

The challenges of conducting a longitudinal youth monitoring survey in Gulf countries: UAE as example

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Abstract

The paper discusses the methodological issues of running the longitudinal survey of youth in the United Arab Emirates as an example of surveys in the Gulf region. The Monitoring of Emirati Youth: Socio-Economic Characteristics and Values is a unique source of information on millennial generation of current Emirati citizens. It is an annual panel survey of about 1600 sample size. The survey focuses on happiness and life satisfaction in relation to work, family and values, and uses the outcomes for the relevant social/public policy programs in UAE. The current paper presents the research design of the study and disclose the methodology under the context of rather closed traditional society. The research questions cover three areas of studies:

- 1) the transfer from university/school to job and career development: what positions the youth take, what problems they face, how the education affects their first job choice and future career;
- 2) values and beliefs, that are changing fast nowadays and their effects on personal achievements and their socio-economic status;
- 3) marriages, family values, family formation, fertility, family problems and divorces.

Finally, the project is seeking to answer – how much the mentioned three areas affect the subjective well-being of Emiratis Youth? What should be changed in the society for the better to have healthier and happier Youth?

Introduction

The recent massive expansion of tertiary education and continuous shifts in values, norms and practices in the different spheres of life lead to the following two challenges for any society in the world: 1) replacement of generations and 2) substitution of prime-age workers by young employees. These are very much interconnected issues.

On the one hand, the population of most countries, including Gulf region, has undergone the transition from traditional to secular-rational values (Inglehart 1997, Inglehart & Welzel 2010, Welzel 2013). This cultural transition not only changed individuals' vision but also influenced social, political and economic practices. As a result, institutions have turned to be more democratic and people-oriented, humans became more emancipated. The traditional values such as family preservation and childbearing took the back seat, leading to a decline in social relations and growing moral pressure on the new generations (Bartolini 2011). Individualistic values like career development and self-actualization came to the force for both men and women, causing the more competition in the labor market, the sphere which was historically male-dominant.

On the other hand, national and global economics faces severe problems with youth unemployment and substitution of prime-age workers by young employees. Firstly, the rates of youth unemployment have been increasing during the last decade (OECD 2014, 2015), which may be a sign of that young men and women do not have either an opportunity or a desire to join the labour force. Secondly, the misbalanced work-family life might cause problems with substantial human development; and the future well-being of young and adult generations.

The exploration of the trends in youth employment, their values and family attitudes in gender perspective is crucial, as young men and women will comprise future family units on one hand and future labor force of the country on the other hand. Despite the importance of the mentioned issue, not so many studies were introduced exploring the labour market of youth from a gender perspective in the world. There are almost no such regular academic-based studies with microdata available for the research in the Gulf countries and MENA region, including UAE.

The UAE government pays huge attention to the youth problems. They developed United Arab Emirates Youth Empowerment Strategy and established the Ministry of Youth in 2016. However, the topic of youth is under researched by the social science scholars in the region. This serves as an excellent motivation to establish such Monitoring of Emirati Youth in UAE and fill in the gap by providing the relevant information on regular basis.

The UAE society as other developed countries in the world is currently facing drastic social changes. Additionally, the huge number of working migrants in the country influence youth's

values, attitudes, and behavior. To eliminate social conflicts, have healthy, happy and developing nation, the government needs to trace these social changes, current needs and problems of the millennial generations. Monitoring of Emirati Youth (MEY) is one of the way for tracing the situation on regular basis and provide research-based up-to-date policy recommendations for better social and economic development of the country.

The MEY project is aimed at disclosing and analyzing the socio-economic characteristics and values of UAE youth and their effects on youth's subjective well-being. MEY is focused on three blocks of research questions:

- 1) **the university/school to job transition and further career development impact on the current youth's subjective well-being.** In this part of the research important questions will be addressed such as: what positions does the youth take after graduation? How much are they satisfied with the level of received qualifications and how much do they fit into their job needs? Do the young Emirati males and females have any problems with job match process and how long does it take them to obtain the desired jobs? How much the received profession affects their first job choice and their income? Do they need to get more training after school/university or receive further degree? How do they see their future career? Are there any gender differences in job search processes, wages and life satisfaction? How much are Emirati young women are willing to find good jobs after graduation? What do young Emirati males think about working women? How can social policies help the job matching process and contribute to the prosperous careers of Emirati Youth?
- 2) **values and beliefs, religion attitudes that are changing fast nowadays and their effects on personal achievements and their socio-economic status.** The second part of the project is dedicated to the investigation of the values and beliefs, attitudes to the family, career, gender equality and etc. among Emirati Youth. How much the changing values shape the career orientations and family creation? Do gender equality attitudes predict the further family-work balance? How much young are men and young women happy with more gender equality and why is it important? All these questions will be tackled in this part of research. What are the differences in gender attitudes among men and women in UAE?
- 3) **marriage, family preferences, family formation, child-birth planning, divorce attitudes and work-family balance.** The importance of the family defines subjective well-being, that is why it is crucial to know the Youth's family problems to improve their life satisfaction. Do young mothers manage to be happy with work-family balance? What do they need to have as many children as they want? What can be done to increase fertility

rates, that are constantly going down during last 20 years? What are the gender roles in both families and outside for young Emiratis and are there any changes? What policies and programs might be taken to avoid big number of divorces among young Emiratis?

The current paper presents the methodological challenges to answer the mentioned research questions of the longitudinal monitoring survey.

Literature review on youth studies and problems

The current literature review presents the overview of the existing methodological solutions for the data collection on youth by longitudinal surveys as well as discussion of the three-mentioned research areas.

The previous studies showed that initial individual experience on the labour market strongly determines the future career paths (Del Boca & Sauer 2009, Lyonette et al 2010, Cuesta & Carcedo 2014). That is why it is very important to trace the young generations for their economic, social, family, work and subjective well-being changes. Additionally, the importance of studying gender differences is determined by the current UAE vision 2021.

After finishing high school, college or university young women and men start searching for a job. During this search period, they are becoming the most vulnerable group in the labor market as they have no working experiences (Sherer 2005; Eichhorst et al. 2014), and almost no social capital for smooth job match. That increases the possibility to be entrapped in unsatisfactory initial job matches (Osterman 1995).

Difficulties faced by new Emirati entrants may be also caused by more general factors affecting all national workers on the labor market, such as high competition for the job places with highly skilled migrants. Another unfavorable macroeconomic condition like inefficient labor market institutions operating in the country (lack of correspondents between educational system and real employment sector, too strong social protection for the incumbent workers and the lack of impetus for firms to employ new-entrants etc.) might also affect the job search processes. To access the general factors affecting the situation of youth employment in a country one should pay attention on the ratio of young employees to prime-age workers, as well as the ratio of unemployed youth to unemployed adult population. Such indicators can explain the trends in youth's labor market integration and reflect hurdles faced by the new-entrants. Moreover in the situation of the growing population (and UAE population is tremendously growing every year) it is very important to trace and to study the young population problems, including unemployment as the jobs might become scarce and no full-time and part-time positions might be available for the newcomers.

If we look at the world statistics, we will see that the youth unemployment rates are alarming: the global youth unemployment rate has increased from 11.6% in 2007 to 13.1% in 2013 (OECD 2014). The UAE national data showed 10% of unemployed among people aged 15-24 for 2014. Moreover, the unemployment rate is higher for young women than for young men in most of the world countries and the UAE is not exclusion here. Young Emirati females suffer from unemployment almost twice more than young Emirati men. All these employment/unemployment processes are closely related to the social-economic status and family formation mechanisms of young generation, what in its turn defines their subjective well-being at the end.

Preliminary observation of the worldwide statistics shows that usually women are less likely than men to participate in the labor market in the most countries, which means that they are less likely to be employed or to look actively for a job. However, the employment rates of women vary depending on the region of the world: in low-income countries, the gender gap in labour force participation rates is approximately 10%, in lower-middle income countries – about 40%, in upper-middle income countries – 20% and in high-income countries is approximately 15%, (World Bank Statistics 2013). The participation rates of men and women in Gulf region, including UAE, are determined both by high GDP of the country and by cultural background of the countries. For example, Kuwait and UAE have higher share of female employment in the labor market than Saudi Arabia or Oman. But we don't have detailed information on what is going on in the young age female groups who are also entering the time for their motherhood? Can they easily combine work with family responsibilities? Are they protected by labour market legislation? Do they face difficulties with coming back to the labour market after child-birth interruption?

We ground the study on three theories for explaining the value change and gender differences in career paths. Let me start from the *gender segregation theory*, which addresses the issue of gender differences in behavior patterns in socio-economic sphere of life. This theory postulates that men and women have diverse skills, fundamentally different tastes and opposite desires to invest time and efforts into the career development. Consequently, male and female positions on the labor market vary significantly and tend to be opposite (Schultz 1990, Bussey & Bandura 1999, Grusky & Levanov 2008). Due to this theoretical framework gender differences in working practices do not depend on external factors such as institutions or socio-cultural factors such as values and norms but on the initial individual biological differences between men and women, which has its inevitable impact on the structure of the labor market.

Another theory we can apply to is the *gender theory*, which is inverse to the mentioned above segregation theory. It has its roots in the XX century when a definition of ‘gender identity’ was introduced to social sciences (Udry 1994, Haig 2004). The main idea of the *gender theory* is that different forms of femininity and masculinity are socially constructed, and modern people have more freedom to choose their own gendered roles in different facets than people have had several decades ago. The role of gender in the sphere of employment is changing as well. Firstly, not only female professionals (Mallon & Cohen 2001; Gold & Fraser 2002; Cabrera 2007 etc.) but also male professionals struggle to meet the demands of work and family (Clark 2015), and devote time to household activities rather than to career development. Secondly, the feminine nature of a woman is changing: “women of the generation Y turned to become achievers” (Terjeson et al. 2007), women of today if compared to men have even greater aspirations in terms of ones’ career development (OECD 2012). Thirdly, there are clear signs that male and female careers are beginning to converge (Terjeson et al. 2007).

And finally, the most important theory to explain the links between subjective well-being, career goals, achievements and social status is the *theory of post-materialism* developed by Ronald Inglehart in the 1970s, which goes in line with the gender theory. It suggests that the population all around the world have been undergoing the transition from traditional to secular-rational values (Inglehart 1997, Inglehart & Welzel 2010, Welzel 2013). This transition not only changes individual visions on the number of issues such as liberalism and egalitarianism; but also influences cultural, social, political and economic practices. As a result, people change their preferences towards individualistic aims such as career development and self-actualization. Moreover, within the framework of this theory gender equality issue is the key issue to focus on. Gender equality is not just a consequence of democratization and institutionalization; but a part of a broader cultural change, namely, the shift of values from traditional to secular-rational ones (Inglehart 1997, Welzel 2013), the shift to individual aims and practices.

This theory deals with *the influence of culture and history* on the structure of labour markets in different regions of the world. According to this paradigm, we can split countries into: 1) those where the idea of gender equality was historically developed through democratic or other institutes and spread of egalitarian norms, young men and women have similar positions on the labour market like in *Western developed countries*, where young people are more empowered, egalitarian and eager to achieve equality in all fields of life (Alesina et al. 2013, Alexander & Welzel 2010) 2) those countries where traditional values dominate young men and women have different positions on the labour market, like Gulf countries where religion and tradition have still huge impact on the way of life of the people.

The theory of post-materialism suggests that gender equality is the result of the institutional and value changes (Inglehart 1997, Welzel 2013). What we know is that on average young people are more empowered and egalitarian nowadays (Alesina et al. 2013, Alexander & Welzel 2010). But not so much was studied in the economic and social behavior change of young generations or Generation Y.

The term “Generation Y” (Gen Y) is used to describe the new behavior patterns of the cohort born between 1980s and 2000s (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008). The main distinguishing features of Gen Y are:

(1) Gen Y has been educated in an environment where they have been encouraged to pursue success regardless of gender or status and where there is an expectation of gender equality (Ng and Wiesner, 2007). For example, young women nowadays are more oriented at career development; they seek for fare rewards and success more than their mothers and grandmothers (Ng and Sears, 2010). Moreover, Gen Y females meet support from their partners to earn money and climb the career ladder. The dual careers become acceptable by both men and women. This marks a shift in thinking and practice from previous generations where it was more likely that women would experience career interruptions due to family responsibilities while men’s careers continued relatively unimpeded (Favero and Heath, 2012).

(2) Gen Y is likely to be employed under huge pressure with the potential negative spill-over effects for family roles. Family conflicts and challenges of how to manage dual careers are riding up (Sok et al., 2014). This growing pressure on new generations nowadays can finally lead to the decline of marriage life and decrease of subjective well-being and happiness for the world population (Bartolini 2011). At the same time the recent studies showed that Gen Y values autonomy, leisure, and work-life balance (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008; Twenge et al. 2010; Clarke 2015) and see work as less central to their lives when compared with Baby Boomers and Generation X (Dries et al 2008, Twenge 2010, Clarke 2015). Gen Y changed their work values and showed their negative attitudes towards highly pressured, long working hours thus they consider freedom as a core work value (Clarke 2015).

There are almost no publications on young generation in UAE, this fact speaks for the considerable potential contribution of the current research proposal to the ongoing literature debate and will let us compare the differences or similarities between the Western and Eastern cultures.

The current statistics review of the UAE official open sources showed that there are no regularly published indicators like employment and unemployment, professional positions, socio-economic and subjective well-being of youth. Even though there are few cross-sectional studies of youth

done by special requests like Youth and Entrepreneurship in UAE (Khalifa Fund for Enterprise Development, 2013), there is a big lack of open available data for research analysis on youth. Even though there is ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey started in 2008 and that runs survey annually for 16 MENA countries (including UAE) it does not fill the gap for the data and scientific research discussion. Unfortunately, its sample structure (only 300 respondents for UAE) does not allow to do the reliable distributions and even simple frequency analysis by social groups. The results are provided in a very general way for Gulf countries, without any dynamics. Moreover, the narrow questionnaire does not allow to answer the raised questions. Therefore, there is still a big need for the fundamental regular scientifically driven monitoring youth survey.

Research design of MEY

The methodological approach to answer the mentioned research questions is a survey based data analysis. Such methodology is widely applied in US (Boston Youth Survey, 2008 by Harvard; National Youth Survey by University of Michigan since 1976; Illinois Youth Survey by University of Illinois since 1993) in Australia (Annual Youth Survey in Australia 2016, Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth since 1995) and in Europe (Young Europeans by Eurobarometer since 1982; National Study of Youth and Religion by University of Notre Dame since 2001).

The research design of the survey is the annual representative panel survey of the Emirati youth aged between 18 and 29 years old, starting in 2017 and following them every year after. The sample will be annually enlarged by the new participants to minimize the deterioration of the panel in future. The survey is representative for the Emirates and all young groups by education level. The total sample will be not less than 1600 respondents, with increasing sample every year to replace the drop-outs of the survey and recover the panel.

The proposed study is aimed first at collecting new data for the work, family, values and subjective well-being of Emirati youth aged 18-29 years old. The survey is more explorative than explanatory. Never the less, preliminary literature review and statistics allow us to propose a list of hypotheses that will be tested.

1. We expect to find more difficulties for young Emirati women in job search than for young Emirati men; however, this tendency will change soon, as there is a big shift toward more educated women in the society.
2. We expect to disclose more difficulties in finding a new job in private sector for the graduate students than in public sector for both Emirati men and women. This hypothesis

reflects the misbalanced labor market in terms of jobs availability and proper education of Emirati.

3. The young generation of UAE can be defined as more career oriented group of society. More over the values for the development and self-achievements would be very important both for males and females.
4. The family formation is under deep transformation process in UAE. The age of first marriage for both men and women becomes higher, the number of children born per one woman becomes less and the rate of divorces is increasing. Under such conditions we expect the young Emiratis to share more freedom in family values and accept divorce more often.
5. We expect young families to face a number of new for society phenomena that might lead to divorces such as marriage loans, females better education, women income independency, low males' engagement into the household life, low males' contribution to the family.
6. The subjective well-being of the Emiratis youth will depend not only on income but also on their work achievements, family situation and personal health conditions. Values and gender attitudes will shape the work-family perceived balance which will be the driving force for the self-assessment of their life-satisfaction.

Questionnaire and survey instruments

The questionnaire was designed in accordance with the already existed US, Europe and Australian Youth Surveys but it was adjusted to the local needs, issues and cultural specifics. The questions on values were aligned with World Value Survey and European Value Study. That makes the MEY survey data comparable with the other similar surveys in the world and broaden the research perspective. At the same time the local specifics of the questions allows to meet the UAE social policy demands and concentrate on the country's needs.

The questionnaire consists of 93 questions organized in five blocks: 1) values and beliefs; 2) job and education; 3) life satisfaction and lifestyle; 4) marriage and socio-economic characteristics; 5) females' health and reproduction.

Values and beliefs questions are organized to measure, level of national pride, out-group and in-group trust, gender equality attitudes, justification of violence, justification and reasons for divorce; as well as the factors of successful marriage.

Job related questions allow to estimate the level of employment and unemployment among youth as well as to characterize the type of employment and the working ours, position level and economic sector, the length and reasons of unemployment, the ways of job search, job experience

and job satisfaction. Education questions include the level of education, the specialization, the quality of education and satisfaction with the training, education of parents and current studies.

Lifestyle questions are dedicated to the daily activities, healthy habits, social media usage, loneliness and life satisfaction questions.

Several questions are focused on the marriage experience including marriage payments and loans for weddings. Social status and economic status is also asked in this block of questions.

Finally, the questionnaire ends with the list of questions to females only on their health, pregnancies and possible difficulties after childbirth.

Methodology of analysis

At the first step, the descriptive statistics provided annually comprises a huge part of the annual report. The reports will be presented to the government and will serve as ground to work out policy briefs.

At the second step, more advanced analysis will be applied to prepare the research publications for journal articles and academics books. For these purposes the hypotheses will be tested by the appropriate regression analysis techniques like panel regression, probit regression, multinomial regression and etc. (in respect of the dependent variable nature).

The main dependent variables according to the research questions are subjective well-being (measured through the level of happiness and life satisfaction as well as loneliness indicators), employment status, marital status, probability to have a child or childbirth planning, wages, income group and more.

The list of independent variables is very wide and includes socio-economic characteristics, values and attitudes, family characteristics and personal characteristics

Methodological challenges and possible solutions

Age of respondents

The first challenge is to define the youth age. 15-24 or 18-29?

Sensitive questions

All sensitive questions should be excluded

Legalities and procedures

Ethical committee approval

Concluding remarks

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