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Life satisfaction among Generation X and Millennials: Empirical Analyses

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Abstract:

The aim of the present study was to examine life satisfaction among Generation X and the Millennials. Generation X has been defined as those people born from 1965 to 1980 and the Millennials has been defined as those born between 1981 & 1996. The Millennials has also been called as Generation Y. It has been observed by behavioral scientists that people born at different times have different their cognitive, affective and behavioral patterns. These differences arise because of different set of experiences due different time lag. Their experiences lead them to have either preponderance of positive emotions like happiness or preponderance of negative emotions like anger etc.

The current research aimed to examine life satisfaction among the Generation X and the Millennials. The main objectives of the current study were to (i) Examine life satisfaction among Generation X (ii) Examine life satisfaction among the Millennials and (iii) Examine the differences in life satisfaction among them. A sample of 300 self-employed young adults out of which 150 belonged to Generation X and 150 belonged to the Millennials. The purposive sampling technique was used for the data collection. The measures used were i) Sociodemographic Data Sheet & ii) satisfaction with life scale(Diener et al,1985) The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics like mean, SD and independent t test. The findings indicate significant group differences on the measures of life satisfaction. Generation X scored higher on the measure of life satisfaction than that of the Millennials implying that Generation X were more satisfied from their life than the millennials. The study highlights the importance of promoting life satisfaction programs among the Millennials using psychological intervention strategies.

Key words: Life satisfaction, Generation X, Millennials, well-being.

Introduction: Strauss and Howe (1997) propounded Strauss-Howe generational theory. The theory posits that American and the global history follows a generational cycle. According to the theory, each cycle is defined by four “Turnings” and each turning lasts for about 20 years. The theory further asserts that generational archetypes play an important role in historical events and these archetypes recur. The cycle of the four “Turnings” has been named as Saeculum which is roughly the length of human life. The main idea of the theory is seasonality. They assert that the cyclical nature of time permeates all human life. The theory attempts to understand the generational attitude and their attitudinal patterns. The theory attempts to correlate these attitudinal and behavioral patterns with significant historical events. The theory says that the cyclical generational attitude are the main factors in analyzing and understanding history and politics. Strauss and Howe assert that race, gender, economic class, religion and political beliefs are not much important in influencing the course of history. There are three alternative ways people understood time as per this theory. chaotic, cyclical, and linear. Chaotic time was prevalent in primitive times. Traditional civilizations conceived of time as cyclical. Linear time is a modern concept. The danger of chaotic and linear concepts of time is that they disconnect people from other generations. This disconnect inhibits learning about the future. Strauss and Howe posit that without the concept of recurrence, understanding the past is meaningless.

Generation X has been defined as those people born from 1965 to 1980 and the Millennials has been defined as those born between 1981 & 1996. The Millennials has also been called as Generation Y. Behavior scientists including mental health professionals like Clinical Psychologists state that attitudinal and behavioral patterns seem quite different in these two groups based on day to day observation of their behavior toward multiple domains like life satisfaction, happiness, anger, impulsivity etc.

The terms like quality of life, perceived quality of life, subjective well-being (SWB), well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction have been used interchangeably at times in the academic literature. There are subtle differences in some of these terms and each term has unique meaning (Campbell, Converse, & Rogers, 1976; Diener, 1984; Diener & Seligman, 2004). The terms subjective well-being and happiness are equivalent and has been defined in terms of affect or cognitions or the combinations of both (Andrews & Robinson, 1991; Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999, 2003; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., in press).

Affective theorists define SWB as either positive affect alone or as a preponderance of positive affect (such as joy, contentment, or pleasure) over negative affect (such as sadness, depression, anxiety or anger) in an individual’s experience (Andrews & Robinson, 1991; Bradburn, 1969). Cognitive theorists use the life satisfaction approach to SWB, defining happiness in terms of cognitive judgments as to whether a person’s needs, goals, and wishes have been fulfilled (Campbell et al., 1976; Cantril, 1965). Thus, life satisfaction is defined as a “cognitive judgmental process dependent upon a comparison of one’s circumstances

with what is thought to be an appropriate standard” (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffen, 1985, p. 71).

Life satisfaction is determined by a person's perception of how their life should be in comparison to how it actually is (Paolini, Yanez, & Kelly, 2006). When individuals believe that their lives should be lived in a particular manner, their expectations rise. When their lives fall short of their expectations, their level of life satisfaction decreases. Earlier studies has established that a person's ability to adapt to regular living circumstances is contingent upon maintaining a high sense of life satisfaction. If your life happiness decreases, you increase your risk of experiencing maladaptive life events such as physical or psychiatric illness (Kitsantas, Gilligan, & Kamata, 2003). Life pleasure is contingent upon a variety of life domains, including age, gender, socioeconomic situation, student status, employment status, and family. Each domain has a significant impact on an individual's sense of fulfilment in life. Domains define the roles that a human play, and when an individual plays several roles, life happiness is likely to decline.

The concept of life satisfaction transcends the living conditions approach, which is primarily concerned with the material resources available to humans. Three primary traits have been found to be connected with life satisfaction. Life contentment is a term that refers to an individual's life circumstances. The approach necessitates a micro perspective, in which the circumstances and perspectives of individuals are critical. Macroscopic characteristics of a society's economic and social status are necessary for placing the findings at the individual level in perspective, but they do not occupy centre stage.

E.L. Thorndike coined the terms "satisfaction" and "dissatisfaction" in 1911. Thorndike defined a fulfilling state as one in which an individual does not attempt to avoid a situation but instead does behaviours that maintain or renew it. The dissatisfying condition is one in which the individual does nothing to keep or maintain it, but rather frequently works to bring it to an end.

Life satisfaction is described as a positive attitude about one's life in its whole. Life satisfaction has not been directed specifically at female experiences; a few studies have examined the distinctive predictors of female life satisfaction. For instance, multiple studies have indicated that the more gender equality exists within a society (i.e., reproductive freedom, equal pay, equal value under the law, and equal access to education and success), the greater reported life happiness (Sousa and Lyubomirsky 2000).

Life satisfaction is a cognitive, judgemental process defined by Shin and Johnson (1978) as "a worldwide assessment of a person's quality of life according to his or her selected criteria" (p.478). Satisfaction judgments are contingent upon a comparison of one's circumstances to what is believed to be a suitable norm. It is critical to emphasise that how people feel about their current condition of affairs is determined by comparison to a standard that each individual establishes for himself or herself; it is not determined externally. The subjective well-being field is defined by its emphasis on individual assessments, rather than on some standard deemed improbable by the researcher (Dienes,

1984). For instance, while health, energy, and so on are all good, various individuals may place a different value on them. It is for this reason that we should solicit the individual's entire assessment of their life, rather than focusing on their happiness with specific scientific disciplines, in order to establish a measure of total life satisfaction. According to Tatarkiewicz (1976), "Happiness necessitates overall contentment, which is defined as "satisfaction with life in general".

Life satisfaction is a subjective measure of one's feelings and attitudes toward one's life at a certain point in time, ranging from negative to positive. It is one of three key measures of well-being: life satisfaction, beneficial effect, and detrimental effect (Diener, 1984). Although satisfaction with current life circumstances is frequently assessed in research studies, Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (1999) include the following dimensions of life satisfaction in their definition: "desire to change one's life; satisfaction with the past; satisfaction with the future; and significant other's perspective on one's life" (Beutell, 2006).

Review of Literature: Chipperfield and Havens (2001) conducted a study to compare life satisfaction levels between those who had experienced a change in marital status and those who maintained their married status over a seven-year period. The findings suggest that men and women have a different association with marital status transitions or stability.

Young (2006) research findings show that improving staff and friend support may help patients with long-term mental illness achieve a higher level of life satisfaction.

Until the late 1960's, it was assumed that women with jobs/working outside the home were generally happier and more satisfied than full-time home makers or non-working women. However, numerous national polls have consistently refuted this idea, reporting no substantial variations in life satisfaction between the two groups (Surila Agarwala, 2001).

Paul Mussen et. al. (1982) investigated the Early Adult Antecedents of Life Satisfaction at Age 70. Participants in this study were in their early 30s; mothers were correlated with 15 cognitive and personality qualities, while both parents were correlated with personal, interpersonal, and familial variables. Around 40 years later, the surviving parents underwent extensive interviews and were granted life satisfaction scores.

Christian Bjørnskov, Axel Dreher, and Justina A. V. Fischer (2007) used a cross-section of 66 nations to examine the effect of gender discrimination on individual life satisfaction. Women are more content with their lives today than they were 20 years ago, when discriminatory practices were less common in the business.

Ramachandran and Radhika (2012) evaluated a variety of socioeconomic indicators, as well as the level of life satisfaction and the factors related with it, among senior people in Japan and India. The Indian elderly reported a higher level of life satisfaction than their Japanese counterparts.

Method:

Aim: To compare the life satisfaction and among Generation X and Millennials in self-employed young adults.

Objectives: The main objectives of the current study were to

- (i) Examine life satisfaction among Generation X self-employed young adults
- (ii) Examine life satisfaction among the Millennials self-employed young adults
- (iii) Examine the differences in life satisfaction among them.

Hypothesis:

H1: There will be a significant difference in life satisfaction among Generation X and Millennials among the self-employed young adults.

Research design: The investigation of the present research was based on non-experimental, cross-sectional research design.

Sample: The study sample consisted of 300 self-employed young adults out of which 150 were from Generation X and 150 who were millennials. Participants were recruited from Delhi NCR & Gurgaon.. The purposive sampling technique was used to gather the sample. The age range of the sample was 24 to 55 years.

Tools:

- (i) Sociodemographic Data Sheet: It was developed by the investigators to obtain information about respondents' name, age, gender, class, and religion.
- (ii) Subjective Well-being scale (Diener, E., Emmons, R.A., Larsen, R.J., & Griffen, S, 1985).It is a seven point rating scale consists of five global statements about life satisfaction. Thus, minimum score on this scale is 5 and the maximum score is 35. A score above 21 indicates an above average satisfaction with life. The internal consistency of satisfaction with life Cronbach's alpha= 0.83-0.92.

Analysis of data:The protocols were scored and Descriptive statistics was used to measure mean and SD of the sample. Independent t-test was used to examine group differences.

Ethical Considerations:

- 1) The university management and institute from where data was collected were assured that the confidentiality of the results will be maintained.
- 2) Written informed consent was taken from all the respondents.
- 3) The university and Institutes from where the data were collected were informed about the implications of the study.
- 4) The participants were reassured that there would no be any psychological & physical harm to them during the data collection and research process.

Procedure: The Google forms were made after compiling the questionnaires. The participants of the institutes were contacted via phone & emails. The researcher briefed them about the study and consents were taken. The participants were also be ensured about the confidentiality and that will be used only for research purpose. And then the links were forwarded to them and ask them to notify the researcher once they submit the form

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 and requested to forward the same to their friends as well. Researcher duly thanked all the participants for being a part of this research and for their co-operation.

Results and Discussion:

Table 1 (a): Distribution of Generation X according to Education

Sl. No.	Class	Students	
		Frequency	Percent
1	Management	73	48.66 %
2	Engineering	42	28.00%
3	Law	35	23.33 %
	Total	150	100%

Table 1 (b) Distribution of Generation X according to Gender

Sl. No.	Gender	Students	
		Frequency	Percent
1	Boys	94	62.66 %
2	Girls	56	37.33%
	Total	150	100.0%

Table 1 (c): Distribution of Millennials according to Education

Sl. No.	Class	Students	
		Frequency	Percent
1	Management	64	42.66%
2	Engineering	49	32.66%
3	Law	37	24.66 %
	Total	150	100%

Table 1 (d) Distribution of Millennials according to Gender

Sl. No.	Gender	Students	
		Frequency	Percent
1	Boys	101	67.33 %
2	Girls	49	32.66%
	Total	150	100.0%

Table1 (e): Descriptive and comparison between Generation X and Millennials group on life satisfaction

Variable (Life satisfaction)	Mean	Standard Error of Mean	Standard Error of difference	t value	P value
Generation X (N =150)	25.50 (3.28)	0.26	0.49	6.73**	0.00
Millennials (N =150)	22.18 (5.06)	0.41			

Significant at 0.01 level ($p < 0.05$)

According to Table 1(e), the mean difference and standard deviation for participants who are General X and Millennials on life satisfaction came out to be 25.50 ± 3.28 and 22.18 ± 5.06 . The standard error of mean for both the groups were 0.26 and 0.41. The standard error of difference was 0.49. The result shows that there is a significant difference between the participants who are Generation X and Millennials on life satisfaction ($t=6.73$, $p= 0.00$) that means H1 has been supported. This means that the life satisfaction of General X is higher than those of the Millennials.

The possible explanations of this difference could be differences in the socio cultural milieu in which these two groups are born and brought up. The more joint family system and collective culture prevalence during 1965 and 1980 might have lead Generation X to be higher on life satisfaction than the Millennials. Relationships and collective culture are important factors leading to life satisfaction. The perception that there is available social support in different forms often enhance effective coping under life challenges leading to more life satisfaction. Several prospective studies using mental health outcomes measures have shown a positive relationship between social support and mental health (Aneshensel & Frerichs, 1982). The generalized beneficial effect of social support could occur because of large social network provide people with regular positive experiences and a set of stable socially rewarding roles in the community. This kind of social support could be related to overall well-being because it provides positive effects, a sense of predictability and a sense of stability in one's life situations and a recognition of self-worth. This can act as " stress buffer".

Khan, Aleem & Walia (2021), however found no significant differences in the well being scores among Generation X & Millennials. There could be multiple factors for such differences. Some of the important methodological factors which might be leading to these differences are differences in research design, nature of participants studied, tools used, differences in cohort groups etc.

Life-satisfaction is one of the indicators of 'apparent' quality of life. Together with indicators of mental and physical health, it indicates how well people thrive. Data about life-satisfaction is used for several purposes. The most elementary use of life-satisfaction data is to estimate apparent quality of life within a country or a specific social group. This is typically done to assess the extent of a social problem or issue and to recommend possible policy interventions. High satisfaction suggests that the quality of life, in the population concerned, is good. Though conditions may not be ideal, it is apparently acceptable for most of the population.

Limitations and Recommendations: Like every scholarly work, the present study too has certain limitations like limited sample size, limited geographical area and questionnaires not adapted to Indian population. In order to overcome these limitations, it is recommended that future researches should have larger sample size, cover larger geographical area and adapt the questionnaires to Indian population before administering them.

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest in this research

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Contributors: The first author is the one who did the research. The second author mentored the research process and the third author edited it later to give his input.

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