

Happiness and homelessness:

A case study of Happiness awareness among homeless people

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Abstract: This paper deals with the subject of how homeless people feel in relation to their lives, and the prospective of future change in relation to how happy they consider themselves, based on interviews and analysis of data obtained from several social surveys I carried out among 144 homeless people between 2004 and 2010 in several Argentine cities and slums. Contrary to common thought, many homeless did not feel unhappy about their economic conditions. The reasons for this are considered in the conclusion

1. Introduction

Happiness is a very elusive concept. Some consider happiness to be an emotion (Haidt, 2006), a feeling (Gilbert, 2006), a way of expressing the inner world (Hochschild, 1981) or a means to communicate the joys of life to others (Klein, 2006).

Happiness has been a paradigmatic subject of study in different disciplines like philosophy (Chan, 1963), psychology (Seligman, 2004), economy (Frey, 2001; Leonhardt, 2008), law (Ross, 1977), medicine (Lyubomir et.al. 2005), immunology (Loyd, 2006), robotics (Nakagawa, 1999), etcetera.

It is generally defined as a state of the spirit in which the person feels a general sense of wellbeing, or as a state of mind characterized by love, satisfaction, pleasure, contentment or joy (Cambridge Dictionary, 2008). Yet, a final definition is lacking, due in part to the difficulties for social sciences to quantify an element which is not logical (Macareño, 2006) and very characteristic of the individual, non-communicative inner self (Bericat Alastuey, 2000). In particular sociology has been, since its founding, avert to the treatment of passions, feelings and emotions. Sociology, as the science of social action logic and social structures, has done without the concept of happiness for more than 200 years, and

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because of this it has paid little attention to the emotional realities of the concrete social beings, and how it affects the social fabric and the world of decisions of people within society.

The main question I had was if happiness had any relevance in how a person defines him or herself within society. That is to say, if the identity of a person in relation to society (or to any social group, for this matter) is weighed by how happy he or she feels within that group. One of the main elements for identity research is the degree of pride a person feels in the belonging to a social group; what are then the relations between identity, pride and happiness. If a person feels happy within a determined society, group or social circumstance, it is more than probable that this person would not try to change his or her commitment to the society, group or circumstance. In other words, happiness maybe consider, coldly, as an element of inertia regarding the belonging to a social structure, and even more, regarding social mobility. Of course there are moral and ethic considerations to take into account, which may change this picture, but as a consideration for quantification of social interactions, happiness may be, at least, a very interesting element for consideration.

The description, explanation and sociological understanding of reality would be incomplete if the sentient element that helps take social-bound decisions, like happiness, is not incorporated. (Hochschild, 1975).

2. Background and Literary Review

2.1. Homeless definition review

According to the United States Code homeless is defined as:

- an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
- an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

In this study I use the above definitions as to what I consider a 'homeless person', using both as identifiers of people without proper housing. But, I should also add to them the consideration of homeless of people living in slums, where life conditions are inhuman: lack of basic human needs provision (clean water, sanitation, shelter), lack of proper resting place, destitution, promiscuity-leading conditions, lack of space for personal privacy, lack of boarding space for personal belongings. Life in a slum is, from the perspective of the stress

and deprivation people undergo there, not much better than life in the streets.

In the case of homeless living in shelters, it is possible to say that while they remain there, they at least can enjoy of a minimum proper sleeping space and of some decent sanitation; yet these benefits cease as soon as the homeless person returns to the streets when the morning comes.

There are other definitions of what a homeless person is which vary from country to country, but considering them all, in essence, 'homeless' is regarded as someone who has no proper, or adequate, means of abode or resting, and needs to use public space for such. Most shelters are public, or are provided by public funding, which subjects homeless people to political ups and downs. A slum may be considered a 'public' space since in most cases the land where people make their precarious residences belongs to the state; in the case of slums built on private land, residents are under continuous risk of being expelled, in a permanent state of insecurity. For these reasons is that I consider that either living in the streets, in shelters or in slums, homeless people are (in different degrees) similarly subject to deprivation, in an unstable medium that does not allow them fully develop personally or socially, which works as a constant restriction to any achievement of happiness feeling. So, the main hypothesis would be that most homeless people are unhappy, in a state of resignation and/or depression. Life under such precariousness has not only a physical (medical) hardship: proper sleep deprivation, weather direct influence (extreme cold/heat), hygienic limitations, insalubrious conditions that are "life degrading" and "sickness-leading", but also psychological: lack of a place where to feel alone at times (privacy space), uncertainty of abode, uncertainty of future.

It is difficult to imagine any sense of happiness or hope under this state of continuous life penalties.

2.2. Main reasons for homelessness

Homeless life starting and reasons for continuous homeless life span sometimes are treated together, yet they are different, although related. Among the main reasons for a person to become a homeless, we can cite unavailability of employment positions, poverty, lack of social inclusive education, social conflicts (social anomie, social distress, widespread political corruption, internal or international strife), lack of proper health care policies, lack of homelessness contention programs, economic crisis, loss of income or job, lack of affordable land or housing, family problems such as domestic violence, natural disasters, criminality and prison service (and lack of prison servers social absorption), discrimination, and depending on the country, alcoholism, drug abuse and/or other addictions culture (Jencks, 1994). If these conditions are kept during long periods of time, the possibilities or opportunities for ascendant social mobility are stalled, and most homeless people have no further choices; indeed, it is possible to assert that the homeless

population might grow (Wright, 1989). But if these adverse circumstances change, the probabilities of a homeless person to cease to be so are increased, at least theoretically (Neale, 1997).

The study on the length of homeless careers is not less important than the study on the causes of homelessness (Sosin et.al., 1990). Among its main predisposing elements, we can mention both structural factors (such as social limitations, social discrimination towards homeless, lack of human capital, lack of reinsertion policies for homeless and cultural identity as 'homeless') and personal vulnerabilities (addictions, sicknesses, lack of familiar ties, work attitude) which have a weight when it comes for a homeless to revert to a different social standing (Rossi, 1989).

3. Methodology

In this study I asked 144 homeless and slum-residents in a period span of 6 years (from 2004 to 2010) about how happy they felt about their lives, if they were resigned to that life, or if they were unhappy. The questionnaire changed its length through the years, asking more elements in the later interviews. These took place in different cities, shelters and slums in Argentina, although I had opportunity to conduct similar surveys in Spain, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, the U.S. and Japan, as well as obtained data of similar nature from researchers from several European and Asian countries. The problem in methodology surged upon a lack of cohesive question-sampling system, so for this reason, and in order to make this paper coherent, I chose only to evaluate a minimum set of questions that I asked the 144 persons I interviewed in Argentina. Further analysis of the other questionnaires (other countries) revealed similar patterns. Due to lack of length, I only analyzed the condition of happiness among Argentinean homeless, leaving the remaining material for other presentations.

As the years passed, the Argentinean economic situation fluctuated, so the total number of homeless people in Argentina has been changing dramatically. In the first years (2004 to 2008), there were very limited governmental assistance programs for the homeless. In many local statistics they were not considered in censuses, so their total number is difficult to assess. From 2009 there have been more assistance from local, state and federal governments, yet this has not been enough to reach minimum basic needs satisfaction in all cases (Perez, 2010).

4. Results/ Analysis

4.1. Presentation

The questionnaire was in its core, very simple. It asked each respondent to assess how

happy he or she felt within the circumstances of his or her life, what made him or her happy, what unhappy, and if there were possibilities of change, would the interviewee feel happy, how was the relation with other homeless people, and if they had family, how did they feel about them; if they did not have family, would they want to have one, and if this was true, would his or her concept of happiness change, and how much. The question about happiness asked the interviewee to assess personally what he or she considered this to be, and the rating was purely personal. They were also asked to imagine if the homeless in general as a group were also happy or not, and happier or not than other social groups. Along the years there were some changes in the answers, but not big enough to alter the final results, so I decided to consider all the data as one set, from 2004 to 2010. The first hypothesis was that although the old adage says that 'money does not buy happiness', a certain degree of material procurement is necessary for a life with dignity, or at least, with satisfaction of basic human needs (Maslow, 1943). That is to say, that people that were under such hardships, where the minimum need of shelter was not covered, or covered in a precarious way, would not be happy with their lives, and certainly would want to change this if possible. But then I considered that there might be an alternative to the happy/unhappy pair, and that would be resignation, a state in which the person somehow feels unhappy but that is not enough to make him or her desire for a change, accepting the situation as it is. So I devised a scale of 'happiness' ranging from 0 (zero) as the feeling of most unhappiness, or feeling of misery and deprivation affecting totally the person and making him or her desire for changes, to 10 (ten) meaning the most happiness and satisfaction with the situation. The midpoint 5 (five) was considered as a state of resignation, where the person was half happy, half unhappy, with desires of change, but not so strong. The usage of this scale was intended as a measure of how happy the person felt and simultaneously infer from this if the person did want any changes in life or not. The interviewees were asked to rate happiness and satisfaction differently. Satisfaction was seen as a 'degree of material fulfillment' with life, and happiness as the feeling arousing from life experience itself. The second hypothesis was that the degree of happiness and the degree of fulfillment were interrelated, so those who had a slightly better housing condition (like living in shelters and/or slums) would be happier and more satisfied than those in worse conditions (like homeless living in the streets).

A third hypothesis was that people that had shorter homeless life would be less happy than those who had longer ones, since in their case they presumably had gotten habituated to the hardships of life, adapted better than people with less experience. I analyzed this from the perspective of former social class extraction and education level. The hypothesis was that the more higher the social standing before homeless life, or the higher the education level the person had, the worse he or she would feel regarding homeless life. Finally I believed that age and gender might have an effect on the perception of happiness. For methodological purposes, I divided the interviewees according gender, age (three groups:

20 to 40 years, 40 to 60 years and 60 and over), education level, former class extraction (three classes: high class, middle class and lower class; based on the description given by the interviewees, and not based on actual income documentation), homeless life style (life in the streets, life in shelters, life in slums) and finally according to homeless life duration (three groupings: less than a year, between one and five years, more than five years).

According to private estimates (Caritas, 2010) the possible number of homeless people in Argentina would be around 6000, yet this number is still contentious. National statistics have been unreliable (Calvo, 2009). Although a sample of 144 respondents is relatively small, it can provide a rough idea about the hypothesis indicated, which in turn can be used for further studies, at least as a starting point. In the future I intend to enlarge this continuous research and expand the number of interviewees. So, from this point of view, results can be said to be somehow limited.

Table 1: Basic questionnaire (gender was judged upon interview)

- Where do you live? (In the streets, without permanent address, in a shelter, in a slum)
- How old are you?
- What is the highest education level you have attained?
- Do you have a family in similar life conditions living with/near you?
- How long have you been homeless?
- Which social class did you belong before homeless/shelter/slum life?
- Do you feel happy with your life right now?
How much? (From 0: not happy at all, to 10, very happy; 5 is considered as 'resignation with present life [not bad, not good, having to live this way anyway]')
- What things/situations/feelings, etc., make you most happy?
What things/situations/feelings, etc., make you most unhappy?
- Do you feel satisfied (materially, socially, etc.) with your life?
How much? (From 0: not satisfied at all, to 10, very satisfied)
- What things/situations/feelings, etc., make you most satisfied?
What things/situations/feelings, etc., make you most not satisfied?
- Do you feel happy within the group/family you live with (in the case of family existence)? How much? (from 0: not happy at all, to 10, very happy; 5 is considered as 'resignation with present life [not bad, not good, having to live this way anyway]')
- Do you feel materially, economically, socially satisfied within the group/family you live with (in the case of family existence)? How much? (from 0: not satisfied at all, to 10, very satisfied)
- Do you feel that the group/family you live with (in case of family existence) as such is happy? How much? (from 0: not happy at all, to 10, very happy; 5 is considered as 'resignation with present life')
- Do you feel that the group/family you live with (in case of family existence) as such is materially satisfied? How much? (from 0: not satisfied at all, to 10, very satisfied)
- If you have family, do you think they feel happy with their present life? (from 0: not happy at all, to 10, very happy; 5 is considered as

'resignation with present life [not bad, not good, having to live this way anyway]')

- If you have family, do you think they feel materially/economically/socially satisfied with their present life? (from 0: not satisfied at all, to 10, very satisfied)
- Do you consider yourself as a member of a distinct social group (or different social class) that can be called 'homeless society', 'shelter society', or 'slum society'?
- Do you think the group of people that in similar circumstances close to you is a happy group as such? (from 0:the group is not happy at all, to 10, the group is very happy; 5 is considered as 'resignation for the group with the present life')
- Do you think the group of people that in similar circumstances close to you is a materially satisfied group as such? (from 0:the group is not satisfied at all, to 10, the group is very satisfied)

Table 2: Age Groups, Gender, Family

Location		Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
Gender	Age	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over
	Family	40	60	60	40	60	60	40	60	60
Male	With Family	3	3	2	4	7	5	8	6	4
	Without Family	3	3	2	4	4	4	4	4	3
Female	With Family	3	3	3	6	5	3	8	8	4
	Without Family	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3

(totals: 73 male respondents and 71 female respondents)

Table 3: Education Level

Education Level	Primary Studies not Completed	Primary Studies Completed	Secondary Studies Completed	University Degree Completed
Male	18	26	19	10
Female	12	28	26	5

Table 4: Social Class Extraction prior to homelessness

Former Class	Lower Class	Middle Class	High Class
Male	28	28	17
Female	30	29	12

As we can see from tables 1 to 4, the distribution of the respondents into the different fields

is relatively balanced, so therefore we cannot say there was biased data weight. Respondents came from all walks of life. Living in the worst imaginable conditions were university graduated and Ph.D. as well as youngsters without any education at all. There were people living in slums and shelters that were previously company owners and also those who could not recall when they started their present life.

What reasons pushed all of these people to live under such harsh conditions were variable to as many conditions and causes as there were respondents. For some love affairs, broken hearts and emotional downturns meant leaving everything behind. For others, the difficult economic conditions translated into a life devoid of any material elements. Most of these people had to resort to live on the streets, in shelters or slums with their families, all subject to a similar life-style. As we can see from table 5 to table 15, it was harder for those who came from richer classes (Middle and High class), for those with higher education levels (particularly high school graduates and university graduates) and for those with short life as homeless. One such reason is their lack of adaptability or their perceptions of life in a determined mode that included material needs satisfaction. Yet, what I discovered through these interviews was that although the material satisfaction was clearly insufficient and felt, happiness, either as a personal feeling or as a social labeling, was different.

Table 5: Happiness degree perception (according to Family in similar conditions or not)

Location		Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
Gender	Age	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over
	Family	40	60	60	40	60	60	40	60	60
Male	With Family	6.5	6.5	4.0	6.5	5.5	5.0	7.5	7.5	7.0
	Without Family	3.5	4.5	5.0	7.5	7.5	7.0	8.5	8.5	8.0
Female	With Family	6.0	6.5	5.0	8.5	8.5	8.0	9.0	8.0	7.5
	Without Family	6.0	6.5	5.0	7.5	7.5	6.0	8.0	8.0	7.5

Table 6: Happiness degree perception (according to former class extraction)										
	Location	Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
Gender	Age	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over
	Former Class	40	60	60	40	60	60	40	60	60
Male	Lower Class	6.0	6.0	3.5	8.5	8.0	6.5	9.5	8.5	8.0
	Middle Class	6.0	6.0	6.5	7.5	7.0	6.0	8.5	9.0	8.5
	High Class	3.0	4.5	3.5	5.0	4.5	5.5	6.0	6.5	6.0
Female	Lower Class	7.5	9.0	7.0	9.0	9.0	7.5	9.5	9.0	9.0
	Middle Class	6.5	7.0	5.0	8.5	9.0	7.5	9.0	8.5	8.5
	High Class	4.0	3.5	3.0	6.5	6.0	6.0	7.0	6.5	5.0

Table 7: Happiness degree perception (according to education level)										
	Location	Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
Gender	Age	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over
	Education Level	40	60	60	40	60	60	40	60	60
Male	Primary Incomplete	6.0	7.0	5.5	8.0	8.5	7.0	9.0	9.0	8.0
	Primary Complete	5.0	6.0	6.0	8.0	7.5	6.0	8.0	9.0	8.0
	Secondary Complete	4.0	6.0	3.5	5.0	5.5	6.0	7.0	8.5	6.5
	University degree	X	3.0	3.0	X	4.5	5.0	X	5.5	X
Female	Primary Incomplete	6.0	7.5	6.0	9.5	9.0	8.0	9.5	9.5	8.5
	Primary Complete	6.5	7.0	5.0	8.5	9.5	8.0	9.0	9.5	8.5
	Secondary Complete	5.5	5.0	4.0	6.0	7.0	6.0	7.0	6.5	5.5
	University degree	X	X	X	X	6.5	6.0	X	6.5	X

Table 8: Satisfaction degree (according to Family in similar situation or not)										
	Location	Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
Gender	Age	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over
	Family	40	60	60	40	60	60	40	60	60
Male	With Family	2.5	1.0	1.0	3.0	3.5	2.5	3.0	3.5	3.5
	Without Family	3.5	3.0	1.0	3.0	2.5	2.5	2.0	2.5	1.5
Female	With Family	1.5	1.5	0.5	3.5	4.0	3.5	3.5	4.0	3.0
	Without Family	2.5	2.5	2.5	3.5	3.0	3.5	2.5	3.0	3.0

Table 9: Satisfaction degree (according to former class extraction)										
	Location	Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
Gender	Age	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over
	Former Class	40	60	60	40	60	60	40	60	60
Male	Lower Class	5.0	4.5	1.5	5.0	5.0	4.0	3.0	4.5	3.5
	Middle Class	3.5	1.0	1.0	3.5	3.0	3.0	2.5	3.0	3.0
	High Class	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1.0	0.5	2.0	1.5	1.0
Female	Lower Class	3.0	3.0	2.5	5.0	4.5	4.5	4.0	4.0	3.5
	Middle Class	2.5	2.5	1.5	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	3.5
	High Class	0.5	0.5	0.5	2.5	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.5	2.0

Table 10: Satisfaction degree (according to education level)										
	Location	Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
Gender	Age	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over
	Education Level	40	60	60	40	60	60	40	60	60
Male	Primary Incomplete	4.5	3.5	1.5	4.5	5.0	3.5	3.5	4.5	3.0
	Primary Complete	4.0	2.5	1.0	3.5	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.0	3.0
	Secondary Complete	0.5	1.5	1.0	1.0	3.0	3.0	2.0	2.5	1.5
	University degree	X	0.5	0.5	X	1.0	0.5	X	2.0	X

Female	Primary Incomplete	3.5	3.0	2.0	4.5	4.0	4.0	3.0	5.0	3.5
	Primary Complete	2.0	2.5	2.0	3.0	4.0	4.5	3.0	4.0	3.5
	Secondary Complete	0.5	0.5	0.5	3.0	3.0	3.5	3.0	3.0	2.5
	University degree					3.0	2.0		2.0	

Table 11: Happiness and Satisfaction degrees according to homeless/shelter/slum life period

	Location	Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
	Age Period	20 to 40	40 to 60	Over 60	20 to 40	40 to 60	Over 60	20 to 40	40 to 60	Over 60
Happiness	Less than 1 year	4.5	5.0	4.0	6.5	6.0	5.5	8.0	8.0	7.5
	From 1 to 5 years	7.0	7.0	5.5	8.0	7.5	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0
	5 years or more	3.5	4.5	4.0	6.5	6.0	4.5	8.0	8.0	7.0
Satisfaction	Less than 1 year	2.5	1.5	0.5	2.0	1.5	2.5	2.0	1.5	2.5
	From 1 to 5 years	3.0	2.0	2.0	4.0	2.5	2.0	3.5	2.5	2.5
	5 years or more	3.5	2.5	0.5	3.0	2.0	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.5

Table 12: Happiness and Satisfaction degrees as individual under homeless life circumstances

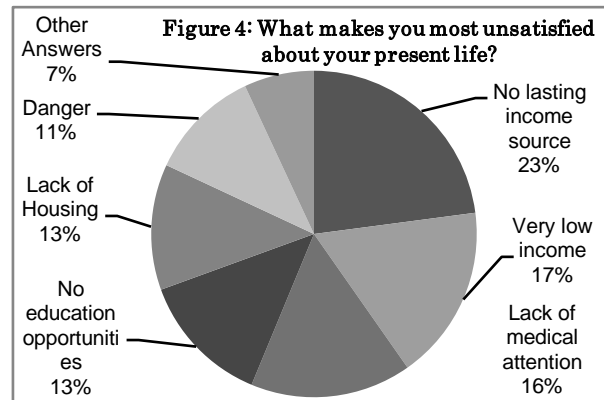
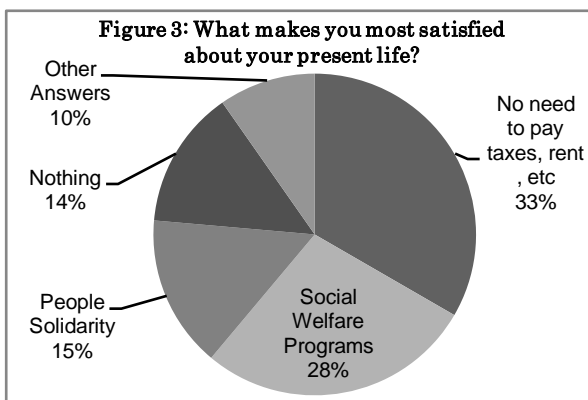
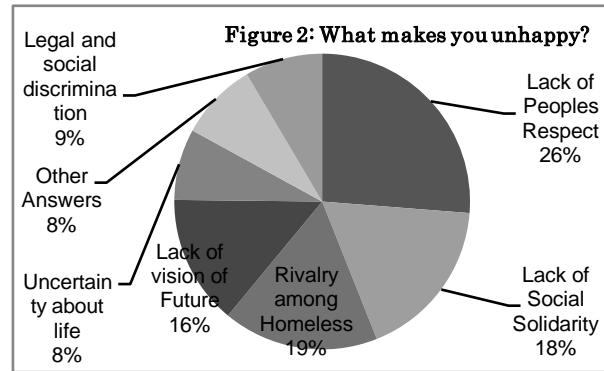
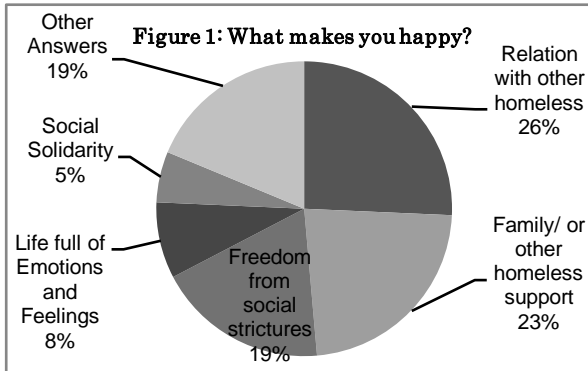
	Location	Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
	Age Degree	20 to 40	40 to 60	Over 60	20 to 40	40 to 60	Over 60	20 to 40	40 to 60	Over 60
Male	Happiness Degree	5.0	5.5	4.5	7.0	6.5	6.0	8.0	8.0	7.5
	Satisfaction Degree	3.0	2.0	1.0	3.0	2.0	2.5	2.5	2.0	2.5
Female	Happiness Degree	6.0	6.5	5.0	8.0	8.0	7.0	8.5	8.0	7.5
	Satisfaction Degree	2.0	2.0	1.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.5	3.0

Table 13: Happiness and Satisfaction degrees as a group (as a 'Homeless society')										
	Location	Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
Gender	Age	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over
	Degree	40	60	60	40	60	60	40	60	60
Male	Happiness Degree	7.5	8.0	7.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.5	8.0
	Satisfaction Degree	3.0	2.0	1.0	3.5	2.5	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Female	Happiness Degree	6.5	6.5	6.0	8.0	8.5	8.5	8.5	9.0	8.0
	Satisfaction Degree	2.5	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.5	3.5	3.5

Table 14: Happiness and Satisfaction degrees as individual under homeless life circumstances										
	Location	Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
Gender	Age	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over
	Degree	40	60	60	40	60	60	40	60	60
Male	Happiness Degree	5.0	5.5	4.5	7.0	6.5	6.0	8.0	8.0	7.5
	Satisfaction Degree	3.0	2.0	1.0	3.0	2.0	2.5	2.5	2.0	2.5
Female	Happiness Degree	6.0	6.5	5.0	8.0	8.0	7.0	8.5	8.0	7.5
	Satisfaction Degree	2.0	2.0	1.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.5	3.0

Table 15: Happiness and Satisfaction degrees as individual under homeless life circumstances										
	Location	Street Life			Shelter			Slum		
Gender	Age	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over	20 to	40 to	Over
	Degree	40	60	60	40	60	60	40	60	60
Male	Happiness Degree	5.0	5.5	4.5	7.0	6.5	6.0	8.0	8.0	7.5
	Satisfaction Degree	3.0	2.0	1.0	3.0	2.0	2.5	2.5	2.0	2.5
Female	Happiness Degree	6.0	6.5	5.0	8.0	8.0	7.0	8.5	8.0	7.5
	Satisfaction Degree	2.0	2.0	1.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.5	3.0

Figures 1 to 4 show the principal happiness/unhappiness and satisfaction/dissatisfaction reasons for homeless life according to the answers most common. There were a myriad of different answers, but the most common were identified, living the rest as 'other answers'. The analysis for the reasons why homeless people gave these answers is sadly beyond the scope of this paper.



4.2. Analysis of the Happiness and Satisfaction values

The degrees of happiness and material/economic/social satisfaction were decided by the interviewees themselves. Therefore, these values are totally subjective, personal. They were asked to evaluate and rate their present life conditions (objectively) and how they felt about it (personal feelings, subjectively). Many researchers believe that this kind of answers belong to the realm of psychology, but here I am trying to evaluate a social vision, a social sentiment towards a concrete real matter that affects the interviewees so fatally. Lacks of resources, poverty, have explanations in the realm of Economics, Political Science, Sociology, and Psychology. But here I am trying to present not the reasons, but how they affect the everyday life of people, how life hardships subject people to an internal world where they try to get strength to continue life, or where, on the contrary, the fall into despair and depression. That is to say, try to find what repercussions have life as such on the personal world of people, but from a sociological and economic point of view.

The scales are in absolute terms, from no perception, or 0, to full perception, or 10. It could

be argued that the degrees of happiness and satisfaction cannot be compared, but they are inasmuch in absolute terms. I wanted to see if there was any relationship, either of magnitudes or of distribution among the selected items (age, education, former class provenance and homeless life duration).

As I said above, my first hypothesis was that people living on the streets, slums and shelters were in a state of depression, most likely permanent. The second hypothesis was that the dissatisfaction degree with life had a relationship with the degree of happiness (or better, unhappiness) perceived. To my surprise, both hypothesis were proven wrong by the data obtained (tables 1 through 15).

From the samples, the general mean degree of personal happiness was $P\mu_h = 6.80$, with a standard deviation of $P\sigma_h = 1.20$. This value is well over 5, which I had considered as a definition for resignation, almost between this and the value for total happiness, which was 10. This general rating indicates that people are relatively happy, perhaps not happy with their live situation, but that they are not depressed, and that happiness is a feeling quite present all time. The general mean degree of personal material/economic/social satisfaction was $P\mu_s = 2.55$, with a standard deviation value of $P\sigma_s = 0.72$. It was conceivable that life on the streets, shelters or slums was unsatisfactory, and this result proves it. The difference level between $P\mu_h$ and $P\mu_s$ is striking, though. $P\mu_s$ shows that homeless people are dissatisfied with their lives, but not sad or depressed by this. The difference between $P\sigma_h$ and $P\sigma_s$ indicate that people were more certain about their perception of life dissatisfaction (which had, in almost all cases, very low values), yet the magnitude order difference is not big enough to merit a disqualification of the happiness degree.

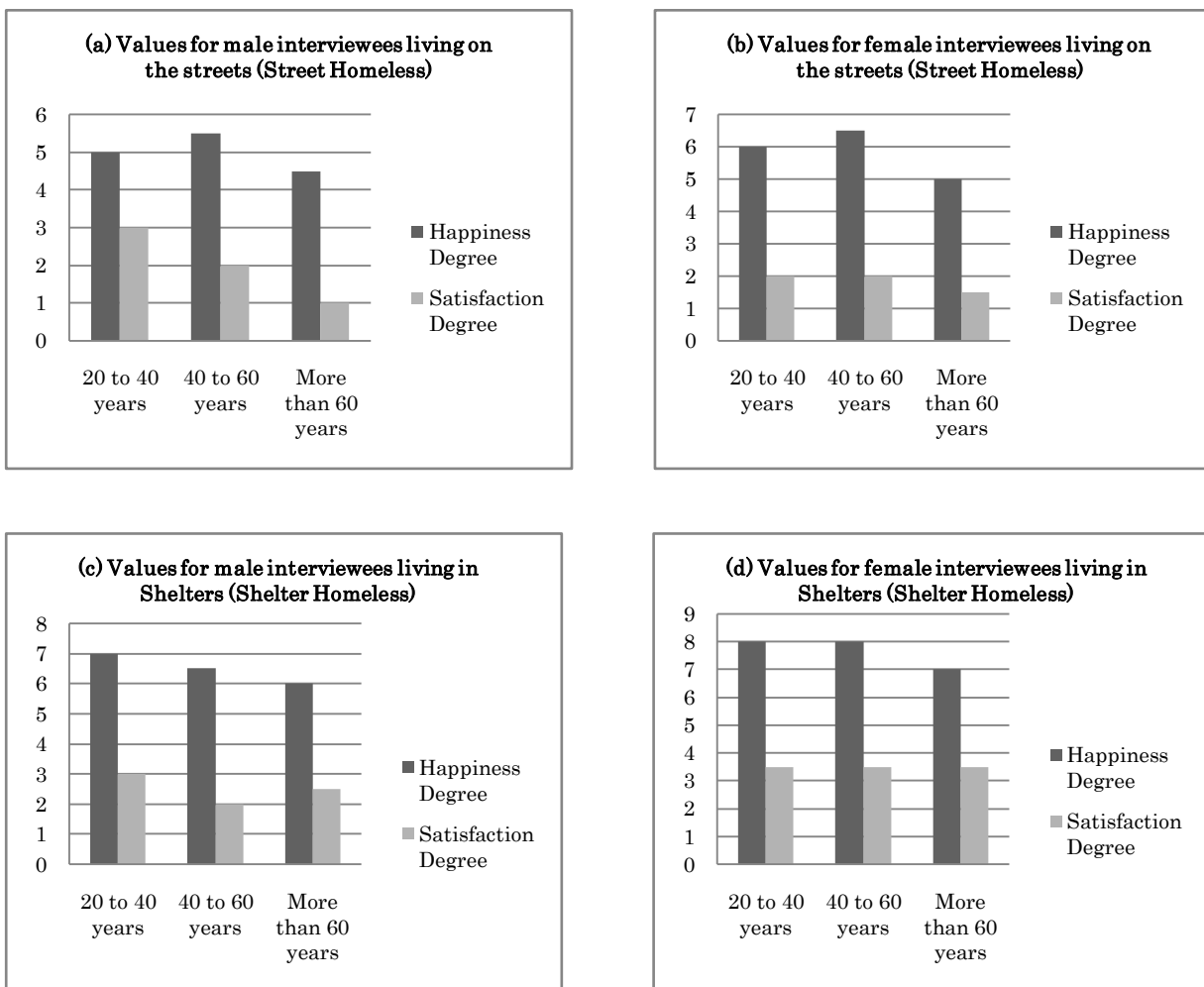
The mean happiness degree as a social group was even higher, $G\mu_h = 8.14$, with a standard deviation of $G\sigma_h = 1.14$. Predictably, on the contrary, the value for material/economic/social satisfaction as a social group, $G\mu_s = 2.75$, with a standard deviation of $G\sigma_s = 0.63$, was in the same range as $P\mu_s$. The high value of $G\mu_h$ indicates that homeless people see themselves, as a social group, or 'homeless society', as 'happy', which would explain the high social resilience they have in order to undergo life difficulties, and which would also explain that people with longer homeless careers or coming from lower classes are more adapted to homeless life.

The third hypothesis, about homeless career and happiness, on the other hand, proved to be correct. As we can see from table 11, people who have mid-range careers (one to five years) seemed to feel happier than other people in similar conditions, and also had a better fulfillment sentiment. In the other homeless life career brackets, feelings of happiness and judgments about reality, or perception of fulfillment or satisfaction, were quite different. Regarding the fourth hypothesis, about the relation between schooling level or former social class standing and happiness, we can see from table 6 and table 7 that the higher the educational level the homeless person had, or the higher his or her social class

standing was, the lower his feeling of happiness was. Nevertheless, in all cases the feeling of material dissatisfaction was similarly high; anyhow, we can see that there is also a lower level of material fulfillment among more educated people, and also among those coming from higher classes (tables 9 and 10).

Finally, the fifth hypothesis was about gender, age and happiness. As it arises from figure 5 and 6, there are not big differences according to gender. Happiness is high in general, in all age brackets, but slightly more in the groups of people between 20 and 40, and between 40 and 60 years.

Figure 5: Happiness Degree and Satisfaction Degree as an individual perception: Values according age group, gender and life circumstances (life on the streets, in shelters, or slums)



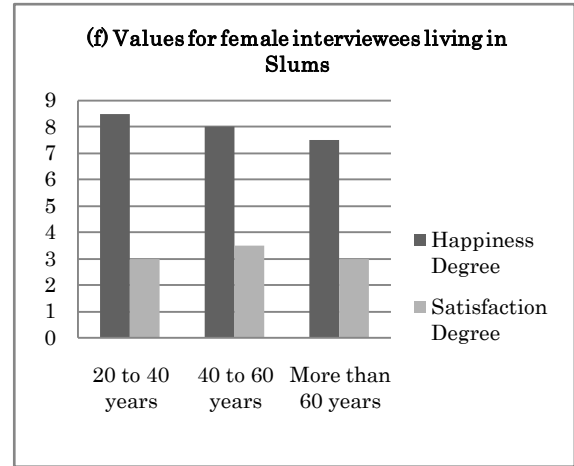
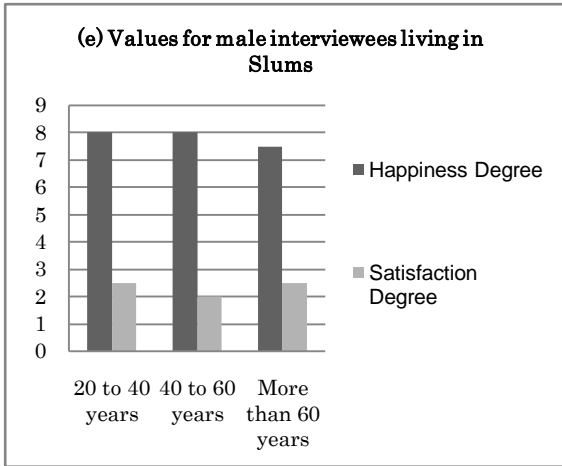
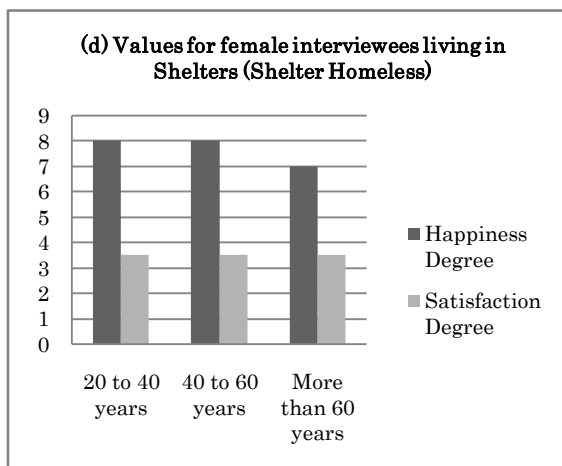
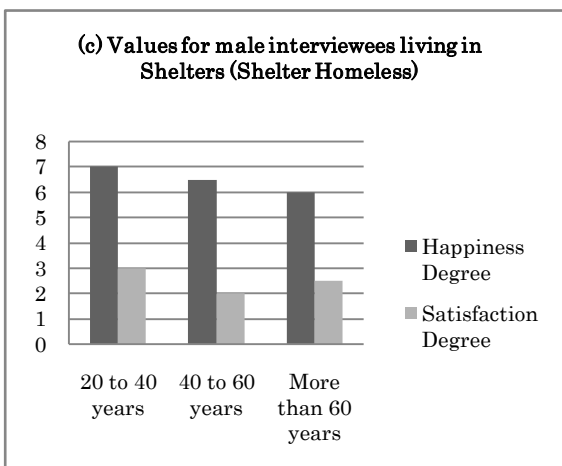
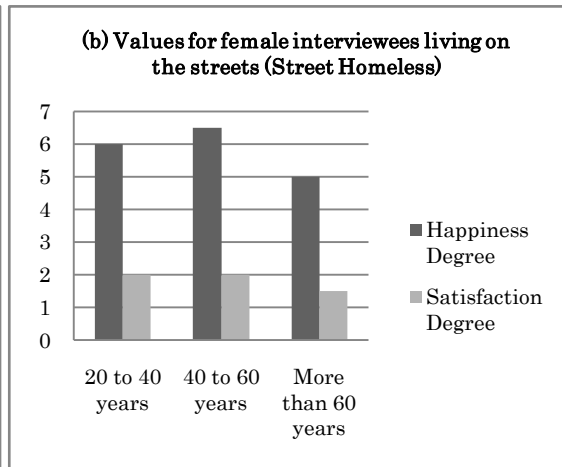
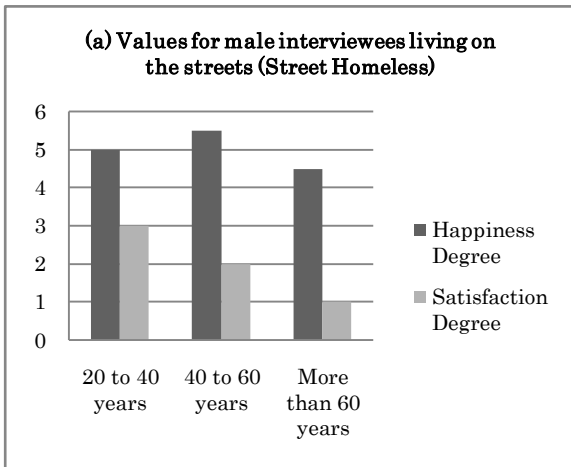
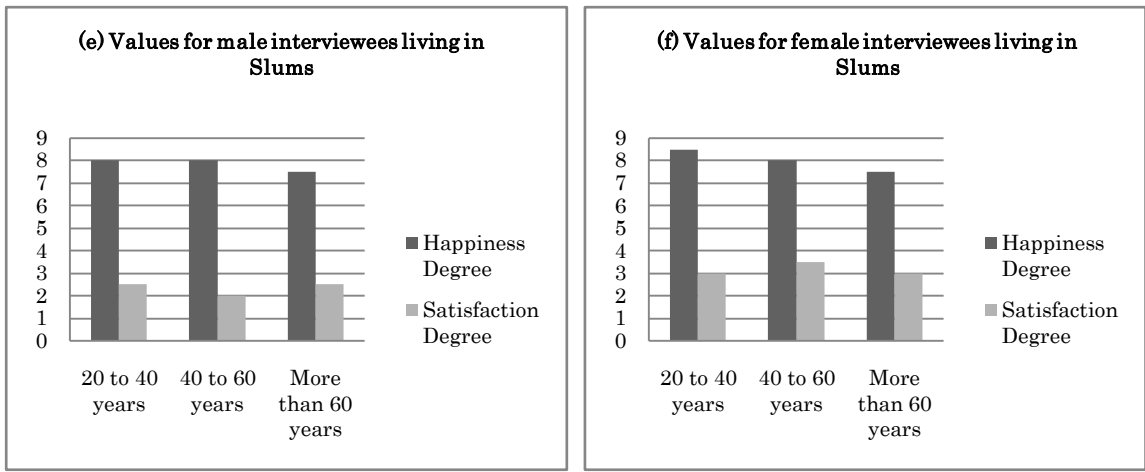


Figure 6: Happiness Degree and Satisfaction Degree as a Group: Values according age group, gender and life circumstances (life on the streets, in shelters, or slums)





5. Conclusion

Contrary to what I considered as first hypothesis, that homeless people and shelter/slum residents would felt very unhappy, or at best, resigned, showed a different result. Although the happiness degree was in general of 6.80, much above the level of resignation (level 5), we can conclude that in general homeless people are not so unhappy with their lives, and more than resigned.

I had thought that the results would be much lower. As for hypothesis number two, that the degree of happiness would reflect the degree of satisfaction with life conditions, this also showed a contrary result: in most cases, homeless people were not satisfied with the material conditions, both personally and socially, and in this sense they did want material changes. This can be summarized as follows: homeless were relatively happy with their lives, from a personal and social emotional or feeling stance, showing us they possess a high degree of social resilience (Masten, 2009), and that also they feel happy in relation of the group of homeless as one society, or 'big family' (See figure 1). They felt comfortable as much as they considered there was support from other members, and also they considered there was also respect from society in general, but not much from official sources (See figure 2.) Gender and age did not have a big impact in differences of happiness or satisfaction sentiments, but former class extraction, education and homeless life duration indicated differences. Happiness, as a feeling of social support against life hardships, is therefore shaped also by other elements, such as education and homeless life span and social class upbringing, because these elements also have emotional as well as logical implications in the feeling of happiness and its social consequences.

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