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Perceived comfort and subjective life evaluation in the Philippines: Evidence from a national visioning exercise

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Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas

This study examines how Filipinos evaluate their current life status and determines the factors associated with achieving a “comfortable life”, utilizing data from the National Economic and Development Authority’s (NEDA) Long-Term Vision exercise (*AmBisyon Natin 2040*). Instead of measuring subjective well-being in the conventional sense of happiness or life satisfaction, this research interprets respondents’ self-assessed comfort levels—categorized as “poor,” “sometimes poor and sometimes comfortable,” or “at least comfortable”—as indicators of perceived material security and life adequacy. Using a generalized ordered logistic model, the results demonstrate that income, livelihood, and education are critical drivers of achieving at least a comfortable life. Similarly, satisfaction with health, education, and community environment also increases the likelihood of reporting comfort. The findings provide insights into the socio-economic and environmental correlates of Filipinos’ perceived quality of life, as articulated through this national visioning exercise.

JEL classification: I31, O15, D60, C25.

Keywords: Comfort, subjective life evaluation, quality of life, long-term visioning, Philippines

1. Introduction

Traditional metrics such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and poverty incidence measure the objective aspects of living conditions but fail to capture how citizens perceive their current life situation. The *AmBisyon Natin 2040* survey, conducted by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA),¹ was designed as a long-term visioning exercise to understand the

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¹ NEDA was recently renamed Department of Economy, Planning, and Development (DEPDev)

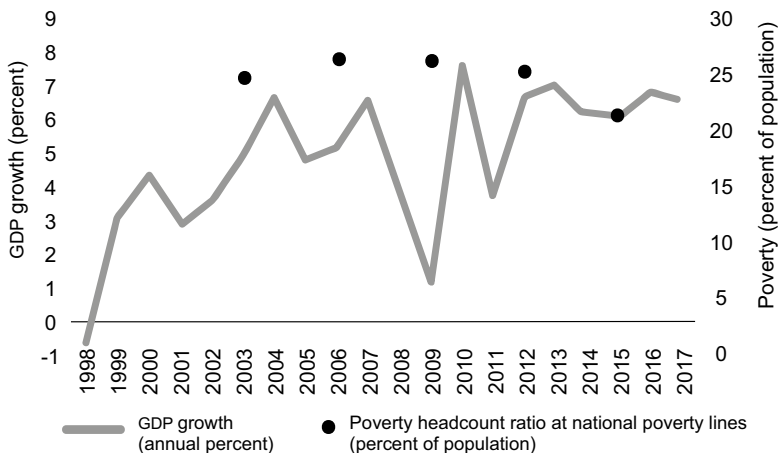
aspirations of Filipinos by 2040 and their views on present circumstances relative to that vision. While not explicitly a survey of happiness or life satisfaction, it presents a unique opportunity to analyze subjective life evaluation—specifically, how people describe their current life as “poor,” “sometimes poor and sometimes comfortable,” or “at least comfortable.”

This notion of comfort reflects material adequacy and security rather than emotional (hedonic) or eudaimonic well-being, providing a valuable perspective on how Filipinos assess their quality of life within their socio-economic context.

The Philippines recorded high levels of economic growth, as measured by its GDP, over the decade preceding the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 1). However, the government has faced criticism for the limited impact on poverty, which remained above 20 percent, despite an average of 5.6 percent GDP growth between 2008 and 2017. This suggests that GDP growth does not automatically translate to poverty alleviation or improved living conditions for Filipinos.

Compounding this, despite at least 20 percent of Filipinos remaining poor, the country has consistently ranked high in global happiness surveys, such as being the third happiest country in the world based on the 41st Annual Global End of Year Survey of Gallup International [Placido 2018]. During the same period, a self-rated poverty survey showed that 44 percent of Filipino families considered themselves “poor” [SWS 2018]. These survey results highlight that Filipinos can still report happiness despite socioeconomic hardships.

**FIGURE 1. Gross Domestic Product (1998-2017)
and Poverty Incidence (2003-2015)**



Source of data: World Bank.

Given these seemingly paradoxical stylized facts, this paper investigates how Filipinos evaluate their current life or comfort level and identifies the significant factors that affect comfort. Using the nationally representative Long-term Vision dataset from NEDA, this paper employs a *generalized ordered logistic regression*

model to evaluate which factors determine the probability that an individual considers his or her life as “poor”, “sometimes poor or sometimes comfortable”, or “at least comfortable.” The factors that affect the subjective life evaluation of Filipinos include those that relate to personal capabilities (i.e., *income and livelihood*) and the quality of institutions (e.g., *public office and services*).

2. Conceptual background and related literature on subjective life evaluation and perceived comfort

Well-being is an ambiguous, multi-faceted concept that lacks a universally accepted definition. Historically, it was often associated with or assessed by measurable economic indicators like GDP per capita. Dissatisfaction with purely income-based measures led to an evolution toward a more multidimensional approach, including frameworks based on capabilities and *functionings* [Sen 1987; 1999], central human capabilities [Nussbaum 1987], intermediate human needs [Doyal and Gough 1991], and axiological needs [Narayan et al. 2000]. Easterlin [2004] treated happiness and life satisfaction as interchangeable measures of overall feelings of well-being. As a result, well-being has been used to refer to terms like quality of life, welfare, living standards, utility, life satisfaction, prosperity, human development, and even happiness.

The recognition of the shortcoming of GDP as an objective measure of well-being by Easterlin [1974] spurred the use of non-economic indicators, such as education, health, environment, and empowerment [Conceicao and Bandura 2008], or adjusted GDP by monetizing social indicators and environmental factors [McGillivray 2007]. These improvements, however, are also limited by issues surrounding quantifying or monetizing factors (e.g., value of leisure, damage of pollution, etc.) and oversimplification using indices.

Recognizing the limitations of objective well-being indicators, Subjective Well-Being (SWB) measures have been introduced to capture “*a multidimensional evaluation of life, including cognitive judgments of life satisfaction and affective evaluations of emotions and moods*” [McGillivray and Clarke 2006]. Yet SWB itself presents conceptual challenges. Economists interchangeably use the terms “happiness” and “life satisfaction” with SWB [Easterlin 2004], although others characterize subjective well-being as “being happy” (*eudaimonia*) while “satisfaction” and “happiness” as “feeling happy” (*hedonic*) [Bruni and Porta 2007]. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines SWB more broadly as “*good mental states, including all of the various evaluation, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences*” [OECD 2013]. This definition encompasses three elements: *life evaluation*, a reflective assessment on a person’s life or its specific aspects; *affect*, referring to emotional states at a point in time; and *eudaimonia*, a sense of meaning, purpose, and psychological functioning.

Economic determinants of life evaluation and perceived comfort include income, employment, and inflation. However, Easterlin [1974] argued in various studies that increasing income does not necessarily make people happier, arguing that people should devote less time in making money and more time for nonpecuniary goals such as family life and health. Dynan and Ravina [2007] found that happiness is based on relative, rather than absolute, income and adapts to changes in income over time. Graham and Pettinato [2002] further observed that happiness may be affected by volatility in income flows, while Di Tella and MacCulloch [2006] demonstrated that social welfare is reduced by higher inflation and unemployment rates. Unemployment, in particular, entails not only pecuniary losses but also diminished self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and social stigma, while inflation erodes purchasing power.

Non-economic determinants of happiness can be grouped into socio-demographic and institutional factors. Happiness has a U-shaped relationship with age [Blanchflower and Oswald 2007], while health status declines throughout the life cycle which has lasting negative effect on happiness [Easterlin 2003; 2004]. Marriage has been shown to increase happiness by providing companionship and mutual support (Stutzer and Frey [2006]; Helliwell [2003]). Behera et al. [2024] examined subjective well-being across 166 countries and showed that social support positively impacts happiness. Shams [2014] reported that education and health positively affect subjective well-being in rural Pakistan.

Institutional factors, including political, economic, and personal freedoms also shape well-being. Frey and Stutzer [2002] argued that individuals report higher well-being in settings with developed institutions and decentralized government, while Veenhoven [2000] identified a positive link between national freedom and happiness. Pontarollo et al. [2020] found that women and indigenous people in Ecuador experience lower well-being, though improvements in education, housing quality, institutional trust, and health insurance mitigate these gaps.

This study contributes to this literature by examining the case of the Philippines, one of the fastest growing developing countries in the period 2010 to 2016, with average GDP growth of 6.4 percent. Yet, as noted earlier, economic growth does not automatically enhance perceived well-being. This paradox—where rising incomes coexist with persistent dissatisfaction—has gained prominence in research on well-being. While much of the literature focuses on advanced economies, fewer studies investigate how individuals in developing countries interpret their economic circumstances amid inequality, informality, and vulnerability. The Philippines provides a particularly relevant case: despite sustained economic expansion and poverty reduction, many Filipinos continue to report feeling economically insecure or “sometimes poor.” Previous empirical studies on happiness and comfort in the Philippines were of limited scope, focusing on narrow subpopulations such as children of farmers [Tolentino and Dullas 2015] or high school students [Galang et al. 2011].

By contrast, this study examines the determinants of perceived comfort, as captured by self-assessed financial status, using nationally representative data from the Philippines. By focusing on the divergence between objective improvements in income and subjective perceptions of economic comfort, this paper contributes to understanding the mechanisms behind the well-being paradox in a developing-country setting.

In this study, the term perceived economic well-being or comfort is not treated as a direct synonym for happiness or SWB as defined in OECD [2013] or Diener et al. [1985]. Instead, it is understood as a measure of self-assessed material sufficiency—a sense of being able to meet basic needs and live with relative ease and stability. This framing aligns with the design and intent of the *AmBisyon Natin 2040* aspiration for a “matatag, maginhawa, at panatag na buhay” (stable, comfortable, and secure life). Comfort is thus treated as a component of perceived quality of life: related to subjective well-being, but more grounded in tangible, resource-based evaluations.

To assess the drivers of perceived economic comfort, the study utilizes nationally representative household data and estimates models linking self-assessed economic status with objective and contextual factors. This framework allows us to test whether perceived economic well-being aligns with objective indicators of welfare or whether structural, institutional, and socio-demographic factors drive the observed divergence. By combining subjective and objective measures within a unified empirical framework, the study offers new evidence on the drivers of subjective life evaluation and the persistence of the economic growth-life satisfaction paradox in the Philippines.

3. Data and methods

3.1. *The NEDA Long-Term Vision (LTV) project*

The analysis draws on data from the *AmBisyon Natin 2040* or Long-Term Vision (LTV) project of NEDA, which surveyed 10,000 respondents nationwide in early 2016, selected through a multi-stage area probability sampling.² Although the survey’s primary purpose was to articulate Filipinos’ aspirations for the future, it also included questions on respondents’ assessment of their current circumstances—whether they consider themselves “poor,” “sometimes

² While the LTV survey was designed to be nationally representative of Filipino adults through multi-stage area probability sampling, minor deviations from official demographic distributions are expected. For instance, the share of respondents with a college degree in the sample (about 10 percent) is slightly lower than the 2015 Census estimate of roughly 11 percent. These differences may stem from (i) variations in timing and coverage between the 2015 Census and the early 2016 fieldwork of the LTV survey and/or (ii) minor precision limitations inherent in the sampling design. Addressing this issue is beyond the scope of the present paper.

poor and sometimes comfortable,” “comfortable,” or “more than comfortable.” While this item was not designed as a formal measure of subjective well-being, it functions as an indicator of self-evaluated comfort and perceived material and socio-economic adequacy. Accordingly, the dependent variable in this study is interpreted as a form of subjective life evaluation, distinct from a conventional measure of happiness or life satisfaction.

The questionnaire has two major sections covering respondents’ future vision and present situation, with questions on general life, standard of living, health, education, employment, urbanization, economy, justice and governance, peace and security, and cultural diversity.

Regarding current life evaluation, 64 percent of respondents described their current life status as “sometimes poor, sometimes comfortable,” while 24 percent reported being “comfortable”, and 11 percent identified as “poor”. This distribution is generally consistent across income classes, except among Class AB, where a majority (56 percent) reported living comfortably or more than comfortably.

In terms of education, 90 percent of respondents did not have a college degree, 31 percent completed high school only, and 14.2 percent attended, but did not finish, college. Across educational attainment groups, most respondents still described their lives as “sometimes poor and sometimes comfortable,” except for those who had attended or completed graduate studies—about half of whom assessed their lives as comfortable or more than comfortable.

More male respondents (11.5 percent) reported being poor than female respondents (10.5 percent). However, slightly more female respondents (64.8 percent) said that their life is sometimes comfortable and sometimes poor. More urban dwellers (27.3 percent) assessed their life as comfortable or more than comfortable compared to those living in rural areas (23.7 percent). A higher proportion of respondents aged 20 years and below (27.6 percent) rated their lives as comfortable or more than comfortable, compared to respondents aged 21 to 40 years.

Current life evaluation also varied by livelihood. Comfort levels were highest among those who managed their own business or were students (around 30 percent), and lowest among part-time workers (18.4 percent). Extended households reported higher level of current life evaluation (29 percent) saying that their life is comfortable or more than comfortable relative to nuclear households (24.2 percent). Additional sources of income improved comfort perception: 34.3 percent of respondents who received remittance in the past 12 months described their life as comfortable or more than comfortable, compared with 24.2 percent among non-recipients. The number of employed household members also affects the respondents’ life evaluation. Only 23.7 percent of the respondents with one employed household member rated their life comfortable or more than comfortable. This level increased to 27 percent for those with two employed household members, 28.9 percent for those with three employed household members, and 37.9 percent for those with four employed household members.

TABLE 1. Weighted proportions of Filipinos' current life evaluation by income class, education, gender, region, work status, and household characteristics

	Weighted proportion in sample	Poor	Sometimes poor/ comfortable	Comfortable	More than comfortable	Sample <i>N</i>
SAMPLE		11.0	63.7	23.9	1.3	
AB	0.6	1.7	42.3	47.0	9.0	60
C1	4.8	2.9	50.4	45.1	1.7	493
C2	17.2	5.0	58.7	34.6	1.7	1,727
D	48.2	9.0	67.9	21.8	1.3	4,784
E	29.2	19.3	62.5	17.2	1.1	2,936
Education						
No formal education	0.1	16.3	83.7	0.0	0.0	6
Some Elementary	7.5	23.6	59.6	15.8	1.1	681
Completed Elementary	10.1	18.5	63.1	17.7	0.7	922
Some High school	17.0	15.1	66.3	16.5	2.1	1,495
Completed High school	35.6	9.3	67.8	21.8	1.1	3,198
Some College	16.4	7.1	63.1	28.4	1.4	1,467
Completed College	10.4	4.7	56.4	37.5	1.4	958
Some Graduate/ Masters	0.1	0.0	56.0	44.0	0.0	9
Completed Graduate/Masters	0.1	0.0	44.7	47.5	7.9	11
Vocational/ Technical	2.7	7.1	68.7	23.0	1.2	238
Sex						
Male	50.3	11.5	62.7	24.5	1.3	5,002
Female	49.7	10.5	64.8	23.4	1.4	4,998
Age						
<20	23.1	9.3	63.1	25.7	1.9	1,827
21-30	31.7	9.8	65.2	23.8	1.3	3,076

TABLE 1. Weighted proportions of Filipinos' current life evaluation (continued)

	Weighted proportion in sample	Poor	Sometimes poor/ comfortable	Comfortable	More than comfortable	Sample <i>N</i>
31-40	25.4	12.8	63.7	22.6	1.0	2,897
41-50	19.8	12.7	62.1	23.9	1.3	2,200
Region						
NCR	12.4	10.3	60.7	28.3	0.7	1,280
CAR	1.8	12.1	48.7	36.8	2.4	170
Ilocos	5.0	8.9	69.8	19.1	2.1	500
Cagayan	3.4	10.8	70.4	16.5	2.2	340
Central Luzon	10.9	15.0	66.7	17.4	0.9	1,110
Calabarzon	13.9	10.6	73.6	15.1	0.8	1,450
Mimaropa	3.1	11.3	73.2	14.9	0.7	290
Bicol	6.0	11.4	70.5	17.2	1.0	570
Western Visayas	8.9	10.7	53.7	32.6	2.9	890
Central Visayas	6.0	3.1	53.0	41.8	2.1	589
Eastern Visayas	4.5	9.7	54.2	35.4	0.6	431
Zamboanga	3.7	24.6	40.4	32.3	2.6	370
Northern Mindanao	4.6	13.0	66.6	19.2	1.2	470
Davao	4.9	10.6	73.2	15.0	1.2	480
Soccsksargen	4.5	8.2	57.4	33.6	0.7	460
Caraga	2.7	10.5	70.8	18.4	0.4	260
ARMM	3.7	7.7	65.1	25.2	2.0	340
Urbanity						
Rural	54.3	11.3	65.1	22.3	1.4	5,380
Urban	45.7	10.7	62.1	26.0	1.3	4,620

TABLE 1. Weighted proportions of Filipinos' current life evaluation (continued)

	Weighted proportion in sample	Poor	Sometimes poor/ comfortable	Comfortable	More than comfortable	Sample <i>N</i>
Work status						
Working/ Employed in a company	27.8	11.1	63.0	24.7	1.2	2,930
Manages/ maintains own business	10.5	8.0	60.2	30.1	1.8	1,133
Working part-time	8.2	17.8	63.9	17.2	1.2	864
Not working	40.4	11.2	66.7	20.8	1.3	4,058
Studying	13.1	8.2	58.8	31.4	1.7	1,015
Household type						
Single/Nuclear Family	98.1	11.0	63.8	23.9	1.3	9,819
Extended/with non-relatives	1.9	8.2	62.8	26.0	3.0	181
Number of employed in the household						
1	61.9	13.1	63.2	22.5	1.2	6,235
2	29.2	7.9	65.2	25.6	1.4	2,908
3	6.7	7.0	64.0	27.4	1.5	646
4	1.6	4.1	58.0	33.7	4.2	150
5	0.6	6.9	57.8	29.8	5.5	55
6	0.1	0.0	84.4	0.0	15.6	6
Received remittance in the past 12 months						
No	89.4	11.8	64.0	22.9	1.3	8,960
Yes	10.6	4.1	61.6	32.4	1.9	1,040

Source: Authors' calculations, based on the data from the Long-Term Vision (LTV) project (also known as AmBisyon Natin 2040 project) of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA). Note: We excluded from the sample those with missing information for a particular question.

For this study, only questions that evaluate certain life domains (e.g., education, health, etc.) were included for generating indices. Moreover, response options to some questions in the survey instrument have a five-point scale, while others have a seven-point scale or even a three-point scale. For instance, the response options to the question that asked respondents whether they are afraid that they will not be able to give their family their everyday needs are in the following four-point scale: (1) definitely disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) somewhat agree, and (4) definitely agree. In order to make the scales uniform, responses were reduced to only two options to reflect either negative or positive evaluation on a certain subject or life domain.

The ordinal responses to the included questions were also recoded to reflect uniform direction. For instance, the previously mentioned question that asked respondents whether they are afraid that they will not be able to give their family their everyday needs, the scale was reversed to make the responses reflect (1) negative to (2) positive direction of the responses.

3.2. Methods

This study uses respondents' current life evaluation as a proxy for perceived comfort or material well-being, in contrast with hedonic or eudaimonic measures of subjective well-being. The original four categories—*poor*, *sometimes poor* and *sometimes comfortable*, *comfortable*, and *more than comfortable*—were collapsed into three by creating the “at least comfortable” ($n = 2,487$) category which combined the “more than comfortable” ($n = 128$) and “comfortable” ($n = 2,359$) categories. This prevents sparse categories that may produce negative predicted probabilities in ordered responses [Williams 2016]. The resulting dependent variable thus consists of (1) poor, (2) sometimes poor, sometimes comfortable, and (3) at least comfortable.

Given the ordinal dependent variable, an ordered logistic regression model is first considered [Liu and Koirala 2012]:

$$\ln(Y_j') = \ln\left(\frac{\pi(x)}{1 - \pi(x)}\right) \quad (1)$$

$$= \alpha_j + (-\beta_1 X_1 - \beta_2 X_2 - \dots - \beta_p X_p)$$

where $\pi_j(x) = \pi(Y \leq j \mid x_1, x_2, \dots, x_p)$ refers to the probability of being at or below category j , given the set of predictors, $j = 1, 2, \dots, J-1$, while α_j are the cut-off points and $\beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_p$ are the logit coefficients. For J number of categories, the Proportional Odds (PO) model estimates $J-1$ cut-off points.

However, the PO assumption of the ordered logit model is strict and often violated. Violations may occur due to the large number of explanatory variables [Brant 1990], large sample size [Clogg and Shihadeh 1994], or inclusion of continuous covariates

[Allison 2012].³ To remedy this, we resort to an alternative parameterization of the model. Specifically, we fit the partial proportional odds (PPO) model or the generalized ordinal logit model using the command `gologit2` in Stata.

The generalized ordinal logistic regression model is an extension of the PO model by relaxing the PO assumption for some or all the predictor variables [Liu 2016]. As proposed by Fu [1998] and Williams [2006], this model can be expressed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{logit} [\pi(Y > j \mid x_1, x_2, \dots, x_p)] &= \ln \left(\frac{\pi(Y > j \mid x_1, x_2, \dots, x_p)}{\pi(Y \leq j \mid x_1, x_2, \dots, x_p)} \right) \\ &= \alpha_j + (\beta_{1j}X_1 + \beta_{2j}X_2 + \dots + \beta_{pj}X_p) \end{aligned}$$

where α_j refers to the intercepts or cut-off points, while $\beta_{1j}, \beta_{2j}, \dots, \beta_{pj}$ are the logit coefficients of the predictor variable X_1, X_2, \dots, X_p , respectively [Liu 2016].

This alternative model relaxes the PO assumption and allows the effects of the explanatory variables to vary with the point at which the categories of the dependent variables are dichotomized [Williams 2005]. When only some predictor variables violate the PO assumption in the ordered logit model, the partial proportionate odds framework allows these variables to vary across the different thresholds while keeping the others constrained.

In contrast with the PO model, which estimates the probability of being at or below category j , the PPO model estimates the probability of being beyond category j versus being at or below it. The logit coefficient (β) is interpreted as the change in log-odds of being beyond a category, while the odds ratio (OR) represents multiplicative change in those odds.

For this study, the generalized ordinal logit model was used to estimate the effects of “life domains” on Filipinos’ overall life evaluation.⁴ We include six life domain indices constructed from survey questions manually grouped into thematic domains: constraints/worries, education, employment, health, peace, or governance. Table 2 lists the questions grouped per life evaluation domain.

Each life evaluation domain k is summarized as:

$$I^k = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^n X_j^k}{\sum_{j=1}^n X_{\max, j}^k},$$

where: X_j is the actual score of the respondent for each question j
 X_{\max} is the maximum score for each question j

³ The brant command in Stata, as proposed by Brant [1990] was used to test the proportional odds assumption. A significant test statistic means that the parallel odds assumption has been violated.

⁴ We also estimate alternative specifications using a generalized ordinal logit model applied to (1) evaluations of life, community, government, and country; (2) a set of factors derived from factor analysis reflecting perceptions, trust, and satisfaction with governance; and (3) a set of components generated through principal component analysis (PCA). The full results are available from the authors upon request.

Control variables include income class, education, gender, island group (i.e., Luzon, Visayas, or Mindanao), location (i.e., rural or urban), work status, household type, number of employed household members, number of household members, and whether the household received remittances in the past 12 months.

TABLE 2. Groupings of questions according to life evaluation domains

Life evaluation domain		Questions
Worry-free Life (Constraints)	1	I am NOT afraid that my family will lose our house [1 – Disagree, 2 - Agree]
	2	I am NOT afraid that I or my family will lose our source of income [1 – Disagree, 2 - Agree]
	3	I am NOT afraid that I will not be able to give my family their everyday needs [1 – Disagree, 2 - Agree]
	4	In everyday occurrences, please tell me if you have worries about having a job or source of income. [1 - Worried, 2 - Not worried]
Education	1	Satisfaction on Technical or Vocational school [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]
	2	Satisfaction on Private University [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]
	3	Satisfaction on Public University [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]
	4	Satisfaction on Private High School [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]
	5	Satisfaction on Private Elementary Schools [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]
	6	Satisfaction on Public HS [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]
	7	Satisfaction on Public Elementary [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]
Employment	1	Do you believe that you have many or few opportunities or chances to get a decent job or business? [1 – None, 2 - Many]
	2	In this time, everyone will be able to find a job if they want to. [1 – Disagree, 2 - Agree]
	3	It is good for the country, in the next 25 years, if the citizens will stay in the country instead of going abroad to work. [1 – Disagree, 2 - Agree]
	4	When the year 2040 comes, everyone who wants to work should be able to find a decent job [1 – Disagree, 2 - Agree])
Health	1	Are you not satisfied, somewhat satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied with the private hospitals? [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]

TABLE 2. Groupings of questions according to life evaluation domains (continued)

Life evaluation domain	Questions
2	Are you not satisfied, somewhat satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied with the public health center employees? [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]
3	Are you not satisfied, somewhat satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied with the public hospital employees? [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]
4	Are you not satisfied, somewhat satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied with the public health centers? [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]
5	Are you not satisfied, somewhat satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied with the public hospitals? [1 - Not satisfied, 2 -So satisfied]
6	When 2040 comes, my health is well until I grow old. [1 - Not confident, 2 - Confident]

The inclusion of subjective variables such as satisfaction, perceptions, and confidence is consistent with established approaches in the well-being and quality-of-life literature, where both objective and subjective dimensions jointly shape individuals' life evaluation (Diener et al. [1985]; Frey and Stutzer [2002]; OECD [2013]). These measures capture qualitative aspects of people's lived experience—trust in institutions, satisfaction with services, or feelings of safety—that objective indicators alone cannot represent. In the context of the AmBisyon Natin 2040 survey, these variables are particularly relevant because the exercise was designed to elicit how Filipinos perceive their current life and environment relative to their aspirations for a “matatag, maginhawa, at panatag na buhay.” Hence, the inclusion of subjective explanatory factors is not intended to imply causality but to account for perceived institutional and community conditions that co-vary with respondents' self-assessed comfort or life evaluation. This approach is consistent with prior empirical work treating subjective perceptions as proximate determinants of well-being evaluations rather than as outcomes (Boarini et al. [2012]; Ngoo, Tey, and Tan [2015]).

4. Results and discussion

Table 3 presents the mean values of the indices for each category of the covariates. For instance, individuals with college degrees express relatively higher evaluations about the quality of the education in the country ($\mu = 0.93$), employment conditions ($\mu = 0.92$), health services ($\mu = 0.93$), peace and security ($\mu = 0.64$), community environment ($\mu = 0.65$), and governance ($\mu = 0.76$), compared to those without a college degree.

TABLE 3. Mean values of indices on education, employment, health, security, and governance evaluations

COVARIATES	Education	Employment	Health	Peace and security	Safe community	Governance
Education						
With college degree (n=853)	0.93	0.92	0.93	0.64	0.65	0.76
Without college degree (n=7,718)	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.60	0.75
Gender						
Male (n=4,116)	0.88	0.90	0.92	0.63	0.61	0.75
Female (n=4,455)	0.89	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.61	0.75
Location						
Luzon (n=4,670)	0.86	0.92	0.91	0.65	0.62	0.73
Visayas (n=1,823)	0.93	0.90	0.94	0.61	0.60	0.76
Mindanao (n=2,078)	0.92	0.90	0.92	0.60	0.59	0.79
Urban (n=3,688)	0.89	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.62	0.74
Rural (n=4,883)	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.60	0.76
Age (ave=31)						
<31 (n=4,152)	0.89	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.61	0.76
31 (n=238)	0.89	0.92	0.93	0.63	0.60	0.75
>31 (n=4,181)	0.89	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.61	0.76
Work status						
Working/employed in a company (n=2,471)	0.89	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.61	0.75
Own business (n=951)	0.90	0.92	0.92	0.63	0.62	0.74
Part-time work (n=752)	0.86	0.88	0.91	0.62	0.58	0.76
Studying (n=825)	0.90	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.62	0.76

TABLE 3. Mean values of indices on education, employment, health, security, and governance evaluations (continued)

COVARIATES	Education	Employment	Health	Peace and security	Safe community	Governance
Household characteristics						
Living with extended family members (n=144)	0.93	0.91	0.94	0.64	0.63	0.77
Living with nuclear family (n=8,427)	0.89	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.61	0.75
Number of household members (ave=1.32)						
<2 (n=6,623)	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.61	0.75
2 (n=1,364)	0.89	0.91	0.92	0.64	0.62	0.73
>2 (n=584)	0.90	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.61	0.74
Number of employed household members (ave=1.44)						
<2 (n=5,443)	0.88	0.90	0.92	0.63	0.60	0.75
2 (n=2,433)	0.89	0.92	0.92	0.64	0.62	0.74
>2 (n=695)	0.90	0.92	0.92	0.64	0.62	0.86
Received remittance						
Yes (n=863)	0.92	0.93	0.92	0.64	0.63	0.74
No (n=7,708)	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.63	0.61	0.75

Our specification has a $\chi^2(10)$ of 11.26, and p -value of 0.3373, which is not significant—indicating that proportional odds assumptions for the entire model are upheld.⁵ The estimates for our model are shown in Table 4.

Personal characteristics and capability. Gender and age have significant impacts on subjective life evaluation. The odds of assessing life as “more than comfortable” are 15.29 percent higher for males ($\beta_{male}^{spc} = 0.14 \mid OR_{male}^{spc} = 1.15$) than the odds for females. On the other hand, a unit increase in actual age decreases the odds of being “not poor” (i.e., sometimes poor or comfortable or better) by 1.22 percent ($\beta_{age}^p = -0.01 \mid OR_{age}^p = 0.99$). However, since the odds ratio is nearly equal to 1, the practical significance of age is minimal.

Livelihood and sources of income for the family, as well as the ability to work and earn income, significantly shape life evaluations. Compared to those in Income Class E, individuals in higher income classes have higher likelihood of evaluating life as “more than comfortable.” The odds for Class D to evaluate life as “more than comfortable” is 29.66 percent higher ($\beta_D^{spc} = 0.26 \mid OR_D^{spc} = 1.30$) than the odds for the respondents in Income Class E. These odds are 165.22 percent higher for those in Income Class C2 ($\beta_{C2}^* = 0.98 \mid OR_{C2}^* = 2.65$), 361.22 percent higher for those in Income Class C1 ($\beta_{C1}^* = 1.53 \mid OR_{C1}^* = 4.61$), and 373.59 percent higher for the highest Income Class AB ($\beta_{AB}^{spc} = 1.56 \mid OR_{AB}^{spc} = 4.74$).

Household characteristics also matter. An additional household member also increases the odds of evaluating life as “not poor” by 6.61 percent ($\beta_{HHmember}^* = 0.06 \mid OR_{HHmember}^* = 1.07$). The results show that the odds of being “not poor” is 31.40 percent higher for an additional number of employed household member ($\beta_{employedHH}^p = 0.27 \mid OR_{employedHH}^p = 1.31$).

Educational attainment exhibits one of the strongest capability effects. Having at least a college degree increases the odds of assessing life as “more than comfortable” by 48.80 percent ($\beta_{college}^* = 0.40 \mid OR_{college}^* = 1.49$), while simply studying increases the odds of evaluating life as “more than comfortable” by 50.88 percent ($\beta_{studying}^{spc} = 0.41 \mid OR_{studying}^{spc} = 1.51$). This aligns with the widespread perception of a college diploma as a pathway to employment and financial stability—an interpretation supported by the finding that livelihood positively impacts people’s overall life evaluation.

Employment-related perceptions also play a critical role. The odds of evaluating life as “more than comfortable” are 230.45 percent higher for those with more positive assessment about job opportunities in the country ($\beta_{employment}^* = 1.20 \mid OR_{employment}^* = 3.30$). Managing a business increases these odds by 43.03 percent higher ($\beta_{own business}^* = 0.36 \mid OR_{own business}^* = 1.43$) relative to being unemployed.

⁵ In this specification, nine of the 22 predictor variables meet the PO assumption. These are the indices on health, worry-free life (*constraints index*), income class (C1 and C2), college education, work status (being employed, managing own business, and working part-time), as well as various household characteristics (number of household members). For the rest of the predictor variables, the PO assumption was relaxed; hence, their coefficients were allowed to vary within the model specification comparing the outcome categories.

TABLE 4. Life domains and perception of comfort/life evaluation (N=8,558)

COVARIATES	Poor		Sometimes poor or comfortable	
	Coefficient	Odds ratio	Coefficient	Odds ratio
Life Domains				
Education	1.487894***	4.427759	0.7698443***	2.15943
Employment	3.258179***	26.00213	1.195296***	3.304535
Health	0.4637151***	1.58997	0.4637151***	1.58997
Worry-free life (constraints)	0.9564755***	2.602508	0.9564755***	2.602508
Income class (<i>base=E</i>)				
AB	13.72428***	912,804.8	1.555171***	4.735897
C1	1.528703***	4.61219	1.528703***	4.61219
C2	0.9753907***	2.652203	0.9753907***	2.652203
D	0.658909***	1.932683	0.2597569***	1.296615
College education	0.397419***	1.487979	0.397419***	1.487979
Location (<i>base=Luzon</i>)				
Visayas	0.5537393***	1.739746	1.165063***	3.206125
Mindanao	0.0741606	1.07698	0.4792491***	1.614861
Urban	-0.2800915***	0.7557146	0.0099031	1.009952
Gender (male)	-0.0708487	0.9316028	0.1422558***	1.152872
Actual age	-0.0122906***	0.9877847	0.0037926	1.0038
Work status (<i>base=unemployed</i>)				
Working/Employed in a company	0.0709391	1.073516	0.0709391	1.073516
Own business	0.3578566***	1.430261	0.3578566***	1.430261
Part-time work	-0.0892997	0.9145715	-0.0892997	0.9145715
Studying	-0.0649013	0.9371599	0.4112886***	1.508761
Household characteristics				
Living with extended family members	0.0677156	1.070061	0.0677156	1.070061
Number of household members	0.0640152*	1.066109	0.0640152*	1.066109
Number of employed household members	0.2730789***	1.314004	0.0610315	1.062932
Received remittance	0.63095***	1.879395	0.1728738**	1.188716
Constant	-3.706932***	.0245527	-5.270879***	0.0051391

Notes:

1. **p*-value ≤ 0.1 , ***p*-value ≤ 0.05 , and *** *p*-value ≤ 0.01

2. The covariates in boldface that have the same coefficients regardless of the outcome category (i.e. poor and sometimes poor or comfortable) upheld the PO assumption.

3. The covariates with different coefficients for each outcome category violated the PO assumption. The PPO model relaxes this assumption.

Having the ability to earn additional income for the household also influences people's life assessment, as the odds are 18.87 percent higher for those who received remittances ($\beta_{remittance}^* = 0.17 \mid OR_{remittance}^* = 1.19$) than those who did not receive remittances in the past 12 months.

Beyond material capability, psychological and emotional security matter. Those who report living a “worry-free life” have 160.25 percent higher odds of assessing life as affluent ($\beta_{constraints}^* = 0.96 \mid OR_{constraints}^* = 2.60$) than those who do not feel secure in providing their family's needs.

Environment, community, and society. The quality of environment and locality where people live also influences life evaluation. Living in urban areas decreases odds of reporting life as “not poor” by 24.43 percent ($\beta_{urban}^p = -0.28 \mid OR_{urban}^p = 0.76$) relative to rural areas. Compared to those living in Luzon, the odds to report life as “more than comfortable” are 220.61 percent and 61.49 percent higher for those living in Visayas ($\beta_{visayas}^{spc} = 1.17 \mid OR_{visayas}^{spc} = 3.21$) and Mindanao ($\beta_{Mindanao}^{spc} = 0.48 \mid OR_{Mindanao}^{spc} = 1.61$), respectively.

Satisfaction with community-level public services also contributes to life evaluation. The odds of being “more than comfortable” are 59 percent higher for those who are satisfied with the quality of health services ($\beta_{health}^* = 0.46 \mid OR_{health}^* = 1.59$) and 115.94 percent higher for those satisfied with educational institutions ($\beta_{educ}^{spc} = 0.77 \mid OR_{educ}^{spc} = 2.16$), compared to those who are dissatisfied.

These results indicate that both objective and perceived factors jointly shape Filipinos' life evaluations. Income and livelihood are the strongest predictors of reporting an “at least comfortable” life, consistent with Easterlin [1974] and Dynan and Ravina [2007], who argue that material resources influence subjective well-being but often through perceptions of adequacy rather than absolute income. Higher income classes, college education, and self-employment all increase the odds of reporting comfort, consistent with Sen's [1987; 1999] and Nussbaum's [1987] emphasis on capability expansion.

Satisfaction with public services and local environments also has substantial influence. Respondents who are satisfied with health and education services or who experience economic stability (“worry-free life”) report higher life evaluations, echoing Frey and Stutzer [2002] and Pontarollo et al. [2020] on the role of institutions and community well-being. Interestingly, living outside Luzon and in rural areas is associated with greater perceived comfort, suggesting that regional differences in expectations or social comparison shape well-being—a result consistent with Graham and Pettinato [2002] on relative insecurity in unequal settings.

Overall, the results support international evidence that subjective life evaluation reflects both economic capability and contextual trust in institutions. In the Philippines, the persistence of households reporting that they are “sometimes poor, sometimes comfortable” highlights a pragmatic dimension of well-being grounded in perceived stability and adequacy.

5. Conclusion

The current study used data from a long-term national visioning exercise to examine how Filipinos evaluate their current level of comfort—that is, how they perceive their own living conditions relative to their desired life. Although the survey was not designed specifically to measure subjective well-being, the concept of comfort analyzed here reflects a foundational dimension of well-being: material ease, stability, and adequacy.

The findings show that income, livelihood, and education substantially increase the likelihood of perceiving life as at least comfortable, while satisfaction with community environments and public services also contributes to higher life evaluation. The findings confirm, but also qualify, existing results in the well-being literature. Consistent with Easterlin [1974; 2004] and Dynan and Ravina [2007], income and livelihood remain central determinants of perceived well-being. However, Philippine evidence demonstrates that material resources alone are insufficient to explain how people evaluate their lives. Perceptions of service quality, job security, and economic stability are equally important.

The study contributes to bridging capability-based and subjective well-being approaches. Conceptualizing comfort as self-assessed material sufficiency provides empirical support for Sen's [1987] and Nussbaum's [1987] argument that well-being depends not only on resources but on the capability to convert those resources into a sense of stability and adequacy. Comfort thus represents a tangible component of life evaluation that lies between objective welfare and subjective satisfaction, illustrating how Filipinos reconcile rising incomes with lingering feelings of vulnerability. In this way, the study sheds light on the "well-being paradox" in developing economies, where economic progress coexists with perceived insecurity.

From a policy perspective, improving Filipinos' perceived comfort requires more than income growth. Policies that enhance livelihood stability, expand access to quality education and health services, and strengthen social protection systems can help reduce feelings of vulnerability even among non-poor households. Strengthening local governance and service delivery—especially in rural areas where subjective comfort is higher—may also sustain community trust and satisfaction. These policies align with the AmBisyon vision of a *matatag, maginhawa, at panatag na buhay*, highlighting that reducing insecurity is as important as raising incomes.

This study acknowledges several limitations. The cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation, and the comfort indicator captures primarily the material dimension of well-being, rather than emotional or eudaimonic aspects. Future research should integrate comfort with broader indicators, such as life satisfaction or affect, to capture the full spectrum of Filipinos' quality of life. Panel or follow-up surveys would help track how comfort perceptions evolve alongside economic and institutional changes. Further extensions could examine the impact of environmental

and disaster-related shocks, which are particularly relevant in the Philippines, a country prone to typhoons and natural disasters [Ravago, Roumasset, and Jandoc 2016]. Regularly collecting subjective well-being data would allow policymakers to identify persistent and long-term drivers of Filipinos' life evaluation, enabling more responsive medium- and long-term interventions.

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