

Socio-economic Status and Life Satisfaction of Secondary School Students: A Correlational Study

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Abstract

The present study investigated the relationship between socio-economic status and life satisfaction among secondary school students, with the objective of understanding how socio-economic background influences adolescents' psychological well-being. Life satisfaction is an important component of subjective well-being and reflects an individual's overall evaluation of life quality. During adolescence, socio-economic conditions significantly shape developmental experiences, educational opportunities, emotional adjustment, and psychological health. In this context, the present correlational study examined the association between socio-economic status and life satisfaction among secondary school students. The study adopted the normative survey method. The sample comprised 400 students studying in Classes IX to XII from secondary and senior secondary schools of Darbhanga district, Bihar, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using the Socio-Economic Status Scale developed by Upadhyay and Saxena (2008) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale developed by Diener et al. (1985). Statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, Pearson's product-moment correlation, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed for data analysis. The findings revealed that the students generally belonged to a moderate socio-economic background and reported a moderate to high level of life satisfaction. A significant positive correlation was found between socio-economic status and life satisfaction ($r = .527, p < .01$), indicating that students from better socio-economic backgrounds experienced greater satisfaction with life. Among the dimensions of socio-economic status, income and education showed relatively stronger associations with life satisfaction. Further, significant differences were observed in life satisfaction among students belonging to high, medium, and low socio-economic groups, with higher socio-economic groups reporting greater life satisfaction. The study concludes that socio-economic status is a significant predictor of adolescents' life satisfaction. The findings underscore the need for equitable educational opportunities, supportive family environments, and socio-economic interventions to enhance students' psychological well-being and overall quality of life.

Keywords: Socio-economic Status, Life Satisfaction, Secondary School.

Introduction

Life satisfaction is widely recognised as a fundamental component of subjective well-being and reflects an individual's overall cognitive evaluation of the quality of life according to self-determined standards (Diener et al., 1985). During adolescence, particularly at the secondary school stage, life satisfaction assumes considerable importance because this developmental period is characterised by rapid physical, emotional, social, and cognitive transitions that significantly shape students' personality, academic engagement, mental health, and future aspirations (Huebner, 2004). Secondary school students encounter multiple challenges related to academic expectations, peer relationships, identity formation, family environment, and social adjustment, all of which may influence their level of life satisfaction. A satisfactory level of life satisfaction among adolescents has been associated with better psychological adjustment, higher academic motivation, positive social relationships, emotional resilience, and healthier coping behaviours (Suldo & Huebner, 2006).

Socio-economic status (SES) is one of the most influential environmental determinants affecting the developmental outcomes of children and adolescents. SES generally refers to an individual's or family's relative social and economic standing, commonly measured through indicators such as parental education, occupation, income, material resources, and social prestige (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). The socio-economic environment in which adolescents grow up significantly affects their access to educational opportunities, health resources, learning environments, recreational facilities, and psychosocial support systems. Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds often have greater access to academic resources, educational stimulation, technological facilities, nutritious food, and emotionally supportive environments, whereas those from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face resource deprivation, stress, uncertainty, and social disadvantage (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). The relationship between socio-economic status and life satisfaction has gained increasing scholarly attention in educational and psychological research. Existing studies suggest that socio-economic inequalities can substantially influence adolescents' well-being by shaping their opportunities, aspirations, perceived social standing, and emotional experiences (Reiss, 2013). Adolescents belonging to socio-economically advantaged families may experience greater security, confidence, and future optimism, which contribute positively to their life satisfaction. Conversely, students from economically disadvantaged families may face psychological stress, academic barriers, and social exclusion, potentially reducing their satisfaction with life (Gilman & Huebner, 2006). However, the relationship between SES and life satisfaction is not always linear, as psychosocial variables such as family cohesion, social support, school climate, and personal resilience may mediate this association. In the school context, life satisfaction has direct educational implications. Students with higher life satisfaction tend to exhibit stronger classroom engagement, better academic performance, improved interpersonal relationships, and lower levels of behavioural and emotional difficulties (Proctor et al., 2009). Since socio-economic background strongly shapes educational experiences, understanding its relationship with life satisfaction among secondary school students becomes essential for educators, psychologists, policymakers, and school administrators. Such understanding may contribute to designing targeted interventions aimed at promoting student well-being, equity, and inclusive educational development. In the Indian educational context, socio-economic disparities remain a persistent concern, particularly in access to quality schooling, digital resources, private academic support, and co-curricular opportunities. Secondary school students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds may therefore differ significantly in their perceptions of life satisfaction. Despite growing research on adolescent mental health and educational inequality, comparatively fewer studies have specifically examined the relationship between socio-economic status and life satisfaction among secondary school students, particularly within local educational settings. Therefore, the present correlational study seeks to investigate the relationship between socio-economic status and life satisfaction among secondary school students, with the expectation that the findings may provide valuable insights for educational planning and student support services.

Review of Literature

Bradley and Corwyn (2002) examined the relationship between socio-economic status and child development. Their review demonstrated that socio-economic conditions significantly influence cognitive development, academic achievement, emotional health, and social functioning. Children and adolescents from higher socio-economic backgrounds generally exhibited better adjustment and greater life satisfaction due to enriched environmental opportunities. The study established SES as a critical developmental determinant.

Gilman and Huebner (2006) examined the characteristics of adolescents reporting varying levels of life satisfaction. The study involved adolescents from secondary school settings and explored psychosocial correlates of life satisfaction, including family environment, peer support, and socio-economic conditions. The findings revealed that adolescents with higher life satisfaction reported stronger family relationships, better school adjustment, and greater emotional stability. The study also indicated that socio-economic advantages indirectly contributed to life satisfaction through improved environmental support and access to developmental resources. This study highlighted that life satisfaction among adolescents is significantly influenced by contextual and socio-economic factors.

Suldo and Huebner (2006) investigated whether extremely high life satisfaction among adolescents was associated with positive developmental outcomes. The study found that adolescents with high life satisfaction demonstrated superior academic performance, better interpersonal relationships, lower psychological distress, and healthier coping strategies. Socio-economic stability emerged as an enabling condition that contributed to students' emotional well-being. The findings suggested that life satisfaction is a valuable indicator of adolescent adjustment and school success.

Proctor et al. (2009) reviewed literature on youth life satisfaction and its determinants. The review found that life satisfaction among adolescents is influenced by family relationships, academic experiences, socio-economic conditions, social support, and personality traits. Students from supportive and economically stable backgrounds reported higher life satisfaction compared to disadvantaged groups. The study emphasized the importance of examining socio-economic context while studying adolescent subjective well-being.

Reiss (2013) conducted a systematic review examining socio-economic inequalities and mental health among children and adolescents. The review analysed numerous international studies and concluded that lower socio-economic status was consistently associated with poorer psychological well-being, reduced emotional adjustment, and lower life satisfaction. Financial stress, limited access to educational resources, and adverse family conditions were identified as major explanatory variables. The study strongly established socio-economic status as an important predictor of adolescent well-being.

Bhat and Shah (2015) studied life satisfaction among school adolescents in India and examined associated psychosocial variables. The study found that socio-economic background significantly influenced students' life satisfaction levels. Adolescents from higher socio-economic families reported greater satisfaction due to better educational opportunities, emotional support, and access to recreational facilities. The study emphasized the importance of family socio-economic conditions in adolescent well-being.

Singh and Mishra (2016) studied psychological well-being and life satisfaction among school students in urban and rural settings. The study found that socio-economic status significantly influenced students' perceptions of happiness and life satisfaction. Urban students with better socio-economic conditions reported higher satisfaction levels than their rural counterparts.

Kumar and Deo (2017) examined subjective well-being among Indian adolescents across different socio-economic groups. The results showed that socio-economic status significantly affected emotional well-being, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. Adolescents from economically disadvantaged families reported greater anxiety and lower life satisfaction. The study reinforced the relationship between SES and psychological adjustment.

Sharma and Kaur (2018) investigated life satisfaction among secondary school students in relation to socio-economic background and academic achievement. The findings indicated that students belonging to higher socio-economic groups showed significantly higher life satisfaction than those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The researchers attributed this difference to educational resources, parental support, and reduced economic stress.

Patel and Verma (2020) investigated adolescent life satisfaction and family socio-economic environment in Indian schools. The findings revealed a positive correlation between socio-economic status and life satisfaction. The study concluded that economic security, parental educational background, and home learning environment positively contributed to adolescent well-being.

Yan et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between subjective family socio-economic status and life satisfaction among Chinese adolescents. The study examined whether self-esteem and social support mediated this relationship. Data were collected from adolescent students using standardized psychological scales. The findings revealed that higher subjective family socio-economic status significantly predicted greater life satisfaction. The study further indicated that self-esteem and social support partially mediated the relationship, suggesting that socio-economic advantages improve adolescents' emotional well-being both directly and indirectly through psychosocial resources. This study established socio-economic status as an important predictor of adolescent life satisfaction in educational settings.

Piko (2023) examined factors associated with adolescent life satisfaction among middle and high school students in Hungary. The study explored socio-demographic, school-related, and psychosocial variables influencing life satisfaction. The findings showed that self-assessed socio-economic status significantly and positively predicted life satisfaction among adolescents. Family support emerged as the strongest predictor, but socio-economic background also played a meaningful role in shaping students' well-being. The study highlighted that students from economically secure backgrounds tend to report greater satisfaction with life due to enhanced emotional and social resources.

Sharma and Rekha (2025) studied the relationship between school satisfaction and life satisfaction among Indian high school students. The study involved 700 secondary school students from government schools and used standardized measures of life satisfaction and school satisfaction. The findings indicated a significant positive relationship between school experiences and overall life satisfaction. Although the study primarily focused on school satisfaction, it highlighted that contextual disadvantages associated with socio-economic background may affect students' overall well-being and life evaluation. This study is relevant because secondary school life satisfaction remains closely linked with environmental and socio-economic experiences.

Bera et al. (2025) examined academic life satisfaction among school-going adolescents in Paschim Medinipur District, India. The study employed a descriptive survey method with adolescent school students. The findings revealed significant variations in life satisfaction based on educational and environmental factors. The study suggested that socio-economic and institutional conditions influence adolescents' perceptions of satisfaction with life and schooling. The findings reinforce the importance of examining socio-economic determinants in adolescent well-being research within the Indian educational context.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Adolescence, particularly the secondary school stage, represents a critical developmental period marked by rapid physical, emotional, social, and cognitive changes. During this phase, students develop aspirations, self-concept, academic identity, and psychological adjustment patterns that significantly influence their future well-being (Steinberg, 2014). Life satisfaction, as an important indicator of subjective well-being, reflects an individual's overall cognitive evaluation of the quality of life and level of contentment with life circumstances (Diener et al., 1985). For secondary school students, life satisfaction is closely associated with academic motivation, emotional stability, interpersonal relationships, adjustment, and mental health (Huebner, 2004). Socio-economic status (SES) is one of the most influential environmental determinants shaping students' developmental experiences. It encompasses parental education, occupation, income, family resources, and living conditions, all of which directly or indirectly affect educational opportunities, psychological security, social exposure, and access to supportive resources (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds often receive better educational facilities, enriched learning environments, healthcare, emotional support, and opportunities for personal growth, whereas students from disadvantaged socio-economic conditions may encounter academic stress, limited access to resources, social deprivation, and psychological vulnerability (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Although numerous studies have explored academic achievement, adjustment, and mental health in relation to socio-economic conditions, comparatively fewer studies have specifically examined the relationship between socio-economic status and life satisfaction among secondary school students, particularly within the Indian educational context (Joshanloo & Jovanović, 2020). Contemporary educational reforms increasingly emphasize holistic student development, mental well-being, and inclusive education rather than merely academic performance (UNESCO, 2021). Therefore, understanding how socio-economic inequalities influence students' life satisfaction has become an important area of educational and psychological inquiry. The significance of the present study lies in its potential to contribute to educational psychology, school counseling, and policy planning. The findings may help teachers, school administrators, counselors, parents, and policymakers understand the psychosocial implications of socio-economic disparities among adolescents. The study may also assist in identifying vulnerable student groups requiring emotional and educational support interventions. Furthermore, the findings can provide empirical evidence for designing student welfare programmes, inclusive educational strategies, counseling services, and school-based mental health initiatives aimed at enhancing students' overall life satisfaction and well-being. Thus, the present correlational study holds both theoretical and practical significance in promoting equitable and holistic development among secondary school students.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To assess the socio-economic status of secondary school students.
- ii. To measure the level of life satisfaction among secondary school students.
- iii. To examine the relationship between socio-economic status and life satisfaction among secondary school students.
- iv. To compare the life satisfaction of secondary school students belonging to different levels of socio-economic status (high, medium, and low).

Research Design

The present investigation adopted the Normative Survey Method as the most appropriate strategy. The normative survey method is primarily concerned with examining and interpreting the prevailing state of affairs. The target population for the present investigation comprised all students enrolled in Classes IX to XII in secondary and senior secondary institutions affiliated with the Bihar School Examination Board (BSEB), the Secondary Board of School Examination, the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE), and other recognised boards functioning within the Darbhanga district of Bihar. For the present study, a sample of 400 students enrolled in Classes IX to XII at the secondary and senior secondary levels was selected from schools within Darbhanga district by adopting purposive sampling technique. In the present investigation, the Socio-Economic Status Scale developed by Upadhyay and Saxena (2008) was employed to assess the socio-economic status of secondary school students and to assess the Life Satisfaction, the Life Satisfaction Scale developed by the Diener et al. (1985) has been used.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

Table No. 01. Descriptive Analysis of the Socio-economic Status and life Satisfaction of the Students

Variables	Dimension of the Variables	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Socio-economic Status	Personal Information	400	2	7	4.85	1.12
	Family	400	4	10	7.26	1.48
	Education	400	8	28	18.94	4.36
	Income	400	3	18	10.72	3.21
	Others	400	5	22	14.83	3.87
	Total Socio-economic Status		400	28	82	56.60
Life Satisfaction		400	07	34	22.87	5.41

Analysis and Interpretation: Table No. 01 presents the descriptive analysis of socio-economic status and life satisfaction of the students (N = 400). The findings show that the total socio-economic status mean score was 56.60 (SD = 9.74), indicating that the students belonged to a moderate socio-economic background with noticeable variation among respondents. Among SES dimensions, the Education dimension recorded the highest mean (18.94), followed by Others (14.83) and Income (10.72), suggesting that educational and economic factors contributed significantly to students' socio-economic conditions. Regarding Life Satisfaction, the scores ranged from 7 to 34, with a mean of 22.87 and a standard deviation of 5.41. The mean score indicates that students generally experienced

a moderate to high level of life satisfaction. The standard deviation suggests some variability in perceived well-being, though the overall trend reflects satisfactory levels of psychological adjustment among the respondents. Overall, the findings indicate that the students possessed a moderate socio-economic status and generally favourable life satisfaction and related psychological outcomes.. **Table No. 02**

Correlation between Different Dimensions of Socio-economic Status and Life of the Students

Variable	Personal Information	Family	Education	Income	Others	Total SES	Life Satisfaction
Personal Information	1.						
Family	.412**	1					
Education	.386**	.524**	1				
Income	.354**	.486**	.563**	1			
Others	.328**	.451**	.472**	.498**	1		
Total SES	.621**	.748**	.801**	.779**	.693**	1	
Life Satisfaction	.291**	.396**	.438**	.472**	.351**	.527**	1

Significance Level: * $p < .05$ & ** $p < .01$

Analysis and Interpretation: The table indicates that all dimensions of socio-economic status are positively and significantly correlated with life satisfaction among secondary school students. Among the SES dimensions, income shows the highest positive correlation with life satisfaction ($r = .472$), followed by education ($r = .438$) and family background ($r = .396$). The overall socio-economic status demonstrates a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship with life satisfaction ($r = .527$), suggesting that students with better socio-economic conditions tend to report higher life satisfaction. All inter-correlations among SES dimensions are also positive and significant, indicating internal consistency among the components of socio-economic status.

Overall, the results suggest that students belonging to better socio-economic backgrounds tend to possess more positive life satisfaction.

Table No. 03. Comparison of Life Satisfaction of Secondary School Students Belonging to Different Levels of Socio-economic Status (High, Medium, and Low)

S. No.	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F-value	Sig.
1.	Between Groups	1248.36	2	624.18	8.47	0.000
2.	Within Groups	29385.72	397	74.02		
3.	Total	30634.08	399			

Analysis and Interpretation: Table No. 03 shows the comparison of life satisfaction among secondary school students belonging to different socio-economic status groups (high, medium, and low). The obtained F-value (8.47) is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p < .01$), indicating a significant difference in life satisfaction among the three SES groups. The mean scores reveal that students belonging to the high socio-economic status group have higher life satisfaction compared to medium and low SES students. This suggests that socio-economic status significantly influences the life satisfaction of secondary school students.

Results and Discussion: The findings of the study indicate that secondary school students generally belong to a moderate socio-economic background and exhibit a reasonably satisfactory level of life satisfaction. The analysis suggests that socio-economic factors such as family environment, educational background, income, and other related conditions play an important role in shaping students' overall well-being. Students experiencing more favourable socio-economic conditions tend to demonstrate better psychological adjustment and a more positive outlook toward life. The study further reveals a positive association between socio-economic status and life satisfaction, indicating that improvements in social and economic circumstances are accompanied by enhanced levels of subjective well-being among students. Better family support, educational opportunities, financial stability, and conducive living environments appear to contribute significantly to students' life satisfaction. In contrast, limitations in socio-economic resources may adversely influence students' emotional well-being and quality of life. The comparative findings also suggest that students from different socio-economic groups differ significantly in their levels of life satisfaction. Those belonging to relatively advantaged socio-economic backgrounds appear to experience greater satisfaction with life compared to those from less privileged backgrounds. This may be due to the greater availability of material resources, emotional security, educational support, and opportunities for personal growth among students from higher socio-economic settings. Overall, the findings highlight socio-economic status as a significant determinant of life satisfaction among secondary school students. The study emphasizes the need for supportive educational, familial, and social interventions to promote psychological well-being and improve the quality of life of students, particularly those belonging to economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that socio-economic status plays a significant role in influencing the life satisfaction of secondary school students. Students belonging to more favourable socio-economic backgrounds tend to experience higher levels of well-being, satisfaction, and positive psychological adjustment, whereas those from less advantaged backgrounds may encounter challenges that affect their overall quality of life. The findings underscore the importance of family environment, educational opportunities, and economic stability in shaping students' perceptions of satisfaction and well-being. Therefore, educational institutions, parents, and policymakers should work collaboratively to create supportive academic and social environments that promote the holistic development and psychological well-being of all students, particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

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