

Life satisfaction in Indian women: *The role of employment status and emotional intelligence*

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Abstract

Life satisfaction is a core construct within the framework of women empowerment. The present study was designed to investigate the role of employment status and emotional intelligence (EI) in life satisfaction of Indian Women. It was expected that the delineation of the predictive role of these two variables for life satisfaction would be helpful for future intervention programs. The study adopted a 2 (employed versus unemployed) x 2 (low EI versus high EI) factorial design where employed and unemployed women were separately divided into low EI and high EI subgroups on the basis of median split of EI scores. Apart from the test of EI, all the participants were individually administered the life satisfaction subscale of the standardised test of Utkal Happiness Scale. The analysis of variance supported both the hypotheses. Employed women exhibited higher life satisfaction than unemployed women. Women with high EI showed greater life satisfaction than women with low EI.

Keywords: life satisfaction, emotional intelligence, women empowerment, employment status, positive emotion

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Introduction

Life satisfaction refers to a cognitive, judgemental process. Shin and Johnson (1978) define life satisfaction as “a global assessment of a person’s quality of life according to his or her chosen criteria”. Judgements of satisfaction are dependent upon a comparison of one’s circumstances with what is thought to be an appropriate standard. Life satisfaction is an overall assessment of feelings and attitudes about one’s life at a particular point in time ranging from negative to positive. Diener (1984)) stressed that life satisfaction is one of three major indicators of well-being (i.e. life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect). Life satisfaction is an important component of well-being and may be assessed in terms of mood, satisfying relation with others, achieved goals, self-concept and self-perceived ability to cope with daily life. It involves experiences of having the ability to motivate people to pursue and reach their goals. It is the cognitive assessment of one’s life as a whole.

Neugarten, Havighurst and Tobin (1969) calls life satisfaction “an operational

definition of successful aging”; life satisfaction for Sumner (1966) is “a positive evaluation of the conditions of your life, a judgment that at least on balance, it measures up favourably against your standard or expectations.” Andrews and Withey (1974) state life satisfaction symbolizing an overarching criterion or ultimate outcome of human experience. Life satisfaction is characterized, in agreement with the cognitive theory, as “individual’s cognitive judgement about comparisons based on the compatibility of their own living conditions with the standards” (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). Veenhoven (1993) has best summarized life satisfaction; “Life satisfaction is the degree to which a person positively evaluated the overall quality of his/her life as-a-whole.” Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith (1999) also included the following under life satisfaction: desire to change one’s life; satisfaction with past, satisfaction with future; and significant others’ views of one’s life”. It is referred as an assessment of the overall conditions of existence as derived from a comparison of one’s aspiration to one’s actual achievement.

Employment is an important facet of human life and it has strong effects on individual's satisfaction with life (happiness). This relationship is especially strong and clear for unemployment. Women's unhappiness can be predicted by the effect of loss of income. Clarke (2003) found that unemployed women in the United Kingdom were 69% less likely to have a high quality of life and satisfaction with life. Ferree (1976) and earlier studies by others have argued that women with job outside the home are generally happier and more satisfied with their lives than are full time housewives. Winkelmann and Winkelmann (1998) found that unemployed women in Germany were 38% less likely to have high life satisfaction than employed women. Akbari (2012) found that life satisfaction of employed women was better in comparison to unemployed women in India.

Research with women samples has indicated that loss of employment (unemployment) impacts negatively the psychological well-being and can lower levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem. A survey of modern living examined self-esteem, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction of 389 women (206 employed outside the home and 183 homemakers). Results indicated that employed women had higher self-esteem, less psychological anxiety and high level of satisfaction than homemakers. Multiple Classification Analyses on responses from 946 women explained that full-time homemakers are more dissatisfied with their lives than women employed outside the home. Homemakers who had wanted a career were more personally dissatisfied than homemakers who had never wanted a career. The career-orientated homemakers were the ones who expressed greater personal dissatisfaction than employed women (Townsend & Patricia, 2002).

Emotional intelligence is another factor which plays significant role in

enhancing life satisfaction among women. Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, control and evaluate emotions. Emotional intelligence has been defined as the ability to recognize, understand, manage and harness emotions both in self and others and to use emotion to facilitate cognitive processing (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey & Palfai 1995). It is a skill, which involves three processes that are perception, (or the ability to consciously recognize our emotions), understanding (integrating what we feel in our thoughts) and regulation (lead and manage effectively both positive and negative emotions). Literature reveals that higher emotional intelligence is typically associated with positive moods and higher life satisfaction because emotionally intelligent persons are able to maintain positive mental states due to their capability to efficiently manage their emotions. Several studies have examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction (Bar-On, 1997). Research with self-report measures has found moderate positive correlations between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction.

Emotional intelligence, personality, alexithymia, life satisfaction, social support and health-related measures were assessed in Canadian (N 500) and Scottish (N 204) groups by (Austin, Saklofske, Huang, & McKenney, 2005). Emotional intelligence was found to be negatively associated with alexithymia and alcohol consumption and positively associated with life satisfaction and social network size. Some empirical evidence that emotional intelligence is associated with emotional well-being comes from research indicating that higher emotional intelligence is associated with less depression and greater life satisfaction.

Existing literature shows that clarity of feelings, component of emotional intelligence as measured by a modified version of Trait-Meta Mood Scale (TMMS; Salovey, Mayer,

Goldman, Turvey & Palfai ,1995) was positively and significantly correlated with satisfaction with life (Palmer, Donaldson & Stough,2002). Gannon and Ranzin (2005) reported that life satisfaction was found to be positively and significantly correlated with all the subscales of emotional intelligence. The subscales include a) emotional recognition and expression, b) understanding of emotions external, c) emotions direct cognition, d) emotional management and e) emotional control; the strongest correlation was with the last subscales.

In a different approach, positive correlation between life satisfaction and emotional intelligence was reported by Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Learner, and Salovey (2006). In particular, Brackett and colleagues found that overall emotional intelligence (perceiving, using, understanding, and regulating emotions) as assessed by ability test and self-report on the basis of the Mayer and Salovey (1997) model was found to be positively and significantly correlated with life satisfaction.

Method

Research objective and formulation of hypothesis

In view of the importance of women's life satisfaction in the context of their empowerment an empirical study was planned to examine the role of two possible predictors of self-concept: employment and emotional intelligence. Therefore, we have proposed following hypothesis:

H₁: Life satisfaction is higher among employed women as compared to unemployed women.

H₂: Life satisfaction is higher among women with high emotional intelligence as compared to women with low emotional intelligence.

Sample and procedures

240 women within the age group of 45 to 55 years participated in our survey. Due care was

taken to sample groups equated with respect to education and age range. They were all married and had children. Out of 240 women participants 120 women were from the employed category and 120 women were from the unemployed category. Again each group was divided into two sub groups (women with high emotional intelligence and women with low emotional intelligence) on the basis of the median split of their scores on emotional intelligence. The participants of all four groups (employed women with high emotional intelligence, employed women with low emotional intelligence, unemployed women with high emotional intelligence and unemployed women with low emotional intelligence) were individually administered the total life satisfaction sub scale of the Utkal-Happiness Scale.

The investigator explained to them that the participation is entirely voluntary and anonymous, and can be withdrawn at any time and it would not affect the person adversely. Rapport was established between the investigator and respondents/participants. All the participants were individually administered measures of emotional intelligence, and self-esteem. The instructions for each part of the questionnaire were adequately explained and care was taken to ensure that they understood the questionnaire. Investigator requested participants to respond to each item in the questionnaire freely and frankly without any hesitation. Investigator had ensured strict confidentiality and the study was conducted in compliance with ethical standards. The participants were debriefed after the study was completed.

Research Design

The study involved a 2 (employed women versus unemployed women) x 2 (women with high emotional intelligence versus women with low emotional intelligence) factorial design. Employment status and emotional intelligence are the independent variables and life satisfaction is the dependent variable.

Instruments used for the study

1. Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS): The emotional intelligence scale was developed by Hyde and Pathe and Dhar in the year 1971. This questionnaire consists of 34 items and the highest score is 170 and lowest score is 34. The inventory measured 10 factors

dimensions, such as self-awareness, empathy, self-motivation, emotional stability, managing relation, integrity, self-development, value orientation, commitment and altruistic behaviour. The split-half reliability of the scale was 0.88 and the content validity of the scale was 0.93. Respondents are requested to indicate their agreements / disagreements on a five- point scale where '1' indicates strong disagreement and '5' indicates strong agreement.

2. **Utkal Happiness Scale:** Utkal Happiness scale was developed and validated by Sahoo in the year 2006. Utkal happiness scale is designed specifically to measure people's happiness. It is a multipart measure consisting of five parts. Part-1 represents life satisfaction. Part-II measures domain-specific happiness. Part-III measures the intensity of feelings. Part-IV is intended to measure participant's satisfaction with goal accomplishment. Part-V includes personal

information such as name, sex, age, education, occupation and place of residence. Monthly income is also sought in this part.

Here I have used part-1 which represents ten life satisfaction statements borrowed from Diener's scale used in cross-cultural context. The statements include item such as "I am pleased with the way I have fulfilled my duties and I feel good about my life." Respondents are asked to indicate their agreement /disagreement with each of the statements on a 7-point scale where '1' denotes strongly disagree" and '7' indicates "strongly agree". The scoring is reversed for negatively keyed items. The overall score is computed by summing scores across ten items.

Data findings

The summary of the analysis of variance on the life-satisfaction scores of the participants is presented in Table1. The mean and standard deviations on the life satisfaction scores of participants are presented in Table 2.

Table-1

Analysis of Variance performed on Life Satisfaction Scores of Participants

Sources	SS	df	Ms	F
Employment status	1161.60	1	1161.60	105.91**
EI level	240.00	1	240.00	21.88**
Employment x EI level	2.01	1	2.01	0.18
Error	2588.37	236	10.97	

**P < .01

Table-2

Mean and SD of life satisfaction Score of participants

Employment status	Employed	Combined employed	Unemployed	Combined unemployed
EI	High Low		High Low	
	52.11		47.90	
Mean	50.30	51.20	45.71	46.80
SD	3.02	3.50	3.70	3.40
	3.73		2.68	
Combined High EI	Mean SD 50.00 3.97		Combined low EI	Mean SD 48.00 3.97

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) performed on life satisfaction scores of the participants shows significant effect for employment status, $F(1,236) = 105.91$, $p < .001$

(see Table 1). As shown by Table -2, employed women show greater life satisfaction than do unemployed women. ($M=51.20$ and 46.80 respectively). The result also shows significant

effect for EI groups, $F(1,236) = 21.88, p < .001$. The examination of mean scores shows women with high EI exhibit greater life satisfaction than do low EI women ($M = 50.0$ and 48.0 , respectively). However, the employment status \times emotional intelligence level effect is non-significant, $F(1,236) = 0.18, n.s.$ In sum, both the hypotheses (H_1 and H_2) are supported. The findings have evinced the fact that, employed women exhibit greater life satisfaction than do unemployed women. Furthermore, women with high EI level report greater life satisfaction than do low EI women.

Discussion

The present study attempts to examine the role of employment status and emotional intelligence in women's life satisfaction. The findings clearly show that employed women have higher life satisfaction compared to their unemployed counterparts. Employment fulfils basic human needs such as financial, societal and intrinsic needs. It is an important part of human life and promotes subjective well-being and life satisfaction. It seems that employed women have positive approach towards their lives and try to develop healthy patterns of adjustment and efficaciously manage their lives. The employed women are aware of their rights of autonomy and decision-making that strengthen their empowerment and empower their satisfaction.

Graham and Pettinato (2002) provide a thorough and illuminating examination of how employments in emerging economies affect women's happiness. In particular the authors explore and establish that economic mobility, opportunity, and relative income levels influence life satisfaction positively. The authors confirm their proposition, finding that more income, higher education and a job go hand in with happiness. Unemployment reduces life satisfaction. Low income seems to have negative effect on both happiness and life satisfaction. The present result supports the findings confirmed by Ferree (1976). He stated that women with job outside the home are generally happier and more satisfied with their lives than are full time house wives. Our result also supported the findings confirmed by Townsend and Patricia, (2002). They have conducted their studies on 946 women. They have found out that full time home makers

are more dissatisfied with their lives than women employed outside the home.

The other findings of this study suggested that women with high emotional intelligence showed higher life satisfaction as compared to women with low emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is expected to emerge as a positive predictor of life satisfaction. Ciarrochi, Deane and Anderson (2002) found that emotional intelligence was positively correlated with life satisfaction. Rey and Extremera (2011) conducted studies on 316 women to examine emotional intelligence and life satisfaction. It was found that mood clarity and emotional repair had a significant direct and indirect link with life satisfaction. Extremera & Fernandez (2005) in their study showed that life satisfaction was significantly and positively correlated with emotional intelligence. Life satisfaction and emotional intelligence were positively correlated in the study done by Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner and Salovey (2006).

As suggested by Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, Hollander and McKenley (2002) individuals with higher emotional intelligence use their ability to understand and regulate emotions to resist situational threats. Theoretically, these individuals should be better able to maintain a positive mood when appropriate, and effectively repair a distressed mood when faced with negative events. This emotional ability may enable them to maintain higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction among themselves.

The positive association between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction is explainable in terms of the recent evidence on the role of emotional balance (Goleman, 2003). A number of neuroscientific studies in recent theories have shown that people's ability to handle negative emotions brings minds equilibrium. When destructive emotions arise the calmness, the tranquillity, the balance of the mind is immediately disrupted. This is reflected in a greater proportion of right-frontal brain activities (Davidsons & Begley 2013). However the resource of emotional intelligence is very relevant in the context of human happiness. A key region for negative emotion is the amygdala buried within the middle of the brain in the region known as the limbic system. In addition to amygdala

there is another structure hippocampus, a long structure just behind the amygdala that has been linked to memory. The hippocampus has an important role in emotion because it is essential for our appreciation of the context of events.

During stress and negative emotions the hippocampus actually shrinks. There is evidence to show that positive emotions (stemming from emotional intelligence) prevent the atrophy of the hippocampus. There is considerable plasticity in this structure. The activation of amygdala can also be reduced with the help of optimistic thinking. Thus, emotional intelligence plays an important role in reducing activation of two neural structures (amygdala and negative memories associated with hippocampus). In addition, the internal resource of emotional intelligence promotes positive emotion leading to life satisfaction.

Implication and Conclusion

The study suggests that employment and emotional intelligence play important roles in enhancing life satisfaction among women, as these two variables are positively correlated with life satisfaction. Employment status enables women to earn money and enjoy those luxuries of life that a nonworking women can only dream of. When they go outside for the job they have to face different kind of circumstances that make them stronger and enable them to manage in bitter condition in a better way. Moreover, the working women are often seem to be emotionally sound, patient, cooperative and deal stressors more appropriately than that of non-working women which enhances life satisfaction. The present study also provides insight into how emotional abilities influence perceived stress and well-being, which may help to design psychological interventions aimed at increasing these abilities among women. Therefore, it seems reasonable to develop specific EI training programmes, to help women to cope with the challenges they face. Educational EI programmes that explicitly work with the emotional abilities based on the capacity to perceive, use, understand and regulate emotions enhance diverse relevant dimensions of psychosocial adjustment and well-being. It would be interesting to create a programme focused on making women more aware of the emotional processes and helping to reason and understand the emotions. This training should focus in part on

developing understanding own emotions, in order to enhance coping in individuals experiencing stress in daily life. This training could even be included in the curriculum of the students. In this sense, some authors propose this EI training could be developed through a tutorial action programme. The tutorial action programme is an optional cross-curriculum programme, for students and lecturers, which is presented as an opportunity to develop students' skills and to have a mentor to lead and support decisions (Montes-Berges & Augusto 2007). In conclusion, our study found that emotionally intelligent female evaluates situations as less stressful which results in a higher satisfaction with life and happiness, and this have important implications for them.

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