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Persecution in Central Europe and its consequences on the lives of SHARE respondents

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Abstract:

We report information from the SHARELIFE data recalling experiences of persecution and dispossession of SHARE respondents and focus on the relationship of persecution and current outcomes in the three Central European populations. 10% of the Czech and East German respondents and about 6% of those in Poland report being persecuted, and political reasons are most frequently reported to be the main reason for this persecution (respectively 61%, 47% and 40%). Persecution in the Czech Republic had most severe consequences for professional careers of the respondents. The experience of persecution in the Czech Republic has strongest effects on the reported satisfaction with job achievements and career disappointment. The relationship between persecution and health is strongest in Poland, where compared to those not persecuted in the past, the persecuted individuals are from 60-70% more likely to report current poor health, three or more limitations in performing daily activities (ADLs), as well as having experienced long-term illness and a period of disability. Persecuted individuals in Poland are also twice as likely to report having three or more symptoms of poor health. Effects of persecution on health are also present in the Czech and GDR samples, though in most cases the effects are not statistically significant.

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24 Persecution in Central Europe and its Consequences on the Lives of SHARE Respondents

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24.1 Reflections of European history

The analysis of life history of individuals living in Europe would not be accurate and complete without considering the major historical events of the 20th century. Many respondents in the SHARE sample have lived through periods of Nazi or Soviet occupation, direct World War II experience, the post-war period, and in the case of the Czech Republic, East Germany and Poland, through several decades of communism. In this chapter we provide the first results on effects these historical events have had on the life of individuals and their families in the SHARE sample.

To our knowledge, these issues have not been studied quantitatively in a general sample framework of the whole population. The existing literature mostly consists of historical research, case studies, and specialised samples of Holocaust survivors or patients suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The SHARELIFE data offer a unique and perhaps the last opportunity to analyse the effects of these important historical events on welfare of European populations.

24.2 Persecution in Europe in the 20th century

Following Rummel (1994), we define persecution as “the responsibility of a government, regime, or self-governing group for an unarmed and non-physically threatening person’s death, imprisonment, dispossession, deprivation of individual rights or freedoms.” Because much of persecution occurred during wartime, we exclude combat deaths during war or military action, non-combatants that die as a by-product of military action, and punishment for what would normally be crimes.

One might perceive persecution as extreme cases of negative “welfare policies” of governments which are the subject of this publication. It is obvious that organised persecution has the most drastic and horrifying consequences on a person’s life, physical and mental health, family, education, professional career and other aspects of their existence. These effects, apart from immediate short term consequences, may have important long-lasting implications. It is also well documented in Beebe (1975), Danieli (1998), and Kreal et al. (1997) that these effects may bear consequences on younger generations. In this chapter we provide evidence on

the scale, form and consequences of persecution as reported by the sample of SHARELIFE respondents. We provide an account of reports of persecution in all SHARE countries, but focus our analysis on three populations who were most likely to have suffered from persecution in the 20th Century – the Czech Republic, former East Germany and Poland.

We are aware of the difficulty of analyzing and comparing these acts of persecution across time, different countries and different regimes. Nevertheless, we believe that our quantitative analysis can provide important insights into the scale of the dramatic forms of state intervention into people's lives, and their consequences in terms of past and current wellbeing of the European populations.

24.3 European history and state persecution in the 20th century

In this section we provide a brief and incomplete list of types of state intervention in SHARE countries which would qualify as persecution according to the definition of Rummel (1994). They can be broadly related to World War II, the communist regimes, civil and colonial wars, and persecution in democratic regimes.

Among the first category belongs the persecution by the Nazi and Soviet regimes: the Holocaust, genocide and reprisals against occupied populations, imprisonment or concentration camps, forced labour and resettlement, forced military service, various forms of persecution affecting job prospects and education opportunities. All of these acts of persecution were also directed against these regimes' own population (also before the beginning of the war). The reasons for persecution were political, racial, religious, sexual orientation, class origin, or any other characteristics convenient for the regime in power. Among World War II we include also the post-war persecution of German nationals on the liberated territories either by the Soviet Army or the domestic majority population (murder, violence, forced resettlement and dispossession in the Czech Republic and Poland in 1944-1946).

Depending on the age of our respondents, the communist regimes in the Czech Republic (1948-1989), East Germany (1945-1989) and Poland (1944-1989) covered all or nearly all of childhood and a substantial proportion of adult lives of our respondents. The intensity of persecution varied greatly between regimes and time periods. The most intense periods of persecution occurred until 1956, with several hundred thousand persons affected by murder, labour camps, imprisonment, political trials, forced collectivization, resettlement and other acts of violence. In the later periods, the forms of persecution were less severe but continued in the form of restricted access to education or persecution at work, penitentiary military service, psychiatric confinement, and other restriction of civic freedoms (including travel). All or nearly all private property was confiscated by the government (except for Polish small scale farmers and shop owners). Relatively liberal periods (e.g. early 1968 in the Czech Republic) were followed by political clamp-down and periods

of significant unrest and persecution all the way until the collapse of the communist rule in the late 1980s. The reasons for persecution were mostly political, religious and based on class origin.

The third category of persecution in SHARE countries is related to civil wars, military dictatorships and colonial wars. These include the Spanish civil war and its consequences, the Greek civil war, or the French, Dutch or Belgian loss of colonies, notably the French war in Algeria.

The last category covers the persecution in otherwise free and democratic societies in which people at different times experienced persecution because of sex, race, origin, religion, age or other reasons.

Importantly, there were several layers of society which were affected by persecution disproportionately than others: the Jewish population during the Holocaust and after (e.g. in 1968 in Poland), other religious and ethnic minorities, wealthy people, church members and intellectuals. Often the same individuals were persecuted first during World War II by the Nazis, and then by communist regimes after the war. The crucial aspect of persecution is that it was not only one member of the family that was affected but consequences were faced also by close relatives either directly or as a result of resettlement, job or educational restrictions.

24.4 State persecution in the SHARELIFE Questionnaire

The current generation of SHARE respondents may include some of the last surviving individuals who have lived through World War II, the most oppressive years of communism and other instances of major turmoil. The SHARELIFE data may thus be one of the last opportunities to examine the consequences of these events on people's past and their current situation, in particular in an international context.

Significant numbers of individuals who have suffered persecution are no longer alive, many either as a direct consequence of oppression, or because persecution indirectly shortened their lives through effects on health and living standards. Moreover, persecution in almost all of its forms experienced in 20th century Europe was far from "random", and usually wealthy or well educated families were more likely to suffer from it. Both of these factors would imply that any observed effects of persecution which we identify in the data would represent a lower bound of the overall consequences of persecution. If some individual characteristics positively affect the outcomes we measure and on the other hand were positively correlated with persecution the coefficients on persecution will be biased. Despite this potential bias, as we shall see, we can still identify significant negative implications of persecution on the lives of SHARE respondents.

The SHARELIFE questionnaire contains an entire section focused specifically on persecution. Two main questions in this section address the general experience of persecution and dispossession in the following manner:

- *There are times, in which people are persecuted or discriminated against, for example because of their political beliefs, religion, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation or their background. People may also be persecuted or discriminated against because of political beliefs or the religion of their close relatives. Have you ever been the victim of such persecution or discrimination?*
- *There may be cases when individuals and their families are dispossessed of their property as a result of war or persecution. Were you or your family ever dispossessed of any property as a result of war or persecution?*

These main questions for those who report persecution or dispossession are followed up by detailed questions on the form and consequences of persecution as well as timing and form of dispossession.

The sample we use for the analysis is based on SHARELIFE data for individuals who could be merged with earlier waves of the survey. The initial sample includes 23,981 individuals from 13 countries, of which 22,897 gave valid information to the persecution and dispossession questions. This sample is used for the initial descriptive analysis of persecution data for all countries. The more detailed analysis in Sections 24.3 and 24.4, which focuses on the Czech Republic, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany) and Poland, uses information from SHARELIFE and some matched data from previous waves of SHARE concerning health and life satisfaction outcomes. Since from the German sample we only use data on those who prior to 1989 lived in the East Germany, the sample is much smaller compared to those in the Czech Republic and Poland. Some sample statistics on the three central European populations are given in Table 24.1. In total we have valid information on persecution questions for 1,815 individuals from the Czech Republic, 430 Germans and 1,710 Polish respondents.

Table 24.1: Sample statistics: Czech Republic, East Germany, and Poland

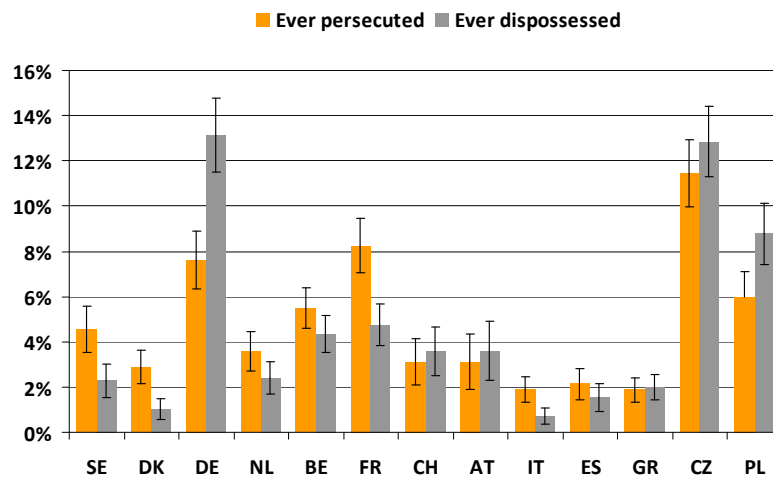
	Czech Republic		East Germany		Poland	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Ever persecuted:						
Number of observations	166	1650	39	391	102	1608
Average age	66.6	63.3	64.1	65.1	67.4	63.0
Female (%)	0.52	0.56	0.42	0.56	0.43	57.3

Source: Authors' calculations using SHARELIFE data.

Figure 24.1 shows the percentage of all respondents that were victims of persecution or whose family was dispossessed. In the Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, France and Belgium more than 5% of SHARE respondents have been persecuted and in the first three countries also dispossessed of their property. In the Czech Republic more than 10% of the current 50+ population have been directly affected by persecution according to the two measures.

The fraction of persecuted persons grows with age: among respondents who are older than 80 years, 18% were persecuted in the Czech Republic, 14% in Poland and 11% in Germany. Among those who prior to 1990 lived in the former East Germany, more than 37% of respondents older than 80 years were dispossessed, compared to only 18% in the former West Germany.

Figure 24.1: Persecution and dispossession in the SHARELIFE Sample



When looking at the data on persecution we must remember that respondents' current countries of residence may not necessarily have been the countries or regimes where they experienced persecution or where they were dispossessed. In fact, in many cases persecution or dispossession may have led or been part of forced relocation. This applies in particular to populations of Germany and Poland, which were subject to significant forced migration as a result of changing borders in the aftermath of World War II. A high number of individuals experiencing persecution or dispossession in other countries were born outside their current country of residence.

Figure 24.2: Persecution and dispossession in the SHARELIFE Sample – individuals born within current borders of country of residence

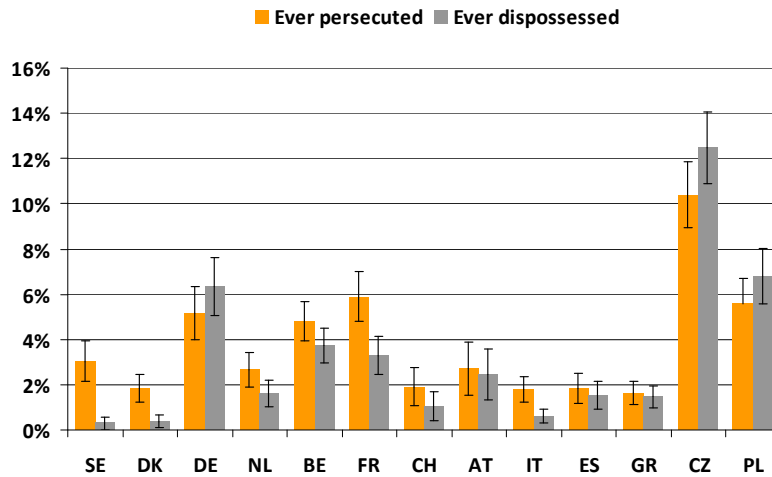
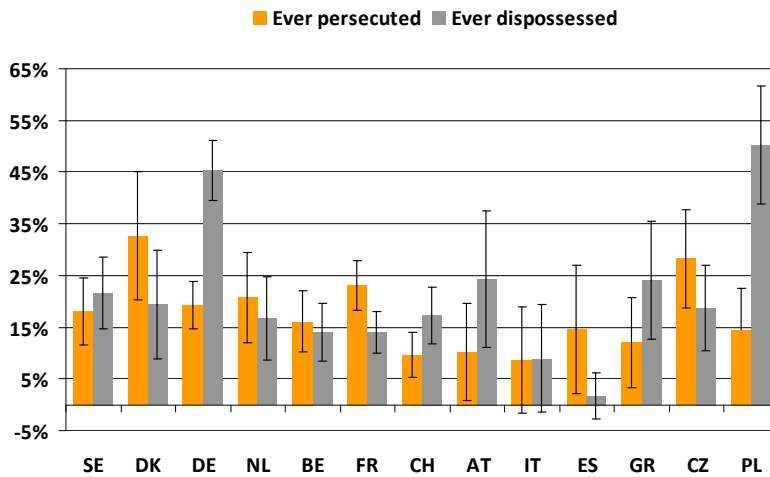


Figure 24.3: Persecution and dispossession in the SHARELIFE Sample – individuals born outside current borders of country of residence



In Figures 24.2 and 24.3 we distinguish between those born within and outside the current borders of countries in which they were interviewed respectively, and the figures confirm the significant relationship between migration and persecution. On average only about 3% of respondents who were born within the borders of their

current residence were persecuted and dispossessed. This is in contrast to the average of 17% among those born outside current borders. The figures also explain why we observe instances of persecution in such countries as Denmark or Sweden, which are likely to have been hosts to immigrating individuals who escaped persecution.

Interestingly, the results indicate also the different nature of the communist oppression (primarily targeting its own population in order to preserve its power) and of the Nazi regime in Germany and occupation of France and Belgium. While the fraction of the dispossessed in the Czech Republic is relatively independent of the birth place, the high fraction of dispossession among Germans and Poles reflects the resettlement at the end of World War II.

State persecution took various forms, and affected individuals in different countries in many ways. A full account of the instances of persecution, their roots and political background would require a detailed analysis of the European political history of the 20th century, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. Thus the next section focuses on three populations which, in political terms, have been subject to the same form of state oppression, namely the Czech Republic, the former East Germany and Poland. Each of these countries has been under the communist rule for a significant part of the lives of SHARE respondents in these countries. We show that despite the common roots of the three regimes, their nature, the degree of oppression and the forms of persecution were very different. Our analysis demonstrates that despite the fact that a long time has passed since the individuals experienced direct forms of persecution, and despite the twenty years of democratic experience, the consequences of persecution on individual's welfare, their assessment of life achievements and life satisfaction are still present to this day.

24.5 Persecution and its consequences in Central Europe

In this section we focus in more detail on three populations of the SHARE sample with common political history, namely the Czech Republic and Poland, and the German Länder which constituted the former German Democratic Republic. For these three samples we examine the differences in the reported form and consequences of persecution. In the analysis we distinguish two types of consequences:

- Direct implications, by which we mean the consequences experienced by the respondents at the time they were subject to persecution. The SHARELIFE interview directly asks for the details described.
- Long-term effects, by which we understand the consequences on the welfare of SHARE respondents, their assessment of their career and general life-satisfaction. The long-term effects are identified either from questions asked independently of the specific persecution questions in the SHARELIFE interview or from previous waves of the survey.

One of the most important features of the data on persecution in the Central European SHARE sample, despite the common history of the communist rule after World War II, are significant differences in terms of the timing and the reported main reason for persecution. In Figure 24.4 we present the distribution of the (first) experience of dispossession reported by the respondents in the three populations. The differences are striking and they reflect the specific timing of major historical events which affected the lives of respondents.

In the Czech Republic, only 5% of all dispossessions took place during World War II, while over 76% in the period between 1948 and 1956. The timing in Poland and Germany reflects more directly the consequences of the outbreak and duration of World War II, as well as the time immediately following the war. The Polish population suffered from dispossession both by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in the period 1939-1943. In the following years it was subjected to forced nationalisation, land dispossession, and forced migration as a result of the communist take-over from mid-1944 and during the years immediately following the war, and the border changes in 1945. In Poland, 26% of dispossessions occurred in 1939-1940 and 44% in 1944-1947 (those who were born outside the current Polish border lost their property mainly after the war (53%)). Dispossession among the German population is largely a reflection of the shifting borders and relocation (79%), though East Germans have also been subjected to collectivisation and nationalisation.

Differences between the populations are also evident in the type of property which was lost due to dispossession (Figure 24.5). This reflects on the one hand the prime focus of nationalisation or collectivisation, and on the other the different nature of main wealth holdings in the middle of the 20th century in the Czech Republic, East Germany and Poland. Houses and land were the most frequently lost assets in Poland (almost 80% of cases), while land was taken away from 60% of dispossessed East Germans and Czechs. Almost 30% of Czech respondents who suffered dispossession lost their business, a much higher proportion than in the East Germany (14%) and Poland (6%). The type of property lost reflects the timing of dispossession (Figure 24.4). In Poland and Germany, houses and farms were the main property families lost in forced resettlement during and after World War II. In the Czech Republic, the main type of lost property are farms and farm land during the forced collectivization as well as full nationalization of businesses from 1948 to 1953. The SHARELIFE data also reflect differences in terms of compensation for property lost during the war and communist years. While 47% of Czechs have not been compensated for their lost property, the proportion is much higher among the East German population (54%) and is highest in Poland (65%).

Figure 24.4: Timing of dispossession in Central Europe

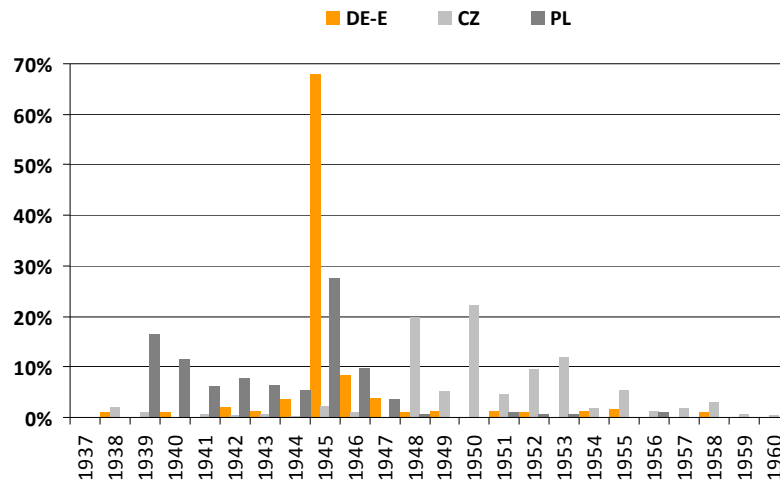


Figure 24.6 presents further interesting differences between the three regimes, and shows information on the reported main reason for persecution, where respondents were prompted to choose from:

- own political beliefs,
- own religion,
- own ethnicity or nationality,
- own sexual orientation,
- own background (class/property ownership),
- political beliefs or religion of close relatives,
- or other reasons.

Figure 24.6 groups categories (4), (6) and (7) as “other”. “Political” corresponds to category (1), and “background” to category (5). Once again there are important differences in the experiences of the three populations. While political reasons dominate in all countries, they seem to be much more frequent in the Czech Republic (61%) compared to Poland (40%). Ethnicity/nationality was an important reason for persecution in Poland (22%), but least prominent to the current residents of the Czech Republic. Note that ethnicity is also the second most important reason for Poles. Finally, about 10% of respondents in all these ex-communist countries state that their family background, as well as political beliefs and religion of their relatives were also important reasons for persecution. There are important and interesting differences in terms of the main reason for persecution when we compare the former East and West Germany (figures not reported in tables here). While among those who prior to 1989 lived in West Germany and report being subjected to persecution, ethnicity/nationality was the main reason (47%), among East Germans this is the case only for 12% of the persecuted. Only

15% of persecuted West Germans report their political beliefs as the main reason for persecution (compared to 47% in the East). Naturally these differences reflect the post-war political development in the two parts of Germany.

In the communist countries, job-related persecution was one of the most prevalent forms (see Figure 24.7). This is in particular evident in the data for the Czech Republic. Almost 40% of persecuted people were denied promotions or experienced pay cuts, more than 20% of persecuted persons lost their jobs. 35% of Czechs who experienced persecution were harassed or assigned to tasks of lower responsibility or qualification, and almost 30% experienced difficulties finding a job adequate to their training or qualification. In East Germany these numbers are also high (25% lost their jobs) while in Poland persecution with immediate implications for the job situation was much less frequent. Only about 10% of Poles in the SHARE sample who admit to having been persecuted lost their jobs as a result of persecution, and an even lower proportion experienced difficulties finding a job in consequence of persecution.

Figure 24.5: Type of property lost to dispossession in Central Europe

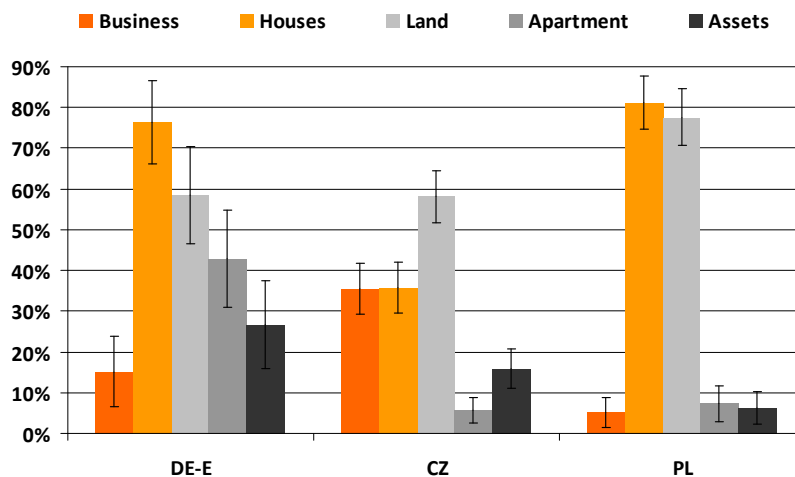
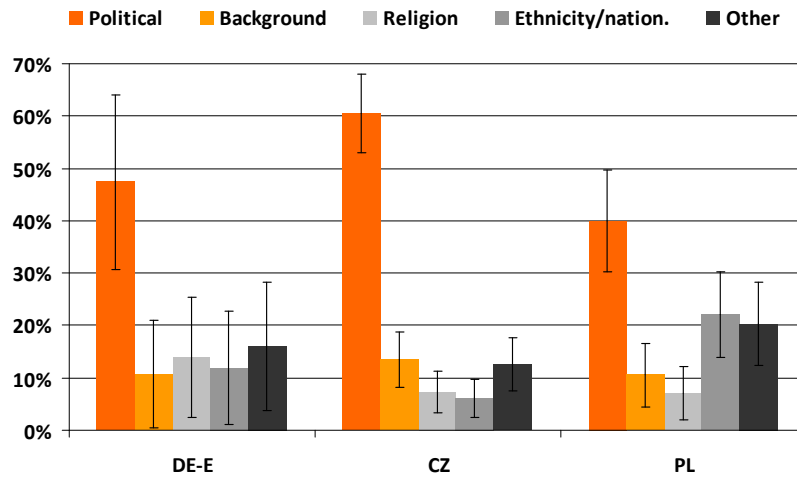
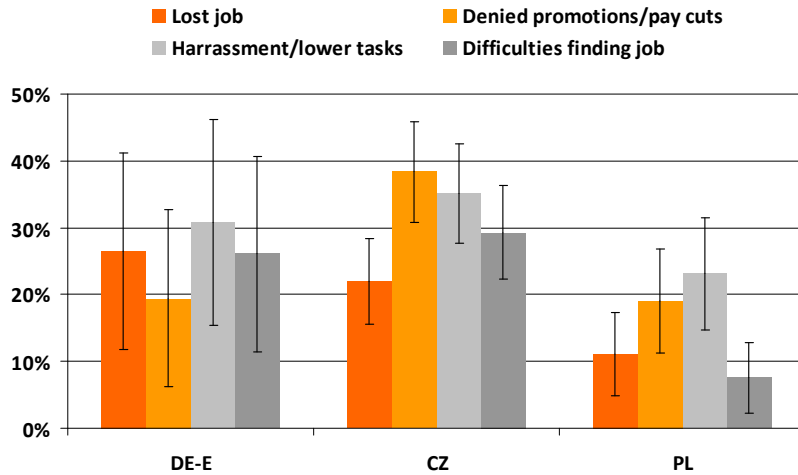


Figure 24.6: The main reason for persecution in Central Europe



There is no doubt that an important part of the SHARE sample who lived in the former communist regimes have been subjected to significant stress and discrimination due to their political beliefs, religion or ethnicity. They and their families suffered financial consequences in terms of lost wealth, and in terms of their career development. Although a lot of time has passed since the time when the respondents were subjected to persecution, and prior to the SHARELIFE interview they have lived for almost twenty years under free, democratic regimes, the SHARE data show that the history of persecution does not remain unmarked in terms of their current health and welfare. We turn to these long-term effects of persecution in Section 24.5 below.

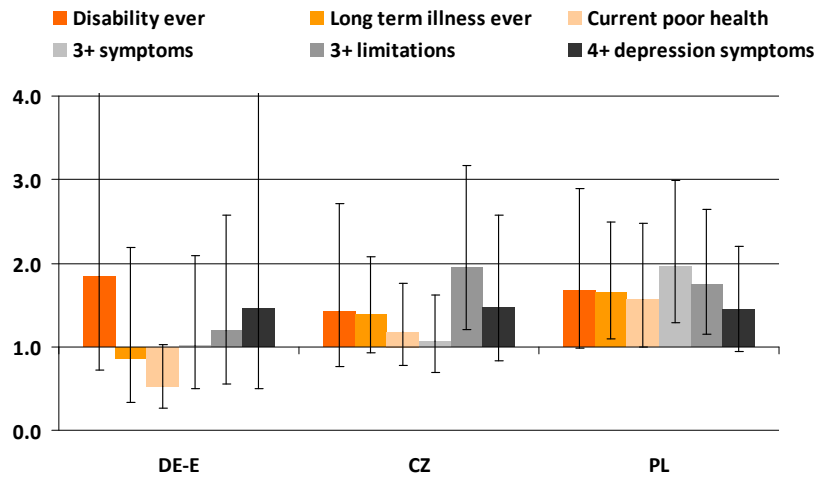
Figure 24.7: Persecution and direct job implications in Central Europe

24.6 Long-term effects of persecution

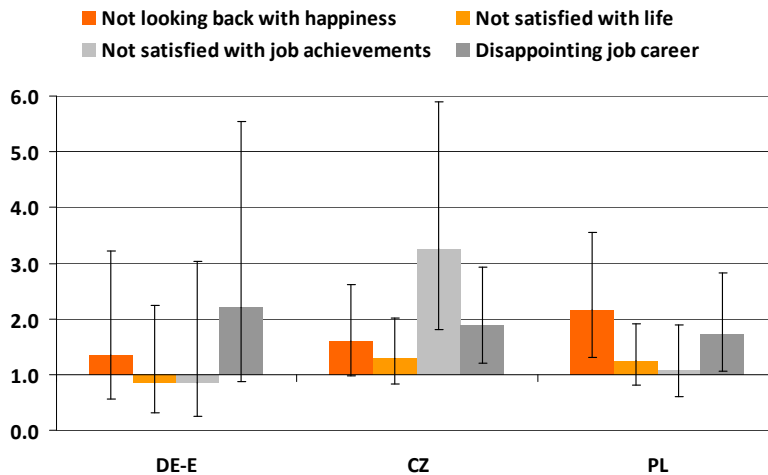
Two types of broad welfare measures have been selected for analysis of long term effects of persecution in Central Europe – six different measures of health, and four different measures of life satisfaction. It is clear that persecution has had detrimental effects on individuals' lives. For example, in the SHARELIFE interview, those persecuted are much more likely to report having experienced periods of stress, poor health, financial hardship or hunger. Although significant amount of time has passed since the periods when individuals were persecuted, as we shall see below the experience of persecution matters for their current situation.

Figures 24.8 and 24.9 report odds ratios for the likelihood of experiencing several forms of poor health (Figure 24.8) and life satisfaction (Figure 24.9). In all cases we control for age and gender of the respondents, as well as for a number of early life circumstances. The latter are based on several variables from in the SHARELIFE interview including childhood housing quality, relative performance at school, controls for the profession of the main bread winner and number of books in the household at childhood. The black bars correspond to 90% confidence intervals for the odds ratios.

Figure 24.8: Persecution and long-term effects on health in Central Europe



We analyse three measures of health reported in the SHARELIFE interview: current status of general health (reported “fair” or “poor” health), and declarations of experiencing disability or long-term illness. The other three measures are taken from the baseline interview in wave 2, and we examine the odds of having three or more symptoms of poor health, three or more limitations in activity of daily living and declaring four or more symptoms of depression. The experience of persecution in Poland is reflected in odds ratios in excess of one for all measures of health considered, and in almost all of these the effects of persecution are statistically significant. The effects are less significant in the Czech Republic but also strongly above 1 in four out of six cases. Only in the DE-E sample the effects do not seem to be significant, which partly reflects the much lower sample size of East German respondents.

Figure 24.9: Persecution and long-term effects on life satisfaction in Central Europe

The experience of persecution does not seem to have strong effects on overall life satisfaction, or the likelihood of looking back at life with happiness (Figure 24.9), though in the latter case in Czech Republic and Poland there is some evidence on the difference between those who experienced persecution and those who did not. Only in the Polish case this is significant at 90%, and persecuted individuals are twice as likely to report that they do not look back at life with happiness compared to those who did not suffer persecution. It seems that although persecuted individuals have gone through significant periods of stress and various extreme situations, their assessment of life overall does not differ that much from others. Interestingly the SHARELIFE data also suggest that they are more likely to report a specific period of happiness. Such attitudes are also reported in studies on the Holocaust survivors and their children (see Krell et al., 1997; Shmotkin and Litwin, 2009). However, when we look at satisfaction with professional life, the consequences of persecution are still very strong, in particular in the Czech Republic, where as we saw in Figure 24.7, the direct implications on professional life were most severe. The Czech respondents who experienced persecution are three times as likely to be dissatisfied with their job achievements, and almost twice as likely to report dissatisfaction with their careers in comparison to those who did not experience persecution. In Poland persecution increases the likelihood of reporting disappointing job careers by about 80%, and while the effects are not significant in the former German Democratic Republic they are in similar range.

24.7 The role of distant past in SHARE data

SHARELIFE data provide a unique source of information on the effect of often remote historical events and circumstances on the lives of European populations. The data identify instances of persecution and property dispossession among those currently aged 50+, who have themselves experienced the tragic side of the European 20th century history.

In this chapter we have presented the information collected in the SHARELIFE interview on often dramatic experiences of European populations in the 20th century. The data recorded reflect experiences in World War II and in its immediate aftermath, dramatic situations of populations who lived under communist regimes, as well as instances of persecution related to the period of de-colonisation, and other national political distress. A high proportion of those who report having been persecuted, in particular in West European countries, was born outside the current borders of these countries, and persecution is likely to have been the key motivation behind their migration. In the entire SHARELIFE sample almost 5% responded that they have experienced being persecuted, with the highest proportion in the Czech Republic (12%) and lowest in the south of Europe (about 2%). Persecution in the 20th century Europe often led to the loss of lives or had extremely severe effects on health, which may have led to a significant shortening of people's lives. It also led to forced migration or to departure of native populations to escape the oppressive nature of European regimes. Any analysis on those who survived and remained in their countries can thus uncover only a "lower bound" of the detrimental effects of persecution on people's lives.

Our focus in the analysis has been on three populations who were heavily affected by both World War II and subsequently the long period of communism, namely the Czech Republic, the German population who lived in the German Democratic Republic, and Poland. The common past makes the three a particularly interesting case for comparison, both in terms of extent and form of oppression. While in all three cases political reasons were most frequently given as the main reason for persecution, oppression for political reasons was more frequent in the Czech Republic than in Poland or the German Democratic Republic. In the latter two, ethnicity or nationality was on the other hand a more frequent main reason for persecution than in the Czech Republic. In the Czech Republic persecution had more significant effects on the position at work, with greater frequency of harassment and denied promotions.

Although the reported instances of persecution and dispossession in the majority of cases took place a long time ago, the consequences of these situations are felt by the respondents to this day. These effects are evident in the case of long-term health effects and are reflected in lower satisfaction with life and professional career. Interestingly, the country where the effects of persecution on satisfaction with career are strongest, the Czech Republic, is also the country where persecution had most frequent immediate implications on the position on the labour mar-

ket. The Polish persecuted population seems to have suffered most in terms of their health state as a consequence of persecution, with the persecuted individuals almost twice as likely to report problems in several health dimensions.

Even though our analysis treats instances of state oppression from the distant past, there are lessons from it which have implications for the policy of the European welfare state in 21st century. We could divide them into two main areas:

- Significant periods of stress and oppression have serious detrimental long-term effects on health; this places particular responsibility on democratically elected governments with respect to the compensation towards and care of those who experienced persecution in the past. This regards both those who experienced persecution in their home countries in Europe, as well as those who emigrate as a result of persecution and find their home in the EU.
- Although the nature of harassment at work in communist regimes was different to the forms it might take nowadays, it seems that there is a strong link between the experience of harassment and job satisfaction. Appropriate anti-harassment legislation may thus contribute to higher satisfaction with work and as a result perhaps contribute to longer working lives.

The initial analysis using persecution information collected in SHARELIFE interviews presented in this chapter is only the first attempt to uncover the consequences of dramatic events from respondents' life histories on their welfare. In future work we will investigate the effects on health and wellbeing in more detail, on family and social circumstances, as well as on economic implications of persecution, such as employment histories, incomes and wealth accumulation.

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