Role of Individualistic and Collectivistic Orientations in the Happy Life of Kharwar Adivasi Community

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Abstract

Following globalization, westernized cultural values, ideas, and practices have rapidly spread. Cultures are in flux, and indigenous communities are not free from the influence of the outside world. In this research, we investigated how the psychological tendencies of indigenous communities might be affected by such socio-cultural changes in a predominantly collectivist nation. A community-based study was conducted with 150 Kharwar Adivasi individuals residing in 10 villages of Naugarh block, Chandauli, Uttar Pradesh. The participants, aged 25-50 years, were given the measures of Individualism-Collectivism Orientations and Happy Life. Using an exploratory factor analysis, a five-factor structure emerged, explaining 57% of the variance in happy life. The results indicated that 59% of the sample had a collectivistic orientation. Individuals with a collectivistic orientation fared better in overall happiness and its sub-domains than individuals with an individualistic orientation. It is suggested that even though there is a gradual increase in individualism, for the Adivasi community, happiness is still enhanced by tendencies of interdependence. The findings have important implications for understanding the happiness of the under-researched Adivasi population.

Keywords: Economy; Individualistic-Collectivistic Orientations; Happy Life; Meaningful Engagements; Social Relationships

Introduction

Happiness has been embraced as one of the most important goals of humankind. Happiness research has received a tremendous boost since the emergence of positive psychology, which sought to shift psychology's heavy emphasis on mental illness and maladies. However, the conceptualization of happiness is not restricted to psychologists, as explorations of its meaning have been ongoing for centuries. Happiness may come from a good meal, overcoming a pandemic, or a general sense of happiness from living a content life. Happiness is the state of mind or feeling characterized by contentment, love, satisfaction, and pleasure, defined by one's values, needs, and expectations. The broadness of this scope has led to different overlapping definitions of happiness.

Happiness research relies on the theoretical perspectives of hedonism and eudemonism. In the

hedonic view, happiness is equated with the experience of pleasure, or the presence of pleasant emotions and the absence of negative emotions *(Kahneman et al., 1999)*. On the contrary, the eudemonic perspective sees happiness as a sense of well-being that goes beyond the experience of pleasure *(Ryan & Deci, 2001)*. It focuses on personal growth, positive relationships, virtues, spirituality, and positive actions *(Awasthi et al., 2011; 2021; 2023; Kashdan et al., 2008)*.

In line with the principles of eudemonism, a happy life may be understood as a state of well-being

characterized by a sense of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment, and is often associated with factors such as positive social relationships, financial security, good health, and a sense of accomplishment. While there are numerous ways to define a happy life, the concept of subjective well-being (SWB) is frequently used as a substitute for happiness *(Caunt et al., 2013; Diener, 2000)*. Conceptions of happiness are culturally bound, as some researchers *(Weiss, 2007)* have explained happiness in terms of heredity and genetics, while others *(Csikszentmihalyi, 2006)* have found it associated with materialistic needs. Why do some people feel that they are happy or happier than others? This question has led to extensive research into the causes and correlates of happiness.

Individualism and collectivism are two cultural dimensions that may impact a person's perception of a happy life *(Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Schimmack et al., 2005)*. Individualism is a cultural value that emphasizes independence, autonomy, and self-expression. Collectivism, on the other hand, emphasizes interdependence, cooperation, and harmony within the group *(Oyserman et al., 2002)*. Research has shown that individualism is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and happiness in countries where individualistic values are prevalent *(Ahuvia, 2002; Veenhoven, 1999)*. This may be because individualistic cultures place a strong emphasis on personal freedom, self-expression, and personal achievement, which can contribute to a sense of fulfillment and happiness. In contrast, collectivistic cultures place a strong emphasis on social relationships and the well-being of the group, which can also contribute to happiness and life satisfaction. Researchers have stated that individualistic cultures have higher "subjective happiness" than collectivistic cultures, where happiness is understood as a fulfillment of hedonic needs *(Deiner, 2003; Dulababu, 2017; Steel et al., 2008)*. On the other hand, happiness in collectivistic cultures is associated with close

social relationships and the benefit of society *(Pflug, 2009)*.

In collectivistic cultures, people may find happiness in the support and connections they have with their family, friends, and community, and in the sense of belongingness and shared identity they feel as part of a group. In an analysis of definitions of happiness in 12 countries with varying scores on the individualism-collectivism dimension, it was found that happiness was primarily determined in terms of inner harmony, family, and social relationships *(Delle Fave et al., 2016)*. This suggests that, despite cultural differences, some common determinants of happiness are universal, and thus cross-cultural comparisons are justified.

Non-Western cultures tend to be collectivistic, and social relationships are important determinants of happiness in these cultures *(Kitayama & Markus, 2000)*. Collectivism was found to be important for the well-being of Inuit Canadian First Peoples *(Kral & Idlout, 2012)*. Based on interviews with Inuit about the meaning of happiness, the most important theme to emerge was family, followed by communication with family members and friends. The third most important theme was related to the values and practice of traditional knowledge, with "cultural knowledge and identity" being central to their wellbeing *(Kral et al., 2011)*. *Heil (2012)* also found that collectivism is associated with happiness among Aboriginal Australians. Happiness for the Aboriginals is not about the individual's own pleasure but the whole community's well-being. Their happiness is determined by who they are with and the activities they participate in.

The need to develop a culture-specific happy life scale arises from the recognition that different cultures may have distinct understandings and definitions of happiness, and that these cultural differences can shape how individuals perceive and experience it *(Reyes-García et al., 2021)*. An inconsistency in results, as well as viewpoints, has

been found concerning the Indian experience of happiness. According to *Biswas-Diener et al. (2012),* material fulfillment is not sufficient for happiness among Indians. Indian experience of happiness is construed from within. However, when sources of happiness or happy life for individuals were assessed, few common domains emerged.

Classic studies with Indian village populations have shown that despite decade-long gaps in research, there are some common elements in findings. *Sinha (1969)* found that the needs and aspirations of village farmers were different from those described in the Western theories of motivation. Their conception of a happy life was described in terms of eight needs such as basic needs, agricultural or occupational needs, familial and social needs, community and general needs, psychological needs, dependency needs, fantasy or unrealistic needs, and certain undefined needs. Years later, in a Kharwar Adivasi sample, *Mishra (2017) f*ound that the determinants of a happy life are economy (satisfaction of basic needs), relationships (family, friends, spouse, community), health (good strength, hard work, peace of mind), engagement (leisure time, learning of skills), and money (cash, livestock, free from loans). These findings show that people's conceptions of a happy life are related to their basic needs, ecological, and cultural conditions.

In a study by *Dubey and Singh (2018)* on young adults, it was found that their major sources of happiness were materialistic things (books, clothes, electronic devices, and money), life situations (career, family time, and romantic relationships), social and intimate relationships (with parents, friends, siblings, life partner), and finally general happiness derived from helping others, mental peace, the happiness of others and so on. Given the similarity between these studies in characterizing a happy life, there is an indication that a happy life is context-dependent. Therefore, it

is important to develop culturally sensitive measures of happiness that take into account local and ecological contexts, as well as a community's unique cultural values, beliefs, and practices.

Next, Indian culture is predominantly collectivistic in nature; it has been established that individualism and collectivism are context-dependent, that is, an individual can have an individualistic orientation in one situation but a collectivistic orientation in another situation *(Schimmack et al., 2005; Triandis, 2001)*. In a time when society is undergoing rapid change owing to social media and consumerism in terms of food habits, lifestyle, fashion, etc., which are important nuances of a culture, people's psychological orientation may change. The lives of the Kharwar Adivasi people are not free from outside influences. However, studies concerning this population have been rather limited. Whether there is a shift toward individualistic orientation even in the remote Kharwar Adivasi community needs investigation. Moreover, whether psychological orientation leads to differences in happiness also needs exploration.

Therefore, the purposes of this study were: (1) to develop a comprehensive measure of happy life for rural Kharwar culture using a representative sample; (2) to examine the differences in the happy life index of individuals with individualistic and collectivistic orientation.

Method

Sample

A community-based study was carried out with 150 individuals (75 males, 75 females) from the Kharwar Adivasi community. 15 participants were randomly selected from 10 villages in the Naugarh Block in the Chandauli district of Uttar Pradesh. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 50 years (M = 37.46, SD = 7.68).

The Kharwar people of Naugarh represent a settled agricultural community that largely pursues a forest-based economy. They also engage in rudimentary agriculture, cattle rearing, daily labor, and small trades. After the harvest, people have three to four meals a day. For the rest of the year, the primary survival of forest produce. The Naugarh region suffers from a scarcity of drinking water. As a result, people are forced to depend on natural water resources, resulting in a high prevalence of jaundice and diarrhea among people. Consequently, the health status of the community is poor. During the last decades, a few NGOs have started programs for primary education and health care in some villages, but the facilities to cater to the health needs of people are very meager. Electricity, mobile services, gas stoves, etc., have reached some villages but their availability and use remain erratic. Despite these gradual advancements, the lives of Kharwar people are full of constraints due to poverty, poor health conditions, and geographical isolation from the majority of society. While several changes have taken place in family structure, lifestyle, and employment opportunities, the majority continue to live a traditional life.

The present research was carried out as per the guidelines laid down by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Science, Banaras Hindu University. As the study was questionnaire-based, the procedure adopted was non-invasive and non-intrusive, physically, or psychologically. Only those individuals who were willing to volunteer and consented to participate were included in the sample. They were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and that they were free to quit at any time without consequences.

Measures

Individualism-Collectivism Orientation Measure

Based on *Triandis's (1988)* ideas, *Mishra (1994)* developed a new 30-item measure to assess the individualistic and collectivistic orientations of people in India. In our day-to-day decision-making, we generally take suggestions from different people related to us. This measure intends to assess how much importance is given to other individuals in decision-making. The measure consists of five decision areas (marriage, occupation, treatment, selling property, and buying household goods) and six individuals/groups (spouse, family, friends, relatives, neighbors, and self). The participants were asked to rate the importance of each individual/group in each decision area on a 5-point rating scale ranging from "Never" (1) to "Always" (5). The overall scores on this measure range from 30 to 150. The assessment of individualism or collectivism orientation is based on the median split of the total score. Scores above the median indicate a collectivistic orientation, and scores below the median indicate an individualistic orientation. The internal consistency of this scale was .88.

Happy Life Scale

People's conceptions of a happy life are guided by their existential, ecological, and cultural conditions. It has been noted that people from simpler societies are generally more satisfied with life than people from complex urbanized societies *(Mishra, 2007)*. For instance, given their lower materialistic needs, the Adivasi people continue to use forest resources with restraint even today *(Mishra & Berry, 2017)*. This evidence suggests that the needs guiding the lives of Adivasi people may differ from those of mainstream society.

Therefore, drawing on the work of *Mishra (2017)* and relevant literature, this scale was developed to assess the happy life of Adivasi groups in India. A list of 50 items relating to different areas of a happy life was prepared, with 10 items representing each domain of a happy life. The questionnaire was pretested on a sample of 50 individuals (M age =

35.24 years, SD = 6.33 years) from the Kharwar community. Based on their responses and the language modifications made during data collection, a final questionnaire was prepared consisting of 35 items. A five-point Likert scale was used (1= very little; 5 = very much). The scores obtained in each domain can be summed up to derive the happy life index. The obtained data were subjected to exploratory factor analysis.

Analysis
Exploratory Factor Analysis

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (principal component analysis with varimax rotation) was conducted to explore the factor structure underlying the 35 items. Results of the first-order analysis indicated that 3 factors described the underlying structure of the happy life inventory, with many items included in a single factor. 15 items were then excluded due to low factor loadings (<.35), and the items were submitted to additional factor analysis. From this, a five-factor solution emerged, explaining approximately 57% of the variance. The five factors that emerged were social relationships, health, meaningful engagement, the economy, and a positive outlook.

The first factor, "social relationships," was characterized by items related to relations within the family and community, and it accounted for 12.42% of the variance in scores. The second factor, "health," was characterized by feeling physically and mentally healthy, and it accounted for 11.71% of the variance in scores. The third factor, called "meaningful engagements", had high positive loadings on items such as enjoying work, having time for leisure, participating in community activities, etc.; it explained 11.69% of the variance in scores. The fourth factor, "economy," had high positive loadings on four items related to personal and familial economic conditions and explained 11.29% of the variance in scores. The fifth factor, "positive outlook," was characterized by items related to perceptions of the current situation and hopes for the future, and it explained 10.39% of the variance in scores. The final scale consists of 20 items. A complete list of the items, factor loadings, and internal consistency reliabilities is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Results from the Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Happy Life Scale

Items	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
Factor 1: Economy (α= .723)					
1. My family's needs are met with my income.	.099	-.102	.066	.691	-.064
2. I am satisfied with my employment.	.057	.030	-.065	.770	.075
3. The financial condition of my family is fine.	-.071	-.037	-.111	.798	-.005
4. There are enough things in my house for the upkeep of the family.	-.139	.164	.053	.680	.006
Factor 2: Relationships (α= .784)					
5. My family members support each other.	.644	.337	.070	.052	.099
6. There is mutual harmony among the members of my family.	.805	.093	.053	.023	.183
7. There is unity and harmony in my community.	.754	-.106	-.029	-.054	.065
8. I have good relations with my friends, relatives, and neighbors.	.819	.104	-.043	-.045	.093
Factor 3: Health (α= .721)					
9. I feel fresh throughout the day.	.066	.759	-.137	-.045	-.074
10. I feel peace and stability.	.054	.653	.052	.000	.192
11. I am able to perform tasks of daily living.	-.063	.819	.000	.134	-.126
12. I often feel joy.	.222	.675	.040	-.038	-.068
Factor 4: Meaningful Engagements (α= .734)					
13. I have enough time to do what I love.	.038	-.015	.699	-.134	-.017
14. I am interested in learning new skills.	.112	-.019	.692	.037	.043
15. I take pleasure in participating in community activities.	-.011	-.102	.847	-.069	.124
16. I feel happy doing most of my tasks.	-.125	.096	.688	.109	.081
Factor 5: Positive Outlook (α= .645)					
17. I am optimistic about the future.	.142	-.058	.164	.072	.636
18. To me human life is a gift.	.076	.010	.036	.074	.827
19. My life is meaningful and purposeful.	.022	.042	.214	-.058	.670
20. I accept every situation of life whether it is good or bad.	.170	-.055	-.218	-.087	.623
Percentage of Variance Explained	12.424	11.706	11.684	11.292	10.390
Cumulative Percentage of Variance Explained	12.424	24.130	35.814	47.105	57.495

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to examine whether the factor structure obtained from the exploratory factor analysis was appropriate for describing the underlying structure of the Happy Life Scale. A covariance structure consisting of 20 items (4 items in each of the 5 factors) was submitted to confirmatory factor analysis. The goodness-of-fit indices indicated that the 5-factor structure was appropriate to describe the underlying structure of the Happy Life Inventory as seen in Table 2. RMSEA values less than 0.05 are considered good, making the RMSEA value of 0.049 of the current model a good fit (Bentler, 1990). The AGFI value of .921 is greater than the required .80 and above, but the GFI value is .882, which is below 0.9. However, GFI and AGFI are known to depend on the sample size (Mulaik et al., 1989). The CFI and TLI values over .90 show a good fit.

Table 2

Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the Happy Life Scale

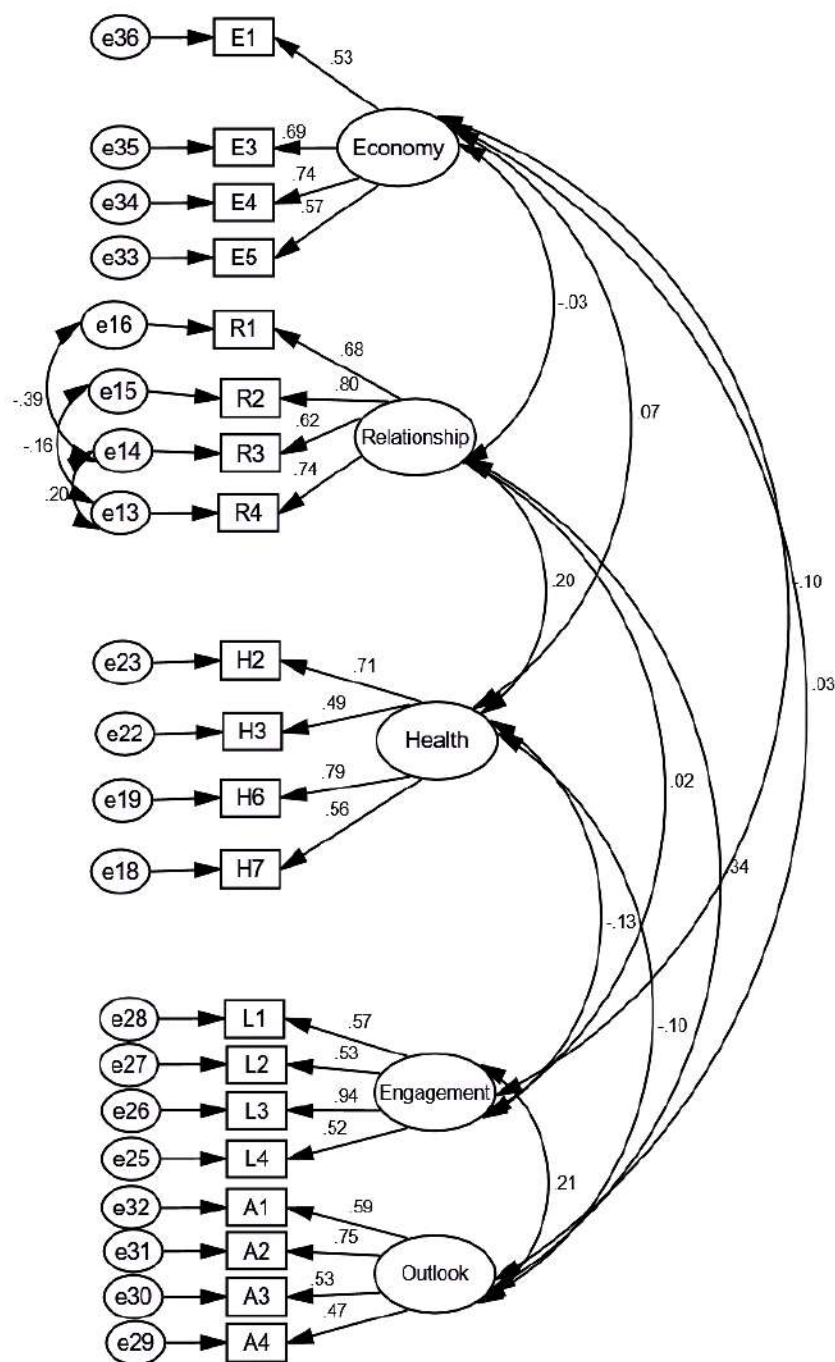|	NFI	GFI	AGFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Five-factor model	.761	.882	.843	.921	.904	.049

Figure 1: Results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the Happy Life Scale

Results

Table 3 presents the mean scores, SDs, and t-ratios for respondents with individualistic and collectivist orientations. The results indicated that 59% of the sample had a collectivistic orientation (n=88). Further, people with a collectivistic orientation scored significantly higher (t = -8.537, p < .001)

than those with an individualistic orientation on individual domains of happiness and the overall happy life index. Based on the effect size estimates, the greatest difference is on the domain of social relationships with collectivistic participants reporting greater happiness (t= -5.924, p<.001) than individualistic participants.

Table 3

Mean scores, SD, and t-ratio of 1respondents with individualistic and collectivistic orientations on Happy Life Scale

	Individualistic (n=62)		Collectivistic (n=88)		*t*	*p*	*Cohen's d*
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**			
Economy	8.95	2.20	10.27	2.73	-3.158	.002	-0.524
Relationships	12.50	3.09	15.08	1.78	-5.924	.000	-1.073
Health	13.11	2.02	14.23	2.37	-2.998	.003	-0.497
Engagements	14.61	2.30	15.68	2.26	-2.830	.005	-0.469
Positive Outlook	13.87	1.82	14.50	1.53	-2.293	.023	-0.380
Happiness index	63.05	4.16	69.76	5.11	-8.537	.000	-1.415

Discussion

This study identified five factors contributing to the happy lives of Kharwar Adivasi people: economy, relationships, health, meaningful engagement, and a positive outlook/attitude. These factors may be categorized into three groups: interpersonal (relationships), intrapersonal (positive outlook/attitude), and living conditions (economy, health, and meaningful engagements/leisure). Although these findings are similar to those from previous studies *(such as Kim et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2007; Ryff, 1989)*, some unique findings emerge due to socio-cultural differences between the study populations. For instance, in the present study, more factors are related to participants' living conditions. It is unsurprising because the Adivasi population is marked by poverty and abysmal health conditions. Therefore, their well-being depends on the fulfillment of basic needs.

The importance of social relationships has

emerged in this study. Kharwar adults mentioned factors such as intimate relationships, caring for the old, and supportive community relationships as important ingredients of their happy lives *(Mishra, 2017)*. The findings are consonant with other research, which found that Asian participants mentioned family, religion, interpersonal relationships, and recognition by others more frequently than Western participants when asked about their sources of happiness *(Lee et al., 1999)*. In the present sample, individuals with a collectivist orientation had greater happiness than those with an individualistic orientation. A similar pattern was observed in Lebanon (a collectivistic culture), where collectivism was positively related to psychological well-being, and this relationship was mediated by family functioning *(Kazarian, 2005)*. Gratifying relationships with family and friends are important contributors to psychological well-being by meeting social, relatedness, intimacy, and security needs *(Haller & Hadler, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000)*.

There is evidence that satisfying relationships are among the main sources of happiness *(Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000)*, as they play a substantial role in fulfilling individuals' needs for affiliation, intimacy, and security. Relationships are a source of social support and comfort, and they promote positive affect *(Christopher et al., 2004)*. It has been reported that married people are happier than single, divorced, or widowed people *(Myers, 2000)*.

The next factor to emerge was health. Research has evidenced that people's self-reported happiness is closely linked to their perceived health status and vice versa *(Bourne et al., 2010; Cohen & Pressman, 2006)*. Health, along with economy, relationships, and social contact, is an important element of subjective well-being *(Dolan et al., 2009)*. The reason for investigating the relationship between health and happiness is the potential for intervention. Similar to our findings, *Miret et al. (2014)* reported that a cross-sectional study in Finland, Poland, and Spain found that health was strongly correlated with well-being, even more so than income. However, since most policies focus on improving the economy, these results indicate that policymakers and healthcare professionals can work to improve the health conditions of the population and in turn, increase their happiness.

Living life according to certain principles, engaging in positive activities, and acceptance of the situation are specific cognitive and behavioral approaches that make one happy *(Rathore, 2010; Yadava, Awasthi, & Saxena, 2019)*. In the present sample, engaging in work, leisure, and community activities has emerged as a significant determinant of a happy life. It has been termed 'meaningful engagements' as these activities have positive consequences for oneself and the community. Other studies have also reported that individuals who spend more time in social activities are happier *(Diener & Seligman, 2002; Waldinger & Schulz, 2010)*. *Minkov (2009)* found that societies with restrictions on taking pleasure in life have a lower percentage of people who are happy about leisure. However, enjoying leisurely hours is important for happiness in several studies *(Kim, 2002; Kim et al., 2006)*.

Despite their poor socio-economic conditions, the economy was the fourth factor related to the happy life of the Kharwars. It is surprising, as the economy is generally given high value in the 'developed society' as an important ingredient of happiness *(Mishra, 2017)*. While *Kim et al. (2006)* found money to be the sixth most important of 16 factors determining Korean happiness, *Lee et al. (1999)* found that students from both individualistic and collectivistic cultures ranked materialistic needs among the least important categories. The discrepancy may be due to the population under study, as the importance of financial condition shifts with individuals' responsibilities.

Longitudinal data *(Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010)* indicate that economic growth promotes individualism. In a study comparing rich and poor countries, it was found that individualism was negatively associated with happiness in poor countries but positively associated with happiness in richer countries *(Veenhoven, 1999)*. Collectivism is valid in contexts where people need to depend on each other to survive. Affluence improves people's access to resources and decreases their reliance on family and community to meet their needs. This trend has been found in China (S*teele & Lynch, 2013)* and Japan *(Uchida & Oishi, 2016),* suggesting that greater financial independence promotes individualistic traits of autonomy and self-expression *(Inglehart, 1997)*.

The focus on a positive outlook towards life is much less compared to Western conceptualizations. *Ye et al. (2015)* found that people can be happy if they can control their lives, even partially, and feel confident about the future.

Aiming for short-term happiness and hedonic pleasures leads to long-term unhappiness *(Bartels & Salo, 2018).*

Based on the factors identified in the present study, an index of Adivasi peoples' happy life may be developed to assess the overall happiness Adivasi adults experience in everyday life. However, given the limitations of the present study, future studies may address some specific issues. First, the sample size of the present study was 150. A larger sample size will aid in validating the findings and identifying smaller effects that may be missed with a smaller sample. Furthermore, future studies may focus on age groups not included in the present study, such as adolescents and older adults. The present sample was primarily engaged in rudimentary agriculture and daily wage jobs. Differences may exist when compared to those whose subsistence is based on hunting and gathering. Conducting comparative studies with communities that practice different forms of subsistence can help understand how cultural and economic differences affect happiness. Next, the present sample was drawn from a single Adivasi community. However, other Adivasi communities residing in the same belt may be sampled in future studies to understand their index of happy life. Similarly, whether this scale is appropriate for non-Adivasi people sharing the same ecological and geographical settings can also be explored. This can help in establishing the cross-cultural validity of the scale.

Conclusion

The present research was undertaken to assess the index of happiness of a Kharwar Adivasi community using a culturally appropriate measure. The five-factor structure showed that relationships, health, meaningful engagement, the economy, and a positive outlook explained the happiness of this group. We found that, despite the socio-cultural changes in this region, most individuals in the Kharwar community still hold a collectivistic orientation. Further, individuals with a collectivistic orientation had a higher happy life index, which may be explained by their social support systems, which form the basis of a closely-knit community such as the Kharwars.

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