



Effect of demographic variables on life satisfaction

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Abstract

Life satisfaction is the ultimate goal that we as human beings are striving to achieve our entire lives. The label satisfaction is a concept that can mean many different things to different individuals. Although needs and wants are as diverse as the individuals. There are certain factors that are generally felt by every society to measure satisfaction. Quality of life studies tend to divide sources of wellbeing into two categories: External circumstances such as available community services or family life, and internal dispositions such as self-esteem or the sense that one controls one's own fate. The present research article focusses on the meaning of life satisfaction and the effect of demographic factors on life satisfaction of women.

Keywords: Life satisfaction, Culture, Social Relationships, Education, Income, Gender, Age,

Introduction

The success of a community or nation is frequently judged by objective standards. The quality of life of the individual is generally quantified in terms of greater income lower taxes, lower crime rates and improvement in education and health care. But this quantification is not always true. Indeed, objective measures of quality of life (i.e. income, education) are often weakly related to people's subjective self-reports of the extent to which they are satisfied with their lives. It is clear that a one to one relationship between observable life circumstances and selective judgments of life satisfaction does not always exist. A great deal of psychological research has explored the sources of people's life satisfaction. These sources include one's overall wealth, whether one is single or married, male or female or young or old.

Findings of many of the researchers investigating the predictors of life satisfaction focused on the experiences of women have shown that they are directly relevant to women's lives. Life circumstances such as bearing and raising children, marriage, poverty and inequality all influence the life satisfaction of women.

Meaning of life satisfaction

Satisfaction is a latin word that means "to make" or "do enough". Satisfaction with one's life implies a contentment with or acceptance of one's life circumstances, or the fulfilment of one's wants and needs for one's life as a whole.

In essence "Life satisfaction is a subjective assessment of the quality of one's life." Because it is inherently an evaluation,

judgments of life satisfaction have a large cognitive component.

Webster's dictionary defines satisfaction as "the fulfilment of a need or want."

Life satisfaction is one of the oldest and most persistently investigated issues in the study of adulthood. It is generally referred to as "an assessment of the overall conditions of existence as derived from a comparison of ones aspirations to one's actual achievements.

Demographic variables in life satisfaction

The objective determinants of life satisfaction tell us the extent to which satisfaction is related to the environment, both imposed (eg. culture) and relatively controllable (e.g. Income, occupation, education, marriage) as well as to specific aspects of persons. (e.g. gender, age.)

a) Culture

Satisfaction is a universal term. People from different cultures are able to distinguish between such terms as 'happiness' satisfaction with life,' best possible life' and 'worst possible life.'

Life satisfaction is not a uniquely western concept. Current research shows that members of individual cultures like U.S. England, Australia report greater satisfaction relative to members of collectivist cultures like China, Japan India etc. Life satisfaction also varies with cultural dimension.

Citizens of wealthy industrialized nations have very high level of satisfaction overall and citizens of poor. Third world nations

have low levels of satisfaction overall. Once a community of people reach a decent standard of living, differences in life satisfaction are less likely to be related to differences in wealth. Members of different cultures reach life satisfaction judgments in distinct ways. Members of collectivist cultures rely on cultural norms to determine their life satisfaction judgments, whereas members of individualistic cultures appear to rely on emotional experiences as their guide to life satisfaction judgments. Thus the life satisfaction judgment can be fluid subject to the changing social environment.

Life satisfaction is greatest among prosperous nations characterized by gender equality, care for human rights, political freedom and access to knowledge.

Women living in patriarchal cultures in which equal opportunities are unavailable and equal value is not afforded would experience greater life dissatisfaction with their lives, than women living in egalitarian cultures.

b) Gender

A majority of studies show no gender differences in life satisfaction. However research findings show that women tend to experience greater joy and deeper sadness than do men. Social resources are predictive of life satisfaction for both man and women, but they are more predictive for women. Perhaps women's roles as the conservators of contact with friends and family lead to their greater reliance on social support. Greater the gender equality within a culture greater is the reported life satisfaction. This spans both equality in the broader cultural sense and equality within marriage.

Gloria Cawan and her colleagues (1998) found that married women report greater life satisfaction than single, widowed or divorced women.

John Haworth and his colleagues (1997) found that among American working women, those who had an internal locus were relatively more satisfied with their lives. For e.g. A woman who perceives her success to be due to her hard work and determination would report greater satisfaction than women who perceives her success to be due to luck or chance. A belief in one's own ability to effect changes and choose the course of one's life is more satisfying than believing that one has no control over life's outcomes.

C) Age

Life satisfaction does not decline with age. It remains stable throughout the life span, showing just a slight increase in the trend between the ages 20 years to 80 years.

This could be attributed to the assumption that women have an extraordinary capacity to adapt to significant life changes. As women age they revise their ideal selves to accommodate their current circumstances.

d) Social relationship

High levels of social supports have been shown to be strongly associated with higher level of life satisfaction. Gender is a factor in the quality of relationships. Women tend to provide greater and more meaningful support to men. Both men and woman report that their friendship with women are more intimate nurturing and supportive than friendship with men. This is perhaps due to the fact that conversations with women involve greater self-disclosure and empathy.

e) Income

The relationship between income and life satisfaction is a complex. Here life satisfaction differences across nations are smaller than within nations. Women who live in poorer, less egalitarian nations tend to be less satisfied with their lives overall than women who live in wealthier nations. However longitudinal research has shown that rise in people's incomes does not necessarily coincide with related increase in life satisfaction. Perhaps once a certain level of wealth is obtained life satisfaction is no longer anchored to increase in wealth and material goods.

f) Education

Researchers have found a small correlation between education and Life Satisfaction. This may be due to the fact that higher levels of education are associated with higher incomes. Education is highly related with life satisfaction with women with lower incomes and poor nations. Poor women in some cultures have little access to education. So when they do gain access they value and appreciate it much more than those who have easy access to education. Education also provides access to a greater occupational and income opportunities which have an additional influence on life satisfaction. Thus, we may summarize the concept of life satisfaction in women who live in egalitarian nations characterized by greater gender equality are relatively more satisfied. Also women who show an internal locus of control and less hostility towards other women are also more satisfied.

A more recent study on elderly individuals in China also emphasized the importance of health as a primary determining factor of life satisfaction for older adults (Ng, Tey, & Asadullah, 2017). The total list of important factors included:

- Gender (females +)
- Education (+)
- Place of residence (city + vs. town -)
- Health status (better health +)
- Cognitive ability (+)
- Regular physical examinations (+)
- Perceived relative economic status (+)
- Access to social security provisions (+)
- Commercialized insurances (+)
- Living arrangements (with family members +)
- Number of social services available in the community (+)

Measurement of life satisfaction

Before examining the factors related to life satisfaction, it is important to discuss how life satisfaction is measured. Researchers' overwhelming choice for assessing life satisfaction is through self-report. Self-report measures require respondents to indicate the extent to which they are satisfied with their lives by selecting a symbol (i.e., a number or a facial expression) on a rating scale (e.g., from 1 to 7). Because life satisfaction is assumed to be a judgment, researchers believe that self-report is the most direct and most accurate way to measure it.

Single-Item vs. Multi-item measures of life satisfaction

There are many self-report measures of life satisfaction. Some measures consist of a single question, such as, "How satisfied with your life are you overall?", whereas other measures

require participants to respond to multiple items. Overall, researchers agree that multi-item scales of life satisfaction are preferable to single-item scales. Although single-item scales have adequate convergent validity (i.e., the scales correlate well with other similar measures) and satisfactory reliability (i.e., the scale measures similarly over time), only multiple-item scales allow for the assessment of internal consistency, as well as the identification of errors associated with wording and measurement.

Additionally, Ed Diener (1984) has argued that multi-item scales have demonstrated greater reliability and validity overall than single-item scales. Furthermore, a meta-analysis conducted by Martin Piquart and Silvia Sorensen (2000) found that correlations between life satisfaction and variables such as income, education, gender, and age are significantly reduced when single-item, rather than multiple-item, scales are used. Researchers speculate that single-item scales may be more susceptible to social desirability biases than multiple-item ones because the latter request a wider range of information with more specificity. Despite these concerns, however, single-item scales have tended to correlate well with the multiple-item scales, so if an abridged version is needed, single-item scales appear to be adequate. The most widely used and most well-validated measure of life satisfaction is a multi-item scale, the Satisfaction with Life Scale

Conclusion

As we've seen, there are many factors associated with life satisfaction. Work on improving or enhancing these factors, and you will find that your life satisfaction improves at the same time. These factors include relationships with loved ones, fulfilment from work, satisfaction with your physical health, happiness with your personal life, and contentment with your sense of spirituality or religion.

"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony." Mahatma Gandhi

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