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Effects of Subjective Well-Being Behavior of Working Parents: The Case of Save the Children Employees in Addis Ababa

Effects of Family Breakdown on Children: The Case of Shedder Refugee Camp Fafan Zone, Somali Regional State-Ethiopia.

Feminism as a Development Perspectives: A Systematic Literature Review

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Effects of Subjective Well-Being Behavior of Working Parents: The Case of Save the Children Employees in Addis Ababa

Bizunesh Gelaw¹ and Mosisa Kejela¹

Abstract

Working parents are exempted from well-being and parenting related interventions due to the wrong assumption that they live a happier life and have positive parenting practices because of their educational and financial status. The purpose of the study was to assess the status of the subjective well-being (SWB) and parenting behaviour of working parents and the effect of subjective well-being on their parenting behaviour. Quantitative and qualitative research approaches and descriptive research design were employed. Of the 123 entire population, 93 parents were drawn as a sample and contacted. 75 of them (36 female and 39 male) responded to the survey fully. The study found out that SWB score of parents is very low, meaning their life satisfaction or happiness level is low. The women's situation is worse. On average, the parenting practices of both parents are good. Females are better parents than males. However, 'setting limits' and 'proactive parenting' stayed challenging to perform. The study revealed that subjective well-being has a significant effect on parenting behaviour. Specifically, sense of purpose, worthwhileness, feeling energy and autonomy found to be the factors affecting parenting behaviour. It found that there is a gap in subjective well-being status and parenting behaviour among the well-educated working parents which needs appropriate interventions. Further studies are necessary to understand the magnitude of the problem at a wider scope to design appropriate and contextualized interventions and policies to improve the parents' subjective well-being and parenting behaviour.

Key words: Subjective well-being, parenting behaviour, working parents

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Introduction

Family is an important social institution that has an impact on children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. The role of parenting played in the family setting is a very important and critical social role in supporting and shaping all the developmental outcomes of children. To bring positive outcomes the parents should fulfil the biological, physiological, social, and financial needs of their children. Parenting itself affected by a number of demographics, social, economic, cultural, and personal aspects (CRS, 2016). Parental well-being considered as one of the major aspects that affect optimal parenting practices.

Well-being has two dimensions: objective well-being (OWB) and subjective well-being (SWB)². SWB is considered as a measure of happiness or life satisfaction. The overall assessment result of subjective well-being can be interpreted as level of positive functioning in a broader sense (OECD, 2013).

Full-time employment is one of the major economic activities the parents engaged to support or fulfil the financial need of their family. Tough full-time employment is a source of financial stability for the family; it can be a source of dissatisfaction for the parents due to lack of work-family life balance. This situation could negatively affect the SWB of the parents, which, in turn, has consequences on parenting behaviour (Matysiak *et al.*, 2016).

² OWB is about economic status, educational attainment and safe environment. SWB is perception of quality of life. It is described in terms of a good mental condition consisting life evaluation (life satisfaction), hedonic/affect (emotional estate) and eudemonia (purpose in life or good psychological functioning).

SWB of people and household become a greater concern of policymakers and development actors. A growing body of academic research has sought to explore the relationship between economic growth and reported levels of life satisfaction within the population. Over the past thirty years, while economic growth measured by traditional economic measures such as GDP there has been no parallel increase in people's satisfaction with their lives (Roberts, 2009).

A global analysis that was conducted using World Value Survey, (Stanca, 2016,) showed that there is a negative relationship between parenthood and life satisfaction worldwide. Amazingly, the countries with highest GDP per capita rate scored negative in parental subjective well-being. Denmark, France, Britain and Japan are among the negative scorers. Ethiopia has been ranked 79th with a (1.52) parenthood satisfaction score.

This is a good indication that, economic development is not a guarantee to ensure the life satisfaction of citizens. Again, there is a general perception that success in economic status directly related to good parenting. However, evidence show that there is no straightforward relationship between economic status and good parenting (La Placa & Sara Hunter,2007).

Life satisfaction has a strong effect on parenting. The lesser parental life-satisfaction implies the lesser the ability of raising children successfully and their pleasure from raising their children. As a result, children might suffer due to gaps in parenting. A good subjective well-being of parents, despite their poor financial status, has positive outcome on the future of children and the whole family (Roberts, 2009).

Recently in Ethiopia, there is an increasing focus from policymakers and development actors' side for children's well-being. To achieve their objectives, the actors are engaging parents by considering as key stakeholders. However, less focus has been given for the well-being of the major role player, which has a multidimensional effect on parenting. Most of the time, child well-being programs target vulnerable children for child abuse and exploitation and working with parents of those children. This situation leads to the exemption of working and educated parents from different kinds of programs that can help them to be better parents.

This portion of the community is expected as skillful and has a better well-being. However, research shows the reverse. For example, Ethiopia scored 4.508 out of ten and ranked 115th out of 157 countries in the level of life satisfaction in 2016 (Helliwell *et al.*, 2016)), 52% of working adults living in Addis Ababa reported a very low level of life satisfaction (Kasahun, 2015). In a global study, Ethiopia ranked 79th out of 105 countries with a (- 1.52) parenthood satisfaction score (Stanca, 2016). The statistics show that the subjective well-being status of Ethiopian adults is very low. The negative score of parenthood satisfaction score needs greater attention for further investigation and policy and program level intervention.

Research conducted on 327 mothers in Iran Qom city showed that good subjective well-being status (happiness) has a positive effect on positive parenting Bahrami (2017). The study also investigated the effect of happiness/subjective well-being on parenting behaviour and its components³. The general reflection is that the degree of life satisfaction has an important implication on parenting behaviour. Individuals with high life

³ Components of parenting are positive parenting, uncertainty in dealing with children, and poor monitoring

satisfaction levels showed more motivation, engagement, and success in their life.

The research intended to study SWB status of working parents, their parenting behaviour and the effect of SWB on their parenting behaviour by focusing on employees of Save the Children in Ethiopia. Working parents, especially employees who work for international organizations like Save the Children, are perceived to have good well-being status as well as good parenting behaviour. It is due to their relative better income and educational status. As a result, they are exempted from any well-being and parenthood programs run by development actors. However, these parents are overstressed and struggling to balance work-family roles.

The resource used the following conceptual framework to show the variables that are measured in the study.

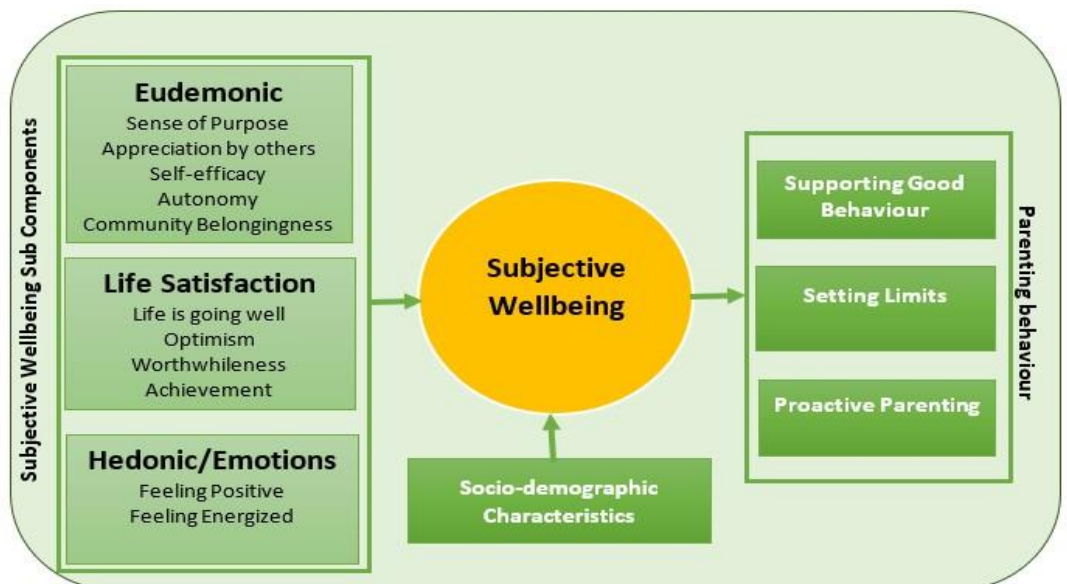


Figure 1. Conceptual framework developed to show the variables that are measured in the study.

Methodology

Participants: The total population of the study is comprised of 123 employees of Save the Children in Addis Ababa office who had children under 18 years of age. Accordingly, out of the 123 parents 93 were randomly selected and contacted to respond to the survey questionnaire. 75 of them (36 female and 39 male) responded to the survey fully. The data collection was undertaken during September 14 to 32, 2019.

Measures/Tools for Data Collection: To obtain the required quantitative and qualitative data, a survey questionnaire⁴, an interview guide for focus group discussion and key informant interview and document review matrix were used.

Data Analysis and Interpretation: To analyze the quantitative data generated from primary sources Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used. Accordingly, the built-in statistical tools and tests were run to produce descriptive and inferential statistics. The qualitative data collected through those qualitative research instruments/tools were also analyzed using thematic and content analysis techniques. The collected data is disaggregated based on some demographic factors such as age and gender of parents, marital status, number of children and income level. Summarized narrations, tables, graphs, and figures are used for interpretation and illustration purposes of the findings.

⁴The survey integrated SWB measure called Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT) copyrighted by Ed Diener, Rong Su, and Louis Tay. And the parenting skill was

Findings

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Out of the total 75 participants (36 female and 39 male) fully responded to the survey. The majority (61%) are between 30 to 35 years of age. On average they have three children who were under the age of 18 (Minimum 1, maximum 4). When we see their education status, 67% had second-degree. 45 % of them get more than 30,000 ETB monthly salary. 97% of them were living with their spouses while 3% were single moms. The majority own car or a house. The women are better in terms of car ownership while the men are better than the women in house ownership.

Parenting Training and Sources of Information

Only 36% of the respondents (16 female and 11 male) participated in parenting training or awareness session. Radio, TV, books and colleagues or friends were found to be the major sources of information about parenting. Religious institutions, the employer of the participants⁵, websites and social media were the next important sources. Newspapers and magazines, schools, and family members are also mentioned as important sources.

Perception on wellbeing and parenting skill

The survey result showed that 83% of the parents believe that both parents' and children's well-being are equally important. However, the focus group discussion revealed that the parents give more priority for the well-being of their children in practice. They considered parenting as scarification to

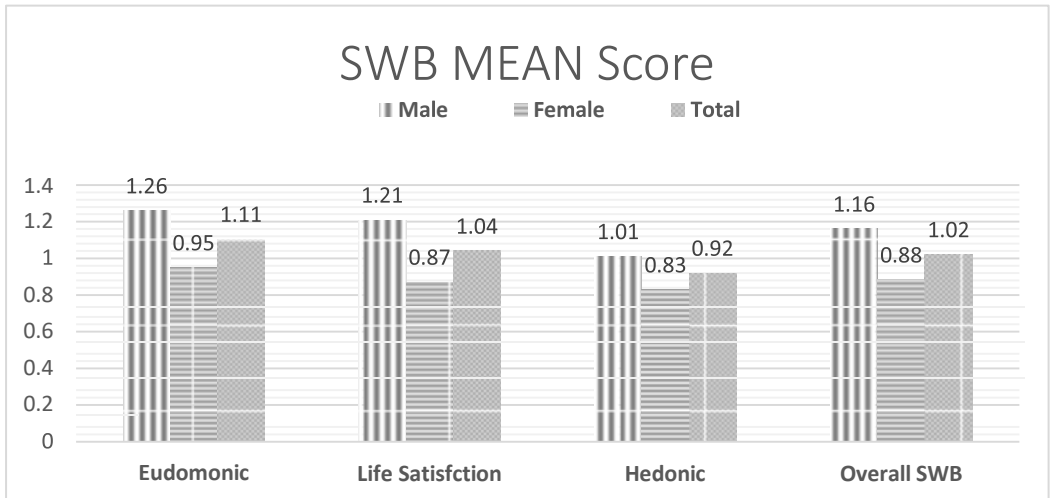
⁵ The "Child safeguarding policy" and "positive disciplining manual" have been found sources of awareness on how to treat children

fulfill the need of their children whom they considered as the purpose of their lives.

In the self-rated parental skill assessment questions 82% of them rated their parenting skill as „very good“ and „good“ (50% very good and 32% good). 13 % rated their skill as “fair” and 5% reported that they were “bad” at parenting. On the contrary, the focus group discussion revealed that the parents were not confident of having enough on their parenting skills.

Status of Subjective Well-being

The survey result showed that the overall subjective well-being of working parents is low (1.1 out of 2 points). It is around 55%. Considering the overall mean score of the respondents, male participants scored higher than the female respondents by 0.3 points. In percentage, the score of male and female working parents is 60% and 45%, respectively. Based on this finding, one can say male parents have a relatively better subjective well-being status than female parents or the male working parents living a moderately happy life. However, the level of happiness of female working parents is very low.



Source: Own survey (2019)

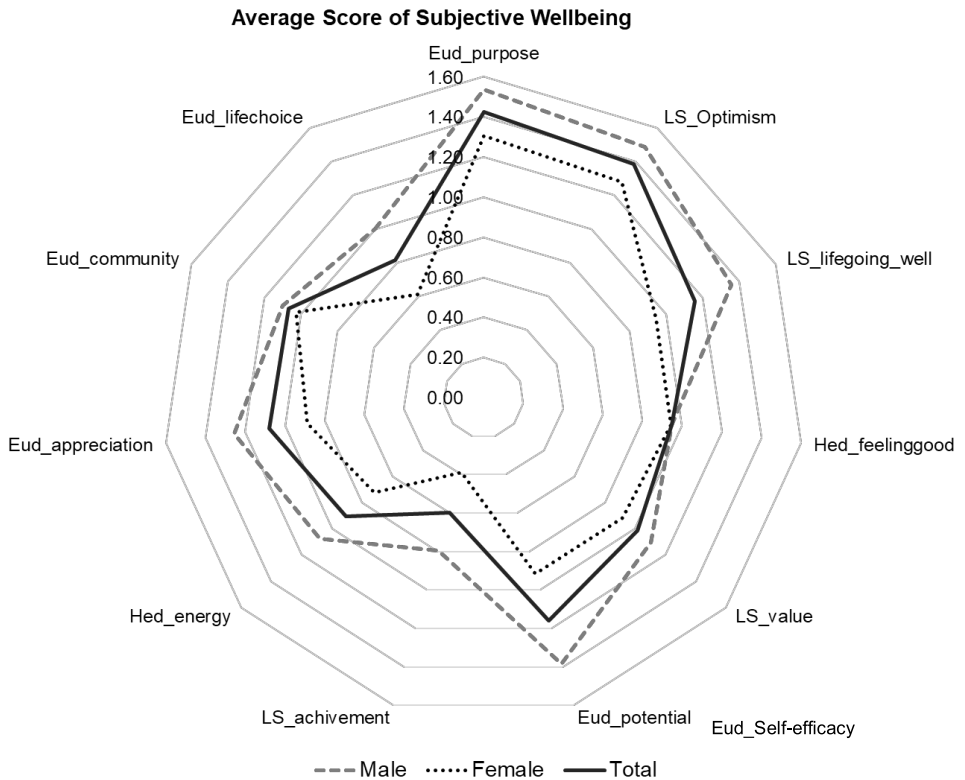
Figure 2. Mean score of subjective well-being by gender

The focus group discussion indicated that the parents understood well-being in terms of being healthy and fulfilling of basic needs. They also reported that they lead a stressful life and struggle to balance work and personal life. They also revealed that they do not have sufficient time to reflect on their well-being and take action to improve the situation.

When we see three major components of subjective well-being, the parents scored in the following order *eudemonic* (purpose in life or good psychological functioning) 1.11 (55%), *life satisfaction* 1.05 (52%) and *hedonic* (positive emotions) 0.93 (46%), respectively. The female parents scored below one (<50%) in all the components (*Eudemonic* 48%, *life satisfaction* 44%, and *hedonic* 42%). That means male parents are relatively better than female parents in terms of having a purpose in life, life satisfaction, and having positive emotions most of the time. Of all the lowest observed scores was the *hedonic* (positive emotions) score of the female parents which is 42%. This component consists of „having energy in most of

the tasks performed and *„feeling well most of the time*. This can be interpreted as the female parents having low energy and negative emotions most of the time.

Parents’ SWB Score by Subcomponents



Source: Own Survey (2019)

Figure 3. Mean score of sub-components of subjective well-being by gender

As visualized above, male participants scored greater than one (>1) in ten out of eleven subjective well-being sub-components. The observed total maximum score is 1.43 (male 1.4, female 1.31) which was on *having a purpose in life*. The minimum average score was 0.4 which was on

achievement (male 0.75, female 0.39). The *achievement* score is very low for both parents. Still the female score on *achievement* is by half lower than the male parents. The only sub-component in which the female and male participants scored closed points is the *feeling good* components, the two groups scored 0.94 and 0.95, respectively.

Female respondents scored low (<1) in seven out of eleven sub-components while men scored <1 in only two of the subcomponents (*feeling good and achievement*).

Table 1. Set of SWB sub-components on which the participants scored <1

Gender	Eudemonic			Hedonic		Life Satisfaction	
	appreciated by others	My life choice is mine (Autonomy)	Self-efficacy	energy	feeling good	value	achievement
♀	0.89	0.61	0.92	0.72	0.94	0.92	0.39
♂					.95		0.79

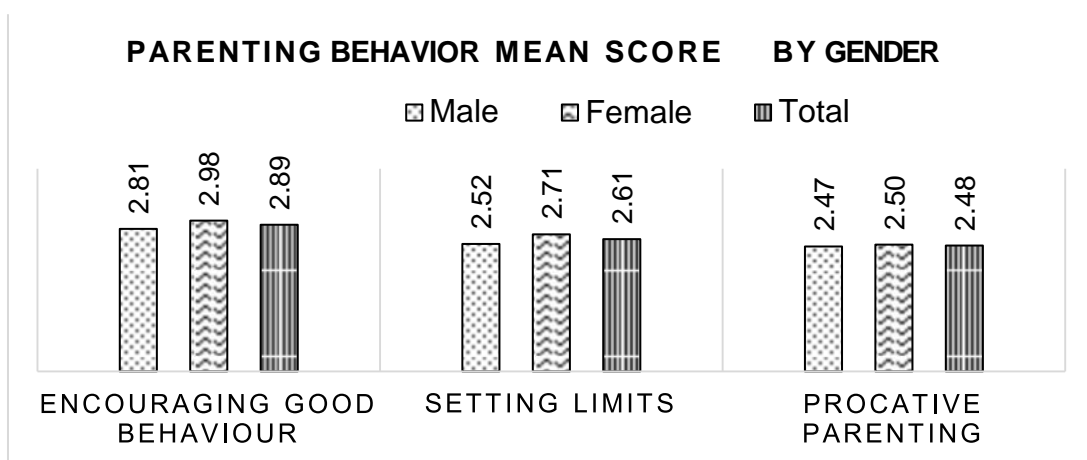
Source: Own survey (2019)

During the focus group discussion, the participants disclosed that they neglect their subjective well-being despite their good understanding that they need to be in good subjective well-being status to fulfill their professional role and parenting roles. They mainly focus on their physical well-being. The female parents expressed that they give priority for their work and for the well-being of their family. They reported that these days the female working parents are very much overburdened and overstressed. Women were struggling to handle their professional duties and reproductive role at the same time. Women sacrifice their achievements for the sake of their children and spouses.

Overall score of parenting behaviour⁶

The findings of the assessment showed that the overall average score of parenting behaviour was 2.7 (67%) out of 4. It was a bit better than the score of subjective well-being (55%). The scores of the components were: *encouraging good behaviour* 2.9 (72%), *setting limits* 2.6 (65%) and *proactive parenting* 2.5 (62%). The parents scored better in *encouraging good behaviour* than *setting limits* and *proactive parenting*.

In contrary to the subjective well-being, score there were slight differences between mean scores of male and female respondents. Female respondents scored slightly above male respondents. The scores of male respondents were 0.16 for *encouraging good behaviour*, 0.19 for *setting limits* and, 0.04 for *proactive parenting* components, respectively.



Source: Own survey (2019)

Figure 4. Parenting behaviour score by sub-components and gender

⁶ Parenting behavior was assessed in three areas i) encouraging good behavior, ii) setting limits, and iii) proactive parenting

Examining sub-components under the three major components of parenting behaviour, there were sub-components on which the parents scored above 3 (75%) and below 2.5 (60%) (a bit higher than the maximum and minimum average scores of the three components).

Encouraging Good Behaviour

Table 2. Summary of encouraging good behaviour sub-components score

	Playing Together	Encourage Problem Solving	Invite or Share Enjoyable Activity	Notice and Praise Good Behaviour	Teach New Skills	Participate in household Chores	Reward for Achievement or New Skill
Male	2.87	2.62	2.62	3.28	2.77	2.54	3.00
Female	3.25	2.47	2.92	3.47	3.11	2.39	3.22
Total	3.05	2.55	2.76	3.37	2.93	2.47	3.11

Source: Own survey (2019)

The parents were good at *noticing and praising good behaviour, teaching new skills, playing together with their children, and rewarding achievements*. In all cases, the female parents were better than males. Even if, the overall score is a bit low, fathers were performing better in terms of *encouraging problem-solving*. Both parents performing low in *participating their children in household chores*.

The focus group discussions indicated that both parents were comfortable in practicing *encouraging good behaviour*. The parents reflected that most of the issues do not require special skills and additional effort. In the case of household chores, both parents reported that they were working parents, and they do not have sufficient time to be engaged in household chores themselves. That limits their effort to let their children participate.

Setting Limits

Table 3. Summary of setting limits score

	Stick to rule	Speak Calmly when upset	Give clear instruction	give a reason to stop unwanted behaviour	Clarify expected behaviour	Set rules	Follow rules
Male	2.15	2.26	2.90	2.49	2.97	2.38	2.46
Female	2.50	1.97	3.22	2.75	3.28	2.67	2.56
Total	2.32	2.12	3.05	2.61	3.12	2.52	2.51

Source: Own Survey (2019)

The overall score of *setting limits* was a bit lower than *encouraging good behaviour*. These parents doing good in terms of giving clear instruction, and clarify expectations than other elements. In both cases, the female working parents were performing better than the males. Both parents have challenges to *stick to rules* and *speaking calmly*. *Speaking calmly when upset* is found to be more challenging for mothers than fathers while *sticking to rules* is the challenge of fathers.

Proactive Parenting

Table 4. Summary of proactive parenting score

	Give Clear Choices	Warn Changes	Plan ahead	Give reasons for your request	Create game out of task	Break tasks in to small steps	Prepare children for challenge
Male	2.41	2.44	2.59	2.92	2.23	2.21	2.46
Female	2.42	2.53	2.61	3.03	2.22	2.39	2.33
Total	2.41	2.48	2.60	2.97	2.23	2.29	2.40

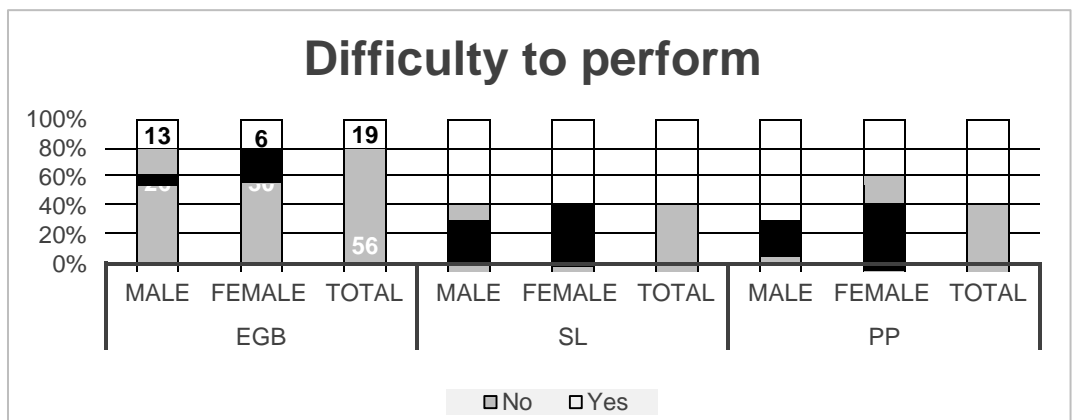
Source: Own Survey (2019)

The scores are the lowest when we compared them with the other two components of parenting behaviour. The only highest observed score is 3.03. That is female parents score under “give a reason for your request” sub-component. In this case, both parents scored better than the other sub-components. It is observed that there are good practices in terms of giving clear choices, warn changes and planning. In all cases, the mothers performed better than their fathers. The fathers are better than the mothers in preparing children for a challenge (Table 4).

The focus group discussion clearly showed that mothers were more open with their children in terms of sharing information on choices, changes, and plans. The fathers have an attitude that it is not fair to inform/tell children something “beyond” their capacity. On the other hand, the mothers were found to be more overprotective than the fathers in case of issues they felt might bring harm to their children.

Difficulty of Performing the Parenting Activities

The respondents requested if the parenting tasks are difficult to perform or not. The result was as follows.



Source: Own Survey (2019)

Figure 5. Response of parents on difficulty of performing parenting roles

Of the total 75 respondents, 47 (63%) and 48 (64%) said that performing *setting limits* and *proactive parenting* are difficult respectively. A significant proportion of participants 19 (36%) responded that *encouraging good behavior* is difficult to perform.

The qualitative data also showed that the respondents perceived that parenting is not an easy task. Particularly, they reflected on their challenges to practice setting limits and proactive parenting. Most parents are focusing on being affectionate and overprotective than focusing on roles that help the children develop good and strong personalities.

Interest to Change their Parenting Practice

The majority of respondents disclosed their interest to change their current practices of *setting limits* (76%, 30 males and 27 females) and *proactive parenting* (80%, 31 male and 29 female). In the *encouraging good behavior component*, 39% (16 male and 13 female) indicated that they want to change their current practice.

The participants reflected during the focus group discussions as the parents believed that they need to be conscious about the context they are living in and try to up-ring their children, the influencing factors of children's behaviors, like school environment, peers, media (both mainstream and social media), etc.

Socio Cultural Determinants of Subjective Well-being and Parenting Behavior


For comparison purpose socio-demographic factors like gender, age, level of education, income, number of children, marital status was considered and

attempted to observe the differences between different categories of respondents. However, gender has been found as the most determinant factor of differences in subjective well-being status and parenting behavior.

Effect of Subjective Well-being on Parenting Behavior

The effect of subjective well-being was found to be significant for *encouraging good behavior* and *setting limited subcomponents* of parenting behavior (Table 5.)



Table 5. Effect of subjective well-being on parenting behaviour

Independent Variable	Dependent Variables	R	Significance
Subjective well-being	 Encouraging good behavior	0.741	0.0000
	Setting Limits	0.669	0.0000
	Proactive Parenting	0.506	0.061

Source: Own Survey (2019)

The most important elements of subjective well-being that affects parenting behavior were, having a purpose in life, having value in life, having energy in most activities and having autonomy in life choices. Having value in life has been a significant factor that affects setting limits and encouraging good behavior aspects of parenting.

Table 6. The effect of subjective well-being sub-components on parenting behaviour

Independent Variables		Dependent	R	Beta	Significance
• Eud_Having Purpose in Life		Encouraging good behaviour	0.741	.426	.028
• LS_What I do is worthwhile (Value)				1.033	.000
• LS_What I do is worthwhile (Value)		Setting limits	0.669	.534	.019
• Hed_I feel energized in most activities				.699	.002
• Eud_My life choices are mine/autonomy				.284	.012

Source: Own Survey (2019)

One-unit change in having value in life results in proportional change (1unit) change in encouraging good behaviour and a 53% change in setting limits (Table 6). Again, one-unit change in having purpose results in a 40% change in encouraging good behaviour. One-unit change in autonomy in life results in a 28% change in setting limits. As we can see the above table five sub components of the subjective out of the total 11 sub-components showed significant effect on parenting behaviour. They are:

- Eudemonic – two sub-components: 1) Have a clear purpose in life and 2) Having autonomy in life choices
- Life satisfaction – one sub-component: What I do is worthwhile (value)
- Hedonic or effect – on sub-component – Feeling energized in most activities

The discussion with parents also revealed that their interaction with their children is highly affected by the level of energy they have, their emotional situation, and the relationship, particularly the relationship with their spouses were found to be the most important factors.

Conclusions

The study showed that the subjective well-being status (happiness level) of working parents is low, with a mean score of 1.1 out of 2 or 55% out of hundred for all parents (60% male, 45% female). The study revealed that female parents scored below 50% or <1 out of 2 in all of the components: eudemonic (*purpose in life*) 0.95, *life satisfaction* 0.87 and *hedonic (positive emotions)* 0.83. The study showed that women are leading a less happy life than males. They scored below one in seven out of eleven sub-components. Particularly, the scores of having autonomy in life and *achievement* are very low at 0.61 and 0.39, respectively. This might affect their overall life satisfaction and happiness which is a very important factor to perform their roles as parents.

Status of parenting

The overall assessment of parenting behaviour status is good. At least the parents average score is greater than 60%, even though it is not sufficient enough. When we see the parenting behaviour categories the scores are *encouraging good behaviour* 2.9 or 72%, *setting limits* 2.6 or 65% and *proactive parenting* 2.5 or 62%.

The parents score of *setting limits* and *proactive parenting* is below *encouraging good behaviour*. Also, the parents reported that both are difficult to perform. Despite their lower subjective well-being status, women

are found to be to relatively better parents than males in their parenting practice.

Effect of Subjective Well-being on Parenting

The study revealed that subjective well-being has a significant effect on parenting behaviour, particularly on *encouraging good behaviour* and *setting limits*. The specific sub-components of subjective well-being that have a significant effect on parenting behaviour are *having a purpose in life, value in life, have energy in most activities and autonomy in life choice*.

In this study, gender found to be the major factor in which significant differences was observed (between male and female). Male parents have better subjective well-being status than females. Besides, the female parents have a better parenting behaviour than their male counterparts.

Recommendations

Working Parents: The parents need to give equal attention to their well-being to improve their quality of life and to play the parenting role successfully. Parents need to establish a community/help group to share experiences and support with peers and develop their awareness on the issues of subjective well-being and parenting through reading, and attending different sessions (self-confidence, emotional intelligence, parenting, communicating with children).

Employers: Most employers should have policies to address the physical well-being of their employees. Helping employees to ensure work-life balance might be a good strategy to motivate employees, improve their productivity and their subjective well-being status. Organizations could support working parents to develop different skills that benefit the

organization and their life equally. Training on self-confidence, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and communicating with purpose might serve a multi-fold purpose to enhance motivation, productivity, and parenting skills. Parenting skill training or awareness creation sessions might help to belongingness and motivation from the employees' side. Flexible time arrangements can be also another good strategy to help the parents to achieve work-life balance.

Policy Makers and Development Actors: The well-being of children is one of the top priorities for policymakers and development actors. Due attention should be given to the well-being of the caretakers of the children. A fertile ground should be created to work with working parents. They should know their gaps and should be interested to improve their skills., Huge changes might be happening just with minimum investment and by showing the right path for working parents.

Research Institutes: Subjective well-being is an important indicator to bring real human development or status of quality of life to citizens. A nationwide assessment is needed to understand the real situation of the subjective well-being of parents in our country as there is no sufficient evidence on the issue. Researches are mandatory to understand the reality and to build upon the existing social values and implement relevant intervention

Media: FM radios and private-owned television should transmit parenting-related information to working parents and children. Such effort needs to be continued and strengthened engaging development actors, professionals and research institute towards making the transmitted information

contextualized and relevant. The social media is also a huge resource to reach the parents.

Private Sector: At country and global levels, the popularity of social enterprises should be enhanced from time to time. Parental well-being and parental behaviour could be a good intervention area since there is a limited number of consulting organizations. The social enterprise model could be the best fit for filling the gap.

Gender Consideration: The findings revealed that there should be gender-related assessments to understand the ultimate causes of the differences between the life satisfaction levels and parenting behaviours of male and female parents. Accordingly, gender-focused interventions are required to support the parents in enhancing their well-being and parenting practices.

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