

Perceived Discrepancy between Self and Parents in Setting Life Goals and Subjective Well Being

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The present research explores the effect of the discrepancy between self-set goals and goals set by parents on subjective well-being (SWB) of young individuals. It was hypothesized that discrepancy between self and parents in setting life goals for an individual will increase negative emotional experience and adversely affect the SWB of the individual concerned. It is further hypothesized that the SWB would increase if one feels that his/her progress towards goals set by parents is satisfactory. To test these hypotheses 45 students in the age range of 19 to 21 years were assessed on various measures of SWB. In addition to it they were asked to write, in order of importance, 10 life goals set by themselves (self-set goals) and that set by their parents (parent-set goals). After getting the list of life goals (self and parent set goals) the respondents were asked to rate (on 5-point scale) the importance given to the two sets of life goals (self and parent set goals) by themselves as well as by their parents. They also rated the satisfaction with the progress towards these two set of life goals. The findings revealed that as the discrepancy between parents and their offspring, in terms of importance attached to life goals, increases the SWB of the latter decreases. However, satisfaction with the progress towards the life goals, either set by oneself or set by their parents, was found to be associated with greater happiness and SWB of the individual. The theoretical implications of the findings for the SWB of Indians have been discussed.

Keywords: Subjective well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, culture, life goals, parental influence,

Living a happy and good life is one of the goals cherished by human beings and most of our strivings and activities can be linked in one way or the other as an attempt toward realization of this goal. However, researchers widely differ in defining what constitute a good and happy life. For example, some have focused on criteria such as loving others, pleasure, self-insight, maturity, or autonomy as the defining characteristics of quality of life, whereas others are of the idea that what comprises a good life depends on the individual's own mental or cognitive framework and perception. From this perspective experience of happiness and satisfaction in one's life is a subjective phenomenon and it depends on an

individual's subjective evaluation of one's life. This subjective perception of happiness and life satisfaction has been referred to as subjective well-being (SWB). A widely accepted view about subjective well-being is that it consists of three primary components: prevalence of positive affect, relative absence of negative affect and life satisfaction (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Diener, 1984).

Subjective evaluation of one's strivings and success towards attaining recent or remote goals has been reported to be one of the important determinants of SWB (Emmons, 1991). It has also been observed that fulfillment and realization of life goals is associated with happiness and positive affect

(Chekola, 1974, Emmons & Diener, 1986) and lack of goal attainment with negative affect (Emmons & Diener, 1986). Moreover, it is not only fulfillment of life goals that influences one's level of SWB, the nature and number of life goals have also been found to be associated with one's feeling of happiness and life satisfaction (Wessman & Ricks, 1966). The aforementioned studies in Western society thus extend the hypothesis that the goals set by oneself and the perceived progress towards those goals are relevant determinants of happiness and satisfaction in one's life.

Goals and their attainment certainly is a causative factor in feeling of happiness and satisfaction but it depends upon the cultural milieu in which individual resides. For example, several studies demonstrated that the SWB of Asians and Asian Americans is better predicted by satisfaction with goals involving family and friends than with goals concerned mainly with the self (Oishi & Diener, 2001; Radhakrishnan & Chan, 1997). Other researchers have also empirically demonstrated that pursuance of goals that match the cultural values enhances the SWB. For example, in a study, Diener and associates (Diener, Suh, & Sapyta, 1997) observed that feelings of autonomy, meaning, and growth (goals valued by individualistic culture like America) were more important in predicting life satisfaction in the USA than in East Asia. Similarly, Oishi, Diener, Suh, and Lucas (1999) found that what made people happy depended on their values. For students who highly valued achievement, getting good grades was predictive of their satisfaction, whereas for those who valued conformity, family harmony was more important to their life satisfaction. The studies dealing with the relationship of life goals and SWB, in general, suggest that pursuance of culturally valued life goals and the progress made towards its fulfillment enhance the SWB of an individual. For example, in the U.S.A., academic success and intimacy are

representative life tasks among college students, whereas social participation is a prototypical life task among retirees (Cantor & Harlow, 1994) and therefore for college students, satisfaction with grades and satisfaction with romantic relationship have been found to be strong predictors of overall life satisfaction (Emmons & Diener, 1985), whereas the work satisfaction was found to be a major predictor among working adults, and social participation emerged as a significant predictor of overall life satisfaction for retirees (Harlow & Cantor, 1996).

The preceding discussion, though, definitely suggests that the culture determines and influences one's life goals and the efforts made to meet those goals advance the feeling of SWB, individuals do not always pursue culturally endorsed goals. Thus, a match between personally and culturally valued goals is likely to improve the SWB of the individual whereas a mismatch is likely to reduce the same. For example, Radhakrishnan and Chan (1997) compared American and Indian students and observed that conformity with parents (behaviour valued in Indian culture) emerged as predictor of SWB of Indians but not of Americans. Such observation lead to the hypothesis that parity between the personally and culturally valued goals will enhance the SWB and any discrepancy or disparity between the two will reduce the experience of SWB. In other words if there would be a conflict between the culturally imposed and self-set goals for life, it is likely to reduce the experience of happiness and life satisfaction, i.e., SWB. However, few researchers suggest that the pursuance of personally valued goals enhances one's SWB even if the personally valued life goals do not match with the cultural expectations. For example, if individuals from collectivist culture give more importance to individualistic values such as personal achievement and success then attainment of such individualistic personal goals will be a better predictor of SWB as compared to the

attainment of collectivistic goals.

The foregoing discussion, despite some caveat, suggests that in an individualistic society where self goal setting and pursuing them is promoted, the experience of SWB is influenced by such cultural norms and values but in collectivistic societies (like India) where goals, particularly for young men and women are usually set by parents, feelings of happiness and satisfaction is likely to be affected by the discrepancy between self-set goals and goals set by parents. Youths of such societies are likely to experience a sort of conflict. In such a cultural and social set up, it is speculated that the feeling of happiness and life satisfaction is likely to be reduced if a discrepancy exists in terms of importance given to life goals between parents and their offspring.

Keeping these views in mind about the cultural variations in setting of goals either by parents for young persons, or by persons themselves, or a compromise between the two, it could be hypothesized that discrepancy between self and parents in setting life goals for an individual will increase negative emotional experience and adversely affect the SWB of the individual concerned as well as the SWB of his parents.

The present study makes an attempt to examine influence of discrepancy between self set goals and goals set by parents on the SWB in University students. The discrepancy between self and parents (in setting life goals for an individual) may be of several types and may occur at different levels. For example, the goals set by individuals and their parents may differ in either nature (content) of the goals or the degree of assigned importance to them. In the later case, again, the self-parent discrepancy may be of at least two types- the parents may assign more importance than their wards or vice versa. In present research we are interested to study the effect of self-parent discrepancy (in setting of life goals in

terms of assigned importance) on SWB of the participants. Another objective of the study was to observe the effect of the perceived satisfaction with the progress towards goals set by parents on SWB. In Indian cultural setting, it could be hypothesized that the perceived SWB would increase if one feels that his/her progress towards goals set by parents is satisfactory.

Method

Sample:

The study was conducted on 45 (36 females and 9 males) postgraduate students of D.D.U. Gorakhpur University and Mahatma Gandhi P.G. College, Gorakhpur. The subjects were within 19-21 years of age and belonged to middle class family.

Tools:

Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985) was used. The respondents are asked to rate their level of life satisfaction by indicating to what extent they agree that the behaviour reflected in a given item is applicable to them. They have to indicate their agreement on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agreed. The possible range of obtained scores in this scale is from 7 (highly dissatisfied) to 35 (highly satisfied).

Affect Balance Scale (Bradburn, 1969): It is 10-item rating scale containing five statements reflecting positive feelings and other five statements reflecting negative feelings. Respondents were asked to focus on feelings during the past few weeks and indicate how frequently they experienced the feelings depicted in each item on a 3 point scale: 1=often, 2=sometime and 3=never.

Life Goals Measurement Questionnaire was developed for the present research. In the first part of this questionnaire, subjects are required to list their 10 goals of life in order of importance. The open-ended response was required from the respondents. For each goal they have

also to rate the importance attached to them by their parents as well as by themselves on a 5 point rating scale. Besides this, subjects have to evaluate their satisfaction with the progress towards those goals on a 5 point rating scale ranging from highly satisfied to highly dissatisfied. In the second part of this questionnaire subjects are required to list 10 goals of life as set by their parent for them in order of importance. Again the listing of life goals set by parents required an open-ended response from the respondents. Similar to the first respondents were asked to rate their progress towards these goals on a 5 point scale along with the importance assigned to these goals by them and by their parents.

Besides these scales, two single item measures of well-being were also used - one for the assessment of well being of the self

and another for the assessment of well being of the family. The former single item measure asked the respondents to rate their perceived level of well-being on a 5 point ranging from not too happy (1) to very happy (5). The latter scale asked respondents to rate the well-being of their family on a 3 point rating scale.

Results

The discrepancies between self-set goals and goals set by parents might be in terms of the goals themselves (goal-discrepancies) and the degree of importance given to those goals (goal-value discrepancy). Table-1 presents the correlation coefficients between various indices of subjective well-being and global goal value discrepancy for self-set goals (1A) as well as for goals set by parents (1B).

Table 1: Correlation coefficients between various indices of subjective well-being and global goal value discrepancy for self-set goals (1A) and global goal value discrepancies for goals set by parents (1B)

	PA	NA	LS	SH	FH
1A Self-parent discrepancy for self-set goals	-.104	.259*	-.155	-.150	-.160
1B Self-parent discrepancy for self-set goals	-.372*	.028	-.105	-.131	-.227

* $p < .05$

The correlation coefficient between global goal-value discrepancy for self set goals and negative affect was statistically significant (.259, $p < .05$), whereas the same with positive affect (-.104), life satisfaction (-.155), self-happiness (-.150) and family happiness (-.160) were in negative direction. The correlation coefficient between global goal-value discrepancy for goals set by parents and positive effect was negative and statistically significant (-.372, $p < .05$), whereas life satisfaction (-.105), self-happiness (-.131)

and family happiness (-.227) were found to be negatively correlated with global goal-value discrepancy for goals set by parents.

The importance attached to self set goals by self and parents was classified into two categories- amount of importance given by parents is less than the importance given by self (Type I) and vice versa (Type II). To ascertain the effect of direction of discrepancy on different indices of well-being the correlation coefficients were computed and presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation coefficients between various indices of subjective well-being and discrepancy scores for self set goals when the importance given by parents is less than that given by self (Type I) and when otherwise (Type II).

	PA	NA	LS	SH	FH
Type-I Discrepancy	-.004	.362*	-.340*	-.320*	-.040
Type-II discrepancy	-.136	.199	-.320*	-.328*	-.112

* $p < .05$

With Type 1 discrepancy, negative affect was found to be positively correlated (.362, $p < .05$). Whereas, life satisfaction (-.340, $p < .05$) and self-happiness (-.320, $p < .05$) were found to be correlated negatively. A similar pattern of correlation was found between Type 2 discrepancy and different measure of well-being (with positive effect, -.136; negative effect, .199; life-satisfaction, -.32 ($p < .05$); self-happiness, -.328 ($p < .05$), and

with family happiness, (-.112).

Similarly the importance attached to goals set by parents, the goal-value discrepancy between self and parent was classified into two categories- amount of importance given by parents is less than the importance given by self (Type I) and vice versa (Type II). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 :Correlation coefficients between indices of subjective well-being and discrepancy scores for goals set by parents when the importance given by parents is less than given by self (Type I) and when otherwise (Type II).

	PA	NA	LS	SH	FH
Type-I Discrepancy	.234	.126	-.166	-.087	-.303
Type-II discrepancy	.062	.017	.065	.136	.024

* $p < .05$

With Type I discrepancy, the correlation coefficient between goal-value discrepancy and perceived family happiness only was found to be negative and statistically significant (-.303, $p < .05$). With Type II discrepancy, no correlation coefficients between goal value discrepancy and measures of well being was statistically significant..

The perceived progress towards goals set by self and by parents was also statistically analyzed to ascertain its effect on well being measures. Table 4 present the correlation

coefficients. The coefficient between satisfaction with perceived progress towards self-set goals and positive affect, .118; negative effect, -.337, $p < .05$; life satisfaction, .270, $p < .05$; self happiness, .173 and family happiness, .228. On the other hand, the correlation coefficients between satisfaction with perceived progress towards goal set by parents and positive affect, .365, $p < .05$; negative affect, .288, $p < .05$; life satisfaction, .342, $p < .05$; self happiness, .355, $p < .05$; and family happiness, .287, $p < .05$ were observed. .

Table 4 : Correlation coefficients between indices of SWB and satisfaction with perceived progress towards self set goal and goals set by parents.

	PA	NA	LS	SH	FH
Satisfaction with Progress towards self-set goals	.118	-.337*	.270*	.173	.228
Satisfaction with Progress towards goals set by parents.	.365*	.288*	.342*	.355*	.287*

* $p < .05$

Discussion

The results indicate that subjects do set their life goals on their own which are discrepant with the goals set by their parents for them and the perceived SWB is differentially influenced by the amount and type of discrepancy. The findings also reflect that progress towards the self-set goal as well

as goals set by parents also substantially influence the person's sense of well being and their family happiness. The significant reduction in positive affect and perceived family happiness as a result of global goal value discrepancy between self and parents for goals set by parents indicates the significant impact of parental expectations on

the SWB of their wards. It extends the hypothesis that for collectivist Indians, happiness or SWB is not an individualistic experience rather, it is a shared phenomenon which depends on the happiness and satisfaction of significant others.

This finding is in congruence with earlier theoretical formulations regarding the complex interaction of culture, goals, and SWB. For example, Kitayama and Markus (2000) theorize that for an individual with independent self-construal (the prototypical self view of individualistic culture) happiness is a subjective state that belongs to an individual and this experience of happiness and life satisfaction is viewed as a personal property. On the other hand, for a person with interdependent view of self (the prototypical self view of collective culture), happiness is an inter-subjective state that is shared with others. Thus, according to this theoretical formulation, while evaluating one's SWB the individual with independent view of self does the evaluation in the context of his/her internal psychological attributes, personal qualities etc., whereas the individual with the interdependent view of self evaluate the same in relation to the happiness and satisfaction of his/her family and significant others.

As far as the relationship of SWB with discrepancy between self and parents in giving importance to self set goals on the one hand and to the goals set by parents on the other is concerned, we find that negative affectivity, dissatisfaction with life and unhappiness in family increases as the corroboration of parental goals decreases. A similar pattern of SWB is observed when there is disagreement between self and parents for the goals set by parents. The divided set of mind between self set goals and goals set by parents is again substantiated when we find that life satisfaction, self rated self-happiness and self rated family happiness increases in both

conditions, i.e., satisfaction with perceived progress towards self-set goals and towards goals set by parents, but this increment in SWB is greater in the later condition.

On the strength of the empirical findings, it can be stated that the youth in India reach on a compromise between the two sets of goals, one self-set goals and another set by parents for her/him. They try to pursue both the goals and their SWB depends on their efforts and progress towards these goals as well as the discrepancy between them. This finding is in tune with the hypothesis that individuals feel relatively happier and satisfied (higher SWB) when they pursue the goals set by parents. Though satisfaction of parental expectations appears to be of paramount importance for SWB of an individual, the significance of self set goals is also reflected in the present findings when we see that pursuance of self-set goals also provide self happiness, family happiness and amelioration of negative affect.

The finding that valuing the parental goals by Indian youths improves their sense of well-being is supported by earlier findings. For example, Radhakrishnan and Chan (1997) observed that conformity with parents emerged as a better predictor of SWB of Indians as compared to Americans. Recently, Miquelon and Vallerand (2006) have reported that pursuance of autonomous goals is positively associated with sense of happiness and self-realization of Canadians, whereas pursuance of controlled goals was found to negatively correlated with the same. Similarly, Oishi and Deiner (2001) reported that attainment of independent goals better predicted the SWB of European Americans as compared to Asians.

On the whole, the findings of the present study suggest that satisfaction with the progress towards life goals enhances one's SWB, however, if there would be any discrepancy between the self and parents in

setting of life goals it would have a deteriorating effect on the SWB of the individual. Such pattern of findings also reflects the role of culture in determining the SWB of an individual. Researchers (e.g., Diener and Suh, 2000) have reported intercultural differences in the nature of determinants of experienced level of SWB. The determinants and processes of experienced SWB depend on cultural values and norms of the respondents. Such observations suggest that processes that determine the SWB in individualistic culture of western society are different than those in a collectivistic culture of Asian countries like India. For example, Suh, Diener, Oishi and Triandis (1997) have reported that respondents of individualistic culture based their satisfaction judgments predominantly on recent emotions whereas collectivists based their life satisfaction judgment on cultural values and norms. Thus it appears that people who are socialized within individualistic culture are more likely to think of their own worth, their own feelings, and their own autonomy when judging their life satisfaction. In contrast, people in a collectivistic culture (like India) are more likely to consider whether it is socially appropriate for them to be happy and satisfied, and might consider the well-being of their family more when deciding if they are satisfied (see Kitayama, 2002). Similarly, Suh, Diener, and Updegraff (2008) observed that when the distinctiveness or separateness of the self is salient (emphasized by individualistic culture) overall life is appraised prominently on the basis of internal emotions, whereas when the self is viewed largely in relation to others (the self view emphasized by collectivistic culture), other people's appraisals, in addition to emotions, seem to become important in evaluating one's life.

The preceding discussion, thus, suggest that the tendency of collective Indians to evaluate their life and well-being in relation

to their family and significant other might be a factor that can explain the observed relationship between self-parent discrepancy (in life goal setting) and SWB. However, further empirical research is needed to substantiate such explanation inasmuch as there are several empirical evidences which demonstrate that the individualistic and collectivistic values coexist among Indians (e.g., Sinha & Tripathi, 1994; Mishra, 1994).

On the basis of the present findings it can be concluded that in Indian (collective) cultural context the evaluation of experience of well-being is not limited to the degree to which personal needs and goals are achieved but it extends to the degree of fulfillment of the needs and goals of relevant others particularly of the family members. The consideration and internalization of needs and goals of the family members even after sacrificing one's own needs and goals is likely to enhance the SWB of the individual of collective Indians who give greater emphasis on the needs of others in comparison to the self-needs. Several researchers have reported that the Indian youths have a tendency to view the goals of their parents as their own whereas the individualists (e.g., Americans) see their personal goals as quite different from the goals of their parents (Radhakrishnan & Chan, 1997). In the light of such observations the findings of the present study imply that the Indians perceive the goals of significant others (e.g., goals set by parents) as their own and as a result the progress towards parental goals enhances their experience of SWB. However, if the discrepancy between self and parent in assigning importance to either self set goals or to goals set by their parents increases to a significant extent then one does not feel happy and satisfied even if the self goals and goals of parents are fulfilled and realized. It also appears that pursuance and satisfaction with life goals, and value or importance given to these goals

differently influence an individual's SWB. Further satisfaction with life goals seems to be such predictor of SWB which is less likely to be influenced by cultural values and norms.

However, it would be premature to generalize such conclusions and implications without further empirical verification as the present study has several limitations. For example, the present study has been conducted on participants of only one culture and thus making conclusions in comparison with other culture would be premature. The relatively small sample of the present study also limits us to make generalizations about Indians. Moreover, given the coexistence of individualism and collectivism among Indians (e.g., Sinha, & Tripathi, 1994; Mishra, 1994), there is also a need to examine the mediating role of individualistic and collective tendencies on the observed relationship between self-parent discrepancy and SWB. However, despite these limitations, the findings do suggest that besides meeting one's own goal the fulfillment of the parental goals have a significant impact on the SWB.

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