

Impact of Human Happiness on Subjective Well-Being

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Abstract

Subjective well-being (SWB) “is a broad category of phenomena that includes people’s emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction”. Habituation theory suggests that human happiness oscillates around a ‘set-point’, thought to have a genetic basis. Income increase will have the weakest effect on an individual who is: relatively rich; living in an affluent country with a growing economy; has high aspirations and wants even more money; and spends their money on material goods for themselves.

Humanity has been thinking about happiness for a long time, and in several different ways. The Buddha and Aristotle were among the early happiness philosophers. The Buddha’s thinking on achieving happiness (which he thought about in terms of escaping suffering) is summarized in the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. He believed that people look for sensual pleasures, possessions, and attachments. The impermanency of such goals, he argued, inevitably led to unhappiness, from the disappointment of loss and envy of others. Aristotle had a different viewpoint, and argued that man is a social animal, with individual happiness secured only within a political community, or polis. The polis should organize itself to promote virtuous behavior. As in Buddhist teaching, virtue is conducive not only to individual well-being but also to social harmony.

So while happiness is a basic aspiration of humankind, it is also a word – or an idea – that is used in different ways.

Key-words :Happiness, Permanent Happiness, Gross National Happiness, Pillars of Gross National Happiness, Cultivation of Happiness, Subjective Well-being, Correlates of Happiness, Measurement of Happiness.

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Happiness is a state of mind or feeling characterised by contentment, love, satisfaction, pleasure or joy. Variety of biological, psychological, religious and philosophical approaches have striven to define happiness and identify its sources. A number of attributes that co-relate with happiness are relationships and social interaction, extra version, marital status, employment, health, democratic freedom, optimism, endorphins released through physical exercise and eating chocolate, religious involvement, income and proximity to other happy people.

The permanent happiness is the product of permanent hormones that paints our sub-conscious. Those hormones are released according to our mental interpretation of our past memories, current perception and expectations. A person is perpetually happy if his brain produces joyful hormones for these three intervals. The importance of these three intervals differ from time to time, person to person. Our expectations or worries about the future have an over-riding impact on our state of happiness. Strong faith in a very happy future can create enough hormones of joy which can erase all the misfortunes of the past and the present.

Some researchers such as David T. Lykken have found that about fifty percent of one's happiness depends on one's genes based on studying identical twins, whose happiness is fifty percent co-related even when growing up in different houses. About ten percent to fifteen percent is the result of various measurable life circumstances variables as economic status, marital status, health, income etc. The remaining forty percent is a combination of unknown factors and the results of actions that individuals deliberately engage in to become happier.

Human relationships are consistently found to be the most important correlation with human happiness. According to Indian philosophy the four Ashrams – Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyas have emphasized the various means of happiness at each age starting from vanaprastha and going to sanyas, the average person seeks happiness in social and religious service. Our old are happier than the younger adults who are worried about earning for a living and raising and nourishing their children as well as educating them. The majority of well conducted research studies concluded that higher levels of religious involvement are positively associated with the indicators of psychological well-being and with less depression, suicidal thoughts and behavior, drugs or alcohol use/abuse.

Buddhism emphasizes that for ultimate freedom from sorrow a person should follow the 'Eight-fold Path' – Right Understanding (right views), Right Thought (right intentions), Right Speech, Right Actions, Right Livelihood, Right Efforts, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration (Samadhi). It emphasizes five types of feelings

– Pleasure, Joy, Pain, Displeasure and Equanimity. Pleasure and pain (in association with body consciousness), joy and displeasure (in association with mind consciousness), equanimity (with mind consciousness and sense consciousness).

According to *Bhagavad Gita* – The person with purity of mind, all his sorrows has an end. A person with placid mind who has controlled his senses attains happiness and satisfaction in such satisfied consciousness, once intelligence is soon established. Happiness does not mean fulfilling of all the materialistic desires and therefore no sorrow. If there are no expectations there will be no unfulfilled expectations and therefore no sorrow. According to *Advaita* philosophy the bondage of the self is due to Avidya or ignorance. It is the individual self which through ignorance, attributes the qualities of the body, the senses, the mind etc. Freedom is attainable by the removal of ignorance and by the attainment of right knowledge.

Idealism is based on unquestionable reasoning and acceptance of intuition as the only way to know the ultimate reality. Truth is one and wise name it differently. Indian philosophy lays down the four goals of life – Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. It does not ignore physical welfare, prosperity and marry making. According to *Dr. S. Radhakrishnan* the only concern of true man is to be a human as possible. Man is not meant for self-destruction but for self-fulfilment. Kindness and love are as contagious as unkindness and hate. According to *J. Krishnamurthi* happiness like virtue is not a thing to be sought after, nor a thing to be invited. Virtue when cultivated becomes immoral because it strengthens the ‘me’ and ‘I’, leading to respectability, which is the self. So one must understand what is suffering which can lead a person to understand what is happiness.

Various views about happiness have been expressed by different western philosophers in their own way. *Socrates* says that happiness is in a life in which pleasure and knowledge are combined with each other. Reaching such happiness requires striving and endeavor. Those who reach this happiness are really prosperous. He believes that happiness is obtained through preventing carnal desires. The happiness of each individual is acquired through the society’s happiness. *Plato* expresses “Virtue is knowledge, the cognition of the supreme form of the good.” In this cognition three parts of the soul – Cognitive, Spirited and Appetitive – all have their share. And thus we get wisdom, courage and temperance of continence. For *Plato*, virtuous life is an indicator of human happiness. *Aristotle* claims that the virtues of character and intelligence are ways of perfecting reason and hence indispensable to the good human life. He says that one is unlikely to be happy if he lacks certain external goods as good birth, good children and beauty. He believed happiness to be the end and to be self-sufficient in itself. It is the end at which all virtuous actions

aim. *Rousseau* says that if man wishes to be happy he should apply his free will to the extent of his ability and the happiness of others will increase our happiness. He advises that the child should become familiar with the small sorrows, only then he will be able to realize happiness in the true sense. If the child is nurtured in affluence and easy life he will never enjoy kindness, co-operation and happiness. *Kant* says each person enacts laws for his happiness according to his understanding, imagination and sense powers, but a confirmable happiness is along with deserving. He emphasizes that the happiness is the natural reward for virtuous behavior, therefore behaving morally leads to happiness.

Abraham Maslow presented a hierarchy of needs, the satisfaction of them may lead to happiness. The hierarchy of needs at most primary stage are physiological needs which are concerned with our survival e.g. hunger, thirst etc. At the next level are the needs of safety e.g. shelter etc. At the third level are the needs for love and belongingness which are concerned with affection and friendship etc. At the fourth level are the needs of self-esteem and at the highest level are the needs of self-actualization. These needs can be used as the basis for evaluating the overall happiness level of individuals.

The concept of 'Gross National Happiness' (G.N.H.) was developed in an attempt to define an indicator that measures quality of life for social progress in more holistic and psychological terms than gross domestic product. G.D.P. measures the amount of commerce in a country but counts remedial and defensive expenditures. The term gross national happiness was coined in 1972 by Bhutan's former king *Jigme Singye Wangchuk* who opened up Bhutan to the age of modernization. According to him the four pillars of G.N.H. are :

- 1) The promotion of sustainable development.
- 2) Preservation and promotion of cultural values.
- 3) Conservation of natural environment.
- 4) Establishment of good governance.

Erick Weiner in his book 'The Geography of Bliss' travels the globe to find secrets of happiness and suggested seven factors to attain happiness – contentment, connection to nature, connection with a place, interconnectedness with other people, exposure to death and dying, a focus on the positive and travelling.

According to *Diener, Lucas* and *Oishi*, Subjective well-being is defined as a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life. These evaluations include emotional reactions to events as well as cognitive judgements of satisfaction

and fulfilment. Thus subjective well-being includes experiencing pleasant emotions, low levels of negative moods and high life satisfaction. The positive experiences embodied in high subjective well-being are a core concept of positive psychology because they make life rewarding. According to Diener, many theories of happiness have been proposed and these theories can be categorized into three groups – Need and Goal Satisfaction Theories, Process or Activity Theory and Genetic and Personality Disposition Theories.

Need and goal satisfaction theory states that the reduction of tension and satisfaction of biological and psychological needs and goals cause happiness. People who have important goals tend to be more energetic, experience more positive emotions and feel that life is meaningful. Both need theorists and activity theorists state that subjective well-being changes with the conditions in peoples' lives. When individuals achieve their goals or they are engaged in interesting activities, they experience positive well-being. Genetic and personality disposition theorists believe that subjective well-being is strongly influenced by stable personality dispositions.

Researches have identified a number of attributes that correlate with happiness – relationship and social interaction, extra-version, marital status, employment, health, democratic freedom, optimism, endomorphins released through physical exercise, religious involvement and income and proximity to other happy people. Researches have further revealed that many demographic factors such as age and income are related to subjective well-being. Usually most of the people moderately happy and thus demographic factors distinguish them from those who are very happy.

Subjective well-being influences the subjective perception of health and thus there is a correlation between subjective well-being and subjective health. Marital status and religious activities are also positively correlated with subjective well-being and affects the marriage of men and women. Culture of the people also influences subjective well-being. For example Indian nation, which is an amalgamation of different caste, creed and religion and wealth and the subjective well-being of particular community is applied to whole of the nation.

According to *Daniel Kahneman*, happiness can be measured using the day reconstruction method, which consists in recollecting memories of the previous working day by writing a short diary. According to G.N.H. concept, treating happiness as a socio-economic development matrix proposed by *Med Jones* in 2006 (The President of International Institute of Management), seven developmental areas which affect the nation's mental and emotional health are – economic, environment, physical,

mental, workplace, social and political wellness.

Ed Diener developed a scale referred to as subjective well-being, a concept related to happiness and quality of life has been used to compare nations to each other as this construct. The study reveals that high income, individualism, human rights and social equality correlated strongly with each other and with subjective well-being. *Adam Cramer* developed a behavioural model of Gross National Happiness. *Richard D. Lane* and his associates conducted a research study on “Neuroanatomical Correlates of Happiness, Sadness and Disgust. Conclusions drawn were that this study should be considered preliminary, it identifies regions of the brain that participate in happiness, sadness and disgust, regions that distinguish between positive and negative emotions and regions that depend on both the elicitor and valence of emotions or their interactions.

Thus it is a fact that the motivation of every human being is to be happy always. Happiness is a feeling, a perception of all good minus all bad, an entirely subjective state of mind, the product of permanent hormones that paint our subconscious. Our expectations or worries about the future have an impact on our state of happiness.

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