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Social Welfare: Happy, Healthy, And Wealthy

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Abstract:- Social welfare policies in the U.S. are designed to facilitate the citizens to attain the highest levels of happiness, health, and wealth. However, the finite nature of these three parameters and other extenuating factors make it impossible for Americans to fully meet these desires. The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of happiness, health, and wealth on the formulation and implementation of social welfare policies in the United States. A case study research design method was used to collect and analyze the relevant data. The findings show that engagement in voluntary activities and living in more urban areas increases the happiness of the Americans. It was also established that health disparities in the United States are influenced by several factors, including race, immigrant status, and levels of income. It is proposed that U.S. policymakers should address the existing disparities in the country by developing and implementing appropriate policies that increase happiness, health, and wealth.

Keywords:- Social, welfare, us, happy, wealthy, healthy

Background

Human beings, regardless of their socio-economic status, levels of education, or religious beliefs, desire to be wealthy and lead a happy and healthy life. Remarkably, from a theoretical point of view, each of the aforementioned human aspirations is infinite (Watts & Hodgson, 2019). In other words, people's yearning to be happy, healthy, and wealth has no practical measure. Nevertheless, it is essential to highlight that the capacity for state-based institutions, community, and individuals to meet these ambitions are, rather obviously, finite (Watts & Hodgson, 2019). This situation implies that people across different parts of the world, both in developing and developed countries, have limited capacity to fully meet all the aforesaid aspirations. Governments of various nations recognize the importance of their citizens becoming wealthy and living a happy and healthy life. Consequently, all countries with functioning institutions, whether autocratic or democratic governance structure, have formulated and implemented various social welfare

policies that emphasize supporting the people to meet the listed aspirations. However, due to their finite capacity, governments are unable to fully satisfy all these human aspirations. Watts and Hodgson (2019) acknowledge that everyone may want to have a long, healthy, and successful life, but the apportionment of the available resources is capped either by society or nature. Furthermore, on numerous occasions, accessible resources are often distributed in unequal and uneven ways. The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of happiness, health, and wealth on the formulation and implementation of social welfare policies in the United States.

Subsequently, the paper has been divided into four main sections, with each part addressing a specific aspect connected to the thesis statement. In the first section of this study, the researcher outlines and explains the methodology that was used to accomplish the set research goals and objectives. In

particular, the author describes the nature and type of data that was collected, the procedure used to gather the relevant data, as well as the techniques that were utilized to analyze the collected data. Meanwhile, in the second part of the report, the investigator provides a brief description of the results, and at the same time, engages the readers in a detailed discussion of the research findings. Notably, the investigator accomplishes this goal by contextualizing the findings to research evidence from previous scholarly work. Finally, in the third section of the paper, the author offers a conclusion of the research by highlighting key insights concerning the investigation, the results, and implications for the study.

Methods

The present research falls in the social work realm because it involved an in-depth evaluation of how happiness, health, and wealth influence the formulation and adoption of social welfare policies in the United States. Consequently, the investigation was carried out following a specified scientific method. It is worth noting that the primary goal of social work research is to build the existing base of social work literature to address specific practical issues in social policy or social work (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). Notably, the present study majorly focused on developing empirical evidence that could facilitate the U.S. government to formulate social welfare policies that effectively help the citizens to lead a happy, healthy, and wealthy life.

The researcher in this investigation identified and used a reliable scientific method that supports maximal compliance with the established empirical

principles, for example, drawing inferences based on the observations that have been collected in a logical, detailed and unbiased manner. In this research, the investigator selected and used the case study research method consisting of six steps, as shown in Figure 1 below. It is worth highlighting that the qualitative parts of this research, for example, the use of observation to draw appropriate inferences on the social welfare of the U.S. citizens, raised reliability and validity concerns. Consequently, to effectively mitigate potential bias, the investigator adopted the triangulation research approach. The method involved the use of many sources and techniques in the collection of data to strengthen the general validity of the study (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Fielding, 2012; Carter, 2014; Wilson, 2014; Fusch et al., 2018). The relevance of the triangulation method in research is to add depth to the collected data.

In this study, the United States was used as a representative country for social welfare. Remarkably, the following research questions were used to guide the collection of data: (1) are U.S. citizens generally happy, healthy, and wealthy; and (2) has the degree of overall happiness, health, and wealth of U.S. citizens influenced the adoption and implementation of social welfare policies in the country? The gathering of data was focused on collecting facts about each of the variables under investigation. In particular, the data was gathered from relevant literature, for example, empirical evidence concerning the U.S. population and appropriate policy documents. The data extracted from various studies were analyzed using a thematic approach.

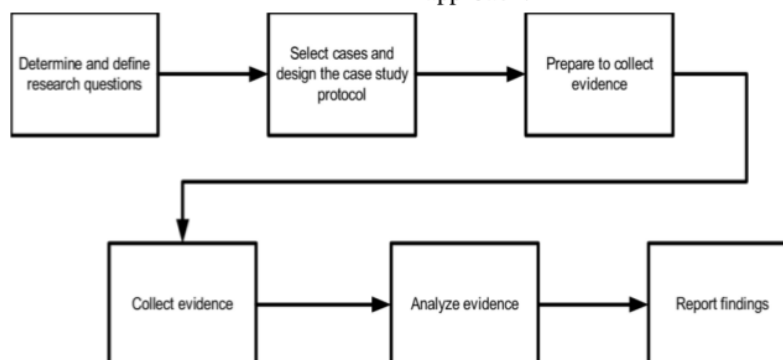


Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of case study research design methodology

Results and Discussion

Conceptualization of Happiness and the Case of the United States

It is argued in some quarters that "the wealthy are not happy" (Singh & Singh, 2002). Notably, this philosophical claim is subject to criticism, mainly because the claimant has not sustained it with empirical evidence. Nevertheless, Singh and Singh (2002) advance a highly persuasive viewpoint in support of the claimant. In particular, these scholars contend that the wealthy are never happy and cannot achieve this human aspiration because wealth is the underlying cause of their unhappy state (Singh & Singh, 2002). The philosophers assert that it is a widely accepted fact that a healthy man tends to lead a much more content and happy life than an individual with abundant wealth. Singh and Singh (2002) further argue that besides affluence, several other things enrich human beings and enable them to have a satisfactory life. It is relatively difficult for people to visualize, leading a decent life without money. However, people need to understand that money is simply one of the numerous components in people's lives, which can offer them finite happiness.

Moreover, Singh and Singh (2002) acknowledge that some individuals are unhappy throughout their lives because they are constantly in pursuit of harnessing as much wealth as possible, while the rich are unhappy in protecting their wealth. According to the scholars, these individuals often worry all night about the safety of their wealth, for they are usually targeted by the Government for tax evasion and other antisocial aspects. Singh and Singh (2002) argue that besides external sources, the wealthy people are also threatened from within their families, resulting in legal disputes, family relations, and unhappiness. According to the authors, the truly happy people are those who have made some contribution to society. For example, William Shakespeare, Mahatma Gandhi, and Mother Teresa are some of the famous people who were truly happy in their lifetime. In particular, none of these individuals was wealthy, but their instrumental contribution in the sphere of literature and Social Welfare will forever remain a significant

source of inspiration for both the present and future generations.

It is worth noting that for long, psychologists and philosophers have been concerned about the good life and how one can achieve it (Peterson et al., 2005). On numerous occasions, these experts have developed and proposed a model that people can use to be happy. In this regard, the hedonism doctrine, which postulates that a person can accomplish happiness by minimizing pain and maximizing pleasure, was theorized by Aristippus a thousand years ago (Peterson et al., 2005). The authors acknowledge that despite its popularity in explaining the roadmap to happiness, Christian philosophers rejected hedonism, arguing that the model offers insights that limited an individual's ability to avoid sin. However, the Renaissance theorists like Thomas Moore and Erasmus shared the view that it was God's desire for people to be happy, as long as they did not get engrossed with the 'artificial' strategies of achieving pleasure. Meanwhile, the English philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and David Hume relied on the model of hedonism as a basis for utilitarianism (Gottfried, 2011). Psychologists have, over the past several years, advocated for an increased focus on examining happiness as well as many other assumptions. Singh & Jha (2008), for example, observe as opposed to continuing with the more conventional emphasis on the dysfunctional or negative forces in routine life, researchers have in the recent years attempted to gain meaningful knowledge on how people can improve their lives.

Incidentally, multiple studies have been carried out to examine the extent of happiness in the United States (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2008; Yang, 2008; DeLeire & Kalil, 2010; Wang, & Sunny Wong, 2011; Gimenez-Nadal & Molina, 2015). Notably, the researchers in each of the aforementioned studies examine the idea of happiness in the United States from varied perspectives and about different concepts. For example, Bjørnskov (2008) has explored this phenomenon concerning social capital in the United States. The researcher postulates that the general expectation is that happiness and social capital would evolve fairly at the same time over a

given period if one factor influences the other. Notably, past studies have shown that social capital levels in the U.S. have been on the decrease since the 1960s (Bjørnskov, 2008). Therefore, it should be expected that the level of average happiness in the country has also declined, that is if all other factors are held constant.

Moreover, Bjørnskov (2008) confirms that the trust decline in the United States has not been uniform across the various states. Similar to the aspect of sociability and social trust, the reductions in the average happiness levels in the United States are not homogenous across different regions in the country. Bjørnskov (2008) acknowledges that monitoring the average happiness and the development of social capital in nine census areas of the United States offers a simple and objective statistical evidence of the correlation between two social variables and happiness. The researcher adds that the link between social trust and happiness is qualitatively consistent with other cross-country findings in the current literature and is almost the same size as reported in many studies. However, the relationship between sociability and happiness is questionable, especially concerning formal social activities.

In a different study, Gimenez-Nadal and Molina (2015) investigate the association between the routine voluntary activities and the level of happiness obtained by individuals in the United States, a country that has for long been known for the practice of community service, and among the Western nations, it remains a leader in volunteering. The researchers observed that about 50% of all adults engage in some form of volunteering. Consequently, gaining meaningful knowledge about the reasons why a substantial number of Americans are actively involved in volunteering work has attracted considerable attention in the scholarly community. Gimenez-Nadal and Molina (2015) found out that the participation of the Americans in voluntary activities has a positive correlation with their daily happiness. In particular, the people who volunteer have lower-values of the u-index and higher values of the net (Gimenez-Nadal & Molina, 2015). The investigators contend that to the degree that happier people are more inclined to take part in

voluntary activities, it may attract the attention of employers, based on the findings reported in current research that have confirmed a positive association between worker output and happiness, to increase volunteer-related programs within the organization.

Subsequently, in another study, Yang (2008) examines the concept of happiness within the context of social happiness. The analysis of the collected data reveals several key findings concerning the extent of happiness in the United States. For instance, the results indicate life-course patterns, birth cohort variations, and time trends in happiness are different and independent of each other (Yang, 2008). Moreover, the researcher also found out that there is a direct correlation between age and happiness. In other words, the overall level of happiness in the United States tends to increase with age. Overall, Young's (2008) study offers crucial insights that future researchers can use to develop a conceptual framework that accurately describes the effect of social inequalities on the extent of individual happiness. In a different study, it has been reported that in the United States, the less urban regions are closely linked with higher happiness levels and vice-versa for the more urban areas (Sander, 2011). Therefore, it is suggested that to attain the desired level of happiness in the United States, one should consider residing in rural areas. In another empirical investigation that sought to describe the prevalent socioeconomic disparities in the U.S. across several health indicators, Braveman (2010) found out that the individuals with the least income and who have the lowest levels of education were steadily healthy. However, for most of the indicators, the individuals with intermediate education and income levels were less healthy compared to the most educated and wealthiest individuals (Braveman, 2010). Consequently, the researchers conclude that in the United States, there is a relationship between health and the hierarchies of social advantage.

Conceptualization of Health and the Case of the United States

In the context of social welfare, a person's health status is often analyzed from different perspectives, for example, social health, mental health, and social

health (Teymoori et al., 2006). Researchers have developed various definitions of health with others, arguing that the spiritual, social, psychological, and social well-being is not necessarily the absence of disability or disease. According to Teymoori et al. (2006), health may be described as the soundness of the mind and body, a state of vitality and vigor that allows an individual to function effectively socially, psychologically, and physically. Therefore, it is correct to conclude that a person's health consists of several dimensions, including spiritual and environmental dimensions, social dimension, psychological dimension, and physical dimension. It is suggested that when developing social policies that focus on improving the general health of the population by putting in place measures that help to address people's emotional and mental aspects of feeling and knowing (Fisher, 2011). Moreover, the mechanisms in force should also focus on the vocational and spiritual domains of the citizens.

One of the most important considerations that policymakers should take into account when formulating policies that focus on increasing social welfare benefits in the society is identifying priorities and the amount of benefit that is produced by other alternatives. In this regard, there have been significant research efforts directed towards developing technological innovations that facilitate the measurement and valuation of the benefit derived from a broad array of public services (Dolan & Tsuchiya, 2011). It is worth pointing out that if welfare is the only consideration, it would mean that the purpose of public policy can only be measured in terms of how the benefits are maximized. However, the individual mandated to formulate policies and the members of the general public are often concerned about how the benefits are distributed in society. It is argued that in theory, social welfare is a powerful tool for evaluating how best to allocate resources to ensure that every member of the society has access to affordable and high-quality health care. Nevertheless, in practice, it is difficult for policymakers to develop social welfare policies that effectively meet the unlimited health needs of each individual in the society, and this can be attributed to a wide range of factors, including the state of a country's economy and the

nature of public service. Although a country may have limited resources, there is a consensus that policymakers should ensure that all citizens have equal access to a broad range of both primary and secondary health care services (Gutmann, 1981; Anand, 2002; Lu & Hsiao, 2003; Powell & Exworthy, 2003; Higgs, 2004; Oliver & Mossialos, 2004; Wendt, 2009). Remarkably, equality in public access to relevant health care services is widely considered as one of the fundamental rights of citizens. San Giorgi (2012) contends that if an individual or group of people are not given access to health care services, their inherent right to health care is violated and that they should seek appropriate remedy from the judicial or quasi-judicial human rights bodies in their country.

Incidentally, research evidence suggests that compared with the Canadians, the residents of the United States experience more challenges in accessing health care services (Lasser et al., 2006). The researchers add that the problems of accessing medical attention are more serious for those individuals without insurance coverage. According to Lasser et al. (2006), health disparities in the United States are influenced by several factors, including race, immigrant status, and levels of income. The investigators observe that universal coverage helps to reduce inequalities and recommends for its adoption in the United States. Nevertheless, there should be sufficient funding to prevent the common waits for care. Another important point worth noting is that universal coverage is inadequate to fully address the health disparities predominant in the United States (Lasser et al., 2006). According to the researchers, there is an urgent need for the relevant stakeholders to develop and implement measures that will help to address the inferior systems of healthcare in those organizations serving the poor members of the society as well as the non-financial access obstacles, for example, language and cultural barriers. Meanwhile, policymakers need to formulate and adopt policies that will effectively resolve the undesired social condition that negatively impacts the U.S. health care system.

Conceptualization of Wealth and the Case of the United States

The widening of income inequality has become a widespread concern in today's world (Dabla-Norris et al., 2015). The researchers acknowledge that there has been a sharp rise in inequality in many of the developed as well as emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs). Dabla-Norris et al. (2015) observe that in a recent survey, it was reported that more than 60% of the people across different parts of the world consider the widening gap between the wealthy and the poor a defining social challenge in modern time. The scholars argue that despite this empirical evidence, researchers and policymakers are yet to understand the extent and the cause of increasing inequality in society. It is imperative to highlight that gaining in-depth knowledge of the degree and causes of inequality is essential for policymakers because it enables them to develop strategies that would help to reduce the broadening gap between the poor and wealthy members of the society. Equality, similar to fairness, is an essential value to many societies across different parts of the world (Dabla-Norris et al., 2015). It is argued that irrespective of religious affiliations, culture, and ideology, people are always concerned about equality. Remarkably, inequality in the society may be a reflection of income opportunity and mobility (Breen & Jonsson, 2005; Andrews & Leigh, 2009; Brunori, 2013; Corak, 2013; Kanbur & Stiglitz, 2016). Research evidence shows that widening inequality in a country has considerable effects on macroeconomic stability and growth, resulting in the concentration of decision-making authority amongst few members of the society, and increasing the risk of crisis (Dabla-Norris et al., 2015). Consequently, policymakers must develop and execute policies that help the country to significantly decrease the gap between the wealthy and the poor members of society.

It is important to note that discussion on the status of economic disparity in the United States is not new and has been a subject of debate in different platforms, including social media and mainstream media. Notably, this social-economic has attracted the attention of many researchers (Smeeding, 2005;

Links, 2006; Heathcote, 2010; Galbraith & Hale, 2009; Rumberger, 2010; Galbraith & Hale, 2014). In particular, these scholars have examined this topic from different vantages. For instance, Smeeding (2005) performs a comparative analysis of the relationship between the U.S. public policy and the economic inequality predominant in the country. The researcher observes that the U.S. has, in the past four decades, recorded significant economic inequality increases. According to Smeeding (2005), this phenomenon is not unique because many of the developed nations in the world have recorded at the minimum modest increases in the inequality of the market as well as the levels of disposable income. Nevertheless, the case of the United States is somewhat unique because economic inequality has prolonged for many years.

Moreover, Smeeding (2005) argues that as the labor markets and the economies become increasingly globalized and the developed countries continue to struggle with the economic and social effects commonly associated with an aging population, dissolution of marriages and a sharp rise in the number of women at workplaces, the interest of the general public has shifted to an emphasis of determining how the various social policies are dealing with the issues of unemployment, poverty, and inequality. It is argued that the increased interest has resulted in greater efforts amongst researchers to develop cross-national measures of economic inequality that are comparable and better within a particular nation, including the United States. Researchers have developed different methods to help in assessing the cross-national variations at several points in the distribution of income. An example of this technique is the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), a tool that provides additional information concerning a country's economic inequality (Smeeding, 2005). Remarkably, this tool has increased the accuracy of comparative studies on economic inequality. It is clear from the preceding discussion that the United States remains one of the developed countries with significant economic inequities in the world. Consequently, this means that the gap between the rich and the poor is extremely wide, a clear indication that policymakers have failed to develop

social policies that effectively ensure increased mobility and opportunity amongst the citizens. It is argued that the continued widening of this economic gap threatens the social stability of the United States. For example, a sharp rise in unemployment rates and poverty index could result in a sharp rise in the crime rate. Subsequently, law enforcement would become difficult because the number of police officers will be lower than the number of lawbreakers.

Conclusion

It is evident from the foregoing discussion and analysis that happiness, health, and wellness are important factors that influence the social welfare of communities in any country, including the United States. Notably, several philosophical arguments attempt to define happiness. Some scholars contend that wealthy individuals are often not happy, and there are several reasons why they cannot accomplish this innate human aspiration. In particular, the proponents of this philosophical claim explain that wealth is the cause of unhappiness amongst wealthy people. The rich are often constantly worried about the safety of their wealth, and this contributes to their state of unhappiness. Nevertheless, it is essential to highlight that the proponents of this thought process lack relevant empirical evidence to support their claims. Meanwhile, other philosophers like Aristippus, David Hume, and Jeremy Bentham relied on the hedonistic model to explain the concept of happiness in people. The available research evidence suggests that in the United States, the active participation in voluntary activities is a source of happiness for most people. Moreover, it has also been confirmed that the people residing in the less urban areas are happier than those living in more urban regions. Parenthetically, it has been confirmed that health disparities in the U.S. are impacted by several factors, for example, race, immigrant status, and levels of income. To attenuate these variations in the health sector, it is suggested that policymakers should develop and implement a policy that supports universal health coverage.

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