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### Social Relationships and Happiness: Bhutanese and Indian Females

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#### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to examine the differences in social relationships and happiness between Bhutanese and Indian females. Differences were explored on different dimensions of social relationships between Bhutanese and Indian females. The association between happiness and social relationships was examined in college students. Participants included 100 females from Lovely Professional University, Phagwara India and 100 from Samtse College of Education, Samtse Bhutan (N = 200). Participants were of age 18 to 23 (Mean age = 20.18). Happiness was assessed using Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle, 2001) and social relationships with Social Relationships scale (Pardeep Kumar, Faheem Nabi, Neha Thakur, 2016). Results revealed that Bhutanese females were higher on both social relationships and happiness. We further found that Bhutanese females are significantly higher on other dimensions of social relationships like Friends, Siblings, Classmates, Teachers, Relatives and Strangers.

**Keywords:** Social relationship, happiness, Bhutanese.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Social relationships are a vital part of human existence and are considered to be the relationship between two or more individuals. The functional aspect of social relationship includes social support, positive practical support and emotional support. Dearth of Social relationships, constitute a major risk factor for health (House, Landis & Umberson, 1988). Many types of scientific evidences have established a significant relationship between social relationships and mental as well as physical health (Cohen, 2004). Considerable evidences reveal that individuals who are low on social relationships are more likely to die than those who have better social relationship (House, Landis & Umberson, 1988). Social relationships also affect the mental and psychological well-being of a person through multiple channels by influencing the social support

system, positive social interactions and health related behaviors. A ten year follow up study by Teo et. al., (2013) found that the quality of social relationship is a major risk factor for depression.

Social relationships play a significant role in maintaining psychological wellbeing of an individual and are the strongest contributors of happiness (Kahana et. al., 1995; Lyubomirsky et. al., 2006). John Locke argued that “all aim at being happy” though the ways are different. Happiness is defined as a multidimensional component of unconscious, cognitive and motivational processes that are unique to how life is interpreted and received by Individuals (Tkach, & DiMatteo, 2005). Happiness being the ultimate aim of every individual’s life has been the centre of the scientific research in positive psychology. However, many scholars have advocated for using the term subjective well-being rather than happiness (Diener, 1994). Subjective well-being includes both concurrent happiness and long term life satisfaction (Diener, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2011; Ryff, 2008).

Epicurus was of the conviction that “of all the things that wisdom provides to help one live one’s entire life in happiness, the greatest by far is the possession of friendship” (De Botton, 2000). A study done by Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) found that social affiliation was the key to happiness for undergraduates, as frequent communication with friends and sharing our experiences can increase the happiness (DiTommaso & Spinner 1993; Saklofske & Yackulic 1989). Deiner and Seligman (2002) in their study found that people who are high on happiness have excellent social relationships. The same has been proposed that social relationships may be the most important sources of happiness (Reis & Gable, 2003).

Bhutan, a country located on the eastern Himalayas came up with the idea of Gross National Happiness, an index to measure the happiness and well-being of its nationals (Thinley, 2005). The leaders of the country rejected the Gross Domestic Product as the only measure of development and prosperity and in 1971 introduced the concept of Gross National Happiness, which wouldn’t just measure the economic but the spiritual, social, environmental health and well-being of their residents (Adler, 2009). This approach is gaining popularity globally as an alternative development approach (Secretariat for the New Development Paradigm [SNDP], 2013). The first official survey revealed the GNH index of 0.81, with women comparatively on the lower trends having lower psychological well-being. However, according to Centre of Bhutanese Studies (2015) the survey found the same trends with some upliftment, with rural women scoring low on the psychological well-being (5.81) and urban females were on higher end (6.21). Normal mental well-being was found to be 82.4% for females which is lower than the average mental well-being for males (89.6%).

Whereas, India a republic country, located on the western side of Bhutan, is the largest democracy in the world and fastest growing global economy. However, India is facing active problems like poverty, droughts, religious extremism and sectarian violence and continuous tensions on its border. The World Happiness report further concluded that income differences play a role but the mental illness is a major source of misery. National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences found a life time prevalence of mental illness to be 13.7% in the surveyed population (Gururaj et.al. 2016). Furthermore, the report also indicated that 150 Million people are in need of active interventions. The patterns of psychological distress and mental disorders are different between the genders in India, with women being high on internalizing disorders. The patriarchal structure of Indian society is adding to the miseries of Indian women. The data also revealed that 38% Indian men have physically abused their partners. The latest data from National Crime Records Bureau shows that 93 women are raped in India every day (Shakil, 2013). The custom of Dowry is adding to the miseries of the married women. Thus, the gender based violence, lower socioeconomic

status, subservient social rank and negative life experiences aid to the diminishing subjective well-being of Indian women.

### **Rationale of the Study**

Although, both countries share a lot of cultural and geographical similarities but other factors may give rise to the differences. No cross-cultural study has been done regarding the happiness and social relationships between these two countries. Hence, there is a need to examine the differences with regard to social relationship and happiness among the females of both the countries. The findings may contribute to the future researches in exploring the probable cause of ensued differences and will open the way for future research in this field.

## **2. METHOD**

### **Participants**

100 females were selected randomly from Lovely Professional University, Phagwara which is situated in Punjab, India and 100 females from Samtse College of Education, located in the Samtse district of Bhutan in the current study (N = 200). All the subjects ranged between the age 17 to 23 (mean = 20.18). Subjects were from Arts, Science and Engineering streams. Table 1 gives the demographic details of the participants and provides information about their locality, Monthly Income and family structure.

### **Instruments**

1. ***Social Relationships Scale:*** Social Relationships scale (SRS) is a 35-item scale developed by Pardeep Kumar, Faheem Nabi and Neha Thakur (2016) to measure the social relationships. The scale measures social relationships across seven dimensions including friends, parents, siblings, classmates, relatives and teachers. The scale includes both positive and negative responses and responses ranged on a Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. The test-retest validity of the test is 0.93.
2. ***Oxford Happiness Inventory:*** A 29-item scale developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) measures the following components of happiness like achievement and satisfaction, vigor and health and enjoyment. The scale has a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.90.

### **Procedure**

The research started by selecting a random sample of university students. After taking their consent two scales were presented to them i.e. Social Relationship Scale and Oxford Happiness Inventory. Instructions were given to subjects before filling the questionnaires and their queries were answered before responding. Both the scales were filled by participants within a time period of 25-30 minutes. After scoring, data was computed through SPSS 16, on Pearson Product Moment Correlation and the *t*-test for independent means.

## **3. RESULTS**

Table 1 provides the baseline characteristics and demographic details of the participants. Participants were divided into three categories: locality, family structure and monthly Income. 51% of the participants

belonged to urban areas, while as 22% to Rural and 27% to Semi-Urban. 73% participants were from Nuclear family and 27% from Joint families. 39% of the participants had a household income of more than 40,000 (INR and BTN) per month while as 43% had less than 15,000 and 18% of the participants had house hold income of 15,000 to 40,000 per month.

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Data of Bhutanese and Indian Females**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Total</i>
Locality			
Urban	102	51%	200
Rural	44	22%	
Semi-Urban	54	27%	
Family Type			
Nuclear	146	73%	200
Joint	54	27%	
Monthly Income			
Below 15,000	86	43%	200
15,000-40,000	36	18%	
Above 40,000	78	39%	
N = 200			

**Table 2**  
**Social Relationships and Happiness of Bhutanese and Indian Females (N = 200)**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Means</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Social Relationships	Bhutanese	136.62	6.273	0.01**
	Indian	120.92		
Happiness	Bhutanese	132.96	10.463*	0.01*
	Indian	108.60		
Friends	Bhutanese	18.60	4.653	0.01**
	Indian	15.94		
Parents	Bhutanese	19.30	1.409	0.162
	Indian	18.38		
Classmates	Bhutanese	19.34	5.548	0.01**
	Indian	16.30		
Strangers	Bhutanese	17.78	3.886	0.01**
	Indian	15.98		
Relatives	Bhutanese	19.38	4.050	0.01**
	Indian	16.48		
Teachers	Bhutanese	18.48	3.357	0.01**
	Indian	16.64		
Siblings	Bhutanese	19.82	2.260	0.026*
	Indian	18.50		

\*Significant at 0.05 Level, \*\*Significant at 0.01 Level.

Table 2 presents the *t*-test results for the independent means and indicates the obtained '*t*' values for the females of Indian and Bhutanese population. The values range from 1.409-10.463, which in most cases is statistically significant. The results suggest that Bhutanese females (mean = 136.2) are high on social relationships than Indian females (mean = 120.9) with '*t*' value 6.273 which is significant at 0.01 level. Bhutanese females are also high on happiness (mean = 132.96) than Indian females (mean = 108.60). On the other dimensions of social relationships scale like Friends, Classmates, Strangers, Relatives, Teachers and Siblings, Bhutanese females are higher than Indian females (*p*-value 0.01).

**Table 3**  
**Relation between Happiness and Social Relationship of Indian and Bhutanese Female (N = 200)**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Happiness</i>	<i>SRS</i>
Happiness	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.565**
	N	200

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3, shows the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation between the two variables i.e. Happiness and Social Relationships. The Correlation Coefficient was found out to be 0.566, which is significant at 0.01 level. The findings indicate that there exists a moderate relationship between the two variables.

## 4. DISCUSSION

### Social Relationships

Table 2, shows that the mean of Bhutanese females is 136.2 and for Indian females is 120.92 with a '*t*' value of 6.273 which is significant at level 0.01. This suggests that Bhutanese females are high on social relationships than Indian females. As much of the research in this field has not been conducted the possible explanation for this could be the patriarchal structure of Indian society where women are dependent on men and have fewer choices in terms of life course (Miller, 1992). In majority of India cultures, females are expected to be under the control of a man and follow him without questioning (Baig, 1988; Kelkar, 1992 Narishman, 1994). Education increases the employment options and also improves the social relationships by widening the social circle outside of the home. According to 2011 census only 65.46 females are labelled as literate in India which is significantly lower than the male average. The National Family Health survey found 'expenses of educating the girl child and their requirement for household work' as main reason of their absence from schools (NFHS 3, 2005). The National Family Health Survey reported that females have 10% authority in respect of visiting their family and relatives, which happens to be a major obstacle towards their sociability (NFHS, 2005). While on the other side comparatively there exist better gender equality on social relationships in Bhutan (Crins, 2004). Both Males and females enjoy same gender equality and same legal rights.

### Friends

As we can see in Table 2, Bhutanese females are higher on friendship than Indian females (*t*-value = 4.653, *p*-value = 0.01). Deimer & Weitkamp (2006) in their study found that friendship quality predicts happiness.

Support from friends or closeness in friendship has been directly linked to happiness (Gladow & Ray 1986). Diener and Seligman (2002) also showed that satisfaction with friends was associated with happiness.

## Happiness

On Happiness Index, Indian females score lower than Bhutanese females. The mean for Indian females is 108.60 and for Bhutanese females its 132.96 and the 't' value 10.463 which is significant at level 0.01 ( $p < 0.01$ ). These findings are also supported by the World Happiness Report 2017, where India is ranked on position 122 which is far behind than Bhutan, ranked 97. There are many possible reasons for these findings. In most of the Indian cultures, male children are more preferred than a girl child and females are regarded and treated differently, which initiates the childhood trauma (Kelkar, 1992). The bias is sustained and the female child receives poorer quality of food and unequal access to healthcare facilities (Van Willigen & Channa, 1991).

Sexual harassment in educational institutes has been a major problem and affects a large section of female students, as mostly these incidents aren't being reported and reporting is also not appreciated which leads to psychological distress. However, Bhutanese women enjoy much more equality and experience a better well-being. The GNH findings of 2015 found that 82.45 Bhutanese women reported normal mental well-being whereas 72.37% women reported no or little stress in the GNH survey conducted in 2010 (CBS, 2015). All these possible factors play a deciding role in the maintenance of social relationship and happiness of Indian and Bhutanese females.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The current study describes the differences among Indian and Bhutanese females on social relationships and happiness. Bhutanese females are comparatively happier than Indian females. Bhutanese females reported significantly higher social relationships than Indian females. Bhutanese females also manifested strong relations with sibling, relatives, classmates, teachers, strangers as well as friends and the differences were found to be significant.

## Future Perspective

The study gives some insights about the role of social and cultural factors on determining the psychological well-being and socialization of Indian and Bhutanese females. Future research is needed to pinpoint the specific reasons that aid to reduce the psychological well-being of Indian females. Our findings can be helpful for researchers to understand the holistic view of social relationship and its connection with happiness. The study also provides feedback to the counselors, psychiatrists, policy makers and researchers to frame intervention programs and policies that will promote happiness among Indian females.

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