

A Study of Subjective Well-being of Citizens in Beijing

By

Song, Xiaomei¹ Yue, Weihong² Wang, Bin³ Du, Juan⁴

Abstract:

The objective of this study is to find the characteristics of the subjective well-being (SWB) of both urban and rural citizens in Beijing, and to explore the influence factors on SWB as well, based on Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory. According to the result of “Subjective Well-being Survey” conducted by the Beijing National Opinion Research Center, the subjective assessments of well-being of people in Beijing are relatively high. It is on an average of 78.8. Family, wealth and living environment are three main factors effect on SWB.

Key Words:

Subjective well-being, Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory

The concept of GNH (Gross National Happiness) was firstly put forward by Wang chuk, the king of Bhutan in year 1970. With the development of economy and society, economy growth rate and happiness are not simply positive correlation. General speaking, economical growth really could increase the degree of happiness.

¹ Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics Email: songxiaomei@bjstats.gov.cn Tel: 8610-83547101

² Beijing National Opinion Research Center Email: yueweihong@bjstats.gov.cn

³ Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics Email: wangbin@bjstats.gov.cn Tel: 8610-83547105

⁴ Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics Email: dudu1004@bjstats.gov.cn Tel: 8610-83547102

Address: No.36 Guanganmen Southern Street, Xuanwu District, Beijing, China, 100054

At the circumstance of low level economy development, little bit higher income could bring happiness to some extent. But when per capita GDP reaches certain level, Diminishing Law of Marginal Utility of Income will start to display. Even appears the happiness gap.

At the 6th Plenary of Chinese Communist Party's 16th National Conference, how to construct socialist harmonious society was highly placed. Whether the citizens could have happiness or not becomes the standard of measuring how successful a harmonious society.

Theory Basis and Method of Study

1. Theory Basis

Happiness rests with needs. The Director of London New Economy Social Welfare Research Center pointed out that Bhutan and Britain should have different standard to measure SWB, because their status quo of economy and society development are in different level. In Britain, people lay more stress on their own experience and feeling on living quality than indexes such as income and house etc..

Therefore, Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory is taken as the theory basis. American social psychologist Maslow has a rating approach of requirements. It consists of five parts. From low to high, they are physiological requirement, security requirement, love requirement, respect requirement and self realization requirement respectively. According to him, the higher social development is, the higher levels of people's requirements are. Whether or not people have a higher level of requirement

is a record of social development.

2. Definition and Measurement of SWB

There are varied measurement scales on happiness, such as GNH (Gross National Happiness), Index of National Public Happiness, SWB etc. They are all aimed to measure social and human development after economy growth, and to improve satisfaction and happiness degree of national public. Due to a widely recognized measurement method has not yet to be done, we simply started from the study of SWB of the National public for the time being and expected to set up an index system fit for Beijing later on. Based on large amount of domestic and foreign latest articles, we describe SWB as an emotion aroused when people satisfy their needs and reach their goals. It is subjective view of their life.

Happiness is not only directly relevant to living conditions of people, but also to needs and value judgment of people. Therefore, Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory is taken as the theory basis to measure happiness. Contents of this questionnaire are as followed: income level and its satisfaction degree, healthy condition and its satisfaction degree, social order and fairness, recognition of family, social relationship and its satisfaction degree, career and its satisfaction degree, social expectation and faith, sense of belonging and general evaluation of happiness.

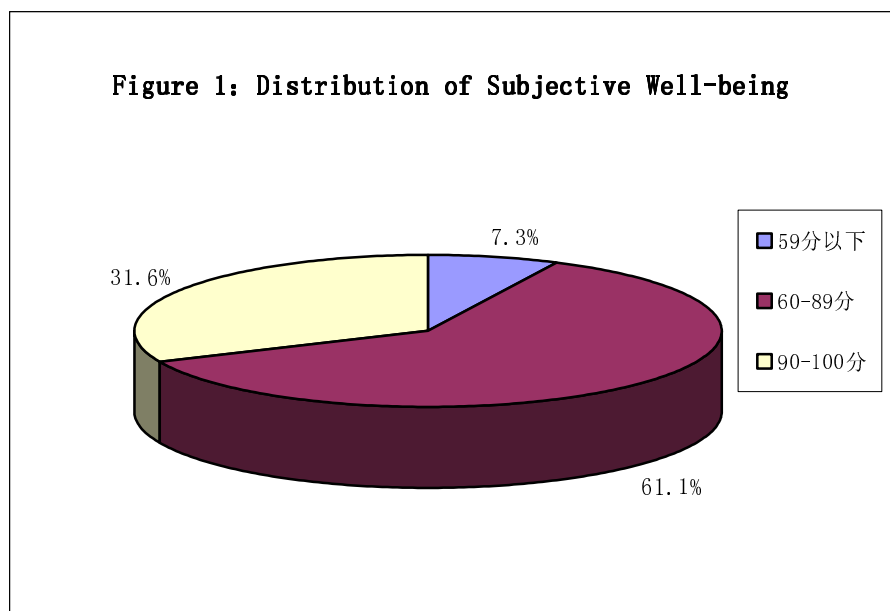
In July 2006, "Subjective Well-being Survey" was conducted by the Beijing National Opinion Research Center by means of CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview). The respondents are 18-70 years old citizens, who have been living in the eighteen districts and counties for more than half a year (including people coming

from other provinces). The total amount of samples is 7118.

Analysis on Subjective Well-being of Citizens in Beijing

1. General speaking, the SWB of Beijing citizens are relatively high

The goal of social development is people's happiness. In terms of general evaluation of happiness, it is relatively high. When the question "All things considered, and given the full score is 100, how many points would you give?" was put forward, 31.6% respondents gave 90 points or above, 61.1% respondents gave 60-89 points, and only 7.3% respondents gave 60 points or below (please refer to figure 1). The average of general evaluation of happiness is 78.8. It can be concluded that Beijing citizens do have relatively strong sense of happiness.



Considering different social groups, the results are as varied as followed:

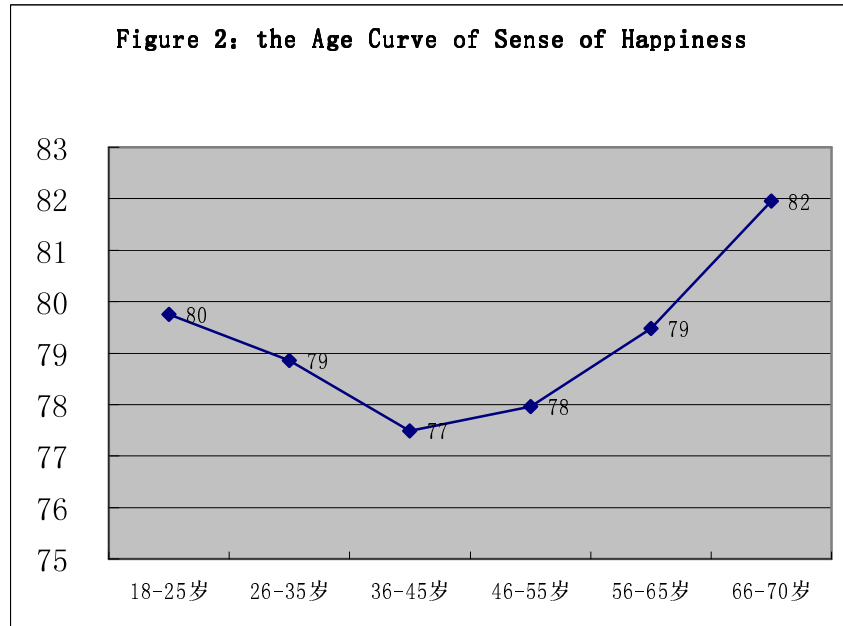
- (1) Citizens of the 10 outskirts have stronger sense of happiness than citizens in the 8 urban areas**

In terms of average value of sense of happiness, it is 80.5 in the 10 outskirts and 77 in the 8 urban areas. The former one is 3.5 points higher. Although facilities as well as public service are better, and people are wealthier in the urban areas, they have bigger pressure on life. For example, it is more crowded and people have higher rate of troubles and wider range of afflictions. People are easier to get annoyed. In addition, relatively speaking, citizens in urban areas usually have higher standard and expectation of happiness. Thus their requirements are more difficult to be satisfied.

(2) The age curve of SWB appears a “U” type

Form age point of view, the youth group aged from 18 to 25 and the elder group aged from 66 to 70, have the highest sense of happiness. It is 79.8 and 82.0 respectively. Whereas the middle aged groups, aged from 36 to 45 and 46 to 55 have the lowest sense of happiness. It is 77.5 and 77.9 respectively. (please refer to figure 2)

It is due to the role played by the middle aged people in family and society. They are more responsible for family and society. They undertake double burden of work and life. They have more worries. Therefore, they have lower sense of happiness. Moreover, laid-off workers are mostly in middle aged groups.



(3) People who have stable jobs have higher sense of happiness

In this regard, people who have stable jobs have higher sense of happiness. For example, students and retirees have the highest sense of happiness. It is 81.9 and 80.3 respectively.

Among working respondents, people who work in government organs and institutions have the highest sense of happiness. It is 80.6. Because they are in charge of social management and have strong sense of belonging. They have stable income as well as medical care and endowment insurance guarantee. Their sense of happiness is the highest among all career people.

Enterprise administrators, technicians and business men have pressure every now and then, but they have stable position and income. They 79.8、79.1 and 78.9 respectively.

Farmers are very ready to be satisfactory. Therefore, it is 79.8. Value under average score is mostly in groups of workers, freelancers, soldiers, police men, not

capable to work and laid off workers. Laid-off workers have the lowest sense of happiness. It is only 72, 7 points lower than the average. (please refer to sheet 1)

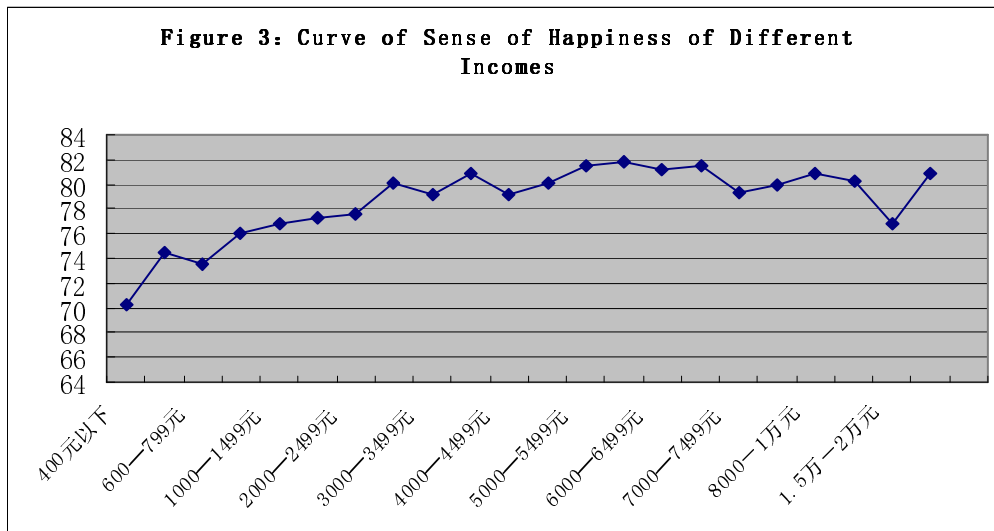
Sheet 1: Sense of Happiness in Different Careers

Career	Value of sense of happiness
Student	81.9
People who work in government organs and institutions	80.6
Retiree	80.3
Enterprise administrator, factory manager	79.8
Farmer	79.8
Technicians of all kinds	79.1
Business man (boss) /self employed	78.9
Average	78.8
Worker/waiter/clerk/part time job	76.8
Freelancer (such as actor or actress)	76.1
Soldier /security guard/ police man	75.6
Others(please mark out)	74.2
Not capable to work	72.5
Laid off workers/ await job assignment /retiree ahead of time/ out of employment	72.0

(4) Higher income could bring happiness, but not positively linear correlation

According to the survey, when family income is less than 4000 RMB, sense of happiness and income are positive correlation. When family income is higher than 4000, the curve of sense of happiness is wave like. The middle level income group of

5000 to 7000 RMB has the strongest sense of happiness. If it is 7000 RMB or above, there is fluctuation. The 15000 to 20000 RMB group is the most uncertain. Its average value of sense of happiness is just the same as 1000 to 1499 RMB group. (please refer to figure 3)



2. The three main factors effect on SWB are family, wealth and living environment

When respondents were asked by the question “what’s the most important factor to your happiness?”, they rank factors in terms of importance like this: good relationship of family members, wealth, social order, career, medical care and spiritual life.

In terms of Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory, love and respect requirements such as good relationship of family members are the most important things to Beijing citizens. At the same time, income, good social order and stable job could bring people sense of security and satisfy the requirement of security. At present, Beijing citizens are in the middle to up level of needs.

(1) People paying more attention on good family relationship have more happiness

According to data, the score of people who attach much importance to family is 82, which is 8 points higher than social climbers, and 5 points higher than pursuer of wealthy life.

(2) Sense of happiness depends on satisfaction degree of income

According to the survey, sense of happiness is not positively linear to income, but to satisfaction degree of income. When question “to which degree you are satisfied with your income?” was asked, 27.6% respondents chose “very satisfied” and “satisfied”, and 20.9% respondents chose “very unsatisfied” and “unsatisfied”. The value of sense of happiness is 89 in the “very satisfied” group, which is 23 points higher than the “very unsatisfied” group with the score 66.

(3) Self recognition and fair social environment are guarantees of happiness

Self recognition of citizens is closely related to sense of happiness. When the question “how would you say your social position?” was asked, 71.7% respondents said that it is just normal, only 6% said it is high, and 19.2% said it is low. Value of sense of happiness is 86 in the group who think they have high social position. Whereas it is only 70 in the group who think they have low social position. There is a difference of 16 points.

There has been a saying of “Worry of Unfairness, other than Worry of Amount of Citizens” in Chinese history. People should have same opportunity, fairness and rights guarantee in society. If a society lacks fairness, it will certainly make influence

on sense of happiness. When respondents were asked by the question “would you think our society could provide you fairness and justice?”, 49.2% gave positive answer. The value of sense of happiness in this group is 83. It is 14 points higher than the group who gave negative answer.

(4) Healthy body and mind are preconditions of happiness

Health is precondition of happiness. In other words, healthy people have more happy resources. 44.8% respondents are satisfied with their health and value of sense of happiness is 83. Whereas, people who are very unsatisfied with their health have lowest score, that is 65. It can be concluded that health is closely related to sense of happiness. Therefore, to provide good healthcare services and regulate the medicine markets are important approaches to be taken.

Mental health is very important as well. According to this survey, 18.9% respondents suffer from mental burden. Value of sense of happiness is 14 points lower than the group who don't have mental problems.

(5) People who enjoy their works have stronger sense of happiness

General speaking, 45% respondents think their job interesting. 46.4% think “their job could display their own value” and 31.4% respondents think they have “promotion opportunity and bright future in their jobs”. The value of sense of happiness is about 67 in the group not satisfied with their jobs. Whereas the value of sense of happiness is as much as 85 in the group satisfied with their jobs.

Other suggestions about the study

China's academics are still working on index system of happiness. There isn't any authorized conclusion yet. During recent years, some foreign and domestic academic institutions as well as NPO all conducted survey on sense of happiness. While they had good achievement, it is difficult to have equal share in decision making process. At this time, Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics took lead to study SWB of citizens over other government departments. It is going to take its advantage of data-mining and reflect the degree of harmonious society, and let public requirements have equal share in decision making process.

How could we measure happiness? To care about indexes of happiness, and improve living standard are starting point of construction of harmonious society. What happiness is? How to measure happiness? It is not highly standardized. There are different definition and measurement methods in different countries, governments and organizations. It is difficult to compare them with each other and the result is not convincing. Ron Coleman, the organizer of the second session of GNH, thought that GNH perhaps is too sentimental. In fact, happiness itself could not be measured. We could only measure some substitutions which theoretically may bring happiness to people. The study of SWS of Beijing citizen is a significative effort in this field. Standing in the shoes of government departments, we tried to design a set of questionnaires fit for development of Beijing and expected to be further enriched.

How would we judge the result? First of all, it is subjective view of happiness. It is not fit for examinational scope of achievements of the local government.

Secondly, although Beijing citizens have relatively strong sense of happiness in this survey, compared with other cities and countries, there is still gap. Domestically, the per capita GDP of Beijing is No.2, but its happiness degree is only middle level in other current studies. It means that happiness involves in many factors, not only economy development, but also environment, population and resources, etc. Internationally, although per capita GDP of Beijing is close to the average of the developed countries, there is still gap between capital cities. The key issue is to improve living standard of people.

During the process, we also found out that those factors are complicated. At different time, with different environment and in different affairs, the answer can be varied. That is the reason why this survey result may have richness of many fold and variations. In this study, we'd like to reflect subjective view of well-being of Beijing citizens through a profile of career, region, education level and age.

References:

1. “Measure Happiness---- The Study of Subjective Well-being”. Xing Zhanjun. People’s Education Press
2. The Secret of Eudaemonics. Xi Kaiyuan. “China Electric Corporation Management ” Volume 6, 2006
3. GNH Should be the measurement index of social development. Lu Peiyi “Scientific Development Concept and Harmonious Society” Volume 7,2006
4. Overview of Subjective Well-being. Tong Yongfeng. “Journal of Liaoning Economy Management College” Volume 1,2006
5. Measuring GNH <http://www.bhutan.gov.bt>
6. Inequality and happiness: are Europeans and Americans different? “Journal of Public Economics” 88 (2004) 2009– 2042