

Determinants of Life Satisfaction in Canada: A Causal Modelling Approach

Authors : Rose Branch-Allen, John Jayachandran

Abstract : Background and purpose: Canada is a pluralistic, multicultural society with an ethno-cultural composition that has been shaped over time by immigrants and their descendants. Although Canada welcomes these immigrants, many will endure hardship and assimilation difficulties. Despite these life hurdles, surveys consistently disclose high life satisfaction for all Canadians. Most research studies on Life Satisfaction/ Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) have focused on one main determinant and a variety of social demographic variables to delineate the determinants of life satisfaction. However, very few research studies examine life satisfaction from a holistic approach. In addition, we need to understand the causal pathways leading to life satisfaction, and develop theories that explain why certain variables differentially influence the different components of SWB. The aim this study was to utilize a holistic approach to construct a causal model and identify major determinants of life satisfaction. Data and measures: This study utilized data from the General Social Survey, with a sample size of 19, 597. The exogenous concepts included age, gender, marital status, household size, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, location, immigration status, religiosity, and neighborhood. The intervening concepts included health, social contact, leisure, enjoyment, work-family balance, quality time, domestic labor, and sense of belonging. The endogenous concept life satisfaction was measured by multiple indicators (Cronbach's alpha = .83). Analysis: Several multiple regression models were run sequentially to estimate path coefficients for the causal model. Results: Overall, above average satisfaction with life was reported for respondents with specific socio-economic, demographic and lifestyle characteristics. With regard to exogenous factors, respondents who were female, younger, married, from high socioeconomic status background, born in Canada, very religious, and demonstrated high level of neighborhood interaction had greater satisfaction with life. Similarly, intervening concepts suggested respondents had greater life satisfaction if they had better health, more social contact, less time on passive leisure activities and more time on active leisure activities, more time with family and friends, more enjoyment with volunteer activities, less time on domestic labor and a greater sense of belonging to the community. Conclusions and Implications: Our results suggest that a holistic approach is necessary for establishing determinants of life satisfaction, and that life satisfaction is not merely comprised of positive or negative affect rather understanding the causal process of life satisfaction. Even though, most of our findings are consistent with previous studies, a significant number of causal connections contradict some of the findings in literature today. We have provided possible explanation for these anomalies researchers encounter in studying life satisfaction and policy implications.

Keywords : causal model, holistic approach, life satisfaction, socio-demographic variables, subjective well-being

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