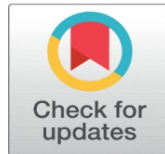
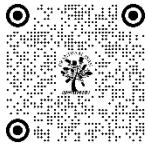


DETERMINANTS OF HAPPINESS OF OLDER MEN AND WOMEN IN SILIGURI, WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

Happiness denotes a subjective feeling of living a good life. It is a key to successful aging. The older adults who judge themselves as happy, remain in more advantage position to cope up with age related changes than their counterparts. The feeling of happiness in old age depends on several internal and external factors. In this light the present study has tried to examine the variation of feeling of happiness among older adults on the basis of some selected socio-economic and demographic variables. It is found that the augmentation of age, no income and subjective assessment of poor health significantly reduce the feeling among happiness among men elderly. On the other hand, loss of spouse and separate living from children have a greater impact on feeling of happiness among women older adults. Thus, the present investigation indicates that power dimensions like income or participation in family decision play more vital role in influencing happiness among elderly men, whereas, in case of women elderly.

Keywords: Older Adults, Subjective Happiness, Marital Status, Living Arrangements, T Test.

1. INTRODUCTION

Happiness denotes a subjective experience of living a good life with a deep sense of fulfilment and contentment. According to Sonja Lyubomirsky (2007) happiness is, "the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile". Thus, the degree to which one likes the life one has determines the level of happiness of the person. What makes a person happy, however, is a debatable issue. The hedonic perspective states that happiness depends on the satisfaction of various human needs. The perspective emphasises on preferences and pleasures of mind as well as body in defining happiness (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Eudaimonic perspective of happiness, on the other hand, believes that sustain happiness comes from the actualization of one's talent and potentiality. In other words, authentic happiness, according to this perspective, emerges out of living a life according to true human nature. Perhaps, happiness can best be apprehended as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes aspects of both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives (ibid).

Old age is the last phase of human life-cycle. At this stage, people often experience multiple losses with augmentation of age. Their familial role gradually changes from providers to dependents. Their marital ties may come to an end with the death of spouses. Their social network gradually sinks due to retirement relocation or because of the death of pears, sibs and other relatives. Sometimes, their relationships with children reduce because of migration of children in other places

or due to growing mental distance with children. The movements of the aged people also, sometimes, get restricted due to falling health. As a consequence, the elderly people may face problem like maladjustment, loneliness, anxiety, depression, etc. which in turn may lead to unhappiness.

However, it does not mean that elderly people are inevitably unhappy. On the contrary, the several studies on happiness and aging suggest that, if other factors remain constant, the happiness increases as the person moves from middle age to old age. The unhappiness in old age, therefore, lies in several socio-economic and demographic factors, like age, gender, marital status, income, educational status, occupation, living arrangements, social network, etc. However, the findings of different studies, on the question of how these socio-economic and demographic factors impact happiness and life satisfaction in old age, are not consistent with each other. For instance, Shah et al. (2021) in their study in Malaysia found that older adults belong to relatively younger age group are happier than their counterparts, whereas Angelini et al. (2012) in their study among European elderly found that life satisfaction of the older adults increases with the augmentation of age. Yet, in another study, it is found that age has no impact on life satisfaction of elderly (Papi & Cheraghi, 2021). Similarly, in respect of gender differences of happiness and life satisfaction in old age, while some studies reported that elderly men are happier and are more satisfied with their life than women elderly (Papi & Cheraghi, 2021; Shah et al. 2021), but, Kandapan et al. (2023) in their study in India observed that female elderly have a higher level of life satisfaction than their male counterpart. Conversely, Bramhankar et al. (2023) in their study did not find any significant differences of life satisfaction between elderly men and women.

Marital status of the older adults is yet another important determinants of happiness and life satisfaction in old age which has received wider attention from the researchers. Most of the studies have observed that married older adults are happier and are more satisfied in their life than widowed and divorced elderly (Kandapan et al. 2023; Papi & Cheraghi, 2021; Xu et al. 2023). However, Hsu (2010) in his study found that never married elderly are more satisfied in their life than married aged. The findings of different studies regarding happiness and life satisfaction of the elderly people and their economic condition, health condition and educational status, although, have shown more consistent with each other's. It is usually found that elderly with higher income (Zhang et al. 2020; Hsu, 2010; Papi & Cheraghi, 2021; Xu et al. 2023; Shah et al. 2021), with better health condition and with better subjective health assessment (Zhang et al. 2020; Kandapan et al. 2023; Mandi and Bansod, 2023; Bramhankar et al. 2023; Xu et al. 2023; Shah et al. 2021), and with higher educational status (Kandapan et al. 2023; Papi & Cheraghi, 2021) are happier and more satisfied with their life than their counterparts with low income, poor health and with lower level of education.

Finally, in respect of relationship between happiness and life satisfaction of the older adults and their living arrangements, while several studies reported that older adults living with spouse and children are happier than those elderly who live separately from children (Bramhankar et al. 2023; Kandapan et al. 2023), Chyi and Mao (2012) in their study among Chinese elderly found that happiness among aged respondents declines with living with children but increases with living with grandchildren. Sukontamorn et al. (2023), however, observed that living with at least one daughter increases the feeling of happiness significantly among the aged in Thailand, but it is not so in case of living with sons.

It is, therefore, clearly evidenced that the findings of different research works on the question of how the feeling of happiness of older adults is influenced by different socio-economic and demographic factors are rather inconsistent from each other; and more researches are needed to reach any definite conclusion. Further, most of the studies have not addressed the issue from a gender perspective that is they have not dealt with how such socio-economic and demographic factors influence the feeling of happiness of elderly men and women, separately. With this understanding, in the present study, a modest attempt has been made to investigate the feeling of happiness of elderly men and women with the following objectives.

2. OBJECTIVES

In the light of above discussion, the present study thrives to examine the following objectives:

1. To find out the level of feeling of happiness among elderly men and women.
2. To compare the feeling of happiness among aged men and women in terms of their age, marital status, income status, educational status, subjective health perception, participation in family decision making process, and living arrangements.

3. DATA AND METHOD

The present study was conducted in four localities namely Vivekananda Pally, Sukanta Nagar, Deshabandhupara, and Pal Para come under jurisdiction of Ward No. 30 and Ward No. 38 of Siliguri Municipal-Corporation. Siliguri is the biggest city in northern part of West Bengal and comes under district of Darjeeling.

Though, in the study different aspects of the aged people like their health, family life and psychological aspects were covered, but, in the present article only the findings regarding feeling of happiness have been incorporated. In the study area total 858 elderly people (60 years and above) were identified with the help of electoral roll, out of which, a sample of 165 aged male and 121 elderly female were selected for interview. A pre-tested interview schedule was used to collect the information from the aged respondents.

To measure the feeling of happiness, a single item of subjective happiness scale was incorporated in interview schedule. The interviewers were asked, "How do you rate your present life with life before 60 years of age?" The responses were categorized as: very happy = 5, happy = 4, neither happy nor unhappy = 3, unhappy = 2, and very unhappy = 1. The data, thus, collected have been tabulated. Mean score and t test have been used to analyze the data.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

THE FEELING OF HAPPINESS AMONG ELDERLY MEN AND WOMEN

Table 1 reveals that more than 50 percent respondents considered that they are unhappy at present in respect of their life before 60 years of age and another 13.64 percent respondents consider that, in comparison of their past life, they are very unhappy in their present life. The older adults, who reported that currently they are very happy in respect of their life before sixty years of age, all are male respondents. Similarly, feeling of 'very unhappy' is also stated more by male respondents than females. Thus, elderly men have given more diverse responses in respect of their feeling of happiness than elderly women. However, the mean score of happiness of aged women (2.55) is little higher than elderly men (2.47) though it is not statistically significant.

Family Engagement

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents According to their Feeling of Happiness

Feeling of Happiness	Male		Female		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Very Happy	8	4.85	0	0	8	2.79
Happy	33	20	38	31.40	71	24.83
Neither Happy Nor Unhappy	14	8.48	4	3.31	18	6.29
Unhappy	84	50.91	66	54.55	150	52.45
Very Happy	26	15.76	13	10.74	39	13.64
Total	165	100	121	100	286	100
Mean	2.47		2.55		2.51	
SD	1.12		1.04		1.14	
t value	0.615				-	

FEELING OF HAPPINESS AMONG ELDERLY MALE AND FEMALE ACCORDING TO AGE GROUP

The data on feeling of happiness among the elderly respondents depict that the mean score of happiness of elderly men belong to 60 years – 69 years is much higher than the aged men belong to 70 years and above age group and the difference is statistically very significant ($t = 3.36$, $p < .01$). But age group wise, no such difference is observed in case of elderly women. If the feeling of happiness is compared between elderly women and men belong to same age group, it is found that within the 60 years – 69 years age group, the mean score of happiness of aged men is higher than elderly women though the difference is not statistically significant. The reverse tendency is observed in respect of 70 years and above age group. Thus, it is found that the feeling of happiness significantly declines among the elderly men with the augmentation of age. But no such tendency is observed in case of elderly men. Age group wise mean score, SD and t value of elderly respondents have been portrayed in Table 2.

Table 2
Feeling of Happiness among Elderly Men and Women According to Age Group

Age	Male		Female		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
60-69 years	2.69	1.14	2.54	1.04	0.38
70 years and above	2.10	0.98	2.57	1.04	2.44*
t-value	3.36**		0.16		

Note: *Significant at .05 level.

**Significant at .01 level.

FEELING OF HAPPINESS AMONG ELDERLY MEN AND WOMEN ACCORDING TO MARITAL STATUS

In respect of marital status, it is observed that though the mean score of happiness of married older adults is higher than widowed elderly, but the difference is highly significant only in case of aged women ($t = 3.45$, $p < .01$), not in case of aged men. Within the married older adults, the means score of happiness is found significantly higher among female respondents than male respondents ($t = 2.04$, $p < .05$). Thus, it is observed that the marital status very significantly influence the feeling of happiness of elderly women. But, in case of aged men, it is less significant. The marital status wise mean score, SD and t value of female and male respondents have been shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Feeling of Happiness among Male and Female Respondents According to Marital Status

Marital Status	Male		Female		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Married	2.50	1.12	2.86	0.95	2.04*
Widowed/Unmarried	2.33	1.10	2.33	0.74	0.00
t-value	0.69		3.45**		

Note: *Significant at .05 level.

**Significant at .01 level.

FEELING OF HAPPINESS AMONG ELDERLY MALE AND FEMALE ACCORDING TO INCOME STATUS

Table 4 illustrates that the mean score of happiness of elderly men with income is significantly very high than aged men without income ($t = 3.28$, $p < .01$). On the contrary the mean score of happiness of aged women with personal source of income is lower than elderly women without income, though the difference is not statistically significant. This is may be due to the fact that most of the elderly women with their own source of income in the present investigation are widowed, therefore, they have lower feeling of happiness the elderly women without income.

If the mean score of happiness is compared between male and female respondents within the same group, it is found that aged men without income is less happy than aged women without income, and the difference is statistically very significant ($t = 3.58$, $p < .01$). On the contrary, the mean score of happiness of aged men with personal income is higher than their counterparts, though the difference is not statistically significant. Thus, it may be concluded that the income status significantly determines the level of happiness of aged men, but no such impact is observed elderly women.

Table 4

Feeling of Happiness among Male and Female Respondents According to Income Status

Income Status	Male		Female		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
With Income	2.56	1.10	2.43	1.01	0.70
Without Income	1.57	0.82	2.62	1.04	3.58**
t-value	3.28**		0.98		

Note: **Significant at .01 level.

FEELING OF HAPPINESS AMONG ELDERLY MALE AND FEMALE ACCORDING TO EDUCATIONAL STATUS

The mean scores of happiness of older adults according to the educational status depict that elderly who had education beyond secondary level are relatively happier than aged who had education up to secondary level for both sexes but the difference is highly significant only in respect of male respondents ($t = 3.12$, $p < .01$). At the same level of education not much gender differences is observed in case of feeling of happiness. Thus, mean scores of happiness reveal that higher level of education increases the feeling of happiness for both elderly men and women, but it is statistically significant only in case of elderly men. The mean score of happiness, SD and t value of elderly respondents according to their educational status have been presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Feeling of Happiness among Male and Female Respondents According to Educational Status

Education Status	Male		Female		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Up to Secondary Level	2.20	1.10	2.51	1.03	1.94
Beyond Secondary Level	2.73	1.08	2.73	1.10	0.00
t-value	3.12**		0.90		

Note: **Significant at .01 level.

FEELING OF HAPPINESS AMONG ELDERLY MALE AND FEMALE ACCORDING TO SUBJECTIVE HEALTH PERCEPTION

From Table 6 it can be seen that the mean score of happiness of elderly men who assessed their health as 'unhealthy' is significantly low than aged men who assessed their health as 'fairly all right' ($t = 3.77, p < .01$). But in case of aged women, an opposite outcome has been found. Further, those elderly who assessed their health as 'fairly all right', the mean score of happiness elderly men is found higher than aged women but the difference is not significant. However, among those elderly who assessed themselves as 'unhealthy' men respondents have significantly low mean score of happiness than their counterparts. So it is observed that the subjective health perception of elderly men significantly determines their level of happiness but it does not impact level of happiness of aged women.

Table 6

Feeling of Happiness among Male and Female Respondents According to Subjective Health Perception

Subjective Health Perception	Male		Female		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Fairly All Right	2.67	1.11	2.51	1.02	1.05
Unhealthy	1.96	1.03	2.65	1.10	3.00**
t-value	3.77**		0.68		

**Significant at .01 level.

FEELING OF HAPPINESS AMONG ELDERLY MALE AND FEMALE ACCORDING TO PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The mean scores of feeling of happiness of older adults in respect of participation in family decision making process show that older adults who participate in family decision making processes have higher score than those do not participate, and it holds true for both male and female respondents. Further, the difference in mean score among the male respondents is higher than female respondents, but all these differences are not statistically significant. Thus, it may be concluded that higher rate of participation in family decision making process may increase the feeling of happiness among the older adults but it is not deterministic in nature.

Table 7

Feeling of Happiness among Male and Female Respondents According to Participation in Family Decision Making Process

Participation in Family Decision	Male		Female		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Participate	2.57	1.18	2.61	1.10	0.21
Not Participate	2.21	0.87	2.51	1.04	1.56
t-value	1.83		0.51		

FEELING OF HAPPINESS AMONG ELDERLY MALE AND FEMALE ACCORDING TO LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Table 8 describes the mean scores, SD and t values of feeling of happiness of older adults in respect of their living arrangements. It is seen that mean score of happiness of elderly women live with children is higher than those aged women who do not live with children. However, a reverse tendency is observed in case of elderly men. If the mean scores are compared within the same group of aged respondents, it is found that those older adults who live with children the mean score of happiness is higher in case of elderly women than aged men. An opposite result is found among those older adults who do not live with children. Therefore, it may be concluded that living with children may increase the feeling of happiness of elderly women but it does not have any impact on feeling of happiness of elderly men.

Table 8

Feeling of Happiness among Male and Female Respondents According Living Arrangements

Living Arrangements	Male		Female		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Living With Children	2.49	1.13	2.71	1.10	1.36
Not Living With Children	2.53	1.12	2.31	0.88	0.89
t-value	0.19		1.92		

5. CONCLUSION

In the present investigation, it is overall found that two-third of the older adults feel either unhappy or very unhappy in their present life in comparison of their life before sixty years of age and in average elderly women are happier than aged men. The study also suggests that influence of background characteristics on the feeling of happiness differ considerably between female and male respondents. The average scores of feeling of happiness are significantly low among the male respondents with higher age, without income, and who assessed their health as 'unhealthy' than those elderly men who are relatively younger in age, have their own source of income, and assessed their health as 'fairly all right'. However, these background characteristics do not impact the feeling of happiness of elderly women. The widowhood likely to reduce the feeling of happiness for both women, and men respondents but it is statistically significant only in case women respondents. Similarly, participation in family decision making process likelihood to increase the feeling of happiness for both female and male respondents but it is more so in case of elderly men. Finally, living with children increases the feeling of happiness only in elderly women but not in case of aged men. Thus, the present investigation indicates that power dimensions like income or participation in family decision play more vital role in influencing happiness among elderly men, whereas, in case of women elderly, family relations probably has a greater effect in determining happiness. Though, to reach any definite conclusion, more research is needed in this direction.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

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None

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