

The Impact of Gender and Inequality Perception on Subjective Well-being—An Empirical Study Based on World Values Survey

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Abstract: Based on micro-data from the World Values Survey, this paper investigates the effects of gender and perceptions of gender inequality on subjective well-being using ordinal logistic regression, and tests the robustness of the findings using OLS regression and other methods. It is found that men have higher perceptions of gender inequality than women, and China has the highest perception of gender inequality compared to Japan, Germany and the USA. The regression results suggest that even though perceptions of gender inequality have a positive effect on subjective well-being, Chinese men's subjective well-being is still significantly lower than women, and this difference may be due to the social pressures and expectations faced by men. In a society with a low perception of gender equality, both men and women are victims.

1 Introduction

The history of feminism is the history of women's pursuit of "Legal equality, citizen equality and educational equality". According to the Fourth Survey on the Social Status of Chinese Women, the proportion of women in higher education has surpassed that of men, and they are becoming more and more involved in economic and social development. At the same time, however, a significant proportion of respondents still hold unequal gender perceptions. Nearly half of the men did not oppose or agree with the view that "men should be socially oriented and women should be family-oriented", and more than 30% of the respondents did not oppose the view that "wives should be submissive to their husbands at home[1]". Compared to the diverse development of feminism in Western countries, feminism in China is still in its formative stage, and there is still a long way to go.

It has been found that unequal gender perceptions have an impact on subjective well-being. Diener (2000) found that there is a gender difference between the degree of sexism and well-being, with lower levels of sexism associated with smaller gender differences in well-being at the national level[2]. Findings by Perry (2013) suggest that sexism increases the risk of low well-being and that gender perceptions inequality has a significant negative impact on African American women's well-being[3]. In existing domestic research, based on four surveys conducted by the World Values Study in China in 1990, 1995, 2001 and 2007, Li Lei (2017) et al. found that gender inequality perceptions negatively affected men's well-being and that social pressure from gender discrimination reduced men's subjective well-being[4]. Based on data from World Values 1981 to 2014, the findings of Huang Shaoan and

Guo Junyan (2019) showed that there was a significant negative effect of gender inequality perceptions on well-being, The more unequal an individual's gender concept is, the lower his subjective well-being will be. Also the findings of this study support the study by Li Lei et al in 2017, which concluded that there are gender differences in the effect of gender inequality perceptions on well-being, with men who hold gender inequality perceptions having lower levels of well-being[5].

Building on existing research, this study uses the latest seventh wave (2017-2022) of the World Values Survey to select survey data from four different countries in China (2018), Germany (2018), Japan (2019) and the United States (2017) to describe the differences in perceptions of gender inequality across the four countries. Furthermore, this study analyzes the impact of gender inequality on subjective well-being in Chinese society, as well as the extent of this impact varies across subgroups such as education, age and gender, through ordinal logical regression.

2 Literature review

2.1 Measurement and influencing factors of subjective well-being

In recent years, as well-being has increasingly become the focus of social psychology research, the measurement of well-being has made great strides. According to the differences in measurement indicators and definition methods, well-being can be roughly divided into objective well-being and subjective well-being[6]. Objective well-being measures people's well-being based on objective conditions, starting from the external environment, health status and socio-economic factors

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that affect the quality of life. Subjective well-being, on the other hand, places more emphasis on the importance of psychological factors and measures the level of well-being through respondents' descriptions and personal experiences[7]. Based on the study of the mechanisms underlying subjective well-being in a broad sense, two major research paradigms have emerged: subjective well-being and psychological well-being. Subjective well-being as a research paradigm focuses on people's satisfaction through material life, while psychological well-being focuses more on individual self-development and self-worth, emphasising the definition of well-being in terms of psychological satisfaction[8].

This study focuses on subjective well-being, which is a measure of well-being based on the subjective experience of the individual, and is the respondent's overall assessment of the quality of their life. While it is true that the subjective assessment of one's well-being cannot be separated from objective indicators such as economic level, education level and health status, this study focuses more on the respondents' own perceptions and evaluations of their well-being from a subjective perspective.

Regarding the factors influencing subjective well-being, according to previous studies, they can be divided into two parts: objective conditions and subjective psychology. Most of the objective factors affecting subjective well-being focus on socio-economic status, employment experience, human capital such as education level, and external environmental factors. For example, Peng Kaili and Yang Chen (2021) found that an increase in objective income level significantly contributed to farmers' subjective well-being[9]; Lei Xiankai (2022) et al. showed that non-farm employment experience had a positive impact on farmers' subjective well-being[10]; Liu Xiaoxi (2022) et al. pointed out that community aesthetics, natural environment and fitness environment had a positive impact on residents' subjective well-being[11]. Compared to the influence of objective conditions on subjective well-being, there are fewer studies that use psychological perceptions as independent variables, and the studies that have been conducted include the influence of self-efficacy, perceptions of fairness, and individual traits on subjective well-being. For example, Peng Liping (2022) pointed out that self-efficacy and identity play a mediating role between volunteering participation and subjective well-being[12]; Qu Sha and Liu Xiaobin (2022) confirmed that perceptions of fairness have a positive effect on subjective well-being, and there are gender differences in this effect, with women's perceptions of fairness having a greater impact on subjective well-being[13]. In addition, some personal traits also have an impact on subjective well-being[14].

In summary, studies on the factors influencing subjective well-being have been characterised by an emphasis on objective conditions rather than psychological factors, and few scholars have explored the relationship between individuals' gender perceptions and subjective well-being, which may be related to the

difficulty of measuring individuals' subjective factors. Based on the latest world values data from 2017 to 2022, this study analyses the impact of individuals' gender perceptions on their subjective well-being from a micro-psychological perspective. That is, do perceptions of gender inequality influence individuals' evaluations of their well-being? Under which factors does this influence differ?

2.2 The impact of gender inequality perceptions

Feminism has been brought to China by successive feminist movements in western countries. Scholars are increasingly concerned about the social constructiveness of gender inequality between men and women has stimulated research in the field of gender equality, in which the impact of gender inequality has received widespread attention.

In terms of educational attainment, Sadker (1995) have shown that teachers' classroom processes discriminate between boys and girls[15]; Li Kehan (2021) et al. have further shown that an increase in the socio-economic status of the father's generation reduces gender differences in the educational attainment of the offspring[16]. In the context of employment, there has been a significant amount of scholarly discussion on gender segregation in the labour market as a result of gender inequality perceptions. Tong Mei (2014) highlights that occupational gender segregation is an important indicator for measuring gender inequality[17]. Cheng Cheng (2015) et al. explain the gender gap in labour market earnings from the perspective of social capital, pointing out that female workers have lower returns to social capital than men[18]. In terms of political participation, Pan Zechuan and Xie Yan (2018) pointed out that there are gender differences in political participation awareness. Compared with men, women have a lower awareness of political participation[19].

As can be seen from the above, much of the research has focused on the impact of perceptions of gender inequality on educational attainment, employment and political participation, but less on its impact on individuals' experiences and perceptions of life, insufficient research in this field provides space for this study. In fact, as the two key variables in this study, perceptions of gender inequality and well-being, are both subjective psychological factors, making the issue of measuring and defining the variables particularly important. Gender equality refers to men and women having equal opportunities and being able to participate equally in social life, while gender inequality refers to the unequal opportunities and rights of men and women. Individuals who hold the concept of gender inequality tend to believe that men perform better in the political and economic spheres, as a manifestation of male superiority. Therefore, this study measures the extent to which individuals have a sense of male superiority in six areas: politics, education, leadership, right to work, income, value, as a reflection of their perception of gender inequality.

3 Theoretical model and hypothesis

Gender and subjective well-being

Are men happier, or are women happier? Research on gender differences in subjective well-being has yielded mixed findings.

Most overseas studies (Costa et al. 2001; Hansson et al. 2005; Smith and Reise 1998) point out that women have more negative emotions and lower well-being[20] [21] [22]. Similarly, Baltes et al. (1999) found that women tend to rate their subjective health lower than men, which is strongly associated with well-being[23]. Stevenson and Wolfers (2008) showed that objective measures of quality of life for American women have improved over the past 35 years, but their subjective well-being has tended to decline compared to men[24]. In contrast, studies have also shown that women have more positive emotions and higher life satisfaction[25]. Diener (1999) emphasises that for women, positive emotions are as easy to express as negative emotions and are not less important[26].

However, it is important to note that most studies on gender differences in subjective well-being have come from the US and Western European countries, with fewer relevant Chinese studies, and the findings do not match those of European and American studies. A community study by Liu Bin (2012) et al. showed that there were gender differences in the contagion of well-being, with well-being being more likely to be transmitted to women[27]. Li Lei (2017) et al. showed that women's well-being was significantly higher than men's in China, and that men's lower well-being may be due to higher social expectations[4]. A study by Huang Shaoan and Guo Junyan (2019) further illustrates that the perception of "male superiority" leads to lower well-being ratings for men[5].

In summary, regarding the effect of gender on subjective well-being, overseas studies are biased towards the conclusion that women's sense of well-being is low, while existing domestic studies are more likely to suggest that gender pressure on men leads to lower well-being compared to women. Given the inconsistency in the findings of the current academic research, this paper proposes two opposing hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1a. Men have significantly higher subjective well-being than women.

Hypothesis 1b. Men's subjective well-being is significantly lower than that of women.

3.1 Perceptions of gender inequality and subjective well-being

Most of the studies on gender inequality and subjective well-being have focused on factual studies rather than conceptual studies. In other words, most of the studies tend to analyze the impact of gender inequality on individual well-being through objective indicators, but less on the relationship between the perception of gender inequality and well-being. Regarding the former, the academic community has formed a more unified conclusion that the higher the level of gender inequality

in a country, the lower the subjective well-being of individuals will be[28]. As for the latter, there is no consensus on the findings. Qian Ge (2017) concluded that, controlling for variables such as country, gender and income, the stronger an individual's perception of gender equality, the lower his or her subjective well-being will be[29]. In contrast, domestic scholars such as Huang Shaoan (2019) showed that the higher an individual's perception of gender inequality, the lower their probability of achieving high-level well-being[5].

Based on this, this paper proposes two mutually exclusive hypotheses to test the impact of individual perceptions of gender inequality and subjective well-being.

Hypothesis 2a. The higher the individual's perception of gender inequality, the lower his or her subjective well-being will be.

Hypothesis 2b. The higher the individual's perception of gender inequality, the higher their subjective well-being will be.

4 Data and variables

4.1 Data

This paper uses the World Values Survey (WVS) database, which has so far conducted seven waves of surveys covering changes in people's values in over one hundred countries from 1981 to 2022[30]. The main part of this paper uses data from the 2018 World Values Survey for China to analyse the relationship between gender differences in subjective well-being, perceptions of gender inequality and subjective well-being in Chinese society by constructing an ordered logistic regression model using stata15.1. In addition, data from four countries, China (2018), the United States (2017), Germany (2018) and Japan (2017), were selected for a multi-country comparison of gender inequality perceptions, containing a total of 7411 valid samples to reflect the degree of equality and differences in gender perceptions in China.

4.2 Variables

4.2.1 Dependent variable

The dependent variable in this paper is subjective well-being, which is measured by a subjective question, "Taking all things together, would you say you are:", which gives four options, "very unhappy", "unhappy", "happy", "very happy" assigned a value of 1-4.

4.2.2 Independent variables

(1) Gender. Gender is a dichotomous variable, taking a value of 1 for females and 0 for males.

(2) Perception of gender inequality. This variable is measured through six dimensions: politics, education, leadership, right to work, income and values. Issues include political priority (Men make better political

leaders than women do), education priority (A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl), management priority (Men make better business executives than women do), value priority (Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay), work priority (Men should have more rights to a job than women) and income priority (If a woman earns more money than her husband, it's almost certain to cause problems) . Each question gave four options, "strongly disagree", "disagree", "agree", "strongly agree " assigned a value of 1-4.

Based on the factors influencing well-being in previous studies, age, years of education, income level, health status, number of children, household savings status in the past year, and subjective social status were selected as control variables in this study.

5 Data analysis and results

5.1 Descriptive statistics

5.1.1 Descriptive statistics of variables

4.2.3 Control variables

Table 1 Description of the variables used in the study.

Interval variables	Mean	SD	Max	Min	n
Gender	0.55	0.5	1	0	2909
Gender inequality perceptions_standard	0	1	4.07	-2.74	2909
Gender inequality perceptions	14.05	2.94	26	6	2909
Years of education	10.22	4.33	22	0	2909
Number of children	1.40	0.91	7	0	2881
Nominal variables	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	n	
Age				2909	
16-24	307	10.55	10.55		
25-34	507	17.43	27.98		
35-44	598	20.56	48.54		
45-54	676	23.24	71.78		
55-64	513	17.63	89.41		
≥65	308	10.59	100		
Income level				2909	
Low	1,078	37.06	37.06		
Medium	1,752	60.23	97.28		
High	79	2.72	100		
Health status				2909	
Very good	18	0.62	0.62		
Good	196	6.74	7.36		
Fair	925	31.80	39.15		
Poor	1,007	34.62	73.77		
Very poor	763	26.23	100		

Table 1 (continued) Description of the variables used in the study.

Nominal variables	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	n
Household savings (last year)				2909
Save money	977	33.59	33.59	
Just get by	1,303	44.79	78.38	
Spent some savings	404	13.89	92.27	
Spent savings and borrowed money	225	7.73	100	
Subjective social status				2909
Upper class	5	0.17	0.17	
Upper middle class	71	2.44	2.61	
Lower middle class	1,241	42.66	45.27	

Working class	1,043	35.85	81.13
Lower class	549	18.87	100

This paper mainly uses data from the WVS in China in 2018. After excluding the missing values of the main variables, there are 2881 valid samples for the variable "number of children" and 2909 valid samples for the other variables. In the independent variable, women accounted for 55% of the sample, slightly higher than men. The maximum value of gender inequality after standardisation was 4.07 and the minimum value was -2.74. The standard deviation of gender inequality before treatment was close to 3, indicating that people's

perceptions of gender inequality varied significantly. In addition, the control variables selected for the study included years of education, number of children, age, income level, health status, household savings status in the past year and subjective social status, with the specific categories and statistics shown in Table 1.

5.1.2 Gender differences in perceptions of gender inequality

Table 2 Statistics and t-test of gender inequality between men and women (N = 2909).

Gender	n	Mean	SD	Min	Max	P-value
Male	1319	0.077	1.001	-2.738	3.728	0.0002
Female	1590	-0.063	0.995	-2.738	4.068	(3.7687)

This paper uses standardised gender inequality perceptions to analyse the differences between men and women. In Table 2, the mean value of perceptions of gender inequality for women was -0.063, which was lower than that of men at 0.077, and according to the t-test, there was a significant difference between men and women in terms of perceptions of gender inequality, meaning that women had lower levels of gender inequality and were more inclined to support equal

gender perceptions. In terms of maximum values, the maximum value of gender inequality perceptions is higher among women than men, indicating that there are still those who hold the idea of "male superiority over women" among women.

5.1.3 Country differences in perceptions of gender inequality

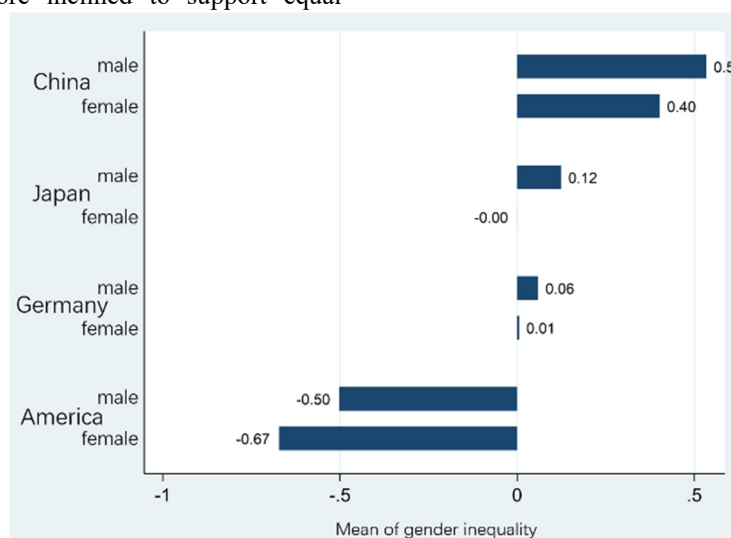


Fig.1 Bar chart of country differences in perceptions of gender inequality

Drawing a bar chart based on the standardised perceptions of gender inequality, it was found that among the four countries: China, Japan, Germany and the United States, China had the highest perceptions of gender inequality, followed by Japan and Germany, and the United States had the lowest perceptions of gender inequality. The finding may be related to the year in which the seventh wave of WVS was surveyed in different countries (2018 in China, 2019 in Japan). This differs from the findings of Huang Shaoan and Guo Junyan (2019) who found that gender inequality

perceptions were highest in Japan and second highest in China. Although there are significant differences in perceptions of gender inequality across countries, in all four countries, men have higher perceptions of gender inequality than women, suggesting that men hold more gender inequality than women and are bound by the idea of "male superiority" shown in Fig.1.

5.2 Impact of gender and inequality perceptions on subjective well-being

Table 3 Ordered logistic regression model of gender, inequality perceptions and subjective well-being.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Gender (F=1)	0.263*** (3.471)	0.200** (2.589)	0.277*** (3.466)	0.280*** (3.463)
Gender inequality perceptions	0.029* (2.224)	0.114*** (3.524)	0.113*** (3.338)	0.112*** (3.309)
Years of education		0.103* (2.424)	0.113* (2.559)	0.099* (2.218)
Number of children		0.09 (1.951)	0.06 (1.130)	0.059 (1.119)
Years of education_Gender inequality perceptions		-0.010** (-3.228)	-0.010*** (-3.328)	-0.010** (-3.230)
Age			-0.062 (-0.470)	-0.057 (-0.436)
Age squared			0.042* (2.332)	0.041* (2.275)
Health status			0.899*** (18.827)	0.855*** (17.713)
Income level			0.284*** (3.712)	-0.04 (-0.445)
Subjective social status				0.357*** (5.855)
Household savings (last year)				0.145** (3.025)
N	2909	2881	2881	2881
R ²	0.003	0.009	0.092	0.100

Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001, t-values in parentheses.

In Table 3, regarding the effect of gender and inequality perceptions on well-being, this paper uses a nested model from model 1 to model 4 by gradually adding control variables, considering the robustness of the regression results. Model 1 contains only the dependent variable well-being and two independent variables, gender and inequality perceptions. Models 2 to 4 include control variables step by step to test the robustness of the regression results, and model 4 is a full model with all control variables.

The effect of gender on subjective well-being was consistently positive and significant in models 1 to 4, indicating that women had higher subjective well-being than men. This result further supports the findings of Li Lei et al. (2017) and Huang Shaoran, Guo Junyan (2019), confirming hypothesis 1b that men have significantly lower subjective well-being than women. Regarding the effect of gender inequality perceptions on subjective well-being, gender inequality perceptions in Model 1 had a positive effect on subjective well-being at the 5% level, and this effect became more significant with the inclusion of control variables in the model. This result suggests that higher perceptions of gender inequality are

associated with higher subjective well-being, that is the stronger the individual's perceptions of gender equality, the less likely they are to have higher levels of well-being, which means that hypothesis 2b is confirmed.

In addition, the results for the other control variables were as follows: years of education, health status, subjective social status and family savings in the past year have significant positive effects on subjective well-being. What's more, age showed a U-shaped relationship with well-being, which means that as age increases, well-being decreases first and then increases. These findings are intuitive and consistent with previous research, so this paper will not focus on them. In addition, the interaction of education years and gender inequality perceptions is consistently and significantly negative, although the coefficient is small, still suggesting that compared with the uneducated respondents, longer years of education inhibit the positive effect of gender inequality perceptions on subjective well-being.

Robustness test of regression results

In research on well-being, life satisfaction is often used as a reference indicator instead of well-being[31].

In the World Values Survey, life satisfaction is measured by asking respondents "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?", with answers ranging from 1 to 10 indicating the least satisfied to the most satisfied level. Referring to the robustness test of Li Lei (2017) et al, in this paper, life satisfaction was used as a proxy for well-being by first conducting OLS regressions on life satisfaction, while further dividing life satisfaction into four categories and conducting ordered logistic regressions to compare the differences between the OLS and ordered logistic regression results with life satisfaction as the dependent variable and the regression results with well-being as the dependent variable (the results are not in the text presented and can be obtained by performing the do file). The results show that the former is generally unchanged from the latter, both in terms of the positive and negative regression coefficients and the degree of significance, and this result helps to confirm the robustness of the paper's findings.

6 Conclusion and Discussion

This paper uses data from the Wave 7 (2017-2022) of World Values Survey to compare the national differences and gender differences of gender inequality through stata15.1 analysis, and uses the survey sample of WVS in China in 2018 to conduct an ordinal logical regression to analyze the impact of gender and inequality perceptions on subjective well-being. The findings of the study are as follows.

Firstly, there are differences in perceptions of gender inequality by gender and country. In terms of gender differences in perceptions of inequality, men's perceptions of gender inequality are higher than women's in different countries, and this result is highly significant in China. Studies have shown that higher levels of gender inequality not only undermine women's rights, but also force men to face higher social expectations and pressures, thus reducing their subjective well-being[5]. At the same time, some women still hold gender inequalities and suffer from the idea that men are inferior to women. In terms of country differences in perceptions of inequality, China has the highest perceptions of gender inequality, followed by Japan and Germany, and the United States has the lowest perceptions of gender inequality. The results show that Chinese society still has a long way to go in fostering gender equality. However, perceptions of gender inequality do not change spontaneously. In order to cultivate and improve the concept of gender equality, it is not only necessary to awaken women's awareness of equality, but also to improve the concept of gender equality in society as a whole, especially among men, through education and cultural environment. This is because an equal gender perspective will not only benefit women, but also men.

Second, in Chinese society, men's subjective well-being is significantly lower than that of women. This result is consistent with related studies analysing the six waves (1981-2014) of world values data, suggesting that this finding has a high degree of stability. Why are

men, who are dominant in all aspects, instead more unhappy? The higher the individual's perceptions of gender inequality, the higher the subjective well-being will be, but why are more men who hold more gender inequality less likely to be happy? It is worth considering this paradox. Some studies have shown that men's lower well-being ratings are due to higher social pressure and workload, especially for men who hold gender inequalities and are bound by "masculinity", where discrimination against women and social expectations prevent men from experiencing well-being[4]. However, this study attempted to include the interaction of gender and inequality perceptions in the regression model, although the coefficient for men ($\beta=-0.029$) suggests that men with gender inequality are less likely to experience higher levels of well-being, the results were not significant ($p=0.29$). Therefore, the above results are not included in the text. Although gender differences in the effect of gender inequality on well-being could not be demonstrated, the findings of previous studies and the analysis in this paper have shown that both men and women are victims in a society with low gender equality perceptions.

Third, individuals' perceptions of gender inequality have a significant positive effect on subjective well-being. Conversely, in a society with a strong perception of gender inequality, the stronger an individual's perception of gender equality is, the lower his or her subjective well-being will be. This finding is not difficult to understand. In fact, previous research has shown that the higher the level of gender inequality in a country, the lower the subjective well-being of individuals will be. In terms of perceptions, the more individuals in a society hold gender equality perceptions that are ahead of their social environment, the less likely they are to be happy, while the more individuals hold gender inequality perceptions, the more likely they are to have higher levels of well-being.

It is worth noting that the study found that the positive effect of gender inequality perceptions on subjective well-being was weaker the longer the years of education. This result suggests that years of education play a moderating effect in the effect of gender inequality perceptions on subjective well-being. This paper suggests that the reason for this may be that the longer an individual has received education, the more likely his new ideas and thoughts are to conflict with the original concept of gender inequality, thus weakening their positive impact on subjective well-being. Due to the focus and data limitations of the study, this finding could not be explored further in this paper, and subsequent research could consider this aspect for more in-depth study.

Due to the characteristics of the data and the limitations of the author's ability, this study has many shortcomings. First, the measurement of the dependent variables in the study is more than simple, so the follow-up study can consider refining the measurement indicators of subjective well-being. Second, the study only uses cross-sectional data from the World Values Survey in China in 2018, which cannot be compared on a

time series, and the follow-up study can be further expanded in terms of the breadth of time and the width of countries. Thirdly, due to the limitations of the data, the study uses more nominal variables than interval variables, which may affect the regression results to a certain extent, and the robustness of the findings needs to be further tested.

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