

# The Effect of Individual Factors, Socioeconomic and Social Participation on Individual Happiness: A Cross-Sectional Study

MARYAM AZIZI<sup>1</sup>, FATHOLA MOHAMADIAN<sup>2</sup>, MOZHGAN GHAJARIEAH<sup>3</sup>, ASHRAF DIREKVAND-MOGHADAM<sup>4</sup>

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Happiness and exhilaration are the most essential demands of human innate psychological needs that affect both physical and mental health.

**Aim:** The present study aimed to investigate the effect of individual factors, socioeconomic and social participation on individual happiness.

**Materials and Methods:** In this study, we evaluated 15 to 54-year-old individuals to find the effects of individual factors, socioeconomic and social partnership (formal or informal) on human happiness. A random sampling method was used in the present study. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) was used. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics including; frequency, percentage, Mean±SD. Correlation coefficient, one way ANOVA and logistic regression were also used as analytical statistics.

**Results:** There was a significant relationship between gender ( $p=0.001$ ,  $r=0.144$ ), marital status ( $p=0.001$ ,  $r=0.174$ ), happy parents ( $p=0.001$ ,  $r=0.194$ ), educational grade ( $p=0.001$ ,  $r=0.189$ ), employment status ( $p=0.001$ ,  $r=0.180$ ), income ( $p=0.001$ ,  $r=0.264$ ), car ownership ( $p=0.001$ ,  $r=0.173$ ), informal social participation ( $p=0.001$ ,  $r=0.3$ ) and formal social participation ( $p=0.001$ ,  $r=0.231$ ) with happiness. However, the relationship between home ownership ( $p=0.346$ ,  $r=-0.015$ ), and happiness was not significant.

**Conclusion:** It seems that good and cordial relations with others, including family, relatives and friends (informal social participation) are the main sources and the most important factors of life satisfaction and human happiness. Higher income can increase happiness by enhancing the possibility to access the needs, desires, problems solving, enhancing the social support and self esteem and opportunities to perform one's favourite activities.

**Keywords:** Enthusiasm, Happy parents, Income, Social participation

## INTRODUCTION

Happiness is one of the most important values [1] that always has been associated with pleasure, optimism and hope [2]. In fact, the happiness is an inner state that is derived from human judgment and experience [3,4]. Eysenck believes that happiness is a collection of fun, a combination of maximum positive effect and the least negative emotion without pain. Happiness and vitality are the most essential human innate desires and psychological need. So happiness and its determinants, has been considered as an important subject [5]. It is important to understand that happiness creates energy, enthusiasm, vitality, movement and dynamism. It also protects humans against stress and problems [6] along with physical and mental health [7]. This means that often happy people are less sick [8] live longer, have less stress and depression than unhappy ones [2]. In fact, happy people have stable marriages, higher incomes and have more creative ideas in comparison to others [9]. Because of the importance of happiness in human life, the psychologists, sociologists, economists, scholars and researchers have investigated the factors affecting human happiness. Subsequently, various theories have been discussed in this field. So, the present study aimed to evaluate the individual, socioeconomic and social factors as main contributing factors on the happiness.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a descriptive study. The study population included all 15 to 54-year-old individuals in Ilam province. The study sample size was calculated using  $n=Z^2 * p * q / (d)^2$ . Because the happiness status was unknown in our study population, therefore we considered  $p=0.5$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$  and  $d=0.05$  and 385 participants were calculated. After

considering design effect = 2, a total sample size of 770 participants was estimated. Considering the possibility of losing a number of questionnaires, the sample size of 800 participants was considered. After removing the incomplete questionnaire, 772 questionnaires were analysed. A random sampling method was used in the present study.

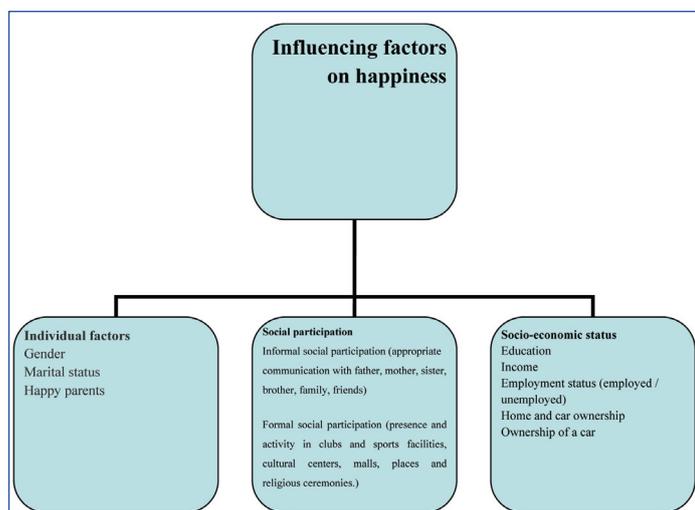
The researcher first provided a list of all Ilam provinces' regions and cities. Then 10 cities were chosen among all the regions and cities randomly. The sample size required for each city or area was determined by the proportion of the population in the area to the whole population.

Research tools included Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) [10] and influencing factors on happiness questionnaire.

The OHQ contains 29 items. All items are scored based on a four Likert scale numbered from 0 to 3. The final score ranges from 0 to 89. OHQ has five domains, including; life satisfaction, self esteem, subjective well being, fulfillment and positive mood. A previous study confirmed the validity and reliability of OHQ in Iranian society [11]. In the present study the reliability of this instrument was estimated with a Cronbach's alpha value=0.93.

The influencing factors on happiness questionnaire were created using books, similar researches (5-7) and adapting them with the social and cultural environment of Ilam. The questionnaire validity was obtained by content validity by an expert panel (CVR=0.75).

The content validity identified that the influencing factors on happiness questionnaire has three dimensions which include [Table/Fig-1]. In addition, 12 questions based on 5-point Likert was used in order to measure the formal and informal social participation. A total of



[Table/Fig-1]: The factors influencing happiness based on content validity

six questions were proposed to assess the formal participation, including; the presence of responsive activities in clubs and sports facilities, cultural centers, malls, places and religious ceremonies. Also, six questions were raised to assess informal participation, including; the status of responsive communication with father, mother, sister, brother, family and friends. To measure the socioeconomic status, these were taken into consideration-educational grade, employment status (employed or unemployed), income, home and car ownership. Data analysis was performed by SPSS 21 using descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, Mean±SD. Statical analysis was also used which included correlation coefficient, one way ANOVA and logistic regression.

## RESULTS

The demographic characteristics of participants were as follows: less than half (41.8%) of all participants were male, most of participants were married (56.6%). Regarding educational level, one third of participants had a diploma (33%), 28.2% had bachelor's degree and 10.7% had master's or Ph.D. The majority of study participants (84.5%) were employed. Study participants had a Mean±SD happiness score of 55.94±16.05. To investigate the relationship between happiness and associated factors pearson correlation coefficient was used. The results showed a significant relationship between gender, marital status, happy parents, educational grade, employment status, income, car ownership, informal social participation and formal social participation with happiness. However, the relationship between home ownership ( $p=0.346$ ,  $r=-0.015$ ), and happiness was not significant. Also, among these factors, formal and informal social participation have the highest correlation with happiness [Table/Fig-2].

A regression analysis was used to predict the factors affecting happiness. The Durbin-Watson statistic was in an acceptable area (1.5-2.5), therefore, we accepted the assuming independence of

errors. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)=1.093 and Tolerance Index=0.915 were in the appropriate range. Also, the linear correlation between independent variables could not distort the application of multiple regression.

| Factors                                   | p-value | r      |
|---|---------|--------|
| Gender                                    | 0.001   | 0.144  |
| Marital status                            | 0.001   | 0.174  |
| Happy parents                             | 0.001   | 0.194  |
| Educational grade                         | 0.001   | 0.189  |
| Employment status (employed / unemployed) | 0.001   | 0.180  |
| Home ownership                            | 0.346   | -0.015 |
| Car ownership                             | 0.001   | 0.173  |
| Income                                    | 0.001   | 0.264  |
| Informal social participation             | 0.001   | 0.300  |
| Formal social participation               | 0.001   | 0.231  |

[Table/Fig-2]: The coefficient of correlation between the studied factors and happiness.

Overall, 10 variables were entered into the equation and resulted in eight steps, led to a reliable model so that:

In the first step, the informal social participation was entered in the equation. This variable had the highest impact on happiness ( $r=0.301$ ,  $R^2=0.090$ ) and explained 9% of change of happiness as the dependent variable.

In the second step, the variable income was entered in the equation. The result showed a significant correlation coefficient between income and the power equation ( $r=0.394$ ,  $R^2=0.155$ ). This variable could be increased 6.5% of the variance of the power equation. During 3<sup>rd</sup> step, the variable formal social participation was entered in the equation. The result showed a significant correlation coefficient between formal social participation and happiness ( $r=0.42$ ,  $R^2=0.177$ ). The formal social participation could be increased 2.2% of the variance of the power of the equation. In the next steps, variables marital status, educational grade, gender, happy parents and employment status were entered in the equation. At each of these steps, the results showed a significant correlation coefficient between variables and happiness. These variables could increase the power of the equation respectively 2.1, 2, 1.5, 1.2, and 0.07. Totally, eight variables have been able to explain and interpret changes 24.5% of the dependent variable [Table/Fig-3,4].

## DISCUSSION

The results of the present study showed that the Mean±SD of the happiness score was 55.94±16.05 among our study participants, which was lower than the mean of happiness score of other studies [12-15]. Previous studies reported the higher prevalence of happiness score among Turkish University students [14,15]. In another study, the Mean±SD happiness score was 114.59±18.31 among 541 Iranian University students [13].

| Model                         | R     | R Square | Adjusted R Square | R Square Change | F      | p-value <sup>a</sup> | Durbin-Watson |
|-------------------------------|-------|----------|-------------------|-----------------|--------|----------------------|---------------|
| Informal social participation | 0.300 | 0.090    | 0.089             | 0.090           | 73.017 | 0.001                |               |
| Income                        | 0.394 | 0.155    | 0.153             | 0.065           | 67.595 | 0.001                |               |
| Formal social participation   | 0.421 | 0.177    | 0.174             | 0.022           | 52.845 | 0.001                |               |
| Marital status                | 0.446 | 0.199    | 0.194             | 0.021           | 45.545 | 0.001                |               |
| Educational grade             | 0.468 | 0.219    | 0.214             | 0.020           | 41.167 | 0.001                |               |
| Gender                        | 0.484 | 0.234    | 0.228             | 0.015           | 37.269 | 0.001                |               |
| Happy parents                 | 0.496 | 0.246    | 0.239             | 0.012           | 34.026 | 0.001                |               |
| Employment status             | 0.503 | 0.253    | 0.245             | 0.007           | 30.856 | 0.001                | 1.699         |

[Table/Fig 3]: Regression analysis of factors affecting happiness among the study participants <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>  $p<0.05$

| Model                         | Un-standardized coefficient |            | Standardized coefficient | t     | p-value |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|--------------------------|-------|---------|
|                               | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                     |       |         |
| Constant                      | 0.989                       | 0.346      |                          | 2.849 | 0.005   |
| Informal social participation | 0.048                       | 0.009      | 0.193                    | 5.574 | <0.001  |
| Income                        | 0.216                       | 0.040      | 0.188                    | 5.463 | <0.001  |
| Formal social participation   | 0.033                       | 0.007      | 0.162                    | 4.744 | <0.001  |
| Marital status                | 0.257                       | 0.062      | 0.135                    | 4.125 | <0.001  |
| Educational grade             | 0.111                       | 0.024      | 0.154                    | 4.552 | <0.001  |
| Gender                        | 0.218                       | 0.061      | 0.115                    | 3.548 | <0.001  |
| Happy parents                 | 0.306                       | 0.086      | 0.118                    | 3.537 | <0.001  |
| Employment status             | 0.225                       | 0.087      | 0.087                    | 2.604 | 0.009   |

**[Table/Fig-4]:** Regression coefficients of factors affecting happiness among the study participants.

Also, the results of regression analysis showed that all demographic factors including; gender, marital status, happy parents are factors affecting happiness among our study participants. The set point theory is the most common psychological and vital theory related to happiness. In fact, the set point reflects a certain level of happiness that is inherited from parents. Based on set point theory factors such as living conditions, nationality, geographic location, cultural, regional, and demographic information such as age, gender and ethnicity account for only 10 percent of total happiness [16].

In addition, the results of some studies on the factors affecting happiness showed that gender is not a contributing factor in happiness [17,18].

The results of previous studies on the relationship between marital status and happiness vary. Some studies suggest the influence of marital status on happiness [17,19] and others showed no effect of marital status on happiness [20,21]. Married people enjoy emotional relationships and emotional intimacy with their partner. Also, they have more opportunity to express their emotions or feelings and it can lead to more happiness in them.

Based on the results of the present study, the socioeconomic factors, including income, education and occupation have affected happiness among our study participants. According to economic theory, living conditions, especially income have a lasting impression on happiness [11] and the results of various studies have confirmed this [17,22].

In addition, individuals with low incomes are likely to face difficulties in meeting their basic needs. They are more susceptible to physical, mental and emotional problems. Also, individual with higher education grade are happier than others. This result is in line with the findings of another study [22]. Although there are studies with conflicting results too [21,23].

It is important to note that having higher education grade may lead to an appropriate job, more income, achieving better economic and social position, high self esteem as well as more happiness. Often, unemployed individuals experience an unstable position in their family and society. Therefore, they are likely to suffer from loneliness and face social isolation.

Participant's social participation (formal and informal) contributed to their happiness. So the results of the current study demonstrated that participant's informal social participation was the most important factor in happiness. Based on the psychology set point theory, intentional activities including the activities of behavioral, cognitive and volunteering, is one of the essential factors of happiness and explain 40% of happiness [24]. In fact, interaction and social participation in formal or informal social communities increase satisfaction and create happiness. Involvement in religious activities and attending religious places are aspects of an formal

social participation. The results of previous studies indicate that there is a significant correlation between happiness and involvement in religious activity. Religious activities makes one feel closer to God, helps in attaining a sense of calm, comfort and security that can increase happiness [18,24].

In the informal aspect of social participation, having good relations with others is one of the important factors that increase the happiness. Also, having a good and healthy family creates a safe, quiet, intimate and friendly space at home that can create and increase happiness among the family members too.

## LIMITATION

The present study had some limitation. Although some factors such as marital and job satisfaction have a significant impact on individual's happiness, we evaluated the marital and employment status regardless of their satisfaction. Also, the parents' happiness was investigated as another effective factor on happiness among the study participants. Although we may not have the correct interpretation of the happiness of others, we examined the parents' happiness from the perspective of their children.

## CONCLUSION

It seems that good and cordial relations with others, including family, relatives and friends (informal social participation) are the main sources and the most important factors of life's satisfaction and human happiness. Also, a higher income helps individuals to achieve their desires easily and lead a comfortable life. Therefore, it can be claimed that in most cases, the individuals with higher incomes experience lower stress and anxiety in their lifetime.

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**PARTICULARS OF CONTRIBUTORS:**

1. PhD Student, Department of Psychology, Psychosocial Injuries Research Center, Ilam University of Medical Sciences, Ilam, Iran.
2. PhD Scholar, Department of Psychology, Psychosocial Injuries Research Center, Ilam University of Medical Sciences, Ilam, Iran.
3. Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Islamic Azad University Branch of Neyriz, Fars, Iran.
4. PhD Scholar, Department of Nursing and Midwifery, Ilam University of Medical Sciences, Ilam, Iran.

**NAME, ADDRESS, E-MAIL ID OF THE CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:**

Dr. Fathola Mohamadian,

PhD Scholar, Department of Psychology, Psychosocial Injuries Research Center, Ilam University of Medical Sciences, Ilam, Iran.

E-mail: mobinmohamadian@yahoo.com

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