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Unlocking Happiness: Analyzing World Happiness Index Rankings and Proposing Strategies for India

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Abstract

The World Happiness Report 2023, released by the United Sustainable Development Network, positions India at 126th out of 137 countries based on parameters such as Healthy Life Expectancy, GDP Per Capita, Generosity, Social Support, Freedom to make Life Choices, and Absence of Corruption. This study explores India's low ranking, attributing it to factors like inequality and unemployment, gender discrimination. The research investigates strategies employed by higher-ranking countries which contributes to happiness and their feasibility in the Indian context. The research also identifies the drawbacks of UN Happiness Index. It includes the factors like sample size, sampling technique, feasibility of the questionnaire, overlooking some factors which can contribute to happiness. It concludes, through secondary research, that not all measures adopted by top-ranking nations are applicable to India. Additionally, the index overlooks various factors contributing to India's happiness. The study advocates for the development of a new, more comprehensive index, acknowledging diverse factors that impact happiness and addressing the drawbacks of the current Happiness Index.

Keywords: *World Happiness Report 2023, United Sustainable Development Network, Healthy Life Expectancy, GDP Per Capita, Generosity, Social Support, Freedom to make Life Choices, Absence of Corruption, Happiness Index, secondary research.*

Introduction

Pulsation is an intrinsic property of life. Great Indian director Satyajit Ray, in his film 'Hirak Rajar Deshe' portrayed the titular character 'Hirak Raja' as the one with endless wealth but an unhappy person. If we look at world's history, the core answer upon which the intellectual human race wanders upon every now and then is "How to be happy?". Religions of the world focus upon the eccentric point and gives various ways of life to be happy and satisfied. It clearly defines the pertinent need of the human race to be content in order for healthy survival.

Around the globe, in our fast moving world, where economies and superpowers have emerged, it is highly important to be in the race and gain economic growth and stability. However, it must be kept in mind that even from a macroeconomic perspective, any growth initiative led by a country is for the development and well-being of its citizens. So the core philosophy is to make the life of the citizens of a country better which in loose terms might also be correlated with happiness of the people of the country. However, in a world of pressing issues, how much people are happy and what work has been done to actually make people happy is of limited scope. Even though it is one of the highly important aspect to focus upon, limited discussions are being taken place.

In present circumstances, as per the World Happiness Report conducted by UN Sustainable Development Network It is being seen that India is lagging behind in terms of general happiness of its citizens. Countries like Finland, Denmark, Icelad, Norway are leading the way. India's standpoint in the index is being critically analyzed and the initiaves which could be replicated from higher ranking countries are also being discussed upon. Another pertinent point of discussion is the index and it's capabilities to correctly represent the situation. The suitability of the index with respect to India keeping in mind the cultural diversity along with the religious inculcations that it bring is being highlighted upon. The research delves into the intricacies of the index and tries to actually bring about effective policy interventions which could be brought

upon in order to make a better tomorrow of India. If found suitable policy makers could use the research as a reference for identifying the problems, and what changes could be brought up.

Objectives

1. Examine the standings of various nations and assess India's position, identifying the factors behind its comparatively lower rank.
2. Explore the approaches adopted by top-ranking countries that positively impact happiness levels.
3. Evaluate the practicality of implementing the successful strategies of high-ranking countries in India.
4. Identify the limitations and drawbacks of the UN Happiness Index.

Literature Review

The Happiness Index, also known as the World Happiness Report, is a survey conducted by the United Nations (World Happiness Report 2023) to measure the happiness and well-being of people in different countries. In 2023 world happiness report came out and India ranked 126 among 136 countries. So there are different reasons why India is so far behind in the rank, other countries are must be taking different steps and doing different things which India may not be able to do yet. And there are some limitations of the UN Happiness Index Report 2023. Several extensive studies have been conducted about why is India lagging behind the Happiness Index and what are the shortcomings of the index? Some previous work of the same reviewed and summarized below:

The article namely "Do you think, India's low ranking given by World Happiness Report, is based on a key misjudgment? Give reasons for your arguments" from Forum IAS criticizes the World Happiness Report's methodology, citing limitations like small sample size, subjective

nature of happiness, and political motivations. It advocates for a revamped approach considering diverse cultural factors for a more accurate assessment of happiness.

Kumar Vivek, IRS , Deputy Commissioner at Ministry of Finance, Government of India, MPA (Columbia University) in an article "Decoding India's Happiness Conundrum: Why the World Happiness Report Fails to Capture the True Essence of India's Well-being" (2023) criticized the World Happiness Report's methodology for India, highlighting issues such as cultural variations, limited determinant factors, and intra-national disparities.

"The concept of measuring happiness and how India can go the Nordic Way"(2019) by Sangeeta Bhattacharyya, R. Roy Burman and Sudipta Paul stratifies countries into Happiness Strata in a Global Happiness Map using the WHR 2018 indices, only to find that India is among the 42 Unhappy Nations of the world. The Nordic (Western European) countries seem to top the happiness charts with Denmark being consistently among the top five. The paper also discusses what India can learn and adopt from Denmark.

Unnati Sahay & Kevin Jesse Warjri in their paper " GROSS HAPPINESS INDEX: A STUDY ON THE FALLING RATE OF HAPPINESS IN INDIA" attempted to explore the various reasons for the falling rate of Gross National Happiness (GNH) in India. The aim of this paper is to find the reasons behind India's rapid fall in GNH, and looking at the problems from multiple dimensions. Focusing on the aim of the research, they tried to get into the core of the multiple problems, taking into account all the issues and see how these aspects are responsible for the falling GNH in India, and tried finding the appropriate solutions towards the end of the research.

RENITA D'SOUZA in her article "Five reasons for an unhappy India"(2021) examines the World Happiness Report (WHR) 2021's insights on India's happiness, highlighting reasons like declining incomes, unfavorable corruption perceptions, lack of social support, low educational attainment, and India's young population.

 The SBI Ecowrap in a report "World Happiness Index flawed, India's rank should have been 48, not 126" criticized India's 126th rank in the World Happiness Index, arguing it should have been 48. The report accused the index of overlooking issues like gun-related violence, civil unrest, and

lack of freedom in better-ranked nations. India's low ranking was contrasted with countries like Ukraine (92), Sri Lanka (112), and Pakistan (108).

Riaz Haq in an article "World Happiness Report 2023: India Among World's Saddest Nations"(2023) tried to show Happiness Scores Trend along with Causes of Unhappiness in India . He pointed several reasons for unhappiness like Rising Suicides, High Unemployment, Hunger Crisis.

"ANALYSING HAPPINESS INDEX AS A MEASURE ALONG WITH ITS PARAMETERS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING INDIA'S RANK IN WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT" a paper by Sarah Ahtesham elaborates the concept of Happiness Index as a measure and analyses various reasons for India to lose its position in the World Happiness Report. Through descriptive study the author appropriately concludes the paper with suitable suggestions.

Kajal Sharma and Sakshi Arora in their paper "Happiness Index with A Comparative Study on India and Finland" (2023) tried to identify the factors that contribute to the happiness of citizens in India and Finland and to examine the differences in the cultural, social, and economic aspects of India and Finland that influence their happiness index. By collecting secondary data the study analysed different approaches and strategies adopted by these countries to promote happiness and well-being. The paper also suggested some recommendations for India to improve its rank in the happiness index.

"India ranks 126th in World Happiness Index 2023 amidst rising mental health concerns" (2023) by The Economic Times stated that India ranks 126th out of 146 countries in the World Happiness Index, indicating low levels of happiness. The decline has been attributed to the mental health crisis in the country, Sales of antidepressants and mood worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. Stabilizers have seen a significant increase, with a 41% surge in India and a 35% rise in Gujarat. The overall sale of drugs related to neurological and central nervous system therapy has also increased by 28%.

NILANJAN GHOSH and SOUMYA BHOWMICK in their article "The unbearable sadness of "being happy": Biases in the World Happiness Report" criticized the World Happiness Report highlights several key issues: cultural bias in defining happiness, subjectivity in self-reported

data leading to inaccuracies, small and biased sample frames, inconsistent methodologies over years, overlooking geopolitical factors and important indicators like job security and income inequality, misinterpreting aspirations as unhappiness, and problems with imputation methods. The report's validity is questioned, especially in its comparison between the Global North and South, suggesting a need for a more inclusive and culturally diverse approach to measuring happiness.

Sairindhri Sengupta in her article "What Does The Happiness Index Ranking Mean For India?" pointed India's 126th ranking out of 149 countries in the 2023 World Happiness Index highlights deep-seated issues such as inequality, discrimination, environmental problems, and corruption. The low ranking emphasizes the need for comprehensive efforts from the government, civil society, and citizens to address these challenges, prioritize gender equality, and invest in basic services. Collaboration is essential to enhance the well-being and happiness of all Indians.

The article "Is India an unhappy country? Find out why the World Happiness Index is reading us Indians wrong" discussed India's low ranking (136th out of 146 countries) in the 2022 World Happiness Index and questions the methodology behind the ranking. It criticizes the subjective measurements used, such as happiness score, social support, freedom to make life choices, generosity, perceptions of corruption, and institutional trust. The author argues that these measurements do not accurately reflect the complexities of happiness, especially in the context of India's cultural and historical background. The article calls for a more nuanced understanding of happiness and challenges policymakers to address the underlying issues affecting the country's well-being.

Parul Oberoi, Shalu Chopra and Yukti Seth in their paper titled "A Comparative Analysis Of The Factors Affecting Happiness Index" (2020) tried to analyze the happiness index and its relationship with various factors by using survey method with the help of a questionnaire. The results have been presented by using pie charts, graphs and tables. The tools of ANOVA and multiple regression have been used to measure the extent of dependence of the factors on happiness index. The study focused on 15-25 year-olds, equally distributed by gender. They came to the conclusion that Low income and single status prevalent. Factors affecting happiness:

physical well-being, freedom, social support. Males reported higher happiness due to better well-being and social support.

EMILIANA R. SIMON-THOMAS in the study "Are World Happiness Rankings Culturally Biased?" (2023) challenges the cultural bias in happiness measurements, indicating that current methods overlook diverse cultural perspectives. By adjusting scores based on cultural beliefs, the study shows happiness in interdependent cultures is underestimated. It emphasizes the need for fair methods and more research on cultural influences in happiness.

Praveen Dwivedi in his article "Happiness Index is Flawed" (2023) stated that The Happiness Index, used to measure a country's well-being, has flaws in accurately reflecting India's happiness. It relies on limited surveys, excluding rural areas and cultural diversity. Economic growth emphasis disregards income inequality issues. Social and political factors impacting happiness aren't considered. A more comprehensive approach, considering cultural diversity, income inequality, and social factors, is needed for a true representation of India's happiness levels.

The lack of available literature or article on Happiness index despite its significance as well Concerns about India's backwardness presents a research gap. It is evident from the literature review that the UN Happiness Index 2023 has several methodological limitations and there are several reasons for India to be behind this ranking list. That is why this indexation will not fit for all countries and will not fit for India also. My research is to find out why India is behind in the list and why are the countries at the top of the list doing so well in the rankings? And what are the steps they are taking for such a good ranking to implement those steps on India and see how successful it will be.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this research involves the utilization of secondary data sources, encompassing research papers, journals, articles, and websites. These resources were accessed to acquire relevant information, contributing to a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of data for the study.

UN Happiness Index Methodology

The World Happiness Report 2023 utilizes Gallup World Poll survey data spanning 2020 to 2022. Derived from respondents' answers to the main life evaluation question, known as the Cantrill Ladder, individuals rate their current lives on a scale from 0 (worst) to 10 (best). The rankings, obtained from nationally representative samples during 2020-2022, contribute to the Happiness Index. The index is computed by averaging respondents' survey results. Although the number of surveyed individuals and countries varies annually, the Gallup World Poll typically engages over 100,000 people in 130 countries. The rankings rely solely on survey scores, employing Gallup weights for representative estimates. (World Happiness Report, 2023)

The Gallup World Poll

The Gallup World Poll, the data source for the World Happiness Report, involves interviews with approximately 1,000 residents annually in over 150 countries. Conducted by Gallup, this extensive survey selects participants randomly, focusing on registered civilians aged 15 and above. Respondents, interviewed face-to-face or by telephone, answer standardized questions in their native languages for statistically comparable results. The collected data, along with other sources, is utilized by the Global Happiness Council to compile the comprehensive World Happiness Report. Face-to-face interviews took an hour, while telephone interviews lasted 30 minutes. (World Happiness Report, 2023)

Sample Size

Each country typically has an annual sample of 1,000 people, resulting in a three-year total of 3,000 surveys. To ensure a current and reliable estimate of life evaluations, the report combines responses from the three most recent years, with the current edition incorporating data from 2020 to 2022. (World Happiness Report, 2023)

Six Parameters

1. **GDP per capita**

For GDP Per Capita they have divided the GDP with the total population and have considered three years moving average and standardized it between 0-1 to represent the score. (World Happiness Report, 2023)

2. Social support

The definition of social support is based on survey results from the Gallup World Poll data.

In the survey, they asked the respondents the following question:

"If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you whenever you need them, or not?"

The answer to the question was standardized between 0-1 with respect to how much help they got. (World Happiness Report, 2023)

3. Healthy life expectancy

Good Healthy life expectancy is being calculated by World Health Organization (WHO). They collected the data from WHO and in the same way have considered three years moving average and standardized it between 0-1 to represent the score. (World Happiness Report, 2023)

4. Freedom to make life choices

Freedom to make life choices is another important factor in the Happiness Index.

Similar to social support, the Gallup World Poll survey results are used to determine this indicator. The following query was posed to applicants:

"Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?"

Similarly the answer to the question was standardized between 0-1 to represent the score. (World Happiness Report, 2023)

5. Generosity

The Gallup World Poll survey results also measured generosity by asking participants to react to the following question

"Have you donated money to a charity in the past month?"

Again the answer to the question was standardized between 0-1 to represent the score. (World Happiness Report, 2023)

6. Perceptions of corruption

The Happiness Index also identifies "perceptions of corruption" as a critical component. It is computed by taking the average of the responses to the next two inquiries:

"Is corruption widespread throughout the government or not?"

"Is corruption widespread within businesses or not?"

Again, the average of the two answers have been standardized between 0-1 which determines the perceptions of corruption for each country. (World Happiness Report, 2023)

Positive Affect

Positive affect has been defined by the average of three factors in Gallup World Poll: laugh, enjoyment and doing interesting work. The answers to each of the ensuing three questions represent these measures: "Did you smile or laugh a lot yesterday?", and "Did you experience the following feelings during A LOT OF THE DAY yesterday? How about Enjoyment?", "Did you learn or do something interesting yesterday?" again the average of the three responses has been standardized between 0-1 to represent positive affect. (World Happiness Report, 2023)

Negative Affect

Negative affect has been defined by the average of three factors in Gallup World Poll: worry, sadness and anger. The answers to each of the ensuing three questions represent these measures "Did you experience the following feelings during A LOT OF THE DAY yesterday? How about Worry?", "Did you experience the following feelings during A LOT OF THE DAY yesterday? How about Sadness?", and "Did you experience the following feelings during A LOT OF THE

DAY yesterday? How about Anger?" again the average of the three responses has been standardized between 0-1 to represent negative affect. (World Happiness Report, 2023)

On the basis of the above parameters they calculated the World Happiness Score and gave ranking of each country based on the World Happiness Score.

Ranking of the Countries

The UN Sustainable Development Network ranked countries based on their Happiness Score. Top-ranking nations include Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Israel, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and New Zealand. Lagging behind is India at 126th, while countries like Malawi, Botswana, Congo, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, and Lebanon are also among those falling behind. Afghanistan holds the lowest ranking.

India's Happiness Ranking

In 2023 United Nations Sustainable Development Network published World Happiness Report 2023 where India ranked 126th out of 136 countries which is very disheartening. To address this concerning issue, it becomes imperative to delve into the underlying factors contributing to the perceived unhappiness for Indians so that we can jump to the solution. This chapter aims to determine whether Indians are genuinely unhappy, pinpointing specific reasons for discontent.

World Happiness Report 2023	
Rank	**Name of Country**
1st	Finland
2nd	Denmark
3rd	Iceland
4th	Israel
5th	Netherlands
6th	Sweden
7th	Norway
8th	Switzerland
9th	Luxembourg
10th	New Zealand
126th	India

World Happiness Report 2023

The nation's chronic dissatisfaction is fueled by multiple factors, encompassing rapid urbanization, city congestion, unemployment, and negative perceptions of corruption, escalating healthcare expenses, concerns about women's safety, environmental pollution, and compromised mental well-being. This ranking should not astonish those acquainted with the country's socio-economic landscape—a terrain marked by sharp disparities, where swift modernization and economic growth cohabit with entrenched inequality, poverty, and social injustice.

Inequality

India's low ranking is significantly attributed to its pronounced inequality, with wealth concentrated among a few, leaving millions in poverty. This stark contrast fuels frustration and disillusionment among citizens who perceive inadequate government efforts. Ironically, individuals in metro cities, despite average jobs, boast about being in the top 6% economically—a poignant irony reflecting the nation's socioeconomic disparities. (Sairindhri Sengupta, 2023)

Declining incomes and unemployment

Ninety percent of India's workforce operates in the informal sector, lacking social and income security. This absence leaves them vulnerable to economic shocks, as seen during the recent pandemic. The informal workforce, already grappling with low-income employment, experienced a disproportionately heavier economic burden and subsequent misery, exacerbating the challenges faced during the recovery period. (Soumyata Singh,2022)

In India, despite education, many young individuals face prolonged unemployment due to scarce job notifications in government sectors. This persistent issue leads to widespread dissatisfaction among the youth, prompting protests that contribute to social unrest. The gap between education and employment opportunities fuels discontent and poses challenges to the nation's social fabric.

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination in India causes unhappiness for both men and women. While women face limited opportunities and societal constraints, men may experience pressure to conform to traditional roles. These inequalities create a stifling environment, hindering personal and collective well-being. Achieving gender equality is essential for fostering a happier and more harmonious society.

Women's Safety

The pervasive issue of women's safety in India contributes to widespread unhappiness by fostering fear and insecurity. High rates of harassment and violence against women restrict their freedom and well-being. Addressing this problem through social and legal measures is essential to create a safer and happier environment for all.

Rising Suicides

The rise in suicides in India is affirmed by experts, corroborated by government data illustrating a notable increase in the country's suicide rate. According to The Hindu, India recorded its highest suicide rate in this century, standing at 12 suicides per 100,000 population. Experts express concern that the actual number of suicides may be higher than reported, suggesting significant underreporting. Furthermore, there is a prevailing worry that the figures and suicide rates might have continued to escalate in 2022. This disturbing trend underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding and effective measures to address the mental health challenges contributing to the increase in suicides. (RiazHaq,2023)

Environmental Issues

India's low Happiness Index ranking is influenced by its environmental challenges, including being among the most polluted nations globally, experiencing elevated air and water pollution levels. This directly harms citizens' well-being, leading to increased respiratory illnesses and health issues. Poor air quality alone results in over 1 million annual deaths, with an additional 1 million attributed to waterborne diseases, as per the World Health Organization (WHO).

The low Happiness Index in India may also stem from societal expectations, compelling individuals to conform to societal and familial norms rather than pursuing personal happiness. For example, people often engage in studies and careers they are not passionate about, resulting in dissatisfaction. Families exert significant pressure on individuals to marry upon reaching a certain age, irrespective of personal readiness, leading to unhappy marriages. Early parenthood without sufficient resources adds mental stress. Gender inequality further exacerbates the situation, especially in rural areas, where women face educational restrictions, dowry-related stress, and prevalent domestic violence. These factors collectively contribute to a pervasive sense of unhappiness in various aspects of life.

Strategies of High Ranking countries which contributes to the Happiness

Examining the World Happiness Index 2023 reveals the top 10 countries as Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Israel, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and New Zealand. These nations' success can be attributed to initiatives promoting well-being of its residents. So in this section we will try to know what things are those countries are doing which contributes to the happiness of its residents.

Finland which holds first rank in Happiness Index has a well-designed social policies are instrumental in fostering happiness and overall well-being among its residents. Public authorities, employers, and individuals collectively finance social security expenses, with 50%, 38%, and 11% contributions, respectively. Statutory pensions, encompassing national and employment pensions, ensure financial security based on residency duration and work history, with tax exemptions for those relying solely on the national pension. Finland provides comprehensive unemployment benefits, including basic and earning-related allowances, the latter requiring membership in an unemployment fund.

Family support includes child allowances, increased for each child, additional aid for single parents, and various allowances related to maternity, paternity, and parental care. Notably, the emphasis on work-life balance is a cornerstone of Finland's approach, featuring shorter work

hours, generous holidays, family-focused policies, and flexible schedules. This commitment significantly contributes to the happiness and well-being of the population. (SGI 2020)

In Denmark which holds second rank Danish welfare model, characterized by equality and universal access, is unique, fostering happiness, social trust, and community spirit therefore being the second happiest country. It stands out globally for its exceptional social policies, featuring a flexible welfare system, universal healthcare, and extensive parental leave. Recent education reforms have enhanced outcomes, though challenges persist, including rising poverty and inequality rates. Immigration policies emphasize integration, and Denmark maintains high security levels. Denmark exceeds UN development assistance targets, funding various tax-funded benefits and services, including healthcare, education, and cultural activities.. The Danish embrace of high taxes stems from the belief in supporting the common good, reinforcing the social safety net. Trust and safety are integral to Danish culture, reflecting in the society's honesty, low corruption, and a sense of security, allowing for children's independence and freedom. (SGI 2020)

The Netherlands, ranking 5th, recently enacted a new pension law that simplifies regulations and includes freelance workers in the system, reflecting ongoing efforts to improve and streamline governance. (SGI 2020)

Sweden, ranking 6th in happiness, boasts a high-quality healthcare system that operates through a single-payer tax-funded model. The electoral processes are meticulously regulated, and political parties receive both public and private funding, with recent legislation increasing transparency in financial contributions. Media independence is robustly protected, fostering a competitive sector where online media plays an increasingly significant role. Extensive access to government information is available online, and civil rights are staunchly upheld. Constitutional limitations on restricting citizens' mobility prevented the imposition of lockdowns or curfews during the pandemic. (SGI 2020)

Norway which has been ranked 7th operates on a social democratic model, funded by general taxes on income, consumption, and fortune. The principle is progressive taxation, contributing to an egalitarian society. Eligible residents enjoy comprehensive benefits, including work-related support, health and medicine coverage, pregnancy and child welfare benefits, and free education.

The Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration assists individuals facing unemployment or health challenges. The public healthcare system is robust, with citizens accessing general practitioners. Parents receive paid leave, and children enjoy free public education. This social democratic approach aims to create a more equal society by providing essential services through progressive taxation.

Switzerland, positioned at 8th place, excels in the quality of its education system. Pension levels are generally high, contributing to the overall well-being of the population. Luxembourg, at rank 9, is currently undergoing educational reforms emphasizing creativity and digital skills. The government's provision of iPads and software during pandemic lockdowns showcases its commitment to education. High minimum wages and housing assistance funds help mitigate the impact of soaring housing costs. Various government programs in recent years aim to enhance citizen participation. (SGI 2020)

New Zealand, holding the 10th spot, effectively managed its healthcare system during the pandemic, despite limited resources, thanks to well-implemented lockdowns and policy interventions. The widespread use of digital tools further contributed to the country's success. The population demonstrates strong policy knowledge, evident in the substantial number of comments submitted by voters on issues of public importance. (SGI 2020)

Feasibility of the Strategies of High Ranking Countries in India

India is a unique country in terms of its people, culture and history and heritage. It is the largest democracy in the world, who got independence from exploitative British rule 75 years ago. Our nation is still a developing nation, however our growth rate has been remarkable especially in the last decade. While India is leading the way, we can always learn from countries having better standings than us. On closely analyzing the top countries in terms of Happiness Index rankings, a common facility for most of the countries was either access to cheap or tax paid healthcare model. In India, such free or incentivized healthcare models are already being implemented by various state Governments and the Central Government however the challenge after access is the quality of these Government facilities. India is not just few islands of sporadic growth, therefore

it is often found out that in various parts of the country especially in the rural areas, health care is the one which greatly suffers in terms of quality as well as access. India's healthcare scenario is the one that needs drastic improvements at the grass root level there by providing such a large population with better facilities. Once a certain degree of health care standard is reached, it is pertinent to understand that happiness has a positive effect in longevity of a healthy population (Veenhoven, 2008), therefore a cycle of happiness and being healthy starts.

Another remarkable common characteristic among all high performing nations was democratically strong Government having transparency in electoral findings and proceedings. While electoral challenges in India is not strictly a logistical challenge, better transparency in terms of funding and process can actually push for a stronger Government thereby leading people up for better development activities and more self-reliance. Education too is a common theme where India can have a better stance, pushing for more vocational education, skill based therefore pulling up a population from poverty.

It is important to note that the situation and circumstances in India is vastly different than any other country. The priorities are different in terms of national policy however it is also pertinent to note that India, the concept of happiness is vastly different than a westernized idea. This leads to a fundamental question whether the index is actually fit to represent a country like India where there is not a single calendar month which goes by without a festival happening at some part of the country which is a phenomenon greatly missing in the West.

UN Happiness Index Shortcomings

The essence of a happiness index is to authentically depict individual happiness. But on critical inspection of the happiness index published by UN sustainable development network, certain shortcomings can be identified. Those are discussed hereafter.

Parameter selection

United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network took six parameters to calculate Happiness Index 1. GDP Per Capita 2. Healthy Life Expectancy 3.Social Support 4. Generosity

5.Freedom to make life choices 6. Absence of Corruption which actually cannot represent the happiness of a person truly.

Happiness is deeply intertwined with cultural values, and these values vary widely among nations. For instance, familial bonding is a cornerstone of happiness in countries like India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The strong emphasis on family ties and social connections significantly influences the well-being of individuals in these societies.

Furthermore, the role of cultural festivals cannot be understated. Different nations celebrate diverse traditions, whether rooted in religious practices or agricultural rituals. These festivities contribute significantly to the collective joy and sense of identity within a community. Integrating cultural values, familial bonding, and diverse festivals as parameters for the Happiness Index could provide a more accurate reflection of subjective well-being. Customizing these criteria for individual countries acknowledges the unique factors that shape happiness, fostering a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to measuring and promoting sustainable development.

Inappropriate Questionnaire for each parameter

The Gallup World Poll's inquiries across diverse parameters cast significant doubt on the suitability of the entire index. Queries concerning social support, generosity, absence of corruption, and freedom to make life choices are under scrutiny due to their subjective nature, dependence on context, possible biases, and inadequacy in reflecting a holistic societal viewpoint.

Social Support: The Gallup World Poll's inquiry about social support relies on a subjective question regarding the availability of friends or relatives during times of trouble. The inherent subjectivity poses a challenge, as individuals with strong personal networks might affirm support, while those lacking such connections may express a lack thereof. However, this fails to capture the broader societal support mechanisms, such as governmental or communal assistance, which would offer a more comprehensive view of social support across diverse circumstances.

Generosity: The metric for generosity, centered on whether individuals have donated money to charity in the past month, is criticized for its contextual dependence. The appropriateness of this question is contingent upon the demographic being surveyed and the timing of the survey. For instance, a student or a struggling farmer might not be in a position to contribute, while a prosperous businessperson may express a more favorable response. The question's inadequacy arises from its failure to account for varying socio-economic contexts and individual circumstances.

Absence of Corruption: The questions related to the absence of corruption, addressing its prevalence in government and business, face criticism for being inherently biased. Individuals may be influenced by their political affiliations, leading to differing perceptions of corruption levels. Those supporting the ruling party might downplay corruption, while the opposition could emphasize its prevalence. This subjectivity compromises the reliability of the index in accurately gauging the actual extent of corruption within a society.

Freedom to Make Life Choices: The freedom to make life choices parameter, gauged by individuals' satisfaction with their freedom to choose, is deemed inappropriate due to its inherent bias based on personal circumstances. A downtrodden housewife and an independent working woman may provide contrasting responses, highlighting the question's failure to capture a universal sense of freedom. A more comprehensive approach would involve evaluating the liberalism of the government and the progressiveness of the community to provide a more nuanced understanding of individual agency within a given society.

Sample Size

The inadequacy of a small sample size, such as the inclusion of only 3000 people from each country in happiness indices, poses a substantial limitation. Particularly in countries like China, India, and the United States, with populations exceeding a billion, this sample size fails to capture the diverse spectrum of experiences. Happiness is multifaceted, influenced by cultural and regional variations, rendering a larger sample essential for a more accurate portrayal of overall well-being. Increasing the sample size would enhance the statistical robustness of the happiness index, ensuring a more representative reflection of the sentiments and satisfaction levels across diverse populations.

Selection of Target Audience

The selection of the target audience in any type of survey, as diverse socioeconomic backgrounds can influence responses. The Gallup survey team must carefully consider demographic representation to ensure a comprehensive understanding. If the questionnaire predominantly targets affluent individuals, responses might skew towards positive sentiments, neglecting the struggles faced by the economically disadvantaged. Conversely, focusing solely on the less educated may overlook nuanced perspectives from the educated population. Striking a balance in sampling diverse demographics is essential to capture the multifaceted nature of happiness. Failure to do so lead to a distorted Happiness Index that inadequately reflects the true state of well-being within a society. It's imperative that the survey methodology accounts for these variations to provide an accurate and inclusive representation of happiness across different strata, fostering a more meaningful understanding of societal well-being.

Unexpected ranking of nations experiencing conflict and facing economic difficulties

The World Happiness Report's rankings, which rate nations like Iraq, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Ukraine higher than India despite their current political unrest, economic crises, and conflicts, cast doubt on the validity and suitability of the report's methodology. This sequence, which seems contradictory, may indicate that the true impact of significant difficulties on population well-being has not been fully captured. The disparities found highlight the need for a more thorough and contextually aware method of measuring happiness internationally. These results raise questions about the report's capacity to provide a meaningful and accurate assessment of happiness and highlight the need for methodological improvements that more accurately capture the complex and multifaceted nature of various national contexts. (Kumar Vivek, 2023)

Shortcomings with Respect to India

A nation ought to be wealthy both materially and energetically. A nation's GDP might be a benchmark for its wealth; however, Gross National Happiness (GNH) is also necessary.

Happiness is such a critical concept that it delves into a fundamental question "what is the need for wealth if people are unhappy?". India is now ranked 126th out of 136 nations in the World Happiness Report (WHR). It is published by Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), It makes use of a framework to assess individuals' perceptions of their own lives and well-being using some parameters. However the parameters that are being used to asses happiness is of debatable in nature when assessing happiness of Indian people is in question. On critically investigating the methods and analyzing the methodology the following shortcomings of the index could be identified.

Inadequate consideration of cultural differences in subjective well-being: The World Happiness Report, employing the Cantril ladder as a key metric for well-being, operates under the assumption that happiness is universally comprehended and experienced uniformly across cultures. However, this approach neglects the influence of cultural disparities in the interpretation and manifestation of happiness, potentially leading to skewed assessments. In India, for instance, where happiness is intricately linked to spiritual practices, community engagement, and familial connections, the Cantril ladder may inadequately gauge genuine happiness levels. The emphasis on individualistic notions of well-being may overlook the holistic and interconnected aspects of happiness deeply rooted in cultural contexts, thus limiting the accuracy of the assessment in diverse societies like India. (Kumar Vivek,2023)

Restricted variety of significant parameters: The World Happiness Report employs a narrow range of determinants, including GDP, life expectancy, generosity, social support, freedom, and corruption, to assess happiness. While these factors hold importance, they fail to capture the full spectrum of elements contributing to happiness. Happiness, being inherently subjective, eludes fixed parameters. In a collectivist society like India, the criteria for happiness markedly differ from those in individualistic societies. The report's methodology overlooks India's distinctive cultural, spiritual, and social dimensions, integral factors in the nation's happiness, thereby limiting the comprehensiveness of the assessment within the country's unique context. (Kumar Vivek, 2023)

Neglect of intra-national diversity in India: The World Happiness Report overlooks the substantial regional variations in economic development, social norms, and cultural practices

within India. This omission in the methodology may result in oversimplifying and distorting the representation of happiness levels across the country. Given India's diverse regions with distinct socio-economic and cultural dynamics, it is essential to acknowledge and incorporate these differences for a more accurate assessment of overall happiness. The current methodology's neglect of intra-national heterogeneity undermines a nuanced understanding of well-being, potentially misrepresenting the diverse happiness experiences within India. (Kumar Vivek, 2023)

Methodological limitations: The Gallup World Poll, on which the report is based, may have limitations with regard to respondents' comprehension of the poll questions and interest to participate. Only a tiny fraction of citizens of a country participates in the report survey. Thus, the feedback of these people (about a thousand) determines the outcomes for all the citizens (about 130 crore), which may not be a realistic perception.

The survey questions exhibit a significant bias towards Western ideals of happiness, potentially overlooking cultural variations. For instance, the inquiry, "Did you smile or laugh a lot yesterday?" may not resonate with certain cultural groups, as expressions of happiness vary, leading to cultural bias in the methodology.

The report heavily relies on self-reported data, introducing the potential for biases and inaccuracies. While perception-based surveys often incorporate a random disturbance term to address this bias, maintaining open-ended questions like "Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday? How about Enjoyment?" can increase the risk of response bias, leading to subjectivity. The challenge lies in obtaining objective responses suitable for cardinal and ordinal measurement metrics with such open-ended questions. Consequently, constructing an index based on perceptions, especially ones contingent on open-ended queries, is evidently flawed. (Kumar Vivek,2023)

Arbitrary weightage distribution to all factors: The report assigns equal weight to the six factors under evaluation, potentially failing to accurately represent their actual importance in determining happiness. In the Indian context, for instance, the weight given to GDP may not be as relevant as the significance attributed to social support and family ties. A more nuanced

weighting system that considers the specific cultural context would be more suitable in capturing the true determinants of happiness.(Kumar Vivek,2023)

Neglect of Varied Developmental Stages: The World Happiness Report makes comparisons between countries at different developmental stages, possibly resulting in misleading assessments. India, being a developing nation with a substantial population and notable income inequality, encounters distinct challenges not adequately addressed by the report's methodology. Contrasting India with developed countries boasting higher GDPs and more advanced social welfare systems may not accurately depict the genuine well-being experienced by individuals in the country. A more context-sensitive approach, acknowledging these disparities, would present a more valid comparison of happiness levels across nations.

Need For a New Index

While the shortcomings of the Happiness index which has been used is evident, it brings out the fact that a better index with a more transparent representation is required. Each country has their own unique ideas and customs which form an important aspect of their daily life. It is particularly important to take into consideration the individual customs of countries into the parameters of the index. While unique customs cannot be a part of an unified index, it is important to assign some weightages to this parameter which would not be a fixed parameter but vary according to country and their own discourse. A floating parameter where a country can put up their own rituals, like for example the influence of big scale festivals as a component in the index might be introduced alongside the fixed parameters such as GDP, and so forth. The component might be represented by parameters such as investment in big festivals of any such indice, and which would vary for each individual country.

Moreover, the index can have a different approach towards sampling, taking into consideration the population size, a proportionate share of population with different income groups might be considered for a more accurate representation. Apart from income based, temporal distribution of samples might also be considered in order to accurately represent people of different regions in

our unique country and the aggregate value must be taken as a true representation of happiness among people of India.

 Developing a new index is a very relevant and important task however it requires a complete research on itself with more time and resource allocated to it, in order to have a better representation of happiness.

Conclusion

The Dalai Lama once remarked, "The purpose of our life is to be happy," a sentiment universally appealing, yet complicated by the diverse interpretations of happiness. The United Nations Development Network's Happiness Report has quantified happiness on a global scale, aiming to establish a standardized metric. However, the challenge lies in the subjective nature of happiness, with individuals finding joy through disparate avenues. This attempt at universal measurement has encountered limitations, evident in the paradoxical observation that countries ranking high in happiness indices may also exhibit elevated suicide rates.

The established criteria for measuring happiness may oversimplify a concept that is inherently complex and deeply personal. Varied cultural, societal, and individual factors contribute to divergent perceptions of happiness. While top-ranking countries demonstrate equal distribution of health and education resources, these benchmarks may not encapsulate the nuanced nature of happiness, particularly in regions like India where accessibility to basic necessities remains uneven.

It becomes evident that the pursuit of a standardized criterion for happiness is an ongoing challenge. The essence of happiness may elude a singular definition, as cultural nuances, individual circumstances, and societal structures influence people's perceptions differently. Therefore, the focus should shift towards a future where happiness indices acknowledge and adapt to the diverse measures of joy. Recognizing that the power to measure happiness extends

beyond a simple index is crucial for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of well-being on both a national and global scale.

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