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Childhood antecedents of adult place satisfaction in 22 countries

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We examine how childhood predictors—including retrospectively reported familial relationships, socioeconomic status, health, and religious activities—potentially influence satisfaction with the area or city where one lives (i.e., place satisfaction) in adulthood. Using data from the Global Flourishing Study (*N* = 202,898) across 22 countries, we conduct a random effects meta-analysis to understand the probable long-term impact of early-life experiences on adult place satisfaction. Our findings reveal that strong relationships with parents in childhood were associated with a slight increase in the likelihood of place satisfaction, while parental divorce and being raised by a single, never-married parent slightly decreased satisfaction. Financial stability in childhood is associated with a modest increase in the likelihood of adult place satisfaction, whereas financial hardship slightly lowers it. Adverse childhood experiences (e.g., physical or sexual abuse, feeling like an outsider) are associated with a decreased likelihood of adult place satisfaction, potentially suggesting lasting effects of early social disruptions. Health during childhood also plays a role—those who rated their childhood health as excellent are more likely to report higher satisfaction with their environment later in life. Contrary to some expectations, regular religious service attendance in childhood is associated with a small but positive increase in place satisfaction. These associations varied substantially across countries, reflecting both global trends and country-specific nuances. For example, a strong maternal relationship boosted satisfaction by 10% in Germany and Japan but was negligible in Sweden. A good paternal relationship increased satisfaction in Brazil and Japan but slightly decreased it in Australia. Growing up in financial comfort generally increased the likelihood of place satisfaction, with the strongest effect observed in Nigeria (9% increase), whereas in South Africa, it was associated with a slight 2% decrease. Financial difficulty reduced the likelihood of place satisfaction by 18% in Hong Kong and 15% in South Africa, while in Australia, it showed a negligible 1% increase. Parental marital status showed mixed results—divorce generally reduced satisfaction but increased it in Japan by 8%. Losing a parent increased the likelihood of place satisfaction in Japan and Argentina but had little effect elsewhere. Childhood adversity consistently lowered satisfaction, with the strongest effect for abuse in Hong Kong (19%) and feeling like an outsider in the U.S. (13%). Religious attendance mostly increased satisfaction (e.g., Poland 10%) but had the opposite effect in South Africa (10%). Sensitivity analyses using E-values indicated some robustness to potential unmeasured confounding, lending additional credibility to the observed relationships. These findings highlight the enduring influence of childhood experiences on how people perceive their living environments in adulthood, with notable cross-national variations that suggest the need for a context-sensitive approach to studying the conditions of place satisfaction.

Keywords Place satisfaction, Community satisfaction, Childhood predictors, City satisfaction, Cross-cultural, Flourishing, Global flourishing study

Places, by their very nature, are dynamic spaces that shape and are shaped by the individuals who inhabit them[1,2]. The connection between individual experiences and the relative attainment of a good life or flourishing in significant places is central to understanding place satisfaction, which, when viewed through the capabilities framework[3,4], is defined by an individual's contentment with their surroundings insofar as these environments may influence their ability to lead a fulfilling life[5]. For example, such contentment may be due to one's spiritual connection to a meaningful place[6,7], love for a place[8], or even their attachment to place[9,10]. This perspective of

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place satisfaction shifts the focus towards examining how significant places contribute to or detract from human flourishing by influencing the range and quality of opportunities available to residents for achieving personal and collective goals. Research has shown that satisfaction with one's place of abode correlates with improved health and well-being outcomes[1], pointing to the urban environment as an important contributor to overall life satisfaction[11,12].

While much of the research on place satisfaction has focused on contemporary environmental factors, life course theory suggests that attitudes toward place are not formed in isolation but develop over time through accumulated experiences[13]. This perspective posits that early-life conditions and transitions—such as childhood stability, family socio-economic status, residential mobility, and exposure to different urban or rural environments—have enduring effects on adult satisfaction with place. This association highlights the importance of intervening in early life experiences to potentially change how they experience satisfaction in the places they live when in adulthood. However, a critical gap exists in our understanding of the factors that influence city satisfaction from a life course perspective. While the impact of current place features and policies on residents' satisfaction has been well-documented[1,2,11,14,15], less attention has been given to the formative role of early-life experiences, despite life course theory emphasizing that key developmental stages lay the foundation for long-term attitudes, behaviors, and well-being[13,16].

Understanding the antecedents of place satisfaction from a life-course perspective (e.g., moving from one area/city to another between childhood and adulthood) can provide valuable insights into how early-life experiences contribute to the formation of attitudes towards place[17]. For instance, early residential mobility may cultivate adaptability in some individuals but foster a sense of displacement in others[2] Likewise, growing up in neighborhoods with high social cohesion may lead to stronger place satisfaction, while childhood exposure to economic deprivation or environmental instability may shape more critical or pessimistic evaluations of future living environments. It also holds the potential to inform policies aimed at enhancing spatial well-being[1], in addition to place satisfaction, across the lifespan.

Thus, exploring the childhood predictors of place satisfaction addresses this important gap in urban studies and psychology, offering a novel lens through which to view the complex relationship between individuals and their urban environments. We apply a life course framework by asking: How do early-life experiences, personal attributes, and familial or social circumstances shape an individual's later satisfaction with the environment they live in? Furthermore, do these associations vary across different national contexts, reflecting structural and cross-cultural differences in how place attachment and satisfaction are formed? Life course theory provides a robust framework for answering these questions, emphasizing that individual trajectories and early-life experiences within a particular socio-historical contexts shape long-term perceptions of place[13,16]. The timing of key life transitions—such as moving, experiencing economic hardship, or growing up in an urban versus rural setting—can have differential effects depending on when and where they occur[18–20]. It also matters for how individuals develop attachments to place and navigate their environments over time[2]. Applying this lens to place, we examine how childhood experiences influence adult place satisfaction, considering both direct effects and the ways social and physical environments interact across developmental stages[1]. This perspective not only helps explain variations in place satisfaction across different national contexts but also highlights potential avenues for urban planning and social policy interventions that could support positive place experiences from an early age."

Research suggests that early-life experiences with nature influence adult attitudes towards the environment[16]. Likewise, childhood socio-economic status and residential stability influence place attachment, mobility, and satisfaction in adulthood[21–23]. Individuals raised in stable, supportive family structures may develop stronger community ties and social networks[24,25], which contribute to greater place satisfaction. In contrast, those who experience economic hardship or familial instability may struggle to establish these connections[26], potentially leading to lower satisfaction with their living environments. Early religious involvement and positive parental relationships can serve as proxy for broader community engagement and social belonging[27], which can substantially affect how individuals engage with their environment. For instance, a person who grew up attending religious services might find greater satisfaction in places where the availability of various religious networks aligns with their early experiences and values[24] or might just be more inclined to be satisfied with the place in which they live because they have been exposed to religious values of gratitude[28]. This contrasts with places or areas that may offer fewer such communities, and points to the importance of religious diversity in shaping place satisfaction. The sense of community and social support found within these religious groups may mirror the positive associations formed in childhood, thereby enhancing satisfaction with those places[29]. Hence, the capacity of one's environment to cater to diverse religious needs plays a critical role in fulfilling the desires of those with a religious upbringing, which may sustain their overall contentment with place.

Furthermore, childhood experiences of abuse or feeling like an outsider can shape one's perception of anonymity and social interactions within place[24,29]. Such individuals might either appreciate the anonymity that places like cities or rural areas offer, allowing them to rebuild their identity, or they might find this anonymity to exacerbate feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction[30]. The impact of early exposure to nature or green spaces during childhood has been documented to foster a lifelong appreciation for environmental quality (e.g., green spaces, air quality)[31,32], which in turn influences satisfaction with environments that prioritize or lack these elements. Additionally, the economic conditions one grows up in can set expectations for how satisfied one is to the place they live[18]; for example, individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds might either see cities as landscapes of opportunity or become more acutely aware of spatial inequalities, thus affecting their level of satisfaction. Immigration status and race/ethnicity also play critical roles in shaping place satisfaction[19,14,20]. Immigrants and ethnic minorities might evaluate places through the lens of inclusivity and diversity, where environments that offer a sense of belonging and representation can lead to higher levels of satisfaction.

The life course model provides a framework for understanding place satisfaction as a multifaceted outcome shaped by a mix of childhood experiences[13,33]. Each factor—be it family dynamics, socio-economic status, or

early socialization practices—contributes to the foundation upon which individuals build their perceptions and interactions with spaces[34], which may inadvertently shape their overall satisfaction with them. While satisfaction with one's place of living is shaped by local and national characteristics, a life course perspective highlights the importance of examining how individual development is shaped by both personal experiences and broader socio-historical contexts, meaning that the same childhood conditions may have different long-term effects depending on where and when they occur[13] For example, in welfare-oriented societies, such as those in Scandinavia, childhood financial hardship may have a weaker association with lower place satisfaction due to strong social security or safety nets that buffer against long-term disadvantage. In contrast, in countries with minimal welfare support (e.g., parts of the Global South), economic hardship in childhood may lead to persistent instability, reducing long-term attachment to place[2,35]. Most existing studies on place satisfaction focus on specific locations[1,2,11,14,15], generating valuable but, by design, context-bound evidence that limits cross-national generalizability. By contrast, a global, "cross-spatial" approach allows for a more comparative lens, revealing how childhood conditions—such as socio-economic stability, family structure, and social integration—affect long-term place satisfaction in different national settings. While place characteristics remain important, the challenge lies in accounting for the different cultural and national environments that shape these relationships. A life course framework helps bridge this gap by situating individual place perceptions within both personal developmental trajectories and larger societal structures, offering a more global and comprehensive understanding of how people evaluate their living environments across time and space. Therefore, this study conducts cross-national analyses to specifically examine the associations between a broad range of childhood experiences and adult satisfaction with their current place of living across different international contexts, addressing this gap. This study takes a step toward strengthening our understanding of the long-term effects of childhood experiences on place satisfaction. It not only broadens the scope of life course theory by applying it to the context of urban-rural studies and environmental psychology but also introduces a novel set of predictors into the discourse on place satisfaction. These contributions have the potential to inform urban policy and planning, shaping the development of places that can better promote the flourishing of their residents.

Drawing on the theoretical framework of life course theory, which posits that early life experiences have long-term effects on later life outcomes[13], our study is structured around three primary research questions aimed at understanding the tethered associations between perceived childhood experiences and adult self-rated place satisfaction. First, we aim to investigate how different facets of a child's upbringing—ranging from familial relationships to socio-economic conditions—serve as predictors of place satisfaction in adulthood. This exploration seeks to reveal the different ways in which perceived early life experiences influence individuals' perceptions and satisfactions with their environments. Second, our research intends to examine the variability of these associations across different national contexts, thereby understanding the influence of cultural, economic, and societal factors in shaping these early-life experiences and their impact on adult satisfaction with their environment. The third research question addresses the robustness of the observed associations against potential unmeasured confounding factors, employing E-values as a methodological tool to assess the strength of evidence supporting our findings[36]. Through these focused inquiries, we hypothesize that childhood predictors will exhibit meaningful associations with perceived place satisfaction in adulthood. Moreover, we anticipate that the strength of these associations will vary across countries, reflecting the diverse capabilities and contexts (e.g., sociocultural, economic, health) that characterize different countries. Lastly, we expect that our observed associations will demonstrate robustness against potential unmeasured confounding[37]. The use of a large, diverse, and international dataset enhances the generalizability of the findings.

Methods

The description of the methods below has been adapted from VanderWeele et al.[38]. Further methodological detail is available elsewhere[39–44].

Population

The Global Flourishing Study (GFS) is a study of 202,898 participants from 22 geographically and culturally diverse countries, with nationally representative sampling within each country, concerning the distribution of determinants of well-being. Wave 1 of the data included the following countries and territories: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Egypt, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania, Türkiye, United Kingdom, and the United States. The countries were selected to (a) maximize coverage of the world's population, (b) ensure geographic, cultural, and religious diversity, and (c) prioritize feasibility and existing data collection infrastructure. Data collection was carried out by Gallup Inc. Data for Wave 1 were collected principally during 2023, with some countries beginning data collection in 2022 and exact dates varying by country[45]. Four additional waves of panel data on the participants will be collected annually from 2024 to 2027. The precise sampling design to ensure nationally representative samples varied by country and further details are available in Ritter et al.[45]. Survey items included aspects of well-being such as happiness, health, meaning, character, relationships, and financial stability[46], along with other demographic, social, economic, political, religious, personality, childhood, community, health, and well-being variables. The data are publicly available through the Center for Open Science (https://www.cos.io/gfs). During the translation process, Gallup adhered to the TRAPD model (translation, review, adjudication, pretesting, and documentation) for cross-cultural survey research (*ccsg.isr.umich.edu/chapters/translation/overview*). Further details about methodology and survey development are documented in the GFS Questionnaire Development Report[39], GFS Methodology[45], and GFS Translations documents[40].

Measures

Candidate childhood predictors

We assessed several predictors at baseline, organized into specific categories: demographic, socioeconomic, family dynamics and relationships, health and well-being, and religious and spiritual predictors. For additional details on the measures, see the codebook (https://osf.io/y3t6m) or Crabtree et al.[39].

Demographic predictors

Age was classified into groups: 18–24, 25–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–79, and 80+. Participants were asked, "What is your age? Please enter your age below." Gender was assessed with the question, "What is your gender?" with response options being Male, Female, or Other. Immigration status was determined by asking, "Were you born in this country, or not?" with response options of Yes or No. Racial/ethnic identity was assessed in some countries with response categories varying by country.

Socioeconomic predictors

Subjective financial status during childhood was assessed with the question, "Which one of these phrases comes closest to your own feelings about your family's household income when you were growing up, such as when YOU were around 12 years old?" The response options included Lived comfortably, Got by, Found it difficult, and Found it very difficult.

Family dynamics and relationship predictors

Parent marital status and family structure during childhood were assessed by asking, "Were your parents married to each other when YOU were around 12 years old?" with response options being Married, Divorced, Never married, or One or both had died. Relationships with parents were assessed with questions such as, "Please think about your relationship with your mother when you were growing up. In general, would you say that relationship was…," with response options of Very good, Somewhat good, Somewhat bad, or Very bad. Responses were dichotomized into Very/Somewhat good versus Very/Somewhat bad. An analogous question assessed the relationship with the father. For respondents without a mother or father due to death or absence, "Does not apply" was treated as a dichotomous control variable. Additionally, feelings of being an outsider in the family were gauged with, "When you were growing up, did you feel like an outsider in your family?" with Yes or No as response options. Experiences of abuse were measured by asking, "Were you ever physically or sexually abused when you were growing up?" with Yes or No responses.

Self-rated health predictor

Self-rated health during childhood was assessed by asking, "In general, how was your health when you were growing up?" with response options of Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, or Poor.

Religious and spiritual predictors

Religious service attendance at age 12 was measured with the question, "How often did YOU attend religious services or worship at a temple, mosque, shrine, church, or other religious building when YOU were around 12 years old?" Responses included At least once/week, One-to-three times/month, Less than once/month, or Never. Childhood religious tradition/affiliation included categories such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Sikhism, Baha'i, Jainism, Shinto, Taoism, Confucianism, Primal/Animist/Folk religion, Spiritism, African-Derived, some other religion, or no religion/atheist/agnostic, with precise categories varying by country.

Outcome variable

Place satisfaction

Our place satisfaction measure comes from the following question: "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the city or area where you live?" Respondents could answer satisfied, dissatisfied, unsure, or refused to answer. This variable was dichotomized as satisfied (1) vs. dissatisfied or unsure (0).

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics for the observed sample, weighted to be nationally representative within country, were estimated for each childhood demographic category. A weighted modified Poisson regression model with complex survey adjusted standard errors was fit within each country for place satisfaction in all of the aforementioned childhood predictor variables simultaneously. In the primary analyses, random effects meta-analyses of the regression coefficients[47,48] along with confidence intervals, estimate proportions of effects across countries with effect sizes larger than 1.1 and smaller than 0.9, and I^2 for evidence concerning variation within a given demographic category across countries[49]. If the Relative Risk (RR) is less than 1, it means that the factor is associated with a lower likelihood of the outcome relative to the reference group. Forest plots of estimates are available in the online supplement. Religious affiliation/tradition and race/ethnicity were used within country as control variables, when available, but these coefficients themselves were not included in the meta-analyses since categories/responses varied by country. All meta-analyses were conducted in R[50] using the metafor package[51]. Within each country, a global test of association of each childhood predictor variable group with outcome was conducted, and a pooled p-value[52] across countries reported concerning evidence for association within any country. Bonferroni corrected p-value thresholds are provided based on the number of childhood demographic variables[53,54]. For each childhood predictor, we calculated E-values to evaluate the sensitivity of results to unmeasured confounding. An E-value is the minimum strength of the association an unmeasured confounder must have with both the outcome and the predictor, above and beyond all measured covariates, for an unmeasured confounder to explain away an association[36]. As a supplementary analysis, population weighted

meta-analyses of the regression coefficients were estimated. All analyses were pre-registered with COS prior to data access, with only slight subsequent modification in the regression analyses due to multicollinearity (https://osf.io/teu49); all code to reproduce analyses are openly available in an online repository[43].

Missing data

Missing data on all variables was imputed using multivariate imputation by chained equations, and five imputed datasets were used[45,55–58]. To account for variation in the assessment of certain variables across countries (e.g., religious affiliation/tradition and race/ethnicity), the imputation process was conducted separately in each country. This within-country imputation approach ensured that the imputation models accurately reflected country-specific contexts and assessment methods. Sampling weights were added into the imputation models to adjust for variable-specific missingness potentially linked to the likelihood of study inclusion.

Accounting for complex sampling design

The GFS used different sampling schemes across countries based on availability of existing panels and recruitment needs[45]. All analyses accounted for the complex survey design components by including weights, primary sampling units, and strata. Additional methodological detail, including accounting for the complex sampling design, is provided elsewhere[42].

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 provides the nationally representative childhood descriptive statistics for the observed sample ($N = 202{,}898$). The majority of respondents reported having a very good relationship with their mother (63%) and father (53%). Most respondents' parents were married (75%) and more than two-thirds of respondents either lived comfortably (35%) or got by (41%) during their childhood. Abuse was reported by 14% of respondents, while 14% felt like an outsider growing up. Health was generally positive, with 64% rating it as very good or excellent. Most respondents were born in their country of residence (94%), and 41% attended religious services at least weekly at age 12. The sample had an approximately even split across males (49%) and females (51%).

Meta-analysis results

As shown in Table 2, a strong relationship with the mother (RR = 1.04, 95% CI: 1.02,1.06, $I^2 = 21.2$) and father (RR = 1.04, 95% CI: 1.02, 1.05, $I^2 = 46.0$) during childhood was associated with a 4% increased likelihood of place satisfaction. Compared to those whose parents were married, parental divorce (RR = 0.98, 95% CI: 0.97, 1.00, $I^2 = 29.7$) and growing up with single, never-married parents (RR = 0.99, 95% CI: 0.97, 1.01, $I^2 = 64.4$) slightly decreased the likelihood of adult place satisfaction, while individuals who lost one or both parents reported a slightly higher likelihood of place satisfaction (RR = 1.02, 95% CI: 1.00, 1.03, $I^2 = 40.9$).

Childhood financial conditions showed a nuanced impact on place satisfaction. Respondents who lived comfortably (RR = 1.02, 95% CI: 1.01, 1.03, $I^2 = 71.3$) reported slightly higher satisfaction, while those who struggled financially had lower satisfaction (RR = 0.97, 95% CI: 0.96, 0.98, $I^2 = 63.9$). Those who faced severe financial difficulties exhibited an even greater decrease in satisfaction (RR = 0.95, 95% CI: 0.93, 0.96, $I^2 = 23.7$).

Financial difficulties during childhood for those who lived comfortably (vs. Got by) reported a 2% increased likelihood of place satisfaction (RR = 1.02, 95% CI: 1.01, 1.03, $I^2 = 71.3$), whereas those who faced financial hardship (i.e., found it difficult) were 3% less likely to report satisfaction with their living environment as adults (RR = 0.97, 95% CI: 0.96, 0.98, $I^2 = 63.9$). Those who faced severe financial difficulties (i.e., found it very difficult) exhibited an even greater decrease in place satisfaction (RR = 0.95, 95% CI: 0.93, 0.96, $I^2 = 23.7$).

Adverse physical or sexual experiences of abuse (vs. No abuse; RR = 0.94, 95% CI: 0.92, 0.96, $I^2 = 70.9$) and feeling like an outsider (vs. Not an outsider; RR = 0.95, 95% CI: 0.93, 0.97, $I^2 = 72.7$) were associated with a 6% and 5% decreased likelihood of adult place satisfaction, respectively. Childhood health also played a role, with excellent self-rated health (vs. good) associated with a 3% increased likelihood of adult place satisfaction (RR = 1.03, 95% CI: 1.01, 1.05, $I^2 = 78.1$), while poor health had a weaker association (RR = 0.97, 95% CI: 0.93, 1.02, $I^2 = 75.1$).

Religious service attendance in childhood was associated with a marginal increase (2%) in adult place satisfaction. Those who attended at least weekly (RR = 1.02, 95% CI: 1.00, 1.04, $I^2 = 67.7$) or monthly (RR = 1.02, 95% CI: 1.00, 1.04, $I^2 = 66.1$) were slightly more likely to be satisfied with their place or city of residence. Individuals born in another country showed a slight 1% increase in place satisfaction compared to those born in their country of residence (RR = 1.01, 95% CI: 0.98, 1.04, $I^2 = 68.6$).

With regard to year of birth, older cohorts had higher place satisfaction, particularly those born between 1943 and 1953 had the highest reported satisfaction (RR = 1.12, 95% CI: 1.08, 1.17, $I^2 = 86.1$), while those born before 1943 (80 + years) had substantially lower satisfaction (RR = 0.57, 95% CI: 0.14, 2.38, $I^2 = 100.0$), though this could be due to the sample size (e.g., 80 + group were just 2% of the total sample). Women (compared to Men) exhibited a small but slightly higher increase (3%) in place satisfaction (RR = 1.03, 95% CI: 1.02, 1.04, $I^2 = 86.0$). In contrast, individuals identifying as "Other" had a substantially lower (78%) likelihood of place satisfaction (RR = 0.22, 95% CI: 0.03, 1.68, $I^2 = 100.0$), though this is highly uncertain given small sample sizes (0.3% of total sample) and considerable variability in responses.

Forest plots

See Figs. 1–27.

Characteristic	*N* = 202,898[1]
City satisfaction	
Satisfied	151,321 (75%)
Dissatisfied	31,758 (16%)
Unsure	18,919 (9.3%)
(Missing)	900 (0.4%)
Relationship with mother	
Very good	127,836 (63%)
Somewhat good	52,439 (26%)
Somewhat bad	11,060 (5.5%)
Very bad	4,642 (2.3%)
Does not apply	5,965 (2.9%)
(Missing)	956 (0.5%)
Relationship with father	
Very good	107,742 (53%)
Somewhat good	55,714 (27%)
Somewhat bad	15,807 (7.8%)
Very bad	8,278 (4.1%)
Does not apply	13,985 (6.9%)
(Missing)	1,372 (0.7%)
Parent marital status	
Parents married	152,001 (75%)
Divorced	17,726 (8.7%)
Parents were never married	15,534 (7.7%)
One or both parents had died	7,794 (3.8%)
(Missing)	9,843 (4.9%)
Subjective financial status of family growing up	
Lived comfortably	70,861 (35%)
Got by	82,905 (41%)
Found it difficult	35,852 (18%)
Found it very difficult	12,606 (6.2%)
(Missing)	674 (0.3%)
Abuse	
Yes	29,139 (14%)
No	167,279 (82%)
(Missing)	6,479 (3.2%)
Outsider growing up	
Yes	28,732 (14%)
No	170,577 (84%)
(Missing)	3,589 (1.8%)
Self-rated health growing up	
Excellent	67,121 (33%)
Very good	63,086 (31%)
Good	47,378 (23%)
Fair	19,877 (9.8%)
Poor	4,906 (2.4%)
(Missing)	530 (0.3%)
Immigration status	
Born in this country	190,998 (94%)
Born in another country	9,791 (4.8%)
(Missing)	2,110 (1.0%)
Age 12 religious service attendance	
At least 1/week	83,237 (41%)
1–3/month	33,308 (16%)
< 1/month	36,928 (18%)
Never	47,445 (23%)
Continued	

Characteristic	$N = 202,898^1$
(Missing)	1,980 (1.0%)
Year of birth	
1998–2005; age 18–24	27,007 (13%)
1993–1998; age 25–29	20,700 (10%)
1983–1993; age 30–39	40,256 (20%)
1973–1983; age 40–49	34,464 (17%)
1963–1973; age 50–59	31,793 (16%)
1953–1963; age 60–69	27,763 (14%)
1943–1953; age 70–79	16,776 (8.3%)
1943 or earlier; age 80+	4,119 (2.0%)
(Missing)	20 (< 0.1%)
Gender	
Male	98,411 (49%)
Female	103,488 (51%)
Other	602 (0.3%)
(Missing)	397 (0.2%)
Country	
Argentina	6,724 (3.3%)
Australia	3,844 (1.9%)
Brazil	13,204 (6.5%)
Egypt	4,729 (2.3%)
Germany	9,506 (4.7%)
Hong Kong	3,012 (1.5%)
India	12,765 (6.3%)
Indonesia	6,992 (3.4%)
Israel	3,669 (1.8%)
Japan	20,543 (10%)
Kenya	11,389 (5.6%)
Mexico	5,776 (2.8%)
Nigeria	6,827 (3.4%)
Philippines	5,292 (2.6%)
Poland	10,389 (5.1%)
South Africa	2,651 (1.3%)
Spain	6,290 (3.1%)
Sweden	15,068 (7.4%)
Tanzania	9,075 (4.5%)
Turkiye	1,473 (0.7%)
United Kingdom	5,368 (2.6%)
United States	38,312 (19%)

Table 1. Nationally representative descriptive statistics of the observed sample. [1]n (%).

Country-specific analysis

Country-specific analyses revealed variations in these above-mentioned relationships (Tables S1a–S24). We report both global trends and general patterns while also highlighting countries that deviated as outliers from these norms. While some childhood experiences, such as positive parental relationships, generally increased place satisfaction across most countries, other factors, including financial conditions, childhood health, religious attendance, and gender, varied in their influence. A few countries emerged as outliers, where the effects deviated in direction or strength from global trends. For example, a positive relationship with the mother was generally associated with greater place satisfaction, but its impact was particularly strong in Germany (RR = 1.10, 95% CI: 1.04, 1.16) and Japan (RR = 1.10, 95% CI: 1.04, 1.17), while in Sweden, the effect was negligible (RR = 1.00, respectively). A good relationship with the father also associated with higher place satisfaction in most countries, but the effect was particularly strong in countries like Brazil (RR = 1.09, 95% CI: 1.03, 1.14) and Japan (RR = 1.11, 95% CI: 1.08, 1.15), whereas in Australia, a good paternal relationship was linked to a 3% decreased likelihood of place satisfaction (RR = 0.97, 95% CI: 0.91, 1.03), a notable deviation from the global pattern.

Parental marital status also demonstrated cross-national variability. While divorce was generally associated with lower place satisfaction and particularly strongest in Argentina (RR = 0.93, 95% CI: 0.86, 1.02), this effect was reversed in Japan (RR = 1.08, 95% CI: 1.02, 1.15). Being raised by never-married parents was linked to higher

Variable	Category	RR	95% CI	Estimated proportion of effects by threshold		I^2	Global p-value
				< 0.90	> 1.10		
Relationship with mother	(Ref: Very bad/somewhat bad)						< 0.001**
	Very good/somewhat good	1.04	(1.02,1.06)	0.00	0.00	21.2	
Relationship with father	(Ref: Very bad/somewhat bad)						< 0.001**
	Very good/somewhat good	1.04	(1.02,1.05)	0.00	0.00	46.0	
Parent marital status	(Ref: Parents married)						< 0.001**
	Divorced	0.98	(0.97,1.00)	0.00	0.00	29.7	
	Single, never married	0.99	(0.97,1.01)	0.00	0.00	64.4	
	One or both parents had died	1.02	(1.00,1.03)	0.00	0.00	40.9	
Subjective financial status of family growing up	(Ref: Got by)						< 0.001**
	Lived comfortably	1.02	(1.01,1.03)	0.00	0.00	71.3	
	Found it difficult	0.97	(0.96,0.98)	0.00	0.00	63.9	
	Found it very difficult	0.95	(0.93,0.96)	0.05	0.00	23.7	
Abuse	(Ref: No)						< 0.001**
	Yes	0.94	(0.92,0.96)	0.19	0.00	70.9	
Outsider growing up	(Ref: No)						< 0.001**
	Yes	0.95	(0.93,0.97)	0.09	0.00	72.7	
Self-rated health growing up	(Ref: Good)						< 0.001**
	Excellent	1.03	(1.01,1.05)	0.00	0.05	78.1	
	Very good	1.02	(1.01,1.04)	0.00	0.05	77.0	
	Fair	0.97	(0.95,0.99)	0.05	0.00	62.7	
	Poor	0.97	(0.93,1.02)	0.18	0.05	75.1	
Immigration status	(Ref: Born in this country)						< 0.001**
	Born in another country	1.01	(0.98,1.04)	0.00	0.09	68.6	
Age 12 religious service attendance	(Ref: Never)						< 0.001**
	At least 1/week	1.02	(1.00,1.04)	0.00	0.00	67.7	
	1–3/month	1.02	(1.00,1.04)	0.00	0.00	66.1	
	< 1/month	1.01	(0.99,1.02)	0.00	0.00	44.2	
Year of birth	(Ref: 1998–2005; age 18–24)						< 0.001**
	1993–1998; age 25–29	1.02	(1.00,1.04)	0.00	0.00	62.9	
	1983–1993; age 30–39	1.03	(1.00,1.05)	0.00	0.09	88.5	
	1973–1983; age 40–49	1.05	(1.02,1.07)	0.00	0.14	87.5	
	1963–1973; age 50–59	1.07	(1.03,1.10)	0.00	0.27	90.2	
	1953–1963; age 60–69	1.11	(1.06,1.15)	0.00	0.59	91.3	
	1943–1953; age 70–79	1.12	(1.08,1.17)	0.00	0.68	86.1	
	1943 or earlier; age 80+	0.57	(0.14,2.38)	0.05	0.64	100.0	
Gender	(Ref: Male)						< 0.001**
	Female	1.03	(1.02,1.04)	0.00	0.05	86.0	
	Other	0.22	(0.03,1.68)	0.50	0.11	100.0	

Table 2. Random effects meta-analysis of regression of adult place satisfaction on childhood predictors. *$p < .05$; **$p < .004$ (Bonferroni corrected threshold).

place satisfaction in Egypt (RR = 1.23, 95% CI: 1.04, 1.45) but had a neutral effect in most other countries. The death of one or both parents was linked to greater place satisfaction in Argentina (RR = 1.11, 95% CI: 1.02, 1.21) and Japan (RR = 1.11, 95% CI: 1.04, 1.18) but had little effect in other countries. Financial difficulty (vs. Got by financially) during childhood was associated with lower place satisfaction in all countries, with the strongest effects in Hong Kong (RR = 0.82, 95% CI: 0.71, 0.93) and Germany when 'very difficult' (RR = 0.92, 95% CI: 0.85, 0.99). In contrast, financial comfort was associated with increased likelihood of place satisfaction in all countries, including Nigeria (RR = 1.09, 95% CI: 1.04, 1.15) but slightly decreased in South Africa (RR = 0.98, 95% CI: 0.90, 1.07).

As expected, experiences of childhood adversity, such as abuse or feeling like an outsider, consistently associated with lower place satisfaction across most countries, though with slight variation. For example, the negative impact of abuse was strongest in Hong Kong (RR = 0.81, 95% CI: 0.72, 0.92), while in the United States, abuse reduced place satisfaction by 6% (RR = 0.94, 95% CI: 0.89, 0.98). Feeling like an outsider had a particularly strong negative association in the U.S. (RR = 0.87, 95% CI: 0.83, 0.91) and Japan (RR = 0.89, 95% CI: 0.81, 0.98).

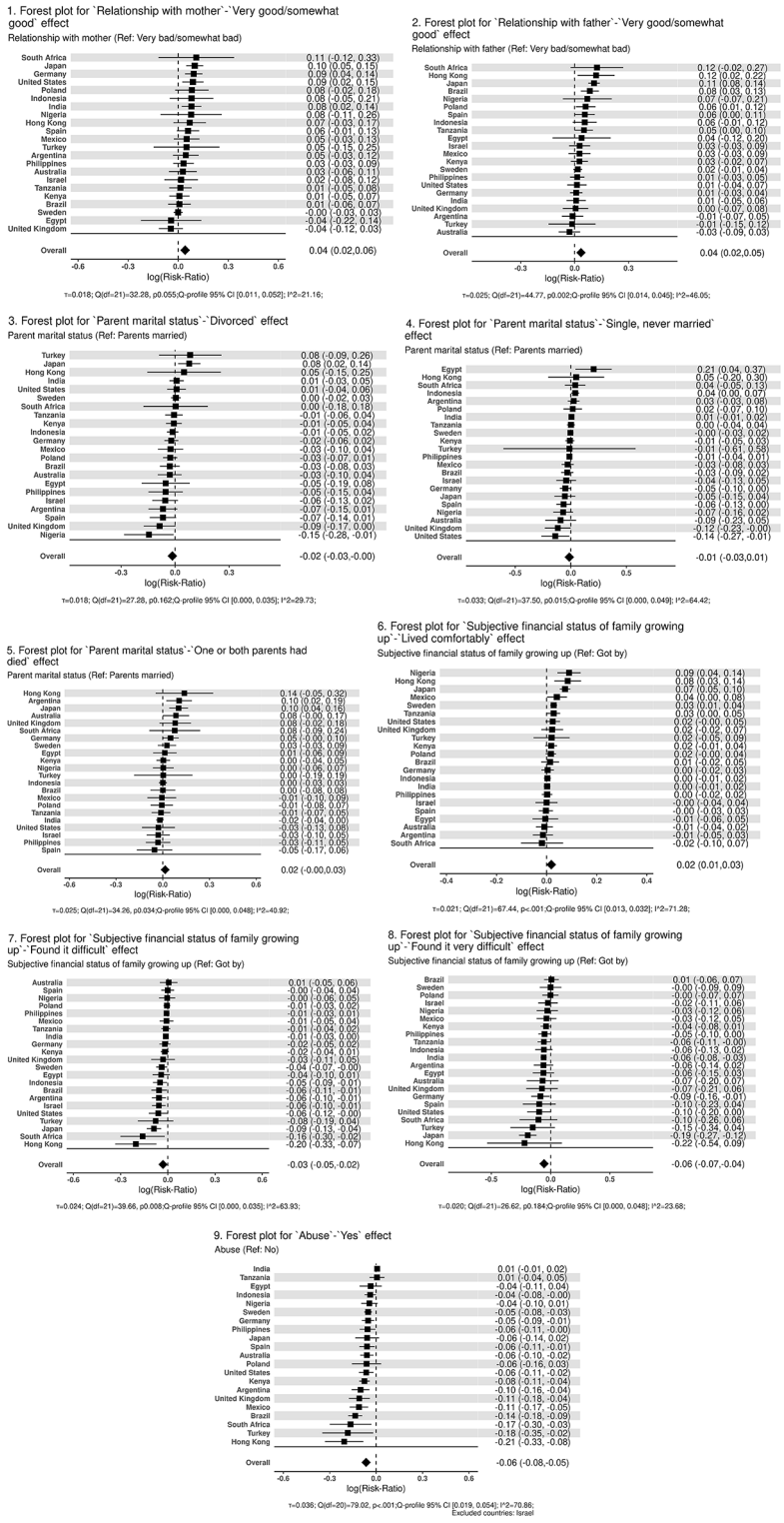

Fig. 1. Forest plots.

The influence of childhood health on place satisfaction also showed divergent trends. Generally, excellent health was expected to be associated with greater place satisfaction. This was confirmed in almost all the countries, especially in Hong Kong (RR = 1.17, 95% CI: 1.06, 1.28) and Japan (RR = 1.09, 95% CI: 1.06, 1.12), though in Tanzania (RR = 0.96, 95% CI: 0.93, 0.99) growing up with excellent health was associated with a lower likelihood of place satisfaction.

Religious service attendance at age 12 was generally associated with higher likelihood of place satisfaction, but exceptions were observed. In South Africa, for example, weekly religious attendance was associated with a

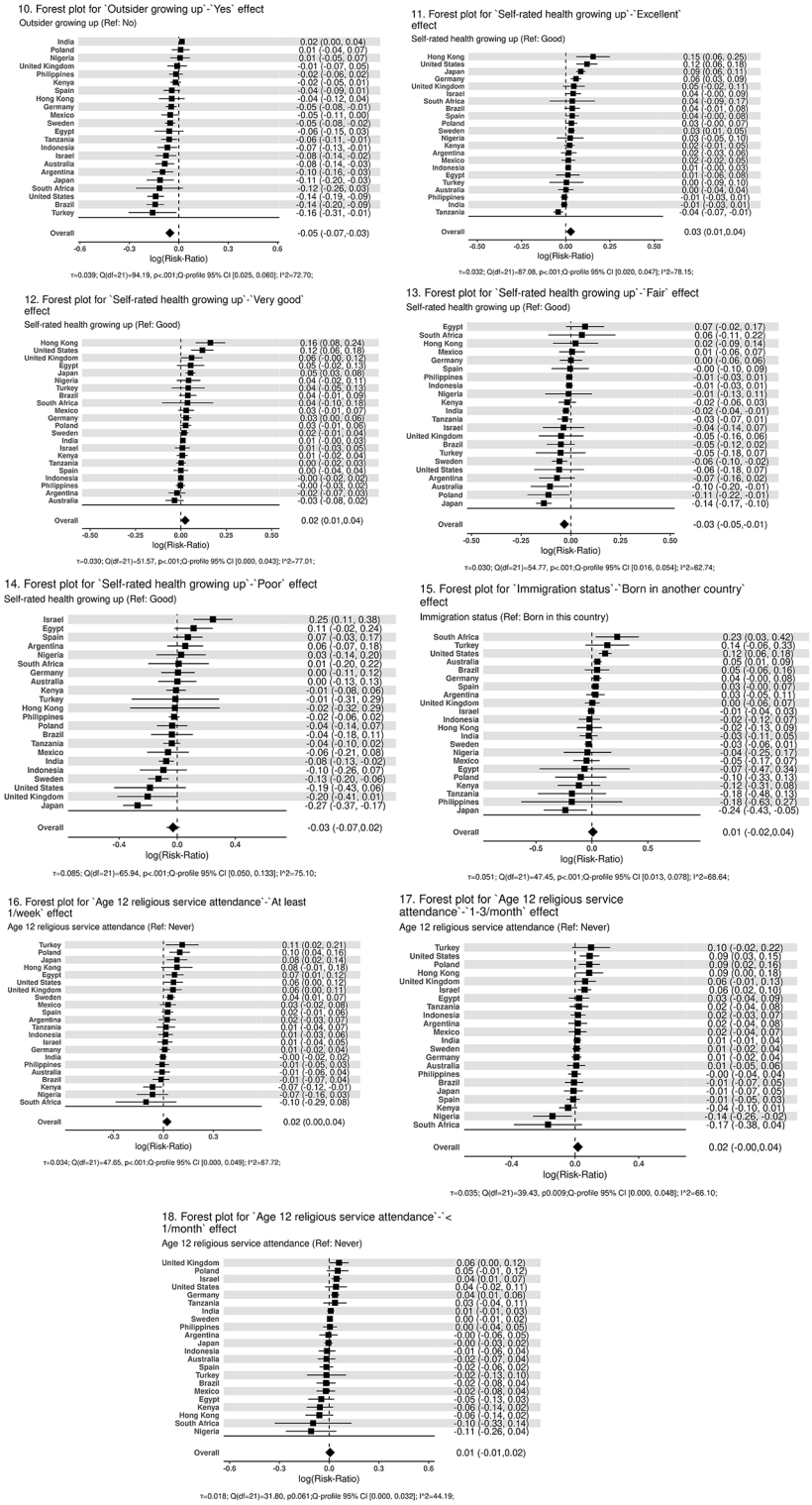

Figure 1. (continued)

10% lower likelihood of place satisfaction (RR = 0.90, 95% CI: 0.75, 1.08), whereas in Poland (RR = 1.10, 95% CI: 1.04, 1.17) and Sweden (RR = 1.04, 95% CI: 1.01, 1.07), religious attendance was associated with higher place satisfaction.

In terms of gender, women consistently had an increased likelihood of place satisfaction, though highest in Turkey (RR = 1.19, 95% CI: 1.10, 1.28). Immigration status showed limited overall influence on place satisfaction, with most countries reporting no significant association. However, exceptions emerged, with immigrants in the

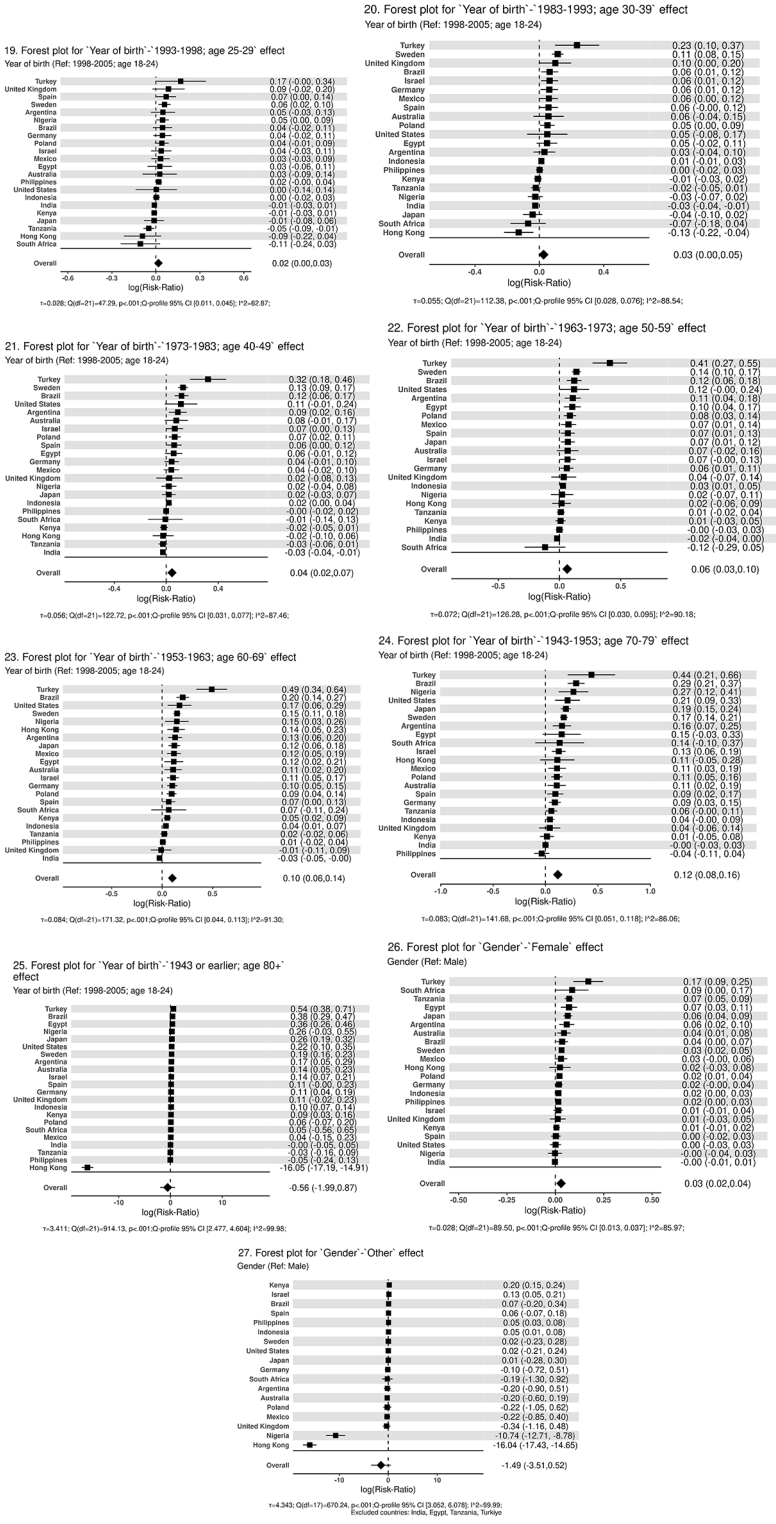

Figure 1. (continued)

United States (RR = 1.13, 95% CI: 1.06, 1.19) exhibiting higher place satisfaction, while in Japan (RR = 0.79, 95% CI: 0.65, 0.96), immigrants were less satisfied with their living environment.

Sensitivity analyses

The magnitudes of the meta-analytic effect sizes are small and thus in most cases, a modest degree of unmeasured confounding could potentially affect the associations (see Table 3; Figures S1–S27). For example, to explain away the association between weekly childhood religious service attendance with adult place satisfaction, an

Variable	Category	E-value	E-value.limit
Relationship with mother	(Ref: Very bad/somewhat bad)		
	Very good/somewhat good	1.25	1.18
Relationship with father	(Ref: Very bad/somewhat bad)		
	Very good/somewhat good	1.23	1.16
Parent marital status	(Ref: Parents married)		
	Divorced	1.14	1.02
	Single, never married	1.13	1.00
	One or both parents had died	1.14	1.00
Subjective financial status of family growing up	(Ref: Got by)		
	Lived comfortably	1.16	1.10
	Found it difficult	1.21	1.15
	Found it very difficult	1.30	1.23
Abuse	(Ref: No)		
	Yes	1.33	1.27
Outsider growing up	(Ref: No)		
	Yes	1.30	1.22
Self-rated health growing up	(Ref: Good)		
	Excellent	1.20	1.12
	Very good	1.18	1.10
	Fair	1.22	1.13
	Poor	1.20	1.00
Immigration status	(Ref: Born in this country)		
	Born in another country	1.11	1.00
Age 12 religious service attendance	(Ref: Never)		
	At least 1/week	1.17	1.07
	1–3/month	1.15	1.00
	< 1/month	1.08	1.00
Year of birth	(Ref: 1998–2005; age 18–24)		
	1993–1998; age 25–29	1.15	1.01
	1983–1993; age 30–39	1.19	1.01
	1973–1983; age 40–49	1.26	1.15
	1963–1973; age 50–59	1.33	1.21
	1953–1963; age 60–69	1.45	1.33
	1943–1953; age 70–79	1.50	1.37
	1943 or earlier; age 80+	2.90	1.00
Gender	(Ref: Male)		
	Female	1.21	1.15
	Other	8.38	1.00

Table 3. Sensitivity of meta-analyzed childhood predictors to unmeasured confounding.

unmeasured confounder that was associated with weekly service attendance and higher adult place satisfaction with risk ratios of 1.17, above and beyond the measured covariates, could suffice but weaker joint confounder associations could not; to shift the 95% confidence interval to include the null, an unmeasured confounder that was associated with weekly childhood religious service attendance and increased adult place satisfaction with risk ratios of 1.07, above and beyond the measured covariates, could suffice but weaker joint confounder associations could not. However, some of the country-specific E-values (reported in the Online Supplement) are more substantial.

Discussion

The current study examined the associations between childhood experiences and place satisfaction in adulthood, drawing on data from the Global Flourishing Study (GFS) involving 202,898 participants across 22 countries. The findings highlight the potential long-term influence of early-life experiences in shaping adult satisfaction with their living environments while revealing both universal and culturally specific patterns in these associations. Universal predictors, such as childhood abuse, feeling like an outsider, financial difficulties, and poor health, consistently show variations in place satisfaction across all countries. However, greater cross-country variability emerged for factors such as parental relationships, immigration status, and religious attendance. These insights show the need to consider societal contexts in interventions aimed at improving place satisfaction. More importantly, these findings reinforce the perspective that place is not merely a static background to human

experience but an active force shaping and shaped by individual life trajectories[59,60]. Life course theory suggests that early-life experiences are not isolated events but embedded within broader social and historical contexts that influence long-term perceptions of place[13,16,60]. From this perspective, place satisfaction in adulthood is the cumulative outcome of a trajectory shaped by childhood stability, socio-economic conditions, familial relationships, and cultural expectations of belonging.

The meta-analytic results indicated that having a strong relationship with the mother and father during childhood was associated with a modest increase in the likelihood of place satisfaction. This finding suggests that while supportive and nurturing familial relationships are necessary for psychological well-being and social integration[27,61,62], they may serve as the foundation for a secure life course trajectory that enhances attachment to place[2,60], which sustains one's satisfaction with it[63]. Interestingly, experiences of parental divorce or being raised by a single, never-married parent slightly decreased the likelihood of place satisfaction, albeit minimally. This suggests that the absence of traditional family structures (e.g., divorce, no marriage, death of parents) may be associated with marginally lower contentment with one's environment in later life, although this effect varies by country. Conceptually, these patterns may indicate that family structure disruptions alter developmental trajectories in ways that later influence how individuals relate to their environments. However, Japan was an exception, where parental divorce was associated with higher place satisfaction, suggesting that in some societies, non-traditional family structures may be less stigmatized or even contribute to greater adaptability in adulthood.

Financial circumstances during childhood emerged as a modest but noteworthy factor, with those who grew up in financial comfort showing a slightly increased likelihood of reporting place satisfaction, whereas those who faced severe financial hardship were less likely to be satisfied with their living environment as adults. This finding aligns with the economic stress model, which links financial hardship to long-term stress and adaptive coping mechanisms[26]. But it also reinforces the idea that place satisfaction is built through long-term financial stability and security. However, these results were not uniform across countries. In Hong Kong, financial difficulty had the strongest negative impact, whereas in Nigeria, financial comfort was associated with a substantial increase in place satisfaction. Life course theory provides an explanatory lens for these disparities. In societies where economic security is relatively stable (e.g., Germany, Sweden), financial hardship during childhood may not be associated with lower place satisfaction as strongly because social welfare systems mitigate long-term disadvantages. On the other hand, in places with greater economic volatility, financial struggles or comfort in early life may create a lasting sense of instability (e.g., Hong Kong) or stability (e.g., Nigeria) respectively, shaping how individuals evaluate the places they live in adulthood. This is consistent with relative deprivation theory, which suggests that the perceived impact of economic hardship is shaped by expectations and social comparisons rather than absolute conditions[64]. From a life course perspective, these financial conditions represent critical turning points that mold expectations and adaptive capacities related to one's living environment[26,63].

Negative childhood experiences, such as physical or sexual abuse and feeling like an outsider, were consistently associated with decreased likelihood of place satisfaction. This suggests that individuals who face problematic interpersonal experiences in childhood might experience lower levels of place attachment in adulthood[59], possibly due to interpersonal disruptions that may derail normative developmental trajectories[2], leaving individuals with a reduced sense of belonging that extends into their appraisal of place[59].

Childhood health was also associated with place satisfaction[1,31,32], with excellent self-rated health associated with an increased likelihood of place satisfaction. This is consistent with life course theory, meaning that robust health and well-being at the early years of life contributes to long-term stability, allowing individuals to develop a stronger sense of agency and positive emotional connection with the place or city they live later in life. However, in Tanzania, excellent childhood health was linked to lower place satisfaction, possibly due to different cultural interpretations of well-being in that context[65,66]. One possible interpretation is that in lower-income countries, excellent childhood health may be associated with individuals from relatively privileged backgrounds who later experience downward mobility, socio-political instability, or economic hardship in adulthood[23,18]. This could create a contrast effect, where individuals who grew up with stable health and security develop higher expectations for their living environments but later encounter unmet aspirations that might contribute to lower satisfaction. Alternatively, in resource-limited settings, survival and resilience through hardship may foster greater appreciation for one's environment—meaning that those who experienced moderate health struggles early in life might develop a stronger emotional connection to place as part of a broader adaptation strategy[67]. Thus, the pattern in Tanzania shows how the meaning of health and well-being is socially constructed within life course trajectories, with place satisfaction reflecting not only material conditions but also shifting expectations and cultural narratives of success.

Weekly religious service attendance during childhood (at age 12) was also associated with a slight increase in place satisfaction, which reflects how early-life experiences are shaped by historical and social contexts to influence long-term developmental trajectories[13]. In Poland and Sweden, where religion has historically been a key pillar of community cohesion and national identity, early religious participation may sustain social capital and continuity of place-based belonging, which reinforces a sense of connection or attachment to one's environment into adulthood[24,25,29]. However, in South Africa, where religious institutions have been entangled with colonial histories, apartheid-era divisions, and socio-economic disparities, frequent attendance may not provide the same integrative benefits. Instead, it may reflect early-life experiences of exclusion or stratification, weakening the connection between religion and place satisfaction. In a country like South Africa, life course theory highlights how the meaning of early religious engagement is not universal but contingent on the historical and structural contexts in which it unfolds, which influences whether it serves as a pathway to social integration or a marker of division in later-life place satisfaction. On the other hand, while religious service attendance supports a strong sense of community and belonging[24], it may also cultivate a perspective that prioritizes spiritual over physical satisfaction[9], potentially contributing to lower place satisfaction among those more actively engaged in religious practices.

Immigration status, in particular, showed minimal influence on place satisfaction, though notable country-specific deviations emerged. In the United States, for example, migrants reported higher place satisfaction, whereas in Japan, immigration was associated with a lower likelihood of place satisfaction. In the US, immigration has historically been framed as a pathway to upward mobility and social integration, which might explain why migrants may experience greater satisfaction due to several factors (e.g., economic opportunities, diverse community networks, policies that support their assimilation), which contribute to higher place satisfaction[19]. In contrast, Japan's more homogenous society and restrictive immigration policies may limit migrants' social integration, economic mobility, and sense of belonging, which ultimately may lead to lower place satisfaction. These patterns highlight how the impact of migration on place satisfaction is not intrinsic to the experience of immigration itself but is shaped by national policies, cultural attitudes toward outsiders, and the degree to which receiving societies facilitate or hinder immigrants' long-term adaptation and well-being.

Finally, women generally exhibited a slightly higher likelihood of place satisfaction than men, but this effect was particularly pronounced in Turkey. Gendered childhood experiences shape later perceptions of place through accumulated socialization, opportunity structures, and constraints[68]. In Turkey, where traditional gender norms emphasize family or community ties for girls from an early age, women may develop stronger place-based attachments as a result of early socialization into localized, home-centered roles. This could contribute to their higher place satisfaction in adulthood, as their life trajectories would, at this point, align with the expectations and cultural narratives they were raised with. However, in more gender-equal societies, where childhood experiences are less rigidly defined by gender, the association between gender and place satisfaction may be weaker because boys and girls are more equally encouraged to explore broader opportunities beyond their immediate environments. Over time, these gendered developmental pathways shape how individuals perceive their living environments, with stronger alignment between early socialization and adult expectations that foster greater place satisfaction.

Place as a life course trajectory

Life course posits that early-life conditions are not merely isolated events but are embedded within broader contexts and trajectories that influence long-term well-being[13,69]. Childhood predictors such as family relationships, financial security, health, and social belonging (e.g., via religious service attendance, immigration status) do not operate in a vacuum; rather, they unfold within societal structures that determine access to resources, shape expectations, and establish norms about stability, mobility, and identity[70]. This perspective shows why childhood antecedents of place satisfaction must be considered within their specific national and cultural contexts—what constitutes a formative experience in one country may have a different meaning or consequence in another[71]. For instance, growing up in financial hardship may lead to a lifelong sense of economic instability in countries with limited social security or welfare (e.g., the United States or Hong Kong), whereas in nations with robust welfare systems (e.g., Sweden or Germany), early financial struggles may be buffered by state support, reducing their long-term psychological toll. On the other hand, while childhood religious participation may sustain a deep-rooted sense of belonging in religiously cohesive societies (e.g., Poland or Nigeria), it may serve as a marker of exclusion in contexts where religious identity is tied to historical marginalization or social stratification (e.g., Apartheid in South Africa).

The cross-national variability in how childhood experiences shape place satisfaction in adulthood highlights the life course perspective's emphasis on cumulative advantage and disadvantage[13]. Early-life experiences establish trajectories that are reinforced or disrupted by later socio-political and economic structures, leading to different long-term consequences[71]. In societies where childhood stability is a strong correlate of adult contentment, disruptions such as parental divorce or place attachment disruptions due to natural disasters (e.g., flooding, wildfires) or human made disasters (e.g., COVID-19 Pandemic) may have more lasting effects on place attachment[2]. However, in contexts where family structures are more fluid and non-traditional arrangements are normalized (e.g., Japan), parental divorce may not be perceived as a major disruption but rather as part of an adaptive social fabric[72]. Similarly, while childhood abuse is universally associated with lower place satisfaction due to its impact on social trust and psychological security, its severity and long-term consequences may be mediated by cultural attitudes toward trauma, mental health support, and community cohesion[69]. In societies with strong communal structures and collective resilience (e.g., some African and Latin American countries), social networks may help mitigate the alienation that often accompanies childhood adversity, whereas in individualistic societies (e.g., the United States), the absence of strong social safety nets may exacerbate the long-term negative effects. This life course approach, as we see it, demonstrates that childhood experiences are not static determinants of place satisfaction but dynamic processes shaped by the intersection of personal histories, structural/national conditions, and cultural meanings that vary across the 22 countries examined in this study.

Limitations, future directions, and implications

Despite the significant findings, this study has several limitations. First, the reliance on self-reported single-item measures, particularly the retrospective nature of the childhood experiences, presents challenges in fully capturing the dynamic nature of early-life influences over time. Single-item measures often lack the depth and nuance needed to capture complex experiences fully, and they rely heavily on participants' memory and subjective interpretation. While recall bias is a concern, for it to completely explain away the observed associations would require that the effect of adult meaning/purpose on biasing retrospective assessments of the childhood predictors would essentially have to be at least as strong as the observed associations themselves[73]. Second, the study focuses on specific childhood predictors but may overlook other influential factors that shape place satisfaction across the life course. For example, while familial relationships and financial conditions were key variables, peer relationships, emotional abuse, neighborhood cohesion, childhood mobility, and social networks may also play a role in shaping long-term place satisfaction. And besides, national policies, gender norms, and

social welfare systems shape childhood experiences differently across countries, which may contribute to the cross-national variations observed in this study. Third, country-level variability across 22 countries suggests that the meaning of childhood experiences is not uniform across settings. For instance, while parental divorce was associated with decreased likelihood of place satisfaction in most countries, it had the opposite effect in Japan, potentially reflecting differences in the social stigma attached to family structures. Religious service attendance also had opposite effects in Poland and South Africa, suggesting that religious participation may sustain social integration in some countries but signal structural exclusion in others. While efforts were made to account for these differences in the discussion, some contextual variations might still be underrepresented. Thus, potential unmeasured confounders could influence the observed associations, and as noted above, the E-values were relatively modest. Fourth, although this study utilizes a synthetic longitudinal design, it remains cross-sectional in nature, meaning that causal interpretations must be made with caution. Although childhood experiences logically precede adult outcomes, unmeasured confounding may still influence the observed relationships. We have addressed this concern through E-value sensitivity analyses, which suggest that many of the associations are robust. However, alternative explanations cannot be entirely ruled out. So, while we frame the childhood predictors analysis as a synthetic longitudinal study, meaning it offers some evidence for causal relationships, these findings should not be interpreted as definitive proof of causality. Retrospective self-reports may also introduce recall bias, particularly in assessing childhood conditions. While life course theory provides a strong theoretical justification for the directional influence of childhood experiences on adult place satisfaction, the observed associations could also reflect reverse causality or unmeasured bidirectional processes. For example, individuals with higher levels of psychological resilience or greater socioeconomic mobility may both report better childhood conditions and experience higher place satisfaction as adults, creating the potential for endogeneity. Future research utilizing true longitudinal panel data could better disentangle these effects by tracking individuals over time and controlling for within-person changes. Finally, the study does not explore the mechanisms through which childhood experiences influence place satisfaction, such as how resilience, social capital, or psychological adaptation mediate or moderate these relationships. A better understanding of these pathways could offer more context-specific interpretations of how early-life conditions translate into long-term attitudes about place.

Future research should address these limitations by incorporating broader sets of predictors, validated psychometric measures, and in-depth analyses of underlying mechanisms to enhance our understanding of the long-term impact of childhood experiences on adult place satisfaction. Future research should continue to explore the complex associations between early-life experiences and adult place satisfaction across different cultural contexts. Longitudinal studies can also provide more insights into the causal pathways linking childhood predictors to adult outcomes. Additionally, examining the role of other factors, such as social networks, personality, and environmental quality, can further enrich our understanding of the determinants of place satisfaction. Moreover, it would seem prudent not to overlook cross-disciplinary approaches, integrating insights from psychology, sociology, urban studies, and public health to offer a more comprehensive perspective on how to enhance place satisfaction and well-being globally[12,16].

The findings of this study have important implications for urban policy and planning. Recognizing that place satisfaction is shaped by childhood experiences across the life course can inform policy efforts aimed at promoting well-being across different stages of life[2,74]. For instance, supporting early-life family stability, financial security, health interventions, and community engagement programs may have long-term benefits for individuals' satisfaction with their living environments. Given that place attachment is shaped over time through socialization and economic opportunities, policies that mitigate childhood adversity and promote social inclusion may enhance long-term well-being. Considering how gender, migration policies, and religious participation shape perceptions of place in different national contexts can inform more culturally sensitive urban planning strategies. Because place is central to human life and well-being[2,74,74,10,9], policymakers and practitioners should consider ways to promote early childhood experiences that strengthen long-term ties to the places people live in adulthood[10,6,7,8].

Conclusion

This study explored the potential effects of childhood relationships (interpersonal), financial status (socio-economic), health (physical), and religious attendance (religious) on adult place satisfaction. The results are best understood within a life course framework, which posits that an individual's trajectory is tethered to place from early life onward[68]. Taken together, the country-level variations reinforce the core argument that life course trajectories are tethered to place and are shaped by structural opportunities and constraints embedded within national contexts. Place satisfaction is not a static, individual-level assessment but rather the cumulative result of long-term experiences, expectations, and socio-cultural conditioning that unfold differently across countries. This study provides evidence that childhood experiences shape how individuals evaluate their living environments later in life.

We applied a life course theory to operationalize the choice of childhood experiences examined. The findings from this paper aid in conceptualizing why place satisfaction is not merely an outcome of present-day environmental factors but rather a reflection of developmental pathways shaped by early experiences and mediated by national contexts. Future research should continue to explore how policy interventions—such as investments in childhood well-being, social mobility programs, and urban planning initiatives—can modify life course trajectories to enhance long-term place satisfaction. This approach could strengthen the capabilities available to people[5], shaping not only individual choices but also the structural conditions that enable or constrain one's ability to flourish within a given place.

In conclusion, understanding the long-term effects of childhood experiences on adult place satisfaction using nationally representative cross-national data provides a novel methodology for understanding the enduring

links between childhood experiences and adult place satisfaction. The conceptualization of study results using life course theory further contributes to showing both universal childhood experiences and cultural specific conditions that position place as not just a backdrop to human flourishing but an active determinant to it. We advocate for policies and urban planning strategies that not only address immediate physical and economic needs but also consider the broader social and psychological factors that contribute to long-term satisfaction with one's living environment.

Data availability

The methodological framework and objectives of our study have been outlined in a pre-registration document available on the Open Science Framework (OSF). This document, which can be accessed https://osf.io/rbcvz/, details our investigative approach into the childhood predictors of place satisfaction in 22 countries. Additionally, The datasets analysed during the current study are available in the pre-registration of the Global Flourishing Study on OSF (see here: https://osf.io/3jtz8). This procedural step is important for maintaining the data's integrity and confidentiality while ensuring our research upholds the highest standards of scientific inquiry and ethical considerations.

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Declarations

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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