

## Relationship between Self and Family Variables and Life Satisfaction of Elderly People in Urban and Semi Urban Families

PRIYANKA

Assistant professor  
Department of Home Science  
Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Urdu  
Arabi-Farsi University, Lucknow  
India

MISHRA SUNITA

Professor  
School for Home Sciences  
Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow  
India

### Abstract:

*The present study was conducted to assess overall life satisfaction in elderly of urban and semi urban dwellings. The study is based upon sample of 400 elderly (200 urban samples and 200 semi urban samples) of age range 60 years and above 60 years. Life Satisfaction Index for the Third Age—Short Form (LSITA-SF) revised form of Life satisfaction questionnaire developed and standardized by Neogarten (1961) was modified and standardised for Indian elderly for measuring over all life satisfaction. Relationship of self and family variables age, education, financial dependence, family income, marital status, living arrangement, religious involvement was taken out with the dependable variable overall life satisfaction.*

**Key words:** Elderly life satisfaction, urban and semi urban elderly, specific domain satisfaction

## **Introduction**

China and India, Asia's most populous nations, are estimated to contribute a significant proportion of this growing number of older people (Irudaya-Rajan, Misra & Sarma, 2001). Demographic projections estimate that more than 176 million of Indian citizens will be in the age group of over 60 years of age, considered the geriatric age in the country. This would make it the second largest population of the elderly in the world and 13% of India's population by 2025 (Chadha, 1997). Aging in the new millennium will be greatly influenced by both global and region-specific factors. This has resulted in the caregiver issue becoming a growing concern for national policy makers. The family as a single unit is undergoing changes leading to significant adjustments in accommodating and caring for older adults in the family, making them more vulnerable to illness and psychosocial strains in the absence of familial support network.

Satisfaction with life and contributors to well-being in old age constitute a major concern for the elderly population as well for gerontological research. 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. Relationship of self and family variables age, education, financial dependence, family income, marital status, living arrangement, religious involvement was taken out with the dependable variable overall life satisfaction.

Age has been used as a variable in all happiness and life satisfaction investigations. Disengagement and activity theories were developed during the years in which negative correlations between age and life satisfaction were reported, this change suggests a need to re-evaluate these theories within the present context of increasing happiness with age.

Mastekaasa, 1992 reported in a cross sectional study the positive association between marriage and psychological well-

being was found to reflect certain personality traits of people living in long lasting relationships.

Education has been analyzed in various studies without significant effect to life satisfaction (Watson, 1930; Clemente and Sauer, 1976).

Financial strain, loss, and dependence are important economic variables to consider in examinations of life satisfaction (Choi, 2001; Chou & Chi, 1999).

Living arrangements of older people are influenced by several factors such as gender, health status, and presence of disability, socio-economic status and societal traditions. With urbanization, families are becoming nuclear, smaller and are not always capable of caring older relatives. There is still strong cultural pressure to 'look after' the parents in the family. Old age homes are neither a popular nor a feasible option.

Warnick (1995) believed that adjusting to the changes that accompany late adulthood and old age requires that an individual is able to be flexible and develop new coping skills to adapt to the changes that are common to this time in their lives. Van Ness & Larson, 2002 documented that various studies have associated religiousness with well-being, life satisfaction or happiness.

## **Methodology**

**Sample:** The sample consists of 400 elderly of age group 60 and above 60 years who were selected randomly from different colonies and villages of three tehsils and eight community development blocks of Lucknow district, Uttar Pradesh, India.

**Tools Used:** Life Satisfaction Index for the Third Age—Short Form (LSITA-SF) revised form of Life satisfaction questionnaire developed and standardized by Neogarten (1961) was modified and standardised for Indian elderly and used for measuring over all life satisfaction of elderly people.

**Procedure:** Along with the Life Satisfaction Index for the Third Age—Short Form (LSITA-SF), an interview schedule was developed by investigator to collect self and family variables. After administration of these tools, collected data was scored and analysed statistically using Correlation.

## Result and Discussion

Correlation coefficient was used to find out the relationship between demographic variables and life satisfaction of elderly in urban and semi urban elderly.

**Table 1. Relationship between overall life satisfaction and self & family variables.**

LIFE SATISFACTION			
SNO.	VARIABLES	URBAN ELDERLY	SEMI URBAN ELDERLY
1	Age	0.1984	-0.3302**
2	Education	0.0517	0.0420
3	Financial dependence	-0.3380**	0.0421
4	Family Income	0.4780**	.3728**
5	Marital status	0.2926*	0.3825**
6	Living arrangement	-0.2563*	0.3261**
7	Religious involvement	0.1066	0.3833**

\*P > 0.05; \*\* P > 0.01

### Age

Age was not related to life satisfaction for urban elderly. Age was found to be significantly and negatively related to life satisfaction of semi urban elderly. That means increasing age had not any effect over life satisfaction of urban elderly but with increasing age life satisfaction of semi urban elderly decreased. This could be because urban elderly being familiar to the globalization and modernization have started preparing themselves for the change that had occurred in our traditional society pattern. For example their children living separate due to reasons like career or difference in living style had become common and to some level acceptable in urban cities. Elderly

also prepare for their pensions and certain hobbies or social group to get engaged with it rather than depending on their kids. Whereas still in semi urban and rural regions separation from their children or facing negative changes in children attitudes are a stigma for elderly. They still depend a lot on their children from financial dependence to emotional and social. Thus semi urban areas not being far from the effect of globalization and modernization had brought a rapid change in thinking and attitude of younger generation while elderly not much affected due to the later reasons find it hard and difficult to accept which could be a probable reason for a negative relationship between their increasing age and life satisfaction. With increasing age their dependence gets increased but changes in present living style prohibits children to give as much support as needed. Thus semi urban elderly feel a downfall in their life satisfaction with increasing age and urban elderly being prepared better to face it and also having accepted the change that is occurring, do not feel much alteration in their life satisfaction.

The literature on life satisfaction and age does not converge on a common finding. Prenda and Lachman (2001), with a large sample representative of the U.S. population aged 25–74, documented a positive linear relationship between age and life satisfaction. In a large sample of Germans with a wide age range (20 –90), there was a curvilinear association between age and life satisfaction (Lang & Heckhausen, 2001). Life satisfaction was highest among those aged 45–65 and lower among people younger and older. Other recent studies found no relationship (Hamarat, Thompson, Steele, Matheny, & Simons, 2002; Wallace, Bisconti, & Bergeman, 2001) or a negative relationship (Chen, 2001).

## **Education**

Education was found not related to the life satisfaction of both urban and semi urban elderly. That means level of education

had not any effect on the level of life satisfaction among elderly of both regions urban and semi urban. This could be because though education can help an individual in being more capable about health care, getting proper treatment, knowledge about benefits provided to elderly by government, pension, and savings etc. but then also there are educated elderly those who face problems like pain of being separated or ill treatment by their own children, feeling social isolation. Still the coding of Indian family bonding is so strong that elderly people find themselves more happy and satisfied being with their children and grand children. Thus there are many factors playing strong role in elderly satisfaction than education. This could be why education was not related to elderly life satisfaction. Palmore & Luikart found that education was more strongly related to satisfaction among the younger middle aged men (45-55) than members of older age groups.

### **Financial dependence**

Financial dependence was found to be negatively and significantly related to life satisfaction of urban elderly and was not related to the life satisfaction of semi urban elderly. That means with increasing financial dependence life satisfaction of urban elderly decreased whereas level of financial dependence had not any effect over life satisfaction of semi urban elderly.

In context to urban region the living standard had increased and also the cost of living. The younger generation had become more materialistic and entered into the fast running tract of metro cities. Thus money is not everything but most important thing in their perspective. Even for elderly urban cities have lots of facilities geriatric specialized hospitals, recreational centers, internet, clubs etc. but for all one needs is money. Urban elderly too who are witnessing this global change know how to adapt themselves to the changing environment. Thus for them financial independence is very important if they have sufficient finance they can adjust and adopt well using the

available facilities. Thus for them the importance of financial independence had increased. If they have to depend a lot on their children for money that have their own priorities, they may feel guilty or sad due to their children attitudes. On the contrary those who have financial independence move ahead with changing world and their children also have positive attitude towards them. These could be the probable reasons why financial dependence was negatively related to elderly life satisfaction.

Semi urban regions still lack a no. of services and facilities example good hospitals, transport, recreational places, organizations etc. for elderly. Thus even if elderly has financial independence as pension, business or agriculture they have to depend on their children. If they have to visit good hospital their children need to take them to city hospital which needs money along with time and effort to go there. Even for recreation or household works (maid for dish washing, cooking etc.) not many options are there thus have to depend on their sons and daughter in laws. Secondly in semi rural areas generally family occupation culture prevails for example business or agriculture which family has is taken up by the next generation thus automatically the young working generation becomes responsible for older generation. Thus this financial dependence is acceptable by the elderly and hence not affecting their life satisfaction.

Revicki & Mitchell, 1990 found financial satisfaction measured as the perception of economic deprivation has been found to be related to lower satisfaction with life, therefore, financial security seems to constitute an important component of life satisfaction in old age. Although well-being does not increase with more money to spend, the experience of financial insecurity probably represents a basic menace to life satisfaction even in old age.

### **Family income**

Family income was found to be positively and significantly related to life satisfaction of urban and semi urban elderly. It implies that as the level of family income increases, life satisfaction level of urban and semi urban elderly also increases. As the cost of living has increased it is natural that increased income would facilitate more facilities and services in to the family. Thus a number of materialistic problems can be easily addressed that is good medical treatment, hiring paid workers for household and outside work etc. Thus as quality of life increases life satisfaction (being part of quality of life) also gets boosted.

Spreitzer and Snyder (1974), in a secondary analysis of 1547 persons from 18 to over 65, found income to be the predominant predictor of life satisfaction. For instance, SES is usually defined by educational achievement and income. While several researchers have acknowledged that education is linked to life satisfaction (Fry, 2001; Meeks & Murrell, 2001), financial resources appear to be better predictors of life satisfaction in older adulthood (Choi, 2001).

### **Marital status**

Marital status was found to be positively and significantly related to life satisfaction of urban and semi urban elderly. That means elderly who were living with their spouses had higher life satisfaction than those who were unmarried or divorcee. The reason for present observation could be with changing traditional norms especially in urban areas the bonding between children, grandchildren and elderly had weaken and is almost diminishing. Thus the only way of intimacy, love and bonding is through concern towards each other by the elderly couple themselves. Life partners share their good and bad experiences and being together for such a good span of time are able to know each other's requirement easily. Thus loss of any of the counterparts is a setback for



them and may reduce their life satisfaction. In the cases where the intimacy or bonding between the couples is not very strong especially in the below poverty people or even in other economic groups because in Indian community practice of arrange marriages is more prevalent the life satisfaction of widow/widowed elderly may fall. Though the affection or intimacy among the couple would not be so strong spending so many years together they become interdependent. Maximum widows face financial problems which could be the probable reason for decreasing life satisfaction rather than pain of losing husband. In the same way due to stereotypic roles most of the males are totally dependent on their wives for all personal and household works as washing their clothes, cooking and serving food, making bed for them etc. Thus that makes them very much uncomfortable and dependent on others which may decrease their life satisfaction. Similar results were reported by Marks (1996) who examined gender and marital status differences in psychological well-being. The results of the study found that, overall, people who were single fare more poorly on a wide array of measures of well-being than do married people. Therefore, it seems that being married has a positive effect on life happiness. Ira W. Hutchison, III 1975 explored the relationships between income levels, sex and marital status were explored for a variety of items related to morale and life satisfaction. It was concluded that either sex or marital status differences may have significant influence on the elderly person's life satisfaction above a poverty level, but neither is important below the poverty level. It is suggested that widowhood at the lowest income levels is relatively insignificant because spouses are not as likely to have been neither as emotionally close nor as interpersonally dependent when married.

### **Living arrangement**

Living arrangement was found to be negatively and significantly related to life satisfaction of urban elderly and was positively and significantly related to the life satisfaction of semi urban elderly. That means if the urban elderly were living alone without their children they had higher life satisfaction whereas among semi urban elderly they had higher life satisfaction when they were living with their children jointly rather than residing alone. The reasons for above results could be elderly in urban areas had been exposed to the changing environment through globalization and modernization. Thus they have accepted it and instead of being with their children who are busy in their own world and facing every day humiliation and avoidance prefer to live alone with their spouses. Since they perceive that they have taken this step for their betterment it enhances their life satisfaction rather than decreasing it. Whereas in semi urban areas where urbanization had still not completely entered elderly still believe in older tradition of joint family and find happiness with their kids. Separation from children is a stigma for them which hampers their life satisfaction. It can also be because even if they have moved away from old thinking does not have proper finance and savings to live independent life. Thus separation from children leaves them financially handicapped which affects their life satisfaction negatively. Silverstein, M.; Cong Zhen; Li Shu Zhuo 2006 found that older parents living in three-generation households or with grandchildren in skipped-generation households had better psychological well-being than those living in single-generation households. Receiving greater remittances from adult children increased well-being and explained why living with grandchildren was beneficial. Stronger emotional cohesion with children also improved well-being. These results suggest that traditional family arrangements were beneficial in rural Chinese society as they represent the fulfillment of a cultural ideal. Implications were

discussed in the context of the corporate Chinese family, characterized by mutual aid and interdependence across generations, and its adaptation to social change.

### **Religious involvement**

Religious involvement was found not related to life satisfaction of urban elderly and was found to be positively and significantly related to the life satisfaction of semi urban elderly. That means religious involvement did not made any effect on urban elderly but among semi urban elderly with increase in religious involvement life satisfaction also increased. This could be because religious involvement is also a way of social involvement and engagement, in cities there are a no. of ways and recreational places to get on with whereas in rural and semi urban regions it is limited to some places and further limitation for elderly. Thus in rural and semi urban places religious involvement is a very common, simple and power full method of social engagement and involvement. Thus the meditation process gives peace and in performing rituals social involvement and engagement covers for their loneliness. Therefore in semi urban elderly religious involvement increases life satisfaction. Ellison, 1995, reported that religiousness exerts its beneficial effects by creating positive emotions that stimulate the immune system. Or, it may provide access to social and psychological resources that buffer the impact of stress and aid one's ability to effectively cope. Also Levin, Markides, Ray, 1996 found membership in religious organizations also provides older individuals with a social network from which to draw emotional support and encouragement, while enhancing one`s ability to adapt to change and buffer stress.

## **Conclusion**

Increasing age had not any effect over life satisfaction of urban elderly but was found to be significantly and negatively related to life satisfaction of semi urban elderly. With increasing age life satisfaction of semi urban elderly decreased. Education was found not related to the life satisfaction of both urban and semi urban elderly. Level of education had not any effect on the level of life satisfaction among elderly of both regions urban and semi urban. With increasing financial dependence life satisfaction of urban elderly decreased whereas level of financial dependence had not any effect over life satisfaction of semi urban elderly. Family income was found to be positively and significantly related to life satisfaction of urban and semi urban elderly. As the level of family income gets increased, life satisfaction level of urban and semi urban elderly also increases. Elderly who were living with their spouses had higher life satisfaction than those who were unmarried or divorcee. Living arrangement was found to be negatively and significantly related to life satisfaction of urban elderly and was positively and significantly related to the life satisfaction of semi urban elderly. Living jointly with family was found to be favorable for life satisfaction of semi urban elderly whereas for urban elderly living alone with spouse was more favorable than living jointly. Religious involvement was found not related to life satisfaction of urban elderly and was found to be positively and significantly related to the life satisfaction of semi urban elderly. Religious involvement did not made any affect on urban elderly but among semi urban elderly with increase in religious involvement life satisfaction also increased.

## Works Cited

- Chadha, N.K. 1990. "Aging and Related Problems: A Synoptic Review." In *Studies in Medical Anthropology*, edited by P.C. Joshi and A. Mahajan. New Delhi: Reliance Pub. House.
- Chen, C. 2001. "Aging and life satisfaction." *Social Indicators Research* 54: 57–79.
- Choi, N. G. 2001. "Relationship between life satisfaction and post-retirement employment among older women." *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 52: 45–70.
- Chou, K. L. & Chi, I. 1999. "Determinants of life satisfaction in Hong Kong Chinese elderly: A longitudinal study." *Aging and Mental Health* 3: 328–335.
- Clemente, Frank and William J., Sauer. 1976. "Life satisfaction in the United States." *Social Forces* 54: 621-631.
- Ellison, C.G. 1995. "Race, religious involvement and depressive symptomology in a Southeaster U.S. community." *Social Science and Medicine* 40: 1561 – 1572.
- Fry, P. S. 2001. "Predictors of health-related quality of life perspectives, self-esteem, and life satisfactions of older adults following spousal loss: An 18-month follow-up study of widows and widowers." *Gerontologist* 41: 787–798.
- Hamarat, E., Thompson, D., Steele, D., Matheny, K., & Simons, C. 2002. "Age differences in coping resources and satisfaction with life among middle-aged, young-old and oldest-old adults." *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 163: 360–367.
- Hutchison III, Ira W. 1975. "The Significance of Marital Status for Morale and Life Satisfaction among Lower-Income Elderly." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 37(2): 287-293.

- Lang, F. R. and Heckhausen, J. 2001. "Perceived control over development and subjective well-being: Differential benefits across adulthood." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81: 509–523.
- Levin, J., Markides, K.S., and Ray, L.A. 1996. "Religious attendance and psychological well-being in Mexican Americans." *The Gerontologist* 36: 454 – 463.
- Marks, Nadine F. 1996. "Flying Solo at Midlife: Gender, Marital Status, and Psychological Well-Being." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58(4): 917-932.
- Mastekaasa, A. 1992. "Marriage and Psychological Well-Being: Some Evidence on Selection in to Marriage." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54(4): 901-911.
- Meeks, S., and Murrell, S. A. 2001. "Contribution of education to health and life satisfaction in older adults mediated by negative effect." *Journal of Aging and Health* 13: 92–113.
- Neugarten, B., Havighurst, L., & Tobin, S. 1961. "The measurement of life satisfaction." *Journal of Gerontology* 16: 134-143.
- Palmore, Erdman and Clark Luikart. 1972. "Health and social factors related to life satisfaction." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 13 (March): 68-79.
- Prenda, K. M. & Lachman, M. E. 2001. "Planning for the future: A life management strategy for increasing control and life satisfaction in adulthood." *Psychology and Aging* 16: 206–216.
- Revicki, D. A. & Mitchell, J. P. 1990. "Strain, social support, and mental health in rural elderly individuals." *Journal of Gerontology* 45(6): S267-274.
- Silverstein, M., Cong Zhen, and Li Shu Zhuo. 2006. "Intergenerational transfers and living arrangements of older people in rural China: consequences for psychological well-being." *Journals of Gerontology*.

*Series B, Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*  
61(5): S256-S266.

- Spreitzer, Elmer and Eldon E. Snyder. 1974. "Correlates of life satisfaction among the aged." *Journal of Gerontology* 29: 454-458.
- Van Ness, P.R. and Larson, D.B., 2002. "Religion, senescence, and mental health: The end of life is not the end of hope." *The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 10(4): 386-399.
- Wallace, K. A., Bisconti, T. L., and Bergeman, S. 2001. "The meditational effect of hardiness on social support and optimal outcomes in later life." *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 23: 267–279.
- Warnick, J. 1995. *Listening with different ears: Counseling people over sixty*. Ft. Bragg CA, QED Press.
- Watson, Goodwin B. 1930. "Happiness among adult students of education." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 21: 79-109.