

THE HAPPINESS PROJECT: ENHANCING HAPPINESS THROUGH TRAINING

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Abstract: *To be happy is one of the major goals of human beings. The present study explores whether there is a difference between before and after interventions related to happiness. The objectives of this study were to compare subjective happiness before and after intervention and to suggest activities to enhance happiness in pre-adolescent under privileged girls. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. 88 early adolescent under privileged girls from semi English medium school participated in this study. Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky, & Lepper, 1999) was used to collect data. Before the start of the project individual Subjective Happiness questionnaire was administered to the subjects. Activities for happiness were taken every week for 6 weeks with the subjects. The subjects were asked to keep doing the activities every day and maintain a journal. After 6 months individual Subjective Happiness questionnaire was again administered to the subjects to find the difference. The results show that the mean subjective happiness score before and after intervention were highly significant. This paper discusses activities for happiness.*

Key Words: *Affect, Happiness, Subjective well-being*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Happiness has been a topic of interest for many centuries. Happiness is a positive emotional state that is subjectively defined by each person. Theories of happiness have been divided into three types: need/goal satisfaction theories, process/activity theories and genetic/personality predisposition (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2009). In regard to need/goal satisfaction theories Freud and Maslow suggested that the reduction of tension or the satisfaction of needs lead to happiness. In short it was theorized that we are happy because we have reached our goals. Such "happiness as satisfaction" makes happiness a target of our psychological pursuits. Philosophers debated the nature of happiness for thousands of years, but scientists have recently discovered that happiness means different things. Three major types of happiness are high life satisfaction, frequent positive feelings, and infrequent negative feelings (Diener, 1984). "Subjective well-being" is the label given by scientists to the various forms of happiness taken together. Psychologists have defined happiness as a combination of life satisfaction and the relative frequency of positive and negative effect. Subjective well-being (SWB) therefore encompasses moods and emotions as well as evaluations of one's satisfaction with general and specific areas of one's life. To be happy is one of the major goals of human beings.

Happiness might not only be a goal of life but also a means for reaching other goals. Research has also proved that happiness stimulates new ideas and happy people persist longer at a task that is not very enjoyable in itself. A person who has a high level of satisfaction with their life, and who experiences a greater positive affect and little or less negative effect, would be deemed to have a high level of SWB or in simpler terms, be very happy. Modern Western psychology has focused primarily on a post-materialistic view of happiness (Diener, & Seligman, 2002) that emphasizes pleasure, satisfaction and life meaning. Seligman and Martin, (2002) suggests that a pleasant and meaningful life can be built on the happiness that results from using our psychological strengths.

Lyubomirsky, King and Diener, (2005) proposed that "a person's chronic happiness level is governed by three major factors: a genetically determined set point for happiness, happiness-relevant circumstantial factors and happiness-relevant activities and practices. People's levels of happiness are influenced by both internal factors, such as personality and outlook, and external factors, such as the society in which they live. Some of the major determinants of happiness are a person's inborn temperament, the quality of their social relationships, the societies they live in, and their ability to meet their basic needs. To some degree people adapt to conditions so that over time their circumstances may not influence their happiness as much as one might predict they would.

Importantly, researchers have also studied the outcomes of happiness and have found that "happy" people are more likely to be healthier and live longer, to have better social relationships, and to be more productive at work. In other words, people high in happiness seem to be healthier and function more effectively compared to people who are chronically stressed, depressed, or angry. Thus, happiness does not just feel good, but it is good for people and for those around them. Most of the evidence so far suggests that happy people are healthier, more sociable, more

productive, and better citizens (Diener and Tay, 2012, Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Research shows that the happiest individuals are usually very sociable.

Harvard School of Public Health examined 200 separate research studies on psychological wellbeing and cardiovascular health. Optimism and positive emotion were found to provide protection against cardiovascular disease, to slow progression of heart disease and reduce risk, by around 50%, of experiencing a cardiovascular event, such as a heart attack. Research shows that people who are optimistic tend to be happier, healthier and cope better in tough times. Our emotions affect our long term well-being. Research shows that experiencing positive emotions in a 3-to-1 ratio with negative ones leads to a tipping point beyond which we naturally become more resilient to adversity and better able to achieve things. Most people think that if they become successful, then they'll be happy. But recent discoveries in psychology and neuroscience show that this formula is backward: Happiness fuels success, not the other way around. When we're positive, our brains are more motivated, engaged, creative, energetic, resilient, and strong.

A review of literature on happiness has found compelling evidence that happier people have better overall health and live longer than their less happy peers. Anxiety, depression, pessimism and a lack of enjoyment of daily activities have all been found to be associated with higher rates of disease and shorter lifespan. Many studies cite a rich and fulfilling social life and a network of close social support with family and friends as being strongly correlated with happiness. Empirical research shows that a very happy individual is likely to be a happily married optimistic extrovert, having an active social life with a network of good social support, who feels fulfilled at work, is religious, enjoys active recreational pursuits, exercises regularly and feels they are in good health. In support of this view, there is evidence that daily pleasurable events are associated with increased positive affect, and daily unpleasant events or hassles are associated with increased negative affect.

Research evidence demonstrates that there are other benefits to happiness: positive affect and well-being. Interestingly, well-being enhances creativity and divergent thinking. It appears that happiness, similarly to positive effect, stimulates playing with new ideas. New research has also shown that happy people persist longer at a task that is not very enjoyable in itself, are better at multi-tasking and are more systematic and attentive. Western neuroscience has now confirmed what Eastern wisdom has known for a long time: happiness is a skill we can learn. Research shows that happiness, compassion and kindness are the products of skills that can be learned and enhanced through training, because of neuroplasticity of our brains. Based on these facts the present study explores whether there is a difference between before and after interventions related to happiness.

2. OBJECTIVES:

- To compare subjective happiness scores before and after intervention.
- To suggest activities to enhance subjective happiness in pre-adolescent under privileged girls.

3. HYPOTHESIS:

There will be significant difference between before and after scores of subjective happiness.

4. METHODOLOGY:

Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. 88 early adolescent under privileged girls from semi English medium school participated in this study. Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) Lyubomirsky, & Lepper. (1999) was used which is a 4 item scale of global subjective happiness. The scores range from 4-28, higher the score higher is the level of satisfaction. Before the start of the project individual Subjective Happiness questionnaire was administered to the subjects. Activities for happiness were taken every week for 6 weeks with the subjects. The subjects were asked to keep doing the activities every day and maintain a journal. After 6 months individual Subjective Happiness questionnaire was again administered to the subjects to find the difference in subjective happiness scores.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

5.1SUBJECTIVE HAPPINESS MEAN SCORES:

Psychologists have defined happiness as a combination of life satisfaction and the relative frequency of positive and negative affect. Research evidence supports the theory of happiness having a genetic component, as well as the concept of adaptation. Although our genes influence about 50% of the variation in our personal happiness, our circumstances (like income and environment) affect only about 10%. As much as 40% is accounted for by our daily activities and the conscious choices we make. The results indicate that the Mean score before intervention is 16.36 and after intervention is 22.05. Therefore the results prove that our actions really can make a difference.

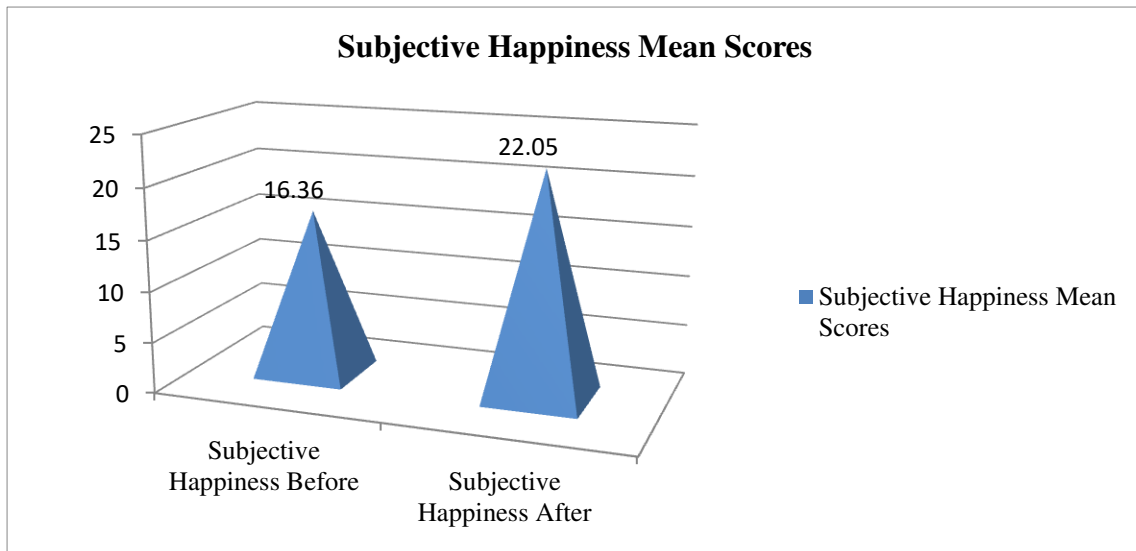


Figure 1: Subjective Happiness Mean Score

Table 1. Subjective Happiness Mean Scores Comparison

| | Paired Differences | | | Calculated-t value | df | p-value |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------|-----------------|--------------------|----|---------|
| | Diff of Mean | SD | Std. Error Mean | | | |
| Before After | 5.6941 | 2.1877 | .2373 | 23.996 | 84 | .005 |

To test significance of difference between mean scores paired T-test is applied. Difference between mean scores before and after intervention is 5.69. Calculated p-value for t test is 0.005. It is less than standard p-value. Therefore T-test is rejected. It can be concluded that there is significant difference in mean scores. Mean score after intervention is significantly greater than mean score before intervention. Therefore it is proved that happiness can be learned and enhanced through training.

5.2 SUBJECTIVE HAPPINESS MEAN SCORE BEFORE AND AFTER INTERVENTION:

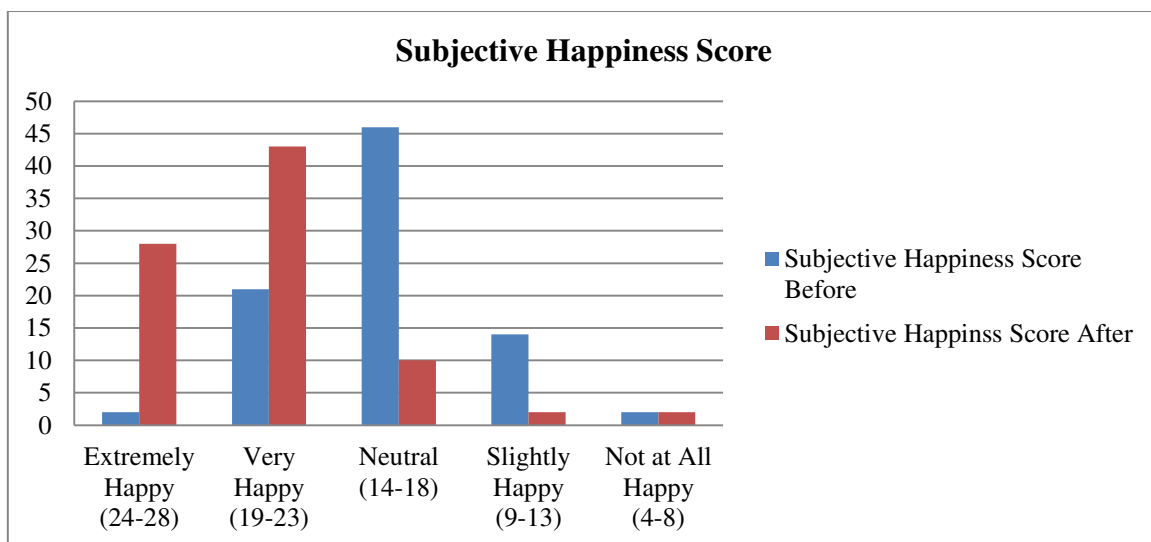


Figure 2: Subjective Happiness Mean Score Before And After

The above figure illustrates that happiness score before intervention was maximum in the neutral range (46), followed by very happy (21), slightly happy (14), not at all happy (2) and extremely happy (2). Happiness score after intervention was maximum in the very happy range (43), followed by extremely happy (28), neutral (10), slightly happy. It was found that the extreme happiness score increased from 2 to 28. Therefore it is proved that happiness can be learned and enhanced through training. In a study on happiness 10% of the U.S college students, Diener and Seligman [4] found that the qualities of good mental health and good social relationships consistently emerge in the

lives in the sample of happiest young adults. Upon closer inspection of their data, analyses revealed that good social functioning among the happiest subset of students was a necessary but not sufficient cause of happiness. It is also proved that engaging in particular life activities generate happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Emmons, (1986), Emmons, and Synder, (1994) have emphasized how the process of pursuing goals generates energy and happiness.

6. CONCLUSION:

Happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being defined by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. Real happiness and contentment is a culmination of genetics, feelings, personality, emotions, and other life variables and circumstances. The results of this research show that the mean subjective happiness score before intervention is 16.36 and after intervention is 22.05. It is concluded that the mean score after intervention is significantly greater than mean score before intervention. Therefore it is proved that happiness being a skill can be learned and enhanced through training. Based on this research, activities for happiness are suggested. The suggested activities for happiness need not be done at once. Ideally, alongside the mindfulness practice, one can select one or two actions to try for a few days and see how it works. There is no need to worry if some actions don't work well. Everyone has their personal preferences therefore one may want to make the actions he/she finds useful with their on-going daily routine.

Based on this research a few suggestions for a happier life are listed below:

- Realize that enduring happiness doesn't come from success.
- Take control of your time.
- Act happy.
- Seek work and leisure that engages your skills.
- Give your body the sleep it wants.
- Give priority to close relationships.
- Focus beyond the self.
- Keep a gratitude journal.
- Nurture your spiritual self.

Suggested activities for happiness are as follows:

- **Thinking about happiness:** Take a moment to think about what happiness means to you. Note down whatever comes in to your mind. Now think about specific things that often make you happy. These could be activities, people, places or anything else that comes to mind.
- **Simple Mindfulness Meditation:** Take 10 minutes each day to do a simple mindfulness meditation.
- **Three Good Things:** Each day write down three good things that happened. They can be anything you feel good about or grateful for.
- **Letter Of Thanks:** List down the people whom you want to thank. Then choose one of these people to write to and tell them how grateful you are; perhaps someone you've not thanked properly before. Think about the impact this person had on you and write a letter to tell them: What specifically are you grateful for? How did they help you? How did it help make you the person you are today?
- **Perform extra act of kindness each day:** This could be a compliment, a helping hand, a hug, a gift or something else. The act may be large or small and the recipient may not even be aware of it. Ideally your acts of kindness should be beyond the kind things you already do on a regular basis.
- **Use your strengths:** Understanding and using our strengths is about focusing on the things that come most naturally to us and that we love to do. Research shows that that using our strengths in new ways can make us happier even after just one week. Identify and review your strengths and then focus on using these in new ways.
- **Look for the good in people:** Appreciate the good things about someone important in your life. Focus on a close friend or family member and take time to think through the following questions –What drew you to your friend when you first met? What things have you really enjoyed doing together during your relationship? What things do you really appreciate about them right now? What are their strengths? In each case try to note down specific examples.

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