Measurement of Multidimensional Well-being of Women in India during 2015-16: A Household-Level Study Using National Family Health Survey Data

Anindita Sengupta
Barrackpore Rastraguru Surendranath College
West Bengal State University
asengupta15@yahoo.com

Improvement of quality of human life has always been the primary motive of the governments of different countries in the world. Till 1980s, governments concentrated on monetary measurements of economic development using the concepts like GDP, National Income or Per Capita Income for policy purposes. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach shifted our focus from monetary indicators of development to non-monetary wellbeing of human beings (Sen, 1990, p.44). Thereafter, wellbeing of human beings became centre of attraction for the governments throughout the world. Consequently, attempts were made construct socioeconomic indicators as an alternative to GDP per capita as a measure of wellbeing. The Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 1990) was constructed using Sen's approach to make international comparisons of achievements and deprivations of well-being. However, HDI was criticized for incorporating GDP per capita itself as a component and also for non-inclusion of the dimensions of life other than health and education (Dasgupta, 1990, 1992; Anand & Ravallion, 1993; Anand and Sen, 2000; Sen,1999). Following these criticisms, UNDP replaced HDI by Human Poverty Index (HPI). Standard of Living (SL) and Quality of Life (QL) are other two much-used indices for international comparisons of deprivation. However, national and international comparisons of wellbeing using HDI-based indices, although deviate significantly from GNP-based rankings, are aggregative measures of development which are absolutely necessary for macro-level policy formulations, but they fail to incorporate many other important dimensions of wellbeing of individuals. Hence, it is quintessential to find out a comprehensive measure of wellbeing in order to make national as well as international comparisons of well-being.

Well-being can be expressed as the combination of feeling good and functioning well; experiencing positive emotions like happiness and contentment as well as the development of individual potential, having control over own life, having a sense of purpose, and having positive relationships. It is a sustainable condition that allows the individual or people to

develop and flourish. Higher well-being is linked to several better outcomes regarding physical health and longevity as well as better individual performance at work. A country with citizens having higher life satisfaction can show better economic performance.

Recently, measurements of well-being are becoming more scientific and accurate. However, many researchers ended up measuring well-being using either a single item about life satisfaction or happiness, or a limited set of items regarding quality of life. Such measures have failed to capture those aspects of life which are fundamental to critical outcomes. A comprehensive measure of well-being should incorporate all the major components of well-being, both hedonic (pleasure and enjoyment) and eudaimonic (meaning and purpose) aspects. Chiappero Martinetti (2000) used fuzzy set theory to investigate wellbeing in a multidimensional frame in Italy. Balestrino and Sciclone (2001) claimed a substantial difference between income-based and functioning-based measure of well-being using data of Italy. Huppert and So (2013) took a systematic approach to comprehensively measure well-being in a framework based on ten dimensions of good mental health. Diener et al. (2009, 2012, 2017) constructed a new measure of subjective well-being following the concepts of (1) psychological well-being, (2) positive feelings, negative feelings and a balance between the two and (3) positive thinking. Ruggeri et al. (2020) used a multidimensional measure of well-being to compare well-being of people of 21 European countries. However, most of such advanced measurements of wellbeing were confined within the European countries. There is a overwhelming absence of advanced level of research on construction of multidimensional wellbeing in Asian countries like India. Majumder (2006, 2009) measured wellbeing of Indian women using the fuzzy sets theory following Martinetti. Sengupta (2014, 2016) measured functioning-based well-being of men and women, as proposed by Amartya Sen and others, for 28 states in India based on National Family Health Survey 3 data. However, it is extremely necessary to construct a comprehensive measure of well-being which would include both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of human life in India.

Under this backdrop, this paper is an attempt to construct a multidimensional index of wellbeing of Indian women incorporating the items suggested by Huppert & So (2013). Our study utilises household-level data from the Indian National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) during 2015-16. We have incorporated ten dimensions of good mental health which include both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being, i.e. competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive emotion, positive relationships, resilience, self-esteem, and vitality. Using information on women in NFHS-4 data, we have constructed categorical variables to represent indicators of ten dimensions of well-being. From these

indicators, a single factor score is calculated to represent multidimensional well-being. This factor score comprises a summary of performance of an individual woman across the ten dimensions, which is similar to a summary score such as GDP, and will be of general value to policymakers. In order to construct the index, we have used the Confirmatory Factor Analysis method in Stata software. We have further calculated the state level averages of the well-being indices and ranked the states of India according to it. To find out the significant explanatory factors behind variations in well-being indices of women, we have used the OLS regression method, taking the well-being index of an individual woman as the dependent variable and wealth-index score and several conversion factors like age, relationship with the head of the household, family-size, religion, caste, sector and agro-climatic area as independent variable. Although wellbeing of individual women is found to be significantly related to wealth they possess, but it is also highly influenced by several other explanatory variables e.g. age, relationship with head of the household, family size, caste, religion, agro-climatic zones and rural/urban areas.