

Subjective Happiness and Differential Loneliness among Indian Adults

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Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the role of age and gender in the experience of subjective happiness and differential loneliness among Indian adults and also to see how these two variables relate with each other. 200 young adults were interviewed for the purpose. ANOVA revealed significant age and gender related differences in the experience of subjective happiness and differential loneliness; while correlations have shown that of Subjective happiness has negative relationship with differential relationship.

Keywords

Subjective Happiness, Differential Loneliness, Indian Adults

1. Introduction

The present study is designed to understand the relation between subjective happiness and differential loneliness among Indian adults.

The term subjective happiness has been used in many fields together with subjective quality of life, psychological well-being, psychological happiness, subjective well-being and life satisfaction etc. Generally, subjective happiness is considered to be the best worth in our lives. In recent years, it came out into the open that objective indicators have no particular relations with the individual's life satisfaction or happiness (Diener, 2000); subjective quality of life is considered the most valuable indicator of an individual's feeling of subjective, psychological well-being and happiness.

Subjective happiness has two aspects: One aspect is of cognitive evaluation and the other is of emotional evaluation. The former means that how positively evaluate and judge, by the results of comparing own life with another person or own frame of reference. The latter aspect emphasizes that emotional evaluation which means individuals' feeling of happiness, gladness and positive or negative emotions such as anxiety, saddening and contentment (Rask et al, 2003). Accordingly, if we accept the happiness means quality of life and subjective well-being, which would imply subjective quality, cognitive and emotional quality all together (Patil, Gouda, & Kamle, 2016; Cheng & Furnham, 2003). Happiness is an emotional state and is a quite subjectively evaluated variable also it could change within the same environment and surrounding.

Loneliness is described as "a chronic distress without redeeming features" (Weiss, 1973). It can further be distinguished between social loneliness (a lack of social integration), and emotional loneliness (absence of a reliable attachment figure). Researchers have documented the age, gender and other demographic differences in the experience of loneliness among people. It is found that female students' loneliness level was higher than male students (Gierveld, 1987; Page & Cole, 1991). Whereas several studies have concluded contradictory finding that loneliness levels were higher among males (Cheng & Furnham, 2002; Davis & Franzoi, 1986; Yaacob, Juhari, Abu-Talib & Uba, 2009), some other studies have also found no significant differ-

ences between males and females (Brage, Meredith, & Woodward, 1993; Ozdemir & Tuncay, 2008;). Voluntary group membership such as club (Cattan, White, Bond, & Learmouth, 2005; Aday, Kehoe, & Farney, 2006) and religious membership (Johnson & Mullins, 1989) are the factors which have been observed to counter feeling of loneliness. Smaller social networks and less frequent interactions with friends and family promote loneliness (Dykstra, van Tilburg, & de Jong Gierveld, 2005; Pinquart & Sorensen, 2003). Contact with friends is more important than contact with adult children and other family members in preventing loneliness (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2003). Social relationship quality is one of the most potent predictor of loneliness than quantity of social contacts, and this is true of relationships with friends, family, and adult children (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2003). In addition, although marriage is generally protective, only marriages that are close and satisfying serve to reduce loneliness (Olson & Wong, 2001). Age and gender related differences have been found in differential loneliness (Schmitt & Kurdek, 1985). College girls are more dissatisfied with their family and large group relationships than elderly women, whereas elderly women are more dissatisfied with their Friendships and Romantic/Sexual relationships in comparison to young girls. Gender differences are also observed in the feeling of differential loneliness (Bhimwal, 2007). Men expressed more dissatisfaction with family, large group, and friendship than women.

The present study is motivated by the question of how loneliness and happiness vary in relation to demographic characteristics of Indian adults. The present study is thus designed with twofold objectives of exploring (1) Differences related to Age and Gender in Differential Loneliness and Subjective Happiness; and (2) Interrelationship between Differential Loneliness and Subjective Happiness.

H1. There will be age and gender related differences in the experience of subjective happiness.

H2. The experience of differential loneliness will be affected by the age and gender of people.

H3. Subjective happiness will have negative relationship with differential loneliness.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The sample consisted of 200 adult respondents living in Lucknow. Incidental sampling method was used for the selection of the respondents. There were 94 females and 106 male participants in the study. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 years to 37 years.

Demographic variables: In the present study two demographic variables – sex and age were used to cross classify the sample into eight subsamples.

Subjective happiness: Subjective happiness can be simply defined as the individual's current evaluation of his/her happiness. Such an evaluation is often expressed in cognitive terms; when asked about subjective happiness, participants will often say, "I generally consider myself a happy person". Subjective happiness is thus, at least in part, a proxy for a global cognitive assessment of an individual's own happiness. The information regarding the subjective perception happiness of the respondents was ascertained through the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999).

Differential Loneliness: Differential loneliness has been defined as "a felt discrepancy between the kinds of relationships the individual perceives himself as having and what he would like to have" (Schmidt & Sermat, 1983; Sermat, 1980). It is a subjective assessment of loneliness within four different kinds of relationships i.e. friendship, family, romantic –sexual, and with social groups / community. The loneliness is assessed in terms of five interaction dimensions: presence verses absence, approach verses avoidance, cooperation evaluation, and communication. In order to assess the differential loneliness among respondents the Differential Loneliness Scale (Schmidt & Sermat, 1983) was used. The scale consisted of 60 items measuring the four dimensions of differential loneliness i.e. family (DLFM), friends (DLFR), social group (DLGR) and romantic relationship (DLRR).

2.2. Procedure

For collecting the data face to face interviews were conducted. A verbal consent was taken from the participants after informing them the purpose of study. They were assured that the information they provide will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for research purpose. Respondents were requested to respond honestly and to answer all the items. Each respondent was briefly interviewed to find out that whether they met the criteria for inclusion in the sample. Thus a sample of 200 was selected, including both male and female between the age group of 18-37 years. They were first interviewed to illicit information about their demographic profile. They were then given a copy of the questionnaire to respond. They were helped if they faced any difficulty regarding understanding or responding to the items in the questionnaire.

3. Results

Basic Statistics on the variables are presented in part A of the Tables 1-5. The means and SDs are used to obtain a general picture of Subjective Happiness and Differential Loneliness among the Indian adults. The results obtained from ANOVAs are presented in Part B of the Tables 1 – 6. Part C of each of these tables is graphical representation of means.

Table 1: Subjective happiness.

A. Means and SD

| Age | Female | | | Male | | | Total | | |
|-------|--------|-------|----|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-----|
| | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N |
| <20 | 18.16 | 3.919 | 55 | 17.27 | 3.551 | 64 | 17.68 | 3.737 | 119 |
| 20-25 | 16.91 | 4.264 | 22 | 17.70 | 3.959 | 23 | 17.31 | 4.083 | 45 |
| 25-30 | 19.25 | 1.165 | 8 | 18.29 | 3.221 | 14 | 18.64 | 2.665 | 22 |
| 30< | 18.33 | 1.323 | 9 | 16.60 | 2.191 | 5 | 17.71 | 1.816 | 14 |
| Total | 17.98 | 3.704 | 94 | 17.46 | 3.533 | 106 | 17.71 | 3.614 | 200 |

B. ANOVA

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | Sig. |
|--------------|--------|----|--------|------|------|
| Age | 31.024 | 3 | 10.341 | .785 | .503 |
| Gender | 12.520 | 1 | 12.520 | .951 | .331 |
| Age * Gender | 29.016 | 3 | 9.672 | .735 | .533 |

C. Graphical Representation

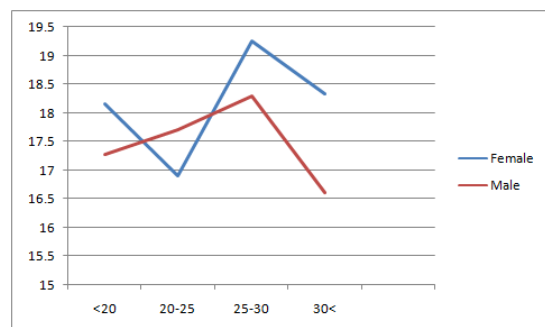


Table 1 deals with subjective happiness of the respondents. Part B of this table shows that neither the main effects nor the inter-

action effect of the age and gender is found to be significant for subjective happiness. Therefore, it can be said that age and gender do not play any role in the experience subjective happiness and thus the first hypothesis (H1) cannot be accepted.

The next four tables (2 – 5) contain findings related to differential loneliness. The variable has four dimensions: family (DLFM), friends (DL FR), social group (DL GR) and romantic relationship (DL RR).

Table 2. Differential loneliness dimension 1 – family (DL FM).

A. Means and SD

| Age | Female | | | Male | | | Total | | |
|-------|--------|-------|----|------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-----|
| | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N |
| <20 | 5.53 | 3.929 | 55 | 5.30 | 2.893 | 64 | 5.40 | 3.398 | 119 |
| 20-25 | 3.82 | 3.290 | 22 | 6.35 | 3.433 | 23 | 5.11 | 3.563 | 45 |
| 25-30 | 4.25 | 1.909 | 8 | 3.07 | 2.921 | 14 | 3.50 | 2.614 | 22 |
| 30< | 3.89 | 2.571 | 9 | 7.80 | 4.382 | 5 | 5.29 | 3.709 | 14 |
| Total | 4.86 | 3.591 | 94 | 5.35 | 3.237 | 106 | 5.12 | 3.408 | 200 |

B. Summary ANOVA

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | Sig. |
|--------------|---------|----|--------|-------|------|
| Age | 59.473 | 3 | 19.824 | 1.801 | .148 |
| Gender | 40.171 | 1 | 40.171 | 3.649 | .058 |
| Age * Gender | 113.577 | 3 | 37.859 | 3.439 | .018 |

C. Graphical Representation

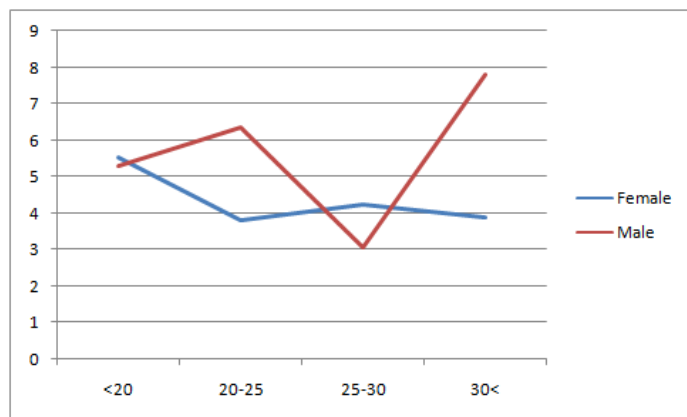


Table 2, contains the details about Differential Loneliness - Family (DL FM). Both the main effect of age and gender are not significant. However, the interaction effect of age and gender is found to be significant. This implies that though age and gender individually do not contribute to the experience of differential loneliness the interaction of the two does make a difference.

Table 3 presents the findings regarding the Differential Loneliness - Friends (DL FR). Results illustrate the gender differences in differential loneliness – friends. The interaction effect between age and gender is also found to be significant. Males feel lonelier than females when it is due to the lack of connectedness with friends. In other words females feel more connected with friends and thus feel less lonely. In a very interesting study on loneliness females tend to report slightly greater loneliness than

males, but only when the measure includes terms such as “lonely” or “loneliness” (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2003).

Table 3: Differential loneliness dimension 2 – friends.

| A. Means and SD | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|--------|-------|----|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-----|
| Age | Female | | | Male | | | Total | | |
| | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N |
| <20 | 8.60 | 3.331 | 55 | 8.16 | 3.138 | 64 | 8.36 | 3.223 | 119 |
| 20-25 | 7.82 | 2.986 | 22 | 7.30 | 3.404 | 23 | 7.56 | 3.181 | 45 |
| 25-30 | 7.25 | 1.581 | 8 | 8.14 | 2.983 | 14 | 7.82 | 2.557 | 22 |
| 30< | 6.56 | 2.128 | 9 | 12.00 | 2.739 | 5 | 8.50 | 3.525 | 14 |
| Total | 8.11 | 3.081 | 94 | 8.15 | 3.254 | 106 | 8.13 | 3.166 | 200 |

| B. Summary ANOVA | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---------|----|--------|-------|------|
| Source | SS | df | MS | F | Sig. |
| Age | 42.120 | 3 | 14.040 | 1.448 | .230 |
| Gender | 45.918 | 1 | 45.918 | 4.737 | .031 |
| Age * Gender | 107.929 | 3 | 35.976 | 3.711 | .013 |

C. Graphical Representation

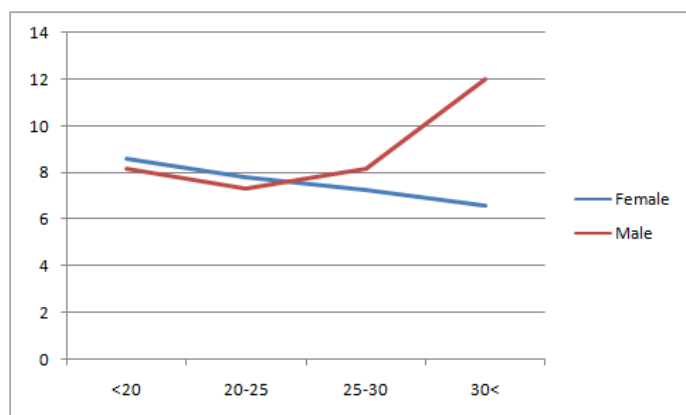


Table 4: Differential loneliness dimension 3 - social group.

| A. Means and SD | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|--------|-------|----|------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-----|
| Age | Female | | | Male | | | Total | | |
| | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N |
| <20 | 3.25 | 1.691 | 55 | 2.34 | 1.702 | 64 | 2.76 | 1.750 | 119 |
| 20-25 | 2.91 | 1.823 | 22 | 3.26 | 1.936 | 23 | 3.09 | 1.869 | 45 |
| 25-30 | 3.75 | 1.389 | 8 | 3.00 | 1.664 | 14 | 3.27 | 1.579 | 22 |
| 30< | 2.00 | 1.936 | 9 | 5.00 | 2.739 | 5 | 3.07 | 2.615 | 14 |
| Total | 3.10 | 1.748 | 94 | 2.75 | 1.886 | 106 | 2.92 | 1.826 | 200 |

B. Summary ANOVA

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | Sig. |
|--------------|--------|----|--------|-------|------|
| Age | 11.000 | 3 | 3.667 | 1.176 | .320 |
| Gender | 4.537 | 1 | 4.537 | 1.455 | .229 |
| Age * Gender | 51.727 | 3 | 17.242 | 5.530 | .001 |

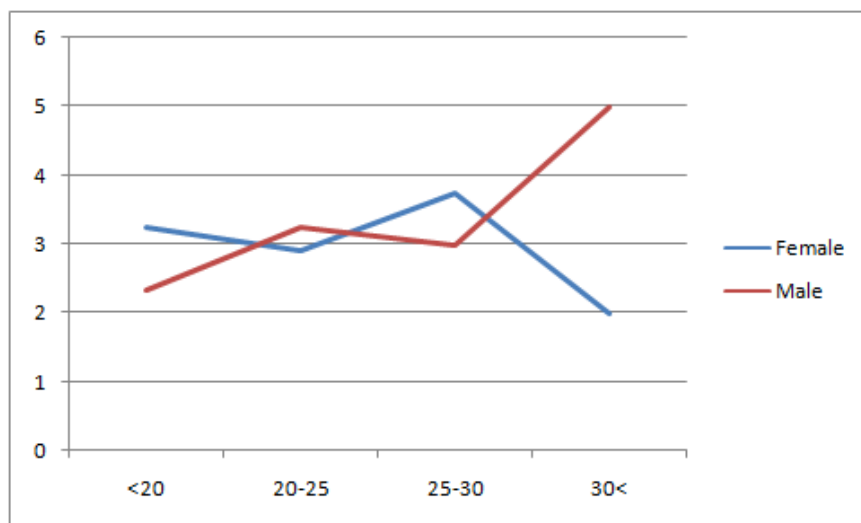
C. Graphical Representation

Table 4 shows findings of Differential Loneliness - Social Group (DL GR). The main effects of age and gender are not found significant while the interaction effect of the two is significant.

Table 5: Differential Loneliness Dimension 4 - Romantic Relationship**A. Means and SD**

| Age | Female | | | Male | | | Total | | |
|-------|--------|-------|----|------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-----|
| | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N |
| <20 | 6.20 | 2.112 | 55 | 5.63 | 3.042 | 64 | 5.89 | 2.658 | 119 |
| 20-25 | 5.91 | 3.161 | 22 | 5.91 | 2.762 | 23 | 5.91 | 2.930 | 45 |
| 25-30 | 3.75 | 3.327 | 8 | 5.14 | 3.416 | 14 | 4.64 | 3.374 | 22 |
| 30< | 3.44 | 2.555 | 9 | 4.60 | 2.191 | 5 | 3.86 | 2.413 | 14 |
| Total | 5.66 | 2.686 | 94 | 5.58 | 2.979 | 106 | 5.62 | 2.838 | 200 |

B. Summary ANOVA

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | Sig. |
|--------------|--------|----|--------|-------|------|
| Age | 74.749 | 3 | 24.916 | 3.185 | .025 |
| Gender | 6.204 | 1 | 6.204 | .793 | .374 |
| Age * Gender | 23.177 | 3 | 7.726 | .988 | .400 |

C. Graphical Representation

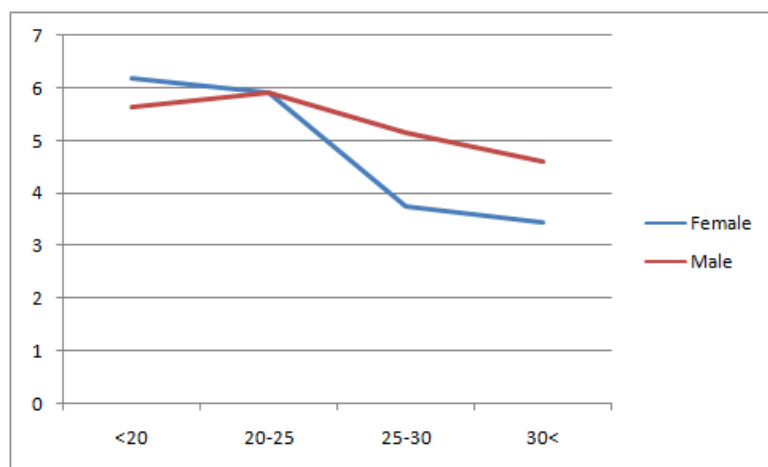


Table 5 contains data regarding the third dimension of differential loneliness: romantic relationship. This aspect assesses the feeling of loneliness pertaining to romantic relationship. On this variable a significant age differences have been observed (Bhatia, Swami, Thakur, & Bhatia 2007). Age related differences have been observed in Differential Loneliness - Romantic Relationship, as the age increases the differential loneliness regarding romantic relationship decreases though initially it increases.

Table 6: Summary of significant findings from the five ANOVA.

| | SHS | DL FR | DL FM | DL G | DL RR |
|---------|-----|-------|-------|------|-------|
| Age | | | | | * |
| Sex | | * | | | |
| Age*Sex | | * | * | ** | |

The table 6 shows that that though the main effect of age is significant with only romantic relationship and gender is significant with friends. However, the interaction effect of age and gender is significant with the three dimensions of differential loneliness i.e. friends, family and social groups. Thus, the second hypothesis (H2) can be accepted. And, it can be said that the experience of differential loneliness will be affected by the age and gender of people. Some other researchers have also attributed the feeling of loneliness to social networks such as family, friends and romantic partner (Dykstra & de Jong Gierveld, 1999; Lauder, Mummery, & Sharkey, 2006).

Table 7. Inter-correlations among subjective happiness and differential loneliness.

| Variable | SH | DL FM |
|---|---------|---------|
| Subjective Happiness (SH) | 1 | -.273** |
| Differential Loneliness – Family (DL FM) | -.273** | 1 |
| Differential Loneliness – Friend (DL FR) | -.247** | .511** |
| Differential Loneliness - Group (DL GR) | -.190** | .532** |
| Differential Loneliness - Romantic Relationship (DL RR) | -.112 | -.011 |

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

The second objective of the study was to ascertain the relationship between differential loneliness and subjective happiness. Pearson correlations have been calculated for the four dimensions of differential loneliness and subjective happiness. The result shows (table 7) the negative correlation of subjective happiness with differential loneliness in family, friends and social group dimensions.

The subjective happiness will go down when a person feels loneliness in terms of family, friends and is less accepted by the society. Increase in the use of the mass media declines in communication with family members, decreases in the size of one's social circle, and increased loneliness (Kraut, et al. 1998). Various studies have established the relationship between loneliness and depression, anxiety, dissatisfaction with life and interpersonal hostility as well as with substance abuse, suicide, and vulnerability to health problems (Hansson, Jones, Carpenter & Remondet, 1986; Jones, Rose & Russell, 1990; McWhirter, 1990; Jackson, Soderlind & Weiss, 2000). The feeling of loneliness composes of negative emotions such as trouble, distress and unhappiness (Jones, Freemon & Goswick, 1981; Russell, Peplau & Cutrona, 1980).

4. Discussion

Human beings are social by nature. They desire to form and maintain positive and significant interpersonal relationships. Loneliness may affect mood, social skills and sociability (Johns, Freeman & Goswick, 1981; Karaoglu, Avşaroglu & Deniz, 2009). All human beings feel loneliness at some point in their lives (Demir & Fısiloglu, 1999). The relationship between differential loneliness and subjective happiness among Indian adults has not been investigated systematically. Television and internet work as an alternate to the social life and in turn leads to a greater feeling of loneliness (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982). It also increases the expectations from social life and becomes detrimental to the feeling of happiness (Frey et al., 2007). The addictive use of television and internet leads to a downward spiral toward greater loneliness and depression. The experience of loneliness is unpleasant and distressing and thus making people more unhappy. Loneliness may also lead to people to submerge themselves into dependency relations, following direction, imitation, being like others, and striving for power and status (Peplau & Perlman 1982).

Reading, watching TV, using the internet, doing social activities, attending parties, drinking, and also using alcohol / drugs do not only signal loneliness, but these also may be some adaptive or maladaptive coping strategies people use to overcome this unpleasant and distressing experience of loneliness (Ozdemir & Tuncay, 2008). Virtual social life produces loneliness by consuming the limited time available for social interactions (Flanders, 1982). It is also established that modern lifestyle has changed family life and reduced the opportunities for families to engage meaningfully in their day to day life (Parija, & Shukla, 2014). Lonely persons are less likely to communicate interpersonally (Bell & Daley, 1985; Zakahi & Duran, 1982). On one hand it has been found that the watching television or use of social media is for companionship (Rubin & Rubin, 1982; Nordlund, 1978) on the other hand it steal the time from relation building activities, e.g. time spent with parents or relatives, friends, colleagues from work or profession, and finally people from socio-religious organization (Bruni & Stanca, 2008). Therefore, it can be said that increase in the options for socialization has somehow increased the feeling differential loneliness among people in different segment of their social life. And thus has a negative impact on the overall life satisfaction among people and (Putnam, 1995) and becomes counterproductive for building of social capital.

To conclude, it can be said that the tough economic, political and technological advances have contributed to a greater feeling of loneliness and unhappiness. However, a selective and a purposive effort to adapt to the modern life style can add value to the people's life.

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