

## Are Omani Women happy in their life?

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### Abstract

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This study would look at the life of women in Sultanate of Oman during the prosperous era of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, where they are privileged to become a part of different ministerial portfolios in Oman. The key objective behind this study is to know the insight of Omani women on their happiness, through identifying certain areas where they can feel the happiness and what extent they think they are happy. The study collected primary data from a sample of 500 women from Oman with a structured questionnaire. This is a qualitative study since reviews of literature shows that the subjective factors will further impact on the happiness of all women, same with Omani women as well. The study partially adopted GNH methods and SWLS scale to understand the happiness of Omani women. The findings of the study shows that women in Oman are happier and employment like factors can enhance their happiness. Finally the study gave certain recommendations to further improve the wellbeing of women in Oman as a whole.

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**Keywords:** Happiness, GNH, SWLS, Gender

### 1. Introduction

The progress of women in the last decades globally is remarkable as wage gap has partly closed; educational attainment has risen and women achieved technological knowledge and freedom from domestic handworks. Those developments can be widely accepted as the measures of subjective wellbeing or happiness. However, there are many studies shows that women's happiness is reducing mainly in industrialized countries compared to their male counterparts (Blau and Kahn, 2007).

Omani women also achieve much progress during the prosperous era of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. Moreover, there are changes in social norms also like, educated Omani women generally want only smaller families and make better use of reproductive health and family planning information and services to achieve their desired family size. (Goveas, S & Neelufer, A (2011). The government's strategic planning has given immense space for women in different sectors of labor market and other key areas (Kabeer, Y (2000). This has given an integration of women with the mainstream with equal rights and duties. Consequently, it is better to get an insight about happiness of Omani women at present wave of happenings in social and economic spare. There are remarkable changes in the enrolment of Omani girls in the schools and colleges since 80's. This has improved the women labor force participation rates as well. At this juncture, it would be good to know whether Omani women are happy in their life or not? Consequently this study would look at level of Omani women happiness. Additionally, it examines the relevance and applicability of earlier findings pertaining to women's wellbeing, challenges as outlined in various national and international studies to a broader context.

The main research questions are: are Omani women aware of good governance? ; are they having sustainable socio-economic development; are they feeling happiness while Oman's cultural preservation; and do they feel psychological wellbeing?

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## Review of Literature

In this section we present a brief review of literature regarding women well-being. Although there is plenty of literature available in context of well-being globally, literature particularly about women happiness study pertained to Oman is not much available. We start with some basic definition of well-being or happiness and then discuss the field of wellbeing little wider. Achieving wellbeing has been the concern of philosophers since Aristotle, and is, in many respects the essence of human existence. In recent years, wellbeing has moved from the realm of philosophy to that of science. There has been a growing body of research into what contributes to the quality of people's experiences of their lives. This has enabled a new understanding of the factors that both influence and constitute people wellbeing.

Blau and Kahn (2007) has define the happiness as the dynamic process that gives people a sense of how their lives are going, through the interaction between their circumstances, activities and psychological resources or 'mental capital'. Because of this dynamic nature, high levels of happiness mean that we are more able to respond to difficult circumstances, to innovate and constructively engage with other people in the world around us. As well as representing a highly effective way of bringing out good outcomes in many different areas of our lives, there is also a strong case that wellbeing as an ultimate goal of human endeavor.

Research on subjective social indicators has established that a woman's objective life circumstances doesn't necessarily correspond to other woman's experience of happiness. In fact each women in our society differ in terms of situational, personal, biological factors. Stevenson and Wolfers (2009) points out that the women's subjective wellbeing has fallen both absolutely and relatively compared to that of men. While the expansion in women's opportunities has been extensively studied, the concurrent decline in subjective wellbeing has largely gone unnoted. The study goes on to explain that the increased opportunity to succeed in many dimensions may have led to an increased likelihood of believe that women are happy in their ground. There is chances are there, women may simply involve in to the complexities and increased pressure of modern lives at the cost of their happiness.

Windy wood et al. (1989) argued that the women's equal access to and control over economic and financial resources is critical for the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women and for the equitable and sustainable economic growth and development. Gender equality in the distribution of economic and financial resources has positive multiplier effects for a range of key development goals, including poverty reduction and the welfare of children. The study emphasized development rationales for enhancing women's access to economic and financial resources include women's role as "safety net of last resort" in economic downturns.

Chan (2010), mentioned that," after thirty years the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, still many women and girls don't have equal opportunities to realize and understand their rights recognized by the law, for example in many countries, women are not entitled to own property or even inherit land, on the other hand social exclusion,"honour killing, trafficking, restricted mobility and early marriage among others, will definitely deny their rights to health to women and at the same time will increase illness and death throughout the life course. And she argued that it is important to fix the health system and society to give the women and girls equal access to health information and services, education, employment, political positions as well to achieve the sustainable progress of the women well-being. Shah(1998) highlighted that Women's rights around the world is an important indicator to understand global happiness. As a result, of the women rights we must understand what are the rights that women deserve, Of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty around the globe, 70 percent are women. For these women, poverty doesn't just mean scarcity and want. It means rights denied, opportunities curtailed and voices silenced by considering the following:

Furthermore Stroup (2011), has reported in his study about the women happiness does it promoted by the economic freedom, that the level of economic freedom has been found to be highly correlated with prosperity and economic growth, because an increase in both the supply of, and demand for, female human capital can increase a woman's ability to achieve greater individual prosperity while enhancing the well-being of all women. It creates a more productive labor force with greater economic potential for the whole economy, while enhancing a woman's ability to identify and exploit a larger set of economic opportunities for avoiding any resilient pockets of intolerance and bigotry left in society.

Therefore, this would naturally place greater pressure on men to recognize women's equal standing in the various non-economic facets of society as well. If women's well-being is found to be correlated with the level of economic freedom in a country, then this would be evidence that the cold-hearted institutions of markets could truly unite the noble goals of an enlightened and tolerant society with the self-centered goals of individual prosperity.

Osava (2010) highlighted that, when it comes to female education rates, progress has been made around the world, and in many countries girls and young women have outnumbered and outperformed boys and men at all levels of schooling for decades. Nevertheless, these advances have yet to translate into greater equity in employment, politics and social relations. So it would affect women happiness. He goes on to emphasize that the benefits of educating girls and women for societies, in general, and their families, more specifically, are well-understood, the case for education serving as a catalyst in reducing gender inequality, or benefiting women themselves, is less clearly established. It is often assumed that education enhances women's well-being and gives them a greater voice in household decisions, greater autonomy to determine the conditions of their lives, and improved opportunities to participate in community affairs and the labor market.

Malhotra et al (2003) examine the relationship of education to four broad aspects of gender equality in which improvements in women's well-being, empowerment or relative position to men are especially desirable to the health and well-being, position in family and society and the economic opportunities returns and finally the political participation. The review indicates that education is a necessary, but not sufficient investment for achieving gender equality or improving women's well-being. The empirical literature suggests that a range of underlying social and economic conditions needs to be favorable in order for female education to have a beneficial effect on gender equality and women's wellbeing. Female education is most beneficial to women in settings which are already less patriarchal, where women have access to services, options and opportunities, and where market and social conditions favor positive returns. The conclusion of the study indicates that education is a necessary, but not sufficient investment for achieving gender equality or improving women's well-being. For most of the other aspects that was examined, the empirical literature suggests that a range of underlying social and economic conditions need to be favorable in order for female education to have a beneficial effect on gender equality and women's happiness. Zuhur (2003) explained that Empowerment will give women more happiness. It includes legal rights that actually accord women certain advantages such as hiring or educational preferences in areas where women have historically lacked access or differential rights such as paid maternity leaves, or the state and criminal justice system's cooperation in enforcing laws that protect women. Empowerment extends beyond acts or attitudes of governments, for it should include women's increased knowledge of the history of women in their own country/region.

Foley (2010) seeks to explain how the women in the Arab Gulf states have harnessed political, economic, and social changes since 2000 to alter their standing at home and abroad. It contends that women are well-positioned to take advantage of these changes, owing to their advanced educations, the ever-higher social and financial costs of employing expatriate workers, and the inability of their male colleagues to fill either skilled or unskilled positions. Women can find happiness from these changes. It also argues that questions of gender are not limited to women. Furthermore, the article mentioned that, just as women are expected to dress and act according to established social norms and obligations, men are also expected to adhere to social expectations. Varghese (2011) measures the women empowerment in Oman by identifying the household decision making ability of women, to assess the economic decision making capability of women and evaluate the freedom of mobility of women for giving recommendations and suggestions to boost women empowerment in Oman. The study found, the women empowerment index that the women in Oman are empowered but still her interest towards more domestic affairs affects her empowerment. She argues that empowerment will enhance women happiness. This study looks at certain variables from review of literature and recognizes the significance of the reviews on this present study.

### **Research Methods and Data**

The study takes the methods, qualitative only, from gross national happiness (GNH). The concept implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards nations of progress and should give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing with economic aspects. This research methodology we adopted in this study is GNH methods ((Alkire, S and J.E. Foster. 2011). It is a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodology. We are considering only the qualitative aspects of GNH as we are not constructing an index.

In addition, we use the SWLS scale of questionnaire designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. One of the limitations of the methodology is, we are not in a position to fully adapt the GNH measurement tool for a small group of population. Subsequently, we use adapted variables from the GNH index and the SWLS (Pavot, W(1993) measurement tool to know the happiness of Omani people.

The notion of GNH has often been explained by its four pillars: good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation. Lately the four pillars have been further classified into nine domains in order to generate extensive understanding of GNH and to replicate the holistic range of GNH values. The nine domains are: psychological wellbeing, health, education, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards. (Alkire, S and J.E. Foster. 2011) In addition to the adapted variables of GNH, this study also took subjective and self-reported indicators. Moreover, the objective indicators are not in our study's scope. Within each domain, two to four indicators were selected that seemed likely to remain informative across time, had high response rates, and were relatively uncorrelated. The research questions are; Is Omani women getting a part of good governance?; Is they having sustainable socio-economic development?; Is they feeling happiness while Oman's cultural preservation.; Do they feel psychological wellbeing?; Do they feel happy with their living standards?; The primary data has taken from 500 women in Al.Batina and Al.Sharquia regions in Oman. The household survey is based on convenience sampling techniques with structured questionnaire. The questionnaire includes three parts. The first part of the questionnaire is adapted & the second and third parts have been framed.

**Table 1: Adapted and Self Maintained Happiness Variables for the Study**

Subjective Indicators of Happiness			
Good Governance	Socio-Economic Development	Cultural Preservation	Psychological Wellbeing
Health Opportunities Part of politics Peace and security in the country Government Regulations	Education Income Employment Empowerment Community Vitality Family Status	Religious norms Values Skills	Time use Age Marital Relations Expectations Worries on the Future of Children Achievement

After all, what we measure defines what we stand for, and we become and what we focus on. Let us then draw an image of a successful county that measures quality of life and wellbeing as a core in its prosperity.

### Discussion and Findings

This section details the respondent's responses. After the data have been collected, the researcher analyzed them. Descriptive analysis method is used to narrate the characteristics of the respondents and their attitudes and opinions towards their happiness. The table.1 shows the respondent's profile, 500 Omani women, in a detailed manner. Age wise we classified respondents into four groups. According to the Table.1, 64% of the respondents are in the age group between 23 to 35 years. 22% of them are between the age 35-45 .It shows that 77% of respondents are married and 18% are unmarried, were only 5% divorced women.

**Table 2: the Respondent's Profile**

<b>VARIABLES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY ((%)</b>
<b>Respondents Age</b>	
25-35	322 (64.4%)
35-45	110 (22%)
More than 45	68 (13.6%)
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Married	385 (77%)
Not married	90 (18%)
Divorced	25 (5%)
<b>Level of Education</b>	
Graduated	80 ( 16%)
Diploma	150 ( 30%)
High school	200 ( 40%)
Illiterates /primary school	70 (14%)
<b>Work Condition</b>	
Employed	95 (19%)
Doing Business	55 (11%)
Seeking for jobs/Unemployed	150(30%)
Homemakers	200 (40%)

One of the main aims of this survey is to measure and to connect the respondents' happiness with the respondent's education level. The education levels recognized into three levels which is diploma level, graduate and illiterates/primary level. The statistical analysis showed that 30% of the respondents has diploma and 16% responders are graduates, 40% completed high school and 16% of the responders were illiterates or have primary level of education. The study presents that 30% of the respondents are seeking for jobs and 19% of them are already employed, 11% are doing business and 40% of respondents are homemakers.

### **Women and Their Happiness**

Here we are going to address the different domains which have been mentioned in GNH measurement. Let us see how Omani women are deal with their views on their own happiness. We used SWLS 7 scale questionnaire to the respondents regarding their idea about happiness.( Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985).We describe SWLS in the study context as a scale to find out the subjective feeling of happiness. In addition, we defined in a relative context that the respondents those who are strongly agree a question in a 'domain' are happiest, highly agree are happier and those who 'agree' are happy. Same principle is applied vice versa as well. We hypothesized that those who 'indecisive' are more close to unhappy people.

#### **1. Are Omani women seeing good governance in Oman?**

As we mentioned, we used SWLS 7 scale questionnaire to get an idea about good governance. The variables under concern are: Health; Opportunities; Peace and Security and Government regulations in the country. The government regulation is one of the variables that have either positive or negative connection with happiness of people. 20% % of respondents are highly agreed that Oman government is having good governance policies. 45% of them strongly agree that there is good governance, 20% them disagreed this idea and 15 % are indecisive According to our definition 45% respondents are admitted that they are happiest on the governance in Oman.While the question about opportunities for women compared with other woman in gulf area, 30.3% are strongly agreed, and 37.7% highly agreed, also 18.8 indecisive and slightly more where disagreed that opportunities are more in Oman. So we can say that more respondents are happier in this area. However, 70 % of respondents are strongly agreed that government is providing peace in the country and women are feeling secure. Accordingly more respondents can be labeled as happiest women in this domain. But 15% of respondents are disagreeing with this and they argued that the laws and regulations can be improved towards the security of women and children. So 10% of respondents are not happy with the present situation.

28.9% are respondents of strongly agreed that they have all opportunities for higher paid jobs. 55% of respondents highly agreed that opportunities are there for job like men in Oman and rest are in indecisive level or disagreed. Accordingly more respondents are happier in this domain. 50% of respondents are agreed on their awareness about their health, 20 % strongly disagreed that they aware on their health issues and treatment options, 10 % Disagree on this and 20%, highly agreed this idea. More respondents are happy in this domain. 60% of respondents highly agreed that going for work will not affect their health and it will add value to their life. 25% strongly disagree with this idea. 5% not know about this and 10 % are strongly believe in this. So we can say that more respondents are happier in this area and their outlook is positive.

## **2. Are they having sustainable socio-economic development for their personal growth?**

The variables under concern are education, income, employment, empowerment, family status and community living. Monthly income at her disposal is one of the important items to be studied as reviews shows that it has an effect on the women's happiness. 29% % of the respondents were strongly agreed that they have enough income for their life, 21% agreed that they have income and almost 45% are strongly disagreed that they have sufficient monthly income for their life and 5% are indecisive about this idea. Unfortunately, more respondents are not happy in terms of income. 55% of respondents are strongly agreed that women gets her rights for education in Oman, 15% highly agreed this idea, 19% are highly disagreed and 11% are indecisive. More women are happiest in this domain. Moreover, 70% of them strongly believed that education will give more rights. More respondents are happiest on the country's outlook on education. They feel that educated people can achieve their objectives faster than others. 29% of women highly agreed that they are employed or doing business so they are happy. According to our definition they are happier than others. 70% of working women agreed that women are equal in pay with men in Oman. They are happy about it. 50% of the women surveyed highly believed that they are empowered and they feel that they have autonomy in taking decisions so we can say almost 50% of our respondents are happier. Almost 65% of our respondents are highly agreed about Community vitality in Oman. So we can say that they are happier in their community life. Still, 30% of respondents disagreed this and they opinioned that the Omani society has certain differences towards educationally qualified women. 40% respondents are happy about their family status in society.

## **3. Are they feeling happiness while in Oman's cultural preservation?**

65% of respondents are strongly agreed that their religion encourage women to continue her study or it's not a barrier at all. 7.7% are indecisive, and the rest are agreed or strongly agreed. So Omani women are happier with their religious norms in Oman. Almost 60% of women are highly agreed on the value system in Oman. So they are happiest according to our study hypotheses.

## **4. Do they feel psychological satisfaction?**

The variables are time, age, marital relations, living standards, feeling of achievement, and worry over children and their future. 55% of respondents strongly agreed that they have a feeling good with their age and responsibilities of that age. As per our study hypothesis these respondents are happiest. But almost 60 % of respondents are not agreed with the proper use of the time. So we can say that the women have more feeling about the wastage of time. 'It could have use it in a better way' that feeling is prominent among them. The study find out that 35 to 45 age group respondents are happier than the rest group. Married women are happier than the rest as data shows. The answer to the question on 'if they are happy and want to raise their kids in Oman' are: 35 % of respondents are strongly agreed that they are feeling really good to raise their children in Oman. Rest are highly agreed and agreed. All respondents happy about the country's overlook on their children and it meet their expectation. The study shows that majority of women highly agreed on having a feeling of achievement in their life.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

We used GNH and the context wise variables and The SWLS questionnaire tools to give global approach to the study. In a relative perspective, the respondents can rate their level of happiness as 'happier' as majority of women are highly agreed that they are happy. Our study acknowledged with Stroup (2011), that woman's ability to achieve greater individual prosperity like employment can enhance the happiness of all women. However, it is little alarming that many Omani women graduates are waiting for job opportunities. We feel that there is a relation between happiness and employment via income so the study findings suggest that those who works for money outside their home are more happier than others. So we recommend that if women get suitable employment, we would have happier women in Oman.

The study agrees with Varghese (2011) that measure the women empowerment through the women empowerment index, that the women in Oman are empowered. As they are empowered they are happy as well. The study approved with Osava (2010) findings that the benefits of educating girls and women for societies, in general, and their families, more specifically, are well-understood, the case for education serving as a catalyst in reducing gender inequality, or benefiting women themselves, is less clearly established. It is often assumed that education enhances women's happiness and gives them a greater voice in household decisions, greater autonomy to determine the conditions of their lives, and improved opportunities to participate in community affairs and the labor market. Most of them are happiest with Government policies and they feel they are secured in this peaceful country under the rule of His majesty. Married women felt happier than the rest and many women feels empowered in their home. Health and education are another areas women needs more support from the government, especially in the health sector, to give the women more attention and spread the awareness in all the possible targeted places in order to increase the Omani women's knowledge and awareness of her health and her family. It would give us more happy/satisfied women .Since country, family and society needs happier/happiest women to be in good conditions to add her contributions towards the society.

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