

Life Satisfaction and the Desire to Emigrate: A Cross-National Analysis

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Causes of Migration

- Literature investigating causes of migration roots in several disciplines such as sociology, psychology, economics.
Reasons range from:
- Economic differentials (Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969),
- Political forces, such as involuntary displacement due to war, poverty, and human rights violations (Jenkins & Schmeidl, 1995; Moore & Shellman, 2006)
- Increased internationalization of higher education and labor markets (Mahroum, 2000; Wiers-Jenssen, 2008)

Life Satisfaction Around the World

- High: America-Caribbean, North America, Western Europe, and Australia-New Zealand (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2017)
- Low: South Asia and Sub Saharan Africa

Emigration Desires

- High emigration desires: Latin America-Caribbean area, post-soviet Commonwealth of Independent States, and Sub Saharan Africa (OECD, 2015)
- The above pool of countries includes low, and lower- and upper-middle-income countries

The Role of Life Satisfaction

- Life satisfaction supersedes economic factors in peoples' decisions to emigrate (Bartolini et al., 2017; Manchin & Orazbayev, 2018; Mara & Landesmann, 2013; Shamsuddin & Katsaiti, 2019).
- Negative relationship between life satisfaction and the intention to emigrate, when investigating both individual and national level life satisfaction levels (Chindarkar, 2014; Graham & Markowitz, 2011; Lovo, 2014; Otrachshenko & Popova, 2014, Cai et al., 2014).

Empirical Findings

- Negative relationship between life satisfaction and intentions and desires to migrate (or re-migrate) using individual level data (Chindarkar, 2014; Cai et al., 2014; Otrachshenko & Popova, 2014; Lovo, 2014; Graham & Markowitz, 2011; Mara & Landesmann, 2013; Shamsuddin & Katsaiti, 2019)
- Ivlevs (2015) reports a positive relationship after addressing endogeneity for intentions
- Polgreen & Simpson (2011) identify a U-shaped relationship between happiness and emigration rates through a national level analysis (Grimes & Wesselbaum, 2019)

Geographical Scope and Controls

- Limited geographical scope (except for Cai et al. (2014) that utilize GWP data for 154 countries), i.e. Otrachshenko & Popova (2014) and Lovo (2014) focus on Europe, Chindarkar (2014) and Graham & Markowitz, 2011 on Latin America etc.
- Some macro controls (except for Cai et al. (2014)): i.e. Chindarkar (2014) controls for low wages and weak economic outlook; Otrachshenko & Popova (2014) include GDP, unemployment, and inequality in their analysis.
- Neglected interaction effects between individual and country-level life satisfaction
- Ignored the possible mediating effect of life satisfaction through macro variables.

Contribution

- GWP data for 127 countries.
- Investigate the relationship between individual life satisfaction and desires to emigrate.
- We evaluate the influence of country-level institutions and characteristics and the effect of wellbeing indicators as individual-national level mediators.
- We adopt an aspirations and capabilities theoretical framework (Sen, 1999; Carling, 2002), that is individuals can overcome obstacles that may prevent migration from their home country or into a host country, taking into account both micro and macro restraints and abilities.

Sources: Individual Data

- Gallup World Poll 2017
- Individual: more than 150 countries, 1000 sample, representative of more than 99% of world population, 15 years and above.
- Data on law and order, food and shelter, job creation, migration, level of income, personal health, civic engagement and evaluative satisfaction from life, health and income

Variables of Interest

- Desire to migrate to another country
- Life Satisfaction
- Gender, marital status, number of children, HH size, education, employed, born in the country, urban, $\ln(\text{income})$, having health problems, satisfaction with freedom in life
- Index of: Confidence in National Institutions; Law and Order; Community Basics; Local Economic Conditions; Job opportunities; Social Life

Questions of interest

- Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?
- Please imagine a ladder, with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?

Sources: Macro Data

- Human Development Report (2018)
 - ① Human Development Index (HDI)
 - ② Gender Inequality Index (GII)
- Gallup World Poll
 - ① (Aggregated) Country level life satisfaction

The Model

Multilevel mixed-effects probit

$$P(Y_{ij} = 1) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{ij} + u_j$$

- 1 Mixed-effect multilevel probit models were estimated without and with interaction terms to test for moderation effects.
- 2 Same models were estimated separately for men and women; for young, adults and elder people; and for born and not born in the country.

Results

Table 2. Multilevel *probit* model results of desire to emigrate, Gallup World Poll, 2017

Desire to emigrate	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Life Satisfaction		-0.00978***	-0.00974***	0.0762***	-0.00903***	0.0692***	-0.00921***	-0.0531***
Country Mean of Life Satis			-0.0124	0.0818*				
Life Satisfaction * Country Mean of Life Satis				-0.0165***				
HDI_2017					-0.198	0.468		
Life Satisfaction *HDI						-0.119***		
GII_2017							0.0515	-0.563**
Life Satisfaction * GII								0.106***
Index of Confidence in National Institutions	-0.00405***	-0.00404***	-0.00405***	-0.00400***	-0.00404***	-0.00400***	-0.00417***	-0.00411***
Index of Law and Order	-0.00346***	-0.00345***	-0.00345***	-0.00342***	-0.00345***	-0.00341***	-0.00353***	-0.00349***
Index of Community Basics	-0.00217***	-0.00213***	-0.00213***	-0.00213***	-0.00211***	-0.00213***	-0.00210***	-0.00212***
Index of Loc. Ec. Con.	-0.00169***	-0.00165***	-0.00165***	-0.00165***	-0.00161***	-0.00159***	-0.00158***	-0.00156***
Job opportunities	-0.000235	-0.000236	-0.000236	-0.000210	-0.000266	-0.000271	-0.000411*	-0.000406*
Index of Social Life	-0.000791***	-0.000754***	-0.000753***	-0.000754***	-0.000779***	-0.000749***	-0.000882***	-0.000842***
Having health problems	0.0205	0.0181	0.0180	0.0158	0.0189	0.0143	0.0194	0.0141
Male	0.128***	0.124***	0.124***	0.123***	0.128***	0.126***	0.129***	0.127***
Age	-0.00396**	-0.00401**	-0.00400**	-0.00427**	-0.00495**	-0.00510**	-0.00505**	-0.00508**
Age squared	-0.000182***	-0.000183***	-0.000183***	-0.000180***	-0.000169***	-0.000169***	-0.000169***	-0.000170***
Married	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Single	0.181***	0.181***	0.181***	0.177***	0.183***	0.179***	0.175***	0.171***
Divorced or widowed	0.0879***	0.0902***	0.0901***	0.0876***	0.0905***	0.0870***	0.0873***	0.0826***
Children under 15 y.o.	-0.0142**	-0.0148**	-0.0148**	-0.0146**	-0.0152**	-0.0147**	-0.0162**	-0.0156**
Household size	0.00128	0.00155	0.00155	0.00160	0.00140	0.00134	0.00222	0.00223
Tertiary education	0.0659**	0.0675**	0.0676**	0.0728**	0.0698**	0.0781**	0.0690**	0.0776**
Having a job	-0.0143	-0.0161	-0.0161	-0.0144	-0.0106	-0.00900	-0.0147	-0.0126
Born in the country	-0.264***	-0.264***	-0.265***	-0.261***	-0.268***	-0.264***	-0.276***	-0.273***
Living in a large city	0.0881***	0.0881***	0.0882***	0.0879***	0.0955***	0.0943***	0.0867***	0.0851***
Natural Logarithm of income	0.0308**	0.0334**	0.0332**	0.0331**	0.0352**	0.0365**	0.0332**	0.0346**
Satis. with freedom in your life	-0.165***	-0.164***	-0.164***	-0.164***	-0.160***	-0.158***	-0.162***	-0.159***
Constant	0.275***	0.299***	0.368	-0.102	0.414*	-0.0308	0.313**	0.557***
Constant var. cons.	0.181***	0.183***	0.182***	0.181***	0.179***	0.180***	0.176***	0.178***
Number of participants	119227	117523	117523	117523	114739	114739	106749	106749
Number of countries	127	127	127	127	124	124	115	115
AIC	106183.3	104882.0	104883.8	104811.7	101999.6	101912.8	93161.6	93074.2
BIC	106396.4	105104.5	105116.0	105053.5	102231.2	102154.0	93591.5	93313.7

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Results cont.

Table 3. Multilevel probit model results of desire to emigrate by socio-demographic groups, Gallup World Poll, 2017

	Male	Female	18-29	30-49	50+	Born in country	Not born in country
Life Satisfaction	-0.0145***	-0.00472	-0.0118**	-0.0134***	-0.0101*	-0.00963***	-0.0151
Country Mean of Life Satis.	-0.0204	-0.00685	-0.0505	-0.0454	0.0154	-0.0127	-0.0404
Index of Confidence in National Institutions	-0.00438***	-0.00375***	-0.00351***	-0.00443***	-0.00505***	-0.00403***	-0.00426***
Index of Law and Order	-0.00358***	-0.00336***	-0.00330***	-0.00374***	-0.00336***	-0.00350***	-0.00220*
Index of Community Basics	-0.00199***	-0.00227***	-0.00128***	-0.00235***	-0.00324***	-0.00205***	-0.00425***
Index of Loc. Econ. Cond.	-0.00165***	-0.00169***	-0.00173***	-0.00169***	-0.00176***	-0.00166***	-0.00184***
Job opportunities	-0.000340	-0.0000875	-0.0000168	-0.000504	0.000291	-0.000216	-0.000101
Index of Social Life	-0.000455*	-0.00105***	-0.000105	-0.000797**	-0.00187***	-0.000678***	-0.00215***
Having health problems	0.0133	0.0227	-0.0242	0.0486**	-0.0334	0.0173	0.0430
Male			0.109***	0.107***	0.104***	0.124***	0.130**
Age	-0.00479*	-0.00329				-0.00388*	-0.00709
Age squared	-0.000168***	-0.000199***				-0.000185***	-0.000133
Married							
Single	0.157***	0.202***	0.252***	0.154***	0.143***	0.186***	0.0715
Divorced or widowed	0.0952***	0.0992***	0.143**	0.0685**	-0.00690	0.0928***	0.0240
Children under 15 y.o.	-0.0115	-0.0177**	-0.0150	0.00212	-0.0133	-0.0139**	-0.0309
Household size	-0.00123	0.00345	0.00449	-0.0190***	0.0180*	0.00143	0.00476
Tertiary education	0.0500*	0.0818***	0.00742	0.105***	0.109***	0.0710***	0.0114
Having a job	-0.0171	-0.0226	-0.0176	-0.0278	0.201***	-0.0153	-0.00346
Born in the country	-0.270***	-0.266***	-0.271***	-0.287***	-0.272***		
Living in a large city	0.0840**	0.0919**	0.110**	0.0993***	0.0450*	0.0917***	0.0345
Natural Logarithm of income	0.0147*	0.0440***	0.0216*	0.0222*	0.0222*	0.0325***	0.00535
Satis. with freedom in your life	-0.167***	-0.159***	-0.157***	-0.130***	-0.269***	-0.160***	-0.268***
Constant	0.819***	0.171	0.326	0.396	-0.423	0.0963	1.266***
Constant var. cons	0.165***	0.203***	0.190***	0.185***	0.154***	0.186***	0.0562***
Number of participants	53908	63615	27372	41842	39821	111989	5534
Number of countries	127	127	127	127	127	127	127
AIC	50824.8	54287.9	30862.3	40068.6	24962.4	99461.1	5415.8
BIC	51029.4	54496.3	31043.0	40258.7	25151.5	99682.5	5568.0

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Results cont.

Table 4. Multilevel probit model results of desire to emigrate by gender with interaction effects, Gallup World Poll, 2017

	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Life Satisfaction	0.0867***	0.0704***	0.0679***	0.0737***	-0.0527***	-0.0541***
Country Mean of Life Satis.	0.0902*	0.0756*				
Life Satisfaction * Country Mean of Life Satis.	-0.0195***	-0.0144***				
HDI_2017			0.381	0.551*		
Life Satisfaction *HDI			-0.124***	-0.118***		
GII_2017					-0.408	-0.705**
Life Satisfaction * GII					0.0948***	0.121***
Index of Confidence in National Institutions	-0.00433***	-0.00371***	-0.00428***	-0.00374***	-0.00442***	-0.00383***
Index of Law and Order	-0.00354***	-0.00333***	-0.00356***	-0.00331***	-0.00365***	-0.00338***
Index of Community Basics	-0.00198***	-0.00227***	-0.00204***	-0.00221***	-0.00193***	-0.00230***
Index of Local Econ. Cond.	-0.00165***	-0.00169***	-0.00156***	-0.00165***	-0.00162***	-0.00155***
Job opportunities	-0.000306	-0.0000671	-0.000368	-0.000137	-0.000455	-0.000308
Index of Social Life	-0.000451*	-0.00106***	-0.000450	-0.00103***	-0.000628**	-0.00104***
Having health problems	0.00991	0.0212	0.0111	0.0179	0.0190	0.0123
Age	-0.00534*	-0.00342	-0.00578*	-0.00425	-0.00588*	-0.00390
Age squared	-0.000163***	-0.000198***	-0.000157***	-0.000186***	-0.000156***	-0.000192***
Married						
Single	0.151***	0.199***	0.152***	0.202***	0.138***	0.200***
Divorced or widowed	0.0896***	0.0979***	0.0914***	0.0963***	0.0785**	0.0991***
Children under 15 y.o.	-0.0111	-0.0175**	-0.0120	-0.0169*	-0.0106	-0.0206**
Household size	-0.00125	0.00352	-0.000990	0.00263	-0.00125	0.00479
Tertiary education	0.0561**	0.0864***	0.0613**	0.0917***	0.0579**	0.0926***
Having a job	-0.0154	-0.0211	-0.0128	-0.0154	-0.0189	-0.0179
Born in the country	-0.268***	-0.262***	-0.272***	-0.263***	-0.277***	-0.275***
Living in a large city	0.0838***	0.0914***	0.0895***	0.0989***	0.0823***	0.0884***
Natural Logarithm of income	0.0147*	0.0437***	0.0168*	0.0482***	0.0178*	0.0429***
Satis. with freedom in your life	-0.167***	-0.159***	-0.160***	-0.155***	-0.161***	-0.158***
Constant	0.272	-0.244	0.463*	-0.276	0.892***	0.465**
Constant var. cons.	0.165***	0.201***	0.164***	0.198***	0.159***	0.198***
Number of participants	53908	63615	52670	62069	48812	57937
Number of countries	127	127	124	124	115	115
ATC	60270.1	64360.8	60604.6	62646.0	46117.1	60178.7

Results cont.

Table 5. Multilevel probit model results of desire to emigrate by age with interaction effects, Gallup World Poll, 2017

	18-29	30-49	50+	18-29	30-49	50+	18-29	30-49	50+
Life Satisfaction	0.0453*	0.0752***	0.0987***	0.0382*	0.0836***	0.0956***	-0.0457***	-0.0690***	-0.0485***
Country Mean of Life Sat.	0.0184	0.0505	0.115**						
Life Satisfaction * Country Mean of Life Sat.	-0.0115**	-0.0170***	-0.0195***						
HDI_2017				0.0581	0.379	0.638*			
Life Satisfaction * HDI				-0.0795**	-0.146***	-0.143***			
GII_2017							-0.245	-0.571*	-0.587*
Life Satisfaction * GII							0.0761**	0.134***	0.111***
Index of Confidence in National Institutions	-0.00349***	-0.00438***	-0.00498***	-0.00351***	-0.00432***	-0.00502***	-0.00351***	-0.00450***	-0.00506***
Index of Law and Order	-0.00328***	-0.00371***	-0.00332***	-0.00331***	-0.00370***	-0.00334***	-0.00339***	-0.00376***	-0.00363***
Index of Community Basics	-0.00128***	-0.00235***	-0.00324***	-0.00126***	-0.00232***	-0.00320***	-0.00135***	-0.00245***	-0.00298***
Index of Loc. Econ. Cond.	-0.00173***	-0.00169***	-0.00176***	-0.00170***	-0.00167***	-0.00161***	-0.00169***	-0.00165***	-0.00157***
Job opportunities	0.00000397	-0.000476	0.000325	0.0000129	-0.000541	0.000116	-0.000135	-0.000586*	-0.0000182
Index of Social Life	-0.000109	-0.000790**	-0.00191***	-0.0000927	-0.000771**	-0.00192***	-0.000102	-0.000925***	-0.000194**
Having health problems	-0.0245	0.0476*	-0.0370	-0.0238	0.0471*	-0.0394*	-0.0239	0.0474*	-0.0390
Male	0.108**	0.105**	0.102**	0.109**	0.108**	0.110**	0.110**	0.105**	0.121**
Married									
Single	0.251***	0.150***	0.138***	0.252***	0.151***	0.144***	0.246***	0.139***	0.146***
Divorced or widowed	0.141**	0.0650**	-0.00767	0.143**	0.0638**	-0.00168	0.150**	0.0643*	-0.00834
Children under 15 y.o.	-0.0150	0.00279	-0.0133	-0.0139	0.00134	-0.0136	-0.0141	0.00236	-0.0136
Household size	0.00456	-0.0193***	0.0182*	0.00292	-0.0186**	0.0196*	0.00183	-0.0171**	0.0230**
Tertiary education	0.00933	0.110***	0.115***	0.0118	0.121***	0.121***	0.0227	0.111***	0.119***
Having a job	-0.0175	-0.0248	0.202**	-0.0142	-0.0198	0.210**	-0.0229	-0.0189	0.205**
Born in the country	-0.269***	-0.282***	-0.271***	-0.273***	-0.283***	-0.278***	-0.276***	-0.281***	-0.320***
Living in a large city	0.110**	0.0985**	0.0455*	0.116**	0.105**	0.0521*	0.111**	0.0955**	0.0504*
Natural Logarithm of income	0.0213*	0.0218*	0.0219*	0.0239**	0.0250**	0.0243*	0.0220*	0.0221*	0.0234*
Satis. with freedom in your life	-0.157***	-0.129***	-0.268***	-0.154***	-0.123***	-0.258***	-0.167***	-0.113***	-0.260***
Constant	-0.00470	-0.0895	-0.957***	0.0178	-0.137	-0.833***	0.200	0.397**	-0.109
Constant var. cons.	0.188***	0.183***	0.155***	0.187***	0.178***	0.156***	0.185***	0.178***	0.156***
Number of participants	27372	41842	39821	26897	41008	38504	24494	38205	36611
Number of countries	127	127	127	124	124	124	115	115	115
AIC	30854.9	40043.4	24938.1	30236.9	38971.8	23866.2	27232.7	35760.3	22282.6
BIC	31043.9	40242.1	25135.7	30425.5	39170.1	24063.1	27419.1	35956.9	22478.3

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Conclusions

- Lower life satisfaction levels increase the desire to emigrate
- However, once we consider the interaction effects, the coefficient of interest flips sign, indicating that for individuals living in happier countries, life satisfaction boosts the desire to migrate.
- In more advanced economies (measured through the HDI) happier people will tend to stay.
- Results hold across gender, age, and country of birth.
- When taking into account country GII, relatively unhappy women wish to emigrate. This result implies that life satisfaction is paramount for women when weighing the benefits of staying versus leaving.