

Research on the Influence Mechanism of Public Service Provision and Public Service Satisfaction on Residents' Happiness

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Abstract. The government provides public services, and the public receives them. The public's evaluation of the provision of government public services is the yardstick used to measure the quality of government services. It is also the responsibility and obligation of the government to enhance the quality of public services and the public's satisfaction. This paper primarily focuses on the correlation between public service provision, public service satisfaction, and residents' happiness. Using the CGSS2015 data as the research object, a significant positive relationship between public service provision and residents' happiness was identified through factor analysis, multiple linear regression, and intermediary effect testing. The conclusion of this paper holds significant reference value for the government in enhancing public services and improving residents' well-being.

Keywords: public service provision, public service satisfaction, residents' happiness.

1. Introduction

Living in peace and contentment, ensuring the people's happiness, has always been the enduring theme of development in China from ancient times to the present, spanning from the grassroots to the leadership. It is also an important criterion for measuring the progress of Chinese-style modernization and even for evaluating whether an era is great.

From the description of "the Great Harmony" in the "Book of Rites - Li Yun Pian," where it states, "People do not only care for their own relatives, not only raise their own children, but also ensure that the elderly have a place to live out their lives, the strong have work to do, the young have opportunities to grow, and widows, widowers, orphans, the lonely, and the disabled are all taken care of," we can see the important role of public services in enhancing people's sense of happiness. The "Plan" emphasizes to enhance and refine the public service system and fostering the growth of public services are key strategies to implement the people-centered development ideology, enhance the quality of life, advance social equity and justice, firmly drive shared prosperity, stimulate the growth of a robust domestic market, and establish a new development paradigm.

The study of happiness politics focuses on the positive role of the government in enhancing national happiness. Previous research has mainly focused on government spending and service quality, neglecting the subjective opinions and evaluations of the public. For example, Hu Hongshu and Lu Yuanping (2012) demonstrated through empirical analysis of CGSS data that increasing government public spending can enhance the happiness of farmers, with significant impacts from education spending, healthcare spending, and social security spending. Additionally, Yin Jinpeng and others (Yin Jinpeng, Chen Yongli, & Ni Zhiliang, 2019) confirmed through empirical research that public investment in education contributes to the improvement of residents' happiness. Such literature either only focuses on public services from a single perspective or lacks an analysis of the target population's perception and satisfaction towards public services. While Zhu Chunkui and others (Zhu Chunkui, Wu Zhaoyang & Xu Jingyuan, 2022) indicated in their research that the subjective perception of public service provision is positively correlated with the improvement of residents' happiness, they stopped short of further exploring the promoting role of public service provision in different areas such as healthcare, education, social security, national security, crime prevention, environmental protection, and social equity. This gap makes it challenging to propose targeted policy recommendations.

In summary, this article mainly focuses on how the provision of public services affects residents' sense of well-being, particularly delving into the mediating role of public service satisfaction in the relationship between public service provision and residents' happiness. To address this question, the article utilizes data from CGSS and employs methods such as factor analysis, multiple linear regression, and mediation effect testing to answer the research question.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Provision of Public Services and Residents' Well-being

Generally speaking, services provided by the government to the general public for public welfare can be called public services, such as medical insurance, compulsory education, and so on. With the development of public services, people are gradually realizing that public services are no longer government-centered but are constructed through the participation of multiple stakeholders. In reality, public services manifest as a dynamic process that can be divided into at least three stages: supply, production, and distribution. The allocation of responsibilities in these stages, especially when discussing who should produce a certain public good and whether providers and producers should be separated, mostly depends on cost accounting. Naturally, the evaluation of public services mostly starts from a material perspective, including government expenditure and service quality. However, as public service theory further develops, its drawbacks also become apparent. They overly rely on practices and experiences derived from manufacturing management and are excessively results-oriented. In response, many scholars, including Stephen and Xie Fen (2017), propose that products (results) are tools for resource transfer and application, while services are the core essence of social and economic operation. Thus, evaluation should start from the utility perspective, meaning that the assessment of public services should be entrusted to the people directly affected by them. This subjective assessment includes four aspects of the so-called sense of well-being of the people: adequacy, balance, convenience, and inclusiveness.

The study of happiness politics focuses on the positive role of the government in enhancing national happiness. When it comes to "happiness," most literature begins with an individual's micro perspective, examining the influence of particular factors like income and family on their well-being. Going deeper into the definition that "happiness is the individual's overall cognitive and evaluative perception of life from an emotional perspective," the provision of public services helps alleviate social inequality, directly improves education levels and healthcare standards, and provides opportunities and fairness for the people. Good public services are reflected in every aspect of life, omnipresent and perceptible.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between the provision of public services and residents' sense of well-being.

2.2 Public service satisfaction and residents' happiness

Continuously improving the well-being of the masses is the starting point and foundation of various tasks in grassroots social governance. China is increasingly focusing on improving people's quality of life and is more inclined to implement measures that benefit the population to enhance their well-being. Public service satisfaction is feedback on public satisfaction, reflecting the performance of public service products, as well as the evaluation of the products and services themselves. It is the most direct feedback on the quality of public service provision. Life satisfaction clearly includes the level of satisfaction with public services, which is just one component of overall satisfaction. Therefore, this article will further analyze by separating public service satisfaction from residents' life satisfaction and make the following assumptions:

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between public service satisfaction and residents' subjective well-being.

Based on the literature review above, this article can boldly speculate that public service satisfaction plays a significant mediating role between the provision of public services and residents' subjective well-being.

H3: Public service satisfaction plays a significant mediating role between the provision of public services and residents' subjective well-being.

3. Data sources and variable measurement

3.1 Data sources

This article uses CGSS as the source of data.

3.2 Variable measurement

3.2.1 Dependent variable

For measuring subjective well-being, the question selected in this article is "Overall, do you feel happy with your life?" This question corresponds to item A36 in the CGSS 2015 questionnaire, with responses ranging from 1 to 5.

3.2.2 Independent variables

For measuring the provision of public services, this article adopts the scale numbered B17 in the CGSS 2015 questionnaire, which mainly includes 4 sub-questions: "Considering all aspects, how satisfied are you with the adequacy of public service resources in our country?" "Considering all aspects, how satisfied are you with the balance of the distribution of public service resources in our country?" "Considering all aspects, how satisfied are you with the convenience of accessing public services in our country?" "Considering all aspects, how satisfied are you with the inclusiveness of public services in our country?" The measurement scale ranges from 1-5.

Through factor analysis, a common factor was extracted, named "provision of public services," with an explained variance of 75.04%.

Table 1 Factor analysis results of public service provision.

	Provision of public services
How satisfied are you with the adequacy of public service resources in China at present?	0.284
How satisfied are you with the balanced distribution of public service resources in China at present?	0.288
How satisfied are you with the convenience of obtaining public services in China at present?	0.291
How satisfied are you with the current inclusiveness of public services in China?	0.291
Explanatory variance	75.04

3.2.3 Mediators

The mediating variable (mediators) in this article is public service satisfaction. For the measurement of public service satisfaction, this article adopts the scale numbered b16 in the CGSS 2015 questionnaire, which aims to understand your satisfaction with the following public services provided by the government. The measurement is a continuous variable, ranging from 0 to 100 points.

Through factor analysis, a common factor was extracted, named "public service satisfaction," with an explained variance of 69.15%.

Table 2 Factor analysis results of public service satisfaction

	Provision of public services
We would like to know how satisfied you are with the following public services provided by the government. -public education	.125
Medical and health care	.130
Housing security	.132
Social management	.139
Employment	.138
Social security	.141
Basic social services	.132
Public culture and sports	.134
Urban and rural infrastructure	.131
Explanatory variance	69.15

3.2.4 Control variables

This study selected gender, age, religious belief, household registration location, education level, total personal income, and health status as control variables. For the measurement of age, this study subtracted the birth year from 2015 for processing; for the measurement of gender, males were defined as 1 and females as 0; this paper reflects the education level with the years of education; for the measurement of religion, 0 is defined as non-religious, while 1 is defined as religious; for the measurement of household registration location, 0 is rural and 1 is urban; for the measurement of income level, continuous variables are used; this paper uses 1-5 to measure health status.

The variables involved in this article are shown in the table below.

Table 3 Variable measurement

Variable type	Variable name	Measurement topic	measure
dependent variable	well-being	A36 Generally speaking, do you think your life is happy?	1-5
independent variable	Provision of public services	See above.	1-5
regulated variable	Public service satisfaction	See above.	0-100
Control variable	gender	A2 gender	0- female, 1- male
	age	A301 What's your date of birth?	physical age
	Religious belief	A501 What is your religious belief?	0- not religious, 1- religious
	Location of household registration	A18 Type of community where respondents live:	0- rural, 1- urban
	income level	A8a. What was your total personal income/total labor or professional income last year?	continuous variable
	educational level	A7a. What is your current highest education level?	0-20
	health condition	A15. What do you think is your current physical health?	1-5

3.3 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics are shown in the following table:

Table 4 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Subjective well-being	8584	3.884	.802	one	five
Provision of public services	8584	3.583	.935	1.15	5.77
Public service satisfaction	8584	83.561	17.993	0	120.2
gender	8584	.484	.5	0	one
age	8584	49.798	16.811	18	94
Religious belief	8584	.102	.303	0	one
Location of household registration	8584	.448	.497	0	one
income level	8584	32609.221	172104.46	0	9991500
educational level	8584	9.405	4.228	0	20
health condition	8584	3.647	1.06	one	five

4. The regression results and discussion

The regression results are shown in the following table.

4.1 Multiple linear regression results

Table 5 Regression results

variable	(1) Subjective well-being	(2) Subjective well-being	(3) Subjective well-being	(4) Subjective well-being	(5) Subjective well-being	(6) Subjective well-being
Provision of public services	0.1394*** (15.79)					
Adequacy of public service resources		0.1278*** (14.18)				
Balanced degree of distribution of public service resources			0.1095*** (12.42)			
Convenience of public services				0.1150*** (13.19)		
Degree of inclusiveness of public services					0.1298*** (14.66)	
Public service satisfaction						0.0073*** (15.92)
gender	- 0.0831*** (-4.98)	- 0.0835*** (-4.99)	- 0.0842*** (-5.02)	- 0.0842*** (-5.02)	- 0.0837*** (-5.01)	- 0.0820*** (-4.91)

age	0.0061*** (10.04)	0.0063*** (10.25)	0.0064*** (10.48)	0.0065*** (10.54)	0.0063*** (10.32)	0.0059*** (9.59)
Religious belief	0.1268*** (4.66)	0.1313*** (4.81)	0.1312*** (4.79)	0.1271*** (4.65)	0.1203*** (4.41)	0.1480*** (5.43)
Location of household registration	-0.0033 (-0.17)	-0.0030 (-0.16)	0.0022 (0.12)	-0.0025 (-0.13)	-0.0023 (-0.12)	0.0165 (0.85)
income level	8.03*e ⁻⁸ * (1.68)	7.77*e ⁻⁸ (1.62)	8.14*e ⁻⁸ * (1.69)	8.39*e ⁻⁸ * (1.75)	8.28*e ⁻⁸ * (1.73)	9.09*e ⁻⁸ * (1.90)
Degree of education	0.0203*** (7.69)	0.0200*** (7.53)	0.0206*** (7.75)	0.0199*** (7.51)	0.0200*** (7.57)	0.0205*** (7.76)
health condition	0.2021*** (23.92)	0.2041*** (24.11)	0.2049*** (24.13)	0.2024*** (23.85)	0.2030*** (23.99)	0.1972*** (23.29)
constant term	2.1741*** (33.79)	2.2577*** (35.64)	2.3170*** (36.77)	2.2969*** (36.46)	2.2606*** (35.93)	2.0772*** (30.98)
N	8584	8584	8584	8584	8584	8584
R-squared	0.1064	0.1015	0.0966	0.0987	0.1029	0.1068

Note: *P<0.1, **P<0.05, * * p < 0.01

The coefficient of influence of public service provision on subjective well-being is 0.1394, and the P value is less than 0.01. Therefore, it can be considered that public service provision has a significant positive impact on subjective well-being, and the subjective well-being of residents will increase by 0.1394 units for every unit of public service provision.

It can be seen that the influence coefficient of the adequacy of public service resources on subjective well-being is 0.1278, and the P value is less than 0.01. Therefore, it can be considered that the adequacy of public service has a significant positive impact on subjective well-being, and the subjective well-being of residents will increase by 0.1278 units for every unit of public service provision.

It can be seen that the influence coefficient of the balanced distribution of public service resources on subjective well-being is 0.1095, and the P value is less than 0.01. Therefore, it can be considered that the provision of public services has a significant positive impact on subjective well-being, and the subjective well-being of residents will be improved by 0.1095 units for every increase in the balanced distribution of public service resources.

The influence coefficient of public service convenience on subjective well-being is 0.1150, and the P value is less than 0.01. Therefore, it can be considered that the provision of public services has a significant positive impact on subjective well-being, and the subjective well-being of residents will increase by 0.1150 units for every unit of public service convenience.

We can know that the influence coefficient of public service inclusiveness on subjective well-being is 0.1298, and the P value is less than 0.01. Therefore, it can be considered that the provision of public services has a significant positive impact on subjective well-being, and the subjective well-being of residents will increase by 0.1298 units for every unit of public service inclusiveness.

4.2 The intermediary effect test results

In order to verify the intermediary role of public service satisfaction in the provision of public services and residents' happiness, this paper conducted Sobel test, and the test results are shown in the following table.

Table 6 Sobel test of intermediary effect

independent variable	mediator variable	Sobel test	Direct effect	Total effect
Provision of public services	Public service satisfaction	0.044*** (9.700)	0.095*** (9.706)	0.139*** (15.790)
Adequacy	Public service satisfaction	0.044*** (10.786)	0.084*** (8.574)	0.128*** (14.183)
Balance	Public service satisfaction	0.043*** (11.548)	0.0066*** (6.995)	0.110*** (12.420)
Convenience	Public service satisfaction	0.042*** (11.256)	0.073*** (7.755)	0.115*** (13.195)
Inclusiveness	Public service satisfaction	0.042*** (10.674)	0.088*** (9.208)	0.130*** (14.659)

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

From the results of Sobel test, we can know that the indirect influence coefficient of public service provision on residents' happiness through public service satisfaction is 0.044, and it has passed the test of 1% significance level, that is, every unit of public service provision can improve the level of residents' happiness by 0.044 units through the intermediary of public service satisfaction. The indirect influence coefficient of public service adequacy on residents' happiness through public service satisfaction is also 0.044, and it passed the test of 1% significance level, that is, every unit of public service adequacy can increase residents' happiness level by 0.044 units through the intermediary of public service satisfaction. The indirect influence coefficient of public service resource distribution balance on residents' happiness through public service satisfaction is 0.043, and it has passed the test of 1% significance level, that is, every unit of public service resource distribution balance can increase residents' happiness level by 0.043 units through the mediation of public service satisfaction. The indirect influence coefficient of public service convenience on residents' happiness through public service satisfaction is 0.042, and it passed the test of 1% significance level, that is, every unit of public service convenience improvement can improve residents' happiness level by 0.042 units through the intermediary of public service satisfaction. Finally, the indirect influence coefficient of public service inclusiveness on residents' happiness through public service satisfaction is 0.042, and it passed the test of 1% significance level, that is, every unit of public service inclusiveness can improve residents' happiness through the intermediary of public service satisfaction.

The results of this study have certain reference significance for understanding public services and how to improve public service satisfaction.

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