

Leisure Time Television Viewing and Subjective Well-Being:
A Study on Rural Women in Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

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television;
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Rural women watch television as an important leisure time activity. Television is considered to be one of the best ways of reducing stress and is an easy, routine activity for women living in the villages. Subjective well-being, reflects an individual's own judgement about the quality of his or her life. This study tries to find out if television viewing contributes to the subjective well-being of rural women in Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu. This study is based on the findings of an UGC-UPE funded project. A survey method was adopted for this study. Findings reveal that heavy viewers of television are the ones who are optimistic about their future, feel satisfaction and convey an overall sense of well-being in their lives.

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1.Introduction

Television viewing is often considered to be a prominent leisure activity in villages. Leisure is the time when one can ease themselves and find respite and relief from the mundane work of everyday life. When compared to other leisure activities, television viewing need not be organised with other persons. One can sit alone in front of the television and does not require a partner with similar time availability and similar preferences. Moreover, watching television does not require any special physical or cognitive abilities (Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

Watching television is an easy, routine activity for many rural women. Television exposes them to the world outside their village. It provides them both information and entertainment. Many rural women rely on television for entertainment. With the above views in mind, this study tries to find out if leisure time television viewing contributes to the subjective well-being of rural women in Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu. This study is based on the findings of an UGC-UPE funded project.

Subjective Well- Being (SWB)

The beginnings of research on subjective well-being can be found in early research starting in the 1920s. In psychology, the perspective of humanist psychology that was popular in the 1960s criticised the inclination of traditional psychology to concentrate on negative aspects of human functioning. Humanistic movement stressed for a more positive psychology. Humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers viewed human nature as basically positive, and asserted that every individual is born with positive inner potentials, and that the driving force in life is to realize these potentials. Humanist psychologists strongly believed that the aim of psychology should be to study and support conditions that assist people to attain fruitful and healthy lives.

Psychologists until then mainly focused on negative emotional states such as depression and anxiety. After emphasis was laid on positive psychology, they became interested in positive emotions and feelings of well-being. Within the discipline, an agreement grew that self-reports on how well life is going, can give significant information on underlying emotional states. This lead to the measuring of what is best referred to as subjective well-being (commonly abbreviated

as SWB). Subjective well-being though not the same as happiness in a strict sense does include several aspects typically associated with happiness and good life. Ed Diener (2000) was a prominent researcher who studied subjective well-being (SWB). According to Diener, measures of SWB assess a person's level of life satisfaction and the frequency of positive and negative emotional experiences.

Diener's definition of subjective well-being is evaluating life positively and feeling good. "Thus a person is said to have high subjective well-being if she or he experiences life satisfaction and frequent joy, and only infrequently experiences unpleasant emotions such as sadness or anger. On the contrary, a person is said to have low subjective well-being if she or he is dissatisfied with life, experiences little joy and affection and frequently feels negative emotions such as anger or anxiety" (Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997, p. 25).

This definition of subjective well-being has since been empirically extended. It encompasses how people assess their own lives in terms of both affective (how they feel) and cognitive (what they think) components of wellbeing (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2003; Veenhoven, 1994). Overall, high subjective well-being combines three specific factors: (1) frequent and intense positive affective states, (2) the relative absence of negative emotions, and (3) global life satisfaction.

Researchers discovered that many economic and social indicators of a person's "objective" life circumstances (e.g., income, age, and occupation) were weakly related to people's own judgements of their well-being (Andrews & Withey, 1976). In a major review of this research, Diener (1984) argued that subjective well-being (SWB) that could be rated by life satisfaction and positive emotional experience, was a critical component of well-being that was completely missing in many researches.

Subjective well-being, in every day terms, reflects an individual's own judgement about the quality of his or her life. From a subjective well-being (SWB) perspective, economic and social indicators are incomplete because they do not directly access how happy or satisfied people are

with their lives (Diener & Suh, 1997). Although these indicators describe the “facts” of a person’s life, they do not tell us how a person thinks and feels about these facts.

In research, SWB is widely considered to have three primary components (Diener, 2000). These three components are *life satisfaction*, *positive affect* and *negative affect*. Life satisfaction is a cognitive judgement concerning how satisfied a person is with his or her life. The cognitive component is also known as contentment (Veenhoven, 2007). The emotional components includes positive and negative affect that is referred to people’s feelings about their lives. Positive affect refers to the frequency and intensity of pleasant emotions such as happiness and joy. Negative affect refers to the frequency and intensity of unpleasant emotions such as sadness and worry.

When asked to recall positive and negative life events, happy people recall more positive events than unhappy people (Diener & Suh, 1997). People with high SWB are more likely to identify life in positive ways, wherein they expect a positive future and express confidence in their abilities. People with lower SWB emphasize more on negative life events and show more self-absorbed reflection about themselves and about their problems.

The European Quality of Life Survey of 2003, revealed a strong correlation between time use and subjective wellbeing. In most of the countries covered by the survey, it was found that people who had long work hours and poor work-life balance generally had low subjective wellbeing (Böhnke, 2005). More time they spend at work, lesser time they have for leisure. Since the extent of leisure is important to well-being, it could be said that poor people not only suffer from economic poverty but also from time poverty and therefore low well-being. This has been validated in the findings of studies by the World Bank in Sub-Saharan Africa. These studies revealed that poor farmers, especially women, face competing demands to their time use. (Blackden & Wodon, 2006).

It is seen that research indicates that life satisfaction is not a simple reflection of actual events and conditions. It also reflects individual mood and the cognitive appraisal of events and conditions (Cummins & Nistico, 2002). Many scholars who have reviewed the literature on adult

life satisfaction have found it valuable to differentiate between two classes of factors associated in perceptions of subjective well-being: personality (or internal) factors and contextual (or external) factors. As Diener and Lucas, (2000) explain, subjective well-being is a person's own evaluation of her or his life, within his or her personal framework.

The relation between leisure and well-being may be causal and enduring. Leisure during adolescence predicted wellbeing 15 years later (Sacker & Cable, 2006). Theories attribute the link between leisure and well-being to several factors including that leisure buffers the effects of negative events (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) and enhances well-being by acting as a protective factor by providing social support, feelings of competency and meaning, relaxation and distraction (Caldwell, 2005).

Mendelsohn's (1966) mass entertainment theory explains that people need relaxation and harmless escapism that television entertainment readily offers. If television entertainment was not available, then people would find other sources to release tensions of everyday life. It was seen that television simply served these needs more easily, powerfully and efficiently, than other alternatives. Mendelsohn stresses that television performed its function very well and at extremely low cost. This could be the reason why rural women mainly turn to watching television as a leisure time activity. Television helps people to relax so that they could later engage in their routine activities with renewed energy and strength. Therefore, the habit of watching television and the pleasure of being entertained seem to be irresistible (Mundorf and Brownell 1990). Possibly, for rural women television is a favourite way to spend one's leisure hours because of the small effort needed, in fact none, to turn on the set and watch.

2. Research Method

This study attempts to find out if television viewing contributes to the subjective well-being of rural women in Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu. The participants of the study were 514 rural women from Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu. These rural women were selected from the villages of Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu. A survey instrument was used to collect data. The questionnaire included Likert –type questions with answers ranging from 1=agree to 3=not sure or 1=not at all to 5 all the time. The numeric variable, daily exposure to television was collapsed

into three sub groups: Group 1, named light viewers, consisted of those who do not watch TV at all or watched less than one hour of TV. Group 2, named moderate viewers, consisted of those who watch more than one hour but less than three hours of TV, Group 3, named heavy viewers, consisted of those who watch more than three hours TV. This compound variable was called TV exposure. Measures of subjective well-being are assessed using a person's level of life satisfaction and the positive and negative emotional experiences. The objective of the study is to analyse the extent of subjective well-being experienced by rural women in the study area due to television usage.

3. Analysis

A crosstabulation was done between the compound variable, TV exposure and the following variables.

Table 1

Variable :	Light Viewers	Moderate Viewers	Heavy Viewers
My life could have been happier than it is now			
Agree	77%	36%	23%
Disagree	12%	39%	64%
Not sure	11%	25%	13%

For the statement 'My life could have been happier than it is now' 77% of light viewers answered agree and 64% of heavy viewers answered disagree and 39% of moderate viewers answered disagree.

Table 2

Variable :	Light Viewers	Moderate Viewers	Heavy Viewers
These are the best years in my life			
Agree	19%	46%	68%
Disagree	73%	36%	11%
Not sure	8%	18%	21%

For the statement 'These are the best years in my life' 73% of light viewers answered disagree and 68% of heavy viewers answered agree and 46% of moderate viewers answered agree.

Table 3

Variable :	Light Viewers	Moderate Viewers	Heavy Viewers
I am just as happy as when I am young			
Agree	27%	43%	65%
Disagree	68%	39%	19%
Not sure	5%	18%	16%

For the statement 'I am just as happy as when I am young' 68% of light viewers answered disagree and 65% of heavy viewers answered agree and 43% of moderate viewers answered agree.

Table 4

Variable :	Light Viewers	Moderate Viewers	Heavy Viewers
I would not change my past life even if I could			
Agree	21%	48%	73%
Disagree	56%	35%	18%
Not sure	23%	17%	9%

For the statement 'I would not change my past life even if I could' 56% of light viewers answered disagree and 73% of heavy viewers answered agree and 48% of moderate viewers answered agree.

Table 5

Variable :	Light Viewers	Moderate Viewers	Heavy Viewers
My expectations are not fulfilled in the past years			
Agree	83%	36%	27%
Disagree	12%	41%	65%
Not sure	5%	23%	8%

For the statement ‘My expectations are not fulfilled in the past years’ 83% of light viewers answered agree and 65% of heavy viewers answered disagree and 41% of moderate viewers answered disagree.

Table 6

Variable :	Light Viewers	Moderate Viewers	Heavy Viewers
My life is on the right track			
Not at all	28%	12%	10%
Occasionally	41%	13%	11%
Some of the time	18%	17%	13%
Often	10%	39%	43%
All the time	3%	19%	23%

For the statement ‘My life is on the right track’ 41% of light viewers answered occasionally followed by 28% of light viewers answered not at all, 43% of heavy viewers answered often followed by 23% of heavy viewers answered all the time and 39% of moderate viewers answered often followed by 19% of moderate viewers answered all the time.

Table 7

Variable :	Light Viewers	Moderate Viewers	Heavy Viewers
My future looks good			
Not at all	23%	14%	8%
Occasionally	38%	15%	10%
Some of the time	21%	16%	16%
Often	14%	36%	46%
All the time	4%	19%	20%

For the statement ‘My future looks good’ 38% of light viewers answered occasionally followed by 23% of light viewers answered not at all, 46% of heavy viewers answered often followed by 20% of heavy viewers answered all the time and 36% of moderate viewers answered often followed by 19% of moderate viewers answered all the time.

Table 8

Variable :	Light Viewers	Moderate Viewers	Heavy Viewers
I like myself			
Not at all	32%	7%	3%
Occasionally	25%	10%	7%
Some of the time	18%	14%	17%
Often	15%	23%	25%
All the time	10%	46%	48%

For the statement 'I like myself' 32% of light viewers answered not at all followed by 25% of light viewers answered occasionally, 48% of heavy viewers answered all the time followed by 25% of heavy viewers answered often and 46% of moderate viewers answered all the time followed by 23% of moderate viewers answered often.

Table 9

Variable :	Light Viewers	Moderate Viewers	Heavy Viewers
I feel there must be something wrong with me			
Not at all	9%	19%	21%
Occasionally	10%	40%	46%
Some of the time	12%	17%	16%
Often	41%	13%	10%
All the time	28%	11%	7%

For the statement 'I feel there must be something wrong with me' 41% of light viewers answered often followed by 28% of light viewers answered all the time, 46% of heavy viewers answered occasionally followed by 21% of heavy viewers answered not at all and 40% of moderate viewers answered occasionally followed by 19% of moderate viewers answered not at all.

Table 10

Variable :	Light Viewers	Moderate Viewers	Heavy Viewers
I can handle any problems that come up			
Not at all	21%	14%	7%
Occasionally	39%	16%	12%
Some of the time	19%	17%	16%
Often	13%	34%	45%
All the time	8%	19%	20%

For the statement 'I can handle any problems that come up' 39% of light viewers answered occasionally followed by 21% of light viewers answered not at all, 45% of heavy viewers answered often followed by 20% of heavy viewers answered all the time and 34% of moderate viewers answered often followed by 19% of moderate viewers answered all the time.

4. Discussion

The results from the study reveal that rural women who are heavy television viewers are the ones who stated that they were experiencing the best years of their life. They seem to have the same happiness that they had when they were young. They clearly state that they choose not to change anything about their life even if they could. They see their life on the right track, hopefully awaiting a good future and are confident enough to handle any problems that come up in their lives. The light viewers feel, life could have been happier than it is now, and state their expectations are not fulfilled in the past years, and also feel that this could be because of something that is wrong with them. Unlike the heavy and the moderate viewers the light viewers do not like themselves.

5. Conclusion

From the above study, it is clear that heavy viewers of television are the ones who are optimistic about their future, feel satisfaction and convey an overall sense of well-being in their lives. This could be because of involving in an enjoyable leisure activity such as television viewing that alleviates them from stress and provides relaxation. After a long days work in the agricultural fields, television watching is seen as an important source that offers both information and

entertainment. Since television is readily available in every rural household, watching television becomes an important leisure activity in the lives of rural women. It brings about a happy, relaxed mood and takes their minds off the everyday worries, thereby contributing to their subjective wellbeing. Television viewing during leisure time undoubtedly provides respite and relief for the rural women from the mundane work of everyday life.

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