

The Impact of Cultural Values on the Association Between Family Relations and Children's Life Satisfaction.

A Comparison of Children in Two-Parent Families Across 39 Countries

19th "Social Monitoring and Reporting in Europe" conference
Demographic Challenges and Opportunities and their Impact on
Individual and Societal Well-being

October 7, 2025
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Theoretical Background: Why culture matters

- ❖ **Ecological Systems Theory:** child well-being is shaped not only by immediate surrounding but also by broader cultural norms (macrosystem) Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, 1992)
- ❖ **Cultural value orientations** impact how children define themselves and relate to others Hofstede (2011); Triandis (1995); Allik & Realo (2004)
 - *Subjective well-being* is interpreted differently across cultures Krys et al. (2021); Suh & Oishi (2002)
 - *Cultural norms* determine importance of family relations Schwartz (2012)

Theoretical Background: Why culture matters

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H1: Children's average life satisfaction is higher in individualistic countries than in collectivist countries, whereas the average quality of family relations is higher in collectivist societies

- Subjective well-being is interpreted differently across cultures Krys et al. (2021); Suh & Oishi (2002)
- Cultural norms determine importance of family relations Schwartz (2012)

Theoretical Background: Why the family matters

❖ **Ecological Systems Theory:** Children most strongly influenced the relationships they directly engage in (microsystem) Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, 1992)

- Direct interactions with parents, siblings, and peers have a stronger impact on well-being than broader cultural conditions, because they occur in daily life Bronfenbrenner (1979); Exenberger et al. (2019)
- The family functions as a site of care, socialization, protection, and emotional safety across all cultures Schatzki (1996)

Theoretical Background: Why the family matters

❖ **Ecological Systems Theory:** Children most strongly influenced the relationships they directly engage in (microsystem) Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, 1992)

H2: Good family relations are universally positively related to children's life satisfaction

- The family functions as a site of care, socialization, protection, and emotional safety across all cultures Schatzki (1996)

Theoretical Background: Tie it all together

❖ Cultural values impact structure of family relations and definition of subjective well-being. *Triandis (1995); Trommsdorff et al. (2004); Hofstede (2011)*

- **Collectivist societies:**

- family ties more intense
- children are socialized to prioritize family over personal desires

- **Individualistic societies:**

- children focus more on their own feelings
- rely less on family support
- navigating relationships may require more social effort

Theoretical Background: Tie it all together

❖ Cultural values impact structure of family relations and definition of subjective well-being. Triandis (1995); Trommsdorff et al. (2004); Hofstede (2011)

H3: The societal value climate impacts the relationship between family relations and children's well-being: children from collectivist societies benefit to a greater extent from good family relations than children from individualistic societies

- **Individualistic societies:**

- children focus more on their own feelings
- rely less on family support
- navigating relationships may require more social effort

Data: Children's Worlds

- ❖ **129,018 children** from **39 countries** (23 **collectivist**, 16 **individualistic**)
- ❖ **3 waves**: 2011/12, 2013/14 and 2016–2019
- ❖ Surveyed in school; **children's self-reports**
- ❖ **Socio-demographics:**
 - ❖ Ages 10–14 (Average: 11.14 years)
 - ❖ 50% boys, 50% girls
 - ❖ 23% siblings, 77% only children
 - ❖ Two-parent households only

Measures: Individual Level

Life satisfaction:

- *How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?*
- 0 = 'not at all satisfied' | 10 'totally satisfied'

Family relations Index:

- I feel *safe* at home
- We have a *good time together* in my family
- My *parents listen* to me and take what I say into account
- 0 'I do not agree' | 4 'I totally agree'

$$\alpha_{\text{collectivist}} = 0.7 \mid \alpha_{\text{individualistic}} = 0.7$$

Measures: Country Level

Individualism vs. Collectivism

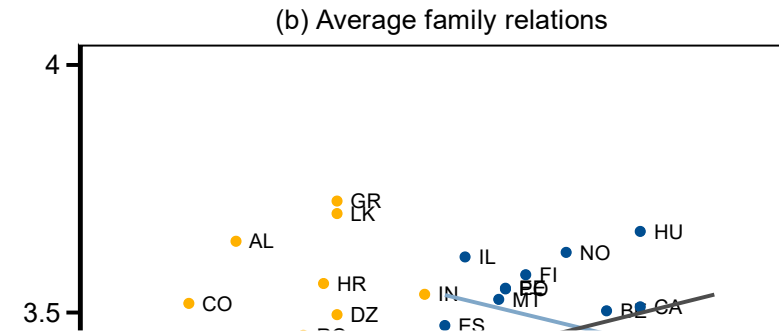
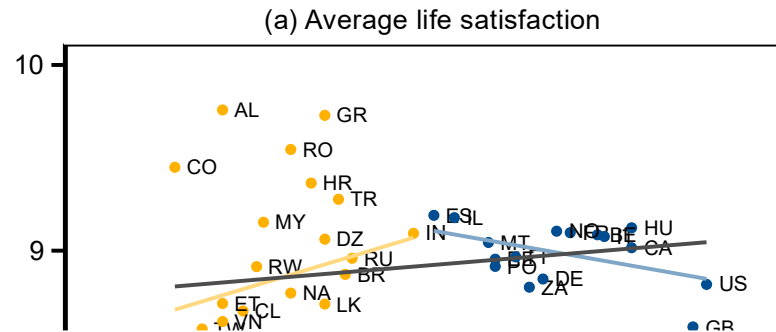
- Individualism Index (IDV), Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory Hofstede (1984, 2011); Hofstede Insights, 2023
- 0 'collectivist' | 100 'individualistic'
- 0 - 49 = (rather) collectivist
- 50 - 100 = (rather) individualistic

Analytical Strategy

- (1) **Descriptive comparison** (H1): Mean comparison of life satisfaction and family relations across **collectivist** vs. **individualistic** countries
- (2) **Single country regressions** (H2): Time-pooled OLS regressions by country and **collectivist** vs. **individualistic**
- (3) **Cross-country moderation** (H3): Three-level multilevel model with random slopes for family relations; nesting:
Children (L1) → Country-years (L2) → Countries (L3)

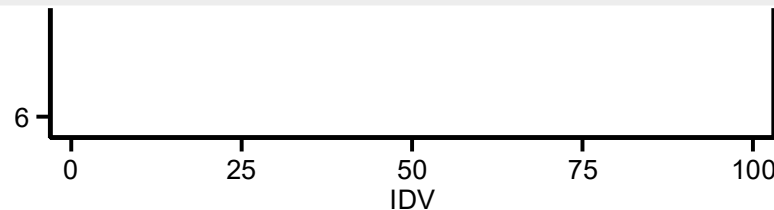
All analyses are controlled for child gender, age, and whether they have siblings and are weighted to ensure equal country influence.

Results (I): Descriptive comparison



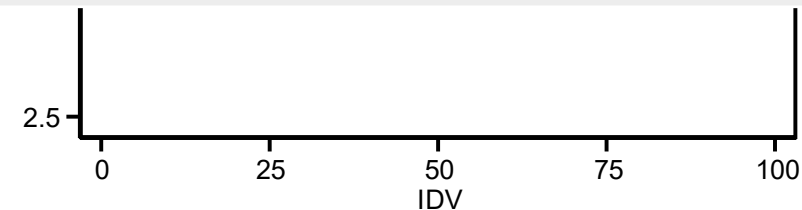
Lowest LS: 6.8 (Uganda)
Highest LS: 9.8 (Albania)

Lowest FR: 2.9 (Uganda)
Highest FR: 3.7 (Greece)



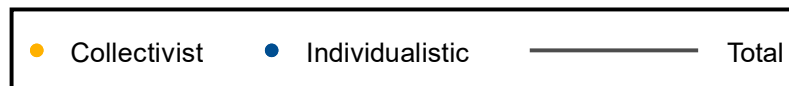
Correlations between country -level life satisfaction and IDV:

r (collectivist countries) = 0.16
 r (individualistic countries) = -0.47†
 r (pooled sample) = 0.14



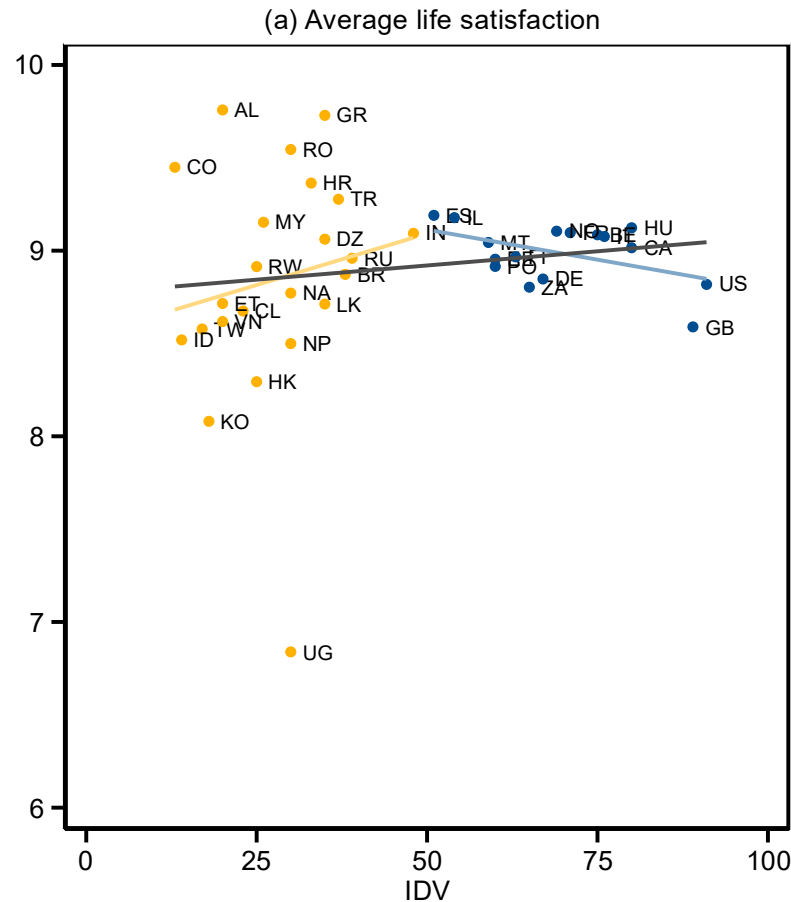
Correlations between country-level family relations and IDV:

r (collectivist countries) = 0.25
 r (individualistic countries) = -0.28
 r (pooled sample) = 0.35**



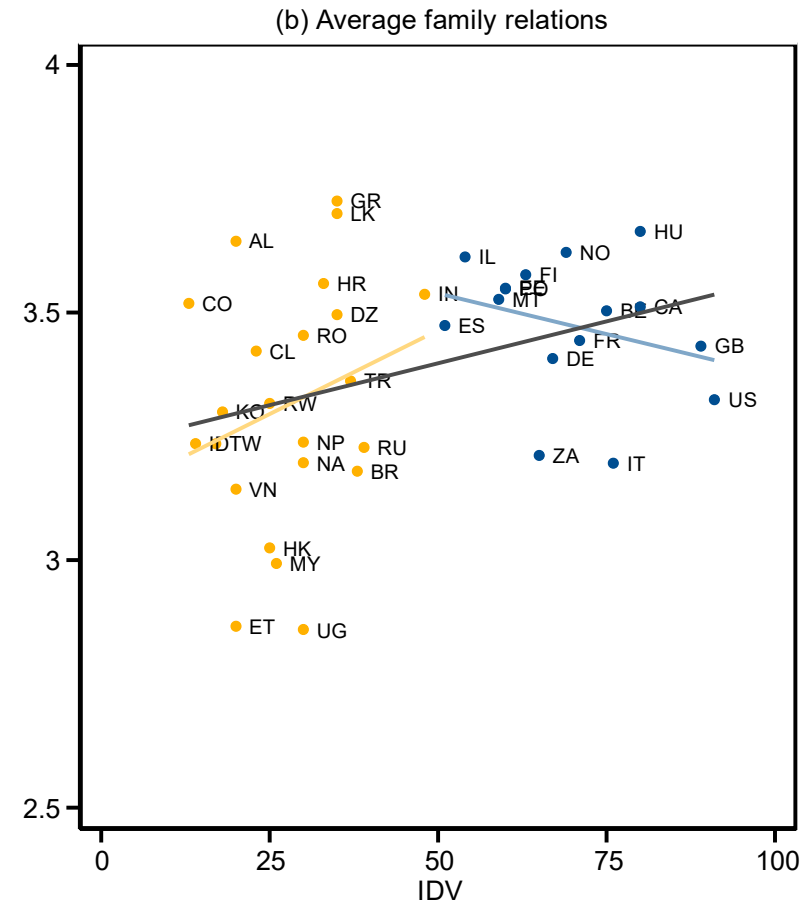
Note: † $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Results (I): Descriptive comparison



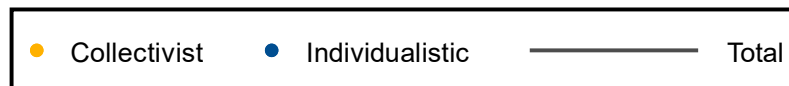
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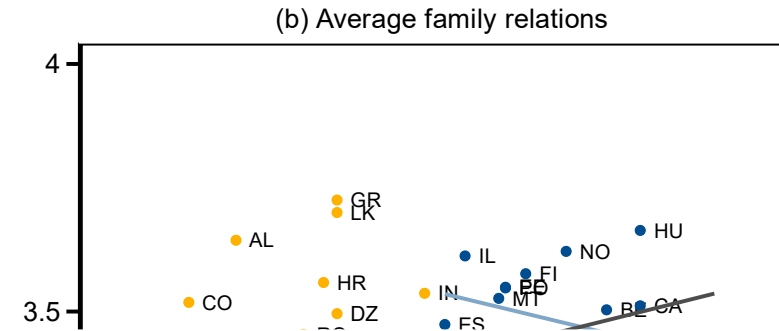
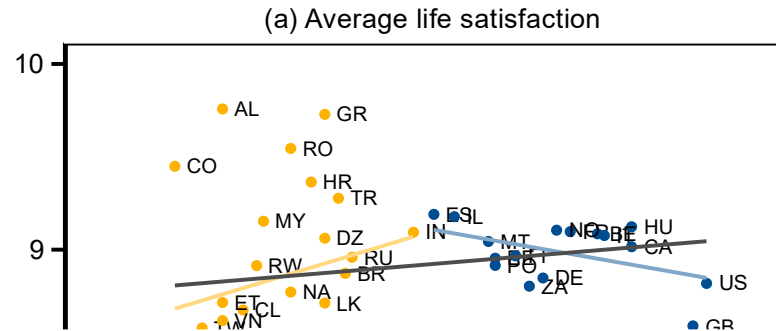


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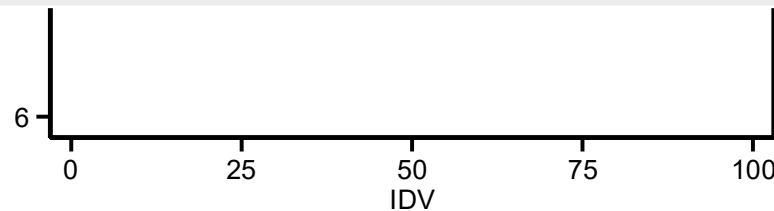


Results (I): Descriptive comparison



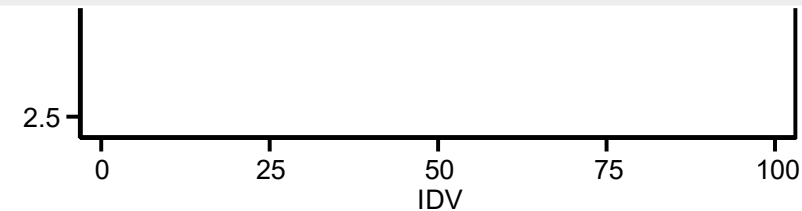
LS *collectivist*: 8.9
LS *individualistic*: 9.0

FR *collectivist*: 3.3
FR *individualistic*: 3.5



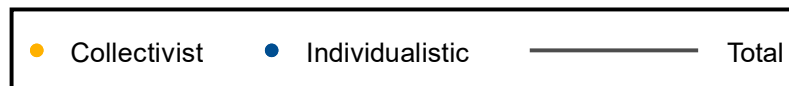
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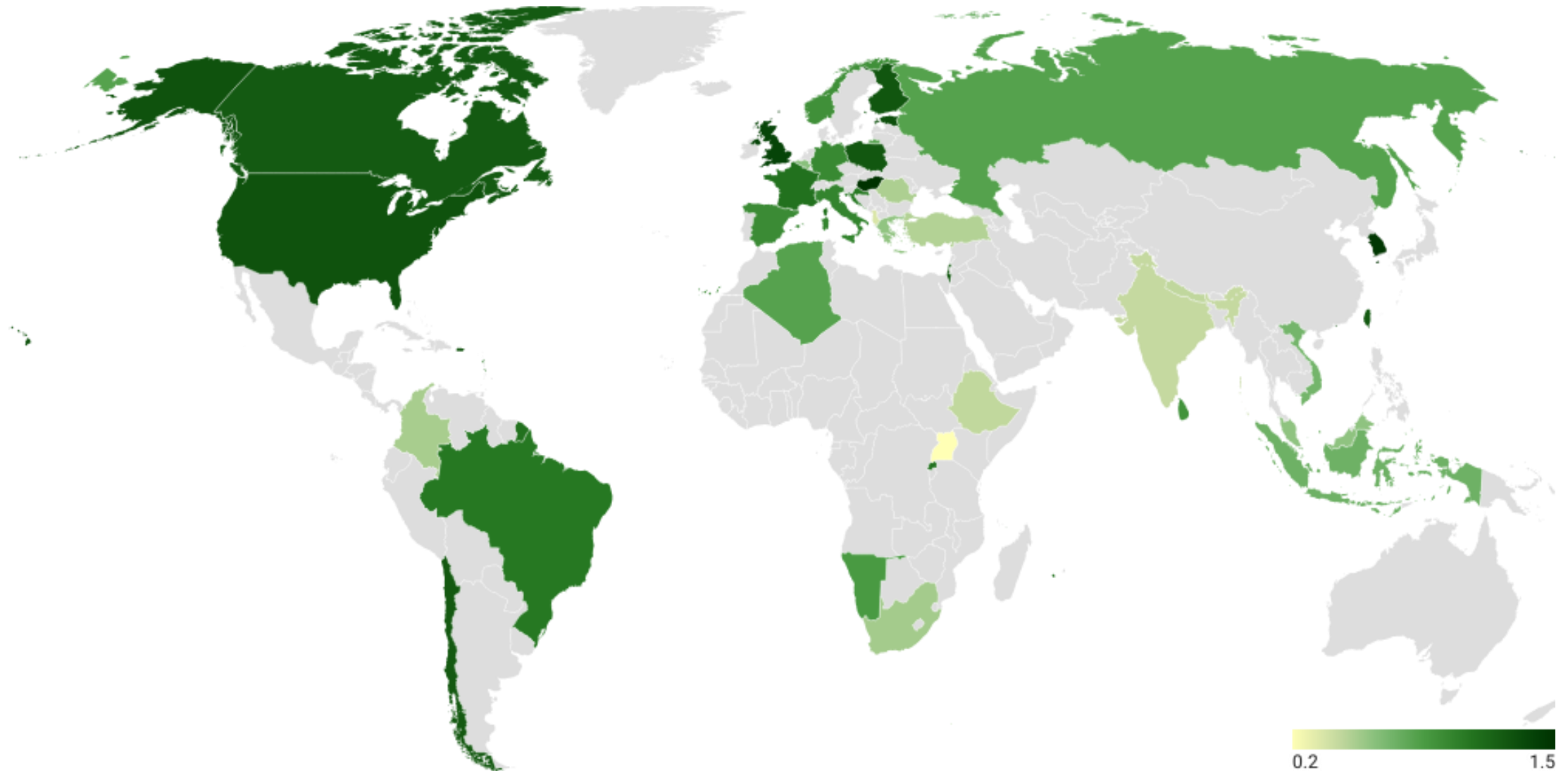
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Results (2): Country-specific regressions



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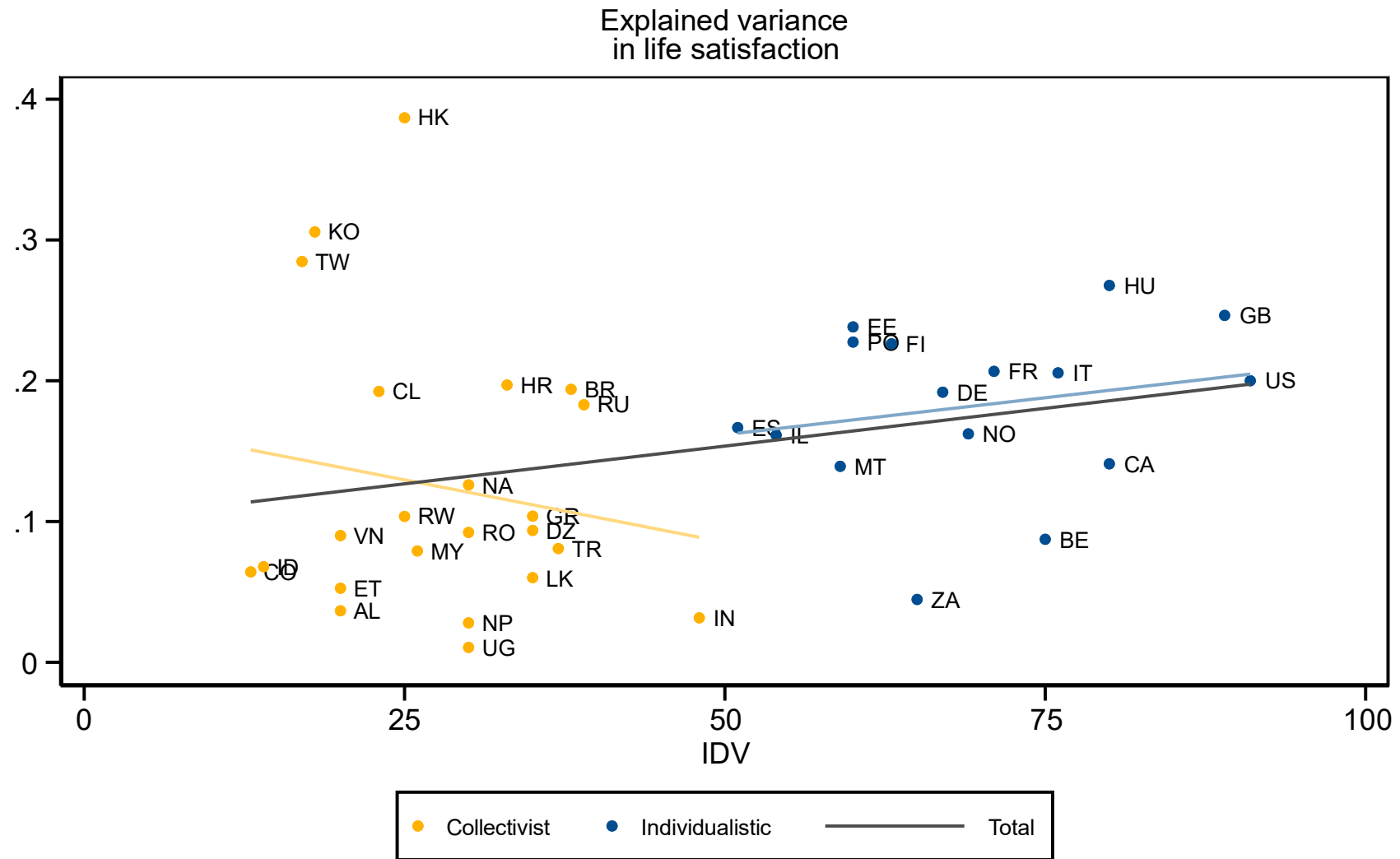


Smallest $b=0.195^{}$ (Uganda)**
Largest $b=1.503^{*}$ (Hungary)**

Collectivist $b=0.902^{*}$**
Individualistic $b=1.052^{*}$**
Pooled $b=0.917^{*}$**



Results (2): Country-specific regressions



Correlations between adjusted R^2 obtained from single-country regressions and IDV:

r (collectivist countries) = -0.16

r (individualistic countries) = 0.21

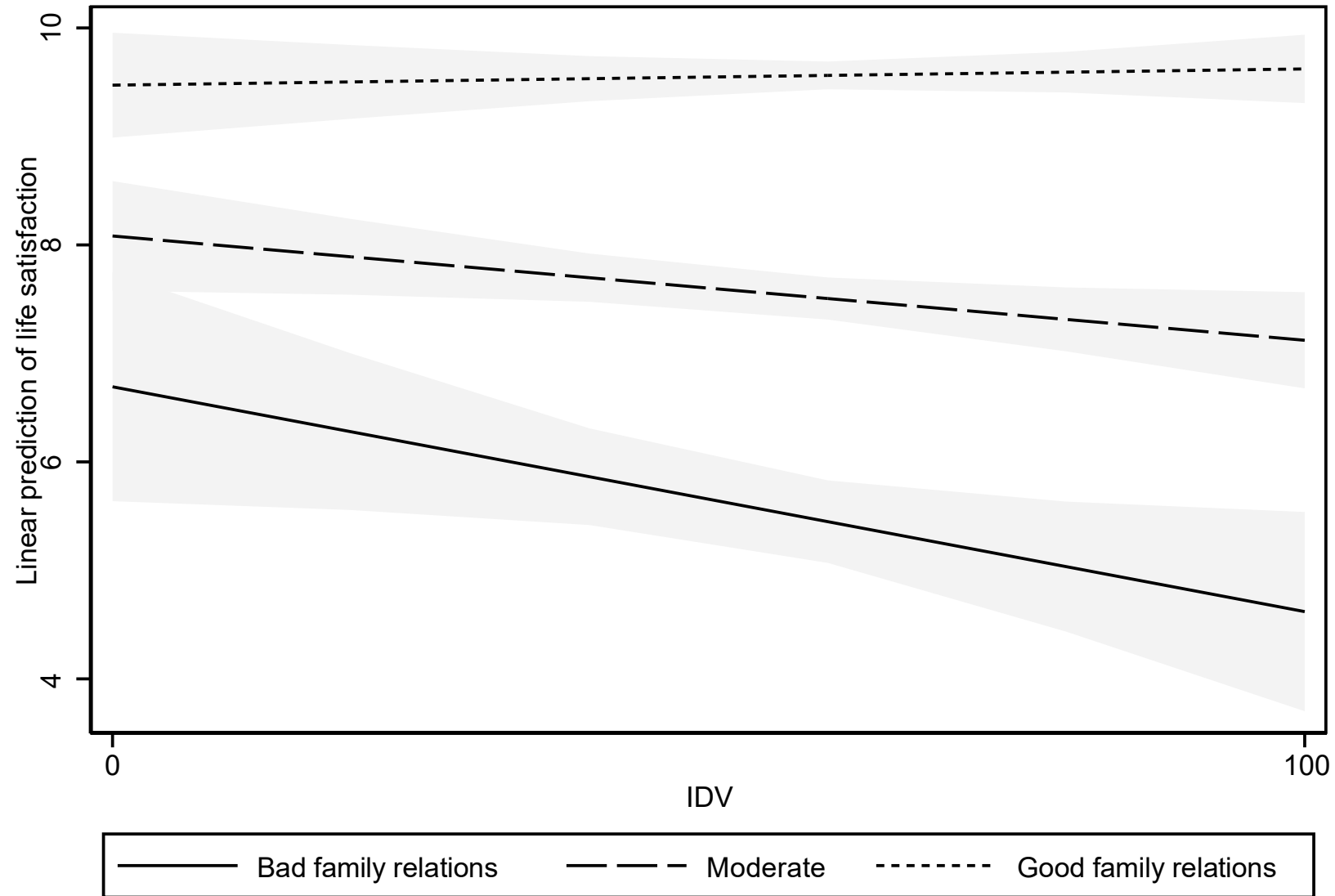
r (pooled sample) = 0.28†

Results (3): Multilevel

DV: Overall Life Satisfaction	Null Model		Full Model	
	b	SE	b	SE
Family relations			0.695***	0.165
Female (ref.: male)			-0.116***	0.026
Age in years			-0.127***	0.016
Siblings (ref.: no siblings)			0.038	0.02
Collectivism			-0.021*	0.009
Family relations * Collectivism			0.006*	0.003
Constant	8.900***	0.076	8.134***	0.503
ICC Level 1	89.5			
ICC Level 2	6.1			
ICC Level 3	4.4			
Chi ²			418.145***	
Log Likelihood	-272729.34		-262479.563	
Individuals (L1)	129,018		129,018	
Country years (L2)	58		58	
Countries (L3)	39		39	

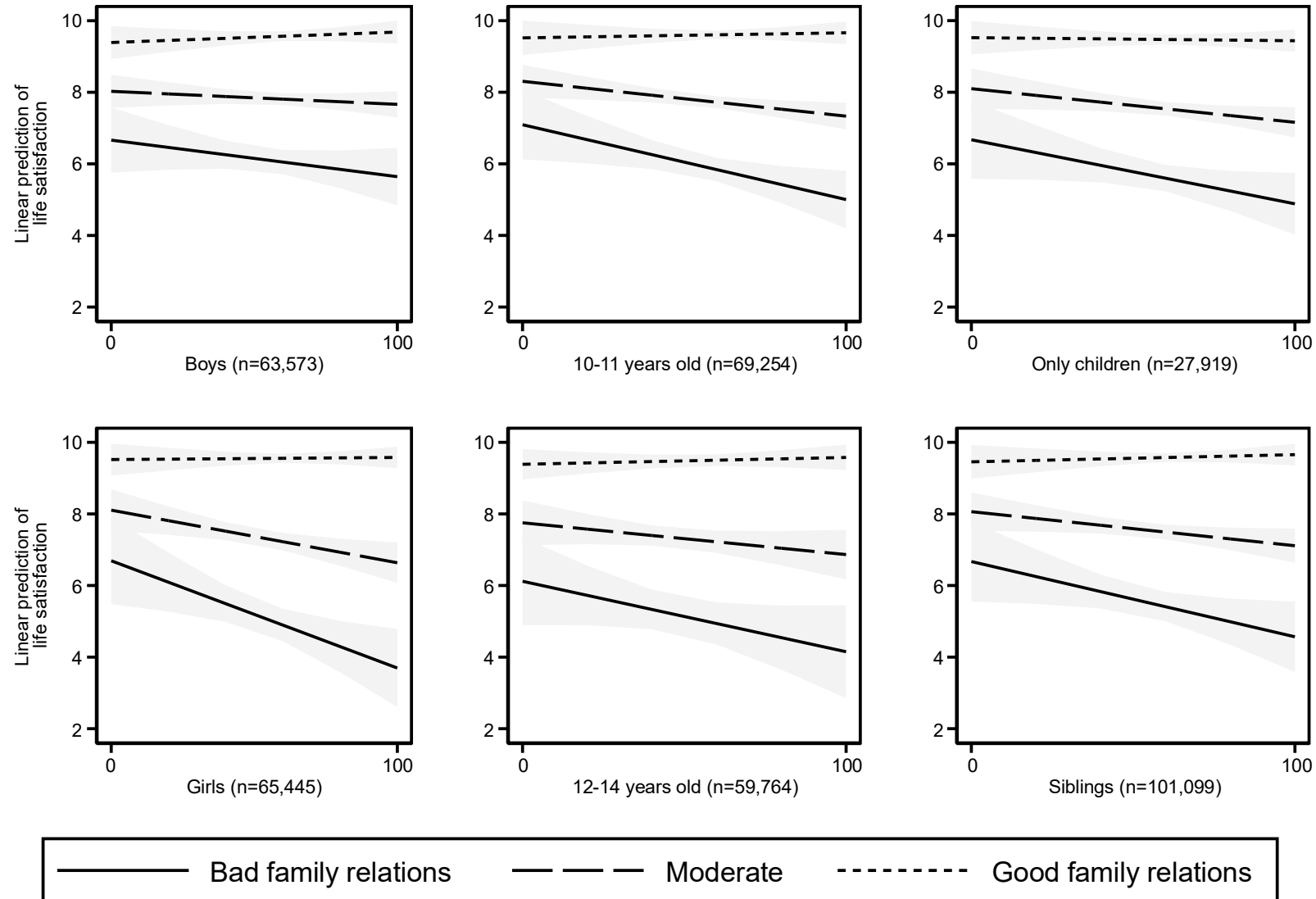
*Note: [†]p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, weighted with population weight to equalize sample sizes between countries. Random slopes for family relations.*

Results (3): Multilevel



Note: Random slopes for family relations

Results (3): Multilevel



Note: Random slopes for family relations

Results: Summary

H1:

Life satisfaction **collectivist** < Life satisfaction **individualistic** X

Family relations **collectivist** > Family relations **individualistic** X

H2:

Family relations are universally beneficial for children's life satisfaction. ✓

H3:

The effect of family relations on life satisfaction is stronger in **collectivist countries** than in **individualistic countries**. X

Limitations

❖ **Cultural values measured only at the country level**

Future studies should include *individual-level* collectivist and individualist orientations (personal values may better predict child well-being)

❖ **Limited cultural diversity in the sample**

More data from *African and Latin American countries* needed (stronger support from policymakers and NGOs)

❖ **Focus restricted to family relations**

Children's *peer and school relationships* could also be examined to assess whether *other social bonds are culturally shaped*

Key take aways

- (1) Children's **life satisfaction** was *high across cultures* but **extreme individualism** and **extreme collectivism** both appear detrimental
- (2) Strong **family relations** *benefit children everywhere* but they matter even more in **individualistic societies**
- (3) In **collectivist societies**, *extended family networks may buffer weak(er) parent-child relationships*
- (4) In **individualistic societies**, *nuclear-family reliance intensifies the negative impact of poor family relations*

Thank you very much for your attention!

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Full paper (Open Access) available here ☺:



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Multilevel regression including quadratic IDV term

Life satisfaction

M3

	b	SE
Family relations	0.695***	0.165
Female (ref.: male)	-0.116***	0.026
Age in years	-0.127***	0.016
Siblings (ref.: no siblings)	0.038	0.02
IDV	0.032	0.047
IDV ²	-0.001	0.000
Family relations * Collectivism	0.006*	0.003
Constant	7.100***	1.101
Chi ²	440.824***	
Log Likelihood	-262478.851	
Individuals (L1)	129,018	
Country years (L2)	58	
Countries (L3)	39	

[†] $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, weighted with population weight to equalize sample sizes between countries. Random slopes for family relations.