

Life satisfaction: An analytical study of the Egyptian wife

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ABSTRACT

Working wives have become obvious partners in the progress of societies, beside of their recognized household responsibilities. Such multiple roles probably affect negatively their satisfaction with life. The current research aimed to study the impacts of the conflicting roles of the Egyptian wife on her satisfaction with life. The research presents a satisfaction pyramid model to achieve this objective. The base of the pyramid comprises (1) the motivation and readiness for the role (2) family support (3) effective communication, while the summit of the pyramid comprises the satisfaction with life. Data collection was done through personal communications with 400 working and non-working wives. The study followed the descriptive analytical method. The results showed that there was no significant difference in life satisfaction between working and non-working wives in the different subscales of the satisfaction measurement. However, the levels of life satisfaction varied significantly according to the wives' career. Life satisfaction of wives increased with increasing the age level up to 40-50 years old; afterwards, significant reductions occurred. Socioeconomic status of the family also played positive significant influences on the levels of life satisfaction. Satisfaction with "readiness and motivation", "family support", and "effective communication" were significantly correlated with "life satisfaction". Such a result verifies the success of the scale used for describing life satisfaction of the Egyptian wives.

Key words: life satisfaction; the pyramid-model of satisfaction; Egyptian wives; family support.

INTRODUCTION

Working wives have become obvious partners in the progress of societies, beside of their recognized household responsibilities (Stanworth, 2000; Pietrasanta, 2002; Malhotra and Schuler, 2005). Although job-employment provides Arab woman with reassurance and appropriate boosters in her future and the future of her children, especially after her husband being disabled or died (Eman and Slema, 2013). However, the multi-roles of the wives as parent care provider, mother, wife, and employee might result in stressful feelings (Edwards and Rothbard, 1999; Hill, 2005). Stress is a commonly used indicator for understanding the quality and stability of the close relationships (Randall and Bodenmann, 2009). According to Greenhaus et al. (2003), individuals who perform multiple roles are considered relatively imbalanced, even if the distribution of commitments between roles is harmonic. Family stress is the interruption in the steady state of the family system (Boss, 2014), thereby affecting negatively the psychological and emotional balances of the wife which may, in turn, influences depressingly the comfort of her husband and the academic achievement of her children (Eman and Slema, 2013). Under severe conditions, working wives might resort to the withdrawal behavior at work as an alternative procedure for work-family conflicts (Hammer *et al.*, 2003).

Satisfaction with life is "how much the person likes the life he/she leads" (Veenhoven, 1996) and its scale is a comparison between the current

situations with what is supposed to be appropriate (Diener, et al., 1985). High levels of life satisfaction indicate high quality of life; whereas, low levels of life satisfaction indicate that serious deficiencies occurred (Veenhoven, 1996). The multi-roles of the wife are thought to affect negatively life satisfaction (Martire, Stephens, and Townsend, 2000) and, in general, the Egyptian score of life satisfaction tends to be medium to low based on the combined happiness and life satisfaction scores (Selim, 2008). In spite of the importance of the studies which address the effects of the conflicting roles of wives on their feelings towards life satisfaction; however, these types of studies are considered rare in the Arab region.

Previous studies on life satisfaction took various approaches on the determinants of satisfaction e.g. (1) work-family (w-f) conflict, policies, and job satisfaction (Ernst Kossek and Ozeki, 1998), or (2) multiple role balance, and job satisfaction (Bryant and Constantine, 2006), or (3) financial satisfaction, friend and family satisfactions (Diener and Deiner, 2009). Although, such studies analyzed the relations expected to affect life satisfaction, they neglected the moderation link between these relations, which may have major impacts on determining the satisfaction with life of the Egyptian wives. It is the received metal picture of the significance of such roles according to the ins and outs. The roles of the wife can be symbolized by a swing ball connected with a series of threads attached together to keep the ball rotating all the

time. These threads are the relations expected to affect life satisfaction. The ball swings along the recognized roles and can be seen in different locations (perform multiple roles). Such a theory assumed that women in the developed countries can choose their roles appropriate to their capabilities and therefore, studying the relations (threads attached together to the ball) might give a reasonable explanation for the wives' feelings of life satisfaction. On the other hand, most responsibilities are not placed on the Arab woman by choice. Accordingly, the motivations and readiness to perform such roles should be considered when studying the Egyptian wives' satisfaction with life. Moreover, the Arabian societies place further responsibilities on the woman to swing faster and for longer periods. Such movement might affect her communications with the surroundings and consequently affect her feelings of life satisfaction. Thus, effective communication is considered another determinant affecting wives' life satisfaction. Finally the strength of the thread attached to the ball is considered in the current study the third determinant affecting life satisfaction. The researcher assumed that the wife's husband, beside of her relatives and friends are her main supporters to perform her multiple roles. The current study presented the pyramid model for discussing life satisfaction according to the following determinants (1) motivation or readiness for the role (which is the outcome balance of the psychological, emotional and physical health) (2) family support (3) effective communication and (4) life satisfaction is the top of this pyramid.

1-Motivation and readiness for the role

Personal feelings are the strongest influences affecting life satisfaction (Mansour, 2011). It is reported that total work loads of wives have recorded little effects on life satisfaction (Haugen and Blekesaune, 2005); however, several external factors might affect negatively their readiness to fulfill their recognized responsibilities. Health status is thought to be the main determinant of satisfaction (Selim, 2008). Gender inequality in the paid work might also affect negatively satisfaction with life (Perrons, 2003). Moreover, the negative effectivity at work might affect family stress (Stoeva *et al.*, 2002). Stable structures of the family are considered within the highest impacts affecting life satisfaction (Louis and Zhao, 2002). In general, women are more psychologically distressed than men (Jick and Mitz, 1985) and recorded lower levels of satisfaction with life than men (Link and Darling, 1986).

2-Family support

Relatives, friends and husbands are the main supporters for wives (Walen and Lachman, 2000; Noor, 2002; Cardner and Cutrona, 2004; van Daalen *et al.*, 2005; Powdthavee, 2009). Their assistance

provide wives with positive energy to reduce work stress, attain work-family balances, and minimize the opportunity of the wives' withdrawal behavior at work (Walen and Lachman, 2000; Noor, 2002; Wayne *et al.*, 2006). Thus, social supports is thought to attain higher levels of life satisfaction (Haugen and Blekesaune, 2005; Selim, 2008).

3-Effective communication

This study assumed that the wives' involvement in poor outcome roles might lessen the levels of life satisfaction e.g. inadequate appreciation on such roles is expected to achieve lower levels of life satisfaction. Work improvement is another type of successful communication which might increase the level of life satisfaction. It is worthy to mention that the feeling of success is mainly associated with boost appreciation; otherwise, the feelings of success and life satisfaction are diminished. Good neighborhoods can also increase life satisfaction (Borooah, 2006). It is worthy to mention that social network sites e.g. Facebook could affect life satisfaction (Valenzuela *et al.*, 2009). These social networks not only outline the way of social interactions but also affect the process of thinking and the future awareness (Richter and Dawley, 2009).

Demographic variables and Life Satisfaction

The demographic variables of the family determine the levels of life satisfaction. For example, the financial income affects positively life satisfaction (Schyns, 2000; Selim, 2008). Likewise, wife's employment has significant impacts on life satisfaction (Brereton *et al.*, 2008; Holloway *et al.*, 2006). The age of wife also affect wives' satisfaction with life. In this concern, it is found that the financial situation is the potent determinant of the older age woman life satisfaction (Choi, 2001). The current research measures wives' life satisfaction by conducting personal interviews with 400 wives in order to collect the data. This research followed the descriptive analytical approach to determine the circumstances and relationships that could affect the feeling of life satisfaction.

The present study

The popular Harvey MacKay quotes states that "find something you love to do and you'll never work a day in your life". From this point of view, the Egyptian wife plays multiple roles in the society; however, the fulfillment of such roles is mostly associated with her feelings of life satisfaction (orientation to happiness). The term "life satisfaction" has become an important psychological aspect because of its significance as a meter for measuring the quality of life on one hand and an indicator for the sustainability challenges on the other hand. The question arises here is whether the surroundings care for the feelings of the Egyptian wife as much as she cares for them, and how could the demographic variables figure out her feelings of

life satisfaction. The current research presented the pyramid model for discussing the life satisfaction according to the following determinants (1) motivation or readiness for the role (which is the outcome balance of the psychological, emotional and physical health) (2) family support (3) effective communication and (4) life satisfaction. To attain this aim, the following objects were considered (a) studying the impacts of job-career of wives on their feelings of satisfaction (b) measuring the relations between the determinants of satisfaction, according to the pyramid model, i.e. "family support", "effective communication", and "readiness" with "life satisfaction" (c) exploring the effects of the family socioeconomic status (FSS) and the surrounding demographic variables on the determinants of satisfaction. Consistent with the research goals, the researcher doesn't expect any significant differences in life satisfaction between working and non-working wife; however, this satisfaction varies according to the career of the wife (Hypothesis 1). On the other hand, life satisfaction is significantly affected by the stage of the wife growth (Hypothesis 2). To test the second hypothesis, participants were classified according to their stage of growth into four categories classified by ten years age group: age varied between 20-30 year old (first category), age varied between 31-40 year old (second category), age varied between 41-50 year old (third category), age varied between 51-60 year old (fourth category). We also posit that satisfaction on "readiness and motivation," "family support", and "effective communication" were significantly correlated with life satisfaction (Hypothesis 3). The measured feelings of life satisfaction were significantly affected by the family socioeconomic status (FSS) (Hypothesis 4). Finally, it is anticipated that significant correlations exist between themes of satisfaction with the demographic variables of the family (Hypothesis 5).

Importance of the study

Theoretical importance: This study contributes in identifying factors and conditions which figure out wife's life satisfaction because psychological and behavioral preparation of mothers are required to sustain the ethics of the society, especially the coming generations; besides, it explores the feasibility of developing a quantitative scale (satisfaction pyramid model) for measuring life satisfaction of the Egyptian wife

Empirical importance: Adopting policies to achieve better feelings of life satisfaction and higher integration in the various community activities.

METHODS

To test the above mentioned hypotheses, three measuring subscales were used (a) Motivation and readiness subscale (b) Family support subscale and (c) Effective communication subscale. Four hundred wives (200 working and 200 non-working wives)

were selected across Qualubia governorate (Kafr Saad, and Gamgara as rural areas and Obour city), and Cairo governorate (El-Zaytoun and Nasr City), Egypt to participate in the current research study. Data collection took place through personal communications with the participants during the period between July–September 2014.

Research instruments

1-**Satisfaction scale:** prepared by the researcher, comprised of the following four scales:

- A- *Motivation and readiness subscale:* This scale, comprised of 13 questions, aimed at measuring the physical and mental health status of wives in relation to their responsibilities, their ability to simplify their household responsibilities and manage their time effectively. The reply comprises 3 *satisfied*, 2 *sometimes*, 1 *dissatisfied*.
- B- *Family support subscale:* This scale, comprised of 13 questions, aimed at measuring their feelings of household stress, the family atmosphere, the existence of the democratic dialogue, behavior reinforcement, and cooperation behavior in performing the various duties. The reply comprises 3 *satisfied*, 2 *sometimes*, 1 *dissatisfied*.
- C- *Effective communication subscale:* This scale, comprised of 13 questions, aimed at measuring their social relations with neighbors, friends and colleagues at work, how effective can they manage such relations, the stresses occurred from such relations and finally measure their abilities to accomplish the different outdoor tasks. The reply comprises 3 *satisfied*, 2 *sometimes*, 1 *dissatisfied*.
- D- *Life satisfaction subscale:* This scale, comprised of 15 questions, aimed at measuring job/work satisfaction, family life satisfaction, housing satisfaction, neighborhood satisfaction and satisfaction with the financial situation of the family. The reply comprises 3 *satisfied*, 2 *sometimes*, 1 *dissatisfied*.

2- General Data Form (prepared by the researcher)

Family-general information was collected, including residence, type of education, number of children, monthly income, job career and the stage of growth. Type of education was coded using three categories: illiterate, earned a high school certificate and earned a bachelor's degree or higher. The number of children were coded using four categories as 1-2 children (small family), 3-4 (moderate family), 5-6 (upper intermediate family) and >6 (big family). Monthly income was implied as low income (<1500 L.E.), moderate low income (1501 – 2500 L.E.), moderate income (2501 – 3500 L.E.) and high income (>3500 L.E.). Job career was coded as not working (house wives), professional, administrative employee and workers. The

demographic properties of the participants of the study are shown in Table 1. Socioeconomic status of the family of the participants was considered according to the common rating scale in Egypt prepared by Al-Shakhs (1995) as follows:

$$y = 2.259 + 1.016 \times X_1 + 0.886X_2 + 0.622 \times X_3$$

Where y: is the socio-economical standards of the family, X_1 : is the mean monthly income of the family, X_2 : is a degree graded for the position of the husband and X_3 : is the educational level for the husband. The demographic characteristics of the investigated sample are shown in Table 1.

Analytic Strategy

The obtained data were statistically analyzed using the SPSS statistical software through the analysis of variance and coefficient of determination at 0.05 probability level. The graphs were plotted using Sigma Plot 10 program. Reliability and validity of the measuring scale and subscales were also considered. Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the measure of the internal consistency reliability, was calculated for the used scales by measuring the

relation between the instruments and the measures of the related constructs and the results are shown in Table 2.

A sample of fifty working and non-working wives retested in 15 days later. Guttman Split- Half Coefficient and Spearman-Brown prediction formula were calculated for the measuring scale and its subscales and the results are shown in Table 3. The results indicate high test-retest reliability with high internal consistency. Such calculated scores were high enough to indicate high reliability of the measuring scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First hypothesis: "There are no significant differences in levels of life satisfaction between working and non-working wives; however, life satisfaction varies significantly according to her job career".

Figure 1 shows that the levels of life satisfaction of non working wives were slightly higher than the measured levels of working wives;

Table 1: The demographic characteristics of the study sample (n=400)

| | % | | % |
|--|-------|-------------------------------|-------|
| Site | | Educational level | |
| Urban | 55.50 | Illiterate | 13.00 |
| Countryside | 44.50 | High school | 56.50 |
| Number of children | | Bachelor degree or higher | 30.50 |
| 1-2 children (small family) | 17.50 | Job career | |
| 3-4 children (moderate family) | 40.50 | Not working (house wife) | 50.00 |
| 5-6 children (upper intermediate family) | 35.50 | Professional | 14.25 |
| >6 children big family | 5.50 | Administrative employee | 24.50 |
| Monthly income, Egyptian pound (L.E.) | | Workers | 11.25 |
| >1500 L.E. (Low income) | 20.50 | Stage of growth, years | |
| 1501-2500 L.E. (Moderate low income) | 24.00 | 20-30 | 25.50 |
| 2,501-3,500 L.E. (Moderate income) | 24.50 | >30-40 | 38.00 |
| <3,500 L.E. (High income) | 31.00 | >40-50 | 31.00 |
| | | >50-60 | 5.50 |

Table 2: Reliability estimates of the satisfaction of life scale calculated according to Cronbach's alpha

| Subscale | The correlation coefficient value of the total degree | The dimensions reliability formula coefficient |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Life satisfaction | 0.86** | 0.88** |
| Readiness | 0.89** | 0.91** |
| Family support | 0.84** | 0.86** |
| Effective communication | 0.87** | 0.89** |

** Significant correlations at the 0.01 probability level.

Table 3. Validity estimates of the measuring scale of satisfaction and its subscales

| Subscale | Guttman Split- Half Coefficient | Spearman-Brown prediction coefficient |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Life satisfaction | 0.834** | 0.879** |
| Readiness | 0.821** | 0.882** |
| Family support | 0.823** | 0.875** |
| Effective communication | 0.799** | 0.794** |
| Total scale | 0.942** | 0.963** |

** Significant correlations at the 0.01 probability level.

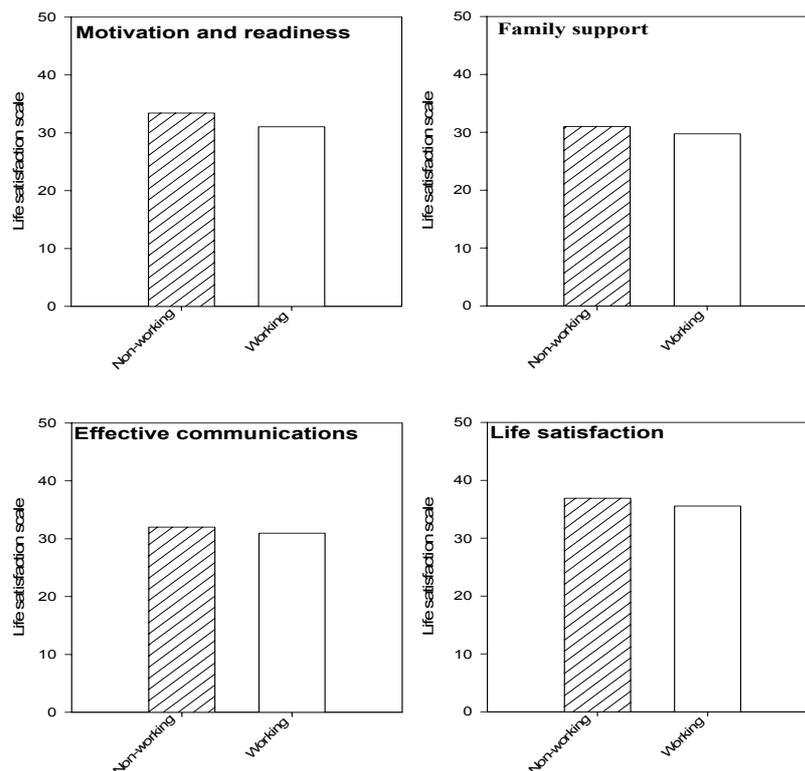


Fig 1: Effect of the employment of wives on the studied life satisfaction determinants

however, such differences seemed to be insignificant (the calculated “F” values were 0.84 for “motivation and readiness”, 0.63 for “family support”, 0.87 for “effective communication” and 0.49 for “life satisfaction” scales). This result agrees partially with Freudiger (1983), who found slight differences in life satisfaction between working and non-working wives.

Probably, the job employment of wives is to alleviate the economic burdens of the family. Farhat (2012) mentioned that the main cause of the Arab wife employment is the economical need to achieve social and psychological amenities. Employment, in general, increases the marital happiness of wives (Rogers and DeBoer, 2001) and supports the Arab wife with the appropriate boosters reassure on her future and the future of her children (Gallant and Pounder, 2008), especially in the presence of disabled husbands or after husbands’ death or being divorced (Spierings *et al.*, 2010). However, the obtained results indicated that the work-family conflicts probably decreased the wife’s feelings of life satisfaction, thus the measured levels of life satisfaction seemed to be relatively low. To what extent could the job career affect the wives’ feelings of life satisfaction, was also a matter of concern in the current research. To achieve this aim, working wives were classified according to the nature of work into three main categories: professional, managerial, and literal. The wife’s feelings of life satisfaction were then evaluated under each category

of job career to find out the effects of these careers on the attainment levels of life satisfaction. It is worthy to mention that the professional work nature is characterized by flexibility and innovation during problem identification, analysis and solving, e.g.: university professor, a doctor, engineer (2) managerial wives whose nature of work is characterized mainly by the routine in the implementation of tasks and does not need innovations to fulfill the different tasks (3) job literal, which rely on the proficiency in the implementation of craftsmanship.

Effect of the wife’s career on her feelings of life satisfaction

Results shown in Figure 2 reveal that the career of the wife affects significantly her feelings of life satisfaction. Craftswomen recorded the least levels of life satisfaction on the different scales of the satisfaction measurements as compared with the professional and managerial wives. Probably, the craftswomen feel that they got jobs of lower priority in the community, thus affected their feelings of life satisfaction.

Although, the results show that the feelings of life satisfaction seemed to be higher in the professional wives than the managerial wives; however, such differences were insignificant. These results were consistent with those obtained by Lounsbury *et al.* (2004) and Grandey *et al.* (2005) who found that career satisfaction has great impacts on life satisfaction.

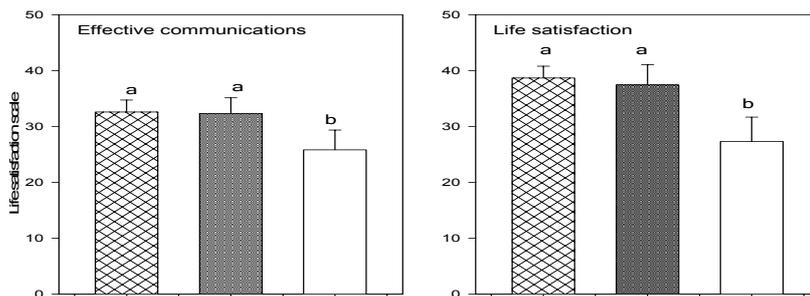
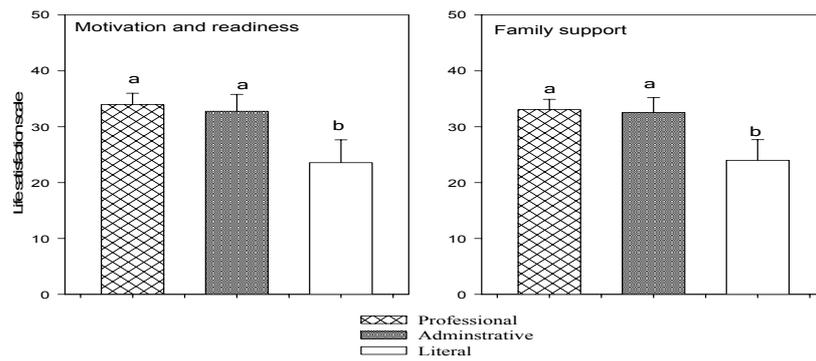


Fig 2: Effects of the career type on the determinant on life satisfaction
Means with the same letter indicates no significant difference

Second Hypothesis: “Life satisfaction is significantly affected by the stage of the wife growth”

Fig. 3 shows that the measured feelings of life satisfaction varied significantly according to the wife’s age level. It seems that the levels of life satisfaction increased significantly with increasing the wife age up to 50-60 years; afterwards, there

was significant reductions occurred at all levels of life satisfaction. Probably, the middle aged wives were always seeking to progress and acquisitions, accordingly their feelings of life satisfaction increased with their progress in work (Bearon, 1989). On the other hand, older wives, on the verge of retirement, are striving to retain the status quo (Bearon, 1989).

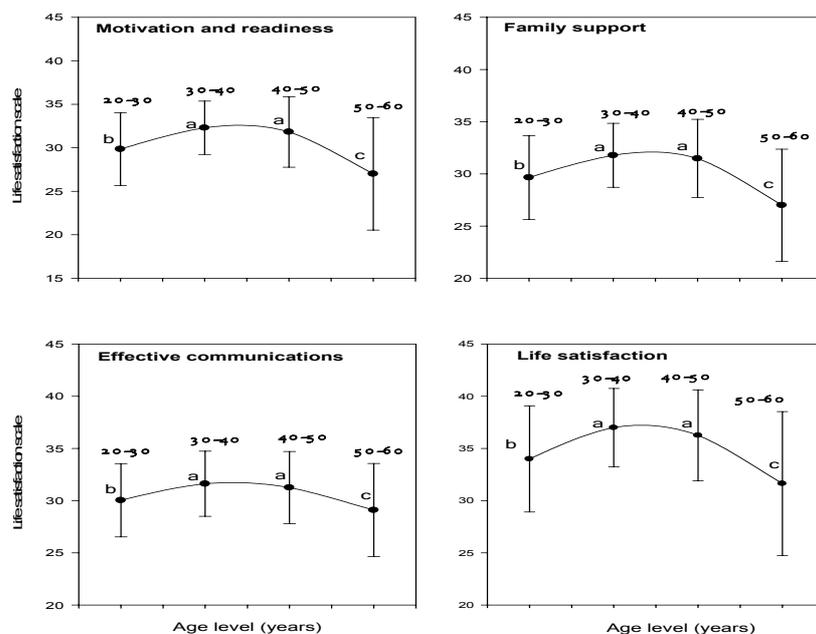


Fig. 3: Effect of the different age level on the measured determinants of life satisfaction
Means with the same letter indicates no significant difference

Their biggest fears of retirement are the main determinant of life satisfaction which are the financial resources and the financial situation of the family after retirement (Choi, 2001). It is thought that the wisdom of the elder age wives might play positive influences on the feeling of life satisfaction (Ardelt, 1997). Thus, the family programs should consider rehabilitating the wives, on the verge of retirement, to accept that retirement is the end stage of the routine work, and the beginning of another phase of creative work, through roles chosen by the elderly for himself (Manour, 2011).

Third hypothesis: “The levels of satisfaction measured on the scales of "readiness and motivation," "family support", and "effective communication" were significantly correlated with those of “life satisfaction”.

Table 4 shows positive significant correlations exist between the measured levels of satisfaction on the “life satisfaction” subscale with the measured levels of satisfaction on the other subscales of the measurement, i.e. "Readiness and motivation," "family support", and "effective communication". These results verify the success of the used measurement for describing the feelings of life satisfaction and also proved that life satisfaction is the resultant of many factors surrounding wives. It is worthy to mention that life satisfaction is associated with family-work relations (Adams et al., 1996) and that the personal qualifications, in addition to family involvement and job satisfaction could specify the level of life satisfaction (Beutell and Wittig-Berman, 1999). On the other hand, the measured levels of satisfaction on the subscales of "readiness and motivation," "family support", and "effective communication" were significantly

correlated with each other. This probably indicates that wives were quickly influenced by the surroundings, and this might affect their readiness to do their supposed responsibilities. Under negative circumstances, wives tend to be more isolated and less productive.

Fourth hypothesis: “The measured levels of life satisfaction were significantly affected by the socioeconomic status of the family”.

The socioeconomic status of the family recorded significant influences on the levels of life satisfaction (Fig 4). It seems that the wives of the high and middle socioeconomic status recorded comparable measures on the life satisfaction scale while the wives of lower socioeconomic status recorded the least levels of life satisfaction scale. Such a result probably demonstrate that lower socioeconomic status has negative impacts on the "motivation and readiness” of the wife, thus affecting negatively her flexibility and inspiration i.e. "family support" and "effective communication".

Accordingly, wives become more likely involve in their own problems on the one hand and more likely isolated from the changes surrounding them on the other hand. This might reflect their negative feelings of life satisfaction.

Fifth hypothesis: “Significant correlations exist between the themes of satisfaction with the demographic variables of the family”.

Table 5 reveals that the levels of satisfaction calculated from the different scales of the used measurement were significantly correlated with both the monthly income of the wife and her educational level.

Table 4: Pearson correlation coefficients among the measured feelings of life satisfaction of the different scales of the satisfaction measurement.

| | Motivation | Family support | Effective communication |
|-------------------------|------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Life satisfaction | 0.925** | 0.928** | 0.869** |
| Motivation | | 0.922** | 0.868** |
| Family support | | | 0.906** |
| Effective communication | | | |

** Significant correlations at the 0.01 probability level.

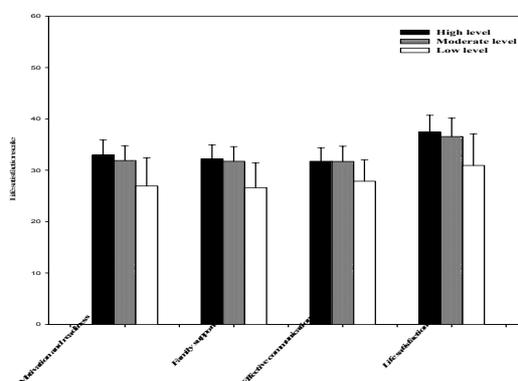


Fig 4: Effect of the family socioeconomic status on the determinants of wives' life.

Table 5: Pearson correlation coefficients among the measured feelings of life satisfaction as affected by the demographic variables of the family

| | Residence | Number of children | Educational level | Monthly income |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Life satisfaction | <0.001 | 0.102* | 0.265** | 0.313** |
| Motivation | 0.617** | 0.092 | 0.324** | 0.362** |
| Family support | 0.013 | 0.105* | 0.272** | 0.324** |
| Effective communication | 0.012 | 0.079 | 0.170** | 0.209** |

** Significant correlations at the 0.01 probability level.

Thus, the wives' sense of independence could be one of the main reasons for increasing her satisfaction of life. Farhat (2012) mentioned that the employment of the Arab wife has achieved her economic independence, which enabled her to be psychologically independent, beside of increasing her sense of prestige and being socially valuable in the society. The obtained results were consistent with those obtained by Dumludag (2013) who found a positive relationship exists between the income and life satisfaction. It is worthy to mention that the number of children was also significantly correlated with the following subscales of the satisfaction measurement "family support" and "life satisfaction"; whereas, its correlations with either "motivation and readiness" and "effective communication" were found insignificant. On the other hand, the place of residence recorded no significant correlation with any of the measured determinants of life satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The results showed that the responses of wives on the questionnaire of the life satisfaction scale were significantly correlated with their answers on the questionnaires of "readiness and motivation," "family support", and "effective communication ". Such a result confirms the success of the used scale for describing life satisfaction in wives. The obtained results could be summarized in the following points:

1. The career of the wife is an important criterion influencing the levels of life satisfaction. Craftswomen recorded the lowest levels of life satisfaction compared with the professional and managerial wives. Accordingly, urgent changes must take place in the culture of the community to raise their level of awareness about the importance of the job literal in the development process of the community.
2. Significant reductions in the levels of life satisfaction occurred in the working and non-working wives within the age level between 50-60 years old. The retirement policies for the elderly should be better reconsidered, in particular, pension and health insurance. Such new policies might account for improving the wives' feelings of life satisfaction. Moreover, the rehabilitation of employed wives could take place within this age level to accept the idea of being retired from the governmental jobs after

the age of 60 years old, and considering volunteer non-governmental work afterwards that the nations need the nations during their progress.

3. The socioeconomically status of the family influences the wives' feelings of life satisfaction. Direct and indirect support should be directed to the families of low socioeconomic status, which might minimize the impacts of the social dimensions and economical pressure on wives, thus improve their levels of life satisfaction. Excluding lower income families from tax payments beside of the increasing the services provided by the government for such classes might also improve their levels of life satisfaction e.g. fulfilling the policies of minimum and maximum wages, improving the education strategies in the public schools to match the corresponding ones of the private schools.

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