



Women's Satisfaction with Life: The Role of Socioeconomic Factors

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Abstract

Are educated Pakistani women satisfied with their lives? What are the possible psychosocial factors which may contribute to the life satisfaction of educated Pakistani women? Pakistani researchers have not answered these important questions, so the current study intends to fill the knowledge gap. The study involved 1291 conveniently selected educated Pakistani women with variations in age, marital status, educational qualification, occupational associations, and socioeconomic status. Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) was administered. The study found that educated Pakistani women were slightly satisfied with their lives, i.e., neither dissatisfied nor extremely satisfied. In percentage, it can be interpreted that the educated Pakistani women were 68.77 % satisfied with their lives. The study also found that only income, i.e., fathers' and husbands' monthly incomes, significantly correlated with women's life satisfaction. The women whose fathers and husbands had higher monthly incomes were found to have higher levels of life satisfaction. The study sensitizes policymakers to facilitate the education of Pakistani women in their progress and development so that they can be more satisfied with their lives.

Keywords: Life satisfaction, Pakistani women, Gender, Women, Feminism.

Women's satisfaction with life: the role of socioeconomic factors

Satisfaction with life is a globally well-recognized construct defined and explained in diversified styles. From Aristotle, who believed in happiness as the only rational goal in a human's life (Diner, Lucas & Oishi, 2002), satisfaction with life has been regarded as an output of several psychosocial factors. It has been regarded as a match between hoped-for and achieved goals (Neugarten, Havighurst & Tobin, 1961), as a comparison between goals and accomplishments (George, 1979), as the fulfillment of a reasonable amount of a person's important desires (Stones & Kozma, 1980), as gratification of a person's needs (Parmenter, 1988), as the accomplishment of a person's life expectations (Edgerton, 1990) and so forth. Jung (1933) and Buhler (1961) regarded life purpose as essential to life satisfaction. Abraham Maslow (1954, 1970) focused on the gratification of human needs to achieve overall satisfaction with life. Neugarten, Havenhurst, and Tobin (1961) involved zest vs. apathy, resolution, and fortitude, congruence between desired and achieved goals, self-concept, and affect or mood. Jones (2001) and Keys and Lopez (2002) included subjective quality of life, happiness, behavioral quality of life, positive affect, self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose meaning, environmental mastery, personal control, positive relations, and morale as elements of life satisfaction. A person's living environment, resources, and ability to engage in productive work are also considered ingredients for life satisfaction (Tennant, 1995).

Satisfaction with life, apart from its definitional ambiguities, is commonly considered a result of a person's subjective, unique, and individualized criteria about life satisfaction (Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzikoto & Ahadi, 2002). It is a person's perception of well-being and quality of life based on any criteria chosen by the person himself (Diener, Emmons, Larson & Griffin, 1985). The "subjective" measurement element is essential in this regard (Beckie & Hayduk, 1997). People may have their yardsticks to measure satisfaction with life following their personal wisdom and life experiences.

Keys and Lopez (2002) suggested that subjective well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction can be used interchangeably. Satisfaction with life can also be interchanged with Quality of Life and may involve a person's sense of fulfillment (Barnes, 1994). Certain demographic factors e.g., age, race, marital status, gender, education, and income, have also been studied and correlated with life satisfaction (Fernandos-Ballestros, Zimmaron & Ruiz, 2001). The role of family and friends, satisfaction with oneself (Campbell, 1981), extraversion in personality (Argle & Lu, 1990), and optimism for the future (Cummins & Nistico, 2001) are also regarded as contributors to one's overall satisfaction with life. A person's physical health is another important factor that contributes to satisfaction with life (Chang, Kim, Shigematsu, Nho, Nishijima & Tanaka, 2001). However, a person's perception of physical health is more important than actual health (Watten, Vassend, Myher & Syverson, 1997).

The relationship of satisfaction with life with one's gender has also interested researchers. In this regard, the findings are not globally the same, as gender roles significantly differ from culture to culture. Veenhoven (1997) suggested that men and women do not differ in life satisfaction based on their gender alone. Some other studies (e.g., Sousa & Lyubomirsky, 2001; Bjornskov et al., 2007) have incorporated other variables between life satisfaction and gender, including gender equality, domestic violence, being a full-time housewife, etc. It is, however, commonly accepted among researchers that cultural variations significantly vary the level of life satisfaction among both men and women. The current study was initiated to explore the levels of life satisfaction among Pakistani women as it was an interesting area that the local or cross-cultural researchers did not touch. The study intended to explore the role of certain psychosocial factors in increasing or decreasing life satisfaction among Pakistani women. These factors included age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation of the respondent, occupation of her father, occupation of her husband, monthly income of the respondent, monthly income of her father, monthly income of her husband, and sex of the respondent's children.

METHOD

Participants

The participants of the study were 1291 conveniently selected women from Pakistan. The sample was categorized into different groups based on age, marital status, and educational qualification: respondents', their fathers', and their husbands' occupations, and respondents', their fathers' and their husbands' monthly income. A detailed description of the participants can be seen in Table 2.

Instrument

Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) was used as the main instrument of the study. The scale is comprised of 5 items only and intends to measure the level of life satisfaction of the respondents based on their cognitive reflection on world experiences. The responses are calculated from 7 points on a Likert scale. The findings can be interpreted into six categories ranging from Very Dissatisfied to Extremely Satisfied with Life. The scale is reported to have perfect internal consistency (Diener et al., 1985) with an alpha of 0.87 and excellent test-re-test reliability i.e., 0.82, across two months. A brief Demographic Information Questionnaire was also used to gather data on the respondents' demographic factors.

Procedure

The researchers approached the women in different educational institutes and governmental and non-governmental organizations. Each participant was informed about the purpose of this study and obtained her consent to participate. The instruments were also given

to the students of the researchers, who further administered them to their mothers and sisters. A timeframe of 3 months was allocated to collect as much data as possible, resulting in information from 1291 women. The data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, and results were tabulated.

Findings & Discussion

Satisfaction with life is a significant indicator of one's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. It is a mirror in which one can see how well and how much s/he appreciates life experiences. Positive life experiences tendancy to make a person more satisfied with life. Negative life experiences, on the other hand, would lessen life satisfaction. Satisfaction with life has also been regarded as an instant tool that can reflect upon almost all psychosocial aspects of one's life.

Women in Pakistan are in the process of progressing and achieving social recognition in various fields. The current study intended to investigate satisfaction with life as perceived by educated Pakistani women, as there was a significant knowledge gap. By measuring the levels of overall life satisfaction, one can have an instant picture of the psychosocial constructs involved in making one satisfied with life, which can be probed further in detail. The current study delimited its scope to educated women only.

The current study's findings revealed that, overall, Pakistani women were "slightly satisfied" with their lives. Their mean score on Satisfaction with Life ($M=24.07$, $\%= 68.77$; Table 1) is an average score on Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). When calculated in percentage, the study revealed that Pakistani women were 68.77% satisfied with their lives. The study also analyzed the level of life satisfaction among Pakistani women based on their age and found that younger adults (women aged between 20 to 30 years) had higher scores on life satisfaction as compared with adolescents (aged 13 to 19 years) and adults (aged 31 to 60 years). This difference was, however, statistically not significant. The study also focused on the role of marital status in increasing or decreasing the levels of life satisfaction among Pakistani women and revealed no significant differences in this regard. The divorced and widows, however, were found to have the least scores on life satisfaction. Educational qualification was also found to have no significant impact on life satisfaction among Pakistani women. According to the current study, Pakistani women had no significant differences in satisfaction with life-based on their occupations. Students, working women, and housewives projected statistically insignificant scores on life satisfaction. The occupations of the fathers and husbands of the understudied women could also not make any significant differences in the levels of life satisfaction of Pakistani women.

The only factor revealed from the current study which significantly impacted life satisfaction among Pakistani women was the monthly income of the husbands and fathers of the women (table 2). It was revealed that the monthly income of fathers and husbands had a positively significant correlation with

the women's life satisfaction levels. An increase in the monthly income of fathers and husbands increased the life satisfaction of daughters and wives. The monthly income of fathers had a higher significance in this regard than the monthly income of husbands.

An interesting analysis (table 3) of the current study, after finding insignificant differences in the women's life satisfaction based on their age, marital status, educational qualification, and occupation, elaborated on the typical characteristics of the women while segregating them into different ranges of life satisfaction. Diener and associates (1985), after developing the Satisfaction with Life Scale, provided different ranges in which the respondents may fall. These included extremely satisfied with life, slightly satisfied, neutral, slightly dissatisfied, and extremely dissatisfied. When the educated Pakistani women separately based on their overall scores on life satisfaction, it was revealed that only monthly income and age may contribute to increasing or decreasing the levels of life satisfaction among the respondents.

The role of psychosocial factors in women's satisfaction with life has been studied worldwide; hence, the researchers have not been reached on some similar grounds in this regard. Studies have provided diversified results based on cultural variations, which cannot be ignored. According to Beutell (2006), both nature and nurture, i.e., personality and environment, play their role in women's life satisfaction. Chipper and Havens (2001) explored the role of marriage in life satisfaction and studied couples based on their marital stability. They found that the life satisfaction of women declined with their marital stability. They also found that life satisfaction declines with the loss of a spouse. Sousa and Lyubomirsky (2001) analyzed life satisfaction about women's hostility towards other women and found an inverse association. Kousha and Moheen (2004) found inverse relationships between women's life satisfaction with their marriage and occupations. Bettencourt and Molix (2003) suggested that life satisfaction declines with age, but an increase in income can mediate this decline. These and various other studies have tried to develop causal connections between life satisfaction and several psychosocial factors and have mostly concluded that one cannot indeed associate a factor as a prime cause of life satisfaction as the determination of life satisfaction is a subjective judgment of a person.

The current study has explored the levels of life satisfaction among educated Pakistani women and has also tried to associate the life satisfaction of these women with different psychosocial factors. The study has concluded that the education Pakistani women are slightly satisfied with their lives. Those who are more satisfied than others have higher monthly incomes from their fathers and husbands. The study has tried to slightly overcome the knowledge gap in the subject with special reference to Pakistan; hence, it is recommended that future researchers incorporate illiterate women in their analyses, too.

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Tables

Table 1: Description of the sample with a categorical overview of the mean, standard deviation, percentage, ranking and variance of the respondents by Satisfaction with Life

Factor	Category	N	M	SD	%	Rank	F or t	Sig. or P
	Overall	1291	24.07	5.97	68.77			
Age	Young Adults	882	24.30	5.80	69.43	1		
	Adolescents	188	23.94	5.87	68.40	2	2.674	.069
	Adults	221	23.27	6.64	66.49	3		
Marital Status	Engaged	136	24.13	6.30	68.94	1		
	Single	762	24.12	5.79	68.91	2		
	Married	374	24.02	6.23	68.63	3	.246	.912
	Widow	7	23.43	5.06	66.94	4		
	Divorced	12	22.50	6.14	64.29	5		

Education	College Level	732	24.16	5.95	69.03	1		
	University Level	509	24.02	6.01	68.63	2	.465	.628
	School Level	50	23.34	5.88	66.69	3		
Occupation Self	Student	795	24.30	5.84	69.43	1		
	Working	330	23.74	6.15	67.83	2	1.578	.207
	Housewife	166	23.63	6.22	67.51	3		
Occupation Father	Salaried	546	24.20	5.73	69.14	1		
	Businessman	745	23.98	6.14	68.51	2	.651	.515
Occupation Husband	Retired	69	24.94	5.58	71.26	1		
	Jobless	26	24.81	5.52	70.89	2		
	Businessman	44	24.57	5.52	70.20	3	.750	.558
	Army Officer	310	24.21	6.20	69.17	4		
	Govt. Employee	842	23.90	5.87	68.29	5		

Table 2: The correlation of Life Satisfaction with Income

	Income Self	Income Father	Income Husband
Satisfaction with Life	.000	.079**	.068*

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: The common characteristics of the women fallen in different ranges of life satisfaction

Scor	Interpretation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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Range		M	Mo	Mo	Mo	Mo	Mo	M	M	M
31-35	Extremely satisfied	25	Single	College	Student	Business man			76550	
26-30	Satisfied	25	Single	College	Student	Business man			74113	
21-25	Slightly satisfied	24	Single	College	Student	Business man			63236	
20	Neutral	28	Married	University	Student	Business man	Govt.		32547	
15-19	Slightly dissatisfied	25	Single	College	Student	Business man			54250	
10-14	Dissatisfied	25	Single	College	Student	Business man			51859	
5-9	Extremely dissatisfied	30	Married	College	Working	Business man	Govt.	17095	27380	

1=Age; 2= Marital Status; 3=Educational Qualification; 4=Occupation Self; 5=Occupation Father; 6=Occupation Husband; 7=Income Self; 8=Income Father; 9=Income Husband; Govt.=Government Servant