

Exploring the Role of Locality and Caste in Shaping Students' Subjective Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of locality and caste factors on subjective well-being. Here, indicators of Subjective Well-being (SWB) are Life Satisfaction (LS), Positive Affect (PA), and Negative Affect (NA). Data was collected on a sample of 250 students using life satisfaction scale and PANAS. Data was analysed utilizing independent samples t-tests and factorial ANOVA. Results indicated significant effects of locality and caste, along with their interaction, particularly on life satisfaction and negative affect. Caste alone was not a significant factor of experiencing pleasant emotion. However, the interaction between caste and locality was significant suggesting that caste differences in positive affect depend upon the locality. These findings underline the relevance of sociocultural factors in shaping individual psychological states.

Keywords: *Subjective Well-being, Positive Affect, Negative Affect*

Subjective well-being is a multidimensional concept. It encompassing emotional responses, satisfaction with life, and overall mental functioning (Vanhoutte, 2014). Subjective wellbeing (SWB) refers to how individuals experience and evaluate their lives and specific domains and activities within them. Unlike objective measures of well-being such as income, health statistics, or educational attainment, subjective well-being focuses on personal perceptions, emotions, and cognitive judgments. It is essentially how people feel about their lives (Kumari & Kumar, 2023).

Components of Subjective Wellbeing

There are three components of subjective well-being: a. affective component (hedonic), and life satisfaction (cognitive measures), and psychological well-being (eudaimonia). Affective component refers to the mood, emotions, and feelings a person. It can be both positive and negative. Positive affect are the emotions and feelings that reflect positive experiences, such as joy, pride, love, and contentment. Negative affect refers to the presence of unpleasant emotions such as sadness, anxiety, anger, and frustration (Kumar et al., 2023).

Life satisfaction, on the other hand, is global judgments of one's life (Kahneman, 2018). It is satisfaction with specific life spheres such as, work satisfaction, academic satisfaction etc.

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Thus, it measures cognitive components of subjective well-being (Diener, 2010). Here, it assesses satisfaction of desires and goal related to individual's life satisfaction. It is a stable component our life and refers to longer-term mood (Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith, 1999; Stone & Mackie, 2013).

A person with high subjective wellbeing tends to experience frequent positive emotions, infrequent negative emotions, and a high level of life satisfaction. Subjective wellbeing is linked to many desirable life outcomes, including better health, greater longevity, improved work and academic performance, stronger social ties, and even resilience in the face of adversity. Policymakers, psychologists, and economists increasingly recognize subjective well-being as a valuable measure of societal progress in addition to economic indicators like GDP.

In India, the structure of society is deeply rooted in socio-demographic factors such as locality (urban or rural residence) and caste (a stratified social identity system). The urban areas are often associated with better infrastructure, education, and employment opportunities. It is, on the other hand, also introduce challenges like increased stress, social isolation, and competition. Conversely, rural areas may offer social cohesion and collectivism but often lack in health, education, and employment infrastructure. Caste is a social construct. It determines individuals' societal positioning, impacting their economic status, social inclusion, and emotional well-being (Fontaine & Yamada, 2014).

This study investigates how these two key social variables—locality and cast interact and influence three core components of subjective well-being: Life Satisfaction (LST), Positive Affect (PA), and Negative Affect (NA).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Life Satisfaction has been widely studied in relation to environmental and social factors. Diener et al. (1999) emphasize that life satisfaction is influenced by income, education, and social factors like locality and caste. Urban residents often report higher life satisfaction due to increased access to opportunities, though this can be offset by higher stress levels (Berry & Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2011).

Positive and Negative Affect, components of emotional well-being, are also affected by social context. Studies by Watson et al. (1988) suggest that positive affect reflects the extent of pleasurable engagement with the environment, while negative affect captures distress and unpleasurable engagement. In the Indian context, caste discrimination and social exclusion are known to negatively affect emotional health (Deshpande, 2011). Further, studies such as Kumar et al. (2020) have revealed that caste-based disparities still significantly impact psychological outcomes, even as the country modernizes. Johri & Anand (2022) findings on caste suggested that caste discourse in urban areas is diminishing. Despite this fact, caste plays an important role in an individual's subjective well-being. Interaction effects between caste and locality have been less frequently studied, presenting a gap in the literature, this research is a step to address this issue.

Objectives

- To examine the impact of locality (urban vs. rural) on life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect.
- To assess the differences in subjective well-being (LST, PA, NA) across caste groups.

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- To evaluate the interaction effect of locality and caste on the components of subjective well-being.

METHOD

Sample

This study was undertaken on a sample of 250 students studying in secondary and higher secondary schools and colleges of Darbhanga town. Sample was consisting of both boys and girl's students and their age range from 15 to 30 years.

Measures:

Following tools were used to collect responses to students:

- 1. Demographic Information:** Here demographic information like age, gender, locality, caste etc. are given.
- 2. Life satisfaction Scale:** This scale was developed by Diener et al. (1985). This scale is a concise instrument for assessing life satisfaction. It consists of five items and is designed to evaluate the cognitive aspects of subjective well-being. Responses are noted on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 to 7.
- 3. Positive and Negative Affect Scale:** This scale is also known as SPANE. It was developed by Diener et al. (2010). It is a 12 items scale measuring both positive and negative emotional experiences and each item is rated on a 5-point scale.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the differences in subjective well-being (SWB) across caste categories (General, OBC, SC) and localities (Rural, Urban) among students. The focus was made to study each component of subjective well-being like Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect, and Negative Affect.

Caste Differences in Subjective Well-Being

As shown in Table-1, no statistically significant difference was found between General and OBC students on the Life Satisfaction ($t = 1.041, p = .299$). This suggests that belonging to either the General or OBC category may not greatly impact an individual's overall assessment of life satisfaction. However, significant differences were found when SC students were included in the comparison, with SC students reporting higher life satisfaction scores compared to both General ($t = 4.246, p < .001$) and OBC ($t = 3.152, p = .002$) groups. This finding is noteworthy as it challenges common assumptions that OBC and SC students, traditionally disadvantaged socioeconomically, may report lower life satisfaction. Possible explanations could include the positive impact of affirmative action policies, increased opportunities, and changing social dynamics improving subjective experiences among SC students (Deshpande, 2011).

Table-1 *t*-showing significance of difference between General, OBC and SC category students on components of subjective well-being

Component of SWB	Caste	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-ratio	Sig.
Life Satisfaction	General	103	21.2330	2.91111	1.041	.299
	OBC	118	21.6780	3.37887		
	General	103	21.2330	2.91111	4.246	.000
	SC	29	23.8276	2.89172		
	OBC	118	21.6780	3.37887	3.152	.002
	SC	29	23.8276	2.89172		

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Component of SWB	Caste	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-ratio	Sig.
Positive Affect	General	103	15.0291	3.55201	2.077	.039
	OBC	118	15.8814	2.51549		
	General	103	21.2330	2.91111	4.246	.000
	SC	29	23.8276	2.89172		
	OBC	118	15.8814	2.51549		
	SC	29	14.5517	1.68154		
Negative Affect	General	103	6.2039	5.00266	.568	.571
	OBC	118	5.7966	5.58318		
	General	103	6.2039	5.00266	3.233	.002
	SC	29	9.2759	1.92533		
	OBC	118	5.7966	5.58318		
	SC	29	9.2759	1.92533		
					3.301	.001

Regarding Positive Affect, a significant difference was observed between General and OBC students ($t = 2.077, p = .039$), with OBC students reporting higher positive emotional experiences. Additionally, SC students differed significantly from OBC students ($t = 2.698, p = .008$), suggesting that caste background continues to influence emotional experiences, but their patterns are changing. Present findings revealed that positive affect was found lowest in the students of general category in comparison to OBC and Sc students. The reason may be better opportunity given by the government for these groups in education and employment (Tomar & Singh, 2021).

In terms of Negative Affect, there was no significant difference between General and OBC students ($t = .568, p = .571$). However, SC students reported significantly higher negative affect compared to both General ($t = 3.233, p = .002$) and OBC ($t = 3.301, p = .001$) students. This suggests that SC students may experience more frequent negative emotions, possibly due to residual societal discrimination or stressors despite improvements in other well-being dimensions (Borooah, 2010).

Locality Differences in Subjective Well-Being

The analysis of locality differences (Table-2) revealed that Urban students reported significantly higher Life Satisfaction compared to Rural students ($t = 7.522, p < .001$). This could be attributed to better access to resources, education, healthcare, and career opportunities available in urban settings (Krishna & Shrader, 1999).

Table-2 t-showing significance of difference between rural and urban students on components of subjective well-being

	Locality	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-ratio	Sig.
Life Satisfaction	Rural	141	20.5248	2.85502	7.522	.000
	Urban	109	23.3211	2.99036		
Positive Affect	Rural	141	16.8652	2.79597	11.070	.000
	Urban	109	13.4495	1.81805		
Negative Affect	Rural	141	3.6596	4.43014	11.810	.000
	Urban	109	9.8716	3.68958		

Conversely, Rural students demonstrated significantly higher levels of Positive Affect ($t = 11.070, p < .001$). This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that people in rural areas, despite having fewer material resources, often report higher emotional well-being,

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possibly due to stronger social ties, closer community networks, and a less stressful lifestyle (Diener & Seligman, 2004).

In contrast, Urban students reported much higher Negative Affect ($t = 11.810, p < .001$), reflecting a greater frequency of negative emotions. This is consistent with literature suggesting that urban living is associated with higher stress, pollution, overcrowding, and competitive pressures, all contributing to increased negative emotional experiences (Evans, 2003).

Main and Interaction Effects of Caste and Locality

The two-way ANOVA results (Table 3) indicated that Life Satisfaction was significantly affected by both Locality ($F = 7.886, p = .005$) and Caste ($F = 14.599, p < .001$), with a significant interaction between the two ($F = 14.660, p < .001$). This suggests that the impact of caste on life satisfaction is different for rural and urban students. For instance, an SC student's life satisfaction may improve significantly more when located in an urban area compared to a rural area.

For Positive Affect, Locality was again a significant factor ($F = 57.376, p < .001$), while Caste alone was not significant ($F = 0.594, p = .553$). However, the interaction between caste and locality was significant ($F = 3.499, p = .032$), suggesting that caste differences in positive affect depend upon the locality.

Table-3 Main and Interacting Effect of Caste and Locality of Subjective Well-being

Dependent Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Life Satisfaction	Locality	57.803	1	57.803	7.886	.005
	Caste	214.006	2	107.003	14.599	.000
	Locality* Caste	214.900	2	107.450	14.660	.000
Positive Affect	Locality	330.912	1	330.912	57.376	.000
	Caste	6.853	2	3.426	.594	.553
	Locality * Caste	40.359	2	20.179	3.499	.032
Negative Affect	Locality	330.912	1	330.912	57.376	.000
	Caste	6.853	2	3.426	.594	.553
	Locality * Caste	40.359	2	20.179	3.499	.032

Similarly, for Negative Affect, Locality had a strong significant effect ($F = 57.376, p < .001$). On the other hand, the Caste main effect was non-significant ($F = 0.594, p = .553$). However, their interaction effect was significant ($F = 3.499, p = .032$). These patterns highlight that the environment (rural vs. urban) plays a crucial role in shaping emotional experiences, sometimes moderating the effects of caste.

The findings suggest that urbanization (locality) is associated with higher life satisfaction but also greater negative affect. This may reflect the dual nature of urban environments: better access to resources alongside greater stress. Caste, traditionally a sensitive and layered socio-cultural factor, significantly affects life satisfaction and emotional well-being, particularly for marginalized groups. The interaction effects between locality and caste further suggest that individuals' psychological experiences cannot be wholly understood without considering the intersections of multiple identity and environmental factors (Easterlin, 2003; Srivastava, 2009).

Summary and Implications

Overall, these findings suggest that locality plays a stronger and more consistent role in shaping subjective well-being than caste alone. While caste differences persist, particularly for SC students in terms of Life Satisfaction and Negative Affect, the urban-rural divide appears more pronounced across all dimensions of well-being.

These results underscore the importance of considering both socioeconomic background and environmental factors when assessing psychological well-being in diverse populations. Policy efforts aimed at improving well-being among youth may thus benefit from targeted interventions that address environmental stressors in urban areas and support emotional resilience among marginalized caste groups.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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