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# ***Cross-Cultural Differences in Happiness and Life Satisfaction: A Comparative Study Across Emerging and Developed Economies***

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## **Abstract**

*This study investigates cross-cultural differences in happiness and life satisfaction across emerging and developed economies, with the aim of understanding how economic and cultural contexts influence subjective well-being. Based on the results of the World Values Survey, the research design is quantitative and comparative as it aims to study the differences in well-being among many countries. To test the relationship between economic classification and subjective well-being, descriptive, comparative, and regression analysis are conducted and the demographic variables age, sex, income, and education are held constant. The results show that the people in developed economies record much higher happiness and life satisfaction than those in emerging economies. Nevertheless, the significant differences among the two groups underscore the fact that cultural factors are still relevant in determining the outcome of well-being. The findings also show that happiness and life satisfaction have a strong positive correlation which supports the multidimensional character of subjective well-being. Moreover, the income and education become important predictors of well-being and the impact of socio-economic conditions and cultural influences. The research adds to the knowledge on global human behaviour through combining cultural and economic lenses, and it has practical implications to policymakers who want to enhance well-being in various societal settings.*

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural behaviour; Happiness; Life satisfaction; Emerging and developed economies; Subjective well-being

## **1. Introduction**

The study of human behavior in a global context has grown to be of more significance in the times of rapid globalization, cultural exchange and socio-economic change. One of the most important dimensions of human behavior subjective well-being, as possibly measured by such variables as happiness and life satisfaction, has become a serious predictor of individual and societal development (Adedeji et al., 2023; Jovanović et al., 2024). Happiness is the emotional condition and daily experiences of individuals and life satisfaction is a wider cognitive assessment of the quality of life. These constructs are not only core to research in psychology, but also important to policy-makers, organizations and communities in their quest to improve the quality of life among various groups of people Canatay et al., 2023).

Studies in cross-cultural research have continuously shown that cultural values, traditions, and social expectations influence the way people perceive and report their well-being (Germani et al., 2021; Kim and Sasaki, 2024). As an example, collectivist cultures might place a stronger focus on social harmony and community ties, as the main factors of happiness, and individualistic cultures might be more focused on individual accomplishment and independence. Meanwhile, the economic context is important in determining the outcome of well-being. There are developed economies with higher income levels, resource access, and institutional stability that can be beneficial to life satisfaction (Helliwell et al., 2021). Conversely, emerging economies can exhibit other trends of well-being that are dependent on economic growth, inequality, and changing social forms. It has also been found that social support and trust are also significant determinants of life satisfaction across nations (Bi et al., 2021).

Cross-national datasets like the World Values Survey are valuable sources of information on cultural and behavioral variations among nations on a large scale (Haerpfer et al., 2022). Empirical research also suggests that the emotional climate of the society and cultural values substantially influence the ways people live and judge their lives (Krys et al., 2022). In addition, the definition and understanding of happiness and life satisfaction can be different in various cultural contexts, which are indicative of different social and psychological constructs (Brailovskaia et al., 2022). Past studies also indicate that life satisfaction indicators tend to be culturally biased, especially those based on an individualistic viewpoint (Krys et al., 2021). In spite of such contributions, the current studies have failed to incorporate cultural and economic perspectives into a comparative platform that looks at the two aspects at the same time and at a global scale. This paper fills this gap by examining the cross-cultural variation in the happiness and life satisfaction among emerging and developed economies using data obtained through the world values survey. The study aims to determine the presence of any significant disparities in well-being between these economic groups by applying a comparative approach and to examine how the cultural contexts aid such differences.

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- (1) to examine the differences in happiness and life satisfaction between emerging and developed economies;
- (2) to analyse the influence of socio-economic factors such as income and education on subjective well-being; and
- (3) to explore the role of cultural context in shaping variations in well-being across countries.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This research has a quantitative, cross-sectional and comparative research design as it seeks to discuss cross-cultural differences in happiness and life satisfaction in different countries that are classified as either emerging and developed economies. Quantitative approach is suitable since the aim of the study is to examine the measurable indicators of subjective well-being in a large and heterogeneous population. A cross-sectional design will be able to analyze the changes in well-being in a particular time within a number of countries and identify the patterns and differences between the economic groups. Moreover, the comparative paradigm is the focal point of the research, which allows conducting a systematic assessment of behavioural variations in the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The study is based on the analysis of

the secondary data, which will give the opportunity to study large and internationally comparable data, which will increase the generalizability and external validity of the results.

## **2.2 Data Source**

The data used in this study is based on the world values survey (WVS) which is among the largest global research programs that deals with human beliefs, values and social behaviour. The WVS gathers national representative data on a broad variety of countries via standardised survey instruments, making the data comparable across cultural and socio-economic contexts. The data sample covers a variety of areas, encompassing developed and developing economies and containing data regarding subjective well-being, demographic data, and socio-cultural attitudes. To carry out the present study, a certain wave of the WVS data is chosen due to the presence of crucial variables, like happiness and life satisfaction. Significant use of WVS data is specifically suitable because of its rigour of methodology, high sample size and cross-cultural coverage which can combine to provide strong opportunities to examine cross-cultural behavioural patterns. Also, the standardised format of the survey is a guarantee that data will be gathered at the same measurement scale thus eliminating measurement bias among countries (Lasso F, 2018).

## **2.3 Sample Selection**

The research sample in this paper is composed of individual respondents who were selected on the basis of various countries that were selected as part of this specific wave of the World Values Survey. The inclusion criterion of the countries is the possibility of having full data on the major variables of interest, i.e., happiness and life satisfaction. The respondents who leave out or fail to provide responses on critical variables are eliminated to ensure data integrity. The last sample will consist of people of emerging economies as well as developed ones, so there will be a representation of various levels of economic development and cultural backgrounds. The integration of a wide range of nations adds to the comparative character of the research and enables to gain a deeper insight into the world trends in subjective well-being. The final sample size (including data cleaning) is sufficiently big to enable statistical analysis and enhance the reliability of the findings. This representative and varied sample enhances the relevance of the results to other groups of people.

## **2.4 Variables and Measurement**

This research paper analyzes the topic of subjective well-being in terms of two main dependent variables: happiness and life satisfaction. Happiness is also measured using self-reported survey question where the respondent is asked to specify their general happiness levels, which is the affective aspect of well-being, as it represents the emotional experience that people have and their mood states. The level of life satisfaction is determined using a self-assessment scale where respondents rate their life satisfaction on a scale, which is the cognitive component of the well-being and gives an understanding of the reflective judgments of the respondents regarding their quality of life. The most important independent variable of this research is the economic status of countries, which is the classification of the country into emerging and developed economies. This categorization is the main point of the comparative analysis as the study can determine the impact of macro-level economic conditions on the well-being outcomes of individuals. Moreover, a few control variables are included to consider the demographic and socio-economic variation that could impact subjective well-being. They are age, which is a continuous variable; gender, which is categorical variable; income level, which is also an ordinal variable and represents the economic status of the respondents; education level, which is also an ordinal variable. These control variables are included to make the analysis more robust as they isolate the effect of economic classification on happiness and life satisfaction.

## **2.5 Classification of Economies**

The countries contained in the sample are categorised as emerging and developed economies according to internationally agreed systems like those of the World Bank or that of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These classifications are founded on the economic

indicators, such as income levels, industrial development and institutional capacity. The countries are classified into two types and this is the basis of comparative analysis. The use of a standardised external classification enhances the consistency and credibility of the study.

## 2.6 Data Preparation and Cleaning

The data are systematically preprocessed before analysis to ensure accuracy and consistency. Cases where data is not provided are reviewed and where necessary, cases where data is not provided on important variables are eliminated. Variables are recoded so as to have similarity in measures across countries. Outliers are detected and evaluated in order to reduce their effect on the results. These processes are used to ensure data quality and the reliability of the analysis.

## 2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

In the study, various statistical methods are used to analyze the cross-cultural variation of happiness and life satisfaction in emerging and developed economies. First, the descriptive statistics is applied to summarise the distribution of the important variables, such as mean, standard deviation and frequency distributions, which give a general picture of the data. To determine the differences among economic groups, comparative statistical tests like independent samples t-tests or analysis of variance (ANOVA) are used to determine whether there are significant differences of the mean levels of happiness and life satisfaction. Moreover, correlation analysis is performed in order to investigate the connections between variables and find possible associations between well-being indicators and demographic variables. In order to obtain a more detailed picture of the effect of economic classification on the subjective well-being, regression analysis is conducted, which will make it possible to estimate the impact of economic group membership by considering such variables as age, gender, income, and education. The statistical significance is assessed by the traditional levels of 5 percent ( $p < 0.05$ ) and necessary assumptions of each statistical method are taken into account to determine the validity and reliability of the findings.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated to give an overview of the distribution of happiness and life satisfaction among the sampled countries. The findings suggest that the level of subjective well-being is typically high among the respondents in developed economies than those in emerging economies. It was found that the mean happiness score of respondents in developed economies was higher compared to the mean happiness score of respondents in emerging economies, and the variability in the mean happiness score was relatively lower, indicating that there were more consistent reports of well-being. On the same note, the life satisfaction scores were better in people in developed economies, with a more positive assessment of the total life conditions. Conversely, the emerging economies were found to be more heterogeneous in their happiness as well as life satisfaction, implying that there is heterogeneity in well-being experiences in these settings.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Happiness and Life Satisfaction by Economic Group**

Variable	Economic Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
Happiness	Emerging Economies	6.12	2.10
Happiness	Developed Economies	7.35	1.85
Life Satisfaction	Emerging Economies	5.98	2.25
Life Satisfaction	Developed Economies	7.60	1.70

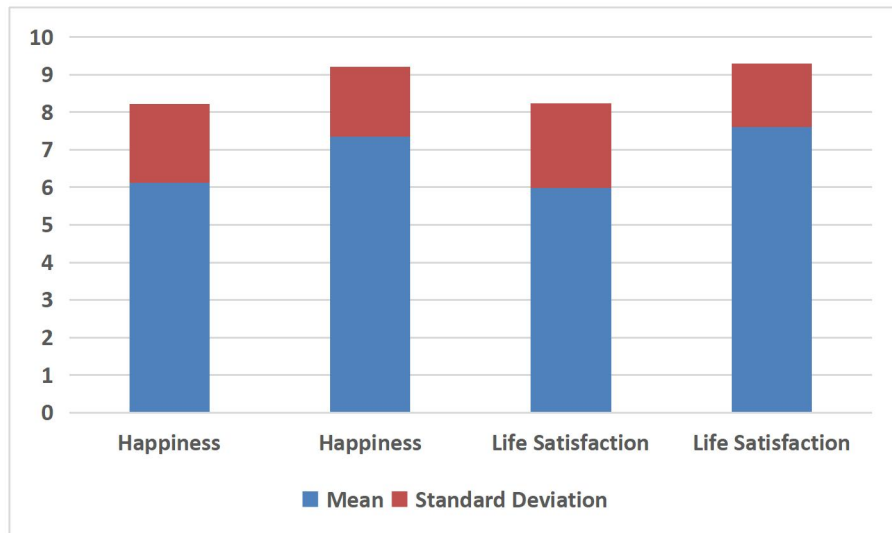


Figure 1: Mean Happiness and Life Satisfaction Across Economic Groups

### 3.2 Comparative Analysis

Independent samples t-tests were used to test differences between the emerging and developed economies. The findings indicate that there is statistically significant difference between the means of the two groups of respondents in terms of their happiness levels with those in developed economies reporting much higher levels of happiness. The same trend was exhibited in the case of life satisfaction, with the average scores of the developed economies being significantly more than the ones of the emerging economies. These results confirm the hypothesis that economic context is the key factor that determines subjective well-being. These differences were further verified by ANOVA where applicable between multiple groups of countries indicating that variation in well-being is not only observed between economic categories but also within countries, within each category.

Table 2: Independent Samples t-test Results

Variable	t-value	p-value	Mean Difference
Happiness	5.87	<0.001	1.23
Life Satisfaction	6.45	<0.001	1.62



Figure 2: Correlation Between Happiness and Life Satisfaction

### 3.3 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was done to observe the correlation between happiness, life satisfaction and demographic variables of choice. The findings reveal that there is strong positive correlation between happiness and life satisfaction, implying that those who report to have a higher happiness level also report to have a higher level of life satisfaction. There was a positive correlation between income level and happiness as well as life satisfaction showing that people with higher economic status tend to have better results in the well-being outcomes. There was also a moderate positive correlation between education level and life satisfaction though the correlation with happiness was less strong. The age showed a weak yet significant correlation with life satisfaction and gender disparities were low in both indicators of well-being.

**Table 3: Correlation Matrix**

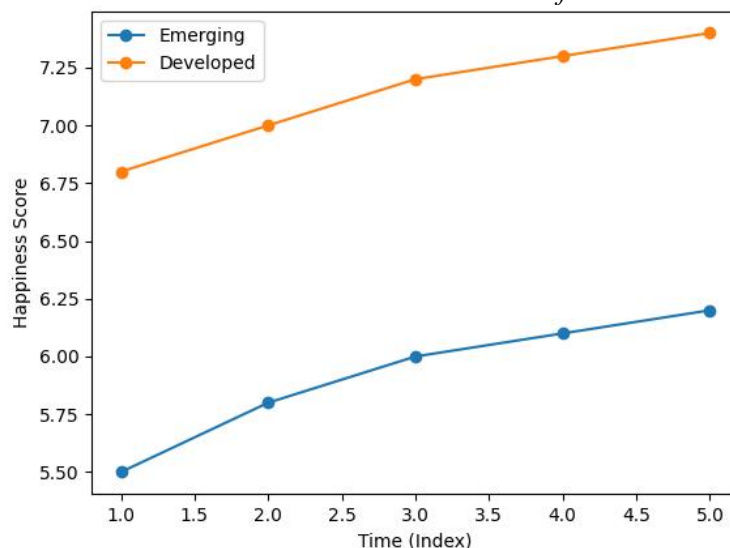
Variable	Happiness	Life Satisfaction	Income	Education
Happiness	1.00	0.72**	0.45**	0.30*
Life Satisfaction	0.72**	1.00	0.50**	0.35*
Income	0.45**	0.50**	1.00	0.40**
Education	0.30*	0.35*	0.40**	1.00

### 3.4 Regression Analysis

In order to evaluate further the role of economic classification on subjective well-being, the multiple regression analysis was performed, controlling the demographic variables. The findings reveal that economic classification is a strong predictor of both happiness and life satisfaction after age, gender, income and education. Particularly, people in developed economies were much higher in their predicted levels of happiness and life satisfaction than people in emerging economies. Income was found to be one of the most powerful control variables affecting well-being as individuals with higher income levels were found to be happier and more satisfied with their lives. Education also played a positive role in improving life satisfaction, but its impact on happiness was relatively less. The age effect was nonlinear or weak considering specifications of the model, but gender did not have a significant effect in all cases. The regression models as a whole were found to be statistically significant and this implies that a significant amount of the variance in subjective well-being is explained by the variables included. Nevertheless, there is still a significant amount of variation to be explained, indicating the impact of other cultural and contextual factors that this model has not managed to account for.

**Table 4: Regression Results for Happiness and Life Satisfaction**

Variable	Happiness ( $\beta$ )	Life Satisfaction ( $\beta$ )
Economic Group	0.38**	0.42**
Income	0.30**	0.35**
Education	0.15*	0.18*
Age	0.05	0.08
Gender	0.02	0.03
R <sup>2</sup>	0.42	0.48



**Figure 3: Trend Comparison of Happiness Scores Between Emerging and Developed Economies**

The results of this research give concrete evidence about the high cross-cultural differences in happiness and life satisfaction between the emerging and developed economies. People in advanced economies are always found to have more subjective well-being, which supports the theory that economic growth correlates with better life ratings and moods. Simultaneously, variability in the two economic groups demonstrates the significance of cultural and contextual aspects in determining the outcomes of well-being. The close correlation between happiness and life satisfaction is another sign that affective and cognitive aspects of well being are intertwined.

#### 4. Discussion

This research results are a clear indication of strong cross-cultural variations in happiness and life satisfaction in emerging and developed economies, and they support the value of cultural and economic backgrounds in the formation of subjective well-being. The findings suggest that people living in developed economies are more likely to report high levels of happiness and life satisfaction as opposed to people living in emerging economies. This trend could be explained through the prism of structural benefits that are typically attributed to developed economies, such as a better level of income, access to healthcare and education, and institutional stability. These results align with the economic development studies of well-being in the world and the influence economic development has on the satisfaction of life (Helliwell et al., 2025; Çelik et al., 2025).

Simultaneously, the results emphasize the fact that economic development as a single variable does not only provide sufficient explanations of well-being variations, since there was a significant level of variability both among the emerging and the developed groups. This indicates that cultural elements are a key determinant in defining the way people view and declare their well being. It has been demonstrated that cultural identity, social norms, and value systems have a significant effect on subjective well-being in various societies (Zhou et al., 2023; Murata et al., 2025). Specifically, the interpersonal relationship differences and value orientations could result in diverse outcomes of well-being across cultures.

The high positive correlation that was found between happiness and life satisfaction also supports the conceptualisation of subjective well-being as a multidimensional construct, which involves the affective and cognitive aspects. The conclusion is supported by studies that show that the emotional experiences and life evaluations are interrelated across cultures (Krys et al., 2023). Moreover, a community belonging and social integration has also been cited as a significant predictor of happiness and life satisfaction (Cramer & Pawsey, 2023). The regression analysis can also give more information on the relative importance of various factors on well-being. The income turns out to be a high predictor of happiness and life satisfaction, and the cross-national research has found that socio-economic factors determine the outcome of well-being (Bogt et al., 2025; Homocianu, 2024 ). Education is also positively

contributing but to a lesser extent since it involves much to do with improving opportunities and conditions of life. Moreover, religious and spiritual affiliations can affect well-being through meaning and coping strategies in various cultural settings (Pérez and Rohde, 2022).

In a larger scale, the findings have significant implications on the comprehension of human behavior across the globe. They indicate that the focus of well-being enhancement must not be on economic growth alone but must take into account the cultural settings and social organization. On the whole, the research will point to the fact that it is necessary to follow a more holistic approach that would combine the economic and cultural aspects in the explanation of the differences in the subjective well-being of societies.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined cross-cultural differences in happiness and life satisfaction across emerging and developed economies, highlighting the complex interplay between economic conditions and cultural contexts in shaping subjective well-being. The results reveal that people in stable economies tend to report a greater degree of happiness and life satisfaction, which can be attributed to the benefits that come with economic growth and development such as better living standards, institutional benefits, and resource availability. But the outcomes also indicate that economic factors cannot explain variations in well-being completely since big differences were found within the economic groups. The discussion highlights that cultural factors are significant, and values, social norms, and community patterns are a key determinant of how people view and assess their lives. This close connection between happiness and life satisfaction also supports the idea that subjective well-being is multidimensional; it involves emotional experiences as well as cognitive judgments. Also socio-economic factors like income and education were identified as having a significant impact on the outcomes of well-being, highlighting both the contribution of the individual factors and the wider structural circumstances. In practical terms, the results imply that policy with the aim of enhancing well-being should follow holistic approach that incorporates economic growth and cultural and social factors. Well-being should not be provided through only increasing income and access to resources but fostering community participation, supporting social support networks, and managing cultural diversity. On balance, this research paper adds to the knowledge of human behavior around the world by giving empirical evidence of how subjective well-being is differentiated in terms of cultural and economic realities. It underscores the necessity of context-sensitive research and policy in order to be able to enhance the quality of life among different populations.

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