Married, Older, Richer, and Better - Educated People are Happier in India

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Abstract

There is increasing interest in happiness and its various aspects in the world and also in India. Though there is a big research gap in the pan - Indian context on the correlations of happiness with some important parameters, namely gender, marital status, age, education, and income, this study tried to fill this gap. The findings showed that income levels, marital status, education, and age group – all were positively related to happiness. Practitioners, namely, policymakers and corporate executives, need to consider these significant insights to understand people and what makes them happy. Instead of working on guesswork on what makes people happy, these insights on correlations of happiness are a good starting point for understanding people. Researchers and academicians can use these new findings in the Indian context as inputs in their research, teaching, and consultancy. One limitation of the study is that it explained the correlations of happiness. Cause and effect is a better measure, and future studies can focus on the causes and effects of happiness.

Keywords : Happiness, India, gender, age, income, education, correlation, COVID - 19 pandemic

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The search for happiness by we, human beings, is since time immoral. The topic of happiness has been of keen interest to many philosphers. As Frédéric Lenoir pointed out in *Happiness : A Philosopher's Guide* (recently translated from its original French), great thinkers have been discussing this topic for more than 2,000 years (Beard, 2015). There have been lots of definitions, concepts, and versions of happiness. Internationally, there is a lot of research happening on various aspects of happiness, including correlating happiness with important parameters such as gender, marital status, age, education, income, etc.

India is one of the big economies in the world and is also one of the oldest civilizations. There is an increasing interest in happiness in various walks of life, including the corporate sector. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has made the topic even more relevant today, though there is a big research gap in the pan - Indian context on the correlations of happiness with some important parameters, namely gender, marital status, age, education, and income, and this study tries to fill this gap. This unique study is the first of its kind study in the pan - Indian context.

Literature Review and Research Gap

The interest in happiness has a long history, and many researchers have focused on studying the history of happiness (McMahon, 2006). In the Western world, since the eighteenth century, the pursuit of happiness gained

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momentum and spread to every aspect of behaviour, from religion and politics to work and parenting (Stearns, 2012).

Happiness research has become a hot topic in the past 20 years. It's only recently that we realized we could marry one of our oldest questions – "What is the nature of human happiness?"– to our newest way of getting answers : Science. Until just a few decades ago, the problem of happiness was mainly in the hands of philosophers and poets (Gilbert, 2012). Today, researchers from various disciplines are studying happiness.

There is a lot of work on understanding what makes people happy (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011 ; Veenhovan, 2013). There is also a lot of research suggesting how to be happy (Ben - Shahar, 2007 ; Seligman, 2004 ; Pillania, 2019), and there are also lots of research and publications on happiness, yet for many people, happiness remains elusive (Beard, 2015).

There is also a growing body of research on happiness at the workplace (Wright et al., 2007) and calls for including happiness in accounting and other measurement systems (Pillania, 2021). In India also, there is growing recognition of happiness at the workplace, and there are studies on work-life balance (Rashmi et al., 2021 ; Sudhindra et al., 2020), quality of work-life (Agarwal, 2019), and impacts of stress (Negi, 2019 ; Preet & Ahluwalia, 2019). The pandemic of COVID-19 is also making people rethink about various aspects of life, including happiness (Pillania, 2020a).

Research Gap

There are studies at national levels on happiness such as World Happiness Reports, Gross National Happiness Index, and others (Helliwell et al., 2012 ; Petrunyk & Pfeifer, 2016 ; Ura et al., 2012). Though the history of happiness in India goes back to the Vedic age (c. 1500 – c. 500 BCE) (Pillania, 2020b), but there is a lack of pan - India studies on happiness.

Within national studies, there are studies on understanding the relationship between happiness and age (Blanchflower, 2020 ; Graham & Ruiz Pozuelo, 2017), happiness and gender (Cummings, 2020), happiness and marital status (Lawrence et al., 2015), happiness and income (Oishi et al., 2011), and happiness and education (Cuñado & de Gracia, 2012). However, there is a lack of such studies on a pan - India level in the Indian context.

This work tries to fill this gap and identify some interesting correlations for happiness in the Indian context. It is a part of the more extensive study, the *India Happiness Report 2020* (Pillania, 2020b).

Methodology

For subjective concepts like happiness, the survey method is well-accepted (Pillania 2020b). For the survey method used in the more extensive study, *India Happiness Report 2020*, a questionnaire was created. The questionnaire was pretested on different groups of people, and based on this pretesting, minor adjustments were made. This final questionnaire was sent to the respondents. Strict confidentiality and anonymity were assured to the participants.

The survey was conducted from March – July 2020. Due to the large size of our country, my team and I took four months of time to collect the data. A total of 16, 950 responses all over India were collected. It consisted of more than 400 respondents from each unit of the total unit of 36 states and union territories of India. This way, the commonly followed statistical condition of 95% confidence interval and .05% margin of error were achieved with the required sample size (Pillania, 2020b). The collected responses were analyzed, and for this, Pearson's correlation was used.

Analysis and Results

The results of the study are quite interesting and are presented in Table 1. The results serve the purpose of showing the important correlations of the study. Pearson's correlation is used to find a correlation between happiness and age, happiness and gender, happiness and marital status, happiness and education, and happiness and income.

The results reveal insignificant correlation between gender and happiness, that is, gender doesn't matter for happiness in India in this study. The other four correlations are significant. The results show that marital status and education are positively correlated to happiness. However, this correlation is weak as shown by the correlation coefficient of 0.082 and 0.085, respectively for happiness and marital status and happiness and education. Age group and happiness and income level and happiness are overall positively correlated. Compared with marital status and education, the age group and income level are correlated higher with happiness but not as strongly as the correlation coefficients are 0.141 and 0.127, respectively. Interestingly, the results of the study reveal that married people are happier than unmarried people in India.

To see some more interesting aspects, some more detailed look at the data is required and this brings out some

Table 1. *Correlation Analysis*

		Happiness	Significance
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.000	Not Significant
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.995	
Marital Status	Pearson Correlation	.082	Significant
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
Age Groups	Pearson Correlation	.141	Significant
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
Educational Levels	Pearson Correlation	.085	Significant
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
Income Levels	Pearson Correlation	.127	Significant
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

Figure 1. *Happiness Score by Income Levels*
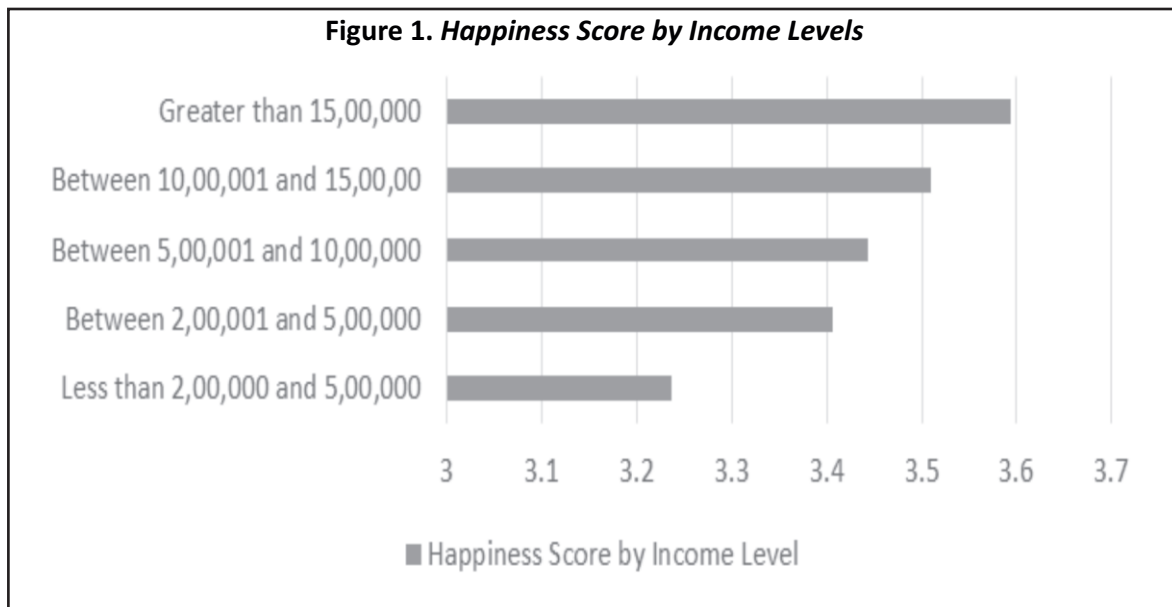
interesting results. People with less than INR 200,000 as the annual income were the least happy. Happiness increases with increasing income levels in the study. The biggest jump in happiness score is when income increases from less than INR 200,000 to between INR 200,000 – 500,000. After that, it increases gradually. This is shown in Figure 1. This is in line with many other international research studies, that is, income doesn't add much to happiness after a certain level of income is reached. In future works, the category of income above INR 1,500,000 can be divided into more categories to get more insights on it.

Happiness generally increases with increasing educational levels in the study. People with educational level less than graduation were the least happy. Maybe, these were the people looking for career prospects, which look difficult in the uncertain COVID-19 times. The biggest jump in happiness is from postgraduate to PhD. People with PhDs were the happiest (this can be inferred from Figure 2). This is in line with the findings obtained by Ilies et al. (2019) regarding importance of education for life satisfaction.

Figure 2. *Happiness Score by Educational Levels*

Figure 3. *Happiness Score by Age*
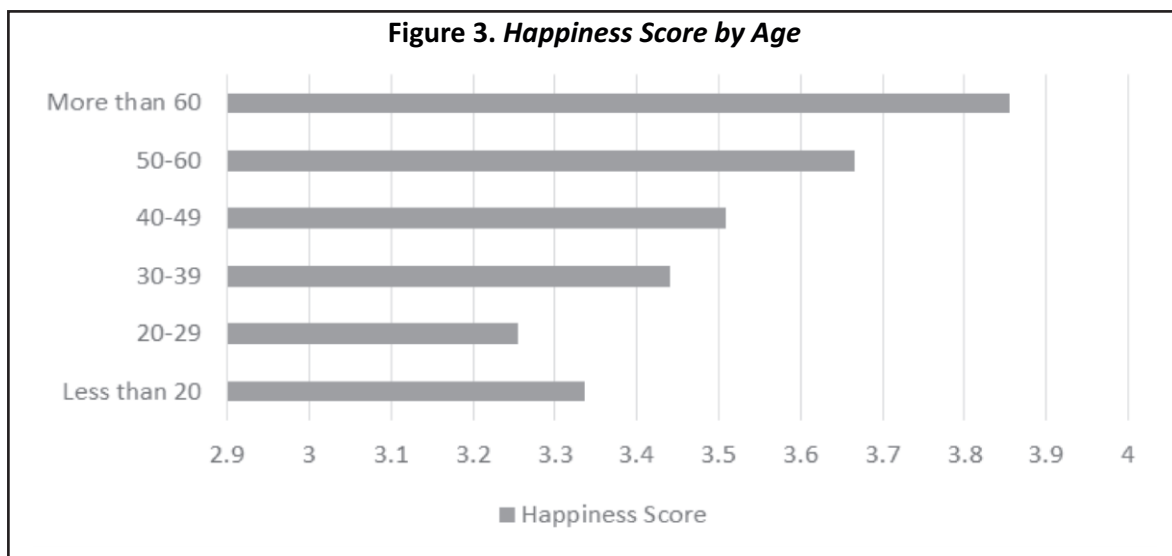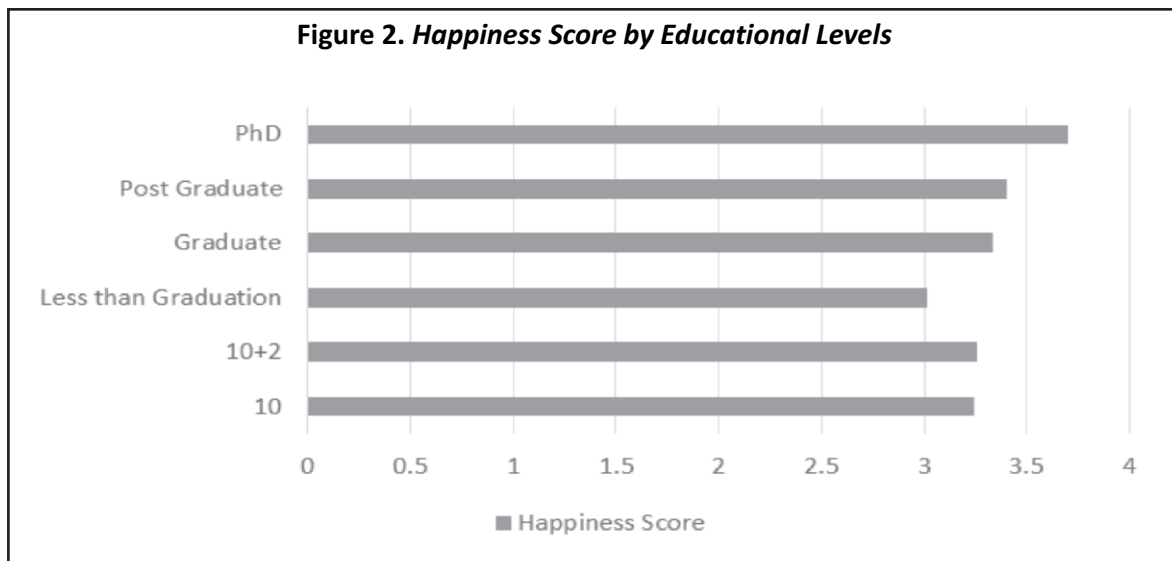
People with age of more than 60 years were the happiest. Generally, happiness increases with age. People in the age group of 20 – 29 years were the least happy. The increase in happiness with age is gradual. The highest jump in happiness scores is from 50 – 60 years and more than 60 years. This can be inferred from Figure 3. This in somewhat similar to the famous U-shaped findings on age and happiness in some international studies. However, it is in contrast to these studies as it drops earlier than middle age and keeps rising.

The data collected for this study is during the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic might have impacted the responses and results of the study.

Key Takeaways

The findings show that income levels, marital status, education, and age groups – are all positively related to happiness ; whereas, the correlation between gender and happiness is insignificant, that is, gender doesn't matter for happiness in India in this study.

Implications

✤ *Implications for Practitioners :* These are significant insights to understand people and what makes them happy. Instead of working on guesswork on what makes people happy, these insights on correlations of happiness are a good starting point for understanding consumers.

✤ *Implications for Researchers and Academicians :* Researchers and academicians can use these new findings in the Indian context as inputs in research works and teaching, training, and consultancy.

Limitations of the Study and the Way Forward

One limitation of the study is that it explains the correlation of happiness. Cause and effect is a better measure. Another limitation is the study might have been influenced by the impact of COVID-19 and more studies are required for a normal time.

This is a first of its kind study in the pan - Indian context. It can be further extended by adding more variables. More studies comparing states or countries can be undertaken. Cause and effect is a better measure, and future studies can focus on the causes and effects of happiness.

Author's Contribution

Dr. Rajesh K. Pillania has undertaken this pioneering work of studying the happiness correlations in the pan - Indian context. There is increasing interest in happiness and its various aspects in the world and also in India ; though there is a big research gap in the pan - Indian context on the correlations of happiness with some important parameters, namely gender, marital status, age, education, and income, and this study tries to fill this gap. The findings show that income levels, marital status, education, and age groups – all are positively related to happiness ; whereas, the correlation between gender and happiness is insignificant, that is, gender does not matter for happiness in India in this study. Practitioners, namely, policymakers and corporate executives, need to consider these significant insights to understand people and what makes them happy. Researchers and academicians can use these new findings in the Indian context as inputs in their research works and teaching, training, and consultancy.

Conflict of Interest

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