

Subjective Well Being in Indian Family Structure: A Study on Middle Aged Adults

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Abstract: *The objective of this study was to compare the scores of both genders in relation to the family structure (nuclear and extended family) on the various subjective well-being dimensions. 60 male and 60 female adults of average age 46.6 years were assessed on Subjective well-being scale (Sell & Nagpal, 1992). The findings revealed that extended family provides a favourable environment for inculcating high sense of subjective well being in both male and female adults.*

Keywords: Subjective well being, Nuclear family, Extended family, Middle-aged adults, Gender difference

1. Introduction

Indian family structure: Modernization and globalization have brought a change in all the social institutions in all the societies. Large- scale migration, easier transportation and faster communication at the macro level have influenced the micro level organizations. Younger members are migrating away from home, due to which the structure of the family is being affected. Women are stepping into the labour market which again results in consequent functional changes in the family. The kinship is undergoing a change with a certain degree of reduction in the expression of love and affection because of distance. These changes have brought about expanded definitions of the word “family” and less traditional perceptions about the roles and responsibilities of family members (Turner, Hamner & Orell, 1993). All these changes in the Indian family structure and the consequent practical modification's are causing adverse effects on the subjective well-being of middle aged people. By size or composition and the depth of generations, a family can be classified into two broad types: (i) The Nuclear Family and (ii) The Extended/Joint Family. A nuclear family is one which consists of husband, wife and their children. As soon as the children get married, they leave their parental home and establish their separate household. Thus, a nuclear family is an autonomous unit free from the control of the elders. Since there is physical distance between parents and their married children, there is minimum interdependence between them. Therefore, a nuclear family is mostly independent. Extended family normally consists of members who at least belong to three generation. The Extended family system constituted the basic social institution in many traditional societies, particularly in the eastern society. This form of family is still found in India. It is deeply rooted in the traditional Indian culture.

Subjective Well Being: Well being is one of the most important goals which adolescence as well as adult individual strives for. Well-Being involves subjective satisfaction and individual pleasure depending upon psychological status of the individual and his environmental conditions. Subjective Well-Being includes satisfaction with a different aspect of life and satisfaction with life as a whole. Satisfaction with aspects of life is concerned with different

domains of life such as work, family, and money and also with specific quality of life such as its comfort and its challenges (Kumar, 2004). Positive mental health “which allows individuals to realize their abilities, cope, and contribute to their communities” and the capacity to sustain social relationships are the key dimensions of subjective well-being (Patil, Itagi, Khadi & Havaladar, 2013).

Middle Adulthood: Those in middle adulthood or middle age continue to develop relationships and adapt to the changes in relationships. Middle age is a period of adjustment between the potentialities of the past and the limitations of the future. An emotional rebellion has been observed in some persons, sometimes referred to as a mid-life crisis, engendered by the recognition that less time remains to be lived than has been lived already. During late middle age individuals become more aware of ill health and thus may consciously or unconsciously alter the patterns of their lives. Individuals accept the limits of their accomplishments and either takes satisfaction in them or despairs and become anxious over unattained objectives.

2. Literature Review

The significant influence of dynamic Indian family structure which is changing from the traditional joint household to nuclear families on the subjective feeling of well being is witnessed in a study by Kaur et al. (2006). Subjective feeling of well being was found significantly lower in women from nuclear families as compared to women from joint families. Also subjective feeling of well -being scores were lower among women from partially nuclear families as compared to women from wholly nuclear families. Gender studies on subjective well- being support males with higher well being in life. Inglehart (2002) finds that in almost every society, men have higher incomes, more prestigious jobs and more authority than women--all links with relatively high levels of subjective well-being. According to a research report by Senik (2015), the general picture that emerges is that women are more satisfied with their lives when they are placed in similar circumstances as men. But, in spite of their higher level of self-declared happiness and life satisfaction, women are more exposed to depression and have lower scores of emotional wellbeing.

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Objective

To study the difference in the subjective well being of males and females living in the nuclear and extended family

Hypothesis

- 1) There would be no significant difference among the Males living in nuclear and extended family on subjective well being.
- 2) There would be no significant difference among the Females living in nuclear and extended family on subjective well being.

Sample

Quota sampling technique was used for the selection of 60 males and 60 females. Out of 60 males, n=30 were living in nuclear family and n=30 were living in extended family. The subjects were selected from the general population of Dehradun, Utrakhand. The mean age of the sample was 46.6 years.

Instrument

The subjective well-being of the respondents was measured by ICMR Subjective Well-being developed by Sell and Nagpal (1992). This scale consists of 40 items, 19 items elicit positive effects which come under the dimensions of well-being (General well being Positive Affect, Expectation-Achievement Congruence, Confidence in Coping, Transcendence, Family Group Support and Social support) and 21 items elicits negative effects about individual life concerns which belongs to dimensions of ill-being (Primary Group Concern, Inadequate Mental Mastery, Perceived Ill-Health, Deficiency in Social Contact and General Well-Being Negative Affect). Each statement has 3 alternative answers, very good, quite good, and not good excluding 14, 27, and 29 items having an extra option, not applicable with scoring of 3, 2, and 1 for positive and reverse scoring pattern for negative items.

3. Results and Discussion

The data was processed using the statistical technique of mean, SD and t-test.

Table 1 shows the scores of Subjective Well-Being of adult males living in nuclear and extended family. The result

reveals that a significant difference is present between the adult males of nuclear and extended family on the overall Subjective Well Being. The mean difference was found to be significant at $t(58) = 2.97, p < .01$. The mean scores of total Subjective Well Being for adult males in extended family is 89.34 with $SD = 7.26$ and mean score of total Subjective Well Being for adult males in nuclear family is 84.42 with $SD = 5.42$. This shows that the extended family environment provides an opportunity for inculcating a heightened sense of Subjective Well being among adult males. However, only two dimensions of Subjective Well Being were found to be significantly different for males living in nuclear and extended family. Family Group Support at $t(58) = 2.05, p < .05$ and Inadequate Mental mastery at $t(58) = 3.58, p < .01$.

Table 2 shows the scores of Subjective Well Being of adult females living in nuclear and extended family. The result reveals that a significant difference is present between the adult females of nuclear and extended family on the overall Subjective Well Being. The mean difference was found to be significant at $t(58) = 2.6, p < .01$. The mean scores of total Subjective Well Being for adult females in extended family is 97.4 with $SD = 7.34$ and mean score of total Subjective Well Being for adult females in nuclear family is 93.74 with $SD = 6.74$. The pattern is similar to the findings of adult males; the extended family environment provides an opportunity for inculcating a heightened sense of Subjective Well Being among adult females. Only two dimensions of subjective well being were found to be significantly different for females living in nuclear and extended family. Expectation Achievement Congruence at $t(58) = 2.27, p < .05$ and Deficiency in Social Contacts at $t(58) = 3.64, p < .01$.

Adult males living in extended family obtained significant high scores on Family Group Support and Inadequate Mental mastery. Family group support reflects positive feelings derived from the perception of the wider family (beyond the primary group of spouse and children) as supportive, cohesive and emotionally attached. This dimension reflects cohesive aspects of family life. Inadequate mental mastery implies a sense of insufficient control over, or inability to deal inefficiently with, certain aspects of everyday life that are capable of disturbing the mental equilibrium

Table 1: Subjective Well being Mean and SD scores of Adult Males living in Extended and Nuclear Family

Dimensions of Subjective Well-Being	Adult Males				t- value
	Extended Family		Nuclear Family		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
General Well-being Positive Affect	7.3	1.31	7.23	1	0.23
Expectation Achievement Congruence	7.46	1.07	7.46	1.33	0
Confidence in Coping	6.3	1.26	6.06	1.33	0.71
Transcendence	6.2	1.58	6.4	1.64	0.48
Family Group Support	6.5	1.25	5.8	1.39	2.05*
Social Support	6.43	1.19	6	1.23	1.37
Primary Group Concern	6.36	1.4	6.06	1.2	0.89
Inadequate Mental Mastery	15.63	2.38	13.66	1.84	3.58**
Perceived Ill-Health	13.06	2.22	13.06	2.31	0
Deficiency in social contacts	7.1	1.51	6.33	1.66	1.87
General Well-being Negative Affect	7	1.57	6.36	1.65	1.53
Total- Subjective Well Being	89.34	7.26	84.42	5.42	2.97**

Adult females living in extended family obtained significantly low score on expectation achievement congruence as compared to adult females living in nuclear family. This factor refers to the feelings of well-being generated by achieving the standard of living, social status, success and freedom as per one's expectations or what may be called satisfaction. Adult females living in extended family scored significantly higher on deficiency in social contacts as compared to females living nuclear family. This refers to the feeling of missing friends or worrying about being disliked.

Blau (1981) has observed that friendship ties tend to be most important in adolescence and older age while nuclear family ties tend to be more important during the middle years. According to Britannica Encyclopaedia, middle adulthood is a period of optimum mental functioning when the individual's intellectual, emotional, and social capabilities are at their peak to meet the demands of career, marriage, and children. Coping with such demands becomes easier when the individual has support, the support can be present in the form of extended family. In the Indian culture, extended families play an important role. In extended families a person is able to enhance their personality factors and their happiness with the help of other family members who assist them to know their abilities and capabilities. The extended family is the bedrock, on which family's religious, social values and personal values along with attitudes related to these are built. They reside together under the same household. In extended family the role and the

responsibilities of every member of the family is equally distributed to them. There is no burden on one male member of the family. This leads to a peaceful and a satisfactory life. They have feelings of contentment, happiness satisfaction with life's experiences and one's role in the world of work, sense of achievement, utility belongingness, and no distress, dissatisfaction or worry etc. and this raises their self-confidence and they feel more satisfied.

4. Conclusion

Both middle aged males and females living in extended family experience higher subjective well-being as compared to those who reside in nuclear family. It could be concluded that extended family provides a favourable environment for inculcating a high sense of subjective well being in adults.

5. Future Scope

- 1) A larger sample could have been employed to get a clear picture of the variable studied.
- 2) A more detailed knowledge of the family structure (for e.g. Single parent, divorced, separated) should be studied.
- 3) The more psychological instruments would have been used to acquire an in- depth knowledge of the respondents behaviour.

Table 2: Subjective Well being Mean and SD scores of Adult Females living in Extended and Nuclear Family

Dimensions of Subjective Well-Being	Adult Females				t- value
	Extended Family		Nuclear Family		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
General Well-being Positive Affect	7.63	0.99	7.53	1.19	0.35
Expectation Achievement Congruence	7.1	0.922	7.7	1.11	2.27*
Confidence in Coping	7.23	1.04	6.63	1.4	1.88
Transcendence	7.4	0.93	6.93	1.43	1.50
Family Group Support	6.36	2.05	7.1	1.56	1.57
Social Support	7.43	1.77	7.23	1.25	0.50
Primary Group Concern	6.36	2.05	6.86	1.65	1.04
Inadequate Mental Mastery	15.8	2.65	14.93	2.22	1.37
Perceived Ill-Health	13.03	2.02	13	1.96	0.05
Deficiency in social contacts	8.06	1.14	6.9	1.32	3.64**
General Well-being Negative Affect	11	3.5	8.93	4.61	1.95
Total- Subjective Well Being	97.4	7.34	93.74	6.74	2.60**

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