

Life Satisfaction and Its Relation to Leisure and Self-Reported Health with an Example from Mexico

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Life satisfaction is a concept related to an individual's evaluation of their life, which is determined by taking into account all of the aspects that could affect it. Such an evaluation usually takes into consideration more than just economic conditions. In this paper, we present the relationship of life satisfaction with two of its main determinants, namely, self-reported health and leisure satisfaction. To exemplify this relationship, we utilize data from Mexico.

happiness

life satisfaction

leisure

self-reported health

subjective well-being

Recently, happiness indicators have gained relevance in public discussions in many nations, with some countries prioritizing them over traditional macroeconomic indicators such as economic growth, as capitalism has sacrificed both social and environmental well-being to maximize economic earnings ^[1]. The economics of happiness is not a new concept, as the classical economists had already shown interest in it; however, this discipline has traditionally focused on the study of wealth, leaving aside issues related to the happiness of a society ^[2].

Bentham ^[3] asserted that "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*" and further defined the principle of utility, which "approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question". By saying "of every action whatsoever", Bentham attempted to extend this principle beyond particular individuals to the actions of the government.

The "felicific calculus" endeavored to measure human pain and pleasure ^[2]. In fact, from Bentham's documents, it is possible to find, among others, the following reflections: the impossibility of fully measuring the intensity of feelings, as, except in the case of small amounts, it is incorrect to assume that an amount of money implies an equal amount of happiness, and the impossibility of qualitatively comparing different feelings, unless they are equated in pecuniary terms ^[4]. It is important to mention that the term "felicific calculus" is commonly used to refer to the calculus performed by Bentham; however, Bentham never used such terminology ^[5].

However, social science methods have evolved to allow for the application of surveys to measure happiness by utilizing questions related to life satisfaction, which are now applied worldwide ^[6]. In fact, in social sciences such as sociology and economics, the quantification of subjective well-being is now a well-established practice ^[7].

Among the different approaches to study happiness, the hedonic rests on a personal calculation of pleasant and unpleasant experiences with the goal of maximizing human satisfaction. This involves anticipating future situations

to choose the best path to guarantee greater well-being. There is a close relationship between Bentham's utilitarian philosophy and this hedonistic approach, since the individual effort to guarantee higher levels of satisfaction is privileged [8].

Hedonic happiness is divided into experiential and evaluative components. The first consists of the search for satisfactory experiences, while the second estimates the balance resulting from positive and negative experiences [9]. According to Kahneman [10], the assumption of hedonic commentary on the current situation has considerable support for a record of momentary individual evaluation.

Meanwhile, the eudaimonic approach to happiness, from the peripatetic philosophy, considers a comprehensive evaluation of satisfaction with life, considering happiness as a process built from the pursuit of personal goals and their fulfillment. This includes people's perception regarding the use of their virtues and potential in accordance with the development of their own being [8]. Therefore, the eudaimonic evaluation of happiness includes the estimation of good living over a long period of time.

In recent times, it has been found that there is a weak but statistically robust positive correlation between income and average happiness [11]. Moreover, income, besides satisfying basic needs, fulfills a positional defining role for people, which suggests the importance of relative income in people's lives [2]. Furthermore, new findings have revealed "perceived social support and income level to be the most consistent predictors of global and domain-specific life satisfaction" [12] (p. 19443).

It has also been proposed that life satisfaction is positively correlated with participation in leisure activities. In this context, a weak but positive statistical correlation between holiday trips and happiness has been found; however, returning to work after a vacation period causes considerable stress due to the accumulated work [13]. Moreover, traveling can help to cope with psychological issues associated with stress from daily life [14]. In the same vein, leisure satisfaction has been found to have a positive influence on life satisfaction among university students [15].

Concerning health and life satisfaction, evidence suggests that the probability of wanting to live shorter lives while enjoying good health increases in those persons with low levels of life satisfaction; meanwhile, in persons with high levels of life satisfaction, the probability of desiring to live longer, even in poor health conditions, increases [16]. There is evidence, in the case of older adults, that indicates that high levels of life satisfaction can contribute to lowering the risk of pain, lowering the number of chronic conditions, and increasing the levels of self-reported health (SRH), among other benefits. Further, life satisfaction is not related to ailments and behaviors such as diabetes, cancer, smoking, and family interaction [17].

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the second part, a brief international historical background on pursuing happiness as public policy is presented; this section, besides presenting information for Mexico, also presents the cases of Bhutan and New Zealand, as these are pioneering countries in incorporating happiness in their public policy plans. [Section 3](#) is divided into two subsections, presenting first the relationship between life satisfaction and leisure satisfaction and then the relationship between life satisfaction and SRH. [Section 4](#)

exemplifies, by way of estimating a multivariate linear regression, the associations among life satisfaction, satisfaction with leisure, and SRH, using cross-sectional data from Mexico's 32 federal entities from 2021.

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