58
Experienced Well-Being subscale			%	
Positive experiences	Something I did made me proud		61.0	
	I did something fun with someone		73.0	
	I did something I really enjoy doing		79.6	
	Learned something interesting		43.4	
	I indulged myself		60.4	
Negative experiences	At times, I felt overwhelmed		67.9	
	I was bored most of the time		19.5	
	I was worried about personal matters		71.1	
	Things happened that made me very angry		32.9	
	I felt disrespected		21.4	

**Note.** \*Inverse item. The percentage presented indicates the number of participants who reported having experienced what each item indicates.

Regarding the perception of social problems (Table 2), the scores are generally high, standing out as issues of difficult solution and high concern, such as being able to get/rent a house and being able to get the job one wants. In relation to trust in institutions, the score obtained is very low, ratifying the deficit in everything related to the feeling of trust.

Table 2.  
Average scores for social problems and institutional trust

Perceived social problems	Mean	SD
1-Getting medical care	3.75	.93
2-Getting social assistance	3.76	1.00
3-Get the job I wanted	4.09	1.05
4-Obtain/rent housing	4.26	1.07
5-Obtain information or assistance from official agencies	3.47	.99
6- To live in peace, without worrying about being assaulted or harmed.	3.43	1.31
Institutional trust	1,71	.465

**Note:** The continuum of the scale of perception of social problems: 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) and of the scale of institutional trust: 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much).

When probing the perception of the emotional climate of the environment, the data show a predominantly negative climate, characterized by fear, anxiety, anger, aggressiveness, sadness and low mood (see Table 3).

Table 3.  
Mean scores on emotional climate

Emotional climate	Mean	SD
Negative emotional climate	3.83	.81
Positive emotional climate	2.36	.71
Items		
Economic situation is very good	1.60	.89
The general affective environment is very good	2.87	1.05
The social environment is of:		
- Hope	2.17	1.07

-	Mutual help and solidarity	2.71	1.04
-	Trust in institutions	2.06	1.05
-	Fear and anxiety	4.12	.86
-	Anger, hostility and aggressiveness among people	3.79	1.01
-	Sadness, passivity and low moods	3.57	1.05
-	Joy and enthusiasm	2.12	.88
-	Calmness to talk	2.30	.90

Secondly, we sought to analyze differential profiles according to socio-demographic variables.

In terms of gender, with respect to well-being, statistically significant differences were only found in subjective cognitive well-being, with male persons ( $M = 7.09$ ) reporting feeling more satisfied with their lives than female persons ( $M = 6.41$ ) ( $t(207) = -2.322, p = .02$ ). When analyzing the predominant affective tonality in the environment, those who identified with the female gender perceived a more negative ( $M = 3.91$ ) and less positive ( $M = 2.29$ ) emotional climate than their male peers ( $M = 3.63$  and  $2.54$ , respectively) (Negative climate  $t(129,423) = 2.378, p = .019$ ; Positive climate  $t(96,510) = -2.148, p = .035$ ).

In relation to well-being and age, different interesting associations were observed. As age increases, higher subjective well-being was observed both at the cognitive ( $r = .201, p = .004$ ) and hedonic ( $r = .212, p = .022$ ) levels, higher levels of vitality ( $r = .160, p = .021$ ) and higher levels of eudaimonic well-being with respect to meaning in life ( $r = .144, p = .038$ ), self-acceptance ( $r = .145, p = .036$ ), social relationships ( $r = .187, p = .007$ ), perceived control ( $r = .207, p = .003$ ) and autonomy ( $r = .202, p = .004$ ). The only dimensions for which no statistically significant relationships were found were personal growth and social well-being.

## Relationships between variables

Table 4 shows the significant relationships between well-being, perception of social problems, emotional climate and institutional trust. Those with higher levels of subjective, eudaimonic and social well-being tend to perceive a more positive and less negative emotional climate. The perception of social problems is associated with less social well-being and a lower sense of life ( $r = -.156; p = .027$ ). In the same sense, greater institutional distrust is linked to lower levels of well-being in all its dimensions, especially social well-being. Finally, it should be noted that the more social problems are perceived, the greater the negative emotional climate and the lower the trust in institutions ( $r = -.282; p = .000$ ). Positive climate is negatively related to negative

climate and social problems ( $r = -.690$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and positively related to institutional trust ( $r = .329$ ;  $p = .000$ ). In turn, negative emotional climate is negatively associated with institutional trust ( $r = -.357$ ;  $p = .000$ ). These results reinforce the link between well-being and how people emotionally and socially value their environment.

Table 4.  
Relationships between well-being, perception of social problems, emotional climate and institutional trust

	Social problems	Positive emotional climate	Negative emotional climate	Institutional trust
Subjective well-being				
Cognitive	-.081	.345**	-.266**	.071
Subjective hedonic well-being	-.104	.299**	-.348**	.147*
Welfare Eudaemonic	-.115	.312**	-.245**	.167*
Social welfare	-.212**	.432**	-.316**	.361**

## Conclusions

The present study attempts to explore how well-being is related to social variables such as emotional climate, perception of social problems and trust in institutions.

It should be noted that the results coincide with previous findings, since good levels of subjective and eudaimonic well-being are verified, even higher than in previous studies at the local level. However, the levels of social well-being continue to be low, especially in terms of the perception of an environment that facilitates the satisfaction of needs. As for the emotional climate, a negative perception predominates, in relation to uncooperative attitudes and high levels of social anger, which coincides with previous studies, both local and international. In addition, there is a high level of distrust towards all the institutions evaluated, confirming studies that point to a crisis of legitimacy, particularly in the political and governmental spheres, which reinforces the feeling of unease and powerlessness.

Differences by gender and age were also verified: while men report greater life satisfaction, women show greater affective pessimism. The older the age, the greater the perception of autonomy and life control.

Finally, the relationships between well-being, perception of social problems, emotional climate and institutional trust corroborate previous studies: low levels of well-being are associated with greater perception of problems, institutional distrust and negative emotional climate.

These findings support the importance of adopting an integrated view of well-being that takes into account both individual and contextual factors.

In summary, the study provides an in-depth, current and necessary look at how the social environment shapes the subjective experience of well-being. This is particularly relevant in contexts such as Latin America, where the perception of institutional and social crisis has a strong impact on people's lives.

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