

## Socio-Economic Status and Well-being among Early Adolescents

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### ABSTRACT

McAllister (2005) defined Well-being as “The absence of illness or pathology with subjective and objective dimensions” and states that Well-being can be measured at individual or societal level, accounting for the elements of life satisfaction that cannot be influenced by economic growth. Socio-Economic Status (SES) is defined as the hierarchy of social positions which describes a person’s social standing or class (Graetz, 1995) and gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes and behaviours that the society ascribes (Moser, 2003). The impact of Socio-Economic Status on Well-being studies the perception of the individual towards his/her Well-being in terms of their stand in the socio-economic strata of the society. There are no significant studies in this area of research correlating Socio-Economic Status, gender and Well-being of early adolescents and hence the study would be of importance. This research focuses on the measurement of the impact of Socio-Economic Status and gender on the Well-being of early adolescents, aged between 14-16 years. A purposive sample consisting of 200 adolescents (n=200), 100 boys and 100 girls from government and private schools in South India would be selected for the study. The Socio-Economic Status Scale (SESS) and the Personal Well-being Index- School Children (PWI-SC) will be used to measure Socio-Economic Status and Well-being respectively. The obtained data would be analysed using mean, t-test, and one-way ANOVA. The Socio-Economic Status is expected to affect the Well-being of children in terms of their personal as well as environmental conditions. The perception of Well-being is expected to be higher among girls than boys. The study will provide an insight of how the Socio-Economic Status of the family and gender will affect the perceived Well-being of the early adolescent. The study will serve as adequate data in understanding factors affecting Well-being and in devising ways of improving the basic needs of adolescents. It can help in the formulation of policies towards adolescents, in designing their educational curriculum, etc. It can also help in the designing of intervention for ‘at-risk’ adolescents.

**Keywords:** *Well-Being, Socio-Economic Status, Gender, Children and Adolescents*

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Psychology is a growing field and the needs for research in the field are explicitly visible. In the life cycle of an individual, adolescence is of very much importance as it is a phase of life when a child steps into adulthood and begins knowing about the external world. This results in growing questions in the adolescent's mind and in turn puts the individual under various conflicts. The conflicts are of importance as they play a major role in determining the person's future and his future endeavours. A person's life is primarily determined by his views and interpretations of the events he comes across. Life satisfaction and happiness in life are basic requirements for a person to lead a peaceful life without mental conflicts. Well-being is the evaluation of a person's happiness (Schwartz & Strack, 1999) based on his assessment of his quality of life based on his own, chosen criteria (Shin & Johnson, 1978). Socio-Economic Status (SES) is the social standing or class of an individual which is measured as a combination of one's education, income and occupation. It is considered to be an indicator of one's social and economic position (Stawarski & Boesel, 1988). It affects a person's Well-being directly as Well-being is also perceived on the basis of the wealth and belongings of an individual. The skills acquired in the initial years of development are essential for the future development of an individual and hence the Well-being of Early Adolescents can help in the improvement of the life conditions of them.

Social context theories state that the social context of an individual plays a major role in determining Well-being (Briggs, n.d.). Micro economic theory states that Well-being increases with income, which is a direct measure of Socio-Economic Status (Rubinstein, 2005). According to the Relative theories (Easterlin, 1974), the effect of income on Well-being depends on the standards of Well-being set by the individual, based on social comparisons. The Absolute theory stated by Venhoveen (1991) assumes that the ability of an individual to satisfy his/her basic needs is dependent on the level of income the individual has. In accordance to the Adaptation theory, the happiness of a person is determined by his levels of adaptation even in low income levels (Brickman et al, 1978). The Aspiration theory (Starbuck, 2007) establishes that the degree of satisfaction attained by an individual is directly proportional to his/her needs and desires. These contradictory ideas stated by the theories require verification by research, so as to determine the status of adolescents in the Indian context. Hence the studying of the effect of Socio-Economic Status on the Well-being of Early Adolescents would be of much importance. The Gender Difference Hypothesis states that there are differences in the psychological aspects of the two sexes which are manifested in thought and action (Jones, 1990). The lack of Indian studies in this area reassures the need for study on the above topic.

The effect of Socio-Economic Status on Well-being has already been studied by various researches conducted in this area. A study on economic theory and subjective Well-being in Mexico states that the perception of an individual plays a major role in determining his/her Well-being and it shows a correlation of less than 5% between Socio-Economic Status and Well-being (Fuentes & Rojas, 2001). Felce and Perry in 1995 have stated that personal values and satisfaction along with an individual's life conditions determines one's Well-being. Hagerty et al

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(2001) states that environmental conditions in combination with an individual's choices shapes happiness, survival and Well-being where new aspects of adaption form the environment or personal desires either increases or decreases Well-being.

The above research findings were refuted by a study aimed at understanding poverty and Well-being by Akire et al., (2012) states poverty to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon, which affects health, education, nutrition, other beneficiaries, etc which determine the Well-being of individuals. It states that poverty not only encompasses material deficits but also deficits in areas of voice, security, isolation, dignity, lack of time, etc which are direct determinants of Well-being. This has been supported by the findings of Sharma and Tiwari (2010) which states that members of the weaker sections of the population tend to show low levels of Well-being in comparison to the stronger sections.

A study on adolescent subjective Well-being in West Africa by Jones (2011), studied the Well-being of adolescents using the Personal Well-being Index- School Children (PWI-SC) to explore domain specific satisfaction of the participants with gender and age as correlating factors. The study found that there is age and gender-related differences in the perception of Well-being and those girls have higher perception of Well-being than boys. Edwards (2003) concluded in his findings that girls worry more than boys regarding physical appearance and girls outperformed boys in their academic performance which affected their general Well-being.

Research evidence suggests that the PWI-SC is a moderately valid and reliable tool for assessing subjective Well-being in adolescents and is also tested to be a valid cross-cultural measure of Well-being (Jones, 2011). A study on the subjective Well-being of adolescents using the Personal Well-being Index states that the PWI-SC is a valid, reliable and sensitive measure of subjective Well-being and it is appropriate for children and adolescents (Lai, 2009). Another study conducted by the Australian Centre on Quality of Life has presented evidence towards the good psychometric properties of the scale and its use among children and adolescents of age 12-19 (Tomyn, 2011).

The work regarding promotion of Well-being among young adults by Edwards (2003) of Glasgow University summarized published and unpublished works on the topics: (a) Promoting mental and emotional health in young people and (b) Positive interventions for young people within the school context focusing between 12 to 18 years of age. The study shows the lack of intervention strategies for improving the Well-being of young people, which emphasizes the need for the development of intervention strategies, which in turn would need investigation to determine the factors causing difficulty.

Subjective biases in recall, response and social desirability, inaccuracy of data, differences in cognitive abilities and possibilities of distortion due to time gap between the occurrence and

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recall of the information act as major limitations in a qualitative design (Jones, 2011). The major challenges in studying poverty are the (a) differences between urban and rural poverty, (b) understanding the subjective feelings of participants towards their Socio-Economic Status, (c) lack of generalized means of comparison between different groups, (d) dynamic nature of the ideas of Well-being and (e) lack of adequate evaluations of policies towards the socio-economically disadvantaged (Akire, 2003).

An evaluation by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) suggests that the political policies towards poverty reduction, means of measurement of Socio-Economic Status, differentiation in levels of social-categorization, etc should be studied by both quantitative and qualitative means should be done to understand the factors affecting Socio-Economic Status and Well-being. Gaps in the literature state that further research on Well-being should be conducted in developing and under-developed countries in order to fill these gaps and facilitate better comparisons between cultures. There were mixed differences in the results on the study of Well-being in adolescents which emphasize need for further investigation (Jones, 2011). Studies suggest that research on Socio-Economic Status should be studied in a multi-dimensional, dynamic and relational as well as a pluralistic way. The mobility in the Socio-Economic Status between generations and factors prohibiting the mobility from a lower to higher status should also be studied (Akire, 2003).

### *Aim*

The aim of the study is to measure Well-being and Socio-Economic Status among early adolescents.

### *Objectives*

1. To study the socio-economic status of early adolescents.
2. To study the Well-being and compare the gender differences among early adolescents.
3. To study the relationship between Well-being and Socio-Economic Status among early adolescents.

### *Hypotheses*

1. There is no correlation between Well-being and Socio-Economic Status.
2. There are no gender differences with regard to Well-being among early adolescents.
3. There are no significant differences among early adolescents of the higher, middle and lower Socio-Economic Status with regard to their Well-being.

## **METHODS**

### *Research Design*

The study follows a between-subject, single factor multi group design, where the dependent variable Well-being is assessed in accordance with Socio-Economic Status, which has three

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groups, namely, high, middle and low. The factor Well-being is also compared on the basis of gender.

### ***Sampling***

The sample includes 280 (140 boys and 140 girls) adolescents between the ages 14-16 years. The samples were selected by purposive sampling methods so as to satisfy the age criteria. They were selected from Tamil and English medium, government and private schools in Chennai and Madurai.

### ***Inclusion Criteria***

Early adolescents of both genders aged between 14-16 years of age.

Early adolescents of different Socio-Economic Status.

Early adolescents who were pursuing secondary education at the time of the study.

### ***Exclusion Criteria***

Adolescents who do not fall in the age range of 14-16.

Early adolescents who were school drop-outs.

Early adolescents pursuing diploma courses or working.

Early adolescents who were suffering from severe health conditions at the time of the study.

Early adolescents who were not living with both the parents at the time of the study.

## **OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS**

***Well-Being.*** Well-being refers to an adolescent perception towards his/her happiness in life. The happiness is divided into eight different areas, life as a whole, standard of living, personal health, achievement in life, personal relationships, personal safety, feeling part of community and future security (Cummins & Lau, 2005).

***Socio-Economic Status.*** Socio-Economic Status refers to the status of an individual based on one's social, economical, educational and occupational standing in society. It includes the income, property, public postings held, academic qualifications of members, etc (Singh, Shyam & Kumar, 2005).

***Adolescence.*** Adolescence refers to a developmental period of immense transition involving multi-dimensional changes such as biological, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual (National Research Council, 2002).

***Early Adolescence.*** Early adolescents refers to that group which includes boys and girls of the age 14-16, belonging to different Socio-Economic Status undergoing school education, either of class IX or X.

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### *Tools*

***Socio-Demographic Profile.*** Developed by the researchers the Socio-demographic Profile included details such as age, gender, place, family type, number of siblings, relationship status, etc of the samples.

***Personal Well-Being Index- School Children.*** The index constructed by Cummins and Lau in 2005 is a reliable and valid measure of Well-being. It includes eight items of happiness, each corresponding to specific life domains such as standard of living, health, life achievement, personal relationships, personal safety, community-connectedness and future security. Parallel forms of the scale are also available for adults, pre-school children and people with intellectual disability.

***Socio-Economic Status Scale.*** The Socio-Economic Status Scale constructed by Singh, Shyam and Kumar (2005) is used for measuring Socio-Economic Status in the Indian context, so as to cover urban and rural population. Items are framed in such a way so as to cater to the Indian standards of classifying how one's Socio-Economic Status is.

### *Procedure*

Once the topic was finalized, the researchers chose appropriate tools for data collection. A total of four schools, both government and private were chosen from Chennai and Bangalore cities. A request letter was forwarded to the schools and a formal permission was obtained for data collection. Samples were selected based on their age and were given an informed consent form, agreeing upon which they took the test. They were instructed to read the consent form carefully and sign the form. Socio-demographic details were collected using a socio-demographic profile. Well-being and SES were measured using the tools PWI-SC and SESS respectively. The results were scored; interpreted using the appropriate norms provided by the authors and analyzed using SPSS software.

### *Statistical analysis*

Well-being is correlated with Socio-Economic Status using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and the within-subject and between-subject significance was calculated using one-way ANOVA. Well-being was also analyzed based on gender using independent sample t-test. The mean and standard deviation of the above were calculated.

## **RESULTS**

The results show absence of correlation ( $p = -0.013$ ) between Well-being and Socio-Economic Status. The average Well-being (79.57) of the target group is high and participants are broadly found to belong to middle Socio-Economic Status class (mean = 93.33). The Standard Deviation was 13.42 for Well-being and 42.13 for Socio-Economic Status, which gives an account of individual differences in the levels of Well-being and Socio-Economic Status among the early

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adolescent population, hence making them subjective variables. The correlation between the variables was calculated using Pearson's product-moment correlation. This shows that Well-being is not determined by one's Socio-Economic Status. Table 1 shows the correlation values between the variables

**Table 1 Correlation between Well-being (WB) and Socio-Economic Status (SES)**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Significance
WB	280	79.57	13.42	-0.013
SES	280	93.33	42.13	

Not significant

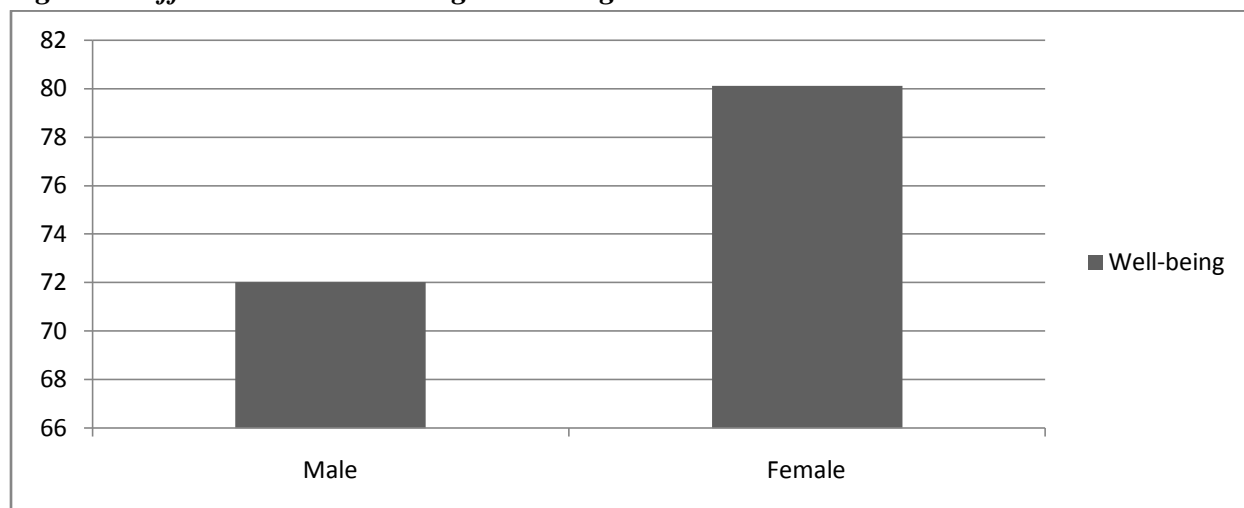
The relationship between the variables Well-being and gender were calculated using independent t-test and found to be significant ( $p= 0.002$ ). The mean score of girls (mean= 80.12) was found to be greater than that of boys (mean= 72.03) and the Standard deviation of girls (10.92) was lesser than that of boys (15.54). This shows that gender differences influence the perception of Well-being. Girls are found to have higher Well-being than boys. Table 2 shows the results of the independent t-test and figure 1 shows the differences in Well-being based on gender.

**Table 2 Gender differences in Well-being (WB)**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t
Male	140	72.03	15.54	0.002
Female	140	80.12	10.92	

Significant

**Figure 1 Differences in Well-being based on gender**



The differences in Well-being of early adolescents based on Socio-Economic Status were calculated using one-way ANOVA. The differences were found to be insignificant ( $p= 0.822$ )

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hence showing lack of influence of Socio-Economic Status on Well-being. The differences in the mean were calculated by comparing high Socio-Economic Status to middle (mean diff.= -1.97) and low Socio-Economic Status (mean diff.=0.24), middle Socio-Economic Status to high (mean diff.= -0.24) and low Socio-Economic Status (mean diff.= -2.22) and low Socio-Economic Status to high (mean diff.= 1.97) and middle Socio-Economic Status (mean diff.= 2.22). The mean differences were found to be insignificant in all classes namely, high Socio-Economic Status in comparison to middle (p= 0.989) and low Socio-Economic Status (p= -0.860), middle Socio-Economic Status in comparison to high (p= 0.989) and low Socio-Economic Status (p= 0.822) and low Socio-Economic Status in comparison to high (p= 0.860) and middle Socio-Economic Status (p= 0.822). This shows that there is no significant relationship between well-being and Socio-Economic Status.

**Table 3 Relationship between Well-being (WB) and Socio-Economic Status (SES)**

SES	SES	Mean difference	Standard error	significance	95% confidence interval	
					Upper bound	Lower bound
High	Middle	-1.97	1.67	0.989	-3.87	4.36
	Low	0.24	3.59	0.860	-10.82	6.87
Middle	High	-0.24	1.67	0.989	-4.36	3.87
	Low	-2.22	3.54	0.822	-10.92	6.49
Low	High	0.24	3.59	0.860	-6.87	10.82
	Middle	1.97	3.54	0.822	-6.49	10.92

Not significant

### **DISCUSSION**

The results state that Well-being and Socio-Economic Status are not correlated and hence do not influence each other and hence the hypotheses stating lack of influence of Socio-Economic Status on Well-being is proved. This is similar to the results found by Fuentes and Roger (2001) and the conclusions of Felce and Perry (1995) as well as Hagerty et al., (2001) but refutes the findings of other few researchers (Akire et al., 2012; Sharma & Tiwari, 2010 & Jones, 2011). The perception of Well-being has hence proved to be a subjective phenomenon, where the Well-being of an individual has been based on his/her own views of happiness. The findings are also supported by the Adaptation theory (Brickman et al., 1978) and Aspiration theory (Starbuck, 2007). Though the level of maturity is found to act on such factors, this is being attained by individuals at an early age of life, due to the higher levels of exposure a child gets in comparison to the olden days. The education an individual undergoes, be it in terms of formal education or experiential learning, helps an early adolescent to reach a mature understanding of his/her Well-being.



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The increase in the Socio-Economic Status of people has been drastic these days where the availability of commodities to the common people has considerably increased, facilitated by the structural change in the government system providing more opportunity for growth. There has been a reduction in the poverty of the citizens of India from 56.4% in 1973-74 to 28.3 in 2004-05. This is due to the ready availability of goods and services, cheaper costs, increase in employment rates, ready availing of loans from banks, etc. But social differentiation still continues to prevail due to the caste and community inequalities (Ghosh, 2010). This has also led to the decrease in the number of families of low Socio-Economic Status, which is a positive sign towards development, promoting both National Well-being and individual Well-being.

There has found to be significant differences among the Well-being of boys and girls. Girls tend to have better Well-being than boys, which is in line with the Gender Difference Hypothesis also found by the research studies conducted by Edwards (2003) and Jones (2011). This finding has refuted the hypothesis but follows the previously conducted research studies. Difference in the rearing practices, responsibilities taken up by an adolescent girl in the family, being in line with the family's financial position, differences in needs, etc may be reasons for this difference. Biology also shows evidence for early maturation of girls than boys which may also be a potential cause.

### ***Significance of research***

The subjective nature of Well-being has been made evident by this research. This study has helped us to know the changing trends in the lifestyle of people due to industrialization, globalization, etc., and has also brought an idea towards the change in psychological aspects these physical changes have brought in. Intervention strategies can be designed to be more effective with a deeper understanding of the gender dynamics, where the strength of intervention can be designed based on the needs of the end user.

### ***Limitations***

Limitations may be found in aspects of the lack of representativeness of the sample as they were selected based on the availability of samples. This has also led to the unequal representation of samples from each Socio-Economic Status group. The emotional bonds that a child may have in the family, self-esteem of the adolescent, adjustment levels of the adolescent, etc have not been studied, which are major aspects influencing Well-being. These limitations may be filled by future research.

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### *Conflict of Interests*

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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