The International Journal of Indian Psychology
ISSN 2348-5396 (Online) | ISSN: 2349-3429 (Print)
Volume 9, Issue 1, January- March, 2021
DIP: 18.01.187/20210901, DOI: 10.25215/0901.187
http://www.ijip.in

Research Paper

Comparative study of Subjective Well-being of Students in India and Japan

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to find the differences in subjective well-being (SWB), using PERMA profiler, between Indian and Japanese university students. Indian students (n = 361; 193 males and 168 females) and Japanese students (n = 390; 172 males and 218 females) participated in a well-being questionnaire survey. The results indicated that there are significant differences between Indian and Japanese students, with Indian students scoring higher in Positive Emotion, Meaning, and Accomplishment and Japanese students scoring higher in Engagement. No significant differences were observed for Relationships. We found that gender of students within a country has no effect on any of the factors of the PERMA. The findings are discussed in relation to cross-cultural studies.

Keywords: *Subjective Well-Being, Culture, College Students, India, Japan*

Definitions of well-being are many and continuously growing. Different theories have been proposed for measuring well-being, some of which emphasized the Hedonic perspective, others stressed the Eudaimonic perspective, and yet others blended these two domains. Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (1999) stated in their research that the subjective well-being (SWB) has two areas: cognitive and emotional aspects. The cognitive aspect refers to the degree of satisfaction with life. On the other hand, the emotional aspect includes both positive and negative emotions such as pleasant and sad. Furthermore, Diener, Oishi, and Lucas (2003) said that SWB encompasses high positive emotions, low negative emotions, and high satisfaction with life.

One of the challenges in the study of well-being or happiness is defining it in such a way that it can be measured. Though it can be measured subjectively or objectively (Butler & Kern, 2016), the concept of well-being may vary across societies and cultures. Many cross-cultural studies (Diener & Diener, 1995; Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999) have confirmed significant cultural variations that affect and define well-being.

According to Diener, Oishi, and Tay (2018), the concept of well-being has been discussed in many different ways, and studies have shown that cultural differences affect the view and concept of happiness. One dichotomy in the cultural perspective is individualistic society

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Received: February 10, 2021; Revision Received: March 26, 2021; Accepted: March 31, 2021

and collectivistic society. Studies on the theories of happiness have pointed to the importance of these dimensions. Thomas and Chambers' (1989) study showed the difference in the concept of happiness in India and the United Kingdom. The respondents in their survey were asked about their happiness. The Indian respondents gave emphasis on one's duty to family and society and on completing one's religious duties. Indians felt at peace with their fate if they had managed to fulfill their social obligations. The British respondents were more concerned about control over their private life. Despite the apparent disparities in the determinants of well-being as found in numerous cross-cultural comparative studies carried out so far, some have found unifying features of well-being governing across countries and cultures (Nishaat & Magari, 2020).

Researchers have investigated possible cultural differences in SWB predictors. For example, an association of financial satisfaction with life satisfaction is more substantial in developing countries than in developed ones (Diener & Diener, 1995). Veenhoven (1989) reanalyzed the data by Easterlin (1974) and found a significant association between GDP per capita and nations' happiness. From various researches on predictors of SWB across the cultures, it can be concluded that the predictors of SWB vary across cultures, and it is associated with the economic development and cultural values of a nation (Diener et al., 2018). Religious faith also significantly affects the definition of well-being in many countries. Hofstede (2001) demonstrated that Muslim faith played a significant role in the Arab world. Similarly, Salagame (2004) explained well-being of Indian people reflects their religious beliefs.

Therefore, various studies point out that well-being or happiness is perceived differently in different countries based on their culture and perception of other factors such as socio-economic conditions and GDP etc.

Measuring Subjective Well-being

Well-being can be defined and measured objectively or subjectively. Hedonic well-being, Eudemonic well-being, and blend of both above-mentioned (Ryan & Deci, 2001) are often used. Diener (1984) confirmed that SWB is based on affective and cognitive components (life satisfaction). Ryff (1989) defined six dimensions (self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth) of psychological well-being. Seligman (2011) developed the PERMA model to measure well-being, which consist of Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Butler and Kern (2016) developed PERMA profiler using the concept of Seligman's PERMA model.

PERMA Theory

Perma theory was developed by Seligman (2011). Butler and Kern (2016) recently developed the PERMA-Profiler to measure five factors of PERMA. Five factors of PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) are described as follows:

Positive Emotion

The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology defined Positive Emotion as *"pleasant or desirable situational responses… distinct from pleasurable sensation and undifferentiated positive affect"* (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009). Frederickson (2001) explained that positive emotion produces flourishing and are worth cultivating. Myers and Diener (1995) demonstrated that positive emotions are considered a key component in happiness or SWB.

Engagement

In positive psychology, Engagement means a specific way of being involved with a task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Engagement is described as having two or three components. A two-component model often includes a behavioral and an emotional affective subtype (Marks, 2000). Others include cognitive subtype as well (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). In the case of student engagement, it includes psychological, behavioral, cognitive, and academic domains (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008).

Relationships

Scholars have long considered social relationships to be fundamental to happiness and well-being. It has been considered one of the most important predictors of well-being (Argyle, 2001; Myers, 2000). Empirical evidence that relationships are tied to well-being is plentiful. Family support, support from a partner is related to greater well-being (Walen & Lachman, 2000).

Meaning

Meaning has been defined as having direction in life and feeling connected to something larger than oneself (Steger, 2012). Meaning is related to life satisfaction (Boyle, Barnes, Buchman, & Bennett, 2009). People who report that they are happy with their lives also claim that they have more meaningful lives. Although it doesn't necessarily mean that having the meaningful life is equal to having the happy one (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013).

Accomplishment

For well-being, it is important to have explicit goals and make efforts to achieve them. While goals can be explicit, a sense of accomplishment is very subjective. It differs from person to person based on personal ambition, drive, and personality differences.

Well-Being in India and Japan

India is a country with a diverse history, culture, and age-old traditions. As a result of this complexity, one needs to take into account myriad aspects, when well-being is to be studied in an Indian context. Therefore, many aspects will be needed to take into consideration to clarify the idea of well-being in India. Happiness may depend upon an individual's interpretation of daily events (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2001, 2006). In India, happiness is associated with fateful thinking as well. The concept that Karma (fate) controls and regulates life is well known in Indian culture (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2001). Deb, Thomas, Bose, and Aswathi (2019) conducted a survey on 414 Indian graduate students, and they found a positive and significant correlation between spirituality and SWB.

Swaminathan, Babu P, and Dellagiulia's (2018) study showed the relationship between well-being and academic performance, social support, and stress in Indian college students. Salagame (2017) explained the relation of well-being and the religious perspective of India. Banavathy and Choudry (2014) studied the Upanisada, a holy scripture of the Hindu religion, and found that various kinds of happiness, ranging from very pleasant and achieved by the effort to delusionary in nature, are included in these scriptures. He explained that these various kinds of happiness may reflect in Indian people.

Various studies have been conducted on well-being of Japanese people, and researchers have created different scales to measure Japanese well-being. For example, Hosogoshi and Kodama (2006) measured the Japanese people's well-being, using the Japanese version of

the Psychological Well-being scale consisting of the six factors made by Ryff and Keyes (1995). Also, Hashimoto and Koyasu (2012) conducted research using the Japanese version of the subjective happiness scale made by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985).

Furthermore, many comparative studies with overseas countries have been conducted to clarify the characteristics of Japanese well-being. In 2000, the World Values Survey was conducted in 60 countries to investigate well-being of each country. Japan is ranked 35th in this survey, which is almost in the middle (Otake, Shiraishi, & Tsutsui, 2010). Diener et al. (1985) conducted a survey of American college students using the Life Satisfaction Scale (five questions) using the Likert method (1-7). Oishi (2010a) conducted a survey using the Japanese version of the same scale. This study indicated a lower level of Life satisfaction in Japan.

Uchida and Ogihara (2012) found that the internal value of an individual strongly predicts cultural well-being in North America. In contrast, in Japan, well-being is predicted by a feeling of a connection in interpersonal relationships.

In the same way, many other studies have been conducted to understand and define well-being in these two countries. But there isn't any comparative study of well-being in India and Japan. It led to this present research, which aims to study the difference between Indian and Japanese students in SWB, using five factors of the PERMA Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016).

India and Japan are very different countries. This study analyzed how these differences are reflected in their well-being. This study will aim to answer these questions:

- Are there differences between Indian and Japanese students in SWB?
- Are there differences between male and female groups in SWB?

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Two sample groups were used in this study. The first group consisted of undergraduate students from 3 universities of India (n = 361; 193 males and 168 females). The second sample was Japanese students (n = 390; 172 males and 218 females) of the 3 private universities. Age of respondent ranged from 18 to 22 for both samples.

Scale and Procedures

Ethical approval was granted by the Soka University research ethics committee. After consenting to participate only, participants were given a questionnaire to answer the survey. Questionnaire of PERMA profiler was used. PERMA profiler was developed to measure well-being using five factors defined by Seligman (2011), which are Positive Emotion (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A).

The questionnaire contained 23 items, including 15 questions (three questions per PERMA factor) and 8 filler questions, measured on the 11-point Likert-type scale. However, 8 filler items from the original profiler were excluded in the final analysis of data. This research used the original English version for the survey in India and the Japanese version (translated by the laboratory of psychological Science in Kanazawa Institute of Technology) for the survey in Japan.

Period: The survey was conducted from 2019 August to 2020 January in both countries.

RESULTS

T-test was used to compare data between Indian and Japanese students. Table 1 shows the differences between Indian and Japanese students in all five dimensions of well-being. Apart from Relationships, a significant difference was found in all the other four factors of PERMA profiler. Indian students rated higher than Japanese students in mean score of Positive Emotion (t=3.98; p<.001), Meaning (t=6.14; p<.001), and Accomplishment (t=9.74; p<.001). On the other hand, Japanese students' mean score was higher than Indian students in Engagement (t=-6.74; p<.001). Significant difference was found in total score of PERMA between Indian and Japanese students (t= 3.81; p<0.001).

Table 1 India Japan Subjective Well-being T Test

	Indian Students (*N*=361)		**Japanese Student (*N*=390)**		**T- value (*df*=749)**
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	
Positive Emotion	20.83	5.54	19.22	5.57	3.98***
Engagement	20.53	4.91	22.82	4.41	-6.74***
Relationships	20.40	5.92	20.11	4.87	.745
Meaning	21.11	5.38	18.65	5.57	6.14***
Accomplishment	20.32	5.39	16.64	4.97	9.74***
Total	110.89	21.31	104.84	22.19	3.81***

*** $p < .001$

In order to make a comparison based on the gender of students of both countries, the researcher performed one way ANOVA. The results in Table 2 demonstrate that there are significant differences between Indian and Japanese male and female groups in Positive Emotions (f=5.43; p<0.001), Engagement (f=16.55; p<0.001), Meaning (f=13.21; $p < .001$), and Accomplishment (f= 33.03; $p < .001$).

Table 2 Means, SDs, F value and Bonferroni to Multiple Comparisons of Four Groups on Subjective Well-being

	India		**Japan**		**F (*df*=3,747)**	**Post-hoc Bonferroni test**
	Male (n= 193)	**Female (n= 168)**	**Male (n=172)**	**Female (n=218)**		
Positive Emotion	21.00 (5.49)	20.64 (5.61)	19.13 (6.09)	19.28 (5.14)	5.43***	IM>JF/JM
Engagement	20.12 (5.08)	21.00 (4.67)	23.08 (4.61)	22.61 (4.23)	16.55***	JM/JF>IF/IM
Relationships	20.11 (5.78)	20.73 (6.08)	19.98 (5.11)	20.20 (4.68)	.64	
Meaning	21.34 (5.28)	20.84 (5.49)	19.00 (6.07)	18.38 (5.14)	13.21***	IM/IF>JM/JF
Accomplishment	20.53 (5.26)	20.08 (5.54)	17.17 (5.25)	16.22 (4.70)	33.03***	IM/IF>JM/JF
Total	103.10 (19.69)	103.29 (20.34)	98.35 (22.42)	96.70 (19.26)	5.21***	IF/IM>JF

Note: IM: Indian Male, IF: Indian Female, JM: Japanese Male, JF: Japanese Female.
*** $p < .001$

The Means and Standard Deviations (SD) of well-being dimensions by 4 (gender) groups show that there is significant differences between Indian males /females and Japanese males/ females in different factors of PERMA. In Positive Emotion, significant difference was found between Indian male and Japanese male / female students (IM>JF/ JM; Means: 21.00, 19.28, 19.13; means difference; IM and JM: 1.87, IM and JF: 1.71; $p< 0.001$). There was no significant difference found between Indian female and Japanese male / female students.

In Engagement, (JM/JF>IF/IM; means: 23.08, 22.61, 21, and 20.12; mean difference; JM and IM: 2.95, JM and IF: 2.07, JF and IM: 2.49, JF and IF: 1.61; $p< 0.001$) the result indicated that both Japanese male and female scored higher than their Indian counterparts. Indian students scored higher than Japanese students in Meaning (IM/IF>JM/JF; means: 21.34, 20.84, 19.00, and 18.38; mean difference; IM and JM: 2.34, IM and JF: 2.96, IF and JM: 1.83, IF and JF: 2.45; $p< 0.001$). In the same way, Indian students scored higher than Japanese students in Accomplishment (IM/IF>JM/JF; means: 20.53, 20.08, 17.17, and 16.22; mean difference; IM and JM: 3.36, IM and JF: 4.31, IF and JM: 2.90, IF and JF: 3.85; $p< 0.001$).

In total scores, significant difference was found between Indian female and Japanese female students and between Indian male and Japanese female students (IF/IM>JF; Means: 103.29, 103.10, 96.70; mean difference, IF and JF: 6.58, IM and JF: 6.40; $p< 0.001$). There was no significant difference found in Relationships.

DISCUSSION

This study showed significant difference in four factors (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Meaning, and Accomplishment) of PERMA between Indian and Japanese students. Indian students had higher score in Positive Emotion, Meaning, and Accomplishment whereas Japanese students had higher level of Engagement. No significant difference was found between male and female students of same country in any factors of PERMA in both countries.

Higher score in Positive Emotion suggests that, Indian students in general are more content, feel positive, and joyful than their Japanese counterparts. Indian male students scored higher in Positive Emotion than Japanese students. But there was no significant difference between Indian female and Japanese male/female students.

For Japanese students scoring lower in Positive Emotion, it could be said that it is because of the stressful environment in which that they have to study and fulfill various duties. Kitayama, Markus, and Kurokawa's (2000) study on Positive Emotion in Japan and America which are two countries with different cultural backgrounds. It revealed that in comparison, Japanese students reported Positive Emotion less frequently than their American counterparts. Also, they showed that the frequency of general Positive Emotion (e.g. calm) and the frequency of interpersonally engaged Positive Emotion (e.g. friendly feelings) were strongly linked in Japan. It may be related to the religious background of people in Japan (Buddhism), which takes calm and stable harmony with others as "happiness" than expressing it (Oishi, 2010b).

Japanese scored higher than Indian students in Engagement factor. Japanese students seem to be more engaged and participate actively in class and interact more frequently with other students and instructors (Shcheglova, 2018). It might also be interpreted as more sincere involvement in their study as well as other activities. In the case of Indian students,

Engagement is lesser. It might be because they do not need to participate in class discussions actively.

There was no significant difference found between the Indian students and Japanese students in the Relationships factor. It could be because both Indian and Japanese societies are collectivistic that promotes social cohesion, interdependence, and relationship. In the case of Japan, relationship is given more significance than personal achievement (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006). Deb et al. (2019) found active interpersonal relationships and a friendly family environment are factors that promote the mental health of Indian college students.

Significant difference was found in the Meaning dimension in this analysis and both male and female Indian students scored higher than their Japanese counterparts. It might be related to the Vedic culture, where the source of happiness or well-being is identified as either intrinsic or extrinsic. It has defined that though the meaning of life is centered in the extrinsic pursuit of happiness, it needs to focus on an intrinsic value, which is also related to the cultivation of a spiritual state. The Vedic tradition emphasizes the pursuit of happiness with a positive note. The overall approach of Indian traditions toward the meaning of life is more optimistic because of its belief in the possibility to transcend the pain/pleasure polarities of existence (Salagame, 2017). That is considered true well-being. Deb et al. (2019) found a positive and significant correlation between spirituality and SWB in a study conducted on Indian graduate students. Spirituality has been associated with the meaning of life and life satisfaction in India.

Significant difference between Indian and Japanese students was found in the Accomplishment as well. Banupriya and Rajan (2019) conducted study on Indian students' academic achievement and happiness. In the case of India, connection between academic achievement and happiness might be related to the increase in the competition to find a job in India. India has a large young population, and finding a good job is significant for their future. Academic achievement is very vital for getting a good job. Graduating the university with better grades is helpful in finding a better job. So they put high importance on academic accomplishment.

In total, significant difference was found between Indian and Japanese students. However, result is slightly different in case of gender. Significant difference was seen between both Indian male and female students and Japanese female students. But there was no significant difference between Indian male and Japanese male, Indian female, and Japanese male students.

CONCLUSION

Concerning the differences in SWB between Indian and Japanese students in the present study, Indian students scored higher in three factors of PERMA out of five (Positive Emotion, Meaning, and Accomplishment) whereas Japanese students scored higher in one factor (Engagement). This study showed that there is no significant difference in Relationships dimension. However, there was significant difference in total score of PERMA in T-test. There was no significant differences between Indian male and Indian female students. Researcher got same result in case of Japanese male and Japanese female students as well. This indicate that the differences between two countries are due to different cultures, without any effect regarding gender.

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Acknowledgement

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Nishaat A. (2021). Comparative study of Subjective Well-being of Students in India and Japan. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *9*(1), 1773-1783. DIP:18.01.187/20210901, DOI:10.25215/0901.187