



The Urban-Outskirt Difference in Subjective Well-being Level among Tehran and Rasht Dwellers as Iranian Metropolises. Are Tehran Dwellers More Satisfied?

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Abstract

Background: Along with general health and economic indices, policymakers are more dealing with the subjective well-being (SWB) of society as a criterion to evaluate their performance. Also, the increasing number of articles published in mainstream health economics journals approves that the importance of SWB is increasing. The aim of the study was to investigate the urban-outskirt difference in subjective well-being level among Tehran and Rasht dwellers as Iranian metropolises.

Methods: The analysis of the study is based on a structured interview that has been carried out by a designed questionnaire with 451 people living in Tehran and Rasht selected by the stratified two-stage cluster sampling method in 2018. One of these study innovations is defining the relative SWB index, a proxy for SWB and happiness. As the second main contribution, we try to overcome data unreliability about income and wealth by defining a specific index for identifying the financial status of interviewees. A series of statistical techniques like ordered Probit were used.

Results: According to the results, the city dwellers have higher life satisfaction (5.23 out of 7) than outskirts dwellers (5.05) while keeping the other factors to be constant. Also, people who live in Rasht had a lower level of SWB (5.06) than Tehran dwellers (5.22). The impact of religious belief is positive on the SWB level.

Conclusions: It is for several years that international reports show that Iranian people are not at a proper level of happiness. Having more financial satisfaction, and feeling more positive emotions should be considered across society. Besides, being the landlord has a statistically significant positive effect on city dwellers' SWB.

Keywords: Self-assessments, Happiness, Urban population, Personal satisfaction.

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Introduction

For decades, neoclassic economists have explained that the choices which are made by individuals are determined by the utility that depends on consuming goods and services. Recently, economists have increasingly believed that economic choices and decision utility approach are not good indicators for well-being and self-reported subjective well-being is a robust indicator which shows the whole evaluation of personal life. SWB concept has been considered as equal to happiness or the quality of life in many economics, psychology, and sociology studies.¹ There are some efforts to define determinants of SWB, such as income, age, marital status, education, and employment status^{2,3} that are common in all

SWB studies. According to the main aim of each SWB study, it may focus on other determinants like health status,^{4,5,6} district of dwellings,^{7,8,9} religion,³ ethnicity,⁸ social relationship,¹⁰ and different components of housing environment.^{8,11} Some studies are conducted to evaluate the urban-rural difference in happiness level.^{5,12,13} In decades, there has been much immigration from rural areas and towns to metropolitan cities. This migration happens due to more job opportunities and better incomes.^{5,12,13} Then, due to higher housing expenses in metropolises, informal housing and shack settlements have been raised.¹⁴ Also, more urbanization is associated with more industrialization, and there are many studies on migration and urbanization.^{15,16} In Iran, there has been a massive amount of migration from rural to urban areas in recent decades. Some of this population have lived in the outskirts of metropolises. Given the importance of happiness, there is no comprehensive study on outskirts dwellers' level of SWB compared to metropolitan dwellers and defining related determinants of the SWB in Iran.

Exploring all determinants which affecting nation's happiness is a fundamental key for policymakers.² Also, exploring the probable difference of outskirts-urban dwellers in the SWB level is another critical issue for the planning of rising it. We examine the factors which are related to housing status for both kinds of dwellers like residence space,¹⁷ and tenure status -being owner or not-^{6,11,18} Some studies define religion as a positive or negative factor for SWB.^{3,11,12} As Iranians are one of the nations that religious beliefs are bold,¹⁹ this variable has been tested, too.

Given the importance of mental health, investigating the probable difference of outskirts-urban dwellers in the SWB level is crucial. Besides, an increasing amount of living people on the outskirts of metropolises become a major dilemma for the government and make lots of social and economic problems. Also, it seems that there is no comprehensive study on the outskirts dwellers' level of SWB compared to metropolitans' dwellers and defining related determinants of the SWB in Iran. This study is to evaluate SWB and its determinants in Iran and focuses on people living in Tehran and Rasht city and outskirts dwellers. One difficulty is providing a quantitative measurement for subjective well-being, while subjective measures of life are interna.¹⁶ For evaluating SWB, we try to modify the local expression of SWB, by using a question with emphasis on relative SWB, due to Iranian culture. There are lots of literature that show relative status and comparison with a reference group is more important than absolute statuses of people.^{4,13,20} In Iran, people are more concerned about their relative status (income, consumption) than their absolute status,

and they compare themselves to a reference group mentally.²¹ The magnitude of relative consumption and estimated quantity of relative importance coefficients show that relative status or rivalry is high among Iranian households. This indicates the importance of relative status to absolute status in Iranian household consumption patterns.²² Defining this indicator is regarded as a contribution of this paper. Also, when Iranian people are formally asked about their expenses and income, they underestimate their real income culturally, and it is a common problem in a typical empirical study in Iran. Also, in developing countries measuring income is difficult because most respondents work in informal sectors; thus, they cannot report a fixed income.²³ To overcome these problems and comparison effect, as the second contribution of this study, we have asked about relative financial satisfaction and used it as a proxy for showing financial status. Using related econometrics and statistical tests, and ordered Probit regression method was used to evaluate the determinants. Also, some robustness checks were carried out on the results.

Given the struggle policymakers have had to define the proper way to assess the happiness level of society, we felt compelled to identify a cost-effective methodology that can use to screen subjective well-being (SWB) among people under Iranian culture.

Materials and Methods

The analysis of this study is based on a structured interview using a questionnaire with people living in Tehran and Rasht and their outskirts in 2018. This study is intending to evaluate SWB and its determinants and compare the SWB levels between outskirts dwellers and urban dwellers. A stratified two-stage cluster method was used to select participants. The sample size is calculated based on two formulas. The first is a sample-proportion formula to ensure the representativeness of the sample, and the second is for comparing the mean of two populations. Given the budgetary constraint, 218 people who lived on the outskirts and 233 people in cities have interviewed. The age limit for an interviewee is 16 or more. At this stage, direct interviews with people were done by research partners who had the necessary training, background, and knowledge of the research method and had a history of collaboration with the statistics centre. All interviewees were residents of the area in which they were interviewed and asked to answer on a voluntary and honest basis. Gallup's questionnaire has been used in this study regarding the positive and negative emotions. The validity test of the questionnaire has been performed using a panel of experts. The reliability test has been carried out using the Raykov's reliability coefficient (RRC).

Studies on the determinant of SWB adopt a general form as follows:

$$SWB=f(SEs, SDs, Hs, RDs, R) \quad (1)$$

SWB is a dependent variable and independent variables that categorized in socio-economic (SEs), socio-demographic (SDs), and health variables (Hs) in addition to variables related to residency, and a district of living (RDs) and people religious beliefs (R). The hypothesis is that the district of living area and other factors related to the people residency, affect SWB.

Notwithstanding the extensive description of SWB measures, there is no unique standard.⁶ A most common definition of SWB is general judgment and evaluation of a person about her/his quality of life as a whole. As relative status (income, consumption) are more fundamental than absolute status in Iran,²⁰ to select the dependent variable, a localized index defined according to the Iranian culture which is a contribution of this study in Iran.

Almost common in all happiness studies socioeconomic independent variables like age, sex, living with a partner, educational level, and having a career are the independent variables. Financial satisfaction is defined as a proxy for the income and financial status of people as all data about income is understated by interviewees in Iran. Some other variables used in the model for showing the health status of people. Variables that are related to the district of housing, tenure status and religious beliefs of people also are considered as explanatory variables for the model.

A series of statistical techniques (correlation process, ordered probit regression method, and OLS regression method) have been used to examine the relations between SWB and related determinants. For non-binary variables, the Shapiro Wilk test and for the normality Skewness/Kurtosis test has been used. The mean for all variables have been calculated by grouping by the district of living, outskirts or city, metropolises, Tehran or Rasht, gender, female or male separately. All data were analyzed using STATA version 14.2.

Results

Table 1 represents descriptive data for the whole sample, by grouping the district of living, the outskirts or city, and by metropolises (Tehran/ Rasht) respectively for dependent and all independent variables for the sample including people from 16 years old or more living in Tehran and Rasht cities. SWB could be a proxy for happiness; it is mean for outskirts dwellers is 5.05 (out of 7) that is less than city dweller, 5.23. There is the same relation for Rasht (5.06), and Tehran dwellers (5.22).

To have a better understanding of the association between variables, table 2 represents the correlation analysis for all variables two by two.

Table 3 represents the ordered probit regression results, and the marginal effect (the effect of a unit change in each variable on the probability of being very satisfied). For instance, a unit rise in financial satisfaction raises the probability of being satisfied and lowers that of being unsatisfied. The estimations are done for each group of dwellers, separately. Equation 1-3 concern with outskirts dwellers' sample. Equation 1 is a basic equation. In other equations, for showing the robustness of results, some variables have been added to model one by one. Equation 2 has all the independent variables of the model. The estimation of equation 3 is carried out to evaluate the effect of religion on happiness. In equations 4 to 6, all the estimations are carried out just for the city dweller. All data showed similar effects of independent variables on the probability of each result for the dependent variable for each group of dwellers, but few differences were observed between the outskirts dwellers and those who were living in urban areas.

Results of the ordered probit regression for the whole sample (the outskirts and city dwellers together) are provided in table 4. All estimations were done according to the

forementioned methodology. Almost all the results are the same as table 3. The table indicates that all results are robust.

Table 1. Descriptive data for the whole sample and disaggregation by metropolitans and living district

Variable description	Variable	Obs	Mean	Std.Dev.	Min	Max	Rasht	Tehran	City	Outskirt
Subjective well-being	rl_satf	445	5.14	1.07	2	7	5.06	5.22	5.23	5.05
Living in outskirts	Outsk	451	0.48	0.50	0	1	0.51	0.46	0.00	1.00
Living in Tehran	Tehran	451	0.51	0.50	0	1	0.00	1.00	0.54	0.49
Age	Age	449	38.56	12.38	16	81	38.18	38.93	38.19	38.97
Sex	Sex	450	0.33	0.47	0	1	0.52	0.15	0.29	0.37
Living with partner	Partner	451	0.71	0.45	0	1	0.73	0.69	0.73	0.68
Having academic education	Academic	451	0.34	0.48	0	1	0.36	0.33	0.41	0.28
Level of positive emotion	Positives	450	4.04	0.68	1	6	4.21	3.87	4.03	4.05
Level of negative emotion	Negativfeel	451	3.25	1.09	1	6	3.50	3.02	3.32	3.18
Self-reported level of health	Healt	448	4.61	0.98	1	6	4.65	4.58	4.63	4.59
Having a job	Occupied	449	0.61	0.49	0	1	0.44	0.77	0.67	0.55
Self-reported level of financial satisfaction	Finan	449	3.39	1.08	1	7	3.18	3.58	3.48	3.29
Owing a residency	Owner	451	0.63	0.48	0	1	0.63	0.63	0.61	0.66
Square meter per capita in residency	Space_indx	445	31.79	17.88	9	150	33.75	29.95	32.12	31.43
Self-reported level of religious belief	Rlgs	449	4.67	1.02	1	6	4.74	4.62	4.66	4.70

Reference group. Outskirt dweller, Tehran dweller, being female, living with a partner, having academic education (upper diploma), owing residency

Table 2. Correlation between all variables

Variable	rl_satf	Outsk	Tehran	Age	Sex	Partner	Academic	Positivfeel	Negativfeel	Healt	Occupied	Finan	Owner	Space_indx	Rlgs
rl_satf	1.00														
Outsk	-0.10	1.00													
Tehran	0.07	-0.07	1.00												
Age	0.02	0.03	0.02	1.00											
Sex	-0.01	0.10	-0.38	-0.09	1.00										
Partner	0.09	-0.05	-0.05	0.30	-0.09	1.00									
Academic	-0.09	-0.15	-0.02	-0.44	0.03	-0.24	1.00								
Positivfeel	0.27	0.01	-0.26	-0.17	0.14	0.09	0.04	1.00							
Negativfeel	-0.09	-0.06	-0.24	0.16	0.02	0.03	-0.08	-0.22	1.00						
Healt	0.14	-0.01	-0.02	-0.37	-0.03	-0.05	0.18	0.36	-0.27	1.00					
Occupied	0.00	-0.11	0.35	-0.04	-0.53	0.10	0.02	-0.14	-0.04	0.06	1.00				
Finan	0.50	-0.10	0.19	0.02	-0.07	0.13	-0.07	0.33	-0.16	0.25	0.04	1.00			
Owner	0.21	0.06	0.02	0.20	-0.05	-0.03	-0.10	0.11	-0.06	0.04	0.00	0.17	1.00		
Space_indx	0.09	-0.01	-0.11	0.25	0.03	-0.14	-0.06	0.01	0.06	-0.11	-0.19	0.07	0.18	1.00	
Rlgs	0.27	0.03	-0.08	0.12	0.15	0.16	-0.10	0.18	0.12	0.00	-0.08	0.25	0.08	0.04	1.00

Table 3. Ordered Probit Regression result for outskirt and city dwellers separately

Variables	Outskirt dweller						City dweller					
	1		2		3		4		5		6	
	Coefficient	SL	Coefficient	SL	Coefficient	SL	Coefficient	SL	Coefficient	SL	Coefficient	SL
Tehran	0.03		0.02		0.01		0.02		0.03		0.03	
Academic	-0.07		-0.07		-0.06		-0.04		-0.05		-0.05	
Positivfeel	0.06	*	0.05	*	0.04		0.07	*	0.06		0.06	
Negativfeel	-0.01		-0.01		-0.02		-0.02		-0.03		-0.02	
Health	0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	
Finan-satf	0.11	**	0.11	***	0.11	***	0.16	***	0.15	***	0.14	***
Owner			0.05		0.05				0.14	***	0.15	***
Space index			0.00		0.00				0.00	**	0.001	***
Rlgs					0.06	***					0.05	**
n	212		210		210		225		220		220	
Log Liklihood	-271.63		-268.41		-264.22		-285.06		-271.1		-268.57	
R ²	0.11		0.12		0.13		0.10		0.12		0.13	
LR chi2	67.87		71.14		79.52		66.3		77.38		82.46	

Note. dependent variable, relative life satisfaction (as a proxy for SWB), on a 7-point scale. Reference group. Outskirt dweller, Tehran dweller, having academic education (upper diploma), owing residency. Marginal effects are measured concerning the highest level of satisfaction. Significance Level (SL) are *P<0.1, **P<0.05, ***P<0.01

Table 4. Ordered Probit Regression result for whole sample

Variables	Whole Sample					
	1		2		3	
	Coefficient	Significance level	Coefficient	Significance level	Coefficient	Significance level
Outsk	-0.05	*	-0.05	*	-0.06	**
Tehran	0.02		0.02		0.02	
Academic	-0.06	*	-0.05	*	-0.06	*
Positivfeel	0.06	***	0.06	**	0.05	*
Negativfeel	-0.01		-0.01		-0.01	
Health	0.00		0.00		0.00	
Finan-satf	0.13	***	0.13	***	0.12	***
Owner			0.09	***	0.09	***
Space index			0.00		0.00	
Rlgs					0.05	***
n	437		430		430	
Log Liklihood	-561.5		-548.14		-541.77	
R ²	0.10		0.11		0.12	
LR chi2	132.53		139.23		151.77	

Discussion

This may be the first study which links the topic of outskirts-urban living situation and the literature on subjective well-being. It is for several years that international reports show that Iranian people are not at an adequate level of happiness. Furthermore, there has been much immigration from rural areas and towns to metropolitan cities due to more job opportunities and better incomes.^{24,25} It seems that there is no specific concern about the subjective well-being of these people. In this study, these kinds of problems have been bold by our shreds of evidence and findings.

The results showed that outskirts dwellers had a lower level of SWB. That can be attributed to several reasons. Due to the higher expense of living, particularly housing expenses in metropolises, some immigrants from rural areas and towns live in the shack settlements and outskirts area. Furthermore, some studies reported that living in a more inferior residency can reduce SWB and happiness.²⁶ These arguments can be a clue for researchers to find more reasons for the lower level of happiness among the outskirts dwellers.

People who live in Rasht had almost the same level of SWB to Tehran. This difference is remarkable between outskirts dwellers' SWB level which are 4.91 and 5.21, respectively for Rasht and Tehran. Some studies showed that there are city fixed-effects for measures of SWB while controlling for other parameters.⁶ Most future studies should be carried out to investigate the real reason for this result. It may relate to the culture and habit of Rasht dwellers.

Apart from the district of living, financial satisfaction is the most influential factor in happiness. This index is used as a proxy for the financial and income circumstances of people due to bias answers about real income in Iran. Results show city dwellers have an upper level of financial satisfaction (3.48 out of 7) than the second group (3.28 out of 7). There is a considerable difference in this index between the outskirts dweller of Tehran (3.63 out of 7), and Rasht (2.96 out of 7). This could be a good reason for explaining the difference between SWB of these two districts.

Most of the literature shows that the upper level of education can improve SWB, but there are a few studies that show educated people are less happy than the others.^{6,20,27} Our results show negative associations, but, not statistically significant.

We use multidimensional positive and negative life intangibles' feelings and emotion indices according to Gallup global emotion annually report definition.²⁸ Having more positive feelings can significantly raise the SWB of people. This result is following what we expected in most equations. For the negative emotional index, there is no considerable significant inverse relationship.

Some studies reported that religious belief had a positive impact on the SWB level, while there are studies that reported a negative impact. The results of the current study indicated the positive effects of such beliefs. People who had higher religious believes, tend to have an upper level of SWB, due to better adaption with life circumstances. This adaptation, in turn, leads to higher levels of happiness.²⁹ Some types of religious beliefs, behaviours, and cognitions foster self-regulation, self-esteem, and (more specifically) self-control, then they can increase the SWB level. Limited willpower in the process of decision making, can reduce SWB and fall the happiness feeling of people.³⁰ As a result, religiousness was positively associated with subjective well-being and measures of positive psychological outcomes, such as satisfaction with life and happiness, and negatively associated with measures of negative outcomes, such as anxiety and depression.³¹

In most studies, the homeownership status does have a positive effect or no effect on housing satisfaction and overall happiness.^{6,11,18,27} Most of our equation result shows that people are concern with being tenure and, owing residency increase their SWB statistically significant. This relationship is not significant just for outskirts dwellers. For city dwellers owning a residency is one of the most influential factors on SWB.

According to the findings, policymakers should pay more attention to the different aspects of the outskirts dweller, particularly for their mental health and happiness. The welfare policies of the country should be revised to increase the

financial satisfaction of all people. Some policies for raising the base level of SWB among some regions of Iran, such as the outskirts of Rasht, should be assigned by policymakers. This study also reveals that for the effect of being tenure, there is some difference relationship for the outskirts and city dwellers. This directly related to different circumstances of living, culture, and welfare of these two districts. Two exclusive contributions of the current study are defining two indices for SWB and financial circumstances according to the Iranian culture. Importantly, data is collected in 2018 while currently, Iran faces the economic crisis due to the US sanctions as well as the coronavirus. That has a considerable effect on not only Iranian's financial satisfaction as a leading determinant of happiness but also the marginal effect regarding 'external shocks' on people's perception of their well-being. Thus, more studies are needed to evaluate the current satisfaction and SWB level of people.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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