



"Redefining Happiness and Well-being in the Present Life of the Post-Pandemic Era": An interpretative phenomenological analysis.

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ABSTRACT

The concept of happiness is a complex idea in collectivist countries like India where the concept of well-being is not free from external factors. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the perception about many abstract concepts of life. The situation of lockdown has streamed varied emotions and feelings about happiness and true meaning of life. People dealt with the negative aspect and realities of life but on the other side, they have also explored the positive aspects ranging from meeting the 'new them' by analyzing their lives and the relationships around them, therefore depicting the brighter side of picture.

The study aims to explore the lived experiences in the current scenario, i.e., after the lockdown has ended. People have the opportunity to get back to their pre pandemic lives, but the circumstances of previous years have now created a deeper impact and have changed the meaning of abstract concepts like happiness for them in true sense which was a life changing phenomenon for some. The study explores the concept of happiness among six individuals from Generation Y using interpretive phenomenological analysis.

Keywords- happiness, interpretive phenomenological analysis, Lockdown relaxations, Generation Y,

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INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease i.e., COVID-19, was first reported in Wuhan, China, by the end of the year 2019. World Health Organization declared it a pandemic on 11th March 2020. (WHO,2020a). As the virus infection spread and situation became uncontrollable, some of the worst-hit countries, like China, Spain, and Italy imposed nationwide lockdowns by the beginning of month March, 2020 (Barkur & Vibha, 2020). India followed a similar trend and a nationwide lockdown was imposed on 25th March 2020. The imposition of lockdown that impacted economies and socio-economic order across the world severely, was more fear evoking than the virus itself (Nicola et al., 2020). The first wave of COVID-19 was unpredictable for the human kind and the measures to prevent it were also unknown. The second wave that was majorly caused by the mutated virus (delta variant) was like a 'tsunami' in India that evolved at a phenomenal rate and impacted human life more as compared to the previous wave in India. People suffered from mental, physical and economic crisis and trauma and are still recovering.

Living in and dealing with difficult situation with uncertainty in life could be seen and explained using different theories of psychology. Humans have an innate ability to decide and the freedom to shape their own lives, no matter what the circumstances are. Victor Frankel gave the concept of theory of meaning gives attention to human's freedom to choose purpose and goals in life that provides a positive outlook towards life and future (Victor Frankel,1969). One can find meaning even in most miserable and difficult circumstances and that the motivation for living comes from finding that meaning. Humans can have meaning in life by putting their best foot forward to deal with the given situations. Abraham Maslow (1962), explained the concept of well-being through the lens of a self-actualized person which later explains the PERMA model that outlines the components of Seligman's well-being theory (2011). PERMA model constitutes both hedonic and eudemonic components that implies to the happiness and well-being of a person. Positive emotions constitute various emotions that range from hope, love, gratitude and are a prime indicator of flourishing that promotes and improves wellbeing (Fredrickson,2001). Engagement on the other hand is related to Csikszentmihalyi's (1989) concept of "flow." It focusses on the task, living at the moment and using strengths in new ways which promotes happiness (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Relationships reflects the idea that we humans are social creatures and need support and love from others for our well-being (Seligman, 2012). Meaning refers to have a purpose in life that helps to face the adverse situations positively (Seligman,2012). People having meaning in life are more satisfied

with their lives and have fewer health problems (Kashdan, et al 2009). Accomplishment, the last component of PERMA model includes perseverance and striving to attain goals for improving oneself (Quinn, 2018), that could be achieved by having internal goals such as growth, which eventually leads to external rewards (Seligman, 2013).

The lived experiences of people during lockdown and the positive and negative aspects were explored in previous studies to understand the psychological well-being of people (Fioretti et.al,2020) but the experiences after lockdown relaxations and the life after covid years were not explored much but are important to be examined.

The present study tries to explore the scenario after the lockdown has ended and when the situation has been comes towards normality. People have the opportunity to get back to their pre pandemic lives but the circumstances of previous years have created a deeper impact and have changed the meaning of abstract concepts (happiness, life satisfaction and well-being) and the prolonged period of social distancing may leave plenty of time for contemplation and reflection; as an individual, as a society and as a Nation that promotes the thought process to construct a more content and stable life (Kapooria.P,2020). India is a country where collectivism coexists with individualism where concerns for family depicts collectivist attitude and realizing own needs and goals are considered and seen as individualist in nature (Sinha.J,2014). People tend to find happiness in their lives which is more influenced by external forces like job prospects and social life (Chakorborthy.B,2018).

In sum, there is existent knowledge related to abstract concepts but considering the new dimension i.e., COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown relaxation scenario, **the objective of the present study** was to explore the abstract concepts (Happiness, well-being) among millennials, who were born around the turn of the century, some of them are still in early adulthood, wrestling with new careers and settling down, while the older Millennials have a home and are building a family. But the pandemic has somehow affected their flow of life in true sense. **The study tries to find answers to the questions that how generation y has redefined the concept of happiness who are living a life when there are no restrictions and no lockdown which is like pre-covid era and how the pandemic has influenced the concept of well-being among them.** The study depicts the concept of happiness and well-being and their reformed meanings in an idiographic manner.

METHOD

Sample

As per the inclusion criteria, which was to include working individuals from Generation Y who are experiencing lockdown relaxations, the sample consists of 6 participants of age range from 25-40 years (generation Y) using purposive sampling method. All the participants were Delhi-NCR based working professionals.

PARTICIPANTS	AGE	GENDER	OCCUPATION	RELIGION
PARTICIPANT 1	35	FEMLAE	PGT TEACHER	HINDUISM
PARTICIPANT 2	28	FEMALE	SCHOOL COUNSELOR	ISLAM
PARTICIPANT 3	39	MALE	LECTURER	HINDUISM
PARTICIPANT 4	26	MALE	HR PROFESSIONAL	HINDUISM
PARTICIPANT 5	31	FEMALE	PHYSIOTHERAPIST	HINDUISM
PARTICIPANT 6	27	FEMALE	MAKEUP ARTIST	ISLAM

TABLE:1 Participant demographic details

Interview schedule Funnelling approach was used for the questioning process (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Appropriate prompts were used to capture the experiences effectively.

Interview Schedule: the interview questions were refined as per the answers of individual participants and to explore the individual experiences which would do justice to the research questions. Some of the original questions that were asked as follows:

- How do you feel these days when there is no covid and no restriction (lockdown)?
- How do you relate happiness with current times when there are relaxations, as you have already experienced almost two years of pandemic?

- “Everyone lives for a purpose and has meaning to life”, how will you apply this phase to your life now
- How do you feel about social relationships now?
- By reflecting on your past success, what seems to be an achievement and accomplishment to you now?

Procedure

The present research was guided by an interview schedule, which was constructed to bring out in-depth responses by the participants. Interview questions were designed to be flexible, non-leading and were neutral in nature. Appropriate prompts were used with initial questions, to encourage the participants to elaborate. The participants were explained the purpose of the research and all of their queries were promptly addressed. After seeking their consent to participate and have the interview recorded, each participant was interviewed through zoom video call by the first author. They were assured of the confidentiality of their interviews and the subsequent data arising from the same. It was made sure that the anonymity of the participants was protected by all means. Interviews lasted between 50- 60 minutes and manual transcription produced six individual verbatim transcripts. All the ethical standards (informed consent, permission to record, confidentiality, anonymity, debriefing) were met during the study.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was adopted as the framework for present study to capture how participants make sense of their experiences of the phenomenon and how they attach meaning to it (Smith, 2004). So, the analysis of the transcripts was done using IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Transcripts were read and re-read thoroughly to get an idea of participant’s perspective. The initial codes were generated as well as other important details by the participants were noted. The second stage involved returning to the transcript and writing more precise and concrete codes by reducing the initial ones to and later merging them into themes which continued throughout the transcripts after again repeating the process. Same method was repeated for each transcript. The final stage consisted of further data reduction by establishing connections between the preliminary themes and clustering the themes across all the data.

Results

Data analysis led to the development of four master themes to answer the research questions. The results can be outlined in terms of the following master theme and sub-ordinate themes

OVERVIEW OF MASTER THEMES AND SUBTHEMES:

1. Rediscovered Self- importance to define happiness

- Exploring and enhancing self
- Realising self-efficacy and meeting self in new way

2. Priority shift from lessons learned

- Family-key source of happiness and importance of closed relationships
- Significance of health and healthy lifestyle

3. Change in dynamics of social relations

- Improved social relation
- The fewer the better

4. Conscious awareness and changed style of life

- Life- a gift of God
- Outlining life in new ways

MASTER THEME 1

Rediscovered self- importance to define happiness

This theme focuses on how because of pandemic participants got a chance to focus on themselves and realizing the essence and importance of it. The pandemic situation made them to think that self is relevant for one's own need and is an important component of happiness and well-being. Even after lockdown relaxations and again getting back to pre-covid life, the feeling of giving importance to self is still in them and bringing positivity to their lives.

Subthemes

Exploring and enhancing self- They got a chance to focus on themselves, and time to build their self. Even after lockdown when there are lockdown relaxations, they are still working on it and trying to improve themselves. They are also focussing on their career, to grow more professionally for self-development and to build their self-identity. For them it's like a 'new them' that they are liking and which is giving them positivity in life and acting like a driving force.

Participant 1: *now have time to think about self and my achievements and also have time to continue my hobbies like singing, photography and cooking as I am in a more relaxed mode now*

Participant 2: *want to improve my self professionally and also want to focus on my career and improving my skills. I have also explored my culinary skills and have realised that I am a good cook.*

Participant 3: *pandemic gave me a chance to meet myself and to rectify myself then and there. I am continuing doing what I like when I get time from work. I sit in my balcony that I decorated during lockdown, listen to music, read books and observing the beauty of nature. I am also continuing to do cycling when I get time.*

Participant 4: *we are learning from our mistakes that we did in past and have time to reflect. on those.*

Realising self-efficacy and meeting self in new way- The theme talks about how the pandemic has made them realize about their needs and their abilities to handle difficult circumstances confidently, thus bringing a positive emotion in them. They have a sense of achievement in terms of their career or growth and from how they have faced the COVID-19 phase. It motivates them to move forward in life. Participants have also felt somewhere a change in their personality, certain realizations move them to lead towards different style of life and different personality aspects

Participant 1: *now I have time to think about my achievements and I feel yes, I have done something in life*

Participant 2: *after exploring myself now I have enough confidence to survive even in difficult situations*

Participant 3: *for me seeing happy faces of my students and the feeling that counselling skills have helped them is a sense of achievement for me. I am satisfied with my achievements*

Participant 4: *I have become more reserved and mature I think, I can manage live alone if I have to and don't need anyone around to be happy. I am happy with this change. Making my family happy is a sense of achievement for me.*

Participant 5: *everything makes me happy whatever is around me which was not the case earlier. I now listen to my own needs and try to improve myself everyday also which is a good change in me*

Participant 6: *now I am confident that I have faced the pandemic efficiently and with positivity so now I can face any difficulty in future. Coming out of it is an achievement that we are still alive at least. All the hard work has paid off whether for career or facing the pandemic.*

MASTER THEME 2

Priority shift from lessons learned

After facing pandemic and going through lockdown, there is a shift in priorities that are still given primary importance even after lockdown relaxations and normal life, because of the lessons that were learned during the COVID-19 waves has created a deeper impact in their lives.

Sub themes

Family-main source of happiness

The theme outlines the events and experiences that the participants had during difficult lockdown times, and how after covid they have realised the importance of family. The feelings and emotions that were developed during lockdown are continuing and strengthening after pandemic. Now the participants give utmost importance to their families and their needs and that's what gives them happiness. They are becoming more family oriented which gives them positivity and feeling of happiness in life. They have decided to prioritise close ones in their life which includes family members, their friends by not letting them down as they have realised their importance in life.

Participant 1: *now I have realized that I can enjoy with family too, they are very important for me, want to spend more time with them and their safety is my priority as well as my accomplishment*

Participant 3: *for me happiness is my family, when I come back home, spend time with them and see their happy faces I forget all the stress and my worries.*

Participant 4: *now I have realized that for me only my family is important, their happiness. I want to do thing only for them and their happiness and don't care about others as they are not important now.*

Participant 5: *now I give more importance to my family than work as I have realised how important is it spend time with them and making memories with them as I don't know in future whether I'll have that time with them or not*

Participant 6: *now I value my family the most, spend more time with them, we support each other and celebrate things together which we weren't use to do earlier.*

Significance of health and healthy lifestyle

People now have sense of awareness on the less prioritized topic of health as before the pandemic they were so busy in their profession and routine activities that somewhere they have neglected it. As the pandemic is related to issues related to health, the participants have realized its importance. They have worked on it by improving their lifestyle and reanalysing their true needs i.e., the importance of organic food, improved sleeping patterns, living a hygienic lifestyle thus bringing behavioural change for good.

Participant 1: *now my health and life are my priority over other things. I have realized the important of health for survival. I try to sleep on time and eat healthy food*

Participant 3: *there has been lot of change after pandemic. Earlier we use to go out not have points in mind to sanitize, or to maintain social distance but now all this is included in our routine for our health safety.*

Participant 4: *we all have become more health conscious now, it's a big and a very good change as we all have become more cautious.*

Participant 6: *we all have moved towards nature and organic things to improve our health, also we should have basic medical knowledge of first aid to provide help immediately.*

MASTER THEME 3

Change in dynamics of social relations

Pandemic has brought changes in social relations and has changed its dynamics. There are two perspectives on the social relationships that are perceived during and after lockdown which are presented in the form of two subthemes:

Subtheme

Improved social relations

Participants who were earlier not very social have realised the need of socialising as after lockdown relaxations this change has brought more happiness in their lives. The lockdown had deprived them from meeting people physically, and the lockdown relaxation and again coming back to normal life is a blessing for them as it has opened the doors for meeting people in person.

Participant 1: *now social relations have become better, got a chance to get connected with even old school friends. Due to lockdown, there was cut off from social world. Now I meet people whole heartedly.*

Participant 2: *now for me social relationships matter, I didn't like to socialise with people much but now have become more open to this idea and feel good about it.*

Participant 5: *earlier I used to like being alone, now I feel good around people and I always try not to let down those who have asked help from me.*

Participant 6: *I feel good to help others whether financially or emotionally and my professional relations have also become better*

The fewer the better

Participants who loved to socialize earlier felt that they have now become less social and their social circle has shrunk which includes only loved ones as the pandemic has moved them towards “the fewer the better” thing, where there is only genuineness and that is important. As the lives are getting back to normal, factors like time-constraints, fear of COVID-19, getting infection from people and moving more towards family has created a distance from social world. The participants are happy with the change as life has become more simplified.

Participant 3: *social distancing and time constraints due to personal-professional life balance has impacted friendship somewhere. But I don't feel bad about it as I feel first, we all need to think about self and me time is important for me*

Participant 4: *I have realised that we don't need people to be happy, my social circle has shrunk that includes only my family and few others who are genuine, honest and are my well-wishers. I got a chance because of pandemic to exclude people who spread negativity in my life.*

MASTER THEME 4**Conscious awareness and changed style of life**

The pandemic period has made them aware of the realities of life and they have become closely acquainted with death by losing their loved ones or someone they knew.

Subtheme**Life- a gift of God**

The difficult situations experienced due to pandemic has made the participants think about life in a different way, therefore gaining a new and matured perspective that impacted their philosophy of life. Participants have become more respectful towards life and value it more than before. They have become much happier, have a sense of achievement and are more satisfied with life than before simply by cherishing moments of life as the future is unpredictable.

Participant 1: *after being infected from COVID-19 now I have realized the important of life and time. Now I feel proud of my achievements as I have time to think*

Participant 3: *somewhere down the line I feel life is gift from God and we all should value it; every day we get this gift from God we should cherish every moment as we have seen how many have lost their lives and loved ones in this COVID-19 wave. I am satisfied with my life if my family is happy*

Participant 4: *we all have become more respectful towards life as we have realized that future is unpredictable and uncertain. Earlier, there was not this consciousness but now I have understood it clearly.*

Participant 5: *during the wave I was acquainted with the word death, now I feel the greatest gift and achievement is that we are alive*

Participant 6: *now I am confident that I have faced the pandemic efficiently and with positivity so now I can face any difficulty in future. I think we are alive that is the biggest achievement.*

Outlining life in new ways

The participants are adopting new style of life, having new ideas and feeling towards major aspects of life by realizing the importance of limiting needs, to stay positive, focussing on things like financial security, helping

others that ranges from financial to emotional help as they are now aware of the significance of these needs. They have become more positive.

Participant 3: *I think we should live in the moment and should cherish it completely. I have realized the importance of financial security during this pandemic.*

Participant 4: *one can find happiness in small things and with fewer people, life is short we don't need negativity around us, I just want to have a peaceful life and fulfilling my family needs for which I need to be financially secure*

Participant 5: *now I don't regret over the past, focus on future prospects by working hard and try to have positive outlook towards life. I fear not lose this conscious that I have gained. I don't want to let down people especially my friends who need me.*

Participant 6: *now the ways to celebrate has changed, and are more confined within families. Life is all about to stay positive and happy and should have a spirit to fight back. We should help others emotionally and financially when they need us*

DISCUSSION

The present research tries to explore the concepts of happiness and well-being after lockdown relaxations and how the participants have redefined it through their lived experiences. One of the most unpredictable situations of the century has created a deep impact on people's mind, but participants have shown the abilities and potentials in making their life better, stable and more meaningful. Each participant has experienced the pandemic and the phase of lockdown differently and has lived through it in their own unique ways but almost all have some similar feelings that merged to form shared meanings which are being shown in the results.

Majority of the participants have realized their strengths and potentials during lockdown. They have rediscovered and met new self which was hidden earlier due to the circumstances but has emerged and evolved after they got time to reflect. This new self is defining their happiness and building their self-confidence even after lockdown relaxation as now again they have chance to display it openly.

Participants have experienced positive as well as negative emotions but have learnt to focus more on positive emotions and cherish every moment for their own well-being. They are slowly moving towards self-actualization by realizing their potential which is consistent with our existent knowledge of positive emotions and engagement of PERMA model. Majority of the participants have reported and realised the importance of relationships especially with their families which came out to be congruent with recent researches on the topic (Fiorretti,2020). The true meaning of ‘humans are social animals’ became important for most of them and they are continuing to do so which explains the importance of relationships for eudemonic well-being. Participants have different purposes in life that gives them meaning to live and are worthy enough to strive for. For some it is professional and for others it is personal goals. Their past achievements and accomplishments are making them satisfied in their present life and is building confidence to accomplish more in future. It is giving them direction and providing a focal point to their lives in a positive manner and therefore indicating towards other two components of PERMA model i.e., meaning and accomplishment. The perspectives of participants are aligned with the World Happiness Survey that reveals that social trust and social connections have large direct and indirect impacts on the happiness and dimensions of well-being. The theory of will to meaning by Victor Frankel (1969), was well represented from the participants verbatims by finding meaning to life in these adverse times of lockdown and having hope for a better future and making conscious effort for it. Different perspectives of the participants narrate the dynamics of social relations and shift in personalities that has changed in comparison to the pre pandemic era. Changing attitude towards life by being more respectful, maintaining work-life balance and consciously adapting new ways to live has brought more positivity and satisfaction.

The present study tries to uncover and explore the abstracts concepts of happiness and well-being that are subjective in nature. One can measure its sources and dimension but how a person feels or think about those factors could only be explored using qualitative methodologies. Present study tries to explore these abstract concepts and their reformed meanings in an idiographic manner. It tries to present the state of psychological well-being of the participants after the covid era.

Conclusion

The accounts of participants explained the positive impact of lockdown even after lockdown relaxations and while leading a normal life again. It has guided the participants towards a better future. The study tries to provide the perspectives of the millennials of India, who live in a society where collectivism coexists with individualism

(Sinha.J,2004). Generation Y has to play different challenging roles in their lives but are also considered as a workforce asset. The study tries to tap their perspective on happiness and well-being that would be helpful in understanding their outlook towards life and improving the workplace condition in the post COVID-19 era according to their well-being which may also improve mental health condition of this generation.

In terms of future researches, it would be useful to include sample from other generations as well and a comparative analysis could be carried out for better understanding of each generational perspective.

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