

# Happiness, Wellbeing and Life satisfaction among Adolescents and Young Adults

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## ABSTRACT

In recent times, concepts like happiness and life satisfaction and the impact that these can have on individuals' lives and their relationships are focused upon more often in research. Happiness is multidimensional and has emotional, social and cognitive aspects. Life satisfaction refers to the cognitive activity where individuals reflect upon and judge their quality of life. It is the equilibrium that is created between the aspirations of an individual and the current state that s/he is in. The level discrepancy between the two determines the extent of satisfaction. This paper reflects on the association between these three variables i.e. happiness, wellbeing and life satisfaction among male and female adolescents and young adults. It was found that wellbeing and level of satisfaction are related for both males and females. However, females in the present study seemed to have better wellbeing and happiness than males but they have the same perception about life satisfaction.

What is the one major goal or quest of life that individuals – young or old, direct all their energy towards?

Happiness, wellbeing and life satisfaction have often been concentrated on as central themes of interest. These are of concern to positive psychologists as the advancement of happiness and wellbeing among young persons is the mission for advocators of mental health and teachers (Huebner et. al. 2006), as also an issue of concern for parents.

Researchers have tried to understand the constructs of happiness and wellbeing and have found that these can be understood with their relationship to life satisfaction. Shin and Johnson, 1978 have described life satisfaction as the evaluation of life on the cognitive continuum and “and one of the most well recognized markers of happiness, wellbeing, and positive functioning among young persons” (Suldo et al. 2006).

While there are many factors that can have a role to play in one's satisfaction with life, personality is one of the important factors that need to be considered. In a broad perspective, personality influences our worldview; it decides how one behaves, moves around in his/her context; and it would therefore have an important role to play in one's ultimate goal of achieving happiness.

There is no doubt that life satisfaction is a complex concept. Happiness and life satisfaction are used alternatively, but they are two different notions. “Life satisfaction is the evaluation of one's life as a whole, not simply one's current level of happiness” (Ackerman, 2018). To be able to understand and study happiness, it would be essential to define happiness and evaluate ‘who’ is happy and ‘why’. Happiness is a fleeting, sometimes short lived, in the moment occurrence. It is definitely enjoyable and gratifying, but it is transient. According to Daniel Gilbert (2009), happiness is “anything we pleased”. It

can be initiated by our thoughts, actions, by any event and so on.

Life satisfaction is more long-lived. It is more constant. It has a broader space and range. It refers to our general feeling about the life we are living and how content and satisfied we are with the way it is progressing. It is our assessment of emotions and perceptions about life at a given point in life that can range from the negative to the positive at any given time. The various factors that can have an impact on life satisfaction revolve around our relationships. Family, peers, spouse, professional and personal life interactions, physical and emotional wellbeing are all important associations that can play a role here.

Wellbeing and life satisfaction also have differences; there are many ways to measure wellbeing, but it is normally defined more stringently and is based on many ranges of definition. Seligman, developed the PERMA model of wellbeing. He focused on the five main factors – positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishments as contributors for wellbeing (Seligman, 2011).

## Methodology

60 boys and girls between the age group of 17 to 20 years formulated the sample for this study. They responded to a questionnaire that incorporated components of two widely used and accepted standardized tools viz. The Satisfaction with Life Scale by W.G. Diener and the EPOCH Measure of Adolescent wellbeing by Margaret L. Kern and Lisbeth Benson.

- The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), by Ed Diener, Robert A. Emmons, Randy J. Larsen and Sharon Griffin is a 5-item tool to study the individuals' global cognitive assessment of life satisfaction. The scale barely takes one minute to complete.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) measures satisfaction that individuals have with their lives. The scale is not restricted to studying the satisfaction that an individual has with any specific areas, and permits the subject to incorporate and amalgamate any areas or domains they choose.

- The EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Wellbeing. In his 2011 book *Flourish*, Dr. Martin Seligman, delineated five pillars of wellbeing, with the acronym PERMA. This consisted of five positive characteristics of wellbeing: Engagement, Perseverance, Optimism, Connectedness and Happiness. Engagement refers to being absorbed, interested and involved in an activity or the world itself. Perseverance refers to having the tenacity to stick with things and pursue a goal, despite any challenges that occur. Optimism refers to having a sense of hope and confidence about the future. It involves generally taking a favourable view of things. Connectedness refers to feeling loved, supported and valued by others. It is the connections and the closeness that we experience towards others. Happiness is a greater feeling of happiness, cheer and contentment with life.

Together both of the above were converted into a single questionnaire and this was administered to the participants.

## Results and Discussion

Items of the EPOCH scale for Wellbeing were administered through the questionnaire to both the males and females. While analyzing the scores of females it was found that they showed the highest percentage on 'connectedness' at 22.9% and the lowest on 'engagement' at 17.81%. 'Happiness', 'Optimism' and 'Perseverance' were in between at 20.53%, 20.14% and 18.62% respectively.

In the case of males, on the wellbeing scale, it was seen that 'connectedness' was at the highest score of 21.10% and 'perseverance' was at the lowest with 18.42%. Happiness was just higher than that at 19.74%. 'Engagement' and 'optimism' were neck and neck with 20.31% and 20.48%.

On the Satisfaction with Life scale, a continuum from extremely dissatisfied to extremely satisfied was developed on a 7-point scale.

In the case females, it was seen that about 43.3% of the sample selected the slightly satisfied category. Just about 3.30% of the female sample was extremely satisfied. A similar percentage was seen in the neutral and the dissatisfied category. 23.3% of the sample said they were satisfied whereas a similar percentage stated that they were slightly dissatisfied. None of the female sample was extremely dissatisfied.

In the case of the males as well, none of them were extremely dissatisfied. 32.1% were slightly satisfied followed by 28.60% who were slightly dissatisfied. An equal number, 14.30% were

in the neutral and the satisfied bracket. 3.60% were dissatisfied and about 7.10% were extremely satisfied.

A comparison between the males and females provided the following results:

For the Wellbeing scale (EPOCH)

- **Engagement:** Males showed a slightly higher percentage (20.3%) than females (17.8%)
- **Perseverance:** Females and males had comparable percentages here at 18.6% for females and 18.4% for males.
- **Optimism:** Males and females had almost similar levels here too with males at 20.5% and females at 20.1%.
- **Connectedness:** Females had a marginal higher level here at 22.9% as compared to males at 21.1%
- **Happiness:** Females had a higher percentage at 20.5% while males were at 19.7%.

On the SWLS scale items the following was observed

- **Extremely Satisfied:** Males at 7.1% seemed to be more extremely satisfied than females at 3.3%.
- **Satisfied:** 23.3% of the female sample stated that they were satisfied as compared to only 14.3% of the males who identified with this category.
- **Slightly Satisfied:** There were more females in this category at 43.3% as compared to only 32.1% of the males.
- **Neutral:** More males chose this option at 14.3% as compared to only 3.3% of the females.
- **Slightly Dissatisfied:** 28.6% of the males identified with this category as compared to 23.3% of the female sample
- **Dissatisfied:** Here, males and females were very close to each other at 3.6% and 3.3% respectively.
- **Extremely Dissatisfied:** None of the male or female sample were extremely dissatisfied.

This study was done on a sample of 30 males and 30 females between the age ranges of 17-20 years. At this age, individuals are generally in high school or in college. The study aimed to assess the levels of wellbeing and happiness and try to provide an association with life satisfaction. Assessing their level of engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness and happiness as also their levels of satisfaction were a means to this end.

Through an analysis of the data collected in this study, it can be concluded that males seemed to be more absorbed, interested and involved in an activity as compared to females. Both have a similar sense of hope and confidence. On the other hand, females seem to have a slightly greater sense of love, support and value than males. Also, males and females are similar in their disposition of happiness, cheerfulness and are contented with their lives. Also, females seemed to be slightly less confident and less absorbed in their activity, but they have a sense of rigidity in their work and have support and love from others and feel happier than males.

Females are mostly 'slightly satisfied' with their life and neither males nor females were extremely dissatisfied. There were

very few males and females who were 'dissatisfied'. Very few females were 'extremely satisfied' or 'neutral'. A greater number of males were 'neutral' and 'extremely satisfied' in their responses towards satisfaction.

Lastly, we can relate wellbeing with the level of satisfaction and make a comparison between both males and females. It can be stated that females have better wellbeing and happiness levels as compared to males while both groups have an equal perception about satisfaction with their life.

Diener worked extensively in this area of happiness, wellbeing and life satisfaction and listed four "ingredients for a happy life": Psychological wellbeing that has a greater value than money and has to do with one's attitude, engagement with work and the goals that are set; Happiness, apart from providing the feel-good factor, is beneficial for relationships, as well as for professional life and for physical health and wellbeing. It is

essential to move away from fantasy in our expectations from life. One can never be happy always; and thought is imperative to happiness as we can feel what we think. Enhancing cognitive abilities may be the guiding force here (Diener, 2011)

Factors that can contribute to life satisfaction may include life chances wherein political freedom, economic welfare, moral order, culture, social equality and personal resources, family bonds, physical fitness, intellectual capacities would be covered. The flow of experience revolves around experiences like safety, love, respect, excitement etc. versus anxiety, loneliness, rejection, humiliation and so on. The course of events includes the things that can confront us in our day-to-day lives causing us to lean towards greater satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Finally, life is the equilibrium of all the above interactions in helping one to focus on the positive and the negative in life and balancing them out. (Veenhoven, 1996)

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