



The Age of Contentment: Exploring Happiness through Generational Lenses in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a comprehensive sociological exploration of happiness among older adults in Pakistan, drawing on a diverse array of socio-cultural factors. Utilizing a mixed-method approach that combines in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the research investigates the multifaceted dimensions of happiness, with particular emphasis on the satisfaction with meeting physiological demands, the generational shift from collectiveness to individuality, the role of social support and family, and a comparative analysis with the younger generation's perspectives. Key findings reveal the paramount importance of good health and basic health facilities in achieving happiness, with close family ties and economic stability acting as significant contributors. The intricate interplay between joint and nuclear family structures sheds light on the complex dynamics of personal freedom, independence, and the value of positive relations within the family. The study further uncovers the linkage between educational achievements and happiness, portraying a cohesive picture that aligns with broader societal values and norms. Cultural reflections unveil a specific understanding of happiness within the Pakistani context, highlighting the nuanced interactions between traditional values and modern aspirations. The findings offer profound implications for policymakers, educational institutions, and communities, emphasizing the need to foster supportive environments, nurture social connections, and understand the evolving nature of social relations within a rapidly changing society. Overall, the research contributes a rich and nuanced understanding of happiness, resonating with universal themes while deeply rooted in the specific socio-cultural landscape of Pakistan.

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1. Introduction

Happiness, a notion steeped in subjectivity and individualism, permeates every facet of human existence, extending its influence across social, demographic, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions. With the emergence of modernity, the interpretation of happiness has shifted, reflecting the increasingly complex dynamics of contemporary society, particularly in the context of Pakistan.

The sociological examination of happiness unveils a myriad of influences, notably interlacing with factors attributed to material wealth (Jabeen & Khan, 2016). This restrictive association often obscures the multifarious nature of happiness and the profound impact it holds over processes central to socialization. The intertwined relationships between individuals and social institutions are pivotal in shaping perceptions and experiences of happiness.

In Pakistan's intricate social fabric, family institutions have traditionally served as vital instruments of socialization, forging bonds and instilling values. However, the tides of

modernization and cultural transformation have altered this landscape, eroding the rigidity of traditional practices. The transition from a conventional to a modern way of life has profoundly influenced Pakistani families, rendering visible social and cultural shifts.

Furthermore, cultural beliefs within the Pakistani context intricately shape happiness. These complex phenomena manifest in various forms, such as the portrayal of unhappiness to seek attention, as sharing happiness is often perceived to have negative repercussions. Stigmatization introduces additional layers of complexity, wherein gender biases hinder the acknowledgment of accomplishments, leading to judgment based on socially assigned roles.

The polysemous nature of happiness further complicates the matter. Encompassing both a sense of well-being and an essential emotion, happiness eludes singular definition, yielding to multiple interpretations and theories (Tiwari, Sharma, & Ray, 2020). Subjective happiness, varying across generations, is molded by the time frame and social changes that individuals navigate. It epitomizes a profound sense of meaning, often punctuated by cheerful or uplifting events.

Bentham's utilitarian perspective (1781) casts happiness as a dynamic equilibrium of pleasure and pain, a subjective measure of well-being steered by individual actions. The intricate balance of managing personal pleasures and pains resonates in collective societal interactions, reflecting intentional, though occasionally unexpected outcomes.

One such surprising manifestation is Pakistan's rank at 121 out of 149 in the United Nations World Happiness Index 2022 (Report, 2022), a position seen as commendable, given the multifactorial influences that shape happiness within the society. The alignment of individual actions with societal standards and values demonstrates the intricate interplay between personal satisfaction and larger societal dynamics.

The present study embarks on an intricate exploration of happiness within the Pakistani cultural milieu. By probing into the diverse and multifaceted nature of happiness, this research aims to unravel the subjective construction of happiness across genders and ages, illuminating the contrasts between contemporary youth happiness and that of previous generations. The quest to decipher whether sharing one's sorrow leads to satisfaction and happiness adds a novel dimension to this exploration, underlying the researcher's keen interest in understanding the evolving cultural, social, and individual parameters that shape the elusive yet omnipresent concept of happiness in modern Pakistani society.

2. Methodology

The methodological framework of this study navigates the intricate terrain of subjective happiness within the Pakistani cultural context. Employing a qualitative research approach, this section elucidates the mechanisms and nuances underpinning the study, underscoring the rigor and ethical considerations that shaped the inquiry.

The qualitative method serves as the research paradigm for this inquiry, facilitating a nuanced exploration of the subjective nature of happiness. By privileging the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants, the qualitative approach enabled a deep and multifaceted understanding of happiness's complex intersections with culture, gender, age, and social institutions (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The study's sampling strategy employed purposive sampling, deliberately selecting participants who met specific criteria, thereby ensuring a rich and relevant data set (Palinkas et al., 2015). The purposefulness of this sampling strategy laid in its capacity to yield insights into the contrasting experiences of happiness across different generations.

The study comprised 12 in-depth interviews, equally balanced between genders and generational categories. The delineation of 3 male and 3 female participants from both young and elder populations ensured diversity and inclusiveness in the sample. Distinct age criteria were established for the youth and elders, framing the youth's age range as 15-25 and the elders as 40 and above. This demarcation captured the divergence in life experiences and social changes that influence the perception and experience of happiness.

In-depth interviews constituted the primary data collection method, facilitating intimate and nuanced exploration of participants' personal experiences and perspectives (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interview process was guided by carefully crafted protocols, enabling the researcher to delve into the multifaceted domains of happiness, family, modernization, beliefs, and societal norms. The development of a comprehensive interview guide ensured consistency across interviews, providing a structured yet flexible framework that accommodated the diverse voices and experiences within the sample (Roulston, 2010).

Thematic analysis served as the analytic method, systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The iterative and reflexive nature of thematic analysis facilitated a layered understanding of the data, unraveling the complexity of happiness within the Pakistani cultural context. The analysis unfolded through a meticulous process of coding, categorizing, and synthesizing the data. Emerging themes were identified and refined, weaving together a rich tapestry that captured the essence of happiness as a multifaceted and culturally embedded phenomenon.

The researcher's unwavering commitment to research ethics was manifest throughout the study. Rigorous measures ensured the privacy and confidentiality of the data (Sieber, 2001). Protocols were implemented to safeguard participants' identities, and informed consent was obtained, aligning with best practices in qualitative research ethics (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

The methodological framework of this study embodies a sophisticated and thoughtful approach to understanding the subjective construction of happiness in Pakistan. The integration of purposive sampling, in-depth interviews, thematic analysis, and robust ethical considerations coalesces into a rich and illuminating exploration of happiness's multifaceted nature, reflecting both its universality and cultural specificity. By grounding the inquiry in a rigorous qualitative paradigm, the methodology transcends mere description, offering profound insights that resonate with the complexities of modern Pakistani society.

3. Findings

3.1. Happiness Among Youth

The exploration of happiness among the youth reveals a textured landscape intricately woven by various factors. The youth's perspective of happiness is predominantly driven by achievement, embracing both material and non-material dimensions of life (Tiwari et al., 2020). This youth-embedded achievement orientation highlights the diversified paradigms of happiness. For instance, as one young respondent articulated, "Happiness is when I care for nature around me and taking care of animals gave me true essence of happiness," whereas another delineated, "Happiness for me is achieving my goals." These verbatim express the multifaceted nature of happiness that oscillates between ecological mindfulness and goal-oriented success.

Education emerges as a seminal construct in the architecture of youth's happiness, resonating with the Bentham's Utilitarianism that asserts life's acts as maximization of pleasure (Bentham, 1781). Respondents unequivocally emphasized the importance of educational accomplishments, career alignment, and self-realization in shaping their happiness. One respondent's statement, "After my degree and getting a job in my relevant field later contributes in my happiness but the happiest moment was when I was able to buy a shop for my parent as a valuable asset," exemplifies the synthesis of education, employment, and individual goals, fostering a sense of control, satisfaction, and holistic well-being.

Contrasting the youth's perspective, the elder generation provides a nuanced understanding of happiness, influenced by family integrity, economic contributions, and spiritual solace. While youth pursue self-realization, economic stability, and future investment, elders find joy in supporting family, nurturing relationships, and spiritual adherence. One elder respondent's reflection: "I always prefer to support my relatives as I feel helping others makes me feel happy and Allah gives me reward in return," juxtaposes with the youth's forward-looking, achievement-centric outlook, illustrating a generational divergence in the conceptualization of happiness.

Family structure, both joint and nuclear, is a critical determinant of happiness across generations. The youth's inclination towards independence contrasts with elders' preference for togetherness in joint family systems. Nevertheless, familial bonds, either through joint familial togetherness or nuclear family autonomy, emerge as vital conduits of happiness, elucidating the transcendent role of family across generational spectrums.

An intriguing cultural insight that permeates the narratives is the notion of masking happiness. In the Pakistani socio-cultural milieu, the portrayal of unhappiness often acts as a shield to evade the potential negativity associated with sharing joy. Spiritual practices, seeking solace in prayers, and embracing privacy in sorrow are coping strategies that resonate with the cultural wisdom of managing sadness. "Whenever I am upset, I want to stay alone and pray so that I can share my worries with Allah also I don't want to talk about my sad moments," shared a respondent, revealing an intricate interplay between culture, spirituality, and emotional expression.

The youth's construction of happiness presents a kaleidoscopic understanding that integrates achievements, education, family bonds, and cultural sensibilities. Rooted in a complex interplay of personal goals, societal expectations, and cultural norms, happiness among youth emerges as a dynamic, multifaceted phenomenon. This exploration, reflecting a rich tapestry of contrasting perspectives, resonates with the broader sociological discourse on happiness and offers a nuanced lens to navigate the evolving contours of happiness in contemporary Pakistani society. The contrast with elders' perspectives further enriches this understanding, bridging generational wisdom with youthful exuberance. In doing so, this study contributes to an integrative and culturally nuanced understanding of happiness, fostering theoretical insights, and practical implications in the realms of social policy, education, and community engagement.

3.2. Happiness Among Older Adults

Elders in the study unequivocally identified good health and the provision of essential health facilities as pivotal prerequisites for the achievement of happiness. The perspective of elders emphasizes physiological necessities and their satisfaction as elemental to the experience of joy and contentment. One respondent elucidated that "Happiness is in having good health and inner peace". This aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, where physiological needs stand as the foundational layer upon which higher-order needs are constructed (McLeod, 2007).

The data reveals an ontological standpoint where happiness is intertwined with health, fulfillment of essential family needs, and a peaceful existence. A male respondent declared that "For me happiness is fulfilling my family's basic needs and for that matter, I feel good health is important for happiness." The empirical evidence corroborates with the sociological perspective positing that satisfaction of basic human needs is a primary determinant of happiness (Castañeda-García, Cruz-Santana, Hernández-Garrido, Díaz-Rodríguez, & Romero-González, 2021).

Within the sphere of family structure, a dialectical nexus emerges between the collectiveness favored by the older generation and the individuality embraced by the youth. The elders harbor a predilection for joint family systems, recognizing it as a haven of togetherness, unity, and supportive relationships. A strong sense of collective consciousness, reminiscent of Durkheim's sociological framework, pervades the elder generation's perception of happiness.

Contrarily, some respondents alluded to the restrictions and encumbrances that joint family living might engender, which unveils an underlying tension between collectiveness and individuality. This tension mirrors a sociocultural evolution where individual autonomy and personal liberty are gaining prominence, particularly among the youth.

The family, in both its joint and nuclear manifestations, emerged as a cardinal, multifaceted institution in engendering happiness among the older adults. Elders accentuated the virtue of strong familial bonds, togetherness, and mutual support, rendering it vital to their well-being and satisfaction. Castañeda-García et al. (2021) has elucidated these intricate dynamics in the context of Pakistani society, underscoring the essence of family in forming a bulwark against existential uncertainties.

Simultaneously, the study also reveals the complex interplay between family structures and happiness, where both joint and nuclear families present distinct advantages. The joint family resonates with elder individuals' values and sociocultural norms, while nuclear families offer the allure of independence and decision-making autonomy. These findings resonate with Parson's structural-functional approach, highlighting the family's role in social integration and stability (Bales & Parsons, 2014).

In drawing a comparative analysis with the younger generation's perspectives, fascinating intergenerational contrasts and convergences emerge. While the youth pursue happiness through achievement, education, and personal goals, elders find solace and joy in familial relationships, good health, and fulfilling basic needs.

However, there exists an underlying commonality where both generations regard education, economic means, and family structure as instrumental in achieving happiness. Bentham's Theory of Utilitarianism finds echoes in these findings, as both generations seek to maximize pleasure through various means (Bentham, 1781).

The examination of happiness among older adults offers a kaleidoscopic insight into the complex interplay of physiological needs, generational shifts, social support, and family structures. The intricate web of these sociological elements offers a nuanced understanding of the happiness construct, juxtaposing and contrasting it with the youth's perceptions.

It reveals a rich tapestry where traditional values coalesce with evolving sociocultural norms, forging a dynamic equilibrium. The insights gleaned from this study contribute not only to the academic discourse on happiness but also illuminate the multifaceted socio-cultural landscapes that shape the lived experiences of the older generation. By recognizing and understanding these dynamics, we edge closer to comprehending the profound and universal quest for happiness, transcending generational divides and cultural boundaries.

4. Conclusion

The exploration into the intricacies of happiness among young and older adults in Pakistan unravels multifaceted dimensions that encompass physiological needs, generational shifts, social support, and the profound role of family structures. At the core of these findings lies a robust nexus between health, economic means, familial relations, and the cultural context that shapes the perceptions and experiences of happiness. These findings, grounded in the rich sociological literature, illuminate how the youth and the elder generation navigate the complex terrain of happiness within the social fabric of a rapidly changing society.

The study illustrates a vivid and complex picture where happiness is intrinsically tied to meeting physiological demands, reflecting a deeply entrenched view where health stands as a pillar of contentment. The generational shift from collectiveness to individuality uncovers a cultural transition, highlighting the tension and balance between tradition and modernity. The pivotal role of family as a social support mechanism resonates throughout, along with the comparative insights drawn between the perspectives of the younger and older generations. These findings bear profound sociological implications, emphasizing the evolving nature of social relations, the resilience of cultural norms, and the multifarious pathways to happiness within a diverse sociocultural milieu.

The linkage between physiological well-being and happiness underscores the significance of health in the broader context of social welfare. This research resonates with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3, which aims at ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages. The emphasis on health as an essential component of happiness echoes the global aspiration to integrate health into the broader framework of human development and societal progress.

The findings of this research provide valuable insights for policymakers, educational institutions, and communities. Policymakers must recognize the intricate relationship between health, family structures, and happiness, and formulate policies that foster a supportive environment for older adults. Educational institutions should incorporate modules and programs that address the multifaceted nature of happiness and well-being. Communities must strive to

nurture social support networks, embrace cultural diversity, and foster intergenerational dialogues that enhance understanding and empathy.

Finally, this study elucidates the cultural specificity of happiness in Pakistan, an aspect that enriches our understanding of the global discourse on happiness. The integration of traditional values, the emphasis on family, and the unique blend of spiritual and material pursuits unveil a complex and rich cultural landscape. The insights gleaned from this research underscore the importance of contextualizing happiness within the specific cultural and social configurations that define and shape the human experience. It's a potent reminder that the pursuit of happiness, though universal in its aspiration, is deeply rooted in the particularities of cultural context and social history, transcending mere universality and reaching into the heart of what it means to be human in a specific place and time.

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