

Chapter 3

‘Although Food Is Not Always on the Table, I Feel Happy With my Family’. The Life Satisfaction Among Mayan Families

Lukasz Czarnecki

University of the National Education Commission, Poland

Abstract

The chapter draws on well-being among Maya-speaking communities in Campeche, southern Mexico. This study will allow us to know with greater scope how well-being is built in the Global South among the indigenous population. Campeche is a fascinating state for making analysis; it is one of the poorest Mexican states with a high number of indigenous population, but gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is one of the highest among Mexican states due to the high concentration of petroleum resources. The objective is to analyse the well-being among Mayan families in Campeche. The methodology used includes a mixed-method approach in research, which will allow the objectives set to be met. The quantitative approach consists of the surveys carried out in Kankí while the qualitative approach allows for the complement of various aspects not detected by the quantitative study. The selection of this setting was made based on the available knowledge on economic and social underdevelopment, high inequality, high levels of poverty and a considerable portion of the Maya-speaking population. Fundamental findings indicate that Maya's well-being is based on family and social relations, which play a significant role in building life satisfaction. Family plays a vital role in shaping well-being, in the context of poverty and inequality. However, families are changing, and a new paradigm emerging from capitalism and neoliberalism impacts the Mayan

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family structure. The study may have an impact on changing public policy on women's roles in Mayan society.

Keywords: Well-being; Mayan families; life satisfaction; happiness; gender roles

Introduction

Being Maya-speaking and Indigenous is far from easy, as the population often lives in what has been described as 'a world apart', where they are rendered invisible, denied recognition and confronted in stereotypical ways (Fisher, 2012; Gracia & Horbath, 2019). Living in conditions of poverty and inequality – further intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic – and excluded from broader society, they continue to strive towards constructing family well-being. This chapter sheds new light on Maya families in the Mexican state of Campeche and their changing life cycles. Central to this contribution is the question: How is well-being shaped among the Maya-speaking population in Mexico today?

The chapter is organised into four sections to address the complexity of Maya family well-being. First, it provides a broad description of the Maya family life cycle. The second section develops a theoretical framework, with attention to subjective well-being (SWB), happiness, family, relational well-being (RWB) and the experiences of the poor and excluded. The third section details the methodology implemented in Campeche to assess Maya well-being, followed by the presentation of results, discussion and conclusions.

Brief History of Campeche

Before turning to the substance of the chapter, it is essential to provide a brief overview of the history of Campeche, as this historical context shapes the social and cultural dynamics of Maya-speaking families. Campeche has long been an important part of the Maya civilisation. Located in the eastern region of the Yucatán Peninsula, it was home to a society with notable achievements in astronomy, calligraphy (without formal writing) and hierarchical organisation. Following the arrival of Spanish conquerors in Mexico between 1519 and 1521, the Yucatán Peninsula was fully conquered in 1546. In 1540, Francisco de Montejo founded the town of San Francisco de Campeche, which became a key Spanish port in the region. Campeche was incorporated into the Viceroyalty of New Spain, where its economy was based on agriculture and trade, rooted in the exploitation of natural resources and Indigenous labour. Despite this, Campeche resisted colonial control more strongly than other areas. For example, in 1517, off the Campeche coast, Maya leader Moch Couoh led 'The Battle of the Bad Fight' (Batalla de la Mala Pelea), demonstrating the courage and wisdom of local resistance. Campeche also played an important role in Mexico's struggle for independence, which was achieved in 1821.

Throughout the 19th century, Campeche faced political and social upheaval, including conflicts with Maya communities and foreign interventions. The Caste War (1847–1901), a rebellion of the Maya population, profoundly affected Campeche and Yucatán, leading to extensive loss of life, particularly among Indigenous people, and significant land destruction. The 20th century brought further transformations. Campeche was governed almost uninterruptedly by the Institutional Revolutionary Party until 2018. The discovery of oil in the Gulf of Mexico in the 1970s spurred the development of the petroleum industry, producing national economic growth. However, this wealth did not significantly change the conditions of the Indigenous population of Campeche. Despite ranking as one of the Mexican states with the highest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [INEGI], 2020*), Campeche continues to be marked by widespread poverty and inequality.

The historical development of Campeche is inseparable from the history of its land and people. The family cycles of the Maya community remain closely tied to the cycles of the land, with rituals embedded in family life that profoundly shape life satisfaction and the collective experience of well-being.

Mayan Family Cycles

Family rites among Maya-speaking communities, historically rooted in nature and the land, are undergoing significant transformations, reshaping the very concept of family within these communities. This raises important questions about the boundaries between traditional and modern values and how these transitions are negotiated across generations.

Traditionally, Maya peasant families constructed their well-being in close connection to the cultivation of land, with life-cycle rituals deeply intertwined with agricultural practices (Cahuich-Campos et al., 2014). In Kankí, the Maya-speaking community in the state of Campeche, three major family rituals mark the passage of life: *jéets méek*, *ch'a cháak* and *janal pixián*.

The first ritual, *jéets méek*, occurs within the child's first months of life. As one Maya woman from Kankí explained, this rite is a 'family ritual that each one can be responsible for the other' (Mayan woman, Kankí, personal communication, 2023). The name itself comes from the way the child is carried astride on the left hip of an adult, usually a godparent or relative chosen for the ceremony. *Jéets* means 'to lighten' or 'to ease the load' while *méek* translates as 'to embrace'. So, *jéets méek* refers to 'the lightening through the embrace' literally. Functionally, the ceremony seeks to promote the child's physical, intellectual and social development while introducing the infant to the community and spiritual world and often likened to a Mayan baptism, which introduces the deities to the infant. However, its more profound significance lies in symbolically marking the beginning of life's cycle. Nevertheless, according to interviews (Mayan woman living in Kankí, June 2023), *jéets méek* is no longer practiced in Kankí. Elders expressed sadness that younger generations feel 'ashamed' of these ancestral practices, preferring, instead what one respondent described as the 'digital world

of superstitions' found on social media and mobile platforms (Elder, Kankí, personal communication, 2023). This generational shift underscores how global technology and modern influences are reshaping family relations and weakening traditional forms of transmission.

The second family cycle is tied to land/agriculture and the milpa system. The ritual of Ch'a Cháak, or rain ceremony, is performed during the dry months of June and July to petition Cháak, the Maya rain god, for water essential to sustaining crops (Czarnecki, 2020). The milpa – a diversified agricultural system also known as *kool* in Mayan language – is central to the household economy, food security and sovereignty of families. In Maya oral tradition, as recounted in the story of 'The Three Working Brothers', the milpa is described as synonymous with family, with sons labouring daily in the fields to support their household: *ma' ts'o'ok u bëelo'obi', chéen tu k'ubahubao'ob ti' u meyahil kòol* ['they didn't get married, they just gave themselves to work in the cornfields' (in Spanish '*... no se casaron, solo se entregaron al trabajo de milpa*')]. For older generations, the milpa embodies not only economic sustenance but also moral and cultural belonging.

However, younger generations increasingly reject agricultural labour, preferring alternative livelihoods. One interviewee emphasised that 'young people do not want to work in the milpa anymore' (Elder farmer, Kankí, personal communication, 2023). This trend was situated within broader concerns about the arrival of Mennonite farmers in Campeche, who have acquired significant tracts of land. While their productivity is high – producing maize, watermelon and other crops for export to the United States and Canada – their methods have raised concerns. As another respondent argued, Mennonites are 'destroying the land using pesticides,' exploiting the countryside and paying Mayan peasants low daily wages of approximately \$12 USD (Community leader, Kankí, personal communication, 2023). These accounts illustrate how cash crop models of production are reshaping rural economies, displacing traditional Maya agricultural practices and exacerbating environmental and social inequalities.

The third family cycle is *janal pixián*, or 'food for the souls', celebrated annually as part of the Yucatec Day of the Dead. This festival blends Maya ritual with Spanish Catholic practices of commemorating the deceased on November 1 and 2. For Maya families, *janal pixián* represents a significant moment of reunion, as relatives gather to honour and remember ancestors. Altars are elaborately decorated with candles, marigolds, photographs, icons and offerings of traditional food and drink, which are believed to nourish the souls of the departed. A key element of the ritual is the use of the *piib*, an underground oven used to prepare sacred foods with rainwater – symbols of fertility and connection to the underworld. This ritual cosmology echoes the concept of *Xibalba*, the Maya underworld described in the *Popol Vuh* (1954). *Janal pixián* thus embodies both cultural continuity and adaptation, blending Indigenous and Catholic traditions while maintaining its central role in family cohesion.

Taken together, these three ceremonies – *jéets méek*, *ch'a cháak* and *janal pixián* – illustrate how Maya family well-being has historically been constructed through cyclical rituals linking family, land and spirituality. Nevertheless, the respondents interviewed show that these rites are transforming. For elders,

ceremonies hold profound meaning, symbolising identity, continuity and resilience. For younger generations, however, they carry less weight, often supplanted by modern ideals of independence, education and urban opportunities, particularly for women who increasingly seek emancipation from traditional roles. At the same time, tourism has revitalised some interest in these ceremonies, as they are increasingly marketed as cultural attractions (Taylor, 2014). Ultimately, Maya family cycles reveal the tension between ancestral traditions and the pressures of globalisation, modernisation and shifting gender dynamics. This transformation makes the research question what the boundaries of these transformations are between traditional values and modern practices and how they shape the future of Maya family well-being.

Theory Approximation

This section focuses on four theoretical concepts central to the study of Maya families and well-being: SWB, happiness and family, RWB and the poor-excluded division.

Subjective Well-Being

In the Global North, well-being is generally associated with individual achievements, emphasising people's evaluations of their lives rather than their immediate feelings (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020).

Moreover, development discourses in the Global North frequently emphasise caring for the well-being of the poorest populations in the Global South. The Human Development Index, developed by Amartya Sen, situates agency as the principal modus operandi of human capabilities (Sen, 1985). Sen (2007) explained that the 'promotion of the person' and the 'pursuit of the person's overall agency goals' are deeply interconnected, as the latter encompasses goals that extend beyond self-interest, including those that contribute to the well-being of others (p. 275). Agency, in this sense, is rooted in individual freedom to act or refrain from acting, with the capacity to transform conditions and make a difference in the world (Sen, 1996).

Sen's theory also points to the insufficiency of income alone in ensuring well-being, a point emphasised in the Easterlin paradox. As Jordan (2008) observed, individuals 'appear to be addicted to ever higher income and consumption, driven by the compulsion to maximise a form of utility that does not correspond to well-being', but this does not translate into greater life satisfaction (p. 111). Rising costs, particularly the increase in housing prices relative to household income in the last decade, have further underscored the limitations of income as a measure of well-being (OECD, 2019).

SWB refers to individuals' evaluations of life in both cognitive and affective terms. Maddux (2018) described SWB as 'a psychological construct concerned not with what people have or what happens to them but with how they think and

feel about what they have and what happens to them' (pp. 3–4). Within Western thought, two dominant traditions shape SWB: the hedonic and the eudaimonic. Jeremy Bentham's hedonic approach emphasised the balance between pleasure and pain within a utilitarian framework. In contrast, the eudaimonic tradition, derived from Aristotle's notion of *Eudaimonia*, emphasises self-realisation as the guiding principle of human flourishing.

Although these conceptualisations have been highly influential, they emerge primarily from Global North contexts. Contemporary SWB differs between the North and South, with the former being more individualistic and the latter more communitarian. Phillips et al. (2022) criticised neoliberal tendencies in the pursuit of happiness, highlighting how these processes narrow the meaning of well-being in ways that neglect relational and collective dimensions.¹ In the Global South, by contrast, communitarian values remain central despite the imposition of neoliberal policies. Indigenous groups, however, remain underrepresented in well-being studies (Reyes-García et al., 2021). While some research has examined disparities in well-being in ancient Maya communities (Munson & Scholnick, 2022), contemporary perspectives that account for Indigenous frameworks remain limited.

Happiness and Family

Happiness is often linked to life satisfaction, a concept promoted by international economic organisations as part of a lifestyle-centred approach to development (Meisel, 2007). Such approaches, however, frequently impose Western notions of lifestyle and individual happiness on less developed countries.

Family is a key determinant of happiness, particularly in collectivist societies.² In pre-Hispanic Latin America, Maya kinship served as a cornerstone of social organisation (Gillespie, 2000), and kinship continues to shape support networks despite market integration and economic change (Hackman & Kramer, 2021). Nevertheless, much of the literature on contemporary family structures remains dominated by Western models (Ramos et al., 2022). There is a pressing need for studies that incorporate Indigenous voices and frameworks – in this case, Mayan perspectives – to understand family cycles and patterns of happiness.

Relational Well-Being

Sarah White (2017) introduced the concept of RWB, which is 'grounded in a relational ontology that views relationality as logically prior to individuals, rather than vice versa; it celebrates multiplicity and resists fixity, seeking always to extend possibilities for relationship' (p. 133).³ RWB emphasises the significance of connections within neighbourhoods and communities, extending to forms of social cohesion. Analogous concepts, such as *guanxi* in China, underscore the importance of non-familial relationships in shaping social life (Czarnecki & Vargas Chanes, 2023).

RWB encompasses ‘relationships between (a) the individual and the collective; (b) the people and the state; (c) the people and the environment; and (d) the people and power’ (Mahali et al., 2018, p. 392). Kinship and neighbourhood ties are particularly significant in shaping Mayan family structures, yet little research has assessed how RWB influences Mayan conceptions of subjective well-being.

Poor–Excluded Division

Poverty and exclusion can be understood through both subjective and objective lenses. From an objective perspective, data from the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL, 2020) show that in Tenabo, Campeche – where Kankí is located – poverty decreased from 67% (6,409 individuals) in 2010 to 55.1% (6,116 individuals) in 2015 and 53.9% (6,513 individuals) in subsequent years. Despite this decline, more than half of the population continues to live in poverty.

Kenyon et al. (2002) identified nine dimensions of social exclusion: economic, societal, social networks, organised political, personal political, personal, living space, temporal and mobility. Addressing these requires targeted interventions such as family empowerment programs, particularly those designed to strengthen women’s decision-making and protect Indigenous children (Tsey et al., 2005). In Mexico, Indigenous populations experience consistently higher levels of poverty and exclusion than non-Indigenous groups, with their living conditions marked by long-term precariousness (CONEVAL, 2019). Greater attention is needed to investigate the mechanisms by which poverty and exclusion are reproduced, particularly in Indigenous contexts.

Together, these four theoretical perspectives highlight the multidimensional nature of well-being and the importance of situating it in specific cultural and socio-economic contexts. SWB emphasises individual evaluations of life, yet in Maya communities, these evaluations are shaped as much by relational and communal ties as by individual agency. Happiness and family underscore the centrality of kinship and intergenerational obligations, which continue to influence how well-being is experienced despite economic modernisation. RWB shifts the focus towards the broader web of social, environmental and political relationships that sustain or constrain Indigenous families. At the same time, the poor–excluded division situates these dynamics within persistent structural inequalities faced by Indigenous populations in Mexico. Taken together, these concepts provide a framework for analysing how Maya families in Campeche negotiate well-being in conditions marked by poverty, exclusion and rapid social change while also maintaining cultural practices that link family, land and spirituality.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate a holistic understanding of family well-being

among Maya-speaking households. The mixed-methods strategy enabled the parallel collection and analysis of both numerical and narrative data, thus allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the research questions. Quantitative data provided a broad overview of household characteristics and well-being indicators. In contrast, qualitative data added depth and context, capturing cultural practices and lived experiences that are not readily visible in numerical measures. This methodological complementarity was particularly well-suited for analysing the structure of well-being within Maya families, whose practices are deeply embedded in cultural traditions and social relations.

Study Site

The research study was conducted in Kankí, a small Maya-speaking community located in the municipality of Tenabo, Campeche, southern Mexico. Tenabo was historically part of the flourishing Maya civilisation as early as the first century CE. Today, Kankí is a rural village with approximately 200 inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [INEGI], 2020). The site was selected not only because of its cultural and historical significance but also due to existing research collaborations with the Faculty of Social Work at the Instituto Campechano, which facilitated access and contextual knowledge.

Further justification for the choice of this setting was based on its documented economic and social underdevelopment, high levels of poverty and inequality and the considerable proportion of Maya-speaking residents.

Quantitative Component

The quantitative strand consisted of a household survey administered to 73 participants, of whom 53 were women and 20 were men. Most respondents reported speaking the Maya language. A non-probability sampling strategy was employed due to the small population size and logistical constraints. Surveys were conducted at midday, when many men were engaged in agricultural labour on the *milpa*, resulting in higher female participation.

The hypothesis guiding this study's quantitative analysis is that general well-being is positively influenced by happiness and RWB but negatively affected by feelings of poverty and exclusion. Furthermore, it is posited that happiness derived from family constitutes the strongest contributor to overall well-being.

Inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years of age, permanent residents of Kankí and members of a household structure relevant to the study of family well-being. Exclusion criteria included refusal or inability to provide informed consent.

Although the survey captured more women than men, this was viewed as an opportunity rather than a limitation, as it reflected women's central role in family organisation and household well-being, which is often overlooked in rural indigenous research.

Guided by SWB theory, the questionnaire was structured around four concepts: (i) SWB, (ii) RWB, (iii) Family Happiness and (iv) Feelings of poverty and exclusion.⁴

The central hypothesis tested was that general well-being is positively associated with happiness and RWB but negatively associated with feelings of poverty and exclusion. It was further hypothesised that happiness derived from family relationships is the strongest component of well-being.

Note that RWB basically represents the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood community. Therefore, RWB should logically be an ascendant of SWB but a consequence of family happiness.

Qualitative Component

The qualitative strand comprised in-depth interviews conducted with participants drawn from the survey population. These interviews contextualised the survey findings by exploring how families define, negotiate and sustain well-being within the broader conditions of poverty, inequality and cultural transformation. Participants reflected on family cycles, ritual practices and intergenerational changes, offering insight into areas not captured by standardised survey instruments. The interviews also revealed tensions between traditional Maya values and the pressures of modernisation, migration and neoliberal policies, thus enriching the analysis with lived experience.

The qualitative analysis is guided by the question: How is well-being shaped among the residents of Kanki?

Rationale for Mixed Methods

The decision to employ a mixed-methods design was justified on both theoretical and practical grounds. Theoretically, family well-being cannot be reduced to economic indicators alone, as it is also embedded in cultural practices, kinship obligations and collective values. Quantitative surveys alone would have been insufficient to capture these dimensions, making qualitative inquiry essential. Practically, previous research conducted in the same community under the guidance of the Faculty of Social Work at the Instituto Campechano demonstrated that integrating quantitative breadth with qualitative depth generates more robust insights into Indigenous family dynamics. The mixed-methods approach, therefore, allowed this study to capture both measurable aspects of family well-being and the lived, culturally situated meanings that sustain them.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Method Results

In this study, four concepts (latent variables) were examined: SWB, RWB, Poor and Excluded and Happiness from Family. Fig. 3.1 illustrates a path diagram. In the path diagram, the direction and strength of the associations are represented

with arrows (i.e., ‘estimated standardised coefficients’) and the concepts with ellipses (i.e., the ‘latent variables’). In Kanki, Maya households that reported greater family happiness also reported both greater RWB and greater SWB. In practical terms, family happiness had a small-to-moderately strong association with RWB and a moderately strong association with SWB. In terms of precision, both associations were statistically unlikely due to random chance alone. This means that we may interpret them as *statistically interesting* as they provided indirect evidence for the relationship.

In turn, RWB demonstrated an even stronger association with SWB than family-based happiness (in contrast to the study hypothesis). For example, RWB accounted for roughly 17% of the variation in SWB (compared to 11% for family-based happiness). Meaning that, this association between RWB and SWB between was moderate strength. In terms of precision, the association between RWB and SWB was statistically unlikely due to random chance alone (i.e., *interesting*). Again, the result provided indirect evidence for the relationship.

Collectively, these findings support the hypothesised relationships. Specifically, these findings suggest that both family and RWB exert moderately strong influences on SWB.

However, family happiness showed negligible association with feelings of poverty and exclusion. Similarly, the association between feelings of poverty and exclusion and RWB respectively SWB was negligible in practical terms. Therefore, relational factors, rather than individual ones (poverty and exclusion), are more important in shaping SWB. Especially, interesting is that RWB was

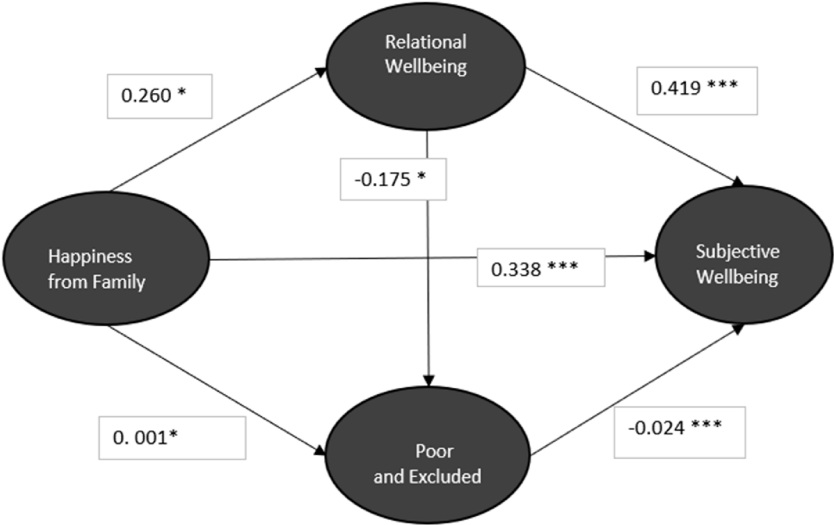


Fig. 3.1. Model Results. (* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$).
Source: Own elaboration based on SmartPLS v4.

seemingly more important than other factors. Again, recall that RWB captures sense of belonging to the community; therefore, the importance implication of community will be elaborated in the Discussion and Conclusion section. Before that, the deeper meaning of community will be explored in the qualitative analysis.

Qualitative Method Results

The quantitative results corroborated the insights derived from the qualitative phase of the study, as illustrated in Fig. 3.2. Among the Mayan-speaking population, there is a pronounced sense of familial belonging. Family emerged as a central source of happiness, as evidenced by participant statements such as ‘family who are united and never let each other fall,’ ‘seeing my family healthy at work, living together, and that everyone gets together to eat,’ and ‘family is the most important thing and achieving your goals’ (Mayan woman, Kankí, personal communication, 2023). Other respondents highlighted emotional harmony within the household: ‘being with the family without disputes’ and ‘being with the family and having a good family coexistence’ (Mayan woman, Kankí, personal communication, 2023).

Peaceful family life was also closely associated with well-being: ‘happiness is being calm with the family’, and ‘being calm is being happy, that is why I like living with my family’ (Multiple respondents from the Mayan community, Kankí, personal communication, 2023). Family was seen as fulfilling not only emotional needs but also necessities. One participant stated, ‘I am happy with

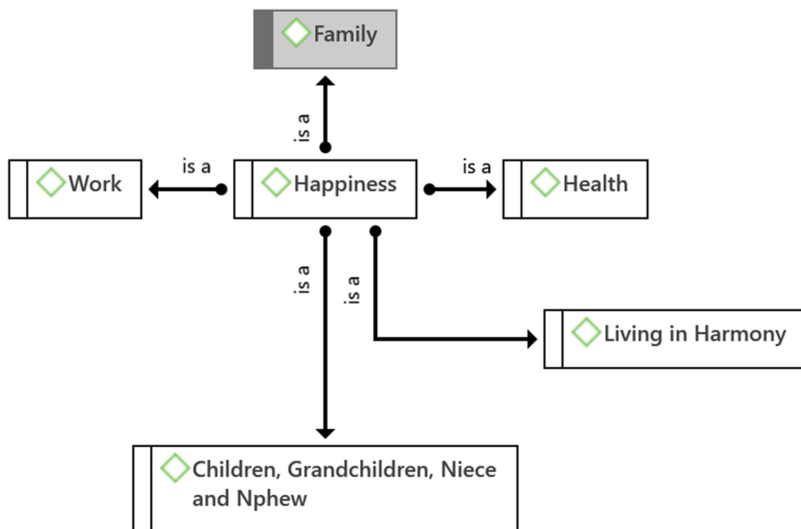


Fig. 3.2. Qualitative Method Results: Core Nodes.

everything I can do with my family and that is my food' while another shared 'although food is not always on the table, I feel happy with my family'. Material wealth was not deemed essential to happiness: 'I am happy with the little money; the most important thing is my family'. Family can bring harmony and equilibrium. One participant stated, 'The neighbours are the ones who push me aside the most, but my family makes me happy'.

Children were frequently cited as a core source of happiness. Participants expressed sentiments such as: 'I am pleased with my children, as long as they are happy, because it cost me a lot to get pregnant', 'my children's health as well as my parents', and that is all', 'be with my children, my grandchildren, with my daughter-in-law' and 'happiness is my children, grandchildren'. Others noted: 'The fulfilment of my children and their living without lack generates my happiness', 'I am happy with my children, with my family, I am happy, my son is happy, so am I' and 'it gives me lots of joy to see my children.'

Health was also identified as a fundamental component of happiness: 'happiness is health, then living with my family, with my community', 'being healthy, that the children are well, that makes me happy' and 'having a healthy family, and that my children fulfil their goals and be good children'. The combination of family and health was significant for respondents: 'happiness is seeing your family healthy'.

Education was highlighted as a primary aspiration for parents, with happiness linked to their children's academic success: 'happiness is to see that my children study and have a good future', and 'the most important thing is that the children finish their studies.'

Participants also reported a strong sense of belonging within their local communities. Expressions such as 'helping each other', 'support at work' and 'that the community advances for the benefit of all' reflected this communal orientation. Neighbourly ties are important factors of building mutual recognition inside and outside village. Agricultural products, such as bean, corn and calabaza, can be easily sold when networking is developed.

Life satisfaction was associated with cultural celebrations and government aid: 'Christmas is coming, we are happy, the government helps, so we are happy'. An outlier case was also identified: 'I do not maintain family ties; they think differently and exclude me'. Additionally, one woman reported experiencing racial discrimination as a significant source of unhappiness: 'The fact of being Indigenous makes me feel excluded, the rich do not appreciate the poor'. However, for mostly all of participants, the family in principle is the source of happiness (see [Fig. 3.2](#)).

While the quantitative data indicated high levels of satisfaction with RWB, interview responses emphasised the centrality of family networks and interpersonal interactions. This finding partially aligns with the results of [Grevenstein et al. \(2019\)](#), who identified significant associations between family engagement and overall well-being.

Conclusions

This study explored the intersection between family and RWB and its contribution to SWB among the Mayan population in southern Mexico. Situated within a broader sociohistorical context, the findings reflect the lived experiences of a community shaped by decades of structural inequality, limited state support and exclusionary neoliberal policies that intensified from the 1980s onward (Czarnecki & Vargas Chanes, 2019). Mexico's weak welfare infrastructure, reliance on informal labour markets and the marginalisation of rural and Indigenous populations have exacerbated poverty, with the Mayan community in the Yucatán Peninsula among the most affected.

The findings reveal that, despite economic hardship and social exclusion, RWB – particularly through family ties – remains central to SWB in Mayan communities. This emphasis on communitarian values contrasts with the dominant Western model of individualistic well-being. While personal achievements are acknowledged, they are often subordinated to the collective happiness of the family unit and local community.

However, this relational model of well-being is not static. Family structures and cultural practices – such as life-cycle rituals like *Jéets Meek*, *Ch'a Cháak* and *Janal Pixián* – are transforming, especially among younger generations. The tension between traditional values and modern influences illustrates the broader processes of cultural negotiation and identity reconfiguration under the pressures of neoliberal modernisation and individualism. As noted by Hackman and Kramer (2021), strong kinship ties may persist even in economically developing contexts, yet our findings suggest that shifting values and material realities increasingly strain these bonds.

This cultural shift echoes classical sociological theories that underscore the importance of the community as source of social meaning and well-being (Tönnies, 1887/2001). Ultimately, this community study contributes to a broader understanding of how well-being is culturally constructed and experienced in the Global South. In contrast to individual-centric models predominant in the Global North, the Mayan concept of well-being is relational, collective and rooted in the maintenance of social harmony within the family and community. Recognising these differences is essential not only for more culturally sensitive well-being metrics but also for developing policies that address intersecting dimensions of inequality, particularly those linked to ethnicity, gender and social cohesion.

This study underscores the importance of expanding well-being research frameworks to incorporate relational and cultural dimensions, particularly in contexts where structural inequalities remain deeply entrenched. Supporting family well-being and preserving cultural resilience.

Finally, further research could benefit from exploring the importance of macro-level determinants that may shape SWB in Mexican indigenous populations such as modernisation, globalisation, colonial legacies or social movements.

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Notes

1. As far as happiness in the Global North is concerned, the short story titled 'Shirt' by Anatol France described a spirit of decadence of the West; the King desires to be happy and wants a shirt from a happy man, but nobody feels happy; finally, a happy man is poor one however without a shirt. The story shows a capitalist model based on the ideology of individual self-creation: 'How to restore life to the exhausted nerves? Wherever there is an atom of Pleasure and Happiness, there will be found the material that repairs the nerves. I prescribe that you must wear the shirt of a happy man. (...) He made a sign that he could not give what they asked of him. He had no shirt' (France, 2014).
2. For this chapter, family includes familial relationships, structure, parenthood and marriage.
3. For this chapter, RWB basically refers to the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood community.
4. Quantitative analysis was guided by SWB theory. As Diener (2000) argued, SWB is 'an all-inclusive entity and can be best considered as a latent variable, a higher order construct composed of a wide spectrum of people's cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives' (p. 34). Latent variable modelling was applied to examine how community-level factors shaped SWB. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was selected as appropriate for small sample sizes. Data analysis was conducted with SmartPLS. v4.
 - (a) Therefore, the quantitative data analysis represented each concept by a unique latent variable (i.e., indirectly observable), each measured with survey-statements/questions (with rating scale ranging from Disagree = 1 to Agree = 10).
 - (b) SWB was measured by the ratings of the questionnaire statements of: 'Your education', 'Your neighbourhood', 'Affective life', 'Social life', 'Life, in general' and 'Country Mexico'.
 - (c) RWB was measured by the ratings of the questionnaire statements of: 'Persons living there help each other', 'Persons living there have good relations' and 'Confidence between persons living there'.
 - (d) Family Happiness was measured by the ratings of the questionnaire statements of: 'At home' and 'With your family'.
 - (e) Feelings of poverty and exclusion was measured by the ratings of the questionnaire statements of: 'Feeling poor' and 'Feeling excluded'.

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