

Life Chances Differentiation in Lithuania: Subjective Attitudes of 18–35 Years Old Youth

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The article examines the subjective attitudes towards life chances of the Lithuanian youth (aged 18–35). Following the concept of life chances introduced by M. Weber (1920) (cited by Grusky 2001), the theoretical aspects of life chances are analysed. The empirical part of the paper is to survey the research results on the life chances of young people in Lithuania in 2023. Based on the analysis of scientific literature and survey research data, we can state that the subjective attitudes of young people to life chances vary depending on age, gender, employment, and parents' socio-economic status when the respondent is 14–15 years old. The survey research revealed that young people, who are currently not working or studying, or who identify themselves and their family with the lowest social class, most unfavourably evaluate their life chances. The scientific research is funded by the Lithuanian Science Council researchers group's Project 'Socio-economic Factors of Youth Life Chances Differentiation in Lithuania' (Reg. No. S-MIP-22-42, contract date 18.03.2022).

Keywords: youth, life chances, subjective attitudes

INTRODUCTION

Youth is among the most vulnerable groups in society. Long-term changes related to (post) modernisation and the welfare state, labour market and employment structures, the expansion of the education system, and the COVID-19 pandemic caused a growing differentiation of youth life chances. In the transition to adulthood, young people face increasing challenges and uncertainties. In addition, an increasing number of young people (18–35 years old) face poverty and deprivation, it is increasingly difficult for young people to successfully integrate into society, or due to structural changes in the labour market (decreased full-time employment, remote work, increasing youth unemployment, insecure and atypical forms of employment, etc.) to find a suitable job (decreased full-time employment, telecommuting, growing youth unemployment, precarious and atypical forms of employment, etc.).

In a dualistic housing market, housing provision for youth becomes challenging due to high purchasing or renting real estate prices in the private sector (Braziene et al. 2018). Therefore, it takes more and more time for young people to become autonomous, the period of dependence on parents increases, and independent life begins relatively later.

Prior research results reveal the challenges faced by young people depending on their social status, education, place of residence, and other factors (Gebel et al. 2022; Unt et al. 2021; Gebel et al. 2021; Gebel 2018; Baranowska-Rataj et al. 2017; Filandri, Bertolini 2016). From the systematic literature analysis, it is evident that most youth research focuses on analysing a particular aspect (transition from school to work, labour market participation, housing provision, health, psychological condition, discrimination, etc.). Analysis of the youth research field allows the following main research directions that are relevant for this study: becoming an adult/transition to adulthood (Buchholz, Blossfeld 2012; Buchholz et al. 2011; Hutchison, 2008, etc.) and youth integration into the labour market (transition from school to work and labour market participation trends) (Gebel et al. 2021; Brazienė 2020; Gebel 2018; Brazienė 2017; Brzinsky-Fay, Solga 2016; Brazienė, Mikutavičienė 2013; Brazienė, Merkys 2013; Brzinsky-Fay 2013, 2011; Matsumoto, Elder 2010; Buchmann, Kriesi 2011), labour market exclusion (Gebel et al. 2022; Karamessini et al. 2019; Baranowska-Rataj, Gebel 2010), housing provision for the youth (Brazienė 2019; Brazienė, Žilys et al. 2018; Gebel 2018; Baranowska-Rataj et al. 2017; Filandri, Olagnero 2014; Laaksonen 2000, etc.), youth social exclusion and social risks (Unt et al. 2021; Bertolini, Deliyanni-Kouimtzi et al. 2021, etc.), etc.; however, the research on youth life chances is rather limited.

This paper aims to reveal the socioeconomic factors of Lithuanian youth (18–35 years old) life chance differentiation. The research question was the following: How does the assessment of life chances differ according to age, gender, education, employment status, and the social class of the parents' family when the respondent is 14–15 years old for the 18–35-year-old youth age group?

The research methods were analysis of scientific literature, survey research and quantitative (survey) data analysis.

DIFFERENTIATION OF YOUTH LIFE CHANCES: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There are various theoretical and methodological perspectives to measure an individual's social position in social inequality and stratification studies. Therefore, for this study applying the concept of life chances allows us to reveal the picture of the differentiation of life chances of youth in the Lithuanian society. The concept of life chances (*German Lebenschancen*) was introduced by Weber (1920) (Grusky 2001; 1994) into sociological discourse (Anikin et al. 2017). Following M. Weber, the term *life chances* refers to an opportunity for each individual, depending on their social status, to improve their quality of life, ensure success and achieve desired goals in life (Anikin et al. 2017). The Weber's life chances theory allows one to determine an individual's class and predict relevant social actions, is life-chance differentiation in terms of positive and negative privileges in class situations (Anikin et al. 2017). Different scholars further developed Weber's life chances theory. Giddens sees life chances as '*the chances an individual has for sharing in the socially created economic or cultural "goods" that typically exist in any given society*' (Giddens 1973: 130–131). Breen (2005) suggests viewing inequality in the distribution of life chances through the lens of the possession of market-relevant assets.

The scientific literature broadly discusses life chances differentiation and intergenerational transmission of social inequalities and disadvantages. Different macro and micro determine the intergenerational transmission of disadvantages and are a characteristic feature of all societies; however, the scope and intensity of this phenomenon differ (Goldthorpe 2000; Atkinson, Hills 1998, etc.). From the previous research it is evident that parent's education and profession have an impact on children's life chances (Berloff, Matteazzi et al. 2017; Aliferi et al. 2015,

etc.). Parents' social status, e.g. existing economic, cultural and social resources determine children's future life chances. Following Breen and Goldthorpe (1999), depending on social class parents' expectations and investment in children's education increases their opportunities to occupy a higher status in society (Breen, Goldthorpe 1999). Persons from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, with a low level of parental education, more often experience a lifelong socio-economic disadvantage, a lower educational engagement, and reduced adult occupational opportunities (Palomino et al. 2017).

Macroeconomic factors, labour market, social security, and education system factors also lead to the differentiation of life chances. Bourdieu (1981) emphasises the fact that it is through the education system that class society systematically reproduces itself. For example, elites employ new strategies to guarantee the transmission of their privileged social position from generation to generation. By using the ideas of Furlong and Cartmel (1997) changing life experiences of young people in contemporary modern industrial societies were analysed. Furlong and Cartmel emphasised labour market restructuring, increased demand for educated workers, flexible specialisation accompanying post-Fordist changes in the workplace, and social policies that extended young people's dependence on families (Furlong, Cartmel 1997: 1).

In addition, by supporting the ideas of Beck and Giddens, Furlong and Cartmel state that the life chances of young people can be predicted depending on their family social status. Thus, class, gender, or distribution of resources are the main factors for 'understanding young people's experiences and life chances in contemporary societies' (Furlong, Cartmel 1997: 2).

Summarising the insights of previous research, the youth life chances of young people (Weber 1920; Munro 2019; Cho, Brand 2019, etc.) are treated in this research as opportunities for young people to achieve their goals depending on their socioeconomic status. Scientific literature presents several research tools on how we can measure the life chances of individuals using objective macro and mezzo level indicators (social environment, educational system, purchasing power and employment, etc.) and subjective indicators on how people perceive their life chances. At the micro level, this research methodologically focuses on the subjective evaluation of life chances, e.g. individual experiences and attitudes of young people. Micro-level theoretical construct is based on the following theoretical concepts: life course theory (Brady, Gilligan 2018; Jones et al. 2019, etc.), employment quality and safety (Kalleberg 2009), subjective welfare and health (Diener, 2009), economic independence and autonomy (Baranowska-Rataj et al. 2015; Walther 2006; etc.), family social and economic status, socio-economic situation and parents' education (Cho 2023; Bourdieu, Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1984, etc.).

DATA AND METHODS

Research instrument

The empirical part of the paper is based on the survey research carried out in Lithuania (in 2023). The total number of 1,209 respondents aged 18–35 participated in the survey. The survey research was conducted using paper-and-pencil interviewing and computer-assisted web interviewing. The survey data were collected adhering the standards for research quality (ESOMAR, WAPOR, etc.) The survey research instrument is based on the methodological literature (Babbie 2013; Bryman 2008, etc.), standardised questionnaires and scales (EU-SILC, EUROSTUDENT 7, 8, International Social Survey Program (ISSP) Social Inequality Module V, 2019), youth transition from school to work (LT) 2012, housing

provision for the youth (2018), and other methodological instruments. For the measurement a five point Likert scale was applied.

For the survey research, the following empirical dimensions of life chances dimensions were distinguished: individual socio-demographic characteristics; family/household characteristics; parents' family characteristics and status; work, employment and career opportunities; income and material; learning, study and training opportunities; subjective welfare and health; autonomy (housing, financial, decision making, etc.). The total number of primary indicators was 367.

Research sample and socio-demographic characteristics

1,209 respondents aged 18 to 35 participated in the survey, among them, 60.9% of women and 38.6% of men. The largest group of the respondents, 37.7%, was 30–35 years old. The majority of respondents, 53.3%, had obtained tertiary, 25.8% secondary, 14.9% vocational and 4.6 % basic education, while the rest of the respondents had less than the basic education. The employment status in the sample varies as follows: 65.3% devote their time only to work, 8.6% respondents are studying, 12.8% combine work with studies, and 13.3% occupy a different status. In the study, 75% of the respondents are employees.

The majority of the respondents are individuals who identify themselves with the Lithuanian nationality (95.8%). The respondents of the study represent the entire territory of Lithuania according to their place of residence. For the other socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (e.g. nationality, place of residence, employment status at work, etc.) and their distribution in the sample, see Table 1.

Table 1. Research sample and socio-demographic characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	%	Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender			Employment status in the main job		
Women	736	60.9	Employee	708	75.0
Men	467	38.6	Employer	47	5.0
Other	6	0.5	A person working under a patent, business license or individual activity certificate	88	9.3
Nationality			Student	52	5.5
Lithuanian	1158	95.8	On paid parental leave	25	2.6
Polish	28	2.3	A family member who helps work on the family farm	7	0.7
Russian	12	1.0	Other	17	1.8
Other	11	0.9			
Age			Employment by the sector		
18–24	345	28.5	Public	247	26.2
25–29	408	33.7	Private	649	68.8
30–35	456	37.7	NGO	48	5.1
Education					

deviation, mean, median). The further data analysis was aimed to reveal how young people's assessments of life chances differ taking into account various sociodemographic variables. All the respondents for the further data analysis are divided into three age groups: 18–24, 25–29 and 30–35 years old.

The employment status was analysed according to four main categories: currently only in employment, only in education, in employment and education, neither in employment nor in education and training. Comparisons of all investigated characteristics of life chances were carried out according to gender, age, education, place of residence, employment status, income level, and individual and parents' social status. For this purpose, descriptive statistics, factor analysis, ANOVA, Man Whitney, and other statistical criteria were applied. In the results section, only statistically significant differences were discussed.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Subjective measurement of life chances was carried out using a five-level Likert scale. For further analysis, the categories – very well/well and very bad/bad, as well as totally agree/agree and totally disagree/disagree – were merged. The research revealed that young people had the least favourable assessment of their chances to provide with suitable housing, become financially independent, or start a business. Educational learning and studying opportunities and professional development are evaluated quite favourably (for more details, see Table 2).

Table 2. Subjective evaluation of life chances (18–35 years old), $N = 1209$, %

No.	Life chances	M*	Sd.	%		
				Very well, well	Very bad, bad	Neither good nor bad
1.	To feel safe in living environment	3.91	0.929	69.6	6.0	24.4
2.	To spend quality leisure time	3.82	0.955	65.4	7.5	27.1
3.	To create partnership/family	3.78	0.775	63.3	10.0	26.7
4.	To develop professionally (professional development)	3.77	0.780	63.8	8.7	27.5
5.	To take care of your health	3.72	0.974	60.5	9.0	30.5
6.	To maintain a healthy lifestyle	3.72	0.974	54.5	10.3	35.2
7.	To study	3.71	0.970	60.3	8.8	30.9
8.	To work and earn	3.63	1.006	57.7	11.0	31.3
9.	To travel	3.61	1.056	55.9	12.8	31.3
10.	To receive quality health services	3.55	1.054	53.3	13.2	33.5
11.	To have and raise children	3.54	1.037	52.0	14.7	33.3
12.	To become financially independent	3.53	1.087	52.4	15.8	31.8
13.	To volunteer	3.53	1.022	51.9	12.2	35.9
14.	To get suitable accommodation	3.35	1.166	46.0	21.8	32.2
15.	To start business	3.08	1.111	34.3	28.4	37.3

* M (average) with five items on a Likert scale ranging between 1 (very bad) and 5 (very well).

For further data analysis, the ANOVA test was selected. This test allows us to determine statistically significant differences in more than two groups. Differences were also tested by the chi-square test. In this case, subjective attitudes towards life chances were compared in different age categories, according to the employment status and parents' social class when the respondent was 14–15 years old, and the current respondent's subjective social status.

Statistically significant differences emerged when assessing the current life chances depending on the parents' social status when the respondent was 14–15 years old. The respondents who assigned their parents to the lowest social class had a statistically significantly worse assessment of their chances to work and earn (ANOVA, $p = 0.001$), become financially independent (ANOVA, $p = 0.002$) and have housing provisions (ANOVA, $p = 0.001$).

The mean comparison test revealed statistically significant differences in the attitude toward life chances depending on the employment status of the respondents. The employment status was assessed according to 4 categories (studying, working, working and studying, not working, not studying, and not participating in training). Youth that are not working, not studying, and not participating in training assess their life chances most unfavourably (ANOVA, $p = 0.001$). Statistically significant differences emerged according to many indicators: when assessing the opportunities to work and earn (ANOVA, $p = 0.002$), to become financially independent (ANOVA, $p = 0.002$), to provide housing (ANOVA, $p = 0.001$), to improve in the field of profession (ANOVA, $p = 0.001$), start a business (ANOVA, $p = 0.001$), travel (ANOVA, $p = 0.007$) and spend quality leisure time (ANOVA, $p = 0.005$).

Based on the International Social Research Program (ISSP), life chances measurement scale was used in the study. It was analysed which main factors influenced the life chances of young people to achieve something in life. The results of the research revealed that, in the opinion of the respondents, to achieve something in life, it is essential to be educated, to have educated parents and to work hard. Also, according to the respondents, being from a rich family and having political connections is quite a significant factor. In the respondents' opinion, gender, nationality and religion are the least significant factors (see Table 3 for details). The respondents' opinion about what is important to achieve something in life was highly homogeneous. There were statistically significant differences according to age groups, and the employment status, e.g. did not emerge when applying different mean comparison tests.

Table 3. Subjective attitudes on what is important (life chances) to go ahead in life, $N = 1209$, %

No.	Life chances to go ahead in life	M*	Sd.	%		
				Completely agree, agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Completely disagree, disagree
1.	Having a good education, yourself	4.03	1.166	75.6	18.7	5.7
2.	Knowing the right people	3.81	0.780	67.1	24.6	8.3
3.	Hard work	3.8	0.970	66.7	23.7	9.6
4.	Having well-educated parents	3.4	1.087	51.2	28.7	20.1
5.	Having political connections	3.39	1.056	46.3	34.9	18.8

Table 3. (Continued)

No.	Life chances to go ahead in life	M*	Sd.	%		
				Completely agree, agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Completely disagree, disagree
6.	Coming from a wealthy family	3.13	1.006	40.4	29.5	30.1
7.	Being born a man or a woman	2.77	1.022	26.6	34.2	39.2
8.	Person's nationality	2.68	0.775	23.9	32.6	43.5
9.	Giving bribes	2.52	1.111	19.4	29.7	50.9
10.	Person's religion	2.47	1.037	17.9	29.7	52.4

* M (average) with five items on a Likert scale ranging between 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

The subjective assessment of factors that impact the life chances of young people revealed that it is essential for young people to provide themselves with financial resources. According to the respondents, the research results showed that the impact (influence) on life chances is primarily material well-being and a salary that meets the needs (see Table 4). The respondents also aimed to stress that individual, family or community-level factors have an impact on life chances, then communal or societal factors. In the opinion of the respondents, less critical are different geopolitical factors, e.g. the war in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic, or the geopolitical environment in general.

Table 4. Subjective attitudes what factors have an impact on life chances, $N = 1209$, %

No.	Factors that have an impact on life chances	M*	Sd.	%		
				Completely agree, agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Completely disagree, disagree
1.	Health condition in general	4.21	0.922	80.4	5.1	14.5
2.	Satisfying salary	4.19	0.951	79.9	5.9	14.2
3.	Psychological condition	4.14	0.939	78.2	5.5	16.3
4.	Material welfare	4.11	0.912	79.4	5.1	15.5
5.	Family and good family relations, family life	4.10	0.967	79.6	7.0	13.4
6.	Favourable social environment (good relations with parents, relatives and friends)	4.04	0.929	76.9	6.2	16.9
7.	Work and employment safety	4.04	0.877	78.0	5.0	17.0
8.	Equal opportunities and non-discrimination	3.80	1.015	66.0	9.0	25.0
9.	Political stability and environment safety	3.75	0.968	64.0	9.4	26.6

Table 4. (Continued)

No.	Factors that have an impact on life chances	M*	Sd.	%		
				Completely agree, agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Completely disagree, disagree
10.	Political freedom	3.72	0.965	63.0	9.2	27.8
11.	Community life	3.69	0.867	61.4	7.5	31.1
12.	Climate and geography	3.64	0.962	59.4	10.3	30.3
13.	Geopolitical environment	3.56	1.004	55.0	11.3	33.7
14.	Trust in government and political institutions	3.51	0.990	53.1	12.9	34.0
15.	War in Ukraine	3.42	1.094	49.6	15.1	35.3
16.	Parenthood	3.41	1.084	49.2	15.8	35.0
17.	COVID-19 pandemic	3.30	1.060	42.8	17.2	40.0

* M (average) with five items on a Likert scale ranging between 1 (completely disagree) and 5 (completely agree).

That research revealed that the health status in general and the psychological condition (formation of optimistic or pessimistic attitudes) were significant to the respondents. In addition, it is interesting to note that young people did not tend to emphasise political freedom or trust in the government and political institutions of the country.

CONCLUSIONS

The data of the empirical study confirm the theoretical assumptions of the study. Scientific literature analysis and quantitative research data allow concluding that the differentiation of young people's life chances depends on the age, socioeconomic status, and the social class of the parents when the respondent is 14–15 years old. One of the most essential results revealed by our analysis is related to the subjective insignificance of structural conditions (climate, war and COVID-19 pandemic). The study's results revealed that parents' education and social status influence the subjective attitude of young people towards life chances.

The results of this study indicate that parental social status and education are essential factors for youth life chances. Family socioeconomic background plays a vital role in youth educational and labour market outcomes. The research findings contribute to the social inequality and stratification by adding a perspective on youth life chances. The findings support previous studies (Munro 2019; Cho, Brand 2019; Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu, Passeron 1977) and the most recent studies, which emphasise the role of parents' education and family socioeconomic status on children's achievements (Gebel et al. 2022; Munro 2019; Cho, Brand 2019, etc.). Parents with higher social status, education, etc. have higher expectations of their children's achievements in education, occupation, and life chances.

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Gyvenimiškų galimybių diferenciacija Lietuvoje: subjektyvus 18–35 m. jaunimo grupės požiūris

Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas subjektyvus Lietuvos jaunimo (18–35 m. amžiaus) požiūris į gyvenimiškas galimybes. Pasitelkiant M. Weberio (1920) (cit. Grusky 2001) gyvenimiškų galimybių perspektyvą, analizuojami gyvenimiškų galimybių teoriniai aspektai bei pristatomi 2023 m. Lietuvoje atlikto jaunimo gyvenimiškų galimybių sociologinio tyrimo (anketinės apklausos) rezultatai. Remdamiesi mokslinės literatūros ir kiekybinio tyrimo duomenų analize, galime teigti, kad subjektyvus jaunimo požiūris į gyvenimiškas galimybes skiriasi priklausomai nuo amžiaus, lyties, užimtumo bei tėvų socioekonominio statuso, kai respondentui buvo 14–15 metų. Atliktas tyrimas atskleidė, kad nepalankiausiai savo gyvenimiškas galimybes vertina jaunimas, kuris šiuo metu nedirba ir nesimoko, arba save ir savo šeimą identifikuoja su žemiausiu socialiniu sluoksniu. Mokslinis tyrimas atliktas įgyvendinant Lietuvos mokslo tarybos finansuojamą mokslininkų grupių projektą „Lietuvos jaunimo gyvenimiškų galimybių diferenciacijos socioekonominiai veiksniai Lietuvoje“ (reg. Nr. S-MIP-22-42, sutarties data 2022-03-18).

Raktažodžiai: jaunimas, gyvenimiškos galimybės, subjektyvus požiūris