



## SATISFACTION WITH LIFE AMONG PORTUGUESE AND INDIAN ADOLESCENTS FROM IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN PORTUGAL

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### ABSTRACT

This study has examined the level of satisfaction with life among adolescents whose families are from India, in comparison with Portuguese adolescents who did not go through an acculturation process and sociodemographic and mental health factors which allowed the prediction of the satisfaction level among them. There were 542 adolescent participants. Three hundred and sixty six were Portuguese and 175 belonged to families coming from India. The participants completed the Revised UCLA Loneliness, the Satisfaction With Life Scale, and a short biographical form. The hypotheses were supported. Indian adolescents and Portuguese adolescents who did not go through an acculturation process did not differ significantly on satisfaction with life. Psychological constructs were more important in the prediction of satisfaction with life than the sociodemographic variables.

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Key-Words: adolescents, ethnocultural groups, mental health, migration, satisfaction with life.

Migration has often been viewed as a highly stressful process and a number of studies have explored its psychological impact by focusing on the prevalence of mental illness in different immigrant groups (Cochrane, 1977; Rack, 1988). However, such studies tend to define mental ill health in terms of admissions to psychiatric hospitals, thus limiting the area of study to the more severe forms of psychological distress.

Subjective well-being is a growing area of psychology that focuses on how people evaluate their lives. Most researchers agree that there are three specific components of subjective well-being that can be operationalized and measured. Two of these components are within the affective domain and the other in the cognitive domain (Diener, 2000; Myers & Diener, 1995). The affective components include the presence of positive affect such as happiness or good feelings and the absence of negative affect.



Negative affect refers to unpleasant feelings such as anxiety and anger. The cognitive component has been conceptualised as the intellectual evaluation of one's life satisfaction either globally or with respect to specific life domains. The present study compares satisfaction of life of Indian adolescents from an immigrant background living in Portugal and young Portuguese living in the same country without migratory experience.

### Satisfaction with life

Shin and Johnson (1978) have defined life satisfaction as an overall assessment of an individual's quality of life according to his chosen criteria. Judgements are based on a comparison with a standard which each subject sets for him/herself. An appropriate standard can not be externally imposed. Diener (1984) has pointed out that the hallmark of subjective well-being is that it centers on personal judgements, not upon some criterion which is judged to be important by the researcher(s). In addition, Diener (1984) has argued that the proper assessment of life satisfaction requires the possibility that different values are imposed by the researcher on the distinctive desirable factors determining satisfaction (e.g., energy and health). Such distinctions should be counteracted by asking them to rate their satisfaction with life as a whole, rather than summing across their satisfaction with specific areas, to obtain a measure of overall life satisfaction. This is particularly important when the focus is on people of diverse ethnocultural background, and who may have different values and perceptions of what may characterise "the good life".

### Indians in Portugal

At present Portugal is simultaneously an emigration and immigration country (Neto & Mullet, 1998; Neto, 2003). There are no current statistics on the number of people from India living in Portugal. The Embassy of India in Portugal estimate the ethnic Indian community and Indians in Portugal together would number approximately around 70, 000, including seven thousand with Indian passports.

According to the Center of the Department of Immigration, Control and Tutors Documentary supplied by the Foreign Service (SEF), there are currently 15 thousand Indians waiting citizenship. Data for 2005 from Central records, estimates there are only 1623 Indian citizens authorized to reside and work in Portugal, and 3353 with authorization to stay until 2010 as people who can live in the country and pursue a work of subordinates, but do not have the freedom to travel in the European Union. These are mostly concentrated in the Lisbon area.

There are four distinct communities (Hindus, Muslims, Ismaeliens, and Roman Catholics of Goa). They differ not only in religion, but also by education: Goans have high educational and occupational standing compared with other groups. The Indian community in Portugal specialize their activities (usually with a family) in retail trade of products imported from the East, as well restaurants and other services marked by ethnic origin. This community is well integrated in the country and has a low rate of child delinquency and school failure (Pinto, 2005).



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### The Present Work

The purpose of this investigation was two-fold. The first objective was to examine whether migration had an effect on happiness, thus in the present study we will compare life satisfaction of young Indians living in Portugal to that of young Portuguese living in the same country.

One basic question about bicultural individuals is whether they are confused outsiders or special individuals with a broader understanding. Until recently, the dominant western view of the multiethnic person was portrayed as troubled and anxious outsiders who lack a clear identity (e.g., Nakashima, 1992). However, the results of recent empirical research have indicated that multiethnic individuals are at no psychological disadvantage in comparison to monoethnic individuals. Researchers have consistently found no differences between self-esteem of multiethnic and monoethnic groups (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996). Two studies have shown that young Portuguese living in France did not differ on loneliness and satisfaction with life from young Portuguese who had never migrated and were living in Portugal (Neto, 1995, 1999). In another study there were no significant differences in level of life satisfaction between Portuguese adolescents living in Portugal and those living in Switzerland (Neto e Barros, 2007).

Thus, the previously negative picture has been replaced by a more optimistic one. Specifically, the contention is that whereas immigration and acculturation may inherently be risky and exacerbate one's vulnerability to symptoms of maladaptation, risks are in themselves not a destiny.

The immigrant group of interest in this study are adolescents of second generation (born in receiving country, or arriving before the age of 7). In this paper, we compare the psychological adaptation of Indian adolescents with immigrant background in Portugal with their host peers. We examine whether satisfaction with life of the second generation immigrants "converges" toward that of the nationals. We do not expect to find significant differences between the level of satisfaction with life of Indian adolescents with immigrant background families to that of Portuguese adolescents.

The second aim was to examine if satisfaction with life can be understood on the basis of demographic and psychological variables. In this vein we will examine whether there were differences in the satisfaction with life according to certain background characteristics, such as gender and religious involvement. Although female teenagers reported more negative affects, they also seem to have experienced greater joys, so that little difference in satisfaction with life was usually found between the genders (Diener, 1984; Neto, 2001a). We therefore did not expect to find gender differences; yet we must be cautious because we have found gender differences in satisfaction with life among Portuguese adolescents living in Portugal (Neto, 1993).

Religion and religious participation can be regarded as one of the domains of well-being. Most studies on church attendance and participation in religious groups showed positive relations to well-being (Argyle, 2001). Argyle (2001) reported that religion produces positive effects on subjective well-being, especially on existential well-being, but also on general happiness, mental and physical health. Thus we expect to find that religious involvement would show a positive influence on satisfaction with life.

Sociodemographic factors account for a small percentage of variance in satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1999). For example, Andrews e Withey (1976) gave a figure less than 10% of the variance in subjective well-being accounted by demographic factors. Thus it is important to examine other factors able to lead to the satisfaction with life, and we will consider also the link between satisfaction with life and other mental health constructs: self-esteem and loneliness.



Self-esteem has been reported to be one of the strongest predictors of well-being (Campbell, 1981). Indeed self-esteem is so closely related to life satisfaction that it could be considered as a component of subjective well-being (Argyle, 2001). Diener's (1984) review of well-being cites 11 studies in which a positive association between self-esteem and well-being was found.

Loneliness has been conceptualised as an individual's dissatisfaction with social relationships accompanied by a negative psychological state (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Satisfaction with life seems to be related to the quality of our social relationships. The research suggests that loneliness is associated with different affective states as being unhappy (Fischer & Philips, 1982). Paloutzian and Ellison (1982) found a substantial association between loneliness and existential well-being.

In summary, this paper was interested in understanding both the level of satisfaction with life among adolescents with immigrant background and its predictors. Specifically, on the basis of theory and existing evidence, the following hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 1 – Satisfaction with life scores of adolescents from Indian immigrant background living in Portugal will not be different from the Portuguese adolescents living in the same country.

Hypothesis 2 – Religious involvement will influence the level of life satisfaction, but gender will not influence it.

Hypothesis 3- A positive correlation should be found between scores for satisfaction with life and self-esteem, and a negative correlation between satisfaction with life and loneliness.

Hypothesis 4 – Mental health factors including self-esteem and loneliness were expected to account for the larger part of the explained variance in satisfaction with life than demographic factors.

## METHOD

### Participants

The participants were 541 students (257 males and 284 females), ages 16 to 19 (M age 17.6 yr.,  $SD = 1.19$ ), who were enrolled in high school education in the Lisbon area. Three hundred and sixty six (166 males and 200 females) were Portuguese and 175 (91 males and 84 females) were Indian from immigrant families. (Table 1). The ethnocultural groups were not significantly associated with gender ( $X^2 = .15$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Table 1 Description of the sample by ethnocultural group, age, and gender

Ethnocultural group	Total of the sample	Gender		Age	
		Males	Females	M	SD
India	175	91	84	17.57	1.24



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Portugal	366	166	200	17.58	1.17
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Total	541	257	284	17.58	1.19
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### Material

All participants were administered the Portuguese versions of the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; Neto, 2000) and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985; Neto, Barros, e Barros, 1990).

After completion of the scales, participants were requested to complete a short biographical form. Beyond asking the sex, age, religion, and ethnicity, other questions were asked. Among them was included one item as a measure of self-esteem: "the way I feel about myself generally is ". This item had appropriately labelled 5-response alternatives.

### Procedure

Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire in the school environment. It took about 20 min to complete. The confidentiality was stressed and the response rate was above 95%.

## RESULTS

### Background Variables and Satisfaction with life

A number of specific questions pertaining to the participants' background were included to assess in an orderly way some of the potential suppositions about how satisfaction with life functions. The approach used, treated each background variable as an independent variable, using participants' sum scores on satisfaction with life scale as dependent variable. One-way analyses of variance were performed on the data.

The means and F ratio for SWLS are shown in Table 2 for ethnocultural group, gender, and religious involvement. The F ratio for each one-way analysis is shown at the top of the relevant column of means.

**Ethnocultural group.** There were no ethnocultural group differences on satisfaction with life  $F(1, 540) = .16, p > .05$ . Indian adolescents ( $M = 23.7$ ) and Portuguese adolescents who did not go through an acculturation process ( $M = 23.9$ ) did not differ significantly on satisfaction with life. These findings support our first hypothesis.

**Gender.** There were no gender differences on satisfaction with life,  $F(1, 540) = 1.32, p > .05$ . Males ( $M = 24.9$ ) and females ( $M = 23.5$ ) did not differ significantly on satisfaction with life.

**Religious involvement.** There were religious involvement differences on happiness ( $F(2, 536) = 10.21, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$ ). The believers/regular attendees ( $M = 24.3$ ) and the believers/nonattendees ( $M = 24.6$ ) showed more satisfaction with life than the



nonbelievers/nonattendees ( $M=21.4$ ). Thus these findings concerning gender and religious involvement support our second hypothesis.

Table 2 Means and F ratio for satisfaction with life as a function of selected background variables

Variable	N	Satisfaction with life
Ethnocultural group		$F = .16$
Indian	175	23.7
Portuguese	366	23.9
Gender		$F = 1.32$
Males	175	24.9
Females	684	24.5
Religion involvement		$F = 10.21^{***}$
Believers/regular attendees	239	24.3a
Believers/non attendees	187	24.6a
Non believers/non attendees	115	21.4b

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

For each variable with means with no subscripts in common differed at the 0.05 level, either by F test directly for a pair of means or by Scheffe test for three means.

### The Relationships between Satisfaction with Life and Mental Health Variables

As can be seen in Table 3 for both ethnocultural groups the correlations between satisfaction with life and self-esteem were significant and positive, and the correlation between satisfaction with life and loneliness was also significant in a negative direction. These findings are in line with hypothesis 3.

Table 3 Correlations between mental health measures and satisfaction with life by ethnocultural group

	Satisfaction with life	
	Indian	Portuguese
Loneliness	-.28***	-.27***
Self-esteem	.27***	.46***

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

To ascertain the contributions of demographic and psychological factors, sequential multiple regressions were performed, where demographic factors (gender and religious involvement) were first introduced in the model (in Step 1) and then the psychological characteristics (self-esteem and





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loneliness) (in the Step 2). Satisfaction with life was regressed separately for Indian and Portuguese participants. This was done in order to see whether there were differences in factors accounting for life satisfaction among the different ethnocultural groups (Table 4). For the Indian adolescents no significant demographic predictors emerged and for the Portuguese adolescents religious involvement contributed significantly to the model, explaining 5% of the variance. On introducing the psychological factors for Indian adolescents there were two factors that contributed significantly to the model: loneliness and self-esteem. For Portuguese adolescents there were three factors that contributed significantly to the model: self-esteem, loneliness, and religious involvement.

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analyses of Variables Predicting Satisfaction with Life among Ethnocultural Groups

Predictor Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	t
Indians				
Demographic predictors (Stepwise)	-	-	-	-
Demographic and psychological well-being predictors (Stepwise)				
1. Loneliness	.28	.08	-.28	-3.81***
2. Self-esteem	.37	.14	.25	3.48**
Portuguese				
Demographic predictors (Stepwise)				
1. Religious involvement	.22	.05	-.22	-4.37***
Demographic and psychological well-being predictors (Stepwise)				
1. Self-esteem	.46	.21	.46	9.86***
2. Loneliness	.49	.24	-.16	-3.35**
3. Religious involvement	.50	.25	-.12	-2.73**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . The beta and t values are for the step at which the variables entered.

## DISCUSSION

This study approached the degree of life satisfaction among adolescents with Indian immigrant families in comparison with Portuguese adolescents who did not go through an acculturation process, and factors that may be related to the level of life satisfaction among them. Four hypotheses were put forward, and these were supported. Before presenting the findings, they should be interpreted cautiously since our conclusions are bound by several limitations in our data. First, the basic design of investigation consisted of cross-sectional sampling of the population. A different shortcoming concerns generalisations of these results to settings culturally different from ours; they should proceed cautiously. The roles of acculturation factors may vary in other contexts. However the results of this study replicate



earlier findings and demonstrate some of the network of background and psychological variables in which happiness is embedded.

Adolescents whose families were from India living in Portugal had not shown lower level of life satisfaction in relation the young Portuguese who had always lived in this country. Young Indians with immigrant background families revealed similar level of life satisfaction to young Portuguese. Therefore, the notion that the geographic mobility of the parents is a basic cause of the psychological maladjustment in its children seems to be incorrect. These results are in agreement with the conclusion that the majority of the immigrants adapt well in host societies, despite the difficulties that they may find in the reply to the cultural changes and the fact of living in the confluence of two or more cultures (Neto, 2002).

Our second hypothesis was supported. No gender differences were found in life satisfaction. This finding is in line with previous studies among migrants' second generation or in accordance with findings among adults (Imamoglu et al., 1993; Warr and Payne, 1992). Although female teenagers reported more negative affects, they also seem to have experienced greater joys, so that little difference in global satisfaction was usually found between the genders.

The relation expected to be found between religious involvement and satisfaction with life could be supported. The believers/regular attendees and the believers/nonattendees showed more life satisfaction than the nonbelievers/nonattendees. Therefore it could be confirmed in accord with diverse research (Argyle, 2001) that religiosity produces positive effect in the satisfaction with life. People involved in religion may be more satisfied than others for many reasons. Three factors have been given serious consideration within psychology. First, religion provides a coherent belief system that allows people to find meaning in life and hope for the future. Religious belief systems allow people to make sense of the adversities, stresses and inevitable losses which occur over the course of the life cycle and to be optimistic about an afterlife in which these difficulties will be resolved. Second, involvement in routine attendance at religious services and being part of a religious community provides people with social support. Third, involvement in religion is often associated with a physically and psychologically healthier lifestyle characterized by prosocial altruistic behaviours (rather than criminality), moderation in eating and drinking, and a commitment to hard work.

The data supported the expected relationship between satisfaction with life and mental health measures. A significant association has been found with the frequency and the degree of positive affect, such as self-esteem and the absence of negative feelings, such as loneliness, and satisfaction with life.

The fourth hypothesis was also supported by the data. Our regression models indicated that about 14% and 25% of the explained variance of life satisfaction can be accounted for by the combined demographic and psychological factors, respectively for the Indians and Portuguese adolescents. Less than 6% of the explained variance could be attributed to demographic factors. Thus, the demographic variables, as could be expected, accounted for a small percentage of variance in life satisfaction. In fact, Andrews and Withey (1976) gave a figure less than 10% of the variance in subjective well-being accounted for by all the demographics they assessed. In this vein Diener (1984) concluded that taken together, demographic variables probably do not account for much more than 15% of the variance. Neto (1995, 2001) and Sam (1998) also found that demographic factors were less relevant to the understanding of life satisfaction than personal factors. Thus, as far as satisfaction with life is concerned, it is rather more important to have an early intervention to improve one's satisfaction at psychological factors, which are more ready to change, than at demographic factors, because many of them do not readily allow themselves for change.





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