

Life Satisfaction – What Does it Really Mean to Indians?

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Abstract

Globalization, customer-oriented bureaucracy, changing lifestyle patterns and erratic demographic changes have all laid foundation to the modern contemporary society of India. In order to account the changing contexts, most research studies conducted under the organizational context have explored either the job satisfaction construct or the role related aspects. This limits the earlier studies to the work domain alone. This study has tried exploring the Life Satisfaction construct, which in itself is comprehensive and inclusively measures both the work and non-work domains. The present study empirically examines the variables of Ideal Life, Excellent Life Conditions, Satisfied Life, Important Things Achieved in Life and Happiness with status quo for the services sector in India. A total sample of 411 employees has recorded their responses that were chosen across seven industries. The Study reveals that the female employees were found to possess excellent life conditions and a more ideal life than their male counterparts. While the men scored on higher satisfaction with life, higher achievement and were in relatively high spirits about their life. This study is phenomenal in the sense that it explored a rare construct for a developing economy which is still foreseeing a multitude of transitions.

Life Satisfaction – An Introduction

India has traditionally been an epicenter of the quintessential family system. India has long been credited for its family values and the strong support systems at home. Life satisfaction in India is perceived to be affected by numerous variables that generally range from caste, family, health, good job, having patrimonial assets and the like. These are some of the prime reasons which are expected to contribute towards the life satisfaction index of India. India has long since been considered as one of the fastest growing economies of the world. This brought in lot of changes and modern times have witnessed a change in the workforce demographics, family roles and the rise in the number of dual-career families. The up rise in the nuclear family system and the rise in dual-career families have seen a considerable proportion of female participation in the workforce alongside their male counterparts. In particular, from an Indian cultural perspective, we see this trend as encouraging as well as

equally detrimental to the multiple roles handled by an average Indian woman. The life satisfaction of Indian men and women are largely bounded by the social acceptance their professions or lives in general.

Research into the work-family domain has also indicated demands arising out of management of children, eldercare responsibilities and other support activities. (Kossek et. al., 1999) feel that employee work-life domain is a regular experience of personal or internal conflicts. The conflicts result either through job or social pressures of the workplace or can occur due to the emotional pressures at the family level. Work-Family conflict, a growing concern among dual-career couples, has been defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which work and family demands are incompatible in some respect, such that participation in one role is perceived as more difficult because of participation in the other (Hammer et. al., 2005; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). (Kuskova Valentina, 2011) tried to delineate the life satisfaction construct from other by defining it as a *an overall, "global assessment" of feelings and attitudes about one's life at a particular point in time according to that individual's "chosen criteria"*

Work-Family role enactment can create both positive and negative effects for the individuals involved. The happiness experienced at the workplace in the form of appraisals, promotions or other growth aspects can create counter effects at the level of family life. In order to support the concept of zero-sum game and the lethal effects on life satisfaction, (Goode, 1960) introduced the scarcity hypothesis to posit that individuals have a finite amount of energy, and when energy is put toward effort in one role it becomes depleted and thus unavailable for use in other roles. As both work and family domains demand time, energy and dedication from an individual, the zero sum game principle applies to these domains in terms of the pay out of the resources. Apart from the resource pay out perspective, it can also be analyzed that zero sum game principle is as well applicable to the participant members involved in both the domains. This means that if an individual is expending more time and energy and in the process gaining in his work domain, then his family members stand to lose the benefits of association with the member excluding the economic perspective. Thus this proves the reality of scarcity hypothesis.

On the same lines, (Stevanovic Pedja, 2011) has stated that life satisfaction can witness two-way outcomes. Increased accomplishment at work was associated with increased family enhancers, which lead to greater family support and life satisfaction. On the negative side, emotional exhaustion at work was associated with more family stressors, which lead to less family support and life satisfaction. Family enhancers or stressors may or may not take into account the gender and work setting differences in the experience of spillover. An increase of age, however, related to a higher prevalence of family enhancers.

With shifting demographics and indiscriminate external changes that are affecting the workplaces, employers and employees themselves seem to be mystified with the growing demands of both work and family roles. Therefore life satisfaction is nowadays viewed as a multi-facet construct that can encompass a wide variety of attributes like workplace emotions, job satisfaction, satisfaction with family, health, friends/peer group and the like.

Methodology

The present study has chosen a sample of 411 employees who are currently employed on a permanent basis in the services sector within India. The Life Satisfaction construct, that was primarily investigated in this study, was administered using (Diener et. al, 1985) standardized instrument. The researchers have consciously chosen the services sector as it witnessed a lot of changes post globalization. Since the services sector was larger in scope and it created a time and cost limitation to the researchers, to systematize the sample selection, this study has limited the industries to seven as per the information listed on www.business.gov.in web portal. The industries thus chosen were Education, Health, IT & ITES, Media, Real Estate, Retail and Tourism. The study was conducted for an overall period of 18 months from October 2012 to February 2014. Around 35 major cities were considered for the study for which around 1050 hard copy questionnaires and close to 400 mailers were sent out for the purpose of data collection. Around 467 questionnaires were returned of which 411 were found usable. Thus, an effective response rate of 28.34% was achieved. The overall sample distribution is given in Table 1 as below:

Table 1: Sample Distribution of the Study

AGE	Under 20 (4)	21-30 (232)	31-40 (141)	41-50 (23)	Over 50 (11)		
INCOME	0-5L (376)	6-10L (28)	11-15L (7)				
GENDER	Male (304)	Female (107)					
EDUCATION	Undergraduate (36)	Graduate (208)	Post Grad (141)	Others (26)			
EXPERIENCE	Lessthan5yrs (197)	6-10yrs (148)	11- 15yrs (38)	16- 20yrs (15)	Over 20yrs (13)		
MARITAL STATUS	Married (173)	Single (238)					
INDUSTRY	Education (48)	Health (63)	IT & ITES (96)	Media (49)	Real Estate (46)	Retail (68)	Tourism (41)
GEOG. REGION	Central (62)	East (83)	North (96)	South (112)	West (58)		

Findings and Discussion

Before analyzing the data, the standardized instrument of life satisfactions was checked for its reliability and thus the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.827 was obtained. This indicated that the instrument proved to be reliable for the conditions in which the study was conducted.

After checking for reliability, each variable was analyzed and compared for each demographic characteristic.

Before looking at the results, we define each variable as:

Ideal Life (IDL) – It is defined as a state which is considered to be supreme and a fulfilled state. We define this state as a state beyond the level of a satisfied life.

Excellent Life Conditions (ELC) – This state as characterized by happiness with the current state of life and a belief that one's life conditions are relatively better when compared to others.

Satisfied Life (SL) – It is defined as a state that symbolizes satisfaction and well-being.

Important Things Achieved in Life (LACH) – This state is characterized by one's perception about their rate of achievement. If one's social acceptance is believed to be high then the rate of achievement is also high.

No Change in Life (NC) – This state portrays one's contentment with the status quo position. This state leads to not seeking any further changes in life.

Summarised Results

Table 2: CORRELATION MATRIX					
	IDL	ELC	LACH	NC	SL
IDL	1.00	0.65	0.44	0.33	0.63
ELC	0.65	1.00	0.45	0.36	0.72
LACH	0.44	0.45	1.00	0.53	0.46
NC	0.33	0.36	0.53	1.00	0.41
SL	0.63	0.72	0.46	0.41	1.00

Table 2 indicates highest correlation observed for Satisfied life and Excellent Life Conditions. This indicates that persons experiencing good life conditions perceive their life as satisfied. The second highest correlation was observed for Ideal life and Excellent Life Conditions. This again is indicative of the fact that ideal life of a person and excellent life conditions are akin to each other. This is closely followed by a high correlation with Ideal life and Satisfied Life. This correlation is obvious because a satisfied life alone will lead to the achievement of an ideal life and vice versa.

Table 3 – Findings of Ideal Life

Relationship	Mean Values
IDL Age (41-50 Years)	5.30
IDL Gender (Female)	5.02
IDL Marital Status (Married)	4.91
IDL Income (12-13Lakhs/annum)	6.0
IDL Education (Post Graduates)	5.09
IDL Experience (11-15 Years)	5.29
IDL Industry (Education)	5.33
IDL Geo. Region (East)	5.25

The above mean values represent the relationship of Ideal Life with the demographic variables. For Age, the highest Ideal life is possessed by the 41-50 years segment. We analyze that this age group are supposedly the happiest segment because they are in a phase where they have achieved success and have also established successful relationships in their life. The female gender was observed to have an ideal life than their male counterparts as we try to figure out that the average Indian working female achieves an ideal state by being a good daughter, wife, daughter-in-law and mother and by juggling in these roles successfully. The married segment possesses an ideal life state than the single/unmarried segment as the Indian societal norms affirm that a person is complete only with marriage. We also observe that ideal life state comes with higher income and higher education. Education Industry recorded an ideal state and we conjecture that this industry enjoys greater number of holidays, fixed work timings and greater job control and autonomy. Of all the geographical regions, the Eastern region of India is considered free from the hustle bustle of modern corporate cultures, deeply rooted in the joint family system and is has not adopted the cosmopolitan attitude as yet.

Table 4 – Findings of Excellent Life Conditions

Relationship	Mean Values
ELC Age (41-50 Years)	5.35
ELC Gender (Female)	4.96
ELC Marital Status (Married)	4.96
ELC Income (13Lakhs/annum)	7.00
ELC Education (Post Graduates)	5.19

ELC	Experience (11-15 Years)	5.29
ELC	Industry (Health)	5.35
ELC	Geo. Region (East)	5.31

The above mean values represent the relationship of Excellent Life Conditions with the demographic variables. Since there was a high correlation between Ideal Life and Excellent Life Conditions, therefore we figured out an obvious and satisfactory relationship for a large number of demographic variables like age, gender, marital status, income, education, experience and geographic region like that of ideal life. The Health industry recorded excellent life conditions unlike the Education industry for the ideal life as we infer that this industry consists of a work culture that gives freedom whilst on work, target free jobs, greater job security and other allied benefits like accommodation, subsidized water, electricity and greater medical benefits wherever applicable.

Table 5 – Findings of Satisfied Life

Relationship	Mean Values
SL Age (Over 50 Years)	5.55
SL Gender (Male)	5.10
SL Marital Status (Single)	5.18
SL Income (13Lakhs/annum)	7.00
SL Education (Post Graduates)	5.30
SL Experience (11-15 Years)	5.39
SL Industry (Education)	5.33
SL Geo. Region (East)	5.34

The above mean values represent the relationship of Satisfied Life with the demographic variables. For Age, the greatest Satisfied Life was observed for the over 50 years segment. We analyze that this age group are supposedly closing in on a successful after life retirement phase. This means that they have achieved success; their kin are well/almost settled and are established in their own professions/lives. An average Indian experiences satisfaction when their children are financially independent and are ready to take on their lives all alone. This result found support when the male (over 50 years) segment was more satisfied than their female counterparts. This was because that the Indian society is still largely patriarchal in nature. The other demographic variables like income, education, experience and geographic region share similarity as the Ideal life. Since there was a high correlation between Ideal Life and Excellent Life Conditions, therefore we figured out an obvious and satisfactory relationship for a large number like that of an ideal life. But interestingly the single/unmarried segment seemed more satisfied than their married counterparts. This may be due to the fact that an average unmarried employee has less burdens in life except for providing financial support to his/her parents if required. Each employee in this segment

gains satisfaction with gain in materialistic possessions, by spending quality time with friends and by efficiently managing work, home and financial aspects.

Table 6 – Findings of Important Things Achieved in Life

Relationship		Mean Values
LACH	Age (41- 50 Years)	4.87
LACH	Gender (Male)	4.74
LACH	Marital Status (Single)	4.74
LACH	Income (13-14 Lakhs/annum)	7.00
LACH	Education (Post Graduates)	4.84
LACH	Experience (11-15 Years)	5.00
LACH	Industry (Retail)	4.93
LACH	Geo. Region (North)	5.01

The above mean values represent the relationship of Important things achieved in Life (LACH) with the demographic variables. For Age, the 41-50 years segment has higher LACH as they belong to the growth or maintenance stage of their career and are reasonably well settled. This is again true for the male segment as we assign reasons to the patriarchal society of India. The Indian woman is constantly buried under the socio-cultural norms which keep her LACH low. The single segment has again scored high on LACH as they are kept out of the marital problems/burdens. Also, we analyze that higher income, education and experience resulted in a higher LACH. We also observe that high LACH was for the retail industry employees as we posit that their work arrangements involve immediate rewards and incentives, thus creating a further urge to perform well. Interestingly, of all the geographical regions, the Northern region of India has scored high on LACH as its one of the employment generating segments of India, poses a strong cosmopolitan and modern corporate attitude. It is also one of the regions that have represented the contemporary nuclear family system of India where work gains precedence over family.

Table 7 – Findings of No Change in Life

Relationship		Mean Values
NC	Age (31-40 Years)	4.96
NC	Gender (Male)	4.87
NC	Marital Status (Single)	4.98
NC	Income (13 - 14Lakhs/annum)	7.00
NC	Education (Others)	5.08
NC	Experience (11-15 Years)	7.00
NC	Industry (Health)	5.63
NC	Geo. Region (East)	5.22

The above mean values represent the relationship of seeking No change in Life (NC) with the demographic variables. For Age, the 31-40 years segment has higher NC as they belong to the establishment stage of their careers and seek to hold onto their jobs for higher growth. Even on the personal front we find that during this stage, the average Indian male gets married and seeks a status quo. On the contrary we found out that the single or unmarried segment also wishes to maintain their status quo. Also, we analyze that higher income, education and experience resulted in a higher NC. We also observe that high NC was for the health industry employees as well as for the eastern region employees as they have excellent life conditions and hence seek a status quo.

Implications and Conclusions

This study can be considered a landmark in itself as it looks at a construct which comprehensively measures the work and non-work domains and the related intrinsic attitudes of an individual. This research also studies the facets of life satisfaction holistically within the services sector as well as from a pan India perspective. Such researches that are either culture specific or cross cultural in nature help in estimating the broader changes that occur in a particular society. Based on such studies, it becomes easier to make assessments about gender related aspects, behavioral or environmental effects, lifestyle changes, crime rate and the like. Such studies are necessary because they help policy makers as well as managers to assess the current sociological changes and patterns that are aiding in the growth of a nation.

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