

An evaluation of life satisfaction after migration

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Life satisfaction & immigration

The study of the means by which humans create meaning and order out of life's challenges and exigencies is very important. It is human nature to seek meaning in existence (Angrosino, 1995). Coping suggests an element of creativity as the individual needs to devise new and novel means to deal with problem situations which cannot always be met by well established habits or ready-made answers. Patterned ways of dealing with newness itself can be termed adjustment processes (Lazarus, 1969).

As opposed to the term happiness which denotes mood states, life satisfaction stresses the cognitive component of the evaluation an individual gives to the success of his/her coping processes in dealing with the tasks of living (Strack, Argyle & Schwarz, 1991). There are two conceptual aspects of well-being - the emotional component consisting of independent and positive dimensions, and the cognitive evaluational aspect which comprises life satisfaction (Pavot, Diener, Colvin & Sandvik, 1991). Life satisfaction shows considerable stability over time (Headey & Wearing, 1989) only in as far as it measures the particular life domains appropriate to the individuals under study. In addition merely comparing life satisfaction measures with other measures is not sufficient for validation of such scales unless external criteria are applied.

Self-report measures of subjective well-being show adequate levels of validity and reliability. Subjective well-being resides within the experience of the individual and includes the measurement of both positive and negative factors (Diener, 1994). According to Veenhoven (cited in Diener, 1994) individuals use two components in evaluating their lives - their affects and their thoughts. Satisfaction defines the cognitive component as "the perceived discrepancy between aspiration and achievement, ranging from the perception of fulfillment to that of deprivation". Satisfaction implies a judgmental or cognitive experience while happiness suggests an experience of feeling or affect. One's emotions are likely to return to an average baseline which is set by one's temperament and one's general life circumstances. Thus, although immediate emotions may change constantly, one's long-term subjective well-being is likely to have considerable stability. Similarly, one's life satisfaction might change if one's life circumstances change dramatically. There are likely to be many life circumstances, however, which are consistent over time and this leads to a degree of stability in life satisfaction especially as our appraisals of events are continuous over time and in turn influence our emotional reactions (Lazarus, 1991). Thus people with high subjective well-being are those who make a preponderance of positive appraisals of their life events and circumstances and would presumably also experience positive life experiences. Life satisfaction refers to a conscious global judgment of one's life. Broader categories of well-being are useful scientifically because they point to more global psychological phenomena. Studying long-term levels of well-being is defensible because temporally stable and cross-situationally consistent levels of longer-term subjective well-being, clearly exist.

Studies that have been conducted on migrant happiness indicate that a comparison strategy is employed with the situation of people usually relatives in the homeland when migrants in the host culture are asked to evaluate their life satisfaction. If their living conditions are better in the country of settlement than they are in the country of origin, then the evaluation of life satisfaction is likely to be positive (Diener & Diener, 1995). The extent to which moods can influence well-being is tempered by the fact that when our moods are called into question respondents do not use it as an indicator of well-being. When this occurs a comparison strategy for selection of relevant information is used depending on whether it has an influence on one's own current living conditions or not. The happiness of these migrants is closer to their compatriots than with those from their country of origin (Michalos, 1985). Differences in subjective well-being covary with the discrepancies one perceives between what one has, what others have, and what one had in the past (Michalos, 1991).

Life satisfaction can present a different picture for different cultural groups. From the perspective of Mauritians in contrast to the western viewpoint, life satisfaction is related more closely to social relationships with the family rather than with friends. Their goals and aspirations are closely aligned with achievements and although they are generally lower than that of other migrant groups and that of the Anglo-Celtic population, this can contribute to happiness according to some researchers (Michalos, 1985). This lowering of expectations reflects their conservatism and reluctance to take high risks in ventures that they know very little of (Duyker, 1988). Collectivism is favoured over individualism and hence high goal aspirations and individual effort are not favoured. Such activities are viewed as contributors to loneliness, anomie and unhappiness (Dinan, 1985). There is a greater reliance on the Christian church (predominantly Catholic) and outside welfare organisations rather than reliance on the individual (Moutou, 1996).

Previous studies on life satisfaction of Mauritian migrants

Lingayah's (1988) study - Mauritian immigrants in Britain

The results of Lingayah's study of 150 Mauritian immigrants to Britain revealed a group who were risk-takers, entrepreneurs and who acted positively in difficult times. The earlier immigrants are described as being more adventurous and hardier than the later ones. A large proportion of the respondents migrated young between the ages of 20 to 30 years of age.

The stated reasons for migration by subjects were the better employment and education opportunities in Britain and their drive to do better than what they could have done if they'd stayed in Mauritius. These immigrants took whatever jobs they could and used these as springboards to better jobs. They were not deterred by the initial rejection and prejudice they experienced. For the majority of respondents, their primary goals were to acquire an education and as much material comforts as they could so as they could return and show these off to their compatriots in Mauritius.

Although Lingayah's study was conducted in the 1980's and no further studies followed, a sense of frustration and disillusionment is also reported by respondents despite their successes. Their main complaints were that despite their hard work they were frustrated by the discrimination and prejudice which they experienced from their English counterparts. Discrimination in the work place made the immigration decision seem like a useless endeavor.

The area of greatest dissatisfaction with life in Australia for Mauritians has also been in the work setting. Through a series of interviews of Mauritians who had immigrated to fourteen international destinations, Dinan (1985) stated that for those in Australia, dissatisfaction with work represented the greatest number of complaints. While those interviewed felt that their income was a good deal higher than what was earned in Mauritius, there was a feeling that they were working below their capacities in unskilled work due to discrimination in the form of lack of recognition for qualifications and experience gained in Mauritius. The dissatisfaction expressed by Mauritians in the workplace echo that of other migrant groups in Australia (Mak, 1995; Mak, 1995). In a study comparing the occupational attainment of migrants from NESB backgrounds with those from English-speaking countries, Miller's (1987) disturbing findings indicated that for NESB migrants job advancements were unlikely despite further education in contrast with their counterparts from English-speaking countries.

Review of studies on immigrant life satisfaction

In a cross-cultural comparative study by Ying (1992) on how Chinese-Americans viewed the quality of their lives, subgroup analyses revealed that biculturality (Beta = 0.42, $p = 0.000$) was the most powerful predictor of life satisfaction for Chinese-Americans whereas for the American-born the level of friendship satisfaction was the strongest predictor (Beta = 0.46, $p = 0.000$). Ying (1992) also noted that the subjective domain satisfactions (Biculturality, Health, Combined work satisfaction, Marriage/singlehood and Friendship) recorded higher positive relationships with life satisfaction than with demographics (Length of residence in U.S.A, Sex, Age, Marital status, SES and Generation). The subjective domain satisfactions accounted for 37 % of the variance in overall life satisfaction for the Chinese-Americans. ".....for immigrants, their experiences of being a Chinese person in American society is quite salient and important to their life quality, as immigration itself is a major change for them, and they undoubtedly compare these experiences to those in their home culture. Thus those who report a higher level of biculturality satisfaction also experience a greater overall life satisfaction" (Ying, 1992 p.18).

In support of Ying's (1992) findings, Meredith's (1984) study on the quality of life for Lao Hmong refugees in Nebraska, indicated that subjective life domains such as those related to this group's own conceptualisations of quality of life (view of the future (optimism) and life control) accounted for a greater percentage of the variance (42%); whereas items investigating objective life domains such as, housing, and standard of living contributed little to the prediction of global quality of life.

Using Path-analysis, investigating the determinants of psychological well-being of Vietnamese refugees, Tran (1987) concluded that membership of ethnic social organisations, availability of ethnic confidants, self-esteem and income revealed the most significant effects on well-being. Length of residence, education, social adjustment, and English speaking ability were also important contributing variables.

Thomas' (1995) findings on the predictors of life satisfaction in institutionalised elderly Vietnamese indicated that those with a high level of internal locus of control, active problem-solving activities, and high optimism were more likely to be satisfied with life than those with an external locus of control who engaged in emotion focused coping and were high in negativity.

There are many issues to be considered when evaluating the means by which life satisfaction has been studied. Typically the variables have been self-report type questionnaires, the measurement of affective or mood states, even the presence of psychiatric disorders, socio-demographic factors, such as, SES, employment levels, income, and in the case of immigrants, level of cultural assimilation and attitude change (Strack et al., 19991).

Culture & well-being

Cultural variation in outlook or a national ethos has been noted by some researchers (Veenhoven, 1994). The problems in interpreting findings across nations is in the measurement of the happiness construct and its stability as a unit of measure. Events do seem to affect the temporal stability of happiness. A transition may involve a change in quality of life and thus a change in the evaluation of it. as new situations such as immigration encourage a reorientation on life. A change in tentative judgments occurs before a final evaluation is made which tends to affect the temporal stability of happiness. Most people remember distinct differences in happiness. Unhappiness seems to be less constant than happiness. Australian data on the stability of happiness (Headey and Wearing, 1992; Headey & Wearing, 1989; Headey, Kelley & Wearing, 1993; Headey & Wearing, 1990), indicate that it is an essentially variable state reproduced over time. Baseline personality measures such as, mental health and self-criticism appear to predict later happiness.

Personality variables have been strong predictors of subjective well-being (Costa & McCrae, 1980, 1990). Diener and Diener (1993) reported that self-esteem correlated about 0.53 with life satisfaction in eight western countries and an average of 0.47 across the 31 diverse countries they studied. Emmons (1986) found that past goal success predicted positive affect. Ambivalence over one's strivings predicted negative affect, and that the importance of one's strivings predicted life satisfaction. There are cross-cultural differences in happiness and life satisfaction which are not completely explained by income differences (Balatsky & Diener, 1992; Diener & Diener, 1993; Diener, Diener & Diener, 1993; Shao, 1992; Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1994). Okun and Stock's (1987) research showed that subjective well-being measures were moderately associated with adjustment, neuroticism, work satisfaction, and with family satisfaction, but were more substantially related to each other. Personality may also influence subjective well-being, not simply in terms of temperament propensities to experience specific types of affect, but also in terms of certain individuals' avoidance of emotional reactions. More objective indicators of well-being are obviously needed to overcome denial. The fact that subjective well-being reacts to life changes and life events also indicates that it is not isomorphic with personality traits. Positive and negative affect, however, each appear to make independent contributions to life satisfaction (Bradburn, 1969; Pavot & Diener, 1993).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the adaptive processes amongst immigrants i.e. how immigrants come to organise their experiences as migrants and the extent to which these processes are related to personality related coping styles and whether these coping processes are related to life satisfaction. The approach investigated in this study is based on previous research on the existence of two dimensions of well-being, positive and negative, devised by Bradburn (1969) and supported by (Warr, 1978; Warr, Barter & Brownbridge, 1983).

Method

Subjects

One hundred and one Mauritians participated in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and every attempt was made to enlist participation in the study from a broad spectrum of the community.

Measures

Adaptation to host culture: was measured via 15 questions on a 4-point scale related to subjects' attitudes towards the host culture (how comfortable subjects felt living in Australia, how they liked Australian culture, the extent to which they thought they were similar to the average Australian); for example 'How do you like Australian culture?', 'How much is life in Australia an enjoyable experience?'

Positive aspects of life in Australia: was measured via 13 questions generated by the author. The reasons for inclusion of these items came from the literature on immigrant acculturation which notes a dearth of studies investigating the positive aspects and motivators of immigration (Furnham and Bochner, 1988). Items included statements from the author's general knowledge, verbal reports from Mauritians themselves and socio-historical studies (Duyker, 1988) of the common possible motivators for Mauritian immigration to Australia. Subjects were asked 'what have been the highpoints (uplifts) of your life in Australia ?' and 'circle the events (on a 4-point scale from 1-'Very important' to 4-'Not important at all') during your time in Australia that have made you feel good and given you a sense that it's been worthwhile being in Australia'. Examples of items are 'Learnt to be independent', 'For the children, the opportunity to prosper' and 'Material comforts are better than in Mauritius'.

Stressors of migration: The questionnaire investigating stress contained 27 questions, generated by the author adapted from verbal self-reports of Mauritians themselves and from the work of Berry (1995) and Furnham and Bochner (1988). The scale requested an appraisal of the subjective impact of the following groups of stressors typically encountered by immigrants. These stressors were related to jobs, health problems, isolation, discrimination, less time for leisure, no help with domestic chores, climate in Australia, expectations not fulfilled by children, discrimination, dealings with Australian bureaucracies. All of the above scales have been used with other immigrant samples.

Sensation seeking: This questionnaire was adapted from Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking Scale (1971). Eighteen items were chosen from Zuckerman's (1971) 35-item scale based on the author's knowledge of Mauritians and what would be meaningful to them. Instead of a Yes/No response set as in Zuckerman's (1971) original scale, another response set was devised by the author in keeping with the response sets of the rest of the other scales in the study. Subjects were asked 'How would you rate yourselves on the following ?' and to rate themselves on a 5-point scale ranging from '1-Not like me at all' to '5-Very much like me'. Some examples of questions were 'I would like a job which would require a lot of traveling', 'I get bored seeing the same old faces' and 'The worst social sin is to be rude'.

Problem-solving: was measured by Heppner's Problem Solving Inventory (PSI). The inventory is a 35-item 6-point Likert-type scale (Items are reverse scored).

Identity with Mauritian Culture: This scale investigated the degree to which subjects were socialised into Australian culture versus preferring to maintain their former traditions and behaviours. The scale is made up of 80 questions and was compiled by the author and Gebart-Eaglemont (1994). Subjects were asked 'What is your opinion about the following?' and to rate their responses on a 4- point scale ranging from '1- not like me at all' to '4-like me'. Examples of questions are 'I prefer to use French than English', 'I have more Australian than Mauritian friends' and 'I think in French rather than in English'.

Psychological well-being: was measured using a 40-item General Well-being Scale (unpublished) that assesses current life satisfaction (Gebart-Eaglemont, 1993).

An alpha reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above is required for a scale to be considered as having good inter-item and internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951; Nunnally, 1978). Analyses of the above scales revealed reliabilities above the accepted standard with alpha values ranging from 0.71 to 0.94.

Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed by the author in English (as this was the preferred language of subjects) to members of the Mauritian cultural groups via key members of the communities under study. Questionnaires were distributed across varied age groups among all the Mauritian social clubs at sporting, religious, elderly and social events. Subjects were instructed that participation was voluntary and anonymity was ensured through the provision of pre-paid envelopes addressed to the author.

Results

Table 1 Reported positive aspects of Life in Australia

Positive aspects of life in Australia	Percentage reporting Important to Very important
For the children, the opportunity to prosper	(76%)
Learnt to be independent	(72%)
The chance to earn a higher income	(70%)
Personal growth, "Found myself" (Gained new perspectives & outlooks)	(64%)
Material comforts are better than in Mauritius	(62%)
Had the opportunity to get the material things (car, house, etc.) that I wouldn't have been able to if I'd stayed in Mauritius	(57%)
Learnt to drive a car	(52%)
Learn English and another culture	(48%)
Had the chance to experience 'liberte' and escape the constraints of Mauritian society	(46%)
Had the chance to try a different career	(45%)
To be able to continue with life unchanged from what it was in Mauritius	(41%)
To find support from an expatriate community of Mauritians here	(35%)
Established my own business	(15%)

The highest frequencies reported were divided into benefits construed out of material gains (higher income, material comforts, car, house, etc.) and individual and group benefits (personal growth, learnt to be independent, the chance for the children to prosper). Learning English and another culture and ventures concerning high risk were not important factors in keeping this migrant group here. While the above results are retrospective and could only be said to depict these subjects' re-evaluation of the reasons for why they immigrated, they represent valuable insights into the readjustments that this group had to make in immigrating to Australia.

Factor Analysis

Using Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) (Extraction Method) OBLIMIN rotation 1 for extraction 1 in analysis 1 - Kaiser Normalization the following pattern matrices were obtained for the scale measuring the Positive aspects of migration.

Table 2. Positive Aspects of Migration Factors

Variables	MA.ACQ	EN. VENT
PMAT	.84588	

PINC	.74145	
PCOM	.67494	
PEC	.67287	
PLIB	.63443	
PCARE		.85803
PPGR		.57348
PDRI		.49598

*NOTE: Factor labels: MA. ACQ - Material Acquisitions ; EN.VENT - Enterprising Ventures/risk-taking ventures. Variable labels: PMAT - Had the opportunity to get the material things (car, house, etc) ; PINC - Chance to earn a higher income; PCOM - Material comforts are better than in Mauritius ; PEC - Learn English and another culture ; PLIB - Had the chance to experience 'liberte' & escape the constraints of Mauritian society ; PCARE - Had chance to try different career ; PPGR - Personal growth ; PDRI - Learnt to drive a car.

Path Analysis

Based on the results of exploring the relationship between variables, using the Maximum Likelihood method recommended by Joreskog and Sorbom (1989), the model in Figure 1 was evaluated and the following model defined in Figure 2.

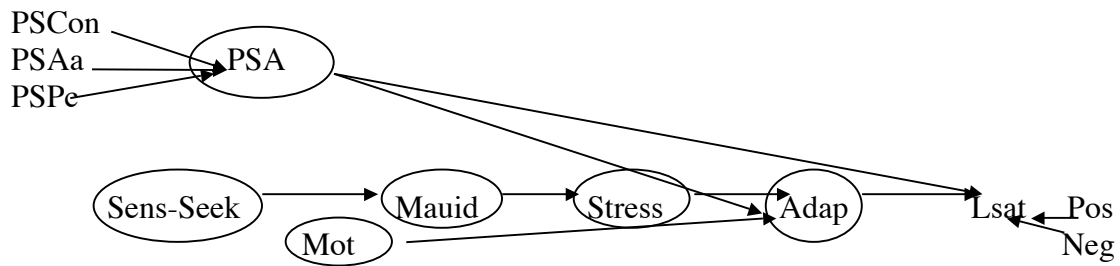


Figure 1: Proposed Model

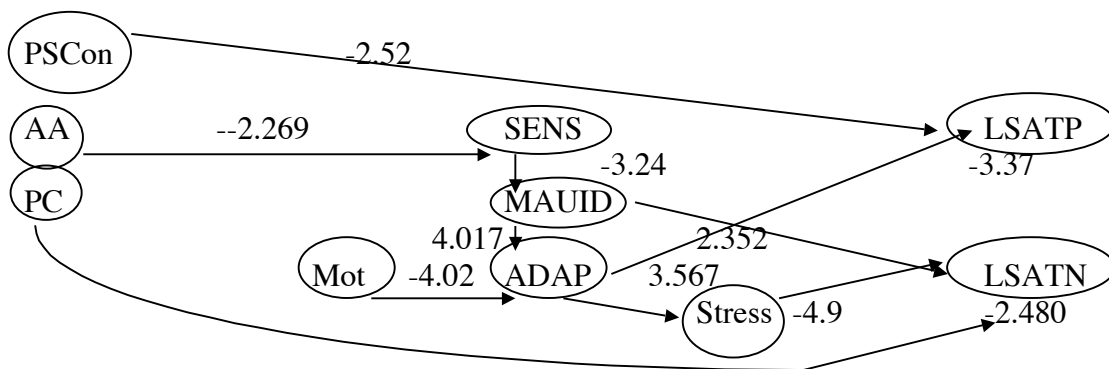


Figure 2: Path-analysis (Final model)

KnowE & Maudid = 3.997

Educ & Maudid = -4.156

GFI = 0.889

AGFI = 0.712

Legend

PSCon - Problem-Solving Confidence

AA - Approach-Avoidance

PC - Personal Control

KnowE - Knowledge of English

LSatP - Positive dimension of Life Satisfaction

LSatN- Negative dimension of Life satisfaction

Maudid -Identification with Mauritian culture

Sens- Sensation -seeking, risk-taking

Adap-Adaptation, acculturation

*Note:PScon, AA, and Adap are reversed scored

The results revealed a number of significant associations between the dimensions of coping and life satisfaction for Mauritians. Confidence in problem situations was directly related to a positive evaluation of life satisfaction. A style of approaching problem situations was associated with a positive evaluation of life satisfaction via risk-taking behaviour, not identifying with Mauritian culture and adaptation with the host culture. A style of approaching problem situations was also associated with ameliorating reports of stress and reports of a negative evaluation of life satisfaction via risk-taking behaviour, not identifying with Mauritian culture and adaptation to the Australian culture.

Another path through which a style of approaching problem situations was associated with *low* reports of a negative evaluation of life satisfaction was via risk-taking behaviour and not identifying with Mauritian culture. Being in control of one's emotions in problem situations was also associated with less reports of a negative evaluation of life satisfaction.

Identification with Mauritian culture appeared to be the central variable accounting for the highest number of relationships and was also related to stress, poor knowledge of English, a style of avoiding problem situations and, low educational attainment. Having more goals and motivators for being in Australia was associated with positive evaluations of life satisfaction for this group via adaptation to host culture.

Discussion

The results of this study represent a group of immigrants who are proud of their cultural origins as indicated by their participation in their own language and customs. The results indicate a people :

- Who feel that they are a lot better off as a result of migration
- The chance to gain improvements in material well-being was rated as a major positive aspect of migration. Items related to material improvement such as the chance to earn a higher income (70% of sample) recorded high ratings on the positive aspects of migration.
- The first generation perception (over 70%) is that for the children, the movement was definitely a positive one, as the opportunities in Australia vis a vis their counterparts in Mauritius are better.

It also appears from the results, that for this group, contact with those from the culture of origin reinforces a sense of identity when the situation outside the group is uncertain, stressful and competitive. According to Brewer (1991) one way to deal with the undesirable nature of stigmatisation is to convert the stigma from a feature of personal identity to a basis of social identity. Members of minority groups tend to face a barrage of questions from other groups about their identity for example, Where are you from ? Where's Mauritius ? Where's Madagascar ? Within one's own group there is greater familiarity and acceptance where one can speak one's language and be more relaxed. Collective identities can buffer the individual from many threats to self-esteem and contribute to well-being (Brewer, 1991). Groups are also often better than individuals in creating their own versions of social reality and to isolate themselves successfully from others (Festinger, 1954). Membership of a group forms part of our self-concept where we minimise the differences between ingroup members and maximise differences

between outgroup members. Where group membership leads to discrimination, minimisation of the differences between ingroups and outgroups occur (Tajfel, 1981).

Mauritian subjects' responses on the positive aspects of life in Australia indicate that their intentions in migrating were to experience change. For example, the results of the factor analysis produced 2 factors material acquisitions and participation in enterprising and risk-taking ventures. Only 41 percent and 35 percent of subjects respectively, ranked the items: 'To be able to continue with life unchanged from what it was in Mauritius' and 'To find support from an expatriate community of Mauritians here' as being Important and Very Important in assessing the positive aspects of their lives in Australia.

Migration represents an experience akin to a rebirth where the immigrant undergoes intensive re-socialisation. Hence there will be a tendency for the migration experience to be evaluated overall as a positive one by the individualistic group which is supported by the results. As immigrants acculturate linguistically an increasing marginal loss of ethnic identification occurs (Laroche, Kim, Hui & Tomiuk, 1998).

Causal influence becomes implausible in the absence of an association. Specifically structural modeling provides evidence in support of a particular theory of associative links between variables. Such a model might be adopted as a set of working hypotheses for future research.

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