

Exploring the Intersection of Norms and Values in Shaping Quality of Life and Happiness: A Sociological Perspective Study of Lahore, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This study explores how our perceptions and experiences of happiness and quality of life are shaped by social norms and values. To learn more about how these social factors affect participants' expectations, aspirations, and general experiences of happiness and quality of life.

Methodology: This study used a qualitative method of exploration relying on interviews to collect data. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method each participant was selected based on specific criteria with one criterion being to include a reasonably diverse group of participants who represented a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds ages and cultures.

Findings: Using thematic analysis, it was found that social norms and values play a major role in determining how people view their happiness and quality of life, with social capital, cultural values, and social comparisons being particularly important factors.

Conclusion: The study concluded that social norms and values have a profound impact on our experiences and perceptions of happiness and quality of life. Theoretical perspectives like social constructionism and symbolic interactionism provide a framework for understanding how these norms and values influence our outcomes.

Keywords: Happiness, Quality of Life, Norms and Values, Individual Perceptions, Social Contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality of life and happiness are intricate ideas that have been explored in depth across various disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, and economics. While personal factors like income, education, and health certainly influence our quality of life and happiness, it's also important to recognize that social norms and values significantly shape how individuals perceive and experience these aspects of life.

Individual factors such as income education health etc. also affect our perception of quality of life and happiness even though these concepts may be affected by individual factors the constructs are complex and multi-faceted and have been studied across many academic disciplines including sociology

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psychology and economics the manifestation and interpretation of subjective experience are greatly attenuated by role and situational context as dominated by social factors and social values or both theoretical models of social constructionism and symbolic interactionism help us make sense of these social factors and consequences there is a large body of research and evidence that shows social factors as a determinant of happiness and quality of life i.e., cultural values such as individualism (Sortheix, & Schwartz, 2017; Cieciuch, & Colleagues, 2021; Knight, & Gunatilaka, 2024; VanderWeele et al., 2024; Panat, & Chandra, 2025; Helliwell et al., 2025; Helliwell et al., 2024; Rajkumar, 2023; Schwartz, & Sortheix, 2022;).

1.1 Research Questions

How social norms and values provide structure and shape the individual's perception regarding the quality of life and happiness goals.

- 1- To understand how social norms and values structure and shape a person perception of what quality of life and happiness mean to them.
- 2- To understand how social norms and values impact individual's hopes, expectations and lived experience of their quality of life and happiness.
- 3- To understand how social norms and values structure and shape the way they interact with and or influenced by other social factors i.e., socioeconomic status education culture to understand their quality of life and happiness.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism illustrates how social interaction and shared meaning have critical implications for an individual's self-concept as well as how they view the social world. Proponents of this theory posit that social norms and values are established and sustained by social interaction restricting our notions of how the world appears and how we experience our quality-of-life and happiness in relation to those norms and values.

1.2.2 Social constructionism

It shows that our social norms and values are created and maintained fundamentally through those interactions and institutions. Followers of social constructionism would argue that norms values and social meanings are neither taken for granted nor universal instead they are dependent to a large extent on the historical cultural and social context in which we live a lot of pioneering studies show that our norms and values have a considerable impact on the quality of life and happiness (Diener Suh 2000 Triandis 1995) for example previous studies indicated that cultural values related to individualism collectivism and materialism can affect the quality of life and happiness we think we have (Diener Suh 2000 Triandis 1995) in combination with social norms and values mentioned earlier social comparisons usually shape our assessment of happiness and quality of life (Festinger 1954 Suls Wheeler 2000) another vital collective characteristic that can predict individuals quality of life and happiness and is always rooted into networked relationships are social capital (Putnam 2000).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent research has examined the complex relationships between social norms values quality of life (QOL) and happiness for instance Howell (2017) found that social norms affect well well-being but only if the norms are consistent with ones values this implies that individuals who pick up on what society expects and are willing to hold to their values may expect to derive more well-being

Mahmood et, al. (2023) stated that in modern societies people find it difficult to adhere to these standards and values, but the majority of them are good for both individuals and society as a whole. Additionally,

social change is a constant process in our society that emphasizes how important it is to follow these standards and values. Norms are our socially accepted behaviors; if we don't follow them, the social order and structure of the society are upset, and social functions come to a halt. Therefore, societal norms place certain restrictions on people in order to maintain societal order and provide a pleasant and quality living, while value systems define what is important and desirable in our lives, as well as our own assessment of what is important for oneself or what is wrong and right.

The impact of social media on QOL has also been examined. Li et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review of 22 studies and found that social media use can lead to decreased QOL due to social comparison. Specifically, individuals who engage in upward social comparison (comparing oneself to others who are better off) on social media tend to experience decreased life satisfaction and happiness.

Kabat-Zinn and Davidson (2018) also discussed the dual avenues to happiness and well-being mindfulness practice and living according to one's personal value-based beliefs although deep breathing exercises and other experiential techniques and meditations are simply tools for the individual to use to increase acceptance for oneself and self-awareness people may find more meaning and purpose in life when their actions and goals align with their values previous research on income and happiness has received some recent scrutiny Tay and Diener (2019) found that the relationship between income and happiness is rather complex and is shaped by cultural norms and values for example people in societies that value materialistic norms seem to have a stronger link to happiness from income.

Mahmood et. al. (2022) stated that questions of QOL are currently frequently discussed in several academic domains. Sociologists view quality of life (QOL) as the emotional understanding of affluence, taking into account individual needs and perceptions. In economics, it refers to the standard of living, while in medicine, it refers to the factors that affect a stable way of life, such as health and illness. Personal satisfaction typically requires the wellbeing component, although quality of life must be defined widely. Researchers are becoming increasingly interested in human subjective wellbeing, which is gauged by a person's level of satisfaction with his life and his sense of happiness (which is also defined as a high percentage of both good and negative emotions).

Joshanloo et al. (2018) explored the relationship between values and well-being across cultures. The study found that certain values, such as benevolence (concern for the welfare of others) and self-direction (independence and autonomy), are consistently related to well-being across cultures. This suggests that these values are universally important for human flourishing.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative method of exploration relying on interviews to collect data. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method each participant was selected based on specific criteria with one criterion being to include a reasonably diverse group of participants who represented a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds ages and cultures. The aim of the interviews was to learn how participants articulated their ideas of quality of life and happiness and the influence of social norms and values on that rhetoric thematic analysis was the appropriate method to make sense of the data collected because it reveals patterns and themes related to the research question.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Norms are the complicit rules and expectations that help regulate how we should act as groups or societies values are the basic beliefs or principles that guide our behavior either separately or collectively. Norms and values determine how we relate to each other socially they dictate what we see as obtainable and what we value as acceptable wanted or needed norms and values influence quality of life and well-being and can promote QOL by giving a sense of belonging shared purpose and control over ones social environment when norms and values are organized around empathy compassion and kindness they can allow for emotional support to assist with perceived good mental well-being and be a basis of norms and values that may support QOL. Also when values and norms support and encourage respect and tolerance

for diversity they provide an inclusive environment that can help relieve stress and anxiety and can promote happiness.

Values and norms also provide individuals with a sense of direction and meaning as we tend to have our goals and aspirations guided by values and norms which can lead to feelings of fulfillment of values and norms can also foster self-respect, self-worth, self-confidence which may lead to feelings of self-esteem and ultimately increased happiness and greater life satisfaction values and norms also support promoting physical health through healthy habits such as regular exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate sleep as an individual is first and foremost a physical being so physical health is first and then it promotes the quality of life and happiness. Norms and values can also foster resilience, which is the ability to cope with challenges and setbacks resilience and adaptability make it easier to positively navigate life's difficulties which also help alleviate stress thus enhancing happiness in summary values and norms are critical in building participatory and inclusive communities they nurture belonging sense of purpose and fulfillment contribute to social networks and emotional support promote healthy lifestyles and positively support our quality of life and happiness.

Norms and values can be thought of as the invisible strings that tie together our common expectations norms and values providing guidance to how we act and make decisions within our communities' norms and values are key features of our quality of life and happiness. Empirical studies show that norms in the society can often be a force for good because as a guide for developing social solidarity these norms help us bringing people together reduce isolation and promote connectedness and social interaction which positively influence our overall well-being. Norms and values give us an identity and sense of belonging they anchor our happiness provide moral compass to manage anxiety and ambiguity and support the establishment of caring relationships which is vital for our emotional health. Norms and values also give us social identity like glue in the narrative of our cultural identity that grounds us in meaning and purpose however if norms and values become too rigid they can also inhibit identity and creativity marginalize people create unreasonable expectations restrict personal agency ignite social conflict which can negatively affect our happiness.

To promote positive impacts, it is essential to encourage inclusive and flexible norms, foster open communication, promote cultural diversity, support individual autonomy, and develop programs enhancing social cohesion. The findings indicate that most individuals have a positive outlook on norms and values one respondent stated that people are kept busy by the social norms and values of society and especially the individual cannot live a meaningful life without norms and values.

One respondent a 39-year-old government employee said:

“In my perception these norms are on the whole good for us these are here to give importance to our society an individual is not free without the norm and the values. I feel that these norms keep man active because if there are no hurdles, rules and regulations only then you will be lazy and you will not put in the energy to do what is required of you.”

The respondent's commentary underscores how important norms values and rules are to provide identity significance worth and motivation for people. They suggest when people have norms and rules they give individuals a level of identification and direction which is important to feel significant and worthwhile this view fits into social identity theory which states our identity is tied to our socialization and to the values that inform our socialization. The respondents remarks also include how norms and rules can enhance motivation and task performance they mention that without norms and rules people can become lazy and unmotivated because there is nothing pushing people to accomplish challenges or achieve their goals. The statement goes on to suggest norms and rules provide a structure for helping people maintain organization and focus both of which are important for achieving aspirations and unlocking potential.

In summary the respondent highlighted the importance of norms, values and rules and emphasized that it promotes feelings of importance motivation and productivity where it seems they have a strong appreciation for the framework these rules provide and the context they offer for personal growth development and success.

Another participant (Banker, 36years) holds the same opinion regarding norms and values of society. For him, norms and values are important and people should follow the norms and values. Too actively living in society people should follow the norms and values of society.

“I never think that cultural standards are hurdle in the way of achieving a higher standard of living and enjoyment. As a member of society we should follow the societal norms, as it is famous saying “Do as the Romans do”. Where we live we should follow the norms and culture of that society to sustain otherwise you can’t exist in the society”.

In the statement, the respondent highlighted the necessity of cultural norms and values to improve quality of life and happiness. People should act according to the social settings where they live. The saying “Do as the Romans do” signifies the importance of engaging in the local customs and traditions. The respondent also expressed the importance of how an individual view’s themselves and acts in the world is really about how the surrounding cultural norms and values shape individuals situations. Respondent argued that to maintain social order and avoid condemnation individuals need to follow cultural values in relation to social learning theory the value of observing and imitating the behavior of others in our social environments helps shape the attitudes and behaviors of individuals.

Furthermore the respondents comment highlights the significance of cultural relativism which is the appreciation and respect for the cultural values and norms of a society or community. In their own words to function adequately in our lives with a community individuals must engage with the local culture.

In conclusion the respondent appreciates the value of cultural norms and values and norms are considered important as a way to achieve quality of life and happiness. It is evident that their priorities and notions surround social harmony and cultural relativism and the acknowledgment to be part of a community requires actions aligned with its traditions.

Some of the respondents don’t find it easy to fulfill the norms. They don’t consider it that much beneficial. They think some traditional norms and values affect the happiness. As one respondent (bureaucrat, 49years) stated:

“I can't, to a certain degree, conform to every social norm. The family structure has an impact on happiness and quality of life, and some traditional standards are extremely strict. To a certain degree, people ought to follow social norms”.

The respondent's statement acknowledges the complexity of navigating societal norms, recognizing that it is not always possible to meet every expectation. Respondent suggests that some traditional norms can be overly rigid, and that the family system can have a significant impact on an individual's quality of life and happiness. Furthermore, the respondent highlights the significance of family dynamics in shaping an individual's quality of life and happiness. It can be suggested that importance of finding a balance between societal expectations and individual autonomy, recognizing that rigid adherence to traditional norms can be limiting and that family dynamics play a significant role in shaping an individual's well-being.

In light of the aforementioned findings, Urzua et al. (2012) conducted a study on the significance of social and cultural values in achieving quality of life. They came to the conclusion that certain values, such as power, achievement, hedonism, and self-direction, are individualistic, while others are collectivistic, such as tradition and conformity, and still others are mixed, such as universalism and security. These values act as mediators and assessors of quality of life.

However, some respondents find it difficult to fulfill these norms at the same time they consider it as

important element. One respondent has argued that it is difficult to fulfill the norms but it is beneficial to follow the norms and values. She (teacher, 34 years) stated that:

“Many times I find it difficult to fulfill societal norms. Actually people like me face a lot of difficulty to fulfill societal norms. I don’t consider that the cultural norms are resistant against to achieve better quality of life and happiness because of my strong decision power. I have put so much effort into it that I don’t feel bad people in society need to uphold societal norms but I feel it can be hard for me to keep the norms but I still believed that people should uphold these norms.”

The respondent’s remark sheds light on the ways that society’s norms operate alongside the health of the individual. They recognize that achieving these norms can be very difficult to uphold especially for those who may have individual barriers related to external stressors. The realization that social norms can sometimes be restrictive or too much to take on may be more noticeable to those in marginal or minority populations.

Conversely, the respondent also expresses a strong feeling of personal agency and the ability to make their own choices, which allows them to navigate societal pressures more easily having autonomy and self-efficacy can help lessen the possible negative impact societal norms, can have on one’s personal well-being.

It appears that they have invested effort in developing decision making skills and those skills help them to address various challenges related to societal expectations. Even though they face a tension with conforming to societal pressures they still speak to the benefit of conformity this viewpoint may stem from a need to maintain social harmony and remain included both of which can be a strong motivator for individuals to feel adequate about belonging.

The respondent’s responses also serve to illustrate the ongoing negotiation between the tension of personal freedom and the desire to conform that many experience in different social and cultural contexts. Theoretically their remarks reflect social cognitive theory which emphasizes the role of personal agency and self-efficacy in promoting adaptive behavior and well-being their notion of individuals who deviate from norms connects with the construct of normative flexibility, which suggests that people may choose to conform to or diverge from norms based on personal values goals and circumstances. Regarding implications the respondents comment points to a need for careful understanding of the relationship between societal norms and individual well-being. While societal norms can provide a sense of structure and belonging, they can also be restrictive or burdensome for certain individuals or groups. Therefore, it is essential to promote a culture of inclusivity, diversity, and respect for individual autonomy, while also acknowledging the importance of social conformity in maintaining social harmony.

Another participant (bureaucrat, 42 years) highlighted the other burning side of the problem and stated that:

“Social norms are important to follow, but sometime state fails to produce the environment where social norms will flourish, and people might receive pressure to fulfill social guidelines to live a peaceful and prosperous life, now the state is liable to make sure good governance for social well-being. I always followed the guidelines in performing any task in my life; either it was related to education, health, and job etc. As opposed to my attitude, my family member asked me to adopt news way of life but I think this is good but social system can disrupt”.

The respondent's statement highlights the complex interplay between social norms, state governance, and individual well-being. On one hand they understand why it is important to adhere to social norms which help to provide a sense of order and belonging that is needed to enjoy a fulfilling and healthy life. On the other hand they also explain that the government has a responsibility to help create and maintain space for these norms to happen because if the government does not maintain order it creates pressure for people to

conform to social order. The respondent's comments highlight their recognition of the tension of wanting to be yourself but also needing to adhere to social conformity. They share their own process of living to build social orders after being trained to adhere to norms in education health and work however their family members' attempts to distance themselves from the norms that the respondent wants to adhere to have left the respondent concerned that they will create an unstable order. This situation demonstrates the difficulty in balancing an aspiration for a personal lived reality with the necessity to adhere and respect a social order.

Additionally, the respondent emphasizes how vital good governance is for enhancing social well-being. He argued that it's the state's duty to create a setting that nurtures social norms, and failing to do so can lead to negative outcomes for both individuals and the community at large. This viewpoint is backed by research in governance and development, which shows that effective governance, is essential for boosting social welfare, economic growth, and overall human well-being.

The feedback provided by the respondent provides an incisive perspective on the complexity of social norms, governmental behavior, and the implication for positive well-being. It has also made a point of establishing the importance of good governance at the social welfare stage as well as addressing the tension between individual freedom and society. The insights certainly emphasize the importance of incorporating the preferences and needs of individuals, communities and society in the governance of well-being.

Few studies have emphasized the significance of social norms and how different people from different backgrounds tend to adhere to them differently. In order for freedom to flourish in terms of economic development, the state must provide social chances, such as social arrangements for health, education, and political and economic necessities. This is how good governance is carried out (Sen, 1999). There are many ways that formal state institutions and social norms interact. For example, informal social norms may have existed before formal laws, but once they are widely followed, they may be reflected in and strengthened by formal law codification. By supplementing private enforcement with formal state enforcement mechanisms, a law supports a norm. The law may likewise add believability to a standard by flagging the reality with which society sees an issue. There is less need to "enforce" agreements with informal social norms and generalized interpersonal trust a scarce commodity, when there is an effective legal framework in place.

Norms and values intersect with various themes influencing quality of life and happiness, including social networks, mental health, leisure, living environment, economic stability, personal growth, and physical and spiritual wellbeing. Shared norms foster social connections, while aligning values enhances mental wellbeing and guides self-improvement. Reciprocal relationships exist, where social networks shape norms, mental health affects value alignment, and living environment influences community standards. These interconnections can promote values-aligned living, social cohesion, and overall wellbeing.

Self-determination and self-efficacy are critical to achieve both quality of life and happiness. The interplay between these two concepts must be contextualized within various influencing factors including adopted social norms and values and how we interact socially and balancing the demands of these norms and our autonomy. Norms and values should be inclusive flexible and able to encompass various perspectives and experiences ultimately the task of enhancing quality of life and happiness rests on our ability to create connections with others and find belonging and connection and this requires a multi-faceted contextually conscious way of considering human flourishing.

5. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that norms and values have importance in supporting quality of life and happiness. Norms and values create belongingness purpose and a sense of fulfillment, supportive relationships and provide moral reference. They allow us to build belonging and acceptance. It influence physical and mental well-being and build like-minded groups with diverse support however it is also clear that acting

on norms and values in an overly rigid way and may act as a restriction. There is a subtle balance that needs to be achieved in terms of the dependence on those norms and values and the identification plus creating quality of life and happiness.

Societal norms and values significantly influence our lives. As members of society, we often find ourselves expected to follow certain norms and ideals. While these standards can sometimes be challenging to uphold in today's world, they generally benefit both individuals and society as a whole. Social change is an ongoing journey that highlights the importance of maintaining cultural norms and values. Ignoring these social norms, which define acceptable behavior, can disrupt social order and hinder societal processes. Consequently, our value systems shape how we perceive what is important or valuable, guiding us in distinguishing right from wrong while helping us maintain social order for a fulfilling life.

In summary, social norms and values have a profound impact on our experiences and perceptions of happiness and quality of life. Theoretical perspectives like social constructionism and symbolic interactionism provide a framework for understanding how these norms and values influence our outcomes. Numerous studies have shown the vital role that social norms and values play in enhancing our happiness and overall quality of life.

5.1 Recommendations

- It is recommended to carry out comparative studies across various cultures to see how social norms and values shape our quality of life (QOL) and happiness.
- It is recommended to inform policymakers about the crucial role these norms and values play in establishing policies that aim to boost QOL and happiness.
- It's important to educate people on how social norms and values impact their QOL and happiness, while also raising awareness about the need to nurture positive values.
- Moreover, creating a comprehensive framework to understand how societal norms and values influence happiness and quality of life is essential. It would be beneficial to draw from theories in sociology, psychology, and economics.
- To gain deeper insights into these dynamics, we should develop new metrics to assess happiness, QOL, and the influence of social norms and values. Lastly, it's vital to analyze the factors that might moderate the relationship between social norms, values, QOL, and happiness, such as personality traits, demographics, and cultural backgrounds.

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Conflict of Interest


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