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SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT. The relationship between one's objective living conditions and his/her subjective well-being is a problematic one. This paper discusses the results of a survey conducted in Turkey to explore the impacts of socio-economic status on satisfaction with various domains of life, and satisfaction of basic, and social and psychological needs. The results from the univariate, bivariate analyses and the multiple discriminant analysis indicate that socio-economic status is a strong determining factor in satisfaction with life domains and satisfaction of needs.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND LIFE SATISFACTION

One of the major areas of the Quality of Life research has been life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is conceptualized as an aspect of overall subjective well-being. The research on subjective well-being was prompted by the realization that quality of one's life is not a function, solely, of economic well-being. There is an extensive body of literature on the significance of subjective well-being in understanding the quality of one's life (Abrams, 1973; Andrews, 1974; Schneider, 1976; Campbell, 1976; Atkinson, 1982; Landua, 1992; Leelakulthanit and Day, 1992; Mullis, 1992).

The relationship between one's objective living conditions and his/her subjective well-being is problematic. Some researchers stress that assuming a correlation between the objective and subjective indicators of well-being is not justified by the empirical findings (Davis and Fine-Davis, 1991: 103—104). On the other hand, a group of literature suggests that there is a positive relationship between people's socio-economic status or income status and psychological well being (Langer, 1963; Dohrenwerd and Dohrenwerd, 1969; Meyers et al., 1974; Kessler and Cleary, 1980; Douhitt et al., 1992; Moller, 1992; and Ying, 1992).

Some researchers conceptualize satisfaction as a subcategory of happiness (Davis and Fine-Davis, 1991: 111), while some others define...
satisfaction and happiness as two distinct areas of psychological well-being (Zapf et al., 1987: 25). Satisfaction, this latter approach contends, is more of a cognitive evaluation that is particularly dependent on social comparisons with other important reference groups as well as individual’s desires, expectations, and hopes. In contrast, happiness is conceived as an emotional state produced by positive and negative events and experiences in the life of an individual.

Life satisfaction may be conceived and studied in two dimensions, representing “two forms of inequality,” as suggested by Zapf and his colleagues (1987: 32). Vertical inequalities in life satisfaction are products of social stratification. Horizontal inequalities are within individuals, and define differences between the life domains in which he/she is more or less satisfied. At an aggregate level, horizontal inequalities also describe the differences in satisfaction between individuals of the same stratum.

The nature and character of the vertical inequalities in relation to life satisfaction, i.e., effects of socio-economic status on life satisfaction, are controversial issues, as mentioned above. The studies on the horizontal inequalities in life satisfaction, on the other hand, concur that people are satisfied more in their “private” domains of life such as family and marriage, household jobs, than in public domains of life (Andrews and Withey, 1976; Zapf et al., 1987; Glatzer, 1991; Leelakulthanit and Day, 1992).

This paper discusses the results of a survey conducted in Ankara, Turkey, to explore the relationships of socio-economic status with satisfaction with various life domains, and satisfaction of basic and social-psychological needs. The purpose of the study was both to observe whether socio-economic status was a determinant of life satisfaction, and to find out the dimensions of life satisfaction that were discriminating between the individuals of different socio-economic status. Satisfaction was conceptualized as a cognitive evaluation, and the question on satisfaction were worded accordingly.

METHOD

The data collection method used in our study was a survey conducted with face-to-face interviews. A total of 145 interviews were done in the