

Factors Affecting Happiness: A Cross-Sectional Study in the Iranian Youth

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Happiness is one of the most important concepts in the mental health that has an impact on different aspects of young people.

Aim: The present study was conducted to identify the factors influencing happiness among young persons in Ilam, Iran during 2014.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among young population 15-29-year-old. Multistage cluster random sampling method was used to select the participants. Data were collected using two demographic and Oxford Happiness Inventory. SPSS software Package 14 was used to analyse the data.

Results: A total of 500 young people, including 272 men and 228 women were enrolled. The Mean \pm SD of the participants' age was 20 ± 2.18 years. There was a significant relationship between the happiness score and location in urban and rural, employment status and physical activity. There was not a significant relationship between gender, marital status and education level with happiness score among participants.

Conclusion: The age groups, type of occupation, physical activity and place of residence were factors associated with happiness in young persons. However, there was not significant relationship between gender, marital status and education level with a happiness score among study participants.

Keywords: Iranian Youth, Happiness score, Physical activity

INTRODUCTION

Securing and improving people's health is one of the main goals and priorities of each community. Health is considered as physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or disability. Concepts such as self satisfaction, life satisfaction and well-being are interest criteria of the World Health Organizations' in the definition of mental health. These components are associated with positive emotions like joy, peace and happiness [1].

Happiness is a psychological concept with several definitions and dimensions [2]. In the field of psychology, the happiness is a positive emotion that is deeper than a good temporary mood. Happiness is one of the most important concepts in the field of mental health and defined as a sustainable approach and pleasant feeling [3]. Happiness in mental health, includes positive emotions such as joy, peace, a sense of involvement and enthusiasm in life [4].

Many psychologists believe that there are at least three fundamental elements of happiness, including emotional, social and cognitive conceptions. Emotional component causing a positive emotional state while social component has led to widespread and positive social relationships with others. The cognitive component causes the individual to interpret everyday events with optimism [5].

The term "well-being" frequently used in literature to mean happiness. However, well being is commonly used in relation to physical factors and happiness used in relation to mental factors [6]. Previous studies have shown several effects of happiness on human life, including improving physical and mental health, improving sleep quality, decreasing levels of stress hormones, better cardiovascular functioning [7], enhance compliance with life events, strengthening the immune system [8], improve the quality of life [9], and increased life satisfaction [10].

Gender, income, married status, education level, the job satisfaction, health, promote education and increase knowledge are the main effective factors on human happiness [11-15].

The cultural, political, social and economic conditions in Iran has led to the adoption of the age range of 15-29 years for young people in Iran become not a matter of choice but a necessity.

It's well known that the effective factors of people's happiness are dissimilar in the various cultures [16]. Considering the importance of young people in the future of each country and the impact of happiness in different aspects of young people's lives; therefore the present study was conducted to identify the factors influencing happiness among young person in Ilam, Iran during 2014.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted among young population 15-29-year-old. According to the latest census, there are about 210 thousand young populations resident in Ilam. The happiness status was unknown in our study population. Hence, we have considered $p=0.5$. The sample size was determined by $d = 0.05$ and $CI 95\%$. $no = Z^2 * p * q / (d)^2 = 385$.

A multi-stage sampling method was used. With the possibility of loss of samples, finally 500 individuals were determined as the sample size. A multistage cluster random sampling method was used to select the participants. First six townships of Ilam (Iran) province were randomly selected. Consequently, 500 young people were selected based on proportion to the population of urban and rural township. All individuals interested in participating in the study were enrolled in the study. Except people who had a physical or mental illness interfering with the happiness. The aim of the study was described, an informed consent was obtained from all participants before the enrollment in the study. To enhance confidentiality, all questionnaires were completed anonymously and only required information was collected.

Data were collected using two questionnaires. The first questionnaire was included 46 questions about demographic variables, leisure activities, the physical activity, the cultural-artistic activities interested, the study duration, barriers to participation in activities, the effect of family support on the youth lives, ethics, the regulatory and planning in the youth life and the impact of youth participation in decision making.

The Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) was the second questionnaire that was applied. This questionnaire was used since the 1980s to define and measure the happiness [17]. OHI has 29

items. All items are scored based on a four Likert scale numbered from 0 to 3 as follows; 0= I am not particularly optimistic about the future, 1= I feel optimistic about the future, 2= I feel I have so much to look forward to, and 3= I feel that the future is overflowing with hope and promise. Although are inversely scored in the items 1,5, 6,10,13,14,19,23,24,27,28,29 [18]. The final score was 0-89. The higher score indicates the greater happiness. Several studies have confirmed the construct validity of the OHI [19-22].

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

SPSS software Package 14 was used to analyse the data of this project. Mean, median, percents and SD were used to describe the data. Scatter grams and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check the normal distribution of data. Categorical variables were analysed by χ^2 analysis or Fisher's-exact test. Quantitative variables with normal distribution were accompanied using the unpaired t-test. Differences were regarded statistically significant with an alpha error of 0.05.

RESULTS

A total of 500 young people, including 272 male and 228 female were enrolled. The Mean \pm SD of the participants' age was 20 \pm 2.18 years. The age group less than 20-year-old were the highest frequency (59%) among study participants.

There was significant relationship between age groups, type of occupation, physical activity and place of residence with a happiness score among participants ($p < 0.05$). However, there was not significant relationship between gender, marital status and education level with a happiness score among study participants [Table/Fig-1].

DISCUSSION

Happiness has several effects on human life, including positive attitude towards living, increase of self-concept, promotion of vitality, mental health; and higher level of social and physical performance [23]. The other positive effects of happiness can be noted in the improvement in the physical and psychological welfare [7]. So far several studies have investigated the happiness status and relative factors among different population [4,5,9].

Since health status affects the level of happiness [24], we've excluded all physical and psychological disorders interfering with the happiness level.

Some participants did not answer questions related to some variables such as physical activity, place of residence, marital status and education levels. Therefore, these variables were calculated after excluding missing data.

Based upon the results of the present study age groups was important factor influencing happiness in young persons. We found that increasing age is associated with increasing levels of happiness, other studies have confirmed the relationship between age and happiness [25,26].

Another result of the present study indicated that type of occupation is influencing happiness in our study population. In line with present result, a study reported a significant difference between employed and unemployed people in happiness [11]. Another Iranian study showed that a positive correlation between income and happiness among 384 individuals older-than-18-year-old citizens in Kerman [27]. A significant relationship between income and happiness in young Iranians were confirmed in another study, about 40% of Iranian youths was very much happy due to their individual incomes [12]. Based upon the result of the present study, the role of gender in young's happiness not significant. Already several studies have investigated the relationship between gender and happiness [28-31]. Other studies reported a significant relationship between gender and marital status with happiness [11,32].

Variables	N (%)	Happiness score, Mean \pm SD
Gender		
Male	272 (54.4)	38.61 \pm 17.83
Female	228 (45.6)	40.1 \pm 17.33
p-value		0.919
Age groups, years		
>20	295 (59)	41.3 \pm 8.4
20-25	115 (23)	42.67 \pm 11.2
<25	90 (18)	43.7 \pm 9.5
p-value		0.04
Type of occupation		
Government employment	178 (35.6)	42.43 \pm 19.34
Ungovernment employment	322(64.4)	37.46 \pm 16.4
p-value		0.004
Physical activity*		
Exercise regularly	305 (62.24)	45.08 \pm 5.94
Without exercise	185 (37.76)	35.37 \pm 4.37
p-value		0.01
Place of residence*		
Urban areas	348 (71.6)	39.75 \pm 18.62
Rural areas	138 (28.4)	38.24 \pm 15.05
p-value		0.001
Marital status *		
Single	424 (85)	38.09 \pm 18.45
Married	75 (15)	39.08 \pm 17.38
p-value		0.496
Education levels*		
Illiterate	84 (17.8)	38.2 \pm 13.3
Primary	65 (13.7)	37.29 \pm 15.4
Secondary	152 (32.2)	38.15 \pm 14.6
Diploma	77 (16.3)	39.12 \pm 11.8
Academic	95 (20)	40.4 \pm 2.4
p-value		0.245

[Table/Fig-1]: The demographic variables of study participants.

*Variables such as physical activity, place of residence, marital status and education levels were calculated after excluding missing.

In contrast with our result, a study reported more happiness among Iranian females than the Iranian males [12]. However, more academic success in young Iranian females was seen as more leisure pursuits was introduced for young Iranian females [12], but also, cultural differences and living facilities between Ilam and Tehran could be other reasons for the difference in results. Diener et al., suggested that happiness levels are equal among men and women, but when we consider depression, the subject is somewhat complex. In such a way that men and women with equal happiness, the depression rate is higher among women than in men. Diener believes that women experience more of both negative and positive emotions than men. The result of these emotions, makes an equal happiness men and women [33].

Despite the fact that numerous studies have shown that married people have higher levels of happiness [34,35], we found that the role of marital status in young's happiness was not significant. In our study, most participants were single (85%), the difference in study populations can be the difference between our results with the results of these studies.

LIMITATION

The current study has a limitation. While some factors such as socioeconomic status and spiritual aptitude have impact on people's happiness, we did not study these factors.

CONCLUSION

The age groups, type of occupation, physical activity and place of residence were factors associated with happiness in young

persons. However, there was not significant relationship between gender, marital status and education level with a happiness score among study participants.

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