

THE ROLE OF SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING IN PREDICTING LEVELS OF HAPPINESS IN BRAZILIANS

O PAPEL DAS VARIÁVEIS SOCIODEMOGRÁFICAS E DO BEM-ESTAR ESPIRITUAL NA PREVISÃO DOS NÍVEIS DE FELICIDADE DOS BRASILEIROS

SANDRA ADRIANA NEVES NUNES

Federal University of the South of Bahia, Brazil
sandranunes@ufsb.edu.br

JHESSICA SANTOS COSTA

Federal University of the South of Bahia, Brazil
jhessica.jj@outlook.com

ANA KAROLYNNE SILVA DE ALMEIDA

Federal University of the South of Bahia, Brazil
karolyne.almeida2011@gmail.com

MARCOS GIMENES FERNANDES

State University of Santa Cruz, Brazil
gimenes@uesc.br

Abstract: Researches have sought to understand if happiness can be associated with sociodemographic variables and spiritual well-being, but there are some controversies in the results. This research aims to investigate if sociodemographic factors (gender, age, ethnicity/race, marital status, income) and spiritual well-being predict subjective perception of Brazilians happiness. This is a descriptive, relational and cross-sectional research, (n = 769) and the participants had a mean age of 33.18 years (SD = 11.99). We found that Brazilians present high levels of happiness and that older people, with more education and with higher family income reported higher levels of happiness. The model which best predicted happiness incorporated two dimensions of spiritual well-being (connection with yourself and connection with God) and three sociodemographic variables (marital status, income and age). The results from this study may serve to support the clinical practice of health and mental health professionals, since they must pay attention to the spiritual well-being of their patients. Moreover, clinical and pedagogical interventions can take into account marital status and age, focusing on younger and single people. Finally, these findings may reinforce, in the public policies arena, the need to strengthen social policies for income transfer to the poorest, as a way of combating inequality and social injustice, since a fair income also appears as a predictor of happiness.

Keywords: Happiness. Spiritual well-being. Sociodemographic factors.

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Corresponding author:

sandranunes@ufsb.edu.br



Resumo: Pesquisadores têm buscado compreender se a felicidade pode estar associada a variáveis sociodemográficas e ao bem-estar espiritual, mas têm havido algumas controvérsias nos resultados. Por essa razão, esta pesquisa visa investigar se fatores sociodemográficos (gênero, idade, etnia/raça, estado civil, renda) e bem-estar espiritual predizem percepção subjetiva da felicidade dos brasileiros. Trata-se de uma pesquisa descritiva, relacional e de corte transversal (n = 769), tendo os participantes a idade média de 33,18 anos (DP = 11,99). Observou-se que os brasileiros apresentam altos níveis de felicidade e que pessoas mais velhas, com maior escolaridade e com maior renda familiar reportaram níveis mais altos de felicidade. O modelo que melhor predisse felicidade incorporou duas dimensões do bem-estar espiritual (conexão

consigno próprio/a e conexão com Deus) e três variáveis sociodemográficas (estado civil, renda e idade). Os resultados advindos desse estudo poderão servir para subsidiar a prática clínica de profissionais da saúde e saúde mental, dando atenção ao bem-estar espiritual dos seus pacientes. Ademais, as intervenções clínicas e pedagógicas podem levar em consideração o estado civil e a idade, focando em pessoas mais jovens e solteiras. Finalmente, esses achados podem reforçar, no âmbito da construção de políticas públicas, a necessidade de fortalecer políticas assistenciais de transferência de renda, como uma forma de combate à desigualdade e injustiça social, já que renda justa também aparece como preditor da felicidade.

Palavras-chave: Felicidade. Bem-estar espiritual. Fatores sociodemográficos.

1. Introduction

Although Psychology has historically paid little attention to the study of subjective well-being and happiness, preferring to investigate unhappiness and human suffering, this scenario has undergone important changes in recent decades (GIACOMONI, 2004). This change was driven by the Positive Psychology paradigm, which was born committed to focusing on building the subject's strengths and virtues as a way of facing and preventing psychological disorders (SELIGMAN; CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, 2000). Happiness is one of these subjects' strengths and virtues.

According to Ferraz, Tavares and Zilberman (2007), all definitions of happiness encompass the notion of a positive emotional state, permeated by feelings of pleasure and emotional well-being. In fact, there have been suggestions that happiness and subjective well-being are synonymous (DIENER; OISHI; LUCAS, 2003; SELIGMAN; CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, 2000) and, in one way or another, the constructs seem to be the main component of a healthy life (DIENER; SCOLLON; LUCAS, 2003).

Over the years, several scholars from different countries have struggled to understand how multiple variables combine to provide people with greater chances of happiness, but the results are still controversial (AYDOS; NETO; TEIXEIRA, 2016; CAVALCANTI; GUIMARÃES; NOGUEIRA, 2009; CORBI; MENEZES-FILHO, 2006; COSTA et al., 2021; DELA COLETA; DELA COLETA, 2007; DEMO; ACOCK, 1996; DIENER; BISWAS-DIENER, 1984; DIERNER et al., 1999; GUEDEA et al., 2006; HARING-HIDORE et al., 1985; ISLAM et al., 2011; KAHNEMAN et al., 2006; LIMA, 2007; LYKKEN; TELLEGEN, 1996; LUCAS; GOHM, 2000; LUZ; AMATUZZI, 2008; NUNES et al., 2022; VEENHOVEN, 1991; WILSON, 1967; GONÇALVES; KAPCZINSKI, 2008; SILVA, A. et al., 2022; OTTA; FIQUER, 2004; RODRIGUES; SILVA, 2010). Diener (1984), in this respect, suggests that the relationships

between sociodemographic variables and happiness, and even between spirituality and happiness, are not so clear.

Taking into account that there is still some controversy in the results of studies that investigated the relationships between sociodemographic variables, spiritual well-being and happiness of individuals, and also, considering that there are few international (GARAIGORDOBIL, 2015) and national studies, according to our review, that have investigated predictors of happiness, the present study aims to fill this gap, seeking to contribute to the elucidation of this phenomenon.

Thus, this research aims at investigating whether sociodemographic factors (gender, age, ethnicity/race, marital status, family income) and spiritual well-being predict the subjective perception of happiness among Brazilians. We will specifically seek to: i) characterize the sample in terms of gender, age, education, race/ethnicity, income and marital status; ii) describe the participants' levels of subjective perception of happiness; iii) describe participants' levels of spiritual well-being; iv) investigate correlations between age, education level, income, levels of spiritual well-being and happiness; v) investigate the effects of gender, race/ethnicity and marital status on happiness and, finally, vi) investigate which are the best predictors of happiness.

Studies such as these that seek to understand how socio-demographic factors and spiritual well-being are related to happiness, are essential to subsidize the development of practices and programs in health and education, and even public policies, that seek to promote both objective living conditions and internal resources, favorable to a greater quality of life.

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

Pursuing happiness is perhaps the central goal of every individual's life. Since the first philosophical definitions on the subject, we can perceive this centrality for human existence. According to Schneider, Dittrich and Dias (2020), Epicurus, in ancient Greece, said that happiness resulted from satisfaction of desires and pursuit of pleasure, goals pursued by all. For Aristotle, all men seek happiness, in their own way (SCHNEIDER et al., 2020). With the Enlightenment, the view emerges that every human being has the right to achieve happiness and that society should aim to guarantee citizens the attainment of this feeling (FERRAZ et al., 2007).

But the fact that happiness occupies the thoughts of individuals does not make it just a private and singular experience (DANTAS, 2018). From a more complex and comprehensive perspective of the phenomena, happiness results from multiple influences arising from

interdependent dimensions: social, economic, political, psychological and individual. Thus, we deduce that the concrete conditions of life mediate what people think, say and how they act about happiness (Dantas, 2018). In our society, for example, social inequalities of gender, race and social class affect the way individuals feel happiness. In this regard, Dantas (2018, p. 17) states:

[...] social spaces are differentiators of social representations of happiness. This differentiation is expressed by the relationship between the perception of feeling happiness and a set of socially differentiated attributes, in which lower levels of happiness assume greater expression among the oldest, among women and those with less economic and socio-cultural resources. different studies, applying different methodologies, point in the same direction: countries with higher rates of social inequalities have lower levels of well-being for their populations.

One can admit that the way society, nowadays, is organized and functions not only affects people's feelings of happiness, but can also affect their sense of spirituality. With regard to spirituality, postmodernity, with its challenges and contradictions, has placed human beings in front of a crisis of existence, experienced as helplessness and existential anxiety (GIDDENS, 2002). In response to this situation, some authors describe that a re-enchantment with the world has emerged, which has brought religiosity (TEIXEIRA, 2011) and supernatural values to the center of civilization, a phenomenon called by Berger (1997) as “rumor of angels”. For Berger (1985) this new religious resurgence arises to contain uncertainties and insecurities, bringing order to the social world. Thus, “the religious appears as resistance against the terror of the lack of meanings, and religion, in turn, is the bold attempt to conceive the universe as humanly significant” (SILVA; SILVA, 2014, p. 204).

This fact has led to a growing interest in the subject in the academic field, with a significant increase in the number of researches. In the last 30 years, for example, there has been a significant increase of 688% in publications around the theme of spirituality and health (WEAVER et al., 2006), which has started to demonstrate important implications of this variable on people's subjective well-being and quality of life (OLIVEIRA; JUNGES, 2012). Furthermore, having a spiritual orientation is a predictor of happiness (positive association), psychological well-being (positive association) and stress (negative association) (ROWOLD, 2011).

In modernity, spirituality is detached from its exclusive relationship with religion. Thus, in the current conception of the term, the notion of spirituality expands and includes, according to Costa Catré et al., (2014), several dimensions: religious spirituality, spirituality linked to nature; humanist spirituality, and cosmic spirituality.

Similar definition of spirituality is adopted by Fisher (2010), when he proposes the concept of spiritual well-being (SWB). To Fisher (2010), SWB can be understood as an expression of good spiritual health and an indicator of spiritual quality of life. The author presents his own comprehensive definition of spiritual well-being, in which SWB expresses the relationships that the individual establishes in four domains of his existence: with the self, that is, with himself, with others, with the environment and with the transcendental. The personal domain is related to how a person establishes relationships with himself, permeated by the meaning, purpose and values that he attributes to his life. It leads to the development of self-awareness and self-knowledge as a driving force in the search for the development of the subject's identity and self-worth. The communal domain concerns the quality and depth of interpersonal relationships, and expresses itself through love, justice, hope, and faith in humanity. The environmental domain reflects the care and protection of the physical and biological world. It involves a sense of wonder and respect, and may express as a sense of oneness with nature. Finally, the transcendental domain concerns the relationship of being with something or some Entity that is beyond what is human, such as a cosmic force, a transcendent reality or God. It involves faith, worship directed to a mysterious source of the universe.

Review of relevant literature

As we pointed out earlier, many international and some national studies have sought to investigate the relationships between sociodemographic variables and the subjective perception of happiness, but there are still controversies in their results. For instance, several researchers concluded that the increase in income does not correlate with a significant increase in levels of happiness at individual level (AYDOS et al., 2016; DIENER; BISWAS-DIENER, 2002; VEENHOVEN, 1991). On the other hand, other Brazilian studies have found a weak but positive correlation between income and subjective well-being or happiness (CAVALCANTI; GUIMARÃES; NOGUEIRA, 2009; CORBI; MENEZES-FILHO, 2006; ISLAM; WILLS-HERRERA; LUZ et al., 2011). Thus, further studies are needed to help elucidate the role of income in predicting happiness.

With regard to gender and its impact on happiness, controversial results have also emerged. For some studies, there are no gender differences when it comes to happiness (DIENER et al., 1999; RODRIGUES; SILVA, 2010; WILSON, 1967), others found that women tend to experience more unpleasant affections and unhappiness than men (CORBI; MENEZES-FILHO, 2006; GONÇALVES; KAPCZINSKI, 2008; LIMA, 2007; LUCAS; GOHM, 2000) and others,

still, conclude that men are more unhappy than women (GUEDEA et al., 2006; SILVA, et al., 2022).

With regard to education, while some studies indicate that levels of happiness are independent of the level of education (DELA COLETA; DELA COLETA, 2007; RODRIGUES; SILVA, 2010), there are also suggestions that more educated people are happier (AYDOS et al., 2016; DIENER, 1984), although inverse relationships have also been found (CORBI; MENEZES-FILHO, 2006).

In respect to marital status, while some studies suggest that marriage is an important determinant of happiness (LIMA, 2007), others have concluded that marriage has little influence on happiness (DEMO; ACOCK, 1996; HARING-HIDORE et al., 1985; LYKKEN; TELLEGEN, 1996). Meanwhile, Aydos et al. (2016) identified in their research, carried out in Campo Grande/MS in 2014, that single participants were the ones who had the highest levels of happiness and Nunes et al. (2022), in a sample of 636 Brazilians collected during the period of the COVID 19 Pandemic, found that single people were the most unhappy group.

In general, studies that investigated the impacts of race/ethnicity on levels of happiness are less controversial, pointing to a disadvantage among racial minorities in the United States, especially until the year 2000, (BLANCHFLOWER; OSWALD, 2004; COVERDILL et al., 2011). It is noteworthy that, in Brazil, and despite our multiracial and multicultural scenario and the serious social problems arising from structural racism, the number of studies seeking to understand the influence of races/ethnicities on levels of happiness are very low. In fact, only one study, dated 2010, was found, and in it no significant differences were found between ethnicities regarding levels of happiness (RODRIGUES; SILVA, 2010).

Regarding the relationship between age and happiness, some studies have found a negative relationship between these variables (LUCAS; GOHM, 2000; WILSON, 1967), that is, the younger the age, the happier people are, and others, at the national level, have found a positive relationship between these variables (GONÇALVES; KAPCZINSKI, 2008; LUZ; AMATUZZI, 2008; OTTA; FIQUER, 2004).

With regard to empirical studies that sought to establish relationships between spirituality and happiness, the results have corroborated the conclusions of Myers (1992) that religious people are happier than non-religious people, whatever their religion (DELA COLETA; DELA COLETA, 1997; DELA COLETA; LOPES; DELA COLETA, M., 2012; RODRIGUES; SILVA, 2010).

Finally, in respect to studies that seek to predict happiness, it seems that they are still scarce (GARAIGORDOBIL, 2015). In one of the few Brazilian studies available ($n = 2,942$), Scalco (2008) concluded that there is a positive association between self-perception of happiness, higher education and higher economic level and a negative association with being unemployed. Being younger, among men, and religiosity, among women, were also variables that predicted levels of happiness. Finally, being separated/divorced or being a widow was associated with lower prevalence of self-perceived happiness only among women.

3. Research design and methods

This is a descriptive, relational, cross-sectional study.

Participants

A total of 769 Brazilians, over 18 years old, of any gender, participated in the sample.

The following inclusion criteria were considered: accepting participation in the research, by signing the Informed Consent Form (TCLE), regardless of gender and physical conditions, aged 18 or over. In addition, to participate in the research, the subject should be Brazilian. The exclusion criterion was being illiterate.

Instruments

A sociodemographic questionnaire and two psychometric scales were used in this study: a) the Portuguese version of the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) and b) the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire (SWBQ) (GOMEZ; FISHER, 2003), both validated for Brazil.

The sociodemographic questionnaire consists of eight questions that aimed to access the participant's gender, age in years, race/ethnicity, marital status, education level, personal and family income, and how many people lived in the house.

The Portuguese version of the Subjective Happiness Scale (DAMÁSIO; ZANON; KOLLER, 2014) consists of four items that measure the subjects' perception of their happiness. The instrument has been validated in several countries, including Brazil, and has excellent psychometric properties¹ (DAMÁSIO et al., 2014). In the present study, the reliability of the scale

¹ The results of the validation study were: $\chi^2 = 0.329$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.84$; CFI = 1.0; TLI = 1.02; SRMR = 0.006; RMSEA (90% CI) = 0 (0 - 0.006).

was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, with a value of 0.81 being obtained, which means that the scale is reliable.

The Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire (SWBQ) (GOMEZ; FISHER, 2003) was validated for the Brazilian context by Nunes, Fernandes and Fisher (2018) based on the original version by Fisher (1999, 2010). It consists of a 20-item instrument, divided into four dimensions: connection with oneself, connection with others, connection with nature and connection with God or something transcendental. Responses are given on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “very low” to “very high”. In the validation study for Brazil, Nunes et al. (2018) concluded that the best fit model was composed of only 17 items, (without items 8, 9 and 15), with good psychometric properties²: The Cronbach's alphas obtained in the present study were 0.98 (relationship with God), 0.77 (relationship with others), 0.82 (relationship with oneself) and 0.91 (relationship with nature). Therefore, all subscales were considered reliable (above the cutoff point of 0.70).

Data collection procedure

Data collection was carried out by completing a questionnaire made available via Google docs. Data collection took place between September 1, 2020 and June 22, 2022. Links to the form were placed on social networks and WhatsApp groups. Furthermore, e-mails' invitations for participating in the study were sent to undergraduate and pos-graduate courses at public and private universities in the five regions of Brazil. The Term of Consent was presented on the first page of the form, where questions related to nationality and age were also asked, as a way of having control over who should continue filling out the questionnaires (who would meet the inclusion criteria).

Data analysis procedure

At first, the descriptive statistics of the variables was verified through the average, standard deviation, minimum and maximum. To verify the asymmetry of the distribution of means, the skewness and kurtosis coefficients were used. Hair et al. (2010) argue that the data are considered normal if the asymmetry is between -2 to +2 and the kurtosis between -7 to +7. Subsequently, the internal consistency of the factors was calculated using Cronbach's alpha.

² The results of the validation study were: $\chi^2/df = 3.030$; GFI = 0.909; CFI = 0.931, RMSEA (90% CI) = 0.072 (0.064–0.081); AIC = 632.637).

Once data normality was confirmed, Pearson's correlation test was used to investigate whether there was a significant relationship between age, educational level, income and spiritual well-being and reported levels of happiness. The T test was also used to investigate whether there were gender differences for happiness and the ANOVA test to investigate whether there was an effect of marital status and race/ethnicity on this variable. To investigate whether sociodemographic factors (gender, age, education level, marital status, race/ethnicity and monthly family income) and spiritual well-being would predict the subjective perception of happiness among Brazilians, a Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis (Stepwise method) was used. These analyzes were performed in IBM SPSS Statistics 25. The accepted significance level for all analyzes was 0.05.

Ethical Considerations

The main project, to which the present study is part, was submitted to the Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Southern Bahia and was fully approved (Number of Approval: 3.929.581; CAAE 29663420.6.0000.8467).

4. Results

Characterization of the sample in terms of gender, age, education, race/ethnicity, income and marital status

A total of 769 subjects participated in the sample, with a mean age of 33.18 years (SD = 11.988; Minimum = 18 and Maximum = 74). The characteristics of gender, education, race/ethnicity, marital status and family income are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Sociodemographic characteristics of participants (n= 769).

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	542	70.5
	Male	221	28.7
	Outro	6	0.8
Race/Ethnicity	White	384	49.9
	Black	78	10.1
	Parda ¹	293	38.1
	Indigenous	6	0.8
	Yellow	8	1.0
Education Level	Basic Education Level	8	1.1
	High School	275	35.8
	Higher Education	99	12.9
	Pos-graduate level (Especialization)	127	16.5
	Pos-graduate level (Master's Degree)	123	16.0
	Pos-graduate level (PhD)	137	17.8
Civil Status	Single	451	58.6
	Married	276	35.9
	Separated /divorced	36	4.7
	Widowed	6	0.8
Family mensal Income	Less than 1 minimum wage ²	91	11.8
	From 1 and less than 3 minimum wages	203	26.4
	From 3 and less 5 minimum wages	139	18.1
	From 5 e less than 7 minimum wages	93	12.1
	From 7 e less than 9 minimum wages	83	10,8
	More than 9 minimum wages	160	20.8

Notes:

¹ The term "pardo" is more commonly used to refer to mixed-race Brazilians, i.e. individuals with varied racial ancestries.

² The value of the monthly minimum wage in Brazil was R\$ 1,212.00 in 2022, which is equivalent to \$ 253.58 nowadays.

Regarding the education of the participants, most have specialization, master's or doctoral degrees, and these three education levels together make up 50.3% of the sample. The number of people with only High School is also expressive (35.8%). Participants with Higher Education, comprise 12.9% of the sample. Only a small portion of the sample had Elementary School (1.1%).

These results show that this is a biased sample in terms of high levels of education, compared to the Brazilian reality, where only 17.4% have Higher Education (IBGE/PNAD, 2019).

With regard to marital status, most participants were single (58.6%). Married people occupy second place, with 35.9%. Legally separated or divorced people make up 4.7% of the sample, and a small number of individuals were widowed (0.8%). Regarding monthly family income, the vast majority earn up to 3 (three) minimum wages (26.4%) or receive more than 9 (nine) minimum wages (20.8%) per month. People earning up to one minimum wage monthly make up a small percentage of the sample (11.8%).

Levels of participants' subjective perception of happiness

In respect to levels of happiness of the participants, the scale has 4 (four) items, with a minimum score of 1 and a maximum of 7. The midpoint of the scale is 4.0. The average happiness score in the total sample ($n = 769$) was 4.66 ($SD = 1.20$). The Confidence Interval (CI) was between 4.58 and 4.75. Thus, considering that the midpoint of the scale is 4.0, it is concluded that individuals tended to report very high levels of happiness, as the confidence interval was greater than the midpoint of the scale.

Participants' levels of spiritual well-being

With regard to the levels of spiritual well-being of the participants, the scales that measured each dimension have 4 (four) items, with a minimum score of 1 and a maximum of 5 and the midpoint is 3.0. The average score for “connection with oneself” was 4.22 ($SD = 0.76$) with the CI between 4.17 and 4.28. The average score for “connection with others” was 4.18 ($SD = 0.72$) and the CI was between 4.13 and 4.23. The mean score for “connection with God” was 3.66 ($SD = 1.46$), with the CI ranging between 3.55 and 3.76. Finally, the average score for “connection to nature” was 4.18 ($SD = 0.84$) and the CI was between 4.12 and 4.24. Thus, considering the midpoint (3.0), we can conclude that the individuals had high levels of spiritual well-being (in all four dimensions) as the confidence intervals were above the midpoint of the scales.

Correlations between age, education level, income, levels of spiritual well-being and happiness

In order to investigate whether there were correlations between all the variables, Pearson's correlation test was used, since the distribution of variables was normal. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Pearson correlations between age, education level, family income, spiritual well-being and happiness (n= 769).

	Connection with God	Connection with others	Connection with oneself	Connection with nature	Happiness
Age	0.170**	0.091*	0.174**	0.136**	0.287**
Education level	- 0.030	0.012	0.087*	0.014	0.195**
Family income	- 0.096**	0.006	0.059	- 0.015	0.193**
Happinnes	0.411**	0.392**	0.552**	0.248**	1

*Significant at $p \leq 0,05$ **Significant at $p \leq 0,01$

As can be seen in Table 2, age, education level and monthly family income showed a positive, albeit weak, correlation with happiness. This means that older people, with more education and with higher family income reported higher levels of happiness. Age also correlated positively with the four dimensions of spiritual well-being, but all correlations were very weak. That is, older people also exhibited more feelings of connection with God, with others, with themselves and with nature. The only positive correlation found between levels of education and spiritual well-being was with the “connection with oneself” dimension. It was a very weak but significant correlation. Thus, people with more education reported higher levels of spiritual connection with themselves. Finally, family income was negatively correlated with a sense of connection with God, which was also a very weak but significant correlation. People with less education feel more connected to God.

On the other hand, participants who reported a greater connection with God, with themselves, with others e with nature tended to have higher levels of happiness, and the strength of the relationships were from weak to moderated. Thus, based on these results, which show that the four dimensions of the spiritual well-being variable are related to subjective perceptions of happiness, one can assume that they can be good candidates as predictors in the model that will seek to explain the variability of levels of happiness.

Gender differences and between marital status and race/ ethnicity groups for the happiness variable

Gender differences were observed ($T = 2.84$; $p \leq 0.01$), with women ($M = 4.77$; $SD = 1.14$) having higher levels of happiness than men ($M = 4.48$; $SD = 1.30$). The effect size associated with this difference was moderate ($d = 0.24$) (COHEN, 1992). An effect of marital status on happiness was also observed ($F = 19.99$; $p \leq 0.01$), with the group formed by single people differing significantly from the married and separated/divorced group, according to Tamnhane's

post hoc test. In this case, single individuals had the lowest means of happiness ($M = 4.40$; $SD = 1.22$), compared to the married ($M = 5.03$; $SD = 1.09$) and separated/divorced ($M = 5.15$; $SD = 0.97$) groups. The effect size (η^2p) associated with this difference was 0.073, which is considered a medium effect size (COHEN, 1992). Finally, no significant effect of race/ethnicity was observed on levels of happiness.

Predicting levels of happiness from sociodemographic variables

To investigate whether the sociodemographic variables would be able to predict levels of happiness of Brazilians, Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis was used, using the stepwise method, which is based on a mathematical model that removes the variables, one by one, that have less explanatory power on the dependent variable. Before performing the regression analysis itself, its prerequisites³ (sample size; absence of multicollinearity; independence of the residuals; homoscedasticity; linear correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variables) were tested. All prerequisites for performing a multiple regression analysis have been met.

In the Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis we entered sociodemographic variables in the Step 1 and spiritual well-being in the Step 2. To perform the analyses, categorical variables (gender, marital status, ethnicity/race) were transformed into dummies.

The analysis resulted in a statistically significant model [$F_{95,763} = 94,372$; $p \leq 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.382$]. The variables that best predicted happiness were the spiritual connection with oneself ($\beta = 0.428$; $t = 13.009$; $p \leq 0.001$), age ($\beta = 0.085$; $t = 2.271$; $p \leq 0.05$), connection with God ($\beta = 0.189$; $t = 5.620$; $p \leq 0.001$), family monthly income ($\beta = 0.122$; $t = -2.036$; $p \leq 0.001$) and marital status ($\beta = -0.076$; $t = 13.009$; $p \leq 0.05$). By observing the beta (β) values, we can see that the best predictor was “connection with oneself”, followed by “connection with God”, monthly family income, age and, finally, marital status. Together, these variables were able to explain 38.2% of the variance in happiness levels, which can be considered a reasonable explanatory capacity, if we consider that happiness is a complex construct that is influenced by several individual and contextual factors. Thus, maintaining a good spiritual connection with oneself and with God,

³ In the case of this study, there are 15 independent variables inserted in the model, which would require at least 225 participants. Therefore, this prerequisite was met since the sample was twice bigger. All independent variables had tolerance values well above 0.1 and none had a value greater than 10 in the VIF, therefore, this prerequisite was also met, indicating that there is no multicollinearity. Regarding independence of the residuals, the Durbin-Watson test was 1.953 (acceptable values should be between 1.5 and 2.0), which indicates that this prerequisite was fully met. Moreover, we observed a distribution very close to normal among the standardized residuals and we verified through Scatterplot graph analysis that there is homoscedasticity in the data. Finally, in the same Scatterplot chart, a relationship between the variables was observed.

having a high monthly income, being older and not being single predict higher levels of happiness among Brazilians. Educational level, gender, ethnicity/race, spiritual connection with others and with nature were excluded from the final model. This means that these explanatory variables were tested (included in the model) but did not enter the final model, as they did not have good explanatory power.

5. Discussion

In this study, most participants reported high levels of happiness and high levels of spiritual well-being. These findings are in line with the results of a recent survey released by international research agencies that investigated levels of happiness in several countries around the world, creating a happiness ranking. According to the World Happiness Report, released in 2023, even though Brazil dropped some positions during the pandemic compared to previous years, it occupies the 49th position in the happiness ranking among 137 countries (HELLIWELL, et al., 2023). Likewise, the Global Happiness 2023, a survey carried out by the international Institute Ipsos, and released in March 2023, indicates that Brazil occupies the 5th position among 32 countries in the happiness ranking (IPSOS, 2023, p. 4). In this survey, it was disclosed that, among Brazilian participants, 83% declared that they considered themselves happy or very happy (IPSOS, 2023, p. 5)

Maybe, the fact that Brazil has a high level of religiosity can help to understand the high levels of spirituality found in this study. According to the IBGE Demographic Census in 2010, around 190,755,799 inhabitants claimed to have some religion, especially the Catholic and the Evangelical religion (IBGE, 2010). The Brazilian population then was 196,4 millions, which means that 97,13% declared having some religion. Although, being part of a religion does not necessarily determine the spiritual well-being of individuals, religiosity correlates with individuals' subjective perception of spiritual well-being (MARQUES; SARRIERA; DELL'AGLIO, 2009).

On the other hand, there are still few studies that have investigated the levels of spiritual well-being among Brazilians (FORTI; SERBENA; SCADUTO, 2020). Thus, although we found some research carried out in different Brazilian states that indicate moderate levels of spiritual well-being among participants (CHAVES, et al., 2015; SILVA, M. et al., 2009), these are studies with small samples and formed by subjects suffering from chronic diseases, and for this reason they may not be representative of the Brazilian population in general. Thus, more studies, with representative samples, are necessary in order to know the levels of spirituality of Brazilians.

With regard to the correlations between age, level of education, family income, levels of spiritual well-being and happiness, we found that older, more educated individuals with higher incomes tend to report higher levels of happiness, although the correlations regarding these variables were not very strong. The results regarding age found in this study corroborate the findings of Ribeiro (2015), who also concluded that in Brazil, happiness increases with age. The author believes that this can be explained if we take into account the relationship of older people with their life goals, both for having accomplished and for having resigned to those that were not achieved. Furthermore, older people tend to have more time to dedicate to leisure activities and creative leisure, which are activities that help to define happiness (RIBEIRO, 2015).

With regard to education levels, the results found here are in line with the findings of Aydos et al. (2016) and Diener et al. (1999), suggesting that more educated people are happier. Exploring better the justification that relates one variable to another, Helliwell (2003) states that the level of education allows the individual to participate in activities and social connections, which are linked to subjective well-being.

Regarding correlations between income and happiness, some authors such as Aydos et al. (2016), Diener and Biswas-Diener (2002), Kahneman et al. (2006) and Veenhoven (1991) found similar results. Therefore, it seems that among Brazilians, having an income that better guarantees subsistence is associated with feelings of happiness

In this study, women were happier than men and singles formed the group with the lowest levels of happiness. The effect of gender on happiness draws attention, because it is contrary to most findings in the literature (CORBI; MENEZES-FILHO, 2006; COSTA et al., 2021; GONÇALVES; KAPCZINSKI, 2008; LIMA, 2007; LUCAS; GOHM, 2000; SILVA, et al., 2022). On the other hand, these findings have also been observed in some national studies (COSTA et al., 2021; GUEDEA et al., 2006; SILVA, et al., 2022). To understand this apparent paradoxical result, one can refer to the sample characteristics of this study. It is noted that the majority of the sample was made up of women (70.5%). The mean age was 33.18 years (SD = 11.99), with high levels of education and income above five minimum wages (43.7%) or above nine minimum wages (20.8%), therefore, a sample formed predominantly by young adults, mostly with higher education and postgraduate degrees, who have a high incomes. It is possible to think that women with high education, with some financial stability and still young people share a sense of satisfaction with life and emotional well-being, for having acquired independence and control over their lives.

As for marital status, the results of the present study are in line with the findings of Lima (2007), who found that marriage is an important determinant of happiness, and with Nunes et al.

(2022), who in their study also found that singles reported the lowest levels of happiness during the pandemic. Thus, it is worth remembering that the data collection for this study took place during the pandemic period and, therefore, it is possible to assume that, due to the imposition of social isolation, as a sanitary measure, single people were the ones who suffered the most negative impacts on their subjective well-being. According to Nunes et al. (2022), social distancing measures certainly affected interpersonal relationships. Considering that the majority of the sample is formed by young adults, we can assume that relationships with peers are fundamental for their quality of life (DE SOUZA; CERQUEIRA-SANTOS, 2012) and happiness (ARGYLE, 2001). Furthermore, in this period of life, romantic relationships are also central to emotional well-being (ARNETT, 2000). Perhaps this helps to understand why, in this sample, and in the pandemic context, single people were the most unhappy.

The model that was able to predict levels of happiness was the one that included: spiritual connection with oneself, with God, family monthly income, age and marital status. The variables that best predicted happiness were “connection with oneself” and “connection with God”. This results reinforce the common belief that happiness and spirituality were historically intimately connected, as defended, for example, by McMahon (2009). Siqueira, Fernandes and Moreira-Almeida (2018) also identified in their research high correlation between spirituality/religiosity and happiness. Likewise, Scortegagna, Pichler and Faccio (2018) identified that spirituality was an important ally for resilience, hope and happiness. Finally, Scalco (2008) concluded in his study that religiosity, among women, was one of the variables that predicted levels of happiness.

Another variable that helped predict the participants' happiness was monthly family income. Corbi and Menezes-Filho (2006) also found a positive correlation between income and happiness, although it was a weak correlation. As already mentioned, several Brazilian studies have found a correlation between income and subjective well-being or happiness (CAVALCANTI; GUIMARÃES; NOGUEIRA, 2009; ISLAM; WILLS-HERRERA; LIMA, 2007).

Age was also a good predictor of happiness in this study: the older the age, the happier Brazilians tend to be. As previously mentioned, these observations are similar to those of Ribeiro (2015) and some other authors, such as Gonçalves and Kapczinski (2008) and Otta and Fiquer (2004). A Brazilian study, for example, revealed that, in old age, quality of life and well-being (interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, autonomy, etc.) are strong indicators that provide happiness. For the participants of this research, happiness is connected with feelings of gratitude, with friendship, with family and with faith and spiritual well-being (LUZ; AMATUZZI, 2008), that is, with more valued experiences at older ages.

Finally, marital status, that is, the fact that the individual is not single, was also one of the variables that explained the variances in levels of happiness. Corbi and Menezes-Filho (2006), Lima (2007) and Nunes et al. (2022) also observed similar results. Ribeiro's (2015) claims the importance of interpersonal intimate relationships, normally achieved by married individuals. Apparently, having someone to share the different moments of life with helps to increase people's sense of happiness.

This research presents strengths that deserve consideration. It had a large sample, with participants from all regions of Brazil and used advanced statistical techniques. On the other hand, it also has limitations. Sampling was not probabilistic, but selected for convenience. Therefore, it is not representative of the Brazilian population. Indeed, there is a clear socioeconomic and educational bias in this sample. Therefore, their results should be analyzed with caution. Finally, data were collected during the pandemic years, and other studies indicate that there are effects of different moments of the pandemic on people's levels of happiness (NUNES et al., 2022). In this study, the pandemic variable was not controlled. Thus, future studies should be based on random samples of the Brazilian population and should measure other variables that can explain the variability in happiness, so that the effect of covariates can be controlled.

6. Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate whether sociodemographic variables and spiritual well-being would predict happiness in a sample of Brazilians from all regions of Brazil. In light of the findings obtained in this research, as well as in previous research, we found that Brazilians have high levels of happiness and that this happiness can be correlated with sociodemographic factors such as age, marital status, monthly family income and level of education, as well as with the spiritual well-being of individuals.

Two dimensions of spiritual well-being were the main predictors of happiness (connection with oneself and connection with God). Aspects of spirituality have long been described as relevant for a person to feel happy. This human dimension has been approached by different areas of the human and social sciences, such as Philosophy, Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology. It has also been considered relevant to the health area, so much so that in 1988, the World Health Organization (WHO) began to include the spiritual dimension to address the multidimensional concept of health (VOLCAN et al., 2003). According to the authors, spirituality is the set of all emotions and convictions of a non-material nature, which is premised on the idea that there is

more to living than can be perceived or fully understood. Feeling spiritually connected to God and oneself seems to bring existential comfort, as it allows man to experience an inner strength that surpasses human limitations and capabilities (BOFF, 2006). For Lukoff (2003), the relevance of spirituality to health imposes the need to place this human dimension as one of the resources for health, as well as to include the theme in professional training courses, so that it produces academic reflections from an early age in training.

Finally, sociodemographic variables contributed to the explanatory model (marital status, income and age). Having an income that allows the enjoyment of goods and services, in addition to survival, not being single and being more mature help explain the higher levels of perceived happiness. This result has interesting social implications, since individuals' income is strongly linked to social class issues, determined by employability and access to education, especially higher education. In this sense, the final model found brings elements of the concrete dimension of people's lives, in addition to the spiritual dimension. Feeling happy depends on how we live concretely, in our daily lives, on how much we can enjoy the material goods and services available in our society.

We hope the results from this study can serve to support the clinical practice of health and mental health professionals, paying attention to the spiritual well-being of their patients, since it seems to be a good predictor of subjective well-being or happiness. Furthermore, clinical and pedagogical interventions can take into account differences in marital status and age, focusing on younger and single people. Finally, these findings may reinforce, within the framework of the construction of public policies, the need to strengthen social policies for income transfer to the poorest, as a way of combating inequality and social injustice, since a fair income also appears as a predictor of happiness.

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