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LIVING STANDARD AND HAPPINESS OF WOMEN TEACHERS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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Abstract:

The study aims at finding out the relationship between living standard and happiness as experienced by Secondary and Higher Secondary school teachers of Jammu and Kashmir (India). Quantitative as well as Qualitative data were obtained from a sample of 20 male and 20 female teachers spread equally over lecturer and teacher cadre. The result reported that living standard had limited influence on happiness. Gender and Occupational position played a role in defining and experiencing happiness. Semi-structured interviews of the respondents revealed various new components of happiness were having uniquely rooted in the local culture. It also suggested certain measures on gender empowerment, school reforms and teacher welfare having policy implications.

KEY WORDS:

Living Standard, Happiness, Gender, Occupational Position.

INTRODUCTION

The last decade has witnessed a triumphant global capitalism significantly changing the consumption habits in the developing countries. Asceticism and austerity as central values of oriental and collectivistic societies are rapidly giving way to materialism and consumerism Money and high living standard have always been pursued in the past across cultures but it is only in the recent past that these have unabashedly been sought to be connected with happiness. The main purpose of this study is to find out the connections between 'living standard' and 'happiness' in a transitional economy with ancient cultural moorings. Additionally, the study also seeks to find out the influence of 'gender' and 'occupational position' on 'living standard' and 'happiness'.

Gallo and Mathews (1999) found low Socio-Economic Status (SES) having strong association with depression, hopelessness, anxiety and hostility as low SES deplete resources and hinders development and restoration of resource reserve. It was reported that men and women employed in positions with low occupational prestige experienced greater interpersonal conflict than those with higher prestige positions (Mathews, Raikkonen et.al. 2000). Twenge and Campbell (2002) reported that association between SES and self esteem has become stronger in women over time and is higher among Asian-Americans than other groups and increases with age peaking in mid-life. However, Andrew and Withey (1978) had earlier found little gender differences in life satisfaction and women even with negative affect were happier than men because of stable marriage. Women were also found to be more satisfied than men with their social relations and living environment (Lu, 1996 and Lu et.al., 1997). But Cass (1988), Rose (1986) and Vencatesan (1996) reported that females perceived greater economic stress than males and the intimacy of marital bond is often strained by the economic stress (Belle, 1990). A study by Siddiqui and Pandey (2006) also suggested that the stability of the family structure is often strained by the economic stress and consequences are harsher for women as it puts added burden on her to fend for the children and run the house. Johnson and

LIVING STANDARD AND HAPPINESS OF WOMEN TEACHERS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Krueger (2006) interestingly brought out that the perceived financial situation and control over life can completely mediate the association between actual wealth and life satisfaction. More recently Cummins et al. (2007) reported that subjective well-being has set points often under genetic control negating that people can be endlessly happier. No matter how rich some one is, their average level of SWB cannot be sustained higher than a level of set point.

At a macro level, many studies conducted on SWB showed that economically poor and rich nations do not differ significantly in the index of life satisfaction (Diener 2000; Diener and Diener 1995; Myers 2000). A number of cross-national studies have revealed that national wealth and economic growth has no positive co-relation beyond a certain point with indices of life satisfaction and happiness as they follow the law of diminishing returns (Kehnaman, 2006). World Bank (1997) also found that subjective well-being though had a strong relationship with national wealth was not clearly linear. It also found population SWB widely varied with same income indicating presence of other factors such as civil disturbance, disease, bad governance etc.

A sample of 40 government employees consisting of equal number of males and females was selected through purposive sampling. In the second stage, from amongst the 20 male and 20 female respondents, equal numbers of lecturer and teacher cadre employees (10 each) were selected through random sampling.

Variables:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| a) Independent | b) Dependent |
| i. Gender | i. Level of living standard |
| ii. Job Hierarchy | ii. Level of happiness. |

DEFINITIONS AND MEASUREMENT

a) Living Standard

Living Standard is the economic well being of an individual. It refers to material comforts a person enjoys. Based mostly on consumption, it is broader than mere possession of property and income. Its measurement therefore would include not only property or income of a person but the use of such property or income to buy material comforts. It is different from Socio-Economic Status (SES) as the latter also considers factors such as educational attainment, occupation prestige etc. The Measures of Living Standard (MLS) employed in this study used both metric and non-metric scale. Metric scale was used to measure items such as size and location of the house, net property worth, perceived financial security etc. Non-metric scale was used to measure items like use of home appliances, health insurance, and different types of personal transport. Items, which had large cost variations, were subjected to metric scales and other items could be measured through non-metric scale. Earlier, in a pilot study on 40 respondents 5 opined that the MLS questionnaire measured living standard 80-100% accurately. Twenty others said, its accuracy was 60-80% and 11 others found the accuracy to be 40-60%. Only 2 rated the accuracy to be between 0-20%. The mean of living standard Questionnaire was 3.75 and Standard Deviation (SD) 0.7425 (Das, 2006).

b) Happiness

Subjective well-being has been studied in a large number of disciplines over many centuries and has been defined in ethical, theological, political, economic and psychological terms. Subjective well-being is defined as people's assessment of their lives. People evaluate their lives in several ways. First, people make judgement about their lives-whether their lives are fulfilling or satisfying and meaningful. People also evaluate specific aspects of their lives such as their marriages, health, work and leisure time. In addition people react to events with affect (moods and emotions). Positive or pleasant affects are shown when things go well and negative or unpleasant affect when things go bad. Thus, the affective system provides an "on line" evaluation of life. The subjective well-being, therefore, is an umbrella term that refers to different forms of positive evaluation of one's life and is colloquially called happiness as it refers to an emotional sense of well-being like contentment, fulfillment, self-satisfaction, joy, peace of mind. According to Argyle (1987), Argyle and Peter Hills (2002) happiness constitutes seven components i) positive cognition, ii) social commitment, iii) positive affect, iv) sense of control, v) physical fitness, vi) satisfaction with self and vii) mental alertness. As regards measurement of happiness, the revised Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ, 2002) consists of same number of similarly worded items of Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) where respondents can answer on a six-point Likert scale. The scale consists of equal number of positive and negative items.

Principal components factor analysis of OHI and OHQ showed seven factors with Eigen value >1. While OHI explained happiness by 60.9%, OHQ did it by 64.3%. OHQ based on OHI, comprised 29 items

LIVING STANDARD AND HAPPINESS OF WOMEN TEACHERS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

each involving the selection of one from four options that are different for each item. The validity of OHQ was satisfactory. Parallel factor analysis of OHI and OHQ virtually produced identical statistical results. Reverse items in OHQ were 1,5,6,10,13,19,23,24,27,28,29.

RESULTS

The main effect of gender on living standard did not differ significantly (SS 93.02, df 1, MS 93.02, F-ratio 4.58, insignificant). However, there was significant difference between the living standard of lecturer and teacher cadre employees (SS 198.20, df 1, MS 198.20, F-ratio 9.74, significant at 0.05 level). The interaction effect between gender and occupational position on living standard was also not significant (SS 731.50, df 36, MS 20.32). Female employees did not differ significantly from their male counterparts on living standard scores (Female: M 26.10, SD 4.57 and Males: M 23.05, SD 5.42). The difference though small may have an explanation as the female employees' income is invariably in addition to that of their spouse. Demographic data substantiated this explanation. On living standard, significant difference was found between lecturer (N 20, M 26.80, SD 4.64) and teacher cadre employees (N 20, M 22.35, SD 4.82) with a t-value of 2.97 significant at 0.05 level.

Difference between teacher cadre male (N 10, M 20, SD 3.59) and female (N 10, M 20, SD 4.90) employees on living standard with a t-value of 2.45 was significant at 0.05 level. Lecturer cadre male employees (N 10, M 26.10, SD 5.34) showed higher level of living standard than teacher cadre male employees (N 10, M 20, SD 3.59) with a t-value of 2.99 and was significant at 0.05 level. This could be explained by the higher remuneration of lecturer cadre employees. Interestingly, such difference in living standards was absent between lecturer and teacher cadre female employees. A possible explanation could be located at the living standard data where females, irrespective of occupational position, showed no special preference for club membership, foreign visits, health insurance, holidaying and owning personal transport etc. This in turn can be traced to sex role socialization of females in the local culture wherein values such as avoiding conspicuous consumption, saving for rainy days, home making etc prevented an average employed married woman from splurging despite possessing disposable income to acquire a higher status.

The effect of gender on happiness differed significantly (SS 3763.60, df 1, MS 3763.60, F-ratio 35.26, significant at 0.05 level). On happiness, female employees (N 20, M 142.55, SD 9.37) scored higher than male employees (N 20, M 123.15, SD 11.14) with a t-value of 5.97 significant at 0.05 level. This meant female employees showed higher level of happiness as compared to males. Female employees scoring higher on self-control, social commitment, mental alertness and satisfaction with self, evidenced this. This further suggested that increased women participation in productive and commercially rewarding employment outside households contributed significantly to happiness of the female worker as well as the family of which she is a part. The difference between male (N 10, M 125.30, SD 110.72) and female employees (N 10, M 144.70, SD 7.80) with a t-value of 4.63 of the teacher cadre on happiness was found significant. The female employees were happier than their male counterparts confirming the trend for the entire sample irrespective of gender and occupational position. Same trend was observed between male (N 10, M 121.00, SD 11.69) and female (N 10, M 140.40, SD 10.68) for officer cadre employees with a t-value of 3.79 significant at 0.05 level.

Low positive co-relationship ($r = 0.175$) was reported for the entire sample between living standard and happiness. However, across occupational position male employees (officer cadre $r = 0.190$ & non-officer cadre $r = 0.173$) showed positive co-relation between living standard and happiness. Significant positive co-relation between living standard and happiness was also found for teacher cadre employees ($r = 0.320^{**}$). Male employees assigning relatively higher importance on living standards to attain happiness could be explained by sex role socialization where success of males is measured mostly in terms of material achievements. However, co-relation between living standard and happiness was found to be negative ($r = -0.157$) for female employees. This negative co-relation was significantly higher in case of teacher cadre female employees ($r = -0.345^{**}$).

However, it would be wrong to conclude that with decreasing living standard, happiness increases for teacher cadre female employees. The relationship is unlikely to be cause and effect in nature. Here, part of the explanation could lie in the work culture of government organizations markedly different from their private counterparts. Teacher cadre employees especially women were handling less critical assignment with lesser responsibilities. The remuneration gap having a bearing on living standard between the lecturer cadre and teacher cadre employees viv-a-vis the workload, however, was remarkably less. Organizational performance, decision related consequences and connected responsibilities were far more rigorous for lecturer cadre than the teacher cadre employees. The remuneration structure for the teacher cadre employees despite lower responsibilities was not commensurately less.

ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

LIVING STANDARD AND HAPPINESS OF WOMEN TEACHERS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the indigenous notion of 'happiness' and its linkages with 'living standard'. Participant's descriptive and evaluative conceptualization of 'happiness' was also analyzed to ascertain the deficiencies of the OHQ in quantifying it.

Following questions using saturation principle were asked: What makes you happy? What makes you unhappy? What makes you happier than others? What things you would not sacrifice for money? The last two questions were partially 'leading' in nature but were posed with the hunch that the process of defining and experiencing happiness is 'comparative' and also not necessarily linked to 'material comforts'.

An analysis of the responses would show that happiness has three components: 'material', 'psychological', and 'spiritual'. Responses to the question – 'what makes you happy?' such as dining out, listening to music, dancing, watching TV, seeing a movie, shopping, long drive, traveling and holidaying, having a big bank balance, owning a vehicle, wearing new clothes, owning an air conditioner, finding employment, receiving gifts, getting posted at a favorable work place, good health, yoga, walking are examples of the material dimension of happiness. Interestingly, responses such as picnicking, preparing a dish for the family, watching a movie or TV program with family, partying with family and friends showed that happiness was often experienced when shared with others confirming the psychological dimension of happiness. The significance of successful interpersonal relations in defining and experiencing happiness was also confirmed with respondents emphasizing on happiness derived out of being loved and wanted by children and spouse, the success and achievement of children, spouse, siblings and parents and close friends. Responses were also received to indicate a planned life, positive thinking, pursuing hobbies, getting married, parenthood, celebration of birthday and anniversary of spouse, promotion and retirement of father/spouse were significant sources of happiness. Spiritual dimension of defining and experiencing happiness also came to the fore as respondents cited visiting places of worship and offering prayers, listening to devotional songs, meditation, attending religious discourses, watching sunrise, helping others especially the less privileged as sources of happiness.

While responding to the question 'what makes you happier than others?' responses included – 'I am settled', 'I am free from emotional insecurity', 'I am satisfied with life by god's grace', 'I have achieved everything in life', 'All my desires stand fulfilled', 'I have achieved according to my expectations', 'I am lucky', 'I have better communication and time management skills', 'I am free from desires and have positive thinking', 'I am loved by others' etc. An in-depth content analysis of these responses suggest that striving for happiness is a natural process as respondents across gender, occupational status and living standard reported attainment of happiness. The process behind such striving is often by limiting social comparison with equals and not those above oneself. It also suggested that respondents strived to derive happiness from their present conditions rather than an uncertain future.

'Fear of loosing' (material and non-material achievements already attained) and 'results contrary to expectations' were the two most dominant responses to the question on reasons for unhappiness. To the question 'what things you would not sacrifice for money?' the overwhelming response was 'being loved and wanted by spouse and children' followed by 'academic and career success of children', 'social relationships' and 'good health'. This signified the continuing importance of family in defining and experiencing happiness.

CONCLUSION

Three important implications arise from the present study. First, increased women participation in the formal economy has great potential in enhancing not only her living standard but her overall happiness and the family of which she is a part. Second, since lecturer cadre employees were found to be less happy than then teacher cadre employees in government organizations and yet were handling more critical and greater responsibilities, governments may have to re-engineer the work processes. Diffusion and delegation of responsibilities downwards along with a reassessment of incentives and disincentives connected with actual performance may become necessary. Third, money's role in ensuring happiness is limited and has been overestimated. Happiness return on non-monetary investments such as family relations on the contrary has been underestimated. Economist Andrew Oswald of the University of Warwick in England (2006) reported, any effect of money on happiness is smaller than most assumed as he held it is much better to try to find a right husband or wife rather than try to double one's salary.

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